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To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Accelerating the Process of Roma Integration
- Draft Council Conclusions

1. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies was established in 2011 with a view to closing the gaps between marginalised Roma communities and the general population. In 2013, the Council also adopted a Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States, with the aim of boosting the implementation of the national strategies and transnational cooperation.

2. On 27 June 2016, the European Commission adopted a Communication entitled "Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States — 2016."
 3. The Slovak Presidency has tabled a set of draft Conclusions responding to the Commission's Communication, which has been examined and revised in the Working Party on Social Questions, which has reached an agreement on the text.
 4. The Committee of Permanent Representatives is invited to forward the draft Conclusions to the EPSCO Council for adoption at its session on 8 December 2016.
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Accelerating the Process of Roma¹ Integration
- Draft Council Conclusions

RECALLING THAT

1. Equality is one of the founding values of the European Union and combating social exclusion and discrimination is one of its specific tasks.
2. In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union takes into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.
3. The Council has the powers to take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. It has exercised these powers when adopting Directive 2000/43/EC, which lays down a framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin throughout the Union in relation to employment and training, education, social protection (including social security and healthcare), social advantages and access to, and supply of, goods and services, including housing.

¹ For the purpose of these Conclusions, as in other political documents of the European Parliament, of the European Commission and of the Council, the term "Roma" is used as an umbrella term which also includes other groups of people who have more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Gens du voyage, etc., whether sedentary or not.

4. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union prohibits any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation and that, according to the Charter, the Union, in order to combat social exclusion and poverty, recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices.
5. This set of Conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments of the European Council, the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission and on work by other relevant stakeholders, including the documents listed in Annex I.
6. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies² up to 2020 was established in 2011 when the Commission adopted a Communication setting out "An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020" placing the subject as a priority on the EU's agenda and proposing concrete measures. The Council then adopted a set of Conclusions entitled "An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020" and soon afterwards the European Council called for the rapid implementation of the Conclusions.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

7. REAFFIRMS the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, under which EU Member States have committed to develop, implement and monitor their respective National Roma Integration Strategies or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion measures in line with a comprehensive evidence-based approach.

² Throughout these Conclusions the term "strategies" covers "integrated sets of policy measures" and strategies alike.

8. RECALLS THAT the size and the social and economic situation of the Roma population vary considerably between different Member States, and that therefore national approaches to Roma integration should be proportionate and tailored to the specific circumstances and needs on the ground. RECOGNISES that the requirements of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies should be implemented in accordance with the Member States' respective legal and policy frameworks.
9. RECALLS the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures adopted in 2013, which reinforced the EU Framework and called on Member States to communicate annually to the Commission measures taken in line with the Recommendation and progress achieved in the implementation of their National Roma Integration Strategies or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion measures.
10. WELCOMES the 2016 Commission Communication assessing the implementation of the EU Framework and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States, NOTING WITH REGRET the fact, clearly highlighted in the Communication, that despite the measures taken by the Member States, only limited progress has been made in advancing Roma integration, in particular at the local level. Reasons for this include insufficient cooperation between stakeholders, a lack of commitment by local authorities, and the ineffective use of available funds and continued discrimination against Roma.
11. RECOGNISES the current refugee crisis which poses new challenges for Member States and creates the need for a discussion and new initiatives at the European level about social cohesion and social integration within the EU. At the same time, STRONGLY AFFIRMS the continued need for integrated measures to improve the situation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Europe, including Roma.

12. RECONFIRMS its commitment to the Roma integration process, including the implementation of the EU Framework as set up in 2011 and complemented by the 2013 Council Recommendation, and its determination to ensure that all policy, legal and financial instruments that have been put in place are used to their full extent to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma.
13. WELCOMES the outcome of the High Level Event on Roma Youth Empowerment organised jointly by the Slovak Presidency and the European Commission, which reconfirmed the urgent need to empower young Roma and to actively involve them in Roma integration policy. There was also a strong call for a greater role for young Roma in shaping the mainstream policies that impact them. The participants stated their ambition to support Roma youth in becoming a driving force of Roma integration in the European Union. In particular, they reiterated their commitment to increase the active participation of young Roma in programmes and measures targeting youth.

URGES THE MEMBER STATES TO

14. Accelerate the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies or sets of integrated policy measures to which they committed themselves within the EU Framework, in accordance with the Council Recommendation, paying special attention to the gender dimension and the situation of young Roma.
15. Strengthen efforts to improve the social and economic integration of Roma, especially at the local level.
16. Taking into consideration national practice, evaluate the effectiveness of their National Roma Integration Strategies and update them regularly, define clear actions, and set measurable goals and milestones, with a view to accelerating the process of Roma integration, taking into account the recommendations made in these Conclusions.

17. Ensure, through mainstream policies or targeted measures, equal access to employment and education so as to allow Roma to fulfil their potential in the labour market. In particular, synergies between education and employment policies are required in order to increase the flexibility, mobility and employability of unemployed Roma. As part of this drive, regional development policies should also contribute to the creation of sustainable job opportunities in the least developed regions.
18. Support the employability of young Roma by developing, in accordance with national practice, programmes designed to enable them to successfully enter the labour market. Promote policies such as vocational and on-the-job training, individual counselling services, social entrepreneurship and first work experience programmes, as well as increased job opportunities in the public sector, especially the education system, in order to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty in Roma communities. Ensure that young Roma can benefit on an equal basis with others from measures taken in the context of the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee.
19. Take steps to empower young Roma by promoting the mechanisms of participatory policy-making so as to give them a concrete say in policy fields directly impacting them.
20. Ensure that the situation of young Roma is addressed in mainstream youth policies or in targeted measures.
21. Ensure that the situation of Roma children is addressed in mainstream policies or in targeted measures.
22. Ensure that the specific situation of Roma women and girls in society is addressed in mainstream gender policies or in targeted measures and include these measures in the National Roma Integration Strategies or integrated sets of policy measures.

23. Facilitate a proactive and participatory approach to integration through the meaningful involvement of relevant stakeholders, including Roma women and young Roma, in the design, implementation, monitoring, policy review and reporting of Roma-targeted interventions. Collect stakeholders' views, in particular the views of Roma at the local level, on the progress of Roma integration and on the challenges that remain.
24. Further develop appropriate data collection, monitoring and reporting methodologies as necessary so as to support effective evidence-based policies. Methodologies for generating data disaggregated by ethnicity should be left to the discretion of the Member States and conform to individual Member States' national legal frameworks and be in line with the subsidiarity principle. Where it is not legally possible to collect ethnically disaggregated data, or where such data is limited, other methodologies might be used to obtain alternative reliable data. Maintain a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the national strategies. Ensure that financial support reaches the final beneficiaries and that the impact of targeted and/or mainstream measures on Roma is adequately documented and can be properly assessed.
25. Increase the efforts to eliminate all forms of segregation in education by promoting equal access to inclusive, quality early childhood education and care for Roma children. Take measures to ensure that all children fully benefit from the right to education. Eliminate the segregation of Roma children in special schools, as this constitutes a form of social exclusion. Provide quality primary, secondary and higher education for Roma children in inclusive mainstream settings and vigorously promote their successful transition from school to further education or employment.
26. Ensure, through mainstream policies or targeted measures, equal access for Roma to universal primary and specialised health care services. If needed, secure funding for healthcare mediator programmes for Roma. Widen access to health care services including by increasing health care awareness and improving access to vaccination and preventive health care in Roma communities.

27. Prevent further unjustified forced evictions of Roma by ensuring that forced evictions always take place in full compliance with Union and national law and in accordance with international human rights instruments, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights. Ensure that the persons concerned are provided with reasonable notice and adequate information and that adequate alternative housing is offered to evicted families, in accordance with national legislation.
28. Acknowledge the discrimination and racism affecting Roma, and with this in mind, take measures at national and local levels to implement and enforce legal safeguards against discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hate crime and hate speech, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in particular with its Article 21 and the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. Fight all forms of racism against Roma, sometimes referred to as anti-Gypsyism, as it is a root cause of their social exclusion and discrimination.
29. Tackle prejudices against Roma through awareness raising and sensitising measures aimed at the mainstream population, for example by promoting a positive image of Roma, or promoting Roma culture, language or history, through school curricula, media, academic programmes or research.
30. Step up their efforts to ensure the effective practical enforcement of the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, including by ensuring that their national, regional and local administrative regulations are not discriminatory and do not result in segregation practices.
31. Taking note of the European Parliament Resolution 2015/2615, recognise and commemorate the victims of the Roma genocide that took place during World War II, in accordance with their national practices.
32. Empower the National Roma Contact Points by ensuring that they have the necessary resources and suitable working conditions as well as by giving them an adequate mandate to carry out their coordination tasks.

URGES THE COMMISSION TO:

33. Carry out a mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 and to propose a post 2020 strategy on Roma integration, and include therein a proposal for a revision of the Council Recommendation.
34. Explore ways to ensure that the untapped potential of young unemployed Roma is harnessed through youth-oriented employment policies.
35. Continue to provide support, guidance and funding to national, regional and local authorities, Roma civil society and other relevant actors actively engaged in Roma integration, particularly local actors working directly with Roma communities, and support their capacity building in order to promote their active mobilisation.
36. Promote dialogue, cooperation and the sharing of effective practices among stakeholders, including through the National Roma Platforms as well as the European Platform for Roma Inclusion.

URGES THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, in close cooperation and in accordance with their respective competences, to

37. Promote the empowerment, active involvement and necessary participation of Roma, in particular of Roma youth, at all levels of policy development, decision making, and policy implementation, with particular focus on employment opportunities as well as education.
38. Ensure that Roma integration policies become an integral part of all relevant policy areas, including within the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

39. Ensure that all available resources, including national funds and the European Structural and Investment Funds, are used effectively, in an integrated and complementary manner. Moreover, facilitate access to funds available for the promotion of the social inclusion of marginalised groups including Roma and increase the absorption rate of EU funds in the countries with the largest Roma communities and in line with the priorities established in the National Roma Integration Strategies.
40. Use the available surveys and analyses produced by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights for establishing results-oriented monitoring and reporting indicators that would help all relevant authorities to ensure the transparent, accountable and effective use of public funds devoted to Roma integration.
41. Continue cooperation on Roma integration with international organisations and bodies such as the Council of Europe.
42. Continue to use existing EU-level tools and mechanisms such as the Network of National Roma Contact Points, the European Platform for Roma Inclusion, the exchange of best practice and the reporting system established in the context of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Evaluate and, if necessary, improve these tools in line with national circumstances, with a view to the effective implementation of national policies.

References

European Council: - Conclusions of the European Council (23/24 June 2011) EUCO 23/1/11 REV 1, p. 13.

Council: - Council Conclusions on An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. OJ C 258, 2.9.2011, p. 6.

- Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. OJ C 378, 24.12.2013, p.1.

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- Communication on "Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States." 10800/16 + ADD 1.

European Parliament: - Report on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion. A7-0043/2011.

- Opinion on gender aspects of the European Framework of National Roma Inclusion [*sic.*] Strategies. 2013/2066(INI). A7-0349/2013.

- Resolution of 15 April 2015 on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II. P8_TA(2015)0095.

Other: - Report by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) entitled "Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU: Review of the implementation of Area A: Women and Poverty of the Beijing Platform for Action (12132/16 ADD 1)".