



European Commission releases Autumn Package 2024 – What’s in it for Europe’s Roma¹?

On 21 November 2023, the European Commission published the [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2024](#), accompanied by the draft [Joint Employment Report 2024](#) (among other annexes), thus launching the next European Semester for this year.

The **Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS)** highlights the main policy priorities for the European Union for the year to come, and it outlines the main tools for implementing these objectives. The Communication also outlines the key aspects of the 2024 European Semester cycle and confirms the commitment to the four complementary dimensions of **environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness, and macroeconomic stability**. Disappointingly, there are **only two references apiece to the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, and no reference to the Social Pillar Action Plan (the EU’s overarching social strategy till 2030), as the overall priorities are, once again, **competitiveness, economic growth, and the green and digital transitions**.

¹ 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](#).

ERGO Network warmly welcomes the **explicit mention of the Roma in this year's Annual Sustainable Growth Survey** (page 9), in the context of **supporting their access to employment**, alongside other categories of workers whose employment rates lag behind, including also young people, women, persons with disabilities, and people with a migrant background. Additionally, the document mentions the **Union of Equality (page 7)**, where the Roma strategy is listed as being a part of it, but not by name, which is a pity. Compared to last year's document, **the number of references to Europe's Roma remained the same** (once in the main text, once in a footnote), however last year's explicit references to the **EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan** were lost.

It is regrettable that, just like in last year's document, **the Roma are only considered from the perspective of their contribution to the labour market**, while other aspects of their wellbeing and social inclusion are missing from the ASGS. There is **no comprehensive approach across the four pillars of the EU Roma Strategy**. While there is one additional reference to the role of EU funds in supporting inclusive education for Roma, nothing is said about access to housing or healthcare. Furthermore, the communication includes **no other references to ethnic minorities, racialised communities, discrimination, racism, or antigypsyism**.

The ASGS's **main focus is on the green and digital transitions**, a staple of this Commission's political agenda, an unfortunate trend since the von der Leyen Commission took office. There is a **lack of prioritisation of social inclusion and the fight against poverty** throughout the text, as poverty is only briefly mentioned, when the targets of the Social Pillar Action Plan are enumerated (twice), in connection to energy poverty (twice) and in-work poverty (once). This is **welcome, but not enough**. Equally disappointingly, **women and key groups** such as older people, young people, people with a disability, migrants (and also the Roma) **are only mentioned in terms of their labour market potential** – but nothing about providing for their inclusion or wellbeing. **Housing is not mentioned at all** in the document, while healthcare is only referred to in passing and non-meaningful ways. Additionally, there is **no reference to social economy** in the text.

The section on Fairness (pages 7-9) is less comprehensive than last year, and the bulk of it is dedicated to employment measures. We very much welcome the paragraph **supporting adequate social protection and social inclusion**, acknowledging the high needs for such policies and outlining an **Active Inclusion approach**, with its three mutually reinforcing pillars of income support, access to quality services, and inclusive labour markets. We also appreciate calls to revisit wages and to **strengthen collective bargaining and to raise wage levels** to combat in-work poverty, to support adequate working conditions, to ensure **labour and social protection rights**, and to improve access to **quality and affordable early childhood education and care** (although this is clearly done from a labour market perspective rather than children's rights).

It is a pity, however, that access to social protection and higher wages seems motivated by a desire to increase purchasing power – rather than combat poverty and ensure wellbeing – as if **people were only regarded by the document as workers and/or consumers**. Only tackling energy poverty is mentioned. For wages, maintaining competitiveness is still listed as a criterion, whereas that has historically translated into **reducing labour costs**. It is equally disappointing that **access to housing or healthcare are not mentioned**, and that education continues to be understood in a **limited sense of providing skills for jobs**, rather than a broader focus on its role for personal development, active citizenship and participation, and sustainable democracies. While the implementation of the Social Pillar is still named a priority, it is not treated as such in the text.

In what concerns the draft **Joint Employment Report (JER)**, we are very pleased to see Europe's **Roma mentioned multiple times** in the document, concerning issues such as their heightened risk of experiencing **poverty and social exclusion** (including that of children), low participation of Roma children in **early childhood education and care, early school leaving**, need for better **access to desegregated housing, low employment rates**, difficulties in **accessing essential social services**. Additionally, **strong links are made to the EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation** and its targets throughout the text, coupled with references to the Council Recommendation and recent Council Conclusions. Very disappointingly though, **there is no mention of antigypsyism or racism**, and only 12 references to discrimination, the vast majority about gender pay equality and one of them **referring specifically to the plight of the Roma**.

The Annual Sustainable Growth Survey explicitly urges Member States to “**actively engage with stakeholders, including** social partners, local and regional authorities, as well as relevant **civil society organisations**” throughout the European Semester and the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (page 11 – our bold). This is very positive, as are the **multiple references to civil society in the draft Joint Employment Report**, where their involvement is deemed key to driving sustainable and inclusive change throughout the European Semester, highlighting that consultations need to be meaningful, transparent and timely.

The ASGS also provides **clarity about the future of the European Semester** and what are the key steps and milestones to be expected for 2024. This year’s Semester will continue to monitor the **implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)** implementation of RRP’s and the Cohesion Policy programmes, exploring how they complement each other in terms of funding and policy outcomes. The **Country Reports** will be released in June and will include an evaluation of progress made towards the European Green Deal objectives, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The **Country-Specific Recommendations** (coming out at the same time as the Country Reports), will focus on a limited selection of challenges and will detail key investment needs for the mid-term review of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes.

ERGO Network will continue to advocate for **a stronger focus on Roma rights and inclusion in the framework for these processes**, and for stronger synergies between the European Semester and the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, and other relevant policies.

*For more information on ERGO Network’s work on the European Semester, please contact Senior Policy Adviser **Amana Ferro** – a.ferro@ergonetwork.org*