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Eurodiaconia's assessment of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks

The following assessments of several National Roma Strategic Frameworks (CZ, DK, HU, NL, RO, SK) were based on consultations with Eurodiaconia's member organisations and desk research with a focus on social protection, access to employment, and education.

Czech Republic

The Czech plans acknowledge that structural discrimination and antigypsyism play a major role in social exclusion of Roma, including mention of self-representation of Roma, however, the proposed actions require more specific targets, monitoring framework, and actions, specifically methodology to pursue active desegregation needs to be further explained.

Educational segregation is recognised as a "persistent" issue, with Roma over-represented in segregated schools and schools for children with learning disabilities. **Solutions to tackle educational segregation include many promising actions but are not specific enough in their scope, and how, when, and where they will be implemented.**

The objective to reduce the poverty rate amongst Roma is tied to a goal in the National Social Inclusion Strategy, to reduce poverty overall. **Therefore, we are concerned that general poverty alleviation strategies will not specifically target Roma and Roma will continue to be left behind.**

The plan says it will link social work solutions to addressing poverty, lack of housing, access to labour market, etc. but there are no clear actions delineated. **Further reflection on how this will happen and practical solutions such as funding and capacity building for social service providers to effectively assist Roma are needed.**

We welcome the measures addressing inadequate and segregated housing. Adopting desegregation approaches and utilisation of existing public frameworks is positively mentioned. **However, our members in Czechia report a lack of social housing, further complicating policy solutions to addressing access to housing for Roma, and an aspect that needs further elaboration in these plans.**

Czechia has failed to formulate concrete objectives because there is no established baseline data. There are no clear plans for collection of data disaggregated by ethnicity. Goals are therefore formulated in a very general format (for example, "Increase level of educational attainment for Roma"). **The plan is missing concrete measures, targets, indicators, and a robust monitoring framework.**

The plan includes a risk assessment but plans to mitigate risk are mostly limited to accepting partial implementation of the framework. **A deeper analysis of how to address obstacles in the implementation of this plan, in particular the lack of political will and structural antigypsyism, would be welcome.**

Denmark

Most of the Danish Roma population arrived in Denmark from the late 1960s to the 1990s. The Roma utilising the services of Kompasset, a day centre and night shelter for homeless people run by **Kirkens Korshær**, are however, predominantly Romanian Roma and a smaller number of Hungarian, Bulgarian,



Serbian and Turkish Roma coming to Denmark to look for work or to collect bottles. A few have been in Denmark for many years, and some are registered in Denmark.

However, the majority are unregistered in Denmark and travel back and forth from Denmark to their home country, whilst surviving on informal work, such as bottle collecting, selling scrap, and collecting different kind of disposed items in bins, which they sell. This group of people predominantly live and sleep on the street and use emergency shelters.

The following feedback to the Danish strategy is thus built on Kirkens Korshærs knowledge of this particular group, and not the sedentary Roma in Denmark, who arrived in the 60s and 90s.

Denmark's strategy on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation, although 26 pages long, does not have much relevance to the inclusion of Roma. First of all, **Denmark does not carry out any statistics on ethnicity and it is therefore not known how many people in Denmark identify as Roma.** In the Danish Roma Strategy, the social service laws in Denmark, are however listed and explained, as well as the general efforts to combat discrimination and hate crime. Yet, none of this is specific to the Roma community and there are thus no ways in which one can monitor the targets and actions set, as none are set. **The plan also does not seem to consider the effects of structural antigypsyism and discrimination and propose measures to tackle this.**

The strategy mentions Denmark's homelessness and housing first strategy yet fails to mention the high representation of Roma amongst the homeless population, relative to the total amount of Roma in Denmark. **There seems to be no targeted initiatives to support Roma getting out of homelessness.**

Moreover, as many Roma live unregistered in Denmark, many experience being rejected from regular shelters and night cafés due to lack of registration, though this practice is illegal, it remains to be practiced. Instead, Denmark has since 2017 introduced laws that criminalise homelessness and poverty. This is specifically, the begging law and the camp ban, - laws that specifically target homeless migrants. In the parliamentary debate prior to the enforcement of the strengthening of the begging law by introducing 14 days in prison without warning for begging, the word Roma was [mentioned 50 times](#). By media, the laws were named the [Roma laws](#). Yet in the strategy, there is no mention of this.

There are a lot of challenges when undocumented people, including children, in need face the authorities in Denmark. This is also apparent in the report, where it is repeatedly written, "if they are in Denmark legally". As long as people are unregistered, even though they might actually be in the country legally, it is very limited to what extent they are able to make use of their rights.

The strategy mentions two organisations. One is the Roma contact point. However, the email posted on the EU side for the Roma contact point does not work at time of writing this report. The other partner organisation allegedly working to improve integration and inclusion of Roma is the council for ethnic minorities. Kirkens Korshær emailed them to hear what work they have on this area, but they said they had not done anything specifically on Roma and referred to a general strategy against discrimination and hate crimes. [In this document](#), there are no mention of efforts to combat the specific manifestations of antigypsyism.

The positive elements of the report are the social services laws and the efforts that exist to combat discrimination and racism in general. What the report is missing, however, is to recognize what areas and in what ways individuals belonging to the Roma community experience discrimination and antigypsyism, and in what areas some are actively excluded from benefitting from. One example of this is when it comes to initiatives towards combatting homelessness and poverty.

Hungary

The Hungarian plans primarily define the issue of Roma exclusion as one of poverty, not antigypsyism or structural discrimination. Discrimination is limited to being described as hampering access to employment for Roma. There is an emphasis on intergenerational poverty but there are limited targeted solutions for Roma, instead they are incorporated into mainstream anti-poverty policy approaches.

The strategy does not cover all situations of poverty, such as homelessness, old age, or disability due to these policy areas appearing in other policy frameworks. Antigypsyism should be mainstreamed in these other policy areas, and the strategy would benefit from some consideration of elements that are specific to the Roma context, **such as discrimination in the housing market and intersectional forms of discrimination and antigypsyism.**

There are several promising planned interventions on increasing access to employment for Roma, but they are not targeted enough to address the multi-faceted reasons that Roma remain far from the labour market. **Furthermore, without mainstreaming antidiscrimination in all policy measures on Roma inclusion, the measures will fail to address the root of the problem.**

Educational segregation is mentioned as a challenge, and planned interventions positively include "pursuing desegregation and anti-segregation" but there are no specific actions, targets, or timelines to reach this. **Our concern is that more focus will be given on inclusive teaching methods without first pursuing active de-segregation.** The plan mentions increasing digital connectivity of disadvantaged students and access to internet packages, however there is little consideration for the lack of electricity in many Roma communities in Hungary.

Several broad actions are delineated for each topical area, but with no quantitative or measurable actions (for example, "increased training on x, increased attention for x"). The plan states that a monitoring mechanism is to be established in the coming period, but they still cite struggles with getting an accurate percentage of Roma within the population (and it is not clear if they plan to disaggregate more general policy monitoring data by ethnicity).

Plans to start a study on early school leaving of Roma children in secondary school to measure the success of interventions is mentioned. This sort of in-depth data collection is overdue, as this has been a noted problem and included in CSRs in past years. In the monitoring section there is plenty of "ambition" for large scale Roma research – but it is research that should have started in the previous framework, it is not certain how and when it will be carried out, and how the results will be used. **By focusing on research to determine the scope of problems that are already well established, we worry that ambitious solutions will be further delayed.**

The Netherlands

The Dutch NRSF explains that Roma are mainstreamed into other policy areas and that policies meant to improve the general socio-economic condition have resulted in improvements for Roma (for example, school attendance). According to our member **The Salvation Army**, this is not the reason for an increase in Roma school attendance, **instead it has resulted from several targeted multi-stakeholder interventions, specific funding by the municipality for schools with Roma children, and the presence of a policy officer at municipalities specialising in Roma.** Some of these initiatives are no longer funded by municipalities or continue based on the decision of the specific municipalities. **Therefore, the inclusion of Roma in relevant policy areas is not sufficient to address the needs of Roma, and in areas of education and employment they continue to fall in the cracks of the system.**

A topic that is not addressed in the Dutch NRSF but was emphasised by our members is that some Roma in The Netherlands are stateless or of unknown nationality, which may hamper access to services, participation,

and social inclusion. Currently research is being done to investigate the scope of the problem and put forward solutions, on the assignment of the ministry of justice.

The NRSF mentions funding for Roma on the topic of respect for their culture and identity, combating discrimination and prejudice, Second World War remembrance, etc. However, The Salvation Army reports that this funding probably will end this year or next year due to depletion of the funding available.

There are several initiatives mentioned in the NRSF (including cultural mediators in schools) that could not be implemented due to COVID or other issues. This shows that there is a lack of a joint approach to Roma inclusion in The Netherlands. The NRSF lacks development of ambitious plans in line with the new framework.

Overall, the Dutch national plans are not targeted enough for Roma and include a few initiatives and funding that are no longer relevant. Our members report that Dutch generic/general policy has had very limited impact on the lives of Roma they work with, with the exception being Roma-focused educational interventions and policy officers at municipalities between 2011-2016, and they anticipate a continuation of this in the upcoming period.

Romania

While the Romanian strategy successfully outlines different campaigns targeting specific challenges, it lacks concrete targets and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that actions make an impact. **There are also several areas of concern (school dropout and access to the labour market) that require multi-faceted solutions to complex problems and require deeper reflection and investment to adequately address.**

A positive aspect of the proposed Romanian strategy is that it makes efforts to contend with the history of enslavement endured by Roma on Romanian territory as well as persistent antigypsyism and anti-Roma attitudes.

Our member in Romania (**Federatia Filantropia Timisoara**) states the importance of **offering food packages/meals to children in kindergarten and primary school to increase school attendance of Roma**, something that is not included in these plans. It is also important to develop concrete measures to decrease school dropout, including **repercussions for families as well as multi-stakeholder work with families** to increase school attendance in a supportive way.

The issue of Roma teenagers who become parents at a young age is mentioned but needs further attention with specific actions, including **reproductive health campaigns**, to end cycles of generational poverty. On a similar note, adult literacy programmes should be promoted to address the high levels of **adult illiteracy in Roma communities and assist in their inclusion in the labour market.**

Regarding access to the labour market, our member emphasises the need to **support the traditional crafts of the Roma ethnic group** beyond what is mentioned in the Romanian NRSF to create pathways to quality employment through this work. Current measures to improve Roma access to the labour market are not adequate because jobs are far from where many Roma live and do not pay enough to incentivise Roma to move from informal jobs to the formal economy. Quality employment training and employment options are needed to aid this transition.

The successful implementation of the action plan requires **active participation of the Roma community on all levels**, another element that is missing in these plans. This is also required for working against discrimination both towards Roma and within the Roma community. Our member mentions discrimination against Roma women, for example, to be an issue that continues to be neglected in national policies.

Slovakia

The stated goal in the strategy regarding education is to implement desegregation and implement inclusive learning by not creating schools in Roma segregated areas but creating infrastructure so Roma can access mainstream schools. However, our member in Slovakia (**Evanjelická diakonia ECAV na Slovensku**) is highly concerned about the current educational system that places Roma children in special schools for so-called learning disabilities (not being able to speak Slovak), which results in Roma children not being able to receive a high school diploma. **Development of new assessment tools must be prioritised, as well as active desegregation of current special schools.** Bilingual education options would greatly benefit the preservation of Roma culture for both Roma and non-Roma children while enabling Roma children to learn Slovak from a young age.

Our member in Slovakia reports that discrimination and antigypsyism is a widespread problem in Slovakia and there is a lack of political will to combat it. Combatting discrimination and antigypsyism is mostly considered in terms of legal remedies and not in changing cultural attitudes or combating structural discrimination, although violence against Roma by police is mentioned. **Challenging structural antigypsyism as well as incidents of hate crime and individual discrimination is necessary.**

Participation of Roma in decision-making processes is mentioned but the plan would benefit from more specific actions on this point. On a positive note, the plan includes discussion of multiple discrimination and includes targets and sub-objectives for all policy areas.

Regrettably, a discussion of how social services can be utilised to improve Roma inclusion is not included. Our members witness the **lack of capacity of civil society organisations and social service providers** as they do not have adequate funding to assist Roma. Short project durations hamper long-term solutions and sustainability.

The NRSF states that they plan to continue utilising EU SILC and FRA MIDIS data as opposed to gathering data disaggregated by ethnicity nationally. In the long term, national data collection disaggregated by ethnicity is important to assess the effectiveness of policies targeting Roma inclusion. **Several targets, such as halving early school leaving and percentage of Roma completing upper secondary education, are not ambitious enough for a 10-year plan.**