

ERPC Response to Consultation Meeting of 13 October 2011

October 2011

Consultation note 24 October 2011

The European Commission has shared its plans for the Sixth European Roma Platform with civil society organisations and launched a dialogue on how and what civil society might contribute to ensure the effectiveness of the EU Roma Framework and the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) supports this discussion, and thanks the Commission for its willingness to consider stakeholders' concerns.

This paper summarises the ERPC's suggestions to the Commission on mechanisms and measures which could and should be put in place to ensure the EU Roma Framework and the EU Roma Platform can become an effective instrument.

1. Enhancing the policy debate

We urge the Commission to enhance a sincere and dedicated policy debate on Roma and to contribute to knowledge-building on ways and means to deliver Roma social inclusion, combat discrimination and curb anti-Gypsyism. This should be achieved by:

- a. Establishing **formal mechanisms** for regular dialogue, participation and expertise gathering. Lessons should be learnt from the accession process and the civil society dialogue between EU and candidate countries. Suggestions on how the European Roma Platform might become a meaningful forum for dialogue are listed under bullet point 3

- b. Ensuring **transparency** in all processes involving the EU Roma Framework. The EU Roma Framework is an instrument which seeks better inclusion for Roma. An initial step is to make matters which concern Roma transparent to permit informed participation. The Commission should ensure member states fully commit themselves to transparency in developing and implementing their NRIS. Only by ensuring adequate access to relevant information will Roma organisations and civil society be able to contribute to the effectiveness of the Framework and the NRIS
- c. Refraining from confining policy debate to the Framework's effectiveness. The ERPC recognises the importance of emphasising the development and implementation of NRIS so as to ensure their effectiveness. Yet this should not allow a blind eye to be turned on other equally important challenges such as the current outbreak of violent anti-Gypsyism.

2. Act against anti-Gypsyism

The mood is becoming increasingly hostile to Roma. We are witnessing severe harassment and violence against them in several member states. Considering the expected increased tensions and anti-Gypsyism owing to widespread economic crisis, it is imperative to address anti-Gypsyism urgently.

To ensure the fight against anti-Gypsyism is given urgent priority on the political agenda and receives political support, the Commission should:

- a. Extend the current Roma Task Force's mandate to tackle anti-Gypsyism. The Task Force should be led by the Commissioner of Justice and Fundamental Rights and should comprise key figures from the Commission and member states, to ensure credibility and implementation of effective counter-measures
- b. Take urgent measures against disturbing and widespread racism, violence and harassment which Roma face. These steps might include monitoring and publicly criticising incidents of racist violence and hate speech, developing tools to address racism, and supporting the Commission and member states in implementing these instruments. Possible instruments include:
 - i. A crisis protocol to respond adequately to anti-Gypsyism incidents, such as hate speech and inter-ethnic clashes
 - ii. Steps to redress the weaknesses of the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia in EU legislation by providing an accurate definition of the types of racist and xenophobic activities and behaviour which it seeks to target, including responses to public figures and state authority representatives who engage in racist and xenophobic acts and behaviour, and expressly addressing racist violence which targets particularly vulnerable groups, such as Roma

- iii. Strengthening monitoring of implementation of the equality directives and the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia

3. Strong commitment to Roma inclusion

Exclusion affects most of the 8 million Roma who live in the EU. While this has been recognised in the EU Roma Framework, the political commitment has not yet been matched by sufficient resources. The **human resources and funding dedicated to this issue should be increased**, to strengthen the Commission's coordinating role and lead the process to make the EU Roma Framework an effective instrument, and steer member states' work, and the internal mainstreaming of Roma issues into all relevant EU policy areas

4. Strengthening the European Roma Platform

- a. **Working groups** comprising the various stakeholders which prepare the topics of the Platform meeting and ensure continuity in the work between the meetings (in particular if the Platform only meets once a year only) should be put in place, as described in our input to the review of the Platform issued June 2011
- b. Regarding the Sixth meeting of the Platform:
 - i. Add a **debate on anti-Gypsyism** to the agenda aiming to create strong commitment to fighting anti-Gypsyism
 - ii. Take advantage of the fact that different stakeholders meet and allow **meaningful interaction between stakeholders**. The current agenda could be modified to allow discussion between all stakeholders on mechanisms of participation in the NRIS processes

The ERPC is ready to contribute its expertise to the policy debate, in working groups, and in close cooperation with the Commission.

We should appreciate the Commission's sharing its plans on how it will ensure periodic revision/reassessment of strategies depending on the content of the strategies and the situation on the ground.

The ERPC is an informal gathering of non-governmental organisations operating at EU level on issues of human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, social inclusion, and Roma and Travellers' rights. Its members are Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre, the European Roma Information Office, the Open Society Institute, European Network Against Racism, Minority Rights Group International, the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, the Roma Education Fund, and Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

From May 2011 to November 2011, the rotating chairmanship of the ERPC is held by Amnesty International in close cooperation with Fundación Secretariado Gitano and the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network. Contact: coordination@romapolicy.eu