

Working Meeting on the European Platform for Roma inclusion

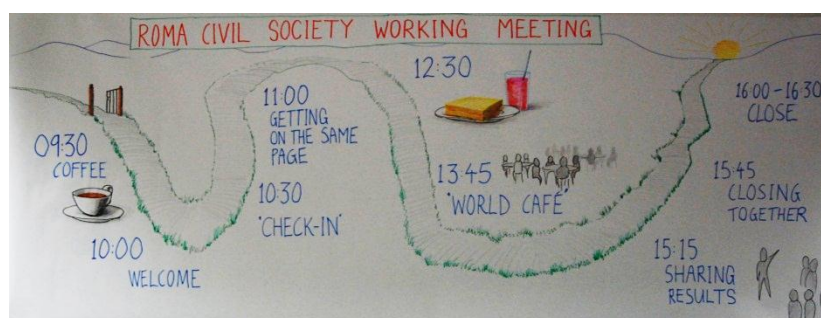
Brussels, 25 November 2014



Representatives from EU civil society, academics and local authorities' networks, international organisations active on Roma inclusion and the European Commission met together for an interactive and participatory discussion on 25 November 2014 so as to reflect upon the European Platform for Roma inclusion.

The aim of the working meeting was to capitalise on collective intelligence, via a fruitful dialogue and collective brainstorm on the substance and format of the next European Platform for Roma inclusion meeting (February 2015) to ensure that the Platform was more efficient and more responsive to the needs and challenges on Roma inclusion, in the current political context.

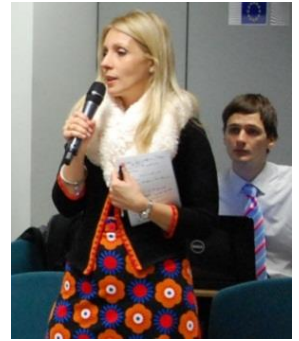
This report reflects the content of the discussions. It therefore echoes all consulted participants' opinions and proposals: hopeful and doubtful, ambitious and less ambitious, creative and conventional, utopic and pragmatic. Not all options will be taken into account: a feasibility, relevance and reality check will need to be done. But all voices had the chance to be heard.



Welcome and purpose

The Commission representative (Directorate General for Justice, Roma coordination), welcomed all participants to the meeting.

She recalled the first European Platform for Roma inclusion meeting, back in 2009 and the steps that followed. She highlighted that since 2009, many steps forward have taken place regarding the European policy framework for Roma integration (e.g. the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies, Roma summits, the network of national Roma contact points), making the role of the Platform less clear.



For this reason, she asked participants to consider not just the next Platform meeting, planned to take place on 5 February 2015, but also to have a more general reflection on the usability and effectiveness of the Platform. She therefore suggested participants to address the following questions throughout the day:

- What is the added value of the European Roma Platform for Roma inclusion in the context of today?
- Why do we think it is important?
- How is it connected to the realities on the ground?
- How is it connected to the national Roma integration strategies, and to the general policy framework of the Commission?
- Is it worth – and if not, how to make it worth- spending money on this?

She also highlighted that all players – Member States, EU institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations, local and regional authorities, experts, the Roma themselves – must get something out of the Platform and see an added-value in this process. She indicated that the Commission strongly supports the setup of national platforms as it is very important that such a consultation and dialogue mechanism takes place also at national level. Therefore, connections with the dialogue taking place at national level has also to be taken into account in the reflections on the future of the European Platform for Roma inclusion.

She invited participants to have an open discussion on all these issues: the European Commission was there to listen, following the European Citizens' Dialogue spirit.

She concluded by highlighting that this is a brainstorming session aimed at offering the chance for everybody to express their opinions, and therefore have a collective reflection on how to make the European Platform for Roma inclusion work. Nevertheless, this meeting does not give the guarantee that proposals will be taken on-board as there is probably no approach of the Platform that would meet everybody's ideas.



The Commission had chosen to invite its stakeholders into a highly participatory process for this working meeting. The role of facilitators was to help participants to have productive, structured conversations.

Getting to know each other

In order to get an idea of who was present in the room, participants were invited to position themselves according to five questions. After each question, the opportunity to hear from people in the different groupings in the room was given.

As a result, it was clear there was a wide range of experience in the room: not only in terms of personal experience of Roma inclusion, but also in terms of the organisations represented (having various focus of activities, size and geographic coverage).



Finally, participants were asked to express which Roma integration issue they would see as most pressing, if they had to choose between rights, political will, funding, poverty/social inclusion or something completely different. No one considered that funding was the main issue. There was a rather even split of participants between rights, poverty/social inclusion, and political will. Other issues that participants put forward included health, education and children's rights.

"We have equal rights, we are equal citizens, we are human beings. The issue is that we have won court cases and they haven't been enforced. If we have enforcement of the rights then we can address how people fight for their rights and how people are included in education and in the job market. It's a question of enforcing the laws equally to everyone."

"Dealing with social inclusion means an integrated approach... you empower the people"

"Without political will, including engagement of Roma, not just at a local level but also at a national level, we cannot tackle the integration of Roma"

"To have better health for Roma, you need better housing, better social inclusion better employment, better education."

"It is the 25th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its four key principles of: non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to participate – if we are able to achieve those four key principles for Roma children then all the other issues would be addressed."

Why a European Platform for Roma inclusion?

In small groups, participants discussed their experience of the European Platform for Roma integration, and went on to discuss the purpose of the Platform.



Following the discussion, ideas were expressed regarding what the European Platform for Roma inclusion should aim at.

These very different ideas mainly brought forward three arguments for keeping the European Platform for Roma inclusion:

- ***to offer the European Commission a consultative participatory forum where the voice of stakeholders can be heard***

To support this argument, some participants mentioned various ideas: the Platform could be seen as a vehicle to assist the EU in assessing Roma strategies; it could be a unique forum for all stakeholders to exchange and discuss on the follow-up; direct dialogue between the European Commission and the EU key partners would enable to

reflect on EU issues and their impact 'on the ground'; it could offer mutual support for implementation of policies by all stakeholders

- **to promote networking and the sharing of expertise among stakeholders**

To support this argument, the following key words were put forward: networking, mutual learning, sharing experiences, building partnerships, interactive sharing of solutions, bringing innovative ideas, identifying knowledge gaps, continuous process of expertise-building based on dialogue, knowledge –transfer of state of the art and "fresh" ideas.

- **to foster political commitment and accountability**

To support this argument, the following ideas were expressed: the Platform could help keeping the Roma issue on the political agenda at EU, national and local level. It could ensure commitments are translated into political will and actions at all levels. It could help maintain political focus, momentum and accountability, and therefore foster implementation of the EU Framework. It could take Roma integration to a more political scale and increase the political weight of the process.

Various participants voiced a **diverging opinion** and reacted on the objective of the Platform being to foster political commitment and accountability: **it seemed to be over-ambitious and represent the risk to be counter-productive** (false expectations cannot be met) for some participants.

In the frame of the discussion, it was also expressed that the Platform should "*strive to **set an example** for a participatory and inclusive engagement, to be replicated at national level*". Furthermore, in order to reach its objectives, "*the need for the Platform to be **result-oriented***" was highlighted. The following ideas were mentioned: "*the Platform could draw conclusions and a possible roadmap of actions (for the short and longer term)*". "*Real outcomes could be set, which are assessed at the next platform meeting (outcomes -> follow-up)*". "*The Platform could end with a joint statement on lessons learned to feed the policy cycle, or recommendations based on experts' conclusions*".

"A momentum for interactive dialogue between different stakeholders on key challenges and solutions on Roma (explicit but not exclusive) integration"



"If the Platform is used as a tool to pressure the Member States, I assume that the Platform will fail. We will end up in discussions about this objective that we did not reach."

Lunch

Over lunch, participants were invited to introduce the people they worked with in the morning.



Making the European Roma Platform truly effective

Participants took part in a world café discussion, in order to try building a common vision of what would make the European Roma Platform truly effective (starting with the 5 February 2015 meeting). This question was divided into three parts, discussing each with a different group of five or six people. Following the discussion, participants shared ideas on relevant structures, players and themes, and voted on which were considered were the most important elements (most votes were expressed on the structure of the Platform).



It was clear that some proposals contradicted each other or were going in **radically different directions**, reflecting well that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for improving the Platform. This means **some options will have to be preferred while some will need to be abandoned**.

Ideas put forward for possible ways to structure the Platform

Participants were first invited to reflect on: "*What positive experiences have you had from effective large-scale events or from other processes? How could we use that experience to **structure** the European Roma Platform, in view of ensuring it remains effective and connected to the reality on the ground?*"

Many and various proposals were expressed on the way forward regarding an effective way to structure the European Platform for Roma Inclusion. The ones receiving most votes were (*in parenthesis, the number of people who voted for these proposals*):

- have two Platform events per year – **one focused on process** and **one focused on a topic** (7);
- have a regular **preparatory committee** (Civil society organisations/Member States/Commission) (4);
- break-out in **smaller workshops or thematic groups** (5);
- promote an interactive and **participatory bottom-up dynamic** (4) and allow an ambitious dialogue in safe space between all stakeholders at the same level (1) ;
- organise the Platform meeting **before key policy documents** are prepared to ensure that the Platform content feeds in the process(2);
- set-up and follow a **2014-2020 roadmap** for the Platform (1).

Other ideas mentioned included: participation of middle-managers from key "line" ministries around specific policy themes to increase impact on policies; responsible use of time; clarity of topics selected in a participatory way; dialogue in small groups; deliberative and participatory process; few keynote speeches; no conference with gifts and speakers.

Ideas put forward regarding Platform participants and their roles

Participants were then invited to reflect on: "*Who are the different players of Roma integration and what roles could they each play to make sure that the platform is effective? In particular, what could you bring to make it a useful process having an impact on the ground?*"

Similarly as for the structure, many and various proposals were expressed on who should participate in the Platform meetings, and what role should each player take. While **some were advocating for various attendance** according to the type of meeting – *for meetings on a specific theme: relevant national and umbrella NGOs, experts, academics, thematic Member State ministries instead of "the usual suspects"*¹ at EU level (1); *topic-oriented attendance* (1); *rotation in the*

¹ Expression used by the participant.

Finally, participants were invited to reflect on: "*What themes would we like to discuss at the 2015 European Roma Platform?*"

There was a very clear interest for having the issue of **anti-gypsyism/discrimination faced by Roma** raised at the Platform (21 votes). But other topics were also mentioned: monitoring the impact of European Structural and Investment Funds / why funding does not reach grassroots NGOs (6); the situation of Roma youth (5); desegregation (5); intra-EU mobility / free movement of Roma (1); access to healthcare & preventative care (1), etc.



The Commission representative (Directorate General for Justice, Roma coordination) thanked participants for the quality of conversations that had taken place.

The stressed that many and various proposals had been expressed throughout the day, in small groups, as well as within collective sharing and exchanging. She highlighted that all this material has been collected and will be carefully processed. She noted that it became clear throughout the day that not everybody agreed with all ideas proposed: what makes this process very rich is that everybody's voice was heard, but it does not mean that every proposal will be followed-up. A line will need to be drawn and choices will need to be made. She also reminded participants that it is everybody's role to make the European Platform for Roma inclusion work and that the need to make it work is not the Commission's only duty, but all players' task jointly.



The day ended with comments from all participants on what they we would take away from the meeting. The following words were mentioned:



Participants

<i>FAMILY NAME</i>	<i>FIRST NAME</i>	<i>ORGANISATION</i>
AHKIM	Ahmed	Centre de Médiation des Gens du Voyage et des Roms en Wallonie
GUSA	Alis Alexandra	European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (ERGO)
HRABANOVA	Gabriela	European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (ERGO)
DIJKSTERHUIS	Ruus	European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (ERGO)
PETROVA-BENEDICT	Roumyana	International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
INGLEBY	Jan David	International Organisation for Migration / Amsterdam University
KULLMANN	Adam	Open Society Foundation (OSF)
STRIETHORST	Anna	Open Society Foundation (OSF)
FOBER	Rita	Open Society Foundation (OSF)
TOSCHI	Massimo	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)
VERMEERSCH	Peter	European Academic Network on Romani Studies
JAHA	Samir	Decade of Roma Inclusion
USEIN	Orhan	Decade of Roma Inclusion
BURGER	Stephan	Eurodiaconia
MALLET	Catherine	Eurodiaconia
SZIRA	Judith	Roma Education Fund (REF)
BILA	William Lazarus	Roma Education Fund (REF)
FEDER	Ana	EUROCITIES network
SMITH	Gordon	EUROCITIES network – Glasgow
BAUER	Michaela	UNICEF Brussels Office
KNAUS	Verena	UNICEF Brussels Office
MONTANO	Gonzalo	Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG)
HERNANDEZ	Marta	Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG)
LEUCHT	Christoph	European Foundation Centre/Forum for Roma inclusion
KHAN	Ali	European Foundation Centre (EFC)
MOLINA	Sixto	Council of Europe
MASSAY-KOSUBEK	Zoltán	European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
IVANOV	Ivan	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
PINTO	Marta	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
SCOGNAMIGLIO	Veronica	Amnesty International
MEYER	Nele	Amnesty International
JARAB	Jan	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
BERCUS	Costel	Bernard van Leer Foundation
PASCOET	Julie	European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
ANDREI	Cornelia	European Commission - DG EMPL
HUSZ	Dora	European Commission - DG EMPL
KALMAN	Szilvia	European Commission - DG EAC
ADROUTSOU	Lorena	European Commission - DG SANCO
URMOS	Andor	European Commission - DG REGIO
TSANKOVA	Aleksandra	European Commission - DG REGIO
LINDHOLM	Pia	European Commission - DG JUST

NEGRO	Ilona	European Commission - DG JUST
CHENEY	Axelle	European Commission - DG JUST
PILEIDOU	Maria	European Commission - DG JUST
BALAZOVA	Jana	European Commission - DG JUST
BANU	Lavinia	European Commission - DG JUST
VUOLASRANTA	Miranda	European Commission - DG JUST
GROZEV	Rossen	European Commission - DG JUST

The meeting facilitators were Conrad Toft (DG HR), Alexandra Daws (DG COMM), Joachim Ott (DG COMM) and John Mac Donald (DG COMM).