



PROTECTING ROMA INCLUSION IN THE NEXT EU BUDGET

Policy recommendations

**Prepared by
Carmen Tanasie
and Stelina Dungaj**



ERGO
N E T W O R K

In February 2024 the European Commission published its **Roadmap for the Next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034)** - MFF, outlining general priorities for the upcoming EU budget. While this document has opened a [public consultation](#) (Deadline: 6 May), it critically overlooks Roma-specific needs—despite overwhelming evidence of persistent inequalities where:

- **6 million Roma citizens face systemic exclusion across the EU**
- **80% of them at risk of poverty (vs. 21% EU average)**
- **Only 43% are in paid employment**
- **25% (1 in 4) experience antigypsyism daily [1]**

Recommended Reading

For more details on the Road to the next MFF and the tangible impacts that can potentially result from the exclusion of minority voices, [read here](#)

Alarming risks in current proposals

The Roadmap's focus on **fund mergers** and **competitiveness-driven reforms** threatens to dilute targeted funding under the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) and undermine the implementation of the **EU Roma Strategic Framework** and **European Pillar of Social Rights** commitments. Discussions on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) have raised concerns among civil society organisations about the shift in priorities towards **competitiveness**, potentially at the expense of social policies.

In a joint statement, CSOs have highlighted the need for the MFF to maintain a strong focus on social cohesion, particularly for marginalised groups such as Roma communities[2].

- For more detailed information regarding the joint statement from CSOs on the next MFF, [read here](#).
- For the recommendations written by Social Platform on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework for Social Europe, [read here](#).

ERGO Network members stress that the next MFF post 2027 must explicitly address Roma inclusion, to:

1. Successfully deliver on the objectives of the EU Roma Strategic Framework
2. Meet the EU's 2030 poverty reduction and other targets under the Social Pillar Action Plan
3. Reverse decades of underinvestment in marginalised communities

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 | Preserve and strengthen both thematic and horizontal enabling conditions in the Common Provisions Regulation to ensure EU funds drive meaningful social progress, uphold fundamental rights, and promote inclusive, accountable policy implementation.

Enabling conditions in the **Common Provisions Regulation** must be **preserved and strengthened to ensure EU funds drive meaningful social progress**, especially for marginalised communities like the Roma. Thematic conditions help align investments with national strategies that reflect the European Pillar of Social Rights, covering areas such as employment, education, health, housing and inclusion.

Crucially, **Roma-specific conditionalities should be enforced**—tying cohesion funding to the adoption of National Roma Inclusion Strategies, as the enabling conditions are the ones that put the strategies in motion.

These targeted requirements would ensure that EU resources address systemic exclusion and promote structural change.

Moreover, enabling conditions must guarantee the active involvement of civil society and Roma-led organisations at every stage, while horizontal conditions safeguard the respect for fundamental rights and prevent misuse of funds. To ensure impact, Member States should be held accountable for measurable outcomes, not just spending, and smaller organisations must be supported to navigate compliance without unnecessary bureaucracy.

Recommendation 2 | The EU Cohesion Policy should remain a central part of the next MFF to ensure that Roma communities have access, agency, and accountability in shaping the future of European society

In our view, the mid-term review of the 2021-2027 MFF leads to cuts in programmes that support social and health priorities, research, and cohesion policy funds. These reductions threaten Europe's long-term social resilience and economic stability. As such, the Cohesion Policy should continue to be a central part of the EU's long-term budget (MFF). While the EU is increasingly focuses on competitiveness, it is crucial to acknowledge that social cohesion is the foundation for achieving that goal.

EU co-funding for Structural Funds should also be increased to better support social projects, especially those that assist vulnerable groups. Even in well-developed regions, a 90% co-financing rate is necessary for such initiatives.

Cohesion Policy, through instruments like the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), provides targeted funding for marginalised communities, including Roma.



This funding supports access to education, employment, housing, and healthcare—core issues that Roma communities continue to face discrimination and exclusion.

Excluding or weakening the Cohesion Policy in the next MFF would risk **rolling back decades of slow but critical progress** in Roma inclusion and empowerment. It's not just about funding—it's about ensuring the Roma community has **access, agency, and accountability** in shaping the future of European society.

Recommendation 3 | The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) should remain a standalone fund in the next MFF to ensure dedicated support for social inclusion, poverty reduction, and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

As the EU's main social policy instrument, the ESF+ plays a critical role in promoting equal access to employment, education, health, and housing, especially for marginalised groups such as Roma communities.

Merging or cutting the ESF+ would weaken its focus, reduce transparency and stakeholder oversight, and risk undermining progress toward key EU targets, including the 2030 poverty reduction goal of the Social Pillar Action Plan. Continued strong, ring-fenced funding is essential to deliver real impact on social cohesion and equality across Europe.

For instance, CSOs demand that the post-2027 ESF+ should include **a dedicated budget of at least €20 billion for the European Child Guarantee**, as urged by the European Parliament[3]. **All Member States should allocate at least 5% of their ESF+ funds** to tackling child poverty, **with higher commitments expected** from those with child poverty rates above the EU average.

Addressing child poverty requires consistent, well-resourced, and targeted investment—particularly in education, health, nutrition, and housing—to break intergenerational cycles of exclusion and ensure equal opportunities for all children, including Roma who are a key priority, and other marginalised communities – something that the CSOs have also been advocating for.

[1] European Commission (2021). EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). (2021). A persisting concern: Anti-Gypsyism in the EU

[2] 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.

[3] Social Platform position paper on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework for Social Europe, [read here](#)

Recommendation 4 | Enforce Rule of Law Conditionality to Protect Fundamental Rights and Combat Structural Racism, Including Against Roma

The rule of law conditionality mechanism was introduced to ensure that EU funds are not used by governments that violate EU values, including respect for fundamental rights, democracy, and equality. However, its implementation has so far fallen short of expectations, particularly in addressing systemic racism and entrenched discrimination, with Roma communities as some of the most affected.

Across the EU, racialised communities—including Roma, people of African descent, Muslims, and migrants—face structural exclusion from education, housing, healthcare, employment, and justice systems. Roma communities in particular continue to endure persistent antigypsyism, with:

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- 45% of Roma live without access to basic housing infrastructure
- Only 44% of Roma children in early childhood education,
- Employment rates as low as 43% (and 28% for Roma women),
- Routine forced evictions and racially motivated police violence,
- Widespread segregation in schools and unequal access to quality education.

Despite these well-documented violations, Member States have continued to benefit from EU funding without meaningful scrutiny or consequences.

The failure to activate the rule of law conditionality in response to breaches of fundamental rights signals a dangerous erosion of EU credibility. It weakens the protection of racialised and marginalised communities.

To restore trust and accountability, the post-2027 MFF must reinforce and enforce the rule of law conditionality as a central tool for fundamental rights protection and anti-racism. This requires

- Systematic use of the conditionality mechanism when Member States undermine the rights of racialised communities, including Roma, by enabling institutional racism, discrimination, or repression of civil society.
- Independent and inclusive monitoring of compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights, with the participation of equality bodies, anti-racist civil society, and minority-led organizations.
- Transparent reporting and decision-making on rule of law breaches and fund suspensions, accessible to the public and to those affected.
- Binding corrective timelines, with partial or full suspension of EU funds when governments fail to implement meaningful reforms.
- Stronger links between the rule of law mechanism and national equality and inclusion strategies, ensure that Member States can be held accountable for failure to combat racism and discrimination.



The rule of law is not an abstract principle—it is a daily reality for millions of EU residents who face racism, exclusion, and injustice. A credible EU must ensure its funds are never used to reinforce these harms. If the EU is serious about being a Union of values, then protecting the rights of Roma and all racialised communities must be non-negotiable, with real consequences for those who fail to comply.

Recommendation 5 | Safeguard and Strengthen the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value Programme (CERV) as a standalone fund to defend human rights and sustain a vibrant, independent civil society across Europe

As civic space continues to shrink in several Member States and civil society actors face growing financial and political pressure, **CERV funding is essential for the delivery of the Union of Equality**—particularly for organizations supporting **marginalised groups**, including racialised communities such as the **Roma**, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ people, women, and people with disabilities.

Roma civil society often operates in hostile environments where national support is absent or politically obstructed; in these contexts, **CERV plays a vital role in enabling Roma-led advocacy, inclusion, and anti-discrimination efforts.**

CERV's structure—with key strands on rights, equality, democratic participation, and protection from violence—must be preserved.

Its direct management by the European Commission ensures access for vulnerable groups in politically constrained settings. To enhance its long-term impact, the programme should expand operational grants and align co-financing rates with other EU funds, reducing them to 10%.

Conclusions

The next Multiannual Financial Framework will be a decisive test of the EU's commitment to equality and cohesion. **Roma inclusion cannot be overlooked.** With persistent gaps in education, employment, access to healthcare, and living conditions, targeted investment is essential—not optional.

To meet the EU's 2030 targets and uphold the European Pillar of Social Rights, **Roma inclusion must be a clear, cross-cutting priority in the next EU budget.** Targeted funding, binding conditionalities, and strong civil society involvement are essential to meet EU 2030 goals and uphold the European Pillar of Social Rights.

**A competitive Europe must also be a fair one.
The MFF must deliver on both.**