

Member States submit National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) – What's in it for Europe's Roma?

Over the past few months (April-July 2021), most Member States have submitted their **National Recovery and Resilience Plans** (NRRPs), in the framework of the **2021 European Semester**.

Key Messages

1. Only 5 of the 11 reviewed NRRPs (CZ, HU, RO, SK ES) explicitly refer to the Roma, despite the dire situation most of them were facing even before the pandemic, now much worsened. Our members deem most measures welcome, but insufficient to tackle root causes of exclusion.

2. None of the 11 reviewed NRRPs includes any references to antigypsyism, while more than half (7/11) also do not mention discrimination or racism. Those that do refer to discrimination only take into account gender equality, disability, sexual orientation, or migrant background.

3. The EU and National Roma Frameworks are absent from most (8/11) of the NRRPs reviewed (AT, BE, CZ, FR, DE, IE, LT, ES). When they are mentioned (HU, RO, SK), these are general references or problem statements, rather than concrete measures to bring about change.

4. None of the 11 Plans reviewed appears to prioritise the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, which is highly disappointing, but not surprising in a context where there was no earmarked minimum amount for social spending in the European Commission Guidance on the NRRPs.

5. All of our 11 national respondents indicated that the engagement of civil society in the drafting of the NRRPs was of poor quality, citing as main criticisms lack of information, unclear process, tight deadlines, lack of resources, and non take-up of submitted input.

This publication has received funding from the European Union. The information contained in this publication reflects only the author's view; and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The **European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network** and its national members have engaged closely with the European Semester 2021, with a view to ensure that Roma rights and inclusion were prioritised in the recovery efforts following the Covid-19 pandemic. Roma people in Europe face poverty and social exclusion at rates of over 80% in most Member States, while their employment, education, health, housing, and other indicators are extremely low compared to the majority of the population, and antigypsyism and discrimination continue to be rampant. The coronavirus crisis only exacerbated this pre-existing situation, as acknowledged by the European Commission and as testified by numerous reports from the ground[1].

ERGO Network conducted its own in-depth research, in the second part of 2020, on **the impact of Covid-19 and associated measures on Roma communities in Europe**. 1352 respondents from seven EU Member States (BE, BG, CZ, HU, IE, RO, SK), five Western Balkan countries (AL, B&H, NM, KO, RS) and Turkey provided evidence on how, despite some positive responses regarding immediate measures taken by some governments to assist vulnerable groups, including Roma and Travellers, **the pandemic disproportionately hit these communities**. You can access the full study here, and/or watch a short animated video of the key findings here.

Against this baseline, ERGO Network's national members in 11 Member States have performed a detailed **review of their countries' National Recovery and Resilience Plans (AT, BE, CZ, FR, DE, HU, IE, LT, RO, SK, ES)**, to assess to what extent the Roma were being explicitly included in national reforms and investments to be supported through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility. Read below a synthesis of this review, which also informed the Key Messages of this analysis, and which is based on a national data collection exercise with the following key questions:

[1] European Commission - Overview of the impact of coronavirus measures on the marginalised Roma communities in the EU; European Commission - EU strategy on the rights of the child, page 2; Fundamental Rights Agency - Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – impact on Roma and Travellers; Council of Europe – Roma and Travellers Covid-19 response; Eurocities - Cities discuss the impact of COVID-19 on Roma inclusion.

1. *Are the Roma mentioned anywhere in the NRRP (or at least ethnic minorities)? If yes, do you agree with the challenges identified measures proposed? What is missing?*
2. *Is antigypsyism mentioned, or at least discrimination and/or racism? If yes, do you agree with how it is addressed? What is missing?*
3. *Are there links made to the EU Roma Strategic Framework / National Roma Frameworks, and are they satisfactory? What about other important frameworks – European Pillar of Social Rights, Sustainable Development Goals, Child & Youth Guarantee, Anti-Racism Action Plan etc?*
4. *What is your overall assessment of the Plan - is social inclusion prioritised enough? Is there enough attention paid to vulnerable groups?*
5. *What was your experience engaging with the drafting – was civil society involved and was the process clear? Was your input taken up in the final report? What lessons learned?*

Additional question for Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia:

6. *Your country received a Country-Specific Recommendation on Roma in 2019 – is this adequately addressed in the Plan?*

Are the Roma mentioned in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans?

Are the measures proposed sufficient / appropriate for Roma inclusion?

According to our survey, the **Roma are only explicitly mentioned in 5 of the 11 NRRPs reviewed**, namely **in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain**. Our members have mixed feelings regarding both the sufficiency and efficiency of these measures for the adequate tackling of the complex hardships that Roma communities face in European countries, worsened by the pandemic and associated measures.

In the ***Czech Republic***, the Roma are only mentioned in connection to **education**, such as a target group concerning measures in schools situated in socially disadvantaged localities, including **tutoring and preparatory classes for everyday educational activities**, according to the school curriculum. Additionally, they are referred to in the context of the educational reform which will be undertaken by the Czech Government in connection to **the development of digital skills**.

In ***Hungary***, the Roma appear 25 times in the 391-page document. About half the time, this is also in the context of **education**, particularly in what concerns **improving access and curbing segregation**, with an additional reference in highly skilled competitive workforce. While a number of measures are foreseen, including desegregation measures and targeted support, our members do not feel that they are concrete enough, nor do they see the NRRP as a reassuring step in adequately tackling Roma access to quality, mainstream education in Hungary.

The Roma are also mentioned consistently in the "Catching Up Settlements" component, which is dedicated to Roma inclusion. This includes pro-active measures specifically targeting disadvantaged groups, with a **primary focus on the needs of the Roma population**. However, our members deplore the fact that no Roma organisation is listed as implementor in any of the 167 settlements, and the **empowerment and recognition of Roma communities are sadly missing**.

In ***Romania***, the Roma are explicitly identified in the Plan as a group severely affected by **poverty and inequality** and impaired access to the **labour market**, while the document equally aims at tackling **segregation**, and **making education available, inclusive and equitable** in remote communities. The Plan includes the latest data on the situation of Roma from national and international reports, and it foresees additional **data collection** on Roma. While they are consistently mentioned in the problem statements, it is felt by our members that the Roma are merely listed as one of the beneficiaries of general measures, without any associated, targeted provisions that would address their specific circumstances.

In ***Slovakia***, the Roma are also mentioned specifically with a focus on **rendering education more inclusive** for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma children. This is also meant to contribute to **better employment outcomes**. Overall, our members are pleased with the phrasing of the proposed measures targeting Roma communities, however they reserve judgment till implementation is underway. Positive measures are also foreseen for extending **early childhood education and care,** as well as **second chance** education.

Disappointingly, the Slovak Plan is lacking in what concerns adequately fighting school **segregation**, as the prevalent misconception is that closing down segregated educational establishments will mean that the Roma will drop out of school altogether, which is contradicted both by realities on the ground, as well as by other commitments in the same Plan to improve access to quality, mainstream education for Roma children. In our members' view, this indicates a lack of ambition and political will to really change the situation of the Roma.

> "If compulsory pre-school education is introduced, and all previous steps taken are inclusive, then Roma children will want to be educated in schools with majority children. If segregated schools do not exist, there is a greater chance that Roma children will be included in the majority schools."
>
> *Roma Advocacy and Research Centre, Slovakia*

In ***Spain***, there are only three references in the entire NRRP to Roma communities. The Roma are mentioned as a vulnerable group under the headings for **equality**, **early childhood education and care** (which the Plan aims to expand), and **vocational training**. However, our members feel that the aim of increasing access to pre-school facilities is seen exclusively from the narrow perspective of getting more women into employment, rather than from a viewpoint of the rights of the child, or Roma inclusion. The same approach can be observed in the case of vocational training, where Roma women are only mentioned from the angle of improving their participation in the labour market.

According to our Spanish members, these three **references are tokenistic** and do not show a commitment of the Spanish Government to decisively tackle Roma exclusion and inequalities. The Roma are not targeted per se by the Plan, but only sporadically as part of other key demographic categories prioritised in the Plan (women, youth etc). There are **no specific measures aimed at bridging the gap between Roma and non-Roma** in Spain across all social indicators. Mainstream measures too often do not reach racialised and marginalised communities, such as the Roma.

While the Roma as such are not mentioned, references to **people with an ethnic minority background are included in the Plans for Germany and Lithuania**. However, these references are unlikely to contribute positively to the improvement of the situation of Roma communities. In Germany, the wording is limited to people with a migrant background. In Lithuania, this reference is only included in passing in the "Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities" section, where the main focus is on the former, with no challenges described or concrete measures foreseen for ethnic minorities.

> "Ethnic minorities are mentioned in the document, but there was no specific mentioning of the Roma community in Germany. Overall, the Plan contains several relevant solutions that are oriented towards the people with migrant background who have been hit by the crisis caused by Covid-19. However, the problems that the Roma community is facing due to the ongoing epidemic are not mentioned in the document."
>
> *Amaro Drom, Germany*

There is **no mention of Roma or Travellers** in the NRRPs of **Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania.** Furthermore, there is **no reference to ethnic minorities** in the Plans for **Austria, France** (where they are not recognised officially), and **Ireland**.

Are antigypsyism, discrimination and/or racism tackled in the Plans?

Are the measures proposed adequate for Roma equality?

To our members' great disappointment, **antigypsyism is not mentioned in any of the NRRPs** reviewed, despite it being the main root cause for the inequality and exclusion that Roma face.

Even more staggering, even **racism or discrimination are absent from the Plans for Austria, France, Hungary, Ireland**, **Lithuania** (one mention under gender equality only), **Romania** (one mention under research only), and **Slovakia**.

> "Economic growth and resilience aren't related to racism and discrimination in the mind of the civil servants; they consider them as two separate domains and those who work on the one, do not even think about the other."
>
> *The Voice of Roma, France*

In the ***Czech Republic***, only very general mentions of discrimination and non-discriminatory approaches feature in the NRRP, in relation to **gender equality and access to services**. Discrimination of groups such as the Roma is not taken into consideration in the Plan.

In ***Belgium***, while the Plan includes a good assessment of **discrimination on the labour market**, no other aspects are taken into account, while the measures proposed only focus on more data collection and testing.

In ***Hungary***, the Plan clearly states that the Hungarian Government does not discriminate on the basis of gender or other grounds, by which it is understood that it won't develop targeted measures for the needs of specific groups. They however further state that a "positive exception" is made in the case of the **development needs of the Roma population**.

> Just as the issue of discrimination and social rejection of the Roma, as a threat to the success of the whole enterprise, does not appear in the material, neither does the organized and institutional participation of the Roma in the implementation.
>
> *Autonómia Foundation, Hungary*

In ***Germany***, a national plan for the prevention of racism is announced, which aims at tackling the rising levels of discrimination and racism brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, with concrete measures. However, in our members' view, **these measures won't be beneficial for Roma communities**, as the federal Government pays much less attention to antigypsyism compared to other forms of discrimination, so it goes unaddressed.

In ***Slovakia***, while the education section talks about the segregation and disproportionate placement of Roma children in special schools, **no link is made to antigypsyism or discrimination**. The Plan speaks about introducing a definition of segregation into legislation, seemingly unaware of the already existing Anti-Discrimination Act and court decisions on the segregation of Roma children in education.

In ***Spain***, while racism is not mentioned, there are several references to discrimination. However, these **don't seem to specifically account for discrimination on racial or ethnic background**, focussing instead on gender equality (where religion, ethnicity and socio-economic background are also mentioned). Additionally, the fight against labour market discrimination of people with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ is also included in the Plan – but nothing on ethnic minorities.

> "Ethnic discrimination and antigypsyism are very important issues, because Roma and other ethnic minority groups are facing many barriers in employment, education, housing, health, etc because of antigypsyism and racism. This must be tackled!"
>
> *Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia, Spain*

Are there links made to the EU and National Roma Frameworks and other key policy frameworks? Are they satisfactory?

Very disappointingly, **most of our respondents (7/11) report that no links are made to the EU or National Roma Frameworks** in their countries' NRRPs (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain). This is very worrying and a great missed opportunity, since the National Roma Frameworks were supposed to be developed at the same time by national Governments, and very fruitful synergies could have been enacted to ensure that recovery funds support the achievement of the horizontal and sectoral priorities of the Framework.

> "There is no link made between the NRRP and the EU Roma Strategic Framework, although in particular in the area of education, employment, and addressing structural discrimination many Roma in Austria are in a particularly disadvantaged position. In addition, the Roma civil society sector was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and they could not carry out their work, while also receiving less donations and membership fees. There should be adequate public policies and funds for closing these gaps."
>
> *Romano Centro, Austria*

The Roma Framework was mentioned in only 3 countries (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia), however our members report mixed feelings regarding the actual concrete alignment of priorities between the Framework and the NRRP process, and the potential for actual change in the lives of the Roma communities in their countries.

In ***Hungary***, the EU Roma Framework is mentioned 4 times, but it feels more like a box-ticking exercise in our members' view, with no substantive links being explicitly made, and the initiative only being mentioned in tables, rather than the actual content. The same applies to the Hungarian National Social Cohesion / Catching up Strategy, which is basically the successor to the National (Roma) Inclusion Strategy. This is also mentioned 4 times, however it has not yet been officially adopted by the Government, so the references feel hollow.

Similarly, in ***Romania***, the National Roma Framework is mentioned, but only briefly and in a general way, stating that measures proposed in the NRRP would contribute to its implementation, without providing concrete details on the how.

More encouragingly, in ***Slovakia***, our members report that the National Roma Framework is mentioned in a constructive way, and positive cross-over is present in the measures.

Unfortunately, it is not only the Roma Framework that seems to have missed out, but also other important EU strategies and frameworks, whose national implementation could have been very usefully linked to the priorities under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. This lack of policy coherence has the negative potential to undermine implementation of both the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, and the other initiatives mentioned below.

> "Overall, it can be stated with great certainty that the listed EU initiatives and other sources of outstanding reference did not seem to visibly influence the preparation of the Hungarian NRRP. Unfortunately, they did not serve as a compass at all to the authors of the document."
>
> *Socfactor, Hungary*

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** was reported as present in their countries' NRRPs by 3 of our respondents (Hungary, Romania, Spain). In Hungary, there is only one reference, which feels like a technicality, not a true political commitment. In Romania and Spain, the references are very limited, and serve only to highlight that the Plan will contribute to the implementation of the Social Pillar, particularly principles 1 and 2 in Spain (on education and gender equality), without making further connections.

The **Youth Guarantee** featured, according to our members, also in 3 NRRPs (Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain). In Hungary, the reference is not substantive, and merely employed to explain connections between NRRP measures and existing Youth Guarantee programmes, to avoid double funding.

The **EU Anti-Racism Action Plan** is only mentioned in the Romanian NRRP, as reported by our respondents. However, the single reference is restricted to ensuring equality in research projects, with no other areas being tackled or highlighted.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** were only mentioned in the Plan for Spain, according to our members.

None of our surveyed members indicated that the **Child Guarantee** was referred to in their countries' NRRPs, despite Roma children being an explicit target group of children in need that the Guarantee focuses on.

Does your country's Plan sufficiently prioritise social inclusion or the plight of vulnerable groups?

There is consensus among our 11 respondents that their countries' **National Recovery and Resilience Plans do not seem to prioritise the social inclusion of vulnerable groups** in their measures. This is very disappointing, at a time where Europe is facing a dire health, social, and economic crisis, with disastrous long-term consequences, particularly for already disadvantaged communities, but also for our societies as a whole. This is consistent with an unfortunate approach by the European Commission in shaping the European Semester 2021 and the NRRP process: in the Guidance provided to Member States on drafting their NRRPs, there was **no minimum spending amount earmarked for social inclusion**, while this was done for other thematic areas, such as green and digital priorities.

In ***Belgium***, our members report that, while inclusion policies and equal opportunity objectives are featured in the Plan, it is **difficult to assess if they will have an impact on discrimination** and exclusion.

> "Social inclusion is not even mentioned as such in the Plan, social issues are only discussed in a general way, without targeting the particular problems of the Roma, worsened by the impact of Covid-19 on Roma communities."
>
> *RomanoNet, Czech Republic*

In ***Germany***, the focus of the NRRP is overwhelmingly on environmental and digital priorities, while **the needs of vulnerable groups are not getting the attention they require**.

In ***Hungary***, despite the Roma being mentioned multiple times in the document, the overall approach of the Plan is non-committal, and the language is formal, without adequate connections being made, with **lists of challenges but no concrete measures or objectives**. Our members deemed what is proposed as shallow, patchy, and haphazard, with some measures even having the potential to cause more harm.

> **"**The overall Plan lacks any significant reference to Travellers, Roma or other minority ethnic groups and, in our opinion, lacks ambition in light of the overall EU social inclusion, equality and anti-racism agenda. This is all the more significant given the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on these individuals and communities."
>
> *Pavee Point, Ireland*

In ***Romania***, a number of measures are foreseen in the areas of poverty reduction, health, education, housing, access to services etc. However, the proposals don't seem to be thought through. While a lot of money is dedicated to social infrastructure such as community centres and others, **nothing is said about the quality or accessibility or impact** of these services. The reform of the welfare system, which is also mentioned, looks at sustainability, rather than adequacy.

In ***Austria*** and ***Slovakia***, the assessment is that social inclusion is only addressed very generally, without looking at intersectional discrimination, or the **root causes of exclusion** and links with segregation.

In ***Spain***, respondents felt that the priority of the Spanish Government was to return to the pre-pandemic situation, rather than improve it, which is a missed opportunity in terms of fighting social exclusion and discrimination. While a great deal of attention is paid to gender equality, there is **nothing comparable for excluded groups**, such as the Roma, while the Plan itself focusses on economic recovery, the middle class, gender equality, and territorial cohesion, but not income inequalities or the exclusion of vulnerable groups.

Was civil society a key partner in the drafting of the Plans, with effective, quality stakeholder consultation processes in place?

All of our surveyed members (AT, BE, CZ, DE, FR, HU, IE, LT, RO, SK, ES) feel that the **national processes for stakeholder consultation were poor** in their countries, both in what concerns the engagement of (pro-)Roma organisations, as well as civil society involvement more broadly.

Our respondents highlight that **information on the process and on opportunities for input was not readily available**. Governments didn't pro-actively reach out to stakeholders to seek their views, the mechanisms were not clear, drafts were published too late and with very short deadlines. Additionally, **civil society is not considered a partner** that should be consulted by default, like industry associations or social partners. There are no Government-sponsored protocols or structures in place to ensure that their voices are taken on board in the drafting.

Some members report having managed to feed their concerns through different informal settings. For example, in ***Germany***, members were able to provide evidence to the Federal Cabinet Committee dedicated to the prevention of racism and right-wing extremism. However, while the involvement of civil society overall is quite well covered in the Plan, the voices of organisations representing **vulnerable groups, as well as issues such as discrimination, are not reflected**.

In the ***Czech Republic***, there was **no clear process with input opportunities**. Our members pro-actively contacted the Ministry of Industry, who was in charge of drafting the NRRP, with a view to discuss how to best mainstream the national Roma Strategy, adopted in May 2021, into the Plan. They also provided input through the Governmental Office for Roma Minority Affairs, who is cooperating with the drafting Ministry. However, they saw **no follow-up to their proposals**, and the national Roma Strategy is not even mentioned in the final NRRP.

> "The issue of Roma inclusion in policy-making is not very well addressed even by EU institutions, so we cannot expect miracles on the national level."
>
> *RomanoNet, Czech Republic*

In ***Hungary***, the process was also deemed **difficult and untransparent**. A first draft was published for comments just before Christmas 2020, with very tight deadlines. In February 2021, 60 NGOs demanded, in an open letter, that a meaningful social consultation be conducted. When the next draft was released, only two weeks were allowed for reviewing a document of 430+ pages. The final, even longer, draft Plan was only submitted to Parliament two minutes before it went into session.

In ***Ireland***, a consultation process was set in place, calling for submissions from stakeholders. While our members did send their input through this channel, there was no opportunity for direct contact or further dialogue, nor confirmation of receipt, nor an explanation about the process. Additionally, **none of the submitted input was reflected** in the final version of the Plan.

> "There were public consultations (done mostly online), actors were encouraged to send inputs, but not all were accepted. Roma civil society was not well represented, there are very few people who understand these processes, and these people are also the ones busy delivering services and support on the ground in Roma communities. What is needed is more resources, more training, more transparency, and a coordination unit at both national and EU level."
>
> *Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Romania*
>
> *Nevo Parudimos, Romania*

The situation was no different in ***Spain***, as our members did not manage to submit an input to the drafting of the NRRP, and they are under the impression that **only select stakeholders were directly consulted**, while the information on the process was not transparent and accessible. While an impressive list of actors is included in the NRRP itself as having been consulted, there was **no public consultation open to all** during the drafting process. As far as our members understood, there will only be a public consultation regarding the implementation.

Does your country's Plan adequately address the Country-Specific Recommendation it received on Roma inclusion in 2019 – in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia?

In 2019, **four countries received a Country-Specific Recommendation which explicitly targeted Roma inclusion**, mostly aimed at curbing segregation in educational settings and ensuring better access of Roma children to public education. According to the Guidance provided by the European Commission regarding the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, **Member States had an obligation to address the 2019 CSRs** in the proposed measures and investments. Unfortunately, Bulgaria could not be included in this analysis (or indeed in the rest of the data collection exercise), due to the fact that the Bulgarian Government is yet to submit its final NRRP to the European Commission at the moment of the publication of this report.

In ***Hungary***, there are seven references in the Plan to the Country-Specific Recommendation received by the country in 2019, which states, among others, "Improve education outcomes and increase the participation of disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma in quality mainstream education." This will be delivered through the development of infrastructure, tools, teachers, professional services, and most of all by one of the main objectives of the Plan, which is digitalization. More substantive details will be included in the new Public Education Strategy 2021-2030, to which the text refers frequently. Despite these commitments, our members find that the measures are rather vague and disappointing, and fall short of consisting a reassurance that Roma children will access quality, inclusive education.

In ***Romania***, the Country-Specific Recommendation of 2019 states, among others, "Improve the quality and inclusiveness of education, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups." It is mentioned three times, regarding the reform of the minimum wage and minimum income systems, as well as the management of funds destined to investments in healthcare. There is, however, no reference tying the Country-Specific Recommendation to specific measures aimed at implementing its content on Roma.

In ***Slovakia***, the Plan mentions the 2019 Country-Specific Recommendation three times, in pages 21, 225, 228. The Recommendation states, among others, "Promote integration of disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma." The NRRP includes specific Roma references under the sections dedicated to education and employment, supporting better and more inclusive access. The Plan highlights an inclusive approach to education, to be implemented by the Ministry of Education, but it remains unclear how school segregation of Roma children will be tackled. Our members feel that measures explicitly targeting the Roma are missing. The Plan equally aims to lower the country's unemployment rate and to ensure more Roma can enter work, but the Ministry of Labour does not propose any measures to tackle the discrimination against Roma on the labour market.

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*This synthesis review was drafted by **Amana Ferro** (a.ferro@ergonetwork.org), Senior Policy Adviser with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network's Brussels office, and endorsed by ERGO Network's national membership in August 2021. It is based on targeted survey responses received from our members in **Austria** (Romano Centro), **Belgium** (Traveller and Roma Mediation Centre), **Czech Republic** (RomanoNet), **France** (The Voice of Roma), **Germany** (Amaro Drom), **Hungary** (Autonómia Foundation, Socfactor Consulting), **Ireland** (Pavee Point), **Lithuania** (Roma Community Centre Vilnius), **Romania** (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Nevo Parudimos), **Slovakia** (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre), and **Spain** (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia).*