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'Roma' Policy Making:

Key Challenges & Possible Solutions

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'Roma' Policy Making: Key Challenges and Possible Solutions

Acknowledging the need for an integrated and targeted approach towards the inclusion of the largest European minority, the EU has moved forward over the past decade in its efforts to develop and launch policies and programmes aiming at bringing about a positive change to the situation of Roma. Despite the significant funds allocated for the implementation of initiatives and strategies, no significant impact has been accounted throughout Europe over the years. The current policy brief looks at some factors that appear to be key impediments to the development of a sustainable and successful policy and suggests steps for overcoming the identified problems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the global financial and economic crisis that has increased the awareness about the need for a new *smart, sustainable* and *inclusive* growth Europe 2020,[1] the 'Roma' issue emerged as one of the key societal and development challenges[2] in the European Union (EU). According to estimates, the 'Roma' population in the EU28 has reached 10 to 12 million people dispersed in communities of various sizes - from a couple of hundreds in Luxembourg (or even less in Malta) to 1,850,000 in Romania.[3]

In comparison to the aging Europe (40.2 years for EU 28), the average age of the 'Roma' population is about 25.1 years.[4] Nevertheless, the vast majority of working-age 'Roma' lacks education and skills to participate successfully in the labour market, which in terms of lost productivity and fiscal contributions to governments makes the cost of non-inclusion very high.[5] According to estimates, if the level of 'Roma' employment is brought to the EU average, a 4-5 % GDP increase could be expected-more than the defence budget of any European country.[6]

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS)[7] was a step forward towards the development of an integrated socio-economic approach to 'Roma' inclusion at the European level. To foster the involvement of the national governments, it assigned the primary responsibility for identification and implementation of measures to the Member States. Four target areas of focused intervention, outlined by the European Commission as housing, labour, health and education, have structured the efforts of national governments throughout the EU. At

the same time, the lack of a strategically designed common policy to address the "Roma issue" puts the success of the project at risk.

The development of a strategy for a positive societal change with a clear vision for the future and with milestones to achieve the outlined goals is crucial both for the national governments and for the European Union. The lack of significant success over the last decades in contrast to the invested resources proves the need not only for a new approach but a whole new philosophy for inclusion. The key challenges to the development of a new EU-level strategy can be identified as issues of *content*, *structure* and methodology.

2. CONTENT RELATED CHALLENGES

- **THE LACK OF A COMMON CONTENT PLATFORM** has been a major shortfall of all the 'Roma'-related policies and strategies both at national and EU levels. Over the last decades, policy and decision makers have been actively discussing 'Roma'-issues and developing and implementing 'Roma'-targeted initiatives.[8] The problem is that the politically correct and policy-friendly concept '*Roma'* is in fact an empty umbrella concept that allows for interpretations, which leads to the lack of coherence between the political discourses (EU, Member States, stakeholders) as well as between the political and the empirical perspectives to 'Roma' inclusion.[9]

- **'ROMA' IS A TARGET GROUP WITH NO CLEAR PROFILE.** The umbrella concept does not refer to one single community but to a puzzled space of identities, languages, religions, nationalities, ethnic groups and myths of ethnic origin, connected horizontally through *some* shared cultural elements (including some racial features) and *more* socio-economic similarities. And yet, *not all 'Roma'* are poor, uneducated, unemployed and marginalized. The complexity obstructs the development of a culturally-sensitive approach to inclusion and at the same time challenges the efficiency of measures addressing 'Roma' as a purely 'economic target audience.'[10]

- **'ROMA' IS A TARGET GROUP OF UNKNOWN SIZE** since statistical data is vague and unreliable. In addition to the fact that in most of European countries ethnically disaggregated data is not collected officially, many 'Roma' prefer not to disclose their ethnic identity even at censuses due to fear of discrimination, or as a result of negative memories from the past, or due to persistent administrative[11] challenges. Romania is an example of the large discrepancies between the official size of the community (600 000 people) and the estimated numbers of 'Roma' (minimum of 1,800,000 and maximum of 2,500,000 people).[12] This problem underscores the first of the structural challenges to the development of adequate 'Roma' policies.

3. STRUCTURE RELATED CHALLENGES

- **HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD THE STRATEGY/POLICY COVER?** The lack of official statistical data, or at least reliable, approximate numbers of the targeted communities, puts the effectiveness and efficiency of any planned policy measure into question. Conceptualization of strategies with no action plan cannot lead to any positive outcome. At the same time, the development of an action plan without

reference to quantified parameters has little chances for success in implementation.

- **THE ADEQUATE ALLOCATION OF FUNDS** is also directly related to a clear understanding of the size of the target group and is a crucial factor for the success of any empowering strategy.

- **NEEDS ASSESSMENTS** rarely support policy strategy design and the planning of measures. The National Roma Integration Strategies (12 developed as sets of policy measures in response to the EU framework and 15 as targeted strategies, four of which were elaborated prior to the call)[13] legitimise the suggested approaches and provisions measures by referring to previous experience by governments and earlier policy documents. No comprehensive needs assessment performed for the purpose of strategy development has been reported as supporting document.

- **"ACHIEVING EQUALITY"** is stated as the guiding principle of policy efforts at national and EU levels but no policy promotes the need for ensuring **'EQUITY.'** Equality is pursued primarily through allocation of funds to support the implementation of 'Roma'-targeted initiatives. However, seldom is attention paid to the structural differences that 'Roma' suffer from birth. Despite all the investments to support 'Roma' education programmes financially, no significant changes have been introduced to make educational systems more flexible and adequate to the needs of the target groups. For example, no mainstream language is currently taught to pupils of 'Roma' origin as a second language.

- **DISCRIMINATION** continues to dominate not only policy planning and implementation, but also the attitudes of mainstream societies toward the objects of integration. No matching policies have been developed to address the need for changing the perceptions of 'Roma' in mainstream communities.

- **'ROMA' ARE SEEN NOT AS STAKEHOLDERS BUT AS BENEFICIARIES**. The reason for this shortfall is the fact that 'Roma' are not *one community* with an institutionalized representation in any of the EU member states or at the EU level. Policies are made *for* 'Roma', very rarely *with participation* of Roma and hardly ever *by* Roma. Instead of constituting 'Roma' as stakeholders, the empowering perspective to 'Roma' issues would suggest the idea that it is the State and mainstream society that *are in need* of integration. At the same time, the identification of 'Roma' as stakeholders is directly linked to fostering their involvement in and ownership of processes.

4. METHODOLOGY RELATED CHALLENGES

- **THE TOP-DOWN OR BOTTOM-UP APPROACH DILEMMA** was the core of policy debates over the last decades. Centralized, large-scale policies and measures have been criticised heavily for misuse of funds, lack of effectiveness and of significant impact on the targeted groups. At the same time, small-scale local level measures have been viewed as successful only to a limited number of beneficiaries and with no wider impact to justify the investments. To add to the problematic identification of the most appropriate approach, lack of knowledge among policy and decision makers has been identified as a key challenge all over the EU at all respective political and governmental levels.[14]

• **'ROMA'-RELATED PROGRAMMES AND STRATEGIES ARE OFTEN DEVELOPED WITHOUT A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING AND/OR WITH NO ESTIMATES OF THE INVOLVED FINANCIAL COSTS.**[15] The lack of official numbers of the beneficiaries might be an excuse for the lack of adequate budgeting. It could, however, not excuse the lack of short, mid and long-term planning of concrete goals and activities, of distribution of tasks among respective authorities or of insufficient knowledge of the administration. In this respect, the major contribution of the EU Framework was the identification of the four focus areas that have become programme priorities also at the national level. Nevertheless, meeting the requirements of the European Commission, none of the Strategies submitted by the Member states argues for specific aspects that need to be covered in a particular country.

• **"ROMA' PROGRAMMES ARE A BUDGET BURDEN AND NOT AN 'INVESTMENT."** Neither the NRIS (as a product of the EU Framework) nor the preceding Roma Decade programmes[16] have presented any cost-efficiency plan as a basis for the development of respective strategies and policies. If financing 'Roma' policies were seen as an investment, as a contribution towards larger expected future benefits, a business approach to the planning would be needed.

• **AIMING FOR INCLUSION, 'ROMA'-RELATED POLICIES NURTURE A CULTURE OF PASSIVENESS.** Obviously, the vast majority of the Strategies developed FOR 'ROMA' and rarely (if at all) BY 'ROMA,' aim to include the 'others' into the existing political and socio-economic frameworks. Over the last decades, debates on inclusion have focused mostly on how to make "them

join the empowering agenda and social standards" rather than on "what are the points of intersection between the two structural and cognitive different realities." This approach to inclusion over the years has nurtured a culture of 'passive beneficence' and 'pursued rights' but not of obligations to the system of social exchanges. Purposely, or by historical coincidence, 'Roma' have been excluded from the social compact[17], and hence they have developed a different attitude towards the modern state and society. The Strategies rarely address the need for re-contracting the social order by involving the marginalized groups in the process; rather they aim to make them fit established frameworks.

• **EDUCATION IS A POLICY PRIORITY MOSTLY ON PAPER.** Education has been set as one of the four key areas of the EU Framework for 'Roma' Integration. The logical assumption would be that as such, it is inevitably a sector where significant resources and efforts should be directed by all national governments. The analyses of the NRIS suggest, however that only three out of 27 national Strategies have pointed at education as a priority.[18] Recognition that education is the key to addressing the problems faced by 'Roma' today[19] would enable the understanding that the EU system currently does not provide for the specific needs of communities and of individuals.[20] A positive step would be, therefore, the identification of appropriate mechanisms as well as designing and implementation of flexible and results-oriented approaches and systems. When education becomes a guiding and primary principle, it will become embedded into all policies aiming at bringing about positive change for 'Roma' in Europe, including measures targeting mainstream societies.

5. WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

• The logical first step is the recognition that the current policy approaches have not contributed to significant positive change or improvement of the general situation of the largest European minority. Next comes objective critical analysis of policy design and implementation shortfalls. It is crucial that there is a **clear understanding of why no significant progress could be observed** despite national and EU resources allocated for Roma-integration programmes over the past decades. By the same token, the analysis of programmes that have achieved certain positive impact should aim at identifying factors that have enabled success, including how they related to a particular context. Those factors should become the basis for policy modelling.

• The second crucial step is **standardization of policy terminology and definitions**. There is a need for a clear and common understanding of whether the term 'Roma' should be used to denote an 'economic targeted audience' or an ethnic (cultural) identity. If 'Roma' would refer to marginalized and disadvantaged socio-economic groups, a different concept is needed to denote the positive ascription to the concept because NOT ALL 'Roma' are poor and marginalized. If 'Roma' denotes a specific cultural/ethnic background, empowering strategies need to make a clear distinction between the target groups, on one hand, and the ethnic group, on the other. Eliminating the inter-connectedness "by default" between the socio-economic characteristics and the cultural categories is the first step towards eradicating the stigma. However, empowering programmes addressing culturally distinct communities need to be culturally sensitive.

• **A clear distinction between 'economic' policies[21] and 'cultural' policies**, currently all referred to as 'Roma policies', will diminish the impact of the lack of statistical data. If empowerment indicators are used for planning of empowering policies, the lack of ethnically disaggregated data would not be an issue. Small-scale bottom-up planning and budgeting (as a part of the horizontally coordinated and monitored policy) can be another mechanism to overcome the lack of official statistics at national and EU levels. At the same time, culturally relevant policies and strategies can easily work with qualitative data.

• To address the complexity of the situation, strategies targeting 'Roma' need to be developed as **multi-layered, specific instruments with differentiated time horizons**. Short-term, mid-term and long-term strategies would have different foci, target groups and goals. Gender and generational aspects must also be embedded.

• **Synchronisation of policies and measures at the EU level would guarantee consistency and continuity of efforts launched at the national level**. It would also ensure that target groups are provided with the same package of services regardless of their (cultural predisposition to) mobility. Furthermore, the protection of human and minority (cultural) rights, the fight against discrimination and the promotion of tolerance and the value of diversity need to become a horizontal line cross-cutting all EU citizenship programmes, which target mainstream societies. The problem of discrimination of 'Roma' should not be a part of 'Roma'-policies but a fundamental element of the mainstream agenda.

- Financing of 'Roma' policies need to become conceptualized and implemented as an '**investment,' and not as a 'charity'**! Both empowering (socio-economic) policies and cultural policies aiming at reducing societal gaps and fostering social cohesion are of benefit for all members of the targeted societies. Planning and budgeting strategies with a clear vision for the calculated expected returns would bring a fundamental change to policy approaches and implementation of programmes.

- The new approach to 'Roma' integration should focus on the **empowerment of the target (cultural and/or socio-economic) groups and the transformation of the beneficiaries into stakeholders and active citizens**. Programmes developed on the basis of a thorough needs and problems analysis with the active participation of the respective stakeholders and future direct beneficiaries would present an opportunity for development of a feeling of 'ownership of change' among individuals and communities. The culture of passive recipients of services as "rights bearers" needs to be transformed into a culture of socially responsible 'rights-and-obligations bearers.'

- A crucial factor for the achievement of all of the above is **education ensuring equity in the process and equality in outcomes.** Achieving expected outcomes in this field requires, however, a fundamental shift of education policies, structures and practices all over Europe.

6. CONCLUSION

The global economic turbulences in the first decade of the 21st century focused the attention of EU policy makers on the need for a new approach to social and economic development. Among the set of programmes and strategies elaborated in the context of the new agenda was the Framework for Roma Integration which set 'Roma' inclusion and the improvement of their standard and quality of living among EU policy priorities. Logically, the economic, political and social integration of 'Roma' also ranked high on the agenda of the Member states' governments.

Although the targeted efforts currently implemented all over the EU are a positive step forward, the analysis of the limited success in the past suggests that a new policy approach is needed. Re-conceptualization of terminology, analysis of experiences, needs analysis and identification of adequate approaches and measures are only a few aspects that should be taken into account. The major challenge is, however, to ensure that essential risk factors, such as the mismatching levels of experience and expertise, the knowledge gap and the lack of capacities or political will, are overcome. Raising awareness among policy and decision makers about the need for a fundamental shift of the perspectives and approaches to 'Roma' issues is a major challenge that needs to be faced.

ENDNOTES

[1] European Commission, EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Communication From The Commission, Brussels, 3.3.2010, COM(2010) 2020

[2] The United Nations (2013) The Role of the United Nations in Advancing Roma Inclusion, Report, February 2013, Available at: http://www.europe.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RomaInclusion.pdf, and Lennox, Corinne (2011) Minority and Indigenous Women and the Millennium Development Goals, Available at: http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php@id=1014

[3] Council of Council of Europe, Estimates on Roma population in European countries, Data available at http://hub.coe.int/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3f6c4a82-0ca7-4b80-93c1-fef14f56fdf8&groupId=10227

[4] Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain; Report arising from the project Health and the Roma Community: Analysis of the Situation in Europe, funded by the European Union Public Health Programme, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009, Madrid, p.19, Available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_health_en.pdf

[5] World Bank, Europe and Central Asia: Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion, Knowledge brief, 2010, Available at http://go.worldbank.org/G1EL5HZ8S0 ; According to the World Bank estimates, the lower bound of annual productivity losses ranges from 231 million Euro (Serbia) to 887 million Euro (Romania); the lower bound annual fiscal losses are between 58 million Euro (Serbia) to 370 million Euros (Bulgaria).

[6] Livia Jaroka, interview, "Inclusion of the Roma: an ethnic and social issue", Article date: 2011, March 8 modified date: 2011, http://www.eu2011.hu/news/roma-integration-no-discrimination-just-beginning#sthash.0u4begJD.dpuf

[7] European Commission, Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (COM/2011/0173 final) Available at/ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173

[8] As even for example the Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)

[9] E.g. NRIS of Germany as compared to the messages delivered through the documents in its Annexes

[10] Livia Jaroka, Report on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion (2010/2276(INI)), Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, Explanatory Statement To The Report (item 8) Rapporteur: Lívia Járóka, Available at Lívia Járóka - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2011-0043+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

[11] E.g. lack of birth certificates and ID documents), it is a fact that in many cases 'Roma' people do not declare their identity. Romania is the example

[12] Council of Council of Europe, Estimates on Roma population in European countries, Data available at http://hub.coe.int/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3f6c4a82-0ca7-4b80-93c1-fef14f56fdf8&groupId=10227

[13] Friedman, Eben, 2014, Education in Member State Submissions Under the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, WP 73, European Centre for Minority Issues; Available at http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/WP_73.pdf

[14] ERPC 2012, Analysis of the National Roma Integration Strategies, European Roma Policy Coalition March 2012, http://www.ergonetwork.org/media/userfiles/media/Final%20ERPC%20Analysis%2021%2003%2012_FINAL.pdf

[15] ERPC 2012, Analysis of the National Roma Integration Strategies, European Roma Policy Coalition March 2012,

http://www.ergonetwork.org/media/userfiles/media/Final%20ERPC%20Analysis%2021%2003%2012_FINAL.pdf

[16] Decade for Roma inclusion, http://www.romadecade.org/decade-documents-decade-governing-documents

[17] Rousseau, Jean Jacques, The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right. 1762.Translated by G. D. H. Cole, Available at http://www.ucc.ie/archive/hdsp/Rousseau_contrat-social.pdf

[18] Friedman, Eben, 2014, Education in Member State Submissions Under the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, WP 73, European Centre for Minority Issues

[19] E.g. poverty, unemployment, crime rate issues, heath status and even racism and discrimination

[20] This conclusion can be made on the basis of the similarities   between the problems faced by Roma in the field of education, reported by the NRIS (note author)

[21] The major problem currently is that there is a clash between the political rhetoric about and real content of the 'Roma' integration policy. While the first promotes the human/minority rights perspective, in reality the approach to integration (also as projected by the EU Framework and the NRIS) is purely a *development* strategy in terms of goals and content (as addressed by the following reports: The United Nations (2013) The Role of the United Nations in Advancing Roma Inclusion, Report, February 2013, Available at: http://www.europe.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RomaInclusion.pdf and Lennox, Corinne (2011) Minority and Indigenous Women and the Millennium Development Goals, Available at: http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php@id=1014). The problem is that the political rhetoric addresses the issues as culturally-defined

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