

# **Recent developments regarding the integration of the ethnic roma minority in Romania: The National Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2021-2027**

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**Abstract:** The paper “Recent developments regarding the integration of the ethnic roma minority in Romania: The National Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2021-2027” is Romania’s most recent effort in offering a new platform regarding the integration of the roma ethnic minority. This strategy offers a different approach and, alongside the new European strategy for roma inclusion, marks a new era in terms of the integration of the roma minority.

**Keywords:** *integration, minority, roma, inclusion*

## **1.Introduction**

This national strategy, approved by government decision, is Romania's response to the recommendations submitted by the European Union through the new Rome Strategic Framework of the European Union 2020-2030, also called the new European Union Strategic Framework on Roma equality, inclusion and participation.

The previous strategy of the Romanian government regarding the integration of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2015-2020 saw as basic principles the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 2013 on effective measures for the inclusion of the Roma population in the Member States, the Europe 2020 Strategy, but also the National Reform Program. The European Union framework of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) until 2020 was the most ambitious strategic plan offered by the European Union regarding the Roma minority and its integration.

The new national strategy for Roma inclusion 2021-2027 aims to respond to the previous failures offered by the former strategy, this in view of the recommendations provided by the European Union.

An absolutely necessary and of high importance of the four main criteria to be addressed concerns measures aimed at accelerating Roma integration, preventing and eliminating segregation, taking into account the situation of young people and the gender dimension, and setting basic values as well as measurable targets and milestones. These measures must also be linked to ways of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating Roma integration measures at level that must be closely linked to ways of taking into account issues relating to Roma inclusion at local and regional level.

Last but not least, in order to ensure the implementation, elaboration, monitoring and review, special modalities will be formed that are in close cooperation with roma civil society, but also with all other relevant and interested parties, including at local and regional level.

The National Roma Inclusion Strategy 2021-2027, following the data correlated with the help of mechanisms and institutions specially empowered in this regard, such as ECRI, IRES or FRA, has come up with a series of proposals to be able to address each of the main socio-economic pillars for the integration of the Roma population. [1]

## **2. Improving housing conditions and infrastructure in vulnerable Roma communities**

One of the most important factor that influences the development of the roma people and in special the roma children is the living conditions and the vulnerable houses that they live in.

Thus, a first index that continues to remain far above the recommendations offered by the European Union, but also far beyond the other EU countries with Roma on their territory refers to the housing situation for Roma. For 68% of them, running water is a benefit and not a normal thing, and 79% of them live without a bathroom or toilet inside the place[1].

On the other hand, according to Eurostat definitions, the share of Roma living in neighbourhoods where all or most of their neighbours are Roma is 67%. The proportion of Roma families living in unsanitary households (with a roof through which water drains, with wet walls or with rot in the window frames or in the floor) is 32%, and the share of those who accuse pollution, dirt or other ecological problems is 25%.

More than 50% live in overcrowded houses, 16.5% live in buildings considered unsafe for housing and 30.3% in buildings that are in a state of visible deterioration. This housing policy remains one of the most difficult, as it is also recognised by the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council no. 406/2019 as an area where the fewest examples of promising approaches common to several countries are found. [2]

Therefore, a long-term, uneasy and integrated approach, containing actions such as: integrating interventions into national legislation and policies related to the land and social housing regime along with a complement to housing insurance with accompanying support combining elements of employment, health, education and community development.

One measure that needs to be taken in order to be able to provide a solution in this regard is to size up the phenomenon of evictions for informal settlements, with a large proportion of the Roma living in this type of settlement. Their demolition, are not treated by the legislation as evictions, the previous judicial review is impossible and the legal guarantees applicable to other evacuations are ignored. Thus, in the event of a forced eviction, it is not always envisaged to provide adequate alternative housing.

## **3. Ensuring the access of Romanian Roma citizens to quality and inclusive education**

Another key element analysed by the NRIS, which I consider to be the most important and absolutely necessary for the integration of the Roma, is education. In the field of education, there are still major discrepancies between the majority and Roma children in terms of school participation, the level of school performance obtained by them and the school abandonment. In addition, the differentiated treatment granted by teachers, as well as elements of segregation and discrimination are closely related to those mentioned above.

A recent research shows that two thirds of roma ethnics have either not graduated from any class or have graduated from secondary school, a share 5 times higher than that of the majority. This gap is also in the case of high school studies, the share being of the majority of those who complete the studies being three times higher than that of the Roma [3].

One measure that is absolutely necessary and that I found in the present national strategy is to focus on the history of the Roma in Romania, this being one marked by exclusion and racial discrimination, being spread over five centuries of bondage, following the genocide during the Holocaust and culminating in a policy of forced assimilation from the communist regime.

The lack of knowledge in society, at all age groups and at all levels, of these events that can have a crucial influence in the development of any people or individual I consider to be a direct cause for which the roma population has not been able to develop in society.

These facts, these historical and human tragedies, generated transgenerational traumas that still produce negative effects for all roma in Romania, through the perpetor of prejudice and stereotypes about the Roma minority, outline Romania as the uan of the countries that have an immediate need for reconciliation with the historical past (from this point of view).

The NRIS proposes a number of approaches, which are absolutely necessary and very well pointed out, in order to correct this injustice. The failure to present historical episodes with a negative or dramatic character for the Roma population in the educational system are generating social stigma or instigating hate speech and hate crimes having as subjects the Roma minorities, regardless of their socio-educational status.

Thus, some measures that are necessary in this respect must include the review of school programs and the updating of university courses that include the presentation of this concept of transgenerational trauma in relation to the Roma minority, in order for it to be studied, researched and taught to the new generation.

In addition, these measures are closely related to the continuous training of specialized teachers. Also, another method that I consider absolutely necessary is the necessity of presenting among young people, personalities from among the Roma minorities in Romania during the week of The Different School, in order to contribute both to the increase of the Roma's self-esteem, but also to the awareness among the majority population of the Roma contribution and to the example of good practices on their part.

#### **4. Improving the health of members of vulnerable Roma communities**

Going further, another key area is that of health where, further, the analyzed studies and researches show that Roma encounter difficulties in accessing basic, curative and preventive health services, integrated and quality. Even if the progress reports made by the BJR are carried out in the communities with Roma people, vaccination campaigns, health education campaigns in order to prevent diseases, as well as other activities carried out by the DNP in accordance with the national health programs managed by the Ministry of Health, the data show that a gap in mortality and morbidity indicators are still maintained among Roma compared to the majority population in Romania [4].

In this respect, Roma should be included in the national programs and interventions in the field of public health managed by the Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance House. Also, special emphasis must be placed on Roma girls and women because they often encounter gender or racial prejudice in terms of access to health and other public services. In addition, another measure to be correlated is the lack of targeted service for Roma girls and women with disabilities and other groups of girls and women in vulnerable situations.

According to the IRES (2018) report, there are visible differences between the Roma population and the majority population in terms of health status and access to health services [3]:

- Lack of annual medical check-up. If 71% of the majority of the majority of the people have their medical check-up
- Access to healthcare services among Roma. The number of Roma people which sustain that they did not benefit from special healthcare in the hospitals has dropped from 21% in 2012 to 12% in 2018.
- Registration with the family doctor. Compared to 2012, there is a slight increase in persons registered with the family doctor in 2018, for both samples, Roma and the majority of the population
- Big differences in the use of contraception. There are large differences (10%) between the majority and the Roma in terms of the use of contraceptive measures. In fact, 16% of Roma women prefer to have an abortion, while in the case of the majority the proportion is 1%. There are no major changes from 2012

#### **5. Boosting Roma employment in line with market requirements**

Another priority area is the insertion on the labour market of the Roma population, this being the most neuralgic point in the vicious circle of poverty, conditioning all the other links, especially considering that the Roma population has an age structure much different from that of the majority population. The Roma people, at national level, has a very young population, one third of them having less than 15 years, compared to the majority population in which about one 1/5 is under 15 years old.

The EU-MIDIS II report notes that only one in four Roma aged 16 or over "was employed" or "self-employed" at the time of the survey. Roma women reported employment rates much lower than Roma men – 16%, compared to 34%.

Overall, the survey shows that the paid labour rates for Roma aged 20-64 are 43%, which is well below the EU average of 70% in 2015. The situation of young people is much worse: on average, 63% of Roma aged 16-24 were not in employment, nor did they participate in some form of education or training at the time of the survey, compared to the EU average of 12% for the same age group.

For this age group, the results also show a considerable gap between women and men, with the percentage of young Roma women not in employment and not enrolled in educational or training programmes being 72%, compared to 55% for men.

Solving this problem would bring, in addition to the plus from a human and social point of view, an economic plus of great value because this category is not entered on the labour market and thus represents a long-term social and economic potential. Thus, due to the lack of qualifications of young Roma trying to enter the labour market, they are heading towards lower jobs in terms of remuneration and, implicitly, of social prestige.

At the moment, the socio-economic dimension of Roma inclusion in the labour market is not addressed either in accordance with the specific needs of the Roma at the level of each communities and social typologies [5], but also in relation to the skills and qualifications requirements demanded by the labour market

## **6. Conclusions**

These are just some of the elements that need to be considered important in order to form preliminary conclusions and ideas for future research, which are in close connection with the recommendations from the European Union. The National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the period 2021-2027 I believe is a first step in order to be able to convey the vision offered by the European Union also at national level, but adapted to the situation of the Roma in Romania.

Given the experience of the 2014-2020 period, it becomes imperative that the Romanian Government assumes a new approach for the policies addressed to Roma in Romania. This new approach must be based on the realities of communities and be focused as a priority on the development of national programmes in the fields of education, employment, health and housing, areas that remain the main pillars of intervention in disadvantaged communities, in the perspective of reducing disparities with the majority population.

A special attention needs to be directed to the education sector and especially to the empowerment of the young roma girls and women. Roma women are not adequately represented and, as such, the draft does not contain a concrete and intersectional approach to the needs of Roma women in all areas covered. More specifically, the draft strategy, although it highlights and presents the vulnerable situation of Roma women and the problems they face in different areas, it does not contain the answers to the problems mentioned with concrete measures and with cross-cutting or special indicators intended for Roma women as requested by the European Commission in the European Strategic Framework on Equality, Inclusion and Roma Participation (2021-2030).

## **7. References**

- [1] ECRI report on Romania – June 2019
- [2] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council no. 406 of 5.02.2019 - Report on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies – 2019
- [3] IRES (2018). Comparative study of the needs of Roma communities in the context of setting strategic priorities
- [4] The Romanian government's strategy for the inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2021-2027 (public document found on the <http://www.anr.gov.ro/index.php/transparenta-decizionala>)
- [5] Civil society report monitoring the implementation of the national roma integration strategy in Romania, 2019