

Comments on the Austrian National Roma Integration Strategy

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The Federal Chancellery is the coordinating institution of the Austrian National Roma Integration Strategy (further: ANRIS). The Federal Chancellery initiated a National Roma Contact Point (further: NRCP) as a dialogue-oriented platform for Romani NGOs and Austrian authorities.

The ANRIS is not *stricto sensu* a strategy but a reporting document of the current status quo in 2011. Therefore, there is a need of a mid-/long-term roadmap or action plan (2012-2020).

1. Involvement of regional and local authorities and civil society

The aim of the platform is to bring together Romani NGOs, local and national authorities and other organisations working on Romani issues in order to enable a dialogue between the different stakeholders.

Although the Department of Minority Affairs (Volksgruppenabteilung) ergo of autochthonous Austrian Roma is a department of the Federal Chancellery there is no exchange or cooperation between these two units.

In 2012 three meetings including the constituting one were convened. The meeting format does not enhance the exchange between authorities/ministries and Romani NGOs as the last-mentioned are not included on equal terms in the discussions and their possibilities for active participation are limited, e.g.: Romani NGOs are informed about upcoming meetings on a short notice. Along with the formation of the NRCP a website was launched, however there are no links to the different Romani NGOs.

In the first constituting meeting the NRCP announced that a study on the social reality of Romani communities would be conducted. This idea was supported by Romani NGOs that are aware of the lack of empirical data on Romani communities in Austria. However, since then the NRCP has not informed the Romani NGOs about any further proceedings.

Although the platform managed to rise within different national authorities awareness for Romani issues, there is a lack of communication with the Romani NGOs and also of transparency concerning further proceedings.

2. Allocation of proportionate financial resources

At the present time programs and projects designed to support the Romani Communities are managed and implemented by Romani NGOs. Within the meetings of the platform authorities presented different European funding opportunities. In this matter, it is to be mentioned that Romani NGOs do not have the required financial and human resources to apply for complex European funding.

Consequently, Austrian Romani NGOs do not have any (or just very limited) access to the above-mentioned financial funds. These circumstances might foster organisations that have not the required expertise in the field of Romani issues but the necessary infrastructure to launch a European project.

3. Monitoring to enable policy adjustments

Monitoring will be conducted by the platform. No monitoring report has been delivered by now.

4. Fighting discrimination convincingly

No anti-discrimination measures have been conducted by now.

Addendum

Within the ANRIS only autochthonous and allochthonous Romani Communities (mostly from Ex-Yugoslavia) are considered. However no attention is paid to recent Romani migrants from post-communist countries. Many of them carry out mendicancy, busking or informal jobs. They face very precarious living conditions and open hostility from the Austrian public including media (hostile and criminalizing coverage) and politics (cf. the introduction of bans on begging is partly even based on racist arguments). As these new Romani communities have no lobbying (yet) they are also not considered in the ANRIS. Their presence in public urban space evokes regularly heated debates, which foster racist argumentation.

Based upon these circumstances the Austrian NRCP is kindly requested to include recent Romani migrants into the ANRIS in order to avoid a further worsening of their situation.