



European Commission releases Spring Package – What’s in it for Europe’s Roma*?

On 23 May 2022, the European Commission published the so-called *Spring Package*, comprising the 27 [Country Reports](#), 27 [Country-Specific Recommendations](#), and the accompanying [Communication on the Spring Package](#), in the framework of the **2022 European Semester**. This marks a return to the 2020 European Semester procedure, as – exceptionally – 2021 did not feature Country Reports or Country-Specific Recommendations. ERGO Network and its national members have reviewed the Package, to see to which extent it explicitly mentions Roma rights and inclusion, as well as ethnic minorities, discrimination, racism, and the role of civil dialogue.

Key Findings

1. **The accompanying Communication highlights the Roma** as one of the most affected groups by the Covid-19 pandemic and speaks of improving their labour market inclusion.
2. **7 Country Reports include references to the Roma** (BG, HR, CZ, HU, RO, SK, SI) in 2022, which is one more than in 2020, but still insufficient as Roma live in 26 EU Member States.
3. **Only one Country-Specific Recommendation (HU) mentions the Roma**, a slight improvement from 2020 (the first year with no Roma CSRs since 2012), but less than pre-2020.
4. **Ethnic minorities, discrimination, and racism are absent from both sets of documents**, with only discrimination mentioned twice each in the Country Reports for 3 countries (BE, HR, IE).
5. **Civil society organisations were not associated to the drafting of the Country Reports**, and the Spring Package references to their role are few and vague (7 Country Reports, 1 CSR).

Overall remarks

The **European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network** warmly welcomes the explicit mention of the European Roma in the *Communication on the Country-Specific Recommendations*. The document acknowledges that “*The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately hit some regions, sectors and population groups that were already facing worse employment and social conditions, notably: the youth, low-skilled and temporary workers, persons with disabilities, people with a migrant background and the Roma*” (page 8). Furthermore, the text stresses that “*increasing the labour market participation of women [...] and underrepresented groups, such as persons with disabilities, migrants and the Roma, still represents a major opportunity for inclusive and sustainable growth and equality*” (page 9).

The recognition of the fact that **Roma communities throughout Europe were particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic** and associated measures is very positive. While we also appreciate wording on improving labour market prospects for Roma workers, it is regrettable that it is anchored solely in the perspective of reducing labour market shortages and employment gaps, rather than stemming from a **rights-based approach, aimed at curbing poverty and improving social inclusion**. Furthermore, nothing is said about other crucial elements, such as education, health, housing, access to services, access to income, access to rights and equality.

The Communication reaffirms the commitment to the **four guiding dimensions** of environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability, as well as the close link with the implementation of the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, now fully integrated in the European Semester. A new tool to be added to the mix is also the recently adopted **REPowerEU**, which is the European plan to reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible. The bulk of the Communication focusses on the EU’s key challenges and priorities: the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the energy crisis and associated impacts.

The implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** (Social Pillar) and of the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) have also been incorporated in the European Semester. Each Country Report includes dedicated monitoring for these two frameworks on a yearly basis, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans also contribute to their delivery. However, the **Social Pillar is not mentioned elsewhere in the Communication** aside this explanatory paragraph, despite being named “the overall guiding framework to ensure fairness in the EU”. While there is an Appendix and separate report tracking the EU’s progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, there is nothing similar for monitoring the implementation of the Social Pillar.

There is a commitment to **support the most vulnerable households** through the current fuel shortage and price spikes, and **energy poverty** is mentioned twice. In addition, a paragraph in the Fairness section is dedicated to the **fight against poverty**, highlighting also the yet unpredictable impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and other current global challenges. The same section includes welcome wording on improving the efficiency of **social protection** systems (access, adequacy, effectiveness), on increasing the availability of affordable and **social housing**, and on supporting effective, resilient and sustainable **healthcare** systems. These commitments are very welcome and can play a key role in ensuring better access to rights and inclusion also for Europe’s Roma.

However, **references to social inclusion are not sufficiently mainstreamed** through the other sections. Sadly, the communication also makes **no further reference to ethnic minorities, racism, discrimination, or antigypsyism**. Labour shortages are highlighted several times, but nothing is said about improving wages or working conditions in order to attract and retain staff. Despite its key potential to support an inclusive and resilient recovery, as well as to deliver better social inclusion, there is **not a single mention of social economy**. instead of a holistic approach that would include wrap-around support for people who have lived through a trauma, **welcoming refugees from Ukraine is limited** to fostering their education, skills, and employment.

While the final section of the Communication deals explicitly with the European Semester being “a joint effort between EU institutions, Member States and stakeholders”, **the role of civil dialogue is significantly understated**. Nonetheless, we welcome the two calls on Member States to engage actively with civil society organisations, including in the implementation of the CSRs, through close dialogue and regular exchanges, **modelled after the Partnership Principle** in Cohesion Policy, in order to support evidence-based policy solutions and ensure broader ownership. However, **only the involvement of social partners is explicitly supported** for the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, including through an upcoming Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue at national and EU level – a glaring missed opportunity to have a similar initiative for civil dialogue.

We further **salute the inclusion of Roma concerns in the Employment Guidelines** for 2022, a yearly document highlighting common priorities and targets for employment and social policies, which provide the basis for the Country-Specific Recommendations. While the references are not in the Guidelines themselves (repeated in the Annex), the recitals include **strong calls to tackle discrimination** (including explicitly that of Roma) and to **support better access for Roma to the labour market**. Once again, however, nothing is said about curbing Roma poverty and improving their living conditions and equal opportunities, so the focus continues to be on plugging employment gaps, rather than on guaranteeing access to rights and wellbeing.

For the first time, the European Semester includes in its Spring Package a brand new annex, namely a **report monitoring Member States’ performance towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Disappointingly, there is **a single mention of the Roma** in this 380-page text, a sentence in page 34 about how the Roma were disproportionately hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Discrimination is only mentioned twice in the whole report. This is disappointing, given that **the Sustainable Development Goals are very relevant for Roma** equality, participation, and inclusion (see ERGO Network’s discussion paper on Roma and the SDGs [here](#)).

Roma in the Country Reports 2022

For the first time since 2020, the European Commission has prepared **Country Reports** for each of the 27 Member States. These Reports provide an **overview of challenges for each country**, incorporating the four guiding dimensions mentioned above, the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, past Country-Specific Recommendations, progress on the Social Pillar Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as emerging developments such as the energy crisis or the war in Ukraine. This analysis is **meant to underpin the Country-Specific Recommendations**, by identifying key priority areas where intervention is required.

Only **7 Country Reports include references to the Roma (BG, HR, CZ, HU, RO, SK, SI)** in 2022, which is one more than in 2020. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Roma live in 26 EU Member States, some of them comprising significant Roma communities, there were no other references in the remaining Country Reports. Additionally, there is **no mention of ethnic minorities, racism, and antigypsyism** in any of the 27 Country Reports, and only a couple of references to discrimination in each of the Reports for Belgium, Ireland, and Croatia. However, these latter references are minimal, and only concern the labour market (in Belgium and Croatia) and the listing of objectives under Cohesion Policy (Ireland).

ERGO Network members have **mixed feelings in what concerns the quality and appropriateness of the measures** for the Country Reports which include Roma-specific content. While it is very positive to see Roma issues in their country explicitly taken on board in the analysis, and what is included is generally adequate, it is felt that **a number of equally important aspects of Roma inclusion and wellbeing are completely overlooked**, thus undermining a cohesive, comprehensive approach that would yield results. Disappointingly, there are **few or no links made to the EU or National Roma Frameworks**, hence a great opportunity to ensure fruitful synergies with policy frameworks such as the European Semester is missed.

In **Bulgaria**, while the Report contains several references to Roma issues, our members state that the tendency is always to identify and state challenges, but **no specific recommendations are made** as to how to respond to them. Important issues such as the growing manifestations of racism and discrimination at all levels are not addressed at all. While the Roma are included in the country's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a Country-Specific Recommendation on Roma would have spurred more needed measures to improve the situation of Roma communities in the country.

In the **Czech Republic**, it is felt that the mentions are brief and very general, and more disaggregated data is needed to capture the full extent of Roma concerns, as well as to inform both policy-making and the spending of EU funds, such as ESF+. The Czech National Recovery and Resilience Plans only mentions the Roma in the context of improving digital skills, while concrete **measures to support Roma employment, housing, or health are missing**, although great challenges remain in all these areas. The focus on education is very important, particularly after the disruptions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, but an additional emphasis on Roma culture would also be welcome.

In **Hungary**, our members deplore the **lack of reference to widespread antigypsyism with no countering action from the state**. According to a recent study (see [ELTE University](#), 2019), 86% of Hungarians would not contribute to improving the situation of Roma, while 80% of respondents reported a marked lack of sympathy towards Roma or a neutral response. Additionally, the **vital role and work of (pro-)Roma civil society organisations are not mentioned**, despite there being over 400 such NGOs in Hungary, working directly on the issues that the Country Report covers. Their work should be recognised, resourced, and supported.

In **Romania**, it is felt that what is included is broadly satisfactory, however more **concrete, targeted measures are missing** – not just from the Country Report, but also the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. For example, the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Roma communities in the country is not sufficiently taken into account, nor are any concrete measures suggested to mitigate its impact.

The overall focus of the Roma mentions continues to be on poverty, employment, and education, which is positive, however the dimensions of **poor housing and lack of access to health and long-term care are not included**. There is a need for better infrastructure connecting Roma communities, which are often remote and isolated. There is a clear danger that, without targeted measures, the **Roma will be left behind by mainstream initiatives**. These targeted measures would need to be supported by sound public budgeting, as at the moment the National Roma Framework is over-reliant on EU funds.

In *Slovakia*, our members find that the Country Report is very general and describes a well-known situation. It draws heavily on quantitative data, which does not mean that real progress was achieved on the ground. For example, it is clear that EU **money spent on Roma inclusion during the last programming period did not yield the expected results**, yet the Report continues to encourage these programmes. While Slovakia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan includes important measures on **curbing school segregation**, this is not sufficiently highlighted in the Report, nor is guidance offered, which leads to doubts over the success of these measures.

Civil society is mentioned in only 8 Country Reports (AT, BG, DK, HU, IE, IT, LV, SE), and the references are all very punctual, one in each Report except Latvia, which has two. Otherwise, civil dialogue is not mainstreamed through the text as an essential part of healthy policy-making. This approach is confirmed by the fact that **none of our members report having been involved in the drafting of the Country Reports**, and they do not think that other Roma stakeholders were involved either. The general feeling is that these documents are produced behind closed doors, with at most a handful of select stakeholders being consulted. The desk officers in the European Commission, as well as the European Semester Officers stationed in countries, can play a strengthened role in **bridging the civil dialogue gap, by pro-actively reaching out to civil society organisations**, particularly those representing marginalised and vulnerable communities, in order to ensure that their concerns are taken on board in an adequate way in the Country Reports.

Roma in the Country-Specific Recommendations 2022

Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) were released this year once again, after a gap year in 2021. The European Commission explicitly opted (according to the accompanying Communication) to focus on the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) and only a limited number of additional challenges. Consequently, **this year's CSRs show striking similarities from one country to another**, appearing to be more country-general than country-specific. All countries who have an approved **NRRP** received a Recommendation to continue its implementation and the processes around **Cohesion Policy**, while all Member States each received a Recommendation on **fiscal policy** and one on **reducing reliance on fossil fuels** (in line with the newly-adopted framework REPowerEU).

This approach **weakens the link between the Country Reports and the Country-Specific Recommendations**, where the former were supposed to underpin the latter and inform their content. However, for a number of countries, some additional Recommendations were issued, stemming from challenges identified in their Country Report. The Communication is accompanied by an Appendix providing an overview of all the CSRs issues this year, by thematic area, as well as an Appendix outlining the state of progress achieved by Member States on the Country-Specific Recommendations received in previous years.

Out of 27 Member States, **only the Country-Specific Recommendation for Hungary mentions the Roma**. This is somewhat of a step forward from 2020, when none of the CSRs included any reference to the Roma, however it is a significant step backwards from the period 2012-2019. For contrast, **4 Member States received a CSR dealing with Roma in 2019** (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia), targeting chiefly education (improving inclusiveness, quality and relevance) as well as overall integration.

ERGO Network response to the Spring Package 2022

Given the very limited progress of the situation in these countries, **we would have expected at least for these CSRs to be repeated** in 2022. However, as the Roma are mentioned in at least 6 countries' National Recovery and Resilience Plans, the Recommendation calling for Member States to implement the NRRPs can be construed as an implicit urging to also act on the Roma measures in the Plan. Nonetheless, **the opportunity was lost to highlight gaps in the NRRPs**, as well as to target those countries whose Plan does not mention the Roma at all. This approach would have also strengthened links with the delivery of the EU and National Roma Frameworks.

The **CSR for Hungary** urges the Government to “**Improve education outcomes** and increase the participation of disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma in quality mainstream education.” In our members' view, inclusive, quality education could play a key role in improving the poverty and unemployment rates of Roma, but such an approach is missing in Hungary. Instead, **school segregation** continues to be rampant (increase from 27% to 40% from 2008 to 2020), given the expansion of church-run schools which the Roma can't access. Additionally, young Roma are overrepresented in **vocational education**, while national **drop-out rate** is over 60%.

Other important concepts for Roma rights and inclusion, such as **ethnic minorities, discrimination, and racism are completely absent from all 27 Country-Specific Recommendations**. Antigypsyism specifically is equally not mentioned. This trend is, unfortunately, consistent with the Spring Package of 2020, where there was equally no reference to any of these issues. These are strikingly absent dimensions in the current climate, where **discrimination is on the rise all across Europe**, with racialised communities bearing not only the disproportionate brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects, but also facing a marked increase in hate speech, discrimination, denial of rights, and police brutality.

Our national members and partners expressed their disappointment at the fact that none of their countries (except Hungary) received a Country-Specific Recommendation in 2022 that mentioned Roma concerns. Additionally, for most, the Country Report this year didn't include any reference to the Roma either.

ERGO Network response to the Spring Package 2022

“We find it a pity that Austria’s Country Report does not explicitly mention Roma and the problems they face. The living and especially the financial situation of many Roma, as well as of other vulnerable groups, has deteriorated significantly since the beginning of the Corona pandemic. We would like to see racism and discrimination of different groups in general being recognised as an issue in Austria in order to underline the importance to fight against it.”

Romano Centro, Austria

“France has no public policies directed at ethnic entities, as it does not recognise minorities. While the ‘droit commun’ (mainstream policies) is for everyone, it is a recognized reality that it is not equally accessible to all, and the groups stigmatized as "gypsies" suffer from specific forms of discrimination in accessing it. These consequences of centuries-old antigypsyism should be tackled by specific measures, taking due account of the reality of the victims.”

La Voix des Roms, France

“Unfortunately, none of the documents contains any mention of problems and challenges faced by the Roma community in Germany. Important topics such as unemployment caused by Covid-19, rising levels of discrimination and antigypsyism, as well as arrival of Romani refugees from Ukraine are not mentioned, although they have been and remain very relevant. We urge the European Commission to develop cooperation with competent NGOs and civil rights actors, so that these issues can be prioritized in future Country Reports.”

Amaro Drom, Germany

“It is disappointing that there is no prioritisation of Roma, Traveller or minority ethnic groups, or racism in either document, and no link made to the EU or national Traveller / Roma inclusion Framework. There is no reference to special measures in education, health, accommodation, the digital divide, or climate justice and fuel poverty, including for Travellers and Roma. Issues raised with the European Commission during its consultation with Irish NGOs last March were not included in the Country Report. Discrimination is mentioned, but without any clear recommendations for the alignment of Ireland's NRRP with EU strategies (or national plans) against racism or for Traveller & Roma inclusion, SDGs or Social Pillar rights.”

Pavee Point, Ireland

“Unfortunately, Roma issues are not popular and nobody is interested in them. It is significant that the small Roma community in Lithuania (about 2000 people) experiences the same difficulties as huge communities in other countries. However, the tendency is to treat the Roma as ‘equal citizens’ in policy-making, which hides the discrimination they face.”

Vilnius Roma Community Centre, Lithuania

“It is strange that there is no reference to Roma, ethnic minorities, racism or discrimination in the Country Report and Country-Specific Recommendations of the Netherlands, since there is a persisting issue with institutional racism and generalised antigypsyism.”

India ki Rasta, The Netherlands

“It is a huge pity that Spain does not mention Roma in the Country Reports and Country-Specific Recommendations. Spain is one of the countries with the largest number of Roma in the EU and Roma have lived in Spain since the 15th century. The documents cover poverty, vulnerability, employment, education, health etc without mentioning the Roma, despite their worsening social indicators (see the 2019 [Fundación Foessa report](#)). While Spain has already designed its National Roma Framework, it is curious to see that there are no synergies with mainstream policies.”

Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia – FAGiC, Spain

In a highly disappointing move, **civil society is not mentioned in 26 out of 27 Country-Specific Recommendations**, as opposed to the Preambles for four Member States (FI, HU, PT, SI) in 2020. Once again **Hungary is the only Member State whose CSR explicitly mentions civil society** this year, in the Preamble. It is stated that the country scores poorly on transparency and consultations with civil society and other stakeholders, while civil society organisations must operate in a hostile environment and a context of shrinking possibilities for civic oversight. While we very much welcome these references, **civil dialogue is an essential component of democracy and policy-making in all countries**, so it is regrettable that this was not highlighted in other CSRs.

Conversely, **social partners are referred to in every single Preamble** of this year's Country-Specific Recommendations, albeit just once, as all documents include the same identical sentence: *"The systematic involvement of social partners and other relevant stakeholders remains important for the successful implementation of the recovery and resilience plan, as well as other economic and employment policies going beyond the plan, to ensure broad ownership of the overall policy agenda."* The vague mention of "other relevant stakeholders" is too weak, in itself, to **ensure that civil society organisations are adequately resourced and capacitated** to engage in the implementation of the NRRP, nor does it guarantee that the necessary protocols and channels for input will be put in place for this to happen.

Conclusions

Overall, while **our members welcome references to Roma communities in some countries**, they lament that most of the Spring Package 2022 doesn't explicitly mention them, whereas the Roma are present in all Member States except Malta, and experience rates of poverty and social exclusion of over 80% in all of them except the Czech Republic. This situation was exacerbated by the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the rising cost of living and energy price spikes. As the Package itself highlights these very challenges, **it would have warranted more attention paid to one of Europe's most left-behind communities.**

The recurrent focus on supporting just transitions and mitigating the consequences for vulnerable groups is very positive, however it is our members' experience that, **unless the Roma are explicitly named as key target beneficiaries of support measures, mainstream initiatives and dedicated national and EU funds end up not reaching them.** Europe's Roma must be specifically prioritised in the EU's Recovery Package and associated funds, if the EU is serious about delivering on its commitments for Roma equality, participation, and inclusion.

Our members equally express disappointment that issues of **discrimination and antigypsyism are not present in the Package**, as these have increased in recent years, and even more so during the pandemic. The fact that the country analyses and recommendations **do not seek to establish explicit synergies with the EU and national Roma Frameworks** is a tremendous missed opportunity.

Finally, they deplore the **lack of recognition and support given to civil society organisations** in the documents, given that most of them are not only on the frontlines, providing essential support to communities in need, but they equally possess the knowledge, expertise, and direct links to beneficiaries which are needed to inform the design of public policies and **ensure both ownership and effectiveness** of interventions.

This response was drafted by Amana Ferro (a.ferro@ergonetwork.org), Senior Policy Adviser with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network's Brussels office, drawing on a data collection exercise in Austria (Romano Centro), Bulgaria (Integro Association), Czech Republic (Slovo 21, Romano Net), France (La Voix des Rroms), Germany (Amaro Drom), Hungary (Autonómia Foundation, Romaversitas, Socfactor), Ireland (Pavee Point), Lithuania (Vilnius Roma Community Centre), the Netherlands (India ki Rasta), Romania (Nevo Parudimos, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities), Slovakia (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre), and Spain (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia - FAGiC). It was endorsed by ERGO Network's national members in July 2022.

* 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.), in accordance with terminology used by the [European Commission](#).