

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe’

(2011/C 42/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- notes that discrimination and forms of social exclusion persist in some Member States; recognises that the health and socio-economic conditions experienced by the Roma are generally worse than those of other ethnic minorities, and that they have lower levels of school attendance and higher unemployment rates;
- recognises that generally there is no lack of European funds available for programmes aimed at Roma inclusion but points out that these are not utilised in a sufficient, sustained manner at national and/or regional and local level, and that one obstacle to their use is the low level of involvement of Roma communities in planning;
- considers that the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion would be more effective and would yield greater results if the coordination mechanisms were formalised, involving the Commission and all Member States and ensuring closer cooperation with local authorities and NGOs;
- considers that: a) local authorities should not be left on their own when addressing social inclusion policies for the Roma community; b) there is a need for territorially integrated regional policies and cooperation arrangements with the countries of origin of Roma migrants; and c) local policies can only be conducted in the context of properly operational European mobility and European and national anti-discrimination policies;
- is committed to working with the Commission, European bodies and Member States in order to nurture policy coherence and harmonisation, consolidate best practice and disseminate the results achieved, promote greater awareness among local administrations and strengthen local authorities' planning capacities, with a view to implementing projects that remove all forms of discrimination and segregation with respect to the Roma and promote their inclusion.

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Rapporteur: | Mr Alvaro Ancisi (IT/EPP), Member of Ravenna Municipal Council |
| Reference document: | Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - <i>The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe</i> COM(2010) 133 final |

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

The context: a continuing problem, and EU-level instruments and policies

1. welcomes the European Commission's Communication and agrees with its assessment that the EU and the Member States bear a shared responsibility towards the Roma people;
2. emphasises that the European Commission needs to establish an appropriate framework promoting dialogue between the Member States, in order to put the values underpinning the EU into practice, so as to prevent and combat discrimination and expressions of xenophobia and encourage the inclusion of the EU's largest ethnic minority group;
3. endorses the conclusions of the Commission Staff Working Document of 7 April 2010 on *Roma in Europe: The Implementation of European Union Instruments and Policies for Roma Inclusion - Progress Report 2008-2010*;
4. considers that the European Commission initiative is appropriate in terms of the subsidiarity principle, in view of the trans-national nature of the Roma community and the widespread social exclusion it suffers in various parts of Europe, including candidate and potential candidate countries; accepts that the principle of proportionality has been met, given that the European Commission's initiative does not establish legal instruments but provides for coordinating measures in the context of the open method of coordination;
5. recalls that upon the accession to the European Union of the new Member States - the countries of origin of most Roma migrants - their nationals became full EU citizens and acquired the same rights as EU citizens from other Member States, and that the foremost of these rights include freedom of movement, one of the fundamental freedoms of EU citizens set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; further recalls that the accession treaties authorise Member States to apply temporary restrictions to the nationals of these States only with respect to labour market access, and that Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States applies without distinction to all EU nationals;
6. advocates that measures restricting labour market access, albeit in line with EU legislation, must not create insecurity for these citizens and Member States should not take over three months to process applications for work permits since this makes it materially impossible to remain in these States for more than three months;
7. notes in particular that discrimination and forms of social exclusion persist in some Member States; recognises that the health and socio-economic conditions experienced by the Roma are generally worse than those of other ethnic minorities, and that they have lower levels of school attendance and higher unemployment rates; stresses that the exclusion of the Roma people also has major economic consequences in terms of direct and indirect costs;
8. therefore calls on the Commission to ensure compliance of national legislation with EU law and to monitor the compliance of practice with the authentic interpretation of EU law;
9. calls for all policies, be they national or local, to refrain from stigmatising or exploiting the Roma or giving artificial priority to a security-based approach at the expense of their economic and social integration; points out that, in particular, expulsions of groups of Roma without an investigation of individual cases fail to respect Community guarantees of legality, and calls on the Member States not to undertake repatriations based on rules targeted specifically at Roma;
10. is aware that the term 'Roma' used in the present opinion is an umbrella term which includes other population groups (the Sinti, Gypsies, Travellers, Kalé, Camminanti, Ashkali, etc.) with similar cultural characteristics and a history of social marginalisation and exclusion within European society; but rules out any attempt to simplify and assimilate groups within a single socio-cultural identity;
11. accepts that the instruments and policies adopted at EU level to encourage the inclusion of the Roma people are appropriate but that implementation at national, regional and local levels is lacking owing both to the absence of strong partnerships and coordination mechanisms and to a local-level failure to implement instruments that could alter the practical living conditions of the Roma;

12. nevertheless stresses that these shortcomings and the difficulties faced by local authorities cannot be ascribed simply to prejudice and stereotyping on the part of local administrations and communities but also, more generally, are the responsibility of the national governments that define the legislative backdrop, and result from the not always clear-cut distribution of competences between the various tiers of government when it comes to the fight against social exclusion and from insufficient vertical cooperation between central and local government; recalls that the majority of the many examples of good practice in this field developed at European level are based on projects and pilot schemes launched by local authorities;

13. recognises that generally there is no lack of European funds available for programmes aimed at Roma inclusion (European Social Fund - ESF, European Regional Development Fund - ERDF, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development - EAFRD); but points out that these are not utilised in a sufficient, sustained manner at national and/or regional and local level, and that one obstacle to their use is the low level of involvement of Roma communities in planning, sometimes because they are unable to mobilise themselves and become active members of civil society;

14. considers that the European Commission and Member States, in partnership with the local authorities, must step up the promotion, on the basis of agreed actions, of opportunities offered by European policies and funding programmes for the social integration of the Roma minority, and in particular of effective measures aimed at Roma communities who have moved to another country;

EU Platform for Roma Inclusion

15. agrees that the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion provides a forum for cooperation between all stakeholders (governments, international bodies, NGOs, experts and civil society) involved at various levels in promoting the integration of the Roma, and for the exchange of good practice and experience among Member States;

16. considers that the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion would be more effective and would yield greater results if the coordination mechanisms were formalised, involving the Commission and all Member States and ensuring closer cooperation with local authorities and NGOs. With a formal mechanism, the Platform would be able to coordinate and effectively implement European, national, regional and local policies on the social integration of the Roma population as well as effective assessment of results;

17. agrees on the need to apply the 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion (drawn up by means of the Integrated European Platform in April 2009) to the planning, implementation and evaluation of Roma inclusion policies:

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting

3. Intercultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of Community instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma;

18. appreciates the practical effort represented by the Integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion – Road Map proposed by the Spanish presidency of the EU on 30 June 2010 in implementation of the conclusions of the Health and Consumer Council (EPSCO) of 7 June 2010 on Advancing Roma Inclusion, with a view to setting specific medium-term objectives for establishing processes to promote the social inclusion of the Roma population;

19. supports the Commission's clear position that free movement must apply fully to Roma who are EU citizens on the same terms as it applies to all other EU citizens;

The role of local and regional authorities in Roma inclusion policies

20. considers that the effective implementation of these principles calls for policies to be defined not only at EU level but, above all, at the level of individual Member States and on a regional and local scale, as underlined in the European Economic and Social Committee opinion on *Integration of minorities – Roma* (OJ C 27 of 3 February 2009);

21. considers, however, that: a) local authorities should not be left on their own when addressing social inclusion policies for the Roma community, whether autochthonous or emerging as the result of intra-European mobility; b) there is a need for territorially integrated regional policies and cooperation arrangements with the countries of origin of Roma migrants; and c) local policies can only be conducted in the context of properly operational European mobility and European and national anti-discrimination policies;

22. believes that on the one hand there is an urgent need for Member States to adopt legislation to render European anti-discrimination and pro-rights legislation effective and applicable, while on the other hand, long-term processes must be launched on the basis of local and regional authority policies in the area of anti-discrimination, civil society involvement, active Roma participation, gender dimension awareness and an intercultural approach;

23. is aware that Roma-inclusive policies relating to education and training for children and young people, labour market integration, improved health conditions and housing, must be integral parts of local and regional authorities' policies on combating poverty and promoting social inclusion;

24. agrees with the European Commission that the prime objective is an inclusive society not a new form of ethnic segregation; it is therefore essential that public policies keep the Roma population as their specific, though not exclusive, target and measures must be included within broader policies and national programmes for tackling social exclusion and poverty within the EU; the approach must be mainstreamed and cross-cutting, and must take account of the complexity and interdependence of the factors that lead to social exclusion and poverty;

25. is aware of the fundamental and strategic role of local and regional authorities in raising public awareness, in combating racist, xenophobic and discriminatory behaviour within local communities, and in promoting an intercultural society; asks that regional and local authorities be equipped with the necessary instruments to counter the propagation of negative stereotypes by the media, so that they can promote ethically correct information and foster a non-discriminatory attitude among the general public;

26. considers that regional and local authorities have a fundamental and strategic role to play in harnessing the resources of the Roma community as informed players in the inclusion process, in informing the Roma population of its rights and in encouraging the bottom-up participation of Roma NGOs and civil society organisations;

27. believes that policies aimed at the desegregation of the Roma community require special planning and extra funding: integration of children within schools and pre-school facilities, with specific support such as cultural mediation and public transport; incentives to enter the labour market, by means of qualifications or micro-credits, avoiding the formation of segregated labour markets; specific measures aimed at the more fragile sub-populations exposed to greater risk, such as women; and adoption of non-marginalising urban settlement and housing policies;

Main objectives of local and regional authorities regarding the social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe

28. believes that local authorities can play a strategic role through their urban planning and housing policies and can have a huge impact when it comes to doing away with the conditions that cause exclusion and place the Roma population at risk. Housing schemes that do not segregate or discriminate, and that bring an end to the illegal camps where Roma communities often continue to live, can also benefit their health and their access to education and employment. In a timely move to encourage such policies, the European Parliament recently introduced measures – adopted specifically for Roma communities – extending the scope of ERDF aid to include housing

programmes for marginalised communities in all Member States;

29. emphasises that European policies and programmes for the social inclusion of the Roma population have added value as regards achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, particularly those relating to education and the eradication of poverty;

30. would argue that by means of their equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming and maternity rights policies, local and regional authorities can play a strategic role in combating the manifold forms of discrimination suffered by Roma women and remove the conditions for exploitation, securing them access to health services and education and combating household and social violence against women;

31. believes that local authorities, through their policies in the areas of child protection, early childhood services and promoting the right to education, can play a strategic role in securing the inclusion of Roma children in pre-school and school systems, in preventative health and healthcare systems, and in social and sporting activities aimed at the population as a whole, thus helping to remove the causes of exclusion from the earliest age, promoting equal opportunities, dispelling cultural prejudices and stereotypes, and helping people to live together in harmony;

32. trusts that in order to deliver on these public policies, local and regional authorities will secure greater and broader access to EU funds (ESF, ERDF, EAFRD) that can be used to develop Roma inclusion programmes, increasing their own planning and implementation potential for inclusive policies; and stresses that information and technical support must be made available in order to help this process, inter alia to ensure that measures have a real structural impact on the problem rather than being merely ad hoc or piecemeal;

33. considers that the Commission's coordinating role is essential for local and regional authorities when it comes to choosing ways to encourage the exchange of good practice, spreading information about effective schemes, the modelling and dissemination of approaches, and the monitoring of policies, encouraging not only exchanges between Member States but also the establishment of networks of local and regional authorities and civil society players;

34. would emphasise that Roma communities in the Member States and in candidate and potential candidate countries do not form a homogenous group and that differentiated approaches are therefore required to reflect the various historical, geographical, economic, social, cultural and regulatory contexts (particularly for Roma communities who have moved to another country and whose members may be citizens of the EU or of third countries, stateless people or refugees); stresses that this complexity poses problems for Member States and also for regional and local authorities when it comes to choosing and testing effective inclusion strategies and nurturing positive changes in the public and civil society mindset;

35. would also stress that, in general, social exclusion and poverty may make those who experience them vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and crime which, by fostering a public perception of insecurity and risks to public order, causes social alarm and may lead to reactions that take the form of discrimination and lack of respect. In the case of the Roma community, these pose additional obstacles to integration within the social fabric. As part of their responsibilities for local security and policing, local and regional authorities, in coordination with the forces of law and order, can play a strategic role in ensuring that the law is upheld, maintaining public security and civil harmony, and avoiding the criminalisation of whole communities;

36. is committed to working with the Commission, European bodies and Member States in order to nurture policy coherence and harmonisation, consolidate best practice

and disseminate the results achieved, promote greater awareness among local administrations and strengthen local authorities' planning capacities, with a view to implementing projects that remove all forms of discrimination and segregation with respect to the Roma and promote their inclusion;

37. commits itself, on 27 January 2011, the UN international day commemorating holocaust victims, to displaying the flag of the Roma at the Committee of the Regions building, in memory of the *Porajmos*, the genocide of the Roma population, as a symbolic act to promote the social inclusion of the Roma population developed in 2010 during the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion; and proposes that the local and regional authorities of the Member States do the same, as a token of their commitment to social inclusion and the fight against discrimination.

Brussels, 1 December 2010.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Mercedes BRESSO
