

COMMON STANDARDS FOR NATIONAL ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

The persistent social and economic marginalization and prejudice faced by many of Europe's 10-12 million Roma is unacceptable in the 21st Century. This conclusion by the European Union drives the goals of the EU's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Effective integration, according to the European Commission, requires 'determined action both at national and EU levels'. To date, national government implementation of Roma integration strategies has been uneven and uncoordinated. If the Framework is to make a difference by 2020, national governments must come together and agree on a set of common standards to guide integration strategies. Without common standards, national efforts at Roma integration will continue to be inconsistent, inadequate, and ineffective.

The seven standards below provide common actions for implementing integration strategies that will make the Framework a genuine success.

1. Consultation

- National governments must provide adequate consultation opportunities for those affected by the policies and involved in their implementation. Conducting consultations using a bottom up approach before the drafting of strategy can ensure practical and technically viable Roma integration strategies.
- Governments should address situations in which formal or structured consultations do not exist for Roma communities by working with NGO representatives and experts to develop forms of consultation. These forms of consultation must include the widest possible range of interests and adequately reflect the socioeconomic and geographic diversity of Roma communities.
- Governments and civil society must work together to ensure that all information, analyses, and opinions on integration strategies by civil society experts and government officials are made public and are readily accessible.
- Government agencies and officials responsible for integration should include a report on the implementation of the consultation process and its outcomes in the national strategy document.

2. Analysing Past Policies

- Government officials, with Roma communities and civil society groups, should review the successes and failures of previous strategies and measures to promote Roma integration, for example, the Decade National Action Plans and the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti.
- Experts from government and civil society should evaluate the use of Structural Funds by EU member states to promote Roma inclusion and incorporate the evaluation's findings into current

national strategies.

3. Targets and Funds

- Government agencies and independent researchers must generate and share reliable and disaggregated data that document the conditions Roma face within their communities and in the larger society. This data is crucial for identifying the gaps between Roma and the rest of the population and for setting baseline indicators for education, employment, health and housing. Governments need to have concrete and practical programs on how to improve existing statistics on Roma exclusion and social deprivation.
- Governments need to identify and develop a set of measurable targets for each of the four priority areas and calculate adequate budgetary allocations to meet these targets.
- Governments must ensure that any measures adopted are aligned with the 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion adopted by the European Commission.
- Governments should provide Roma communities, their advocates, and the general public with an annual breakdown of the resources allocated to meet priority area targets, with details about domestic, EU, and other sources of funds.

4. Linking Integration to Mainstream Programmes and National Budgets

- Government agencies and independent researchers should take marginalized communities as the basis for disaggregating EU2020 targets on education, employment and poverty. Officials, working with independent experts, should also define the mechanisms for 'explicit but not exclusive' targeting of Roma within these categories.
- Governments should identify discriminatory practices in the broader social context and their impact on all Roma citizens. These findings will help governments link the social inclusion targets in their national strategies to specific antidiscrimination measures. As the Council Conclusions state, specific measures can be taken 'to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to ethnic origin'.
- Governments should fully incorporate the measures in their National Roma Integration Strategies into national reform programmes, sector policies, and national budgets, and where such measures are co-financed by EU funds, these should also be included in the relevant operational programmes.
- Governments should make it a strategic priority to work closely with the European Commission, and to make greater use of EU technical assistance to amend current operational programmes. The objective of governments cooperating closely with the EU should be, as stated by the European Commission, 'to address new needs, simplify delivery and speed up the implementation of priorities, including the use of the housing related integrated approach foreseen in the ERDF modified regulation'.

5. Institutional Arrangements

- Each government should appoint a national contact person and allocate sufficient human and financial resources to coordinate the drafting, oversight, and implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy.
- Governments should produce a descriptive briefing on the institutional arrangements and resources allocated for national-level coordination of their integration strategy.

6. Monitoring

- Partners to the consultation process in drafting the strategy should be fully engaged with governments in monitoring government progress in implementing the national integration strategy. Annual reports about the strategy need to provide detailed information about partner involvement in the monitoring process.
- Governments, Roma communities, and civil society groups need to assess annual report findings on national integration strategy activities, impact, and monitoring and take these findings into account as governments amend or develop new integration strategies.
- Government produced annual reports on national strategy activities should have detailed information about progress toward integration targets, how progress is measured, how projects and activities are funded, and the strategy's impact to date.

7. Informing EU Analyses and Deliberations

- The EU Task Force should commission an EU-wide study to determine the impact of the global financial crisis on marginalised Roma communities in light of growing unemployment and cutbacks in public services.
- Civil society groups and independent experts will prepare shadow reports that follow and respond to official government reports about the national Roma integration strategy. The shadow reports will have a structure and schedule similar to UN monitoring mechanisms. The shadow reports should confirm or challenge information in the government reports and provide the European Commission with a range of analyses and data to inform its annual deliberations.