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The Roma in Europe: socio economic condition and policies of integration

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CONTATTI

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¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?file=23375>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=748&langId=en&moreDocuments=yes>

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1. Introduction

The denomination “Roma” is a term given by the non-Roma population, or by the Roma themselves when distinguishing from the non-Roma population. Some authorities (such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, etc) recognize four/five main groups, which may be further divided into several subgroups, distinguished by occupational specialization, territorial origin, culture, religion, language, model of settlement, etc. This articulation is derived from *The Roma and Travellers Glossary* of the Council of Europe (2006)

- the *Sinti* are mainly found in the German-speaking regions (Germany, Switzerland, Austria), the Benelux and some of the Scandinavian countries. In France (the east, particularly Alsace), they are called «Manouches» (English: «Manush») «Manush» comes from a Romani word meaning «human being». There is a southern sub-branch of the Sinti in northern Italy (Piedmont, Lombardy) and Provence, who use a partly Italian-based vocabulary.
- The *Kale* (more commonly called “*Gitanos*” or “Spanish Gypsies”) live in the Iberian Peninsula and southern France and have more or less stopped using Romani. They speak *Kaló* which derives from Spanish. There is also a «Kaalé» group in Finland, which is striving to preserve its traditions, and there are Kale in Wales, who have stopped speaking Kalo since the 1950s.
- the *Romnichal* (*Rom'nies*) live in the United Kingdom, mainly in England and south Wales: among them there is a group, the Romanichals («Romanichels» in French) who identify themselves as «Gypsies» (sometimes «Roma/Gypsies» in official texts). They speak Anglo-Romani, which has a mixed English/Romani vocabulary and English grammar.
- The *travellers* (or «Gens du voyage», used in France), is an administrative term which also applies to non-Roma groups with itinerant lifestyles. It thus covers the various branches of Roma (Roma, Sinti/Manush, Kale/Gypsies), but other communities as well. «Travellers» proper are found in Ireland and Great Britain and are ethnically distinct from the Roma/Sinti/Kale. In Ireland, they are officially regarded as a native community, which is not distinct from the majority in terms of ancestry or ethnic origin. Originally, they were itinerant, but 80% are now sedentary. It should not, therefore, be assumed that Travellers live on the road; in Norway, Travellers are sedentary, while Roma move around. There are no «British Travellers» proper in the United Kingdom, where the only terms used - particularly in England – are «Irish Travellers» or «Travellers of Irish Heritage». In Northern Ireland, however, and in Scotland, the terms «Scottish Travellers» and «Irish Travellers» are used.
- (the *Kalderash* is one of the most numerous subgroups, traditionally smiths, from the Balkans, many of whom migrated to central Europe and North America).

The articulation of groups and subgroups (*endaia*) is often related to linguistic characteristics or the historical professions, comprising more than 18 categories³ and

³ <http://burgenland-roma.at/ethnogloba/a13.htm>

a large number of subcategories. “Roma” is normally used by international organisations such as the Council of Europe, EU, etc as a generic word for all these groups and subgroups. In this paper the term “Roma” is used having in mind its great internal heterogeneity.

The paper presents some elements for discussion emerging from two studies realised in 2008, that was the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue, one for the European Parliament and one for the Dg Employment within the Network of experts on Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health, and Long Term Care.

2. A brief picture of the socio economic conditions of the Roma Community in Europe

The Roma Community across Europe has been estimated to consist of more than 10 million people: it is the biggest minority group in the EU. Throughout Europe no precise data exist on the dimension on the Roma Communities: in many countries ethnic registration is forbidden, while in others official statistics contain no information on ethnicity or self-identification.

Box 1: Collecting data on ethnicity

Data on Roma socio-economic conditions and on their access to social welfare provision are, in most EU countries, poor or lacking. While gathering disaggregate ethnic data may itself be problematic, in the case of the Roma it is made even more difficult by a systematic under-recording trend. Two obstacles generally stand in the way of gathering data on ethnicity: a) the widespread belief that international law and/or the domestic legislation prohibit the gathering and maintenance of ethnic statistics; b) the widespread fear, among the Roma and other ethnic minorities - regardless of their legal status – of misuse of ethnic statistics, dangerous for the Community, and the fear that those statistics may reinforce negative racial stereotypes.

An objection has been made on the grounds that collection of ethnic data would breach the provisions of the EU Directive 95/46/EC on personal data protection: according to the opinion of the EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights the European rules relating to the processing of personal data, including the protection of sensitive data relating to the ethnic origin of the individual, should not be seen as an obstacle to adequate monitoring of the impact on certain ethnic, religious or linguistic groups of either public policies or legislation or private practices. “On the contrary” – it has been argued - “they constitute a necessary and welcome safeguard against any risk of abuse in the process of such monitoring, a pre-condition for which therefore is that these rules protecting personal data are strictly adhered to”.

In Annex 1 the table presents a ‘patchwork’ of existing official data and estimations on the dimension of the Roma Communities in Eu Member States.

The cultural and historic differences among sub-communities impact strongly on their status, opportunities and quality of life, but in particular on their level of integration in the broader national community, even though most of these sub-communities suffer from the same structural discrimination all over Europe, in particular, segregation in the fields of employment, education, training and housing.

Let’s consider more in depth each of these elements starting with the most important element to be taken into consideration, the legal status.

The legal status of the Roma throughout Europe

The legal status of the Roma Communities differs across Europe from country to country and from group to group: it is related, on the one hand, to the period of migration of the groups, and on the other hand to their recognition as an ethnic or national minority.

- Some groups of long-established migration are *citizens* of the country where they live where they are considered national minorities or ethnic minorities and have full citizenship.
- In the same countries some other groups are considered *refugees* or *asylum-seekers* and have no residence permit; in other countries they are considered *asylum-seekers/refugees*, but not in the condition to obtain the status.
- Quite a large number of Roma are *nationals of countries now members of the European Union* such as Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia: they are entitled to free circulation as European citizens, but in some Member States they lack full rights as workers.
- In most of the countries many of the Roma have no birth certificates or identity documents and are therefore considered *illegal immigrants* or *stateless*.

The legal status of autochthon (long established or traditionally settled) groups is often much better, as more often they are recognized as ethnic or national minority groups with related rights, while recent migrated groups often have the status of refugees, asylum applicants, authorized or unauthorized immigrants or stateless persons. In other cases the lack of documents (birth certificates, marriage certificates or other documents) makes it impossible to obtain a legal residence permit, although they might have been born and living for a long period in the country.

This is a fundamental issue, as it strongly influences rights to access the social security and health system and to education, as well as to a decent house and the possibility to participate in public and political life.

The exclusion of the Roma Communities from employment

Roma unemployment is a complex phenomenon, difficult to remedy since it is a multi-layered and inter-generational problem considering the manifold difficulties the Roma have to face to enter the labour market: legal status, poor education and a high rate of illiteracy, and of dependence on social welfare benefits, prejudice and discrimination in the labour market. Low or lacking of educational qualifications, work-based skills no longer relevant in a modern labour market, and settlement in isolated areas with limited access to jobs constitute real barriers that reduce employability and exclude many Roma from work, but there is another important dimension to be considered, that is direct and indirect discrimination that impair their access to employment.

In addition the Roma have difficulties in accessing employment services and labour market programmes due to lack of information, scant awareness on the part of the service providers of the barriers and difficulties they face, and lack of a permanent

address. Self-employment constitutes one of the most traditional and frequent forms of occupation among the Roma.

Roma women face additional disadvantages on the labour market, often related to their traditional domestic role in the family and their frequent pregnancies, as well as to their lack of qualifications and the prejudice they face. The EGGSI report evidences that throughout Europe Roma women are most often employed in auxiliary, unskilled, physically demanding work, and in seasonal and occasional labour in services (like cleaning) in the black or grey economy, which provide very low wages and deny them access to social security benefits. Begging is also predominantly performed by women and children in large urban areas, while subsistence farming is a primarily female activity in rural areas. The social costs of the lack of secure jobs are particularly serious for the most vulnerable among Roma women, namely single mothers, widowed women and women victims of domestic violence, who lack the support of the community and may find themselves caught up in prostitution and/or trafficking.

The exclusion of the Roma Communities from education

The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUFRA, 2008) has recently recognised that Roma children, in spite of the increasing number of dedicated programmes, still suffer peculiarly high levels of discrimination with respect to the education system: a) in primary education the enrolment and attendance of Roma pupils' are disproportionately low all over Europe; b) Roma pupils present an uneven and only partial transition to secondary education, with high drop-out; c) segregation of Roma pupils, although formally banned from education policies, still persists in many respects. Their placement in separate classrooms, or in special schools are justified on the grounds of their (perceived) "different needs", or of their patterns of behaviour, or as a reaction to their learning difficulties. Their separation from other pupils may also be a result of their residential segregation or isolation.

Factors influencing inadequate Roma access to education reported by EGGSI report include lack of training, support and resources for school personnel to deal with ethnically mixed classes; low educational levels and past discrimination experience on the part of the parents, resulting in poor motivation in investing in children's education; lack of informal education facilities, helpful to support the socialization of Roma children, as well as their acquisition of linguistic skills. The fact remains that education still acts as a channel of intergenerational reproduction of Roma social inequalities.

The EGGSI report highlights some additional problems for Roma children in relation with educational systems: Roma children start later than the children of the majority population, since they do not attend pre-school classes; they participate in education irregularly, having a high drop-out rate at around the age of 12-14. This is especially the case for girls due to economic and cultural reasons (child labour and family responsibility), greater mobility between places for some Roma communities; Roma children have greater difficulty in adapting to school rules and higher learning difficulties, not only because of language difficulties, but also because of the lack of awareness among teachers and schools of their specific needs in addition to the racism and bullying that persist against them.

The exclusion of the Roma Communities from social and health care

Roma women and men have an average life expectancy at birth considerably lower than the rest of the population: precise data do not exist due to the lack of statistical data on ethnic but two examples are shameful “The lower life expectancy of both male and female Roma, compared to the general population has been widely noted in both Western and Eastern Europe. In Slovakia, for instance, the life expectancy of Roma women is 17 years less than for the majority population; for men, it is 13 years less. For Irish Travellers, life expectancy is between 10-12 years less than for the settled population”⁴. This is a consequence of poor quality housing and living conditions, and the uneven access to screening and health care. Moreover, due to the inability to provide timely and prolonged health treatment, mortality hits Roma groups much earlier than the broader population: as described by the Open Society Foundation,⁵ higher rates of illness and mortality are present among Roma than in majority populations.

Roma women experience greater health risks than non-Roma women because of early and multiple pregnancies and abortions, the heavy workload at home, poor housing, malnutrition, etc. Abortion is still adopted as a method of “birth control” even if a decreasing trend has been observed. In some countries (such as Slovakia and Hungary) cases of imposed sterilization of young Roma women have been reported.

Access to health care is reported as one factor shaping overall health. According to European Roma Rights Centre “Access to medical services is made impossible in many instances of remote segregated Romani settlements where medical facilities do not exist and transportation to facilities outside the settlement is either unavailable or unaffordable to many people.”⁶ Roma women use health care services less than the rest of the population because medical treatment may conflict with the Roma rules of hygiene and modesty. Many pregnant Roma women (including underage Roma mothers) are not registered with a family physician and fail to go through pre-natal check ups because of lack of information and cultural barriers such as lack of trust in professional care and the difficulties for Roma women to discuss their health problems with strangers, especially if they are men.

Access to services is also obstructed by language problems. The Romani language lacks many specific words in the fields of medicine, health and social care. Some words and contexts that imply sexual or body functions are taboo and cannot be discussed directly.

Roma people also feel excluded by the negative attitudes/racism/discrimination of some health-care workers and hospitals. According to the 2003 European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia report “*Breaking the barriers – access of Roma*

⁴ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2003 b), *Breaking the barriers – Romani women and access to public health care*, Vienna. <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ROMA/rapport-en.pdf>

⁵ Open Society Foundation (2007), *Left Out: Roma and access to health care in Eastern and South Eastern Europe*, Public Health Fact Sheet, Brussels.

⁶ European Roma Rights Centre (2006), *The Disgrace of Health Care for Roma in Europe*, Budapest. http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/roma/articles_publications/publications/ambulance_20061004/ambulance_20061004.pdf

women to public health”⁷ discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes are key factors that block access of Roma to the healthcare system.

The multiple discrimination of Roma women

Discrimination in the case of Roma women is a multiple phenomenon, often being on the basis of both ethnic origin and gender.

Being a minority, with a culture and living habits very different from the majority of the population in EU Member States, the Roma population are subject to negative perceptions and prejudice on the part of the non-Roma population. Roma women must, in addition, cope with difficulties which are aggravated by the specific Roma culture, based on “traditional” strictly separated gender roles within their communities which may hamper the personal development of Roma girls and women. This is particularly true in some of the Roma communities, which have, due to their historic and cultural background, maintained strict adherence to traditional habits. The most significant aspect of the situation of women in several Roma communities is their unequal position within the Roma family. The traditional Roma family is fully patriarchal: the woman occupies a subordinate position and there is a clear division of work between the tasks of men and women. Traditionally, the man provides for the family and represents the family outside home, while the woman’s role is mainly that of taking care of home and family and having responsibility for the transmission of the traditional Roma culture and ethnicity between generations. Girls start taking on adult caring roles from the age of 11; they are expected to marry young and have many children in life-long marriages. These traditional home and family duties prevent Roma women from entering jobs in the “formal” labour market and in any case make it hard to combine work and family life.

Relations between men and women differ between groups and nationality: in some communities young Roma men are becoming increasingly free to choose their future wives, while in others, such as Roma groups from Romania, the parents still choose their future daughters-in-law. Divorce/separation is not common among the Roma, especially if there are children, and in this case the women are in the weaker position as the father usually takes custody of the children or gives them to the grandparents to provide care.

In the absence of a secure job, Roma women who are single mothers, widows, or have escaped from domestic violence face particularly acute problems when trying to secure the economic well-being of their household. Some Roma women are also at the risk of resorting to prostitution or even delinquency as components of ‘subsidiary survival strategies’.

In recent years, as most reports show, changing social and economic contexts are challenging the traditional gender roles and expectations, with varying degrees of acceptance and resistance from men and women of all ages. Roma and Traveller activist women are questioning and challenging the gender roles and assumptions of the traditional culture and violence within and against the community.

⁷ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2003 b), *Breaking the barriers – Romani women and access to public health care*, Vienna. <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ROMA/rapport-en.pdf>

Prejudices and stereotypes

Many European and national surveys show that a substantial proportion of European citizens have a negative view of the Roma population, based mainly on stereotypes and prejudice. One of the latest reports on public opinion presented in the Eurobarometer⁸ indicates that:

- “*discrimination based on ethnic origin (62%) is seen to be the most widespread form of discrimination in the EU*”.⁹
- Discrimination is greater towards the Roma, though differences are present in the European Countries.
- Having a Roma neighbour is a cause of uneasiness for 24% of the non-Roma population (for other ethnic minorities it is 6%). The highest levels of prejudice (expressed by the percentage of respondents who would feel uncomfortable having Roma as neighbours) are documented in the Czech Republic and in Italy (47%), followed by Ireland (40%), Slovakia (38%) and Bulgaria (36%).
- The lowest levels of “uneasy” feelings (12-14%) are measured in Poland, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden and France.

Another part of the Eurobarometer study analyses the willingness of Europeans to have friends among the Roma:

- On average in Europe only 14% of the population answered positively, with the lowest numbers (below 7%) in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Estonia, Poland
- The highest numbers were in Romania and Hungary (42% each), where also the largest number of Roma is living.

This indicates a generally very low level of contact between the majority and the Roma population, which might be influenced by many factors, as for example the segregated living conditions Roma face in many countries, the dispersed numbers of Roma within each country limiting possible contact, language barriers or lack of interest or possibilities in becoming acquainted with people from this culture.

⁸ European Commission, *Discrimination in the European Union: Perceptions, Experiences and Attitudes, Special Eurobarometer 296*, July 2008

⁹ European Commission (2008), *Discrimination in the EU, Special Eurobarometer 296*.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_296_sum_en.pdf

Table 1

Comfort with Roma neighbour: country results				
	Average (on scale from 1 to 10)	Comfortable (8,9,10)	Uncomfortable (1,2,3)	Friends/acquaintances Roma
PL	7.5	58%	12%	7%
SE	7.1	52%	14%	9%
FR	6.9	48%	15%	14%
LU	6.9	36%	13%	6%
ES	6.8	42%	13%	32%
MT	6.8	43%	18%	2%
DK	6.7	47%	21%	4%
NL	6.7	40%	13%	5%
BE	6.6	45%	16%	6%
UK	6.3	40%	22%	11%
EL	6.2	42%	26%	6%
LT	6.2	42%	25%	12%
RO	6.2	34%	20%	42%
SI	6.1	36%	24%	13%
EU27	6.0	36%	24%	14%
EE	5.9	36%	28%	7%
DE	5.8	33%	25%	5%
PT	5.7	24%	19%	26%
CY	5.6	37%	34%	4%
HU	5.5	28%	28%	42%
FI	5.5	25%	25%	20%
AT	5.3	22%	28%	3%
LV	5.2	24%	28%	26%
BG	4.8	21%	36%	47%
IE	4.8	24%	40%	6%
SK	4.5	17%	38%	37%
IT	4.0	14%	47%	5%
CZ	3.7	9%	47%	18%

Source: European Commission (2008), *Discrimination in the EU, Special Eurobarometer 296*.

The low level of contact has an important impact on the perception of the culture, often influenced by negative media reports, preconceptions or a deep rooted mistrust as well as racial discrimination. The other important factor in this respect is the scant and partial media coverage on issues addressing the Roma, opening the way to depicting negative images of Roma.

Negative stereotyping in the media and statements by public officials often seems not to be sanctioned against, as in the Italian case, the Roma being actually one of the main issues addressed by the media. As stated by the former Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles *“Anti-Roma sentiments are so deeply rooted in some societies that discrimination against the Roma in areas such as employment, education, housing or access to public premises appears to be generally tolerated, and not considered illegal.”*¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.vlada.cz/cs/rvk/rzrk/mezinardniaktivty/radaevropy/mgsrom/priloha/default.html>

3. Policies of integration of the Roma Communities throughout Europe

The European Union set ambitious goals in the Lisbon Strategy relating to the creation of more jobs, social cohesion and sustainable development. That a large number of European citizens are socially excluded as a result of belonging to Roma communities jeopardizes achievement of these goals. Combating the social exclusion of the Roma in the name of fundamental rights and their common European environment is a key aspect to turn social cohesion and local development into a common resource, applying even to the more vulnerable and marginal sectors of national citizenries.

Roma poverty has many distinct roots, each interconnected with the others, resulting in a multidimensional, intergenerational process of cumulative causation. Hence, in terms of social inclusion strategies, there is need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach.

The problems experienced by Roma are multidimensional and interlinked: Poor housing has an impact on health and on educational performance and access to public services. Low attendance rates at school and unequal treatment within the educational system affect employment opportunities, access to services, health, and access to justice. This... requires a multisectoral, or integrated, approach to providing solutions... [and thus] close cooperation and coordination between government departments and between national, regional, and local levels of government. It also requires meaningful and ongoing consultation with the breadth of the Roma community. (Open Society Institute, 2006).

European national policies for the Roma – whether targeted on them, or involving them within a wider framework – can be basically classified, according to a World Bank (2005) study, along a twofold continuum:

- on the one hand, coercive vs. rights-based policies;
- on the other hand, individual-based vs. group-based ones.

Four ideal typical policy models – which in practice may intermingle, sometimes clashing, with one another – can thus be described (table 2).

Table 2 – A typology of Roma policy approaches in Europe

	<i>Coercive</i>	<i>Rights-based</i>
<i>Roma treated as a separate group</i>	Exclusion	Minority Rights
<i>Roma treated as individual members of broader society</i>	Assimilation	Integration

Source: World Bank, 2005

1. The first model – *Exclusion policies* – reflects a long historical legacy of policies oriented to maintain, or even reinforce, Roma marginality vis-à-vis the majority society, often on the grounds of their radical strangeness, of their perceived dangerousness, or even of their supposed “inferiority”. In different

guises, such orientation is far from eradicated even nowadays. Its after-effects apply, for instance, in the frequent cases of Roma geographic marginalization, or in their segregation from mainstream society institutions.

2. A second ideal type, (*Forced*) *Assimilation policies*, shares with the former a fundamental concern to reduce the visibility of Roma communities. Assimilative policies aim to make Roma adopt the majority society's values, lifestyles and behaviours. Belonging to the mainstream society is supposed to be the way both to facilitate interaction between Roma and non-Roma, and to provide the former with many more benefits and opportunities than the traditional identities they may be losing, while assimilating. A typically assimilative approach towards Roma minorities, for instance, underlay socialist policies in Eastern Europe during the Cold War.
3. Throughout the last decades, however, quite different minority policy models have gained prominence – at least in terms of public discourse – in liberal democratic states, also under the impulse of international organizations. The two ideal types involved here share a public recognition of minority civil and political rights, but differ as to the privileged focus of such rights: whether an individual, or a group. The *Integration policies* approach involves, in principle at least, the recognition of Roma as individually full members of society, irrespective of their peculiar cultures. The latter can even be maintained, provided they do not prevent the adoption of the majority society's lifestyles – supposed to be a vehicle for their achievement of equal opportunities with non-Roma individuals. Conventionally progressive approaches to Roma inclusion in the labour market, in the education system, etc., on equal footing with any other individuals, fall within this policy model.
4. A more recent version of the liberal-democratic approach, placing greater emphasis on group rights, has to do with *Minority rights policies*. In this perspective, improving Roma (or any minority) living conditions and opportunities entails greater respect for their cultural self-determination, along with their attainment of full individual rights. Indeed, a significant development in the last few decades has been the recognition of minority rights, as a result first of OSCE and Council of Europe initiatives, and then in a common EU framework. On a national level, the increasing importance of minority rights protection – including, in some cases at least, the Roma – should be understood in this perspective. Yet, altogether, “the status of the Roma as an ethnic minority group has been only officially acknowledged in some countries in recent years, and even in those countries... there is little if any systematic monitoring on the socioeconomic situation of the Roma or social inclusion impact assessment” (European Commission, 2006).

Apart from policy-making orientations, the models described above reflect distinct visions that may coexist in national public opinions, and even in Roma self-representations and expectations – whether inclined to integration with majority societies, or rather to the maintenance of their own peculiar identities. Far from being abstract assumptions, distinct orientations impinge on real policy options regarding the Roma in the field of schooling, social and health care education, housing, etc.

However, such ideal policy types may overestimate the overall consistence of national policies: in most of the cases in fact national policies are likely to result in fragmented actions, under many different pressures rather than in far-reaching strategies. Above all, while national policy-making may set a general framework for Roma inclusion, it is on the local level, in relation to local specificities, that social policies are actually implemented. When it comes to evaluating the impact of public policies, special attention should be paid at a local scale of analysis. It is on the local level that formal entitlements take real shape, and abstract law provisions are put into action – whatever the result – in real terms. It is on the local level that effective inclusion measures, if any, can be developed.

From the policy perspective, addressing the condition of Roma requires consideration of multiple, interconnected social and economic factors that influence their daily lives: discrimination, poverty and poor access to employment and education, poor access to healthcare and social services, barriers of gender and traditions. Let's see some perspectives across Europe.

It is in **Eastern Europe** that, thus far, international cooperation on Roma social inclusion has made particularly significant progress. An overall action framework for policy developments in the area is provided by the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015* initiative, promoted by Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia – in cooperation with several international institutions (*inter alia*, the World Bank, UNDP, the Council of Europe and the Open Society Institute). The aim of the initiative is, apart from redressing the lack of relevant information on Roma minorities, to promote their social inclusion through a three-step, multi-policy process:

- defining objectives for improving their current status in a few priority areas and establishing a novel information database for the purpose;
- elaborating and implementing, on a national basis, ten-year action plans consistent with such objectives; and
- regularly reviewing objective fulfilment and, if necessary, modifying national action plans.

This trans-national initiative is headed by an International Steering Committee (ISC), including representatives of participating governments, Roma organizations, international donors, and other international organizations. Overall, the strategic plan sets up broad policy aims and intervention priorities, thus supervising the states' own initiatives. Implementation of the National Action Plan in each country is regularly assessed by a qualified group of experts, researchers and Roma activists, associated in the Decade Watch net.

As for the key areas of concern, *education* is approached in terms of desegregation, integration, elevation of the educational level, better access to childcare services; *employment*, with respect to integration in the labour market, training and retraining, raising the employment level of the Roma; *housing*, aiming at reducing local segregation; *health*, having as purpose better health conditions, longer life expectancies at birth, better access to the healthcare system.

Shifting the focus to **EU15 Member States**, a few national cases call for fuller description of the scope and results of policy-making processes with respect to the Roma minorities.

- In *UK* reference must be made to the work-centred social inclusion policies developed in the last decade. The common thread lies in the attempt to “activate” social groups affected by high levels of unemployment (e.g. the young, long-term unemployed, lone parents, older workers). Government policy has also sought to increase the employment rate overall and to encourage economically inactive women into employment. Such policies, however, have not been specifically targeted to Roma minorities. No data exist on the extent to which the women in these communities have benefited from mainstream labour market activation policies. Policies have also been developed to make work pay (e.g. the minimum wage, in-work tax credits) and to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life (e.g. improvements in maternity and paternity leave, extension of child care provision).
- In *Sweden* – where relatively few Roma people are recorded as employed, and many live on disability pensions or social welfare allowances – the concern exists that their distance from the labour market may be too great for employment policies to bridge; hence, arguably, the need for dedicated activities, although in a broader framework extending well beyond the labour market. In education, for instance, the Government is promoting an extensive reading-writing-arithmetic initiative, aiming to strengthen Roma children’s competence and, in the long term, to reduce the number of school drop-outs. In family policy, a voluntary municipal child-raising allowance will be developed. The expectation here is to increase opportunities for mothers to stay at home longer. However, as most Roma mothers are unlikely to have many employment opportunities, the child-raising allowance may result in a valuable source of income.
- Altogether, in the more generous and nearly universalistic welfare systems – typically in *Scandinavia* – social policies for the Roma seem to place strong emphasis on cultural issues (such as respect for cultural differences, the history of the Roma, their language etc.). Even in these countries, however, what is really at stake is the availability and accessibility of services to the Roma, as well as the development of their socio-economic perspectives, impinging on the factors that account for their poor life opportunities.

When considering actions to improve the situation of the Roma, the relationship between **special services targeted solely to the Roma and normal services open to everyone is important**. In Finland, for instance, the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs has been cautious in promoting segregated measures. Instead, the focus has been on facilitating Roma access to the ordinary provision of basic services.

Two more cases merit mention here on the grounds of their start-up of social inclusion strategies specifically oriented to the Roma: Spain and Greece.

- In *Spain* Roma social inclusion strategies rely on a dedicated National Programme for Roma Development. This policy tool aims at promoting and financing positive actions for the social development of the Roma, as well as

mediating between different public authorities and the representative organizations of the Roma community. It also pursues the strengthening and adaptation of general plans and measures regarding the overall population in order to guarantee equal access conditions for the Roma. The plan, which makes no explicit mention of gender issues, provides both for public programmes and for the financial and technical support of NGOs involved in Roma's placement and social inclusion.

- Also the *Greek* government is currently implementing a nation-wide "Integrated action plan for the social integration of the Roma people", developing along two axes: the first labelled "Structures", with the focus on housing, the second regarding "Services", covering all Roma-related education, employment and vocational training programmes.

Summing up, national policy-making processes with respect to Roma social inclusion may differ considerably, both in their underlying approaches (on a continuum between overall and category approaches, both showing inherent strengths and limitations) and in the social welfare domains regarded as priority. The greatest difference, however, has more to do with the pre-existing structuring of the national welfare regime – hence the significant variations in the amounts of resources, in the knowledge used and applied, in the social actors at stake, and possibly even in the resulting social outcomes, bearing in mind that the demographical weight of the Roma – in a sense, their social relevance – is highly variable from one country to another.

The actual integration of Roma minorities also relies heavily on local factors, i.e. the orientations of the local authorities (and even individual public servants); opportunities to participate in training measures and labour market niches; the local activation of social projects, varying in scope and eligibility conditions; and real access to social welfare provisions – whether in education, health or social care, housing, etc. Important, too, are the self-organizing capacities of Roma communities, whether in terms of mutuality, advocacy, self-representation or service provision.

Whatever their approach, according to the World Bank (2005) effective social inclusion policies should balance three distinct objectives

- "increasing Roma economic opportunities", by enhancing and qualifying their participation in the labour market;
- "building human capital", with the levers of education and health;
- "strengthening social capital and community development", by facilitating Roma participation in the public sphere and in civil society initiatives.

The following paragraphs present some key issues and examples of policies addressing these objectives specifically targeted to the Roma Communities implemented in Europe.

Policies of integration through employment

The concern exists that the distance of the Roma from the labour market may be too wide for employment policies to bridge, and the need for dedicated wider programmes is envisaged. Policies must be geared to identifying and overcoming the specific barriers to employment for the Roma.

A twofold concern should orient the implementation of any welfare policy addressing the Roma:

- facilitating their access to ordinary or targeted welfare provision, which may also involve contrasting barriers related to prejudices and discrimination;
- supporting Roma individuals and families, if necessary, to help their access to employment.

The aim of reducing the number of unemployables and increasing employment in the various groups of the Roma population are a clear and long-term objective of public employment policy. This objective can only be achieved together with increasing the level of education and reducing the attractiveness of social benefits: more attention is needed in seeking out more efficient active employment policy measures, inter-connected not only with the social benefit system but also with education and housing policies. Getting a job should become much more motivational for unemployed people and for people living on social benefits.

The mobilisation of the private sector towards promoting the employment of the Roma through corporate social responsibility programmes can also be an effective method, but also through incentives for employers employing Roma and campaigns to create a discrimination-free social environment that promotes the employment of Roma people.

It could also be useful to support Roma entrepreneurship to help them to integrate their competences in the formal economy: the Roma could be supported in taking advantage of their native language and cultural skills, for example becoming mediators in the health sector or in translation, or by offering them incentives to produce cultural products, including food, arts and crafts, etc.

Box 2: A good practice in Spain

“Proyecto Clavel” (is) a regularization process of underground economy activities, developed in Southern Spain (Seville City), in the framework of an EQUAL project. A “typical” activity for Roma women – street flower selling – has been selected for a regularization plan, which has involved training, technical support and then better earnings for some twenty Roma women, targeted as beneficiaries. More in detail, the project has developed through the following steps: a feasibility plan for activity regularization; the selection and training of recipients; the design of sales spots; technical assistance to beneficiaries; information campaign addressed at the local population.

Policies of integration through education

It is advisable to reduce Roma pupil segregation, first of all avoiding their placement in separate classrooms: comprehensive schooling is recommended to postpone the date of school selection and thus give Roma pupils the opportunity to make up for their educational disadvantages.

To sustain Roma access to school and enhance attainment in education, it is essential to support, on the one hand, training, support and resources for school personnel to deal with ethnically mixed classes, and, on the other hand, informal education facilities helping to support Roma children in their socialisation as well as their acquisition of linguistic skills.

Several MS programmes aiming at helping children integrate into the school system already exist, but there are far fewer programmes for the education of adult Roma. This is to be considered an essential issue as a means intended to break intergenerational reproduction of Roma social inequalities and as part of an active employment policy.

It has also been observed that the interventions with greater impact are generally those able to combine attention to literacy and school attendance with investment in the social background – in family and even in community terms – of Roma children. Educational initiatives should thus be intertwined with support actions outside the school realm, involving both health and psychological action. Such is the case, for instance, of an integrated social support initiative for Roma children launched in Romania by a private Foundation.

Box 3: A good practice in Romania

The Phillip Home Foundation runs integrated programmes (educational, socio-medical assistance, psychological counselling and after school programmes) to address the complex needs of Roma children and their families (...). The project has several complementary components including a day centre for Roma children, health centre, resource centre for parents and also a methodology centre for teachers working with disadvantaged children. The day centre provides support for children to enhance their school performance and socio-medical assistance. The children benefit of a free meal (many Roma parents state they are willing to send their children to school if free meals - even snacks - are provided, and also request school supplies and clothing) and free time activities focused on child development. The staff maintains permanent contacts with the Roma families in order to improve the child-parent relation thus expanding the day centre activities within the local community. The children assisted by the project made visible progress in terms of improved school attendance for those showing school dropout risk, improved school performance, social integration and development of social skills. In order to enhance the programme's efficiency the Phillip Home Foundation developed partnership agreements with various community members, with the local schools and kindergartens and with local authorities.

Policies of integration through social and health care

A recent comparative report by ERRC/NUMENA Research Centre on Human and Social Sciences (2007) puts special emphasis on four lines of intervention, to be developed for greater "health inclusion" in Roma minorities: *mediation in health care*: active involvement of mediators, especially in hospital structures, is likely to enhance reciprocal trust, for easier communication between health staff and Roma patients; *training for health practitioners*: training programmes for medical professions, in the field of anti-discrimination and cultural awareness, may also prove helpful; *increasing knowledge* of the Roma among professionals in social and health care sectors, and stimulating the outreaching work of the institutions; *proactive health initiatives*: visits to the Romani communities by health workers may be helpful in facilitating Roma access to ordinary health facilities; in improving the health practitioners' understanding of Roma lifestyles and conditions, with their impact in health terms; and even in reinforcing the Roma users' confidence in health workers.

Box 4: A good practice in Italy

In 1997 the local Health care service in Rome launched a series of interventions in several camp sites in the city of Rome. The project is based on the recognition that the use of health care services by Roma and Sinti populations is not so widespread; the consequences are that various diseases are common in the camp sites where they live, especially for the children. To overcome this situation and to increase access of the Roma population to the basic health services, the project created a Health Care Unit going directly to the camp sites in Rome in order to provide basic health care services, medical services and social assistance to the Roma population, with particular attention to children.

The project is run by the Local Health Care Service (ASL RM/B) with the support of Opera Nomadi association through Roma cultural mediators trained for this purpose.

The Health Care Unit uses a van equipped as a normal consulting room. The Unit consists of a doctor, a nurse, a social worker and a cultural mediator. They offer basic health care assistance (including also vaccination for children); courses of health education (especially for women, considering also their role as caregivers for all the family); family planning and natal care; information for a better access to the health care and social services in the municipality of Rome.

The innovative element is the great involvement of Romani women as beneficiaries of health care services, and as the main interlocutors between their communities and health care and social services.

Awareness of their culture and needs has been a precondition to gaining the confidence and commitment of the Roma, while helping to ensure that the programmes do not create or perpetuate a classical syndrome of dependency and passivity.

4. In conclusion: integrate programmes addressing the Roma within a comprehensive policy framework...

An interim evaluation report of PHARE support to Roma minorities (EMS, 2004)¹¹ argues that programmes targeted to the Roma have been developed across Eastern Europe in “the absence... of a clear policy framework for social inclusion”. The lack of long-term strategies (and even of appropriate capacities and expertises), the poor integration with wider social inclusion policies, along with the weaknesses of partnerships between the relevant stakeholders, have mostly resulted in short-term, one-off initiatives.

Substantial resources have been invested in education (albeit with insufficient emphasis on lifelong learning) and infrastructure development – although mostly with a top-down approach, with a feeble impact on local participation and community planning. Relatively less investment has been made, however, either in labour market (re)integration, or in health protection.

The literature evidences that to improve the situation of the Roma in Europe two elements are essential:

- to develop policies which identify and address all aspects of their deprivation through an integrated approach

¹¹ EMS – European Management Solutions (2004), From pre-accession to accession. Review of the European Union PHARE assistance to Roma minorities – Interim evaluation, Research Report.

- to provide for the empowerment of the communities through support for the Roma's own self-organization capacities, whether in terms of mutuality, advocacy, self-representation or service provision.

Concerning the first one it is essential from one side to support the *continuity of interventions* and policies and their internalisation within mainstream intervention fields: actually integration of the Roma relies mainly on action at the local level and on contingent factors. Especially in Southern and Eastern European countries, these programmes are often short-lived, pilot projects, funded by the European Social Fund. Effective programmes must, instead, be internalised in ordinary policy making and provided with sufficient financial and human resources.

On the other side it is to note that European countries are increasingly adopting specific policies targeting Roma but scant attention is given to *evaluation of their effectiveness*. It is advisable to introduce constant evaluation of the effectiveness of the policies implemented to promote and refund anew those found effective, changing the ineffective ones, while disseminating policies and measures found particularly effective throughout Europe.

Concerning the second element the *involvement of NGO and Roma community organisations/representatives in policy design and implementation* can maximise the effectiveness of programme implementation thanks to their strong commitment and knowledge of the needs of the target groups. Moreover through these organisations it is much easier to tackle internal differences of the Roma sub-communities, an issue that we consider essential for the effectiveness of every integration policy to be implemented.

... beginning by the recognition of the Roma as a European minority

The Roma population occupies a peculiar position: being widely dispersed throughout Europe and even beyond it, the Roma have no territory of their own. Being a minority everywhere, they share a similarly imposed identity characterized by political and social marginalization and stigmatization.

In many countries the Roma are recognised neither as a national minority nor as an ethnic minority.

Since the Roma are first and foremost citizens of a given country, local legal settings and practices are decisive in determining their position and status. In contrast to other legitimate or historical national minorities, however, the Roma are at a disadvantage. Many of the rights and guarantees of protection existing for other minorities have been obtained through bilateral, legally binding treaties, which the Roma do not enjoy.

Lacking a "mother country" within Europe, the Roma are not considered to fit the ad hoc definition of a national minority. Additionally, since they do not live in well-defined areas of settlement, they do not conform to the traditional profile of a territorially concentrated national minority.

Romani intellectuals, aware of the ambiguity and limitations of applying traditional concepts to their particular situation, have introduced such innovative concepts as "stateless nation" and "nonterritorial," "transnational" or "truly European" people (in the Brussels Declaration) to describe their position. The expression "European

Minority” reflects both their nature as a truly transnational minority and their importance for the process of European integration. The European Parliament's *resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union* (P6_TA(2005)0151) calls in Article 2 on the Council, the Commission, the Member States and the candidate countries to consider recognising the Roma as a European minority. But till now nothing in this direction has been done.

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ANNEX 1

Official data and estimates on the dimension of the Roma communities¹²

Country	Official data on Roma population	Estimations on Roma population	Minimum-Maximum percentage of Roma population
Austria	6,000 people speaking Romani, according to the 2001 census	40,000 Roma people ¹³	0.07% (according to official data) – 0.48% (according to estimations)
Belgium	n.a.	20,000 (according to estimations presented in the national report)	0.19% (according to estimations)
Bulgaria	370,908 (Census)	550,000 to 1 million (according to estimations presented in the national report) ¹⁴	4.7% (according to official data) – 10.13% (according to estimations)
Czech Republic	32,903 people declared themselves Roma according to the 1991 census (16,031 women and 16,872 men); 11,746 persons declared themselves Roma according to the 2001 census (5,597 women and 6,149 men)	160,000-200,000 (3)	0.11% (according to official data) – 2.91% (according to estimations)
Finland	n.a.	10,000 Roma in Finland and around 4,000 Finnish Roma in Sweden (1)	0.09% - 0.19% (according to estimations)
France	n.a.	250,000-300,000 (3)	0.66% (according to estimations)
Germany	85,000 to 120,000 in the mid nineties ¹⁵	Around 200,000 ¹⁶	0.10% (according to official data) – 0.24% (according to estimations)
Greece	7,429 (according to the	According to different sources:	1.08% – 2.5%

¹² Main sources of the following figures: (1) Eggsi Network national reports; (2) European Parliament (2006 a), Economic Aspects of the Condition of Roma Women"; (3) European Commission (2006a), Gender inequalities in the risks of poverty and social exclusion for disadvantaged groups in thirty European countries, Brussels

¹³ Leoni, T. (2004), "The Roma in Austria – A Historical Perspective", WIFO Working Papers 222/2004, 2004A

¹⁴ Rossen Vassilev, (2004) *The Roma of Bulgaria: A Pariah Minority*, The Global Review of Ethnopolitics, Vol. 3, no. 2, January 2004, 40-51

¹⁵ Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin (2007), *Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse einer Studie „Zur Lage von Kindern aus Roma-Familien in Deutschland*, UNICEF, Berlin; European Roma Rights Centre

¹⁶ Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin (2007), *Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse einer Studie „Zur Lage von Kindern aus Roma-Familien in Deutschland*, UNICEF, Berlin; European Roma Rights Centre

	1951 official census); 120,000-150,000 (according to the Greek delegation: statement at the 2001 OSCE meeting)	160,000-200,000 ¹⁷ ; 350,000 ¹⁸	
Hungary	190,046 (according to the 2001 census) of which 93,711 women and 96,273 men (2)	570,000 in 2003 according to Kemeny's estimations ¹⁹	1.88% (according to official data) - 5.64% (according to estimations)
Ireland	22,400 (according to the most recent census)	n.a.	0.53% (according to official data)
Italy	n.a.	120,000-150,000 (according to public authorities estimations and to other estimations) ²⁰	0.20% - 0.26% (according to estimations)
Latvia	8,205 (according to the 2000 census) (2)	12,000 -13,000 (according to Roma leaders) (1)	0.36% (according to official data) - 0.57% (according to estimations)
Lithuania		According to estimations of Tscherenkow, and Laederich between 5,000 to 6,000 ²¹	0.1% (according to estimations)
Netherlands	2,000 (according to the 2002 Annual report Integration Policy of Ethnic Minorities) (1)	6,000 (according to the Anne Frank Foundation report "Monitor Racism and Extreme Right")	0.01% (according to official data) - 0.06% (according to estimations)
Poland	12,900 (according to the 2001 census quoted in (3))	20,000 (3)	0.03% (according to official data) - 0.05% (according to estimations)
Portugal	21,831 (according to a 2001 survey based on 186 city halls questionnaires (2)	20,000-50,000 (1); 40,000 (3)	0.21% (according to official data) - 0.66% (according to estimations)
Romania	535,250 (according to the 2002 census)	1,4- 2,5 million inhabitants; minimum 730,174, medium 851,048 and maximum 968,275 (according to a World Bank study) (1) 1-1,5 million persons (according to the international institutions); 2,5 million persons (3)	2.43% (according to official data) - 13.64% (according to estimations)
Slovakia	89,920 according to the	378,950 (based on 2001 census)	1.67% (according to

¹⁷ Minority Rights Group International (1997), World Directory of Minorities, Minority Rights Group International, London

¹⁸ European Roma Rights Centre (2003), Country Report on Greece, Cleaning Operations: Excluding Roma in Greece. Bucharest

¹⁹ Kemény István-Janky Béla- Lengyel Gabriella (2004) *A magyarországi cigánység 1971-2003*, Bp., Gondolat

²⁰ Statistical Dossier Immigration Caritas/Migrantes. Elaboration on different sources

²¹ Tscherenkow, L, Laederich, S. (2004): *The Roma*. Basel, Schwabe, 2004

	2001 census	and projections to 2005) (3)	official data) – 6.85% (according to estimations)
Slovenia	3,246 (according to the 2002 census)	7,000-10,000 (according to the Roma Union of Slovenia) (3)	0.16% (according to official data) – 0.60% (according to estimations)
Spain	n.a.	680.000 (2)	1.70% (according to estimations)
Sweden	n.a.	40,000-50,000 ²²	0.44% - 0.56% (according to estimations)
UK	n.a.	200,000-300,000 (3)	0.33% – 0.50% (according to estimations)

Source: Eggsi Network, Crepaldi C, con Corsi M., Samek Lodovici M., Boccagni P. Vasilescu C., "Ethnic minority and Roma women in Europe: A case for gender equality?"

²² Ministry of Justice (2003), Sweden's Roma. A National Minority. Fact Sheet. Regeringskansliet, Stockholm