

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN EUROPE

ERGO NETWORK SNAPSHOT ON...

Social Protection, Unemployment Benefits, Minimum Income



80% of Roma are at risk of poverty. In Spain (98%), Greece (96%) and Croatia (93%), this means almost the entire Roma population.



Every fourth Roma (27%) lives in households where someone went to bed hungry.



92% of Roma indicate that they face difficulties in making ends meet.



44% of Roma live in low-work-intensity households.

Most Roma in Europe experience both relative as well as absolute levels of poverty and social exclusion, with rates multiple times higher than those for the non-Roma population.

In a cash-based economy, the impact of cash transfers on the poverty rate, monitored explicitly by the Social Scoreboard, is a key indicator, particularly where less than 50% of Roma are in standard, paid employment.

The umbrella term "Roma" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), as defined by the European Commission.

The latter means that the Roma are often not eligible for contributive benefits, such as unemployment allowance or pension. If they are, such benefits are often accompanied by strict conditionality and sanctions, which Roma jobseekers can't always comply with, since poverty and precariousness themselves act as lock-in barriers to seeking employment.

Lack of information about one's rights and complex bureaucratic processes are further deterrents for the Roma to access the necessary resources that would allow them to survive and thrive.

In Ireland, access to basic social protection payments or the associated state-funded employment services and training schemes are contingent upon presenting proof of habitual residence – due to a restrictive transposition of the European Directive 2004/38 – which many Roma living in Ireland are unable to provide, thus being cut out from supports.

In many Member States, social protection, including minimum income, is set at inadequate levels, which don't allow the recipients and their families to lead dignified lives. Additionally, non take-up of entitlements is a prevalent phenomenon in



Roma communities, motivated by a wide range of factors – from facing discrimination and antigypsyism from state offices, to facing “double” stigma from the wider population for being both Roma and a benefit claimant.

Access to adequate income schemes is a necessary prerequisite of social and economic inclusion, as well as the cornerstone for our European Social Model, which must work for all.

Investment in strong, sound social protection systems is beneficial for all, and ensuring equal access to financial resources is paramount, to ensure that people can take advantage of opportunities and reach their full potential. Reducing poverty is a cross-cutting priority objective of the new EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, while ending poverty and hunger are also Sustainable Development Goals (1, 2).

ERGO Network Recommendations



- Enact an EU Framework Directive on Minimum Income, based on art 153, 1, h TFEU, which would include common definitions of adequacy, linked to the 60% of median income (poverty line), complemented by reference budgets to ensure purchasing power.
- Governments must invest in rights-based activation strategies, that put the beneficiary at the core and ensure ownership through personalised approaches that can't always follow an employment-first approach.
- Put an end to punitive conditionality, which involves sanctions and benefit cuts, and which only contributes to further exclusion and hardship.
- Provide anti-discrimination training to public offices disbursing social protection and penalise discriminatory behaviours in relation to minority recipients, including the Roma. Combat the public discourse which stigmatises benefit claimants and people experiencing poverty.
- Make entitlements automatic (rather than having to be applied for), to ensure that lack of knowledge of one's rights does not act as a deterrent to receiving entitlements as well as to eliminate red tape and simplify delivery.
- Put in place programmes that ensure that social protection entitlements are accessible to categories of the population experiencing multiple difficulties in accessing them, such as not knowing how to read or write, not having an ID card, not having a fixed address or a bank account, not being able to apply online etc.
- Roll out specific provisions to ensure that those who work in the informal economy are also entitled to income support, particularly during the pandemic and in its aftermath, and shield this income from penalties deriving from previous debt and arrears.

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Recommendations

- Annually measure Roma poverty through Eurostat, using the combined AROPE indicator – at risk of poverty, material deprivation and households with low work intensity – to be able to keep track of the multifaceted aspects of poverty and social exclusion in Roma communities.
- In order to design an effective social safety net, consider piloting targeted social audits to identify poverty risks that stem from the intersectional vulnerabilities of Roma.
- The fight against poverty and social exclusion should be made a transversal dimension through the Action Plan implementation, ensuring that quality, sustainable employment opportunities, inclusive education, quality housing, and adequate healthcare contribute to the overall improvement of Roma wellbeing and quality of life, in an Active Inclusion approach.



Sources

- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey – Roma, 2017



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This snapshot is an excerpt from ERGO Network's position paper [How to ensure that the European Pillar of Social Rights delivers on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation?](#), October 2020.