



European Roma Information Office



## Joint statement

Brussels, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014

### International Roma Day

#### **“The socio-economic discrimination of older Roma should be included in Roma integration strategies”**

The Roma and Sinti communities face widespread racial discrimination and exclusion across Europe. The situation for older<sup>1</sup> Roma is even worse and their difficulties and needs are too often overlooked by decision makers, causing many of them to continue living in deprived conditions, at the margins of both mainstream society and of Roma communities.

[Previous research](#) on older Roma undertaken by AGE and ERIO has shown that despite the growing interest at EU level in tackling the exclusion and discrimination faced by Roma with the adoption in 2011 of the [EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies](#) up to 2020, older Roma remained a much neglected group in this political discourse. In 2013, the Council of the European Union adopted the first EU legal instrument in the field of anti-Roma discrimination in the form of [recommendations](#) addressed to Member States to assure an effective Roma inclusion. Moreover, in February 2014, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a most welcomed [recommendation](#) to national governments aiming at assuring the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons and stressing the need to address issues of multiple discrimination for the most vulnerable groups of older people.

On the occasion of the International Roma Day, ERIO and AGE seize the momentum offered by these political developments and join efforts to guide Roma integration policies so that the issue of older Roma is not left out of the equation. This statement thus sheds a light on the intersection of old age and Roma origin addressing crucial fields of discrimination and proposing ways to refocus the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Roma integration from the perspective of ageing.

#### **Need for a stronger ageing dimension in the National Roma Integration Strategies**

The Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of human rights of older persons acknowledges that the increasing number of older persons in Europe augments the need to address the issue of their position in today's societies and represents an important first step to addressing how the rights of this group can be fulfilled. Demographic ageing also shapes the context in which National Roma Integration Strategies are being implemented. Yet, with the exception of article 2.6, which recognises the need to

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<sup>1</sup> By 'older' we mean those aged 50+.

support Roma at all stages of their lives in order to fight poverty, the Council Recommendation lacks a life-course approach to the integration of the Roma population. This is why for AGE and ERIO:

- The ageing dimension should be mainstreamed in the implementation of all Roma integration measures in the Member States, and
- The EU should take a life-course approach when monitoring the progress made by Member States in the integration of the Roma population.

Moreover we wish to address the following areas of action and propose specific recommendations.

#### Anti-discrimination

While the Council Recommendation recognises that Roma experience multiple discrimination, it nevertheless fails to specifically target older Roma. Article 1.1 which refers to mainstream or targeted measures for the full equality of Roma, does not include the ageing dimension. Yet further efforts are needed to implement equality across the life course and in all life settings of Roma people. Age discrimination prevails in many areas of society and varies from denying work to a person because of their age to excluding older persons from health prevention programmes and setting age limits to accessing insurance and banking services. Naturally, the intersection of age and ethnicity-based discrimination makes the situation of older Roma even more vulnerable. Alongside addressing anti-Gypsyism in European societies there is an urgent need to tackle the pervasive ageism that older Roma are suffering from and adopt measures to efficiently combat multiple discrimination. The worryingly racist manifestations should be challenged and publicly condemned.

- National Roma Integration Strategies should contain measures to fight discrimination against Roma, including the most vulnerable groups such as older Roma who face multiple forms of discrimination.
- The Commission should ensure that the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC is effectively implemented and transposed by Member States and persuade politicians to use their national anti-discrimination legislation.
- Member States should take all necessary measures against the increasing anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech from political parties.

#### Access to quality education

Whereas equal access to quality education is one of the main pillars of Roma integration and the Council of Europe Recommendation includes a provision on the right of older persons to fully participate in education and training activities, barriers both related to their age and ethnic origin, impede older Roma from accessing formal and informal education. Most of the older Roma population has low levels of education<sup>2</sup>, which makes their social inclusion a harder task, not only in the work field, but also within society at large. Firstly, positive action should be taken in the field of education by providing vocational training in order to help older Roma gain qualifications and increase their possibilities to be integrated into the labour market. Secondly, lifelong learning opportunities are important to enhance their social inclusion and allow them to be active members of their communities.

- Adult learning policies should include measures to promote active ageing of older Roma.

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliament, *Measures to promote the situation of Roma EU citizens in the European Union. Country reports*, 2011, p. 235

- Intercultural training should be promoted to develop the intercultural skills and a positive understanding of intercultural diversity of staff in education institutions. This should be complemented with a contextualised training about the current needs of older Roma.

### Access to employment

When it comes to employment, older people typically face difficulties in finding a job after being fired, whereas long-term unemployment is prevalent among the Roma population. As for retirement, however, older Roma are worse placed than non-Roma, often because they were not able to pay contributions to the state through continuous legal work. Indeed, according to a FRA survey<sup>3</sup>, 39% of Roma women and 36% of Roma men state retirement as their main activity compared with 58% of non-Roma men and 52% of non-Roma women. In addition to offering professional training for Roma of all ages, eliminating age barriers and stereotypes around older and Roma workers and promoting active ageing are crucial elements for older Roma to access jobs and support their families. Besides, elder care is a sector with important opportunities for younger Roma and employment policies should support individuals gain qualifications and seek jobs in this field. According to the Bulgarian Red Cross, 25% of their employed staff in the provision of elder care services are of Roma origin. Training and guiding Roma personnel in health and social care will allow them to access stable jobs, while at the same time dealing with the shortage of care professionals in elderly care.

- The participation of older Roma in the labour market should be promoted through mainstream and targeted measures.
- Member States should include in their policies the employment of the Roma population in the field of elderly care.
- Member States should promote a racism-free labour market and implement measures to ensure equal treatment and to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma employees. They should adopt measures to improve the socio-economic situation of Roma, especially the most vulnerable groups such as older Roma.
- Guaranteeing older Roma access to equal and to fair employment and payment is vital to promote their inclusion and to fight their high poverty rates.

### Access to healthcare

Health is essential for individuals to access all other fields of social life and all the more necessary for older people, who often suffer from vulnerable health status due to their age. Lack of insurance coverage, limited access to services and information, in parallel to poor living conditions compound the situation of older Roma. Financial barriers, unregistered residential status and discrimination complement the vulnerability of this group. A FRA survey<sup>4</sup> shows that almost twice as many Roma women aged 50+ (55%) than non-Roma women (29%) said that their health is 'bad' or 'very bad'. Moreover, 61% of Roma women reported to be limited in their daily activities due to health problems, compared with 45% of non-Roma women of the same age group. The Council Recommendation's focus on universally available healthcare services is a very important step to tackling the low health standards and life expectancy for older Roma. However, the text does not address the long-term care needs of those who suffer from chronic conditions and/or limitations. According to research carried out in Bulgaria<sup>5</sup>, it is a practice and tradition in Roma communities, for the family to take care of the old and frail. However, the lack of social and financial support entails an inherent risk of inadequate or inappropriate care. The Council of Europe Recommendation includes the main

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>4</sup> FRA, *Analysis of FRA Roma survey results by gender*, 2013, pp. 15-16

<sup>5</sup> *'Home Care and Assistance Services towards Independent and Dignified Life'* project of Bulgarian Red Cross, August 2013

principles to be respected when providing care to older persons and provides useful insights on how to care for older Roma in their communities.

- Member States should take appropriate measures, including preventive measures, to promote, maintain and improve the health and well-being of older Roma.
- The wish of Roma people to stay at home instead of entering residential facilities should be respected by providing good quality and affordable community and home care services.
- The [European Quality Framework for Long-term Care Services](#), which sets up principles and guidelines for the well-being and dignity of older people in need of care and assistance should be a reference document in the provision of care to older Roma.
- Accessible information to help older Roma understand what exists in terms of elder care should be available.
- The health status of older Roma should be improved by providing health centres located close to Roma settlements which can help tackle health problems. Surmounting access barriers also relies on training staff in healthcare centres and on providing translation services.

#### Access to decent housing

Absence of decent housing is indeed one of the crucial problems that Roma have to tackle on a daily basis. Between lack of basic services and forced evictions, older Roma are once again one of the most vulnerable groups in the field. Recent studies show new worrying trends within Roma communities as regards the living conditions of older Roma, who are found to experience more and more loneliness<sup>6</sup> in housing. Specific shortcomings affect those Roma who are used to move periodically; indeed, when moving to settled accommodations, elderly Travellers are reported to suffer from great distress because of lack of freedom and a feeling of confinement<sup>7</sup>. Improving the living conditions and adapting houses to the needs of older Roma are important elements to combating their social exclusion, improving their health status and ensuring access to basic services. Social assistance for housing improvements and the elimination of ghettos and segregated areas are necessary to levy environmental barriers in the inclusion of older Roma.

- Member States should ensure that there are no age limits to access social housing for Roma people.
- Social assistance for housing improvements should be provided to allow living environments to be adapted to the needs of ageing Roma.
- Inter-generational living arrangements should be promoted.
- Member States should fight forced segregation in respect of housing and ensure that older Roma are not evicted without notice and without provisions for quality and decent re-housing.

#### Poverty reduction

Article 2.6 of the Council Recommendation for Roma integration is a good example of a life-course approach to Roma issues. Indeed, older Roma count among the most vulnerable segments of society in terms of poverty, due to accumulated disadvantages throughout their lives, which are exacerbated in old age. Informal employment leads to insecure old-age income and lack of social protection as well as health coverage. Increased health and social care needs amount to an increasing need for social benefits, services and adequate income support to become available for the older Roma population.

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<sup>6</sup> European Parliament, *op. cit.*, p. 370

<sup>7</sup> FRA, *Comparative report: Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the European Union*, 2009, p. 84

- The ageing dimension should be taken into account in all policies aimed to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Older Roma are amongst the most vulnerable groups due to the multiple discrimination they face on the basis of their age and ethnicity.
- Member States should ensure a smooth implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy which should include a balanced level of a social and economic dimension. In particular, Member States should fully engage with the Strategy's aim to lift 20 million people out of poverty by 2020.

#### Empowerment and active participation

Measures targeting the empowerment and active participation of Roma are essential components to effective integration policies and older Roma should not be left out of the target groups. As mentioned in the Explanatory report of the Council of Europe Recommendation, policies to support the participation of older persons to social, economic and cultural life, contribute significantly to the economic growth, prosperity and social cohesion in Europe. Besides, older Roma can also contribute as volunteers and caregivers in their communities and building their capacities through trainings can empower them to become active citizens. Moreover, according to the Council of Europe instrument, older persons should be involved in all decisions that affect them, including in the implementation of Roma integration policies at the national and local level.

- Ensure that older Roma are included in the planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies and policy measures targeting the integration of the Roma community. In particular, Member States should involve a sufficient number of Roma, including older Roma, in a meaningful collaboration during the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. An effective Roma participation is needed in order for policies to be successful and to have a positive impact on these communities.
- Raise awareness of the rights of older Roma, referring both to instruments on Roma and older persons.
- Provide trainings and opportunities for social participation to allow older Roma to contribute to their communities.
- Ensure full participation of older Roma on an equal basis with others in economic, social, political and cultural life.

#### **Conclusions**

Remarkable progress has been made in recent years towards a greater inclusion of both Roma and older people within European societies. These developments are best exemplified on the one hand by the EU Council Recommendation on enhancing effective Roma integration measures in the Member States and on the other hand by the Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of human rights of older persons. Still, an integrated life-course approach towards older Roma continues to be largely absent in those policy developments. In acknowledging the importance of the aforementioned European instruments, we must nonetheless underline the lack of a mainstreamed ageing dimension focused on older Roma within European and national-level policies. Anti-discrimination policies should take into account the situation of such a vulnerable group, often subject to multiple discrimination practices on the grounds of their ethnicity and age.

Indeed, as a number of researches show, older Roma still experience a high degree of discrimination in all social fields, namely education, employment, health care and housing. In order to tackle these challenges, this paper presented a set of policy recommendations to the European and national authorities that have to be contextualised within broader structural conditions, namely the fight against poverty and the

empowerment of older Roma. Only a true life-course approach in designing, implementing and monitoring inclusion policies can result in an effective integration and improvement of the living conditions of older Roma.

**For more information, please contact:**

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**Note to the editor**

**AGE Platform Europe** is a European network of organisation of people aged 50+ and represents over 30 million older people in Europe. AGE aims to voice and promote the interests of the 150 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.

[www.age-platform.eu](http://www.age-platform.eu)

**The European Roma Information Office (ERIO)** is an international advocacy organisation which promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing information to the EU institutions, civil society and governments. Through its wide network, it aims to combat racist discrimination against Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development. [www.erionet.eu](http://www.erionet.eu)