EU strategy on Roma inclusion

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PURPOSE: to set out the plans for an ambitious medium term programme aiming to strengthen the social integration of the Roma.

BACKGROUND: a significant part of the 10-12 million Roma in Europe live in extreme marginalisation in both rural and urban areas and in very poor socio-economic conditions. The discrimination, social exclusion and segregation which Roma face are mutually reinforcing. They face limited access to high quality education, difficulties in integration into the labour market, correspondingly low income levels, and poor health which in turn results in higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy compared with non-Roma.

The EU and its Member States have a **special responsibility towards the Roma**, who live in all Member States, candidate countries and potential candidates. The Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out the values on which the EU is based. These values need to be translated into practice in order to improve the situation of the Roma people, who form the largest ethnic minority in the EU.

Since December 2007, in a series of Council conclusions, the EU has endorsed the Commission's assessment that there is a powerful EU framework of legislative, financial and policy coordination tools already available to support Roma inclusion, but that more can be done to make them work more effectively. The Council affirmed that it is a joint responsibility of the Member States and the European Union to address the challenge of Roma inclusion, within the scope of their respective and complementary competences. The complexity and interdependence of the problems calls for sustainable responses which tackle all aspects of Roma deprivation through an integrated approach.

The European Union needs to build on the strong mobilisation in the EU institutions, Member States and international organisations and within civil society in support of the better social and economic integration of Roma. Measures to overcome Roma exclusion need to be **set within the wider framework of**

European equality, inclusion, and growth policies and to **optimise the use of the legal and financial instruments** available also to mainstream society.

CONTENT: the aim of this Communication, ahead of the 2nd Roma Summit, is to indicate how the EU will develop its contribution to the full social and economic integration of the Roma, on the basis of the progress achieved.

Progress made: since 2008, progress has been made in Member states and at EU level. In 2009, the focus shifted from an analysis of the problems to an exploration of how existing instruments could be made more effective and how the situation of the Roma could be addressed more explicitly across a broad range of policies, including employment, social inclusion, health, education, housing, youth and culture. The enforcement and further development of EU legislation in the areas of non-discrimination, freedom of movement, data protection and anti-racism has continued. The Commission also monitored the transposition of the relevant acquis in candidate countries and potential candidates.

The European Platform for Roma inclusion — composed of key players in Roma inclusion from EU institutions, international organisations, Member States governments and civil society — was launched in April 2009 to exchange good practice and experience and to stimulate cooperation among its participants. Its objective is to increase the coherence and effectiveness of the parallel policy processes at national, European and international level with a view to creating synergies. The Common Basic Principles for

Roma inclusion, drawn up under the Platform process and distilled from the experiences of successful Roma inclusion initiatives, provides a practical framework for public policy makers at all levels on how to design and implement successful initiatives. These principles were used to justify the Commission proposal in 2009 to modify the European Regional Development Fund Regulation.

Most Member States report a stronger focus on internal coordination and on involving the Roma communities. Some Member States have begun to use the opportunities of complex programming and combined cohesion policy instruments.

The European Commission is also implementing a pilot project on Roma inclusion (EUR 5 million 2010-2012), initiated by the European Parliament, addressing early childhood education, self-employment through micro-credit, and public awareness particularly in countries with high Roma populations.

The forthcoming report of a study for the Commission in 2009 and 2010 on activities to improve the impact of policies, programmes and projects aimed at the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma people in the EU will identify success factors and good practice.

Challenges ahead: the analysis of the EU instruments and policies and the progress report 2008-2010 confirm that these instruments and policies are generally apt to support Roma inclusion, even on a large scale. The issue is how to ensure their potential is realised. The challenges ahead include:

- **improve cooperation** between European, national and international players and representatives of the Roma communities, building on the commitment to Roma inclusion that has materialised in the last 5-10 years;
- translate this commitment and cooperation into **positive changes at the local level**. This needs to be complemented by improved ownership and a strengthened capacity on the part of local administrations, civil society and the Roma themselves to initiate and implement projects, programmes and policies;
- **improve communication of the benefits of Roma inclusion** for local and national economic and social development. The social and economic integration of Roma is a 2-way process which requires a change of mindsets of the majority as well as of members of the Roma communities and their leaders;
- promote the **integrated use of EU Funds** in order to tackle the multidimensional challenges of Roma exclusion;
- develop explicit desegregation policies, notably in education and in housing and supported by the Structural Funds;
- place a special focus on the most disadvantaged micro-regions;
- **mainstream Roma inclusion issues into the broad policy areas** of education, employment, public health, infrastructure and urban planning, and economic and territorial development, rather than treating it as a separate policy. Good practices and successful models from projects need to be better disseminated and to become an integral part of policy.

Developing model approaches: there is a large and growing body of experience in the EU of which policy interventions work and which do not. However this knowledge is not yet easily accessible or digestible for public policy makers. Moreover it is not available in a form which is readily adapted to different situations. Roma communities in the EU27 as well as in candidate countries and potential candidates are not homogeneous groups. This heterogeneity means that there cannot be a single strategy: rather there is a need for differentiated approaches that take account of geographical, economic, social, cultural and legal contexts.

The Commission therefore intends to assist policy makers by developing a set of model approaches. Building on best practice, each model would address the needs of the major types of Roma community, including their particularly vulnerable subgroups, and suggest the most appropriate targeted public-policy

interventions. The application of these model approaches would not be mandatory but Member States would be encouraged to take one or more of them into account when structuring their Roma inclusion policies.

The Commission will ensure that the preparation of measures to implement the EU 2020 Strategy as well as of programmes in the new financing period provide specific solutions to the problems of the different types of Roma communities.