

“A Reflection on the EU Roma Framework”

I) GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

The White Paper of the European Commission on *European Governance* (2001) stressed the particular contribution of Churches and religious communities *“in giving voice to the concerns of citizens and delivering services that meet people’s needs.”*

On the other hand, the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* published by the European Commission, considers that in the field of education there is *“a need to strengthen links with communities through (...) churches, religious associations or communities”*. It also invites *“Member States to consider entrusting the management and implementation of some parts of their programmes to intermediary bodies such as international organisations, regional development bodies, churches and religious organisations or communities (...)”*.¹

Following on from that invitation and the role mentioned by the European Commission, and taking into account the mandate for an *“open, transparent and regular dialogue”* between Churches and EU institutions under Art. 17.3 TFEU, the Secretariat of COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community) in cooperation with CCEE (Council of European Bishops' Conferences) therefore here presents its current reflections and proposals to the European Commission in order to improve the living conditions of Roma people in the context of the common good.

2. To promote the logic of solidarity

Solidarity has a logic, which is the logic of love. Therefore, it requires closeness, understanding, dialogue and time for its emergence and intensification. Roma and non-Roma need friendly and unforced contexts and places to meet and create the enabling environment. The school, the town, the church and activities organised by civil society, are particularly important in promoting understanding and solidarity.

On the other hand, solidarity between non-Roma and Roma is the best prevention against unjust discrimination against the Roma people.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 5.4.2011 COM (2011) 173 final.

The logic of solidarity must also include the mutual respect of rights and responsibilities. Inclusion is a two-way process in which both Roma and society have to approach each other.

3. Respect for Roma identity

A Roma identity should not be seen of itself as an obstacle to integration into society, but as a positive contribution to social diversity and enrichment. Roma integration is compatible with Roma identity, and its positive presence in the society is desirable (for example, in universities, schools and cultural activities).

4. Family mainstreaming

The measures adopted for Roma inclusion should take into account the strong awareness of family among Roma people, especially with regard to openness to life, protection of children, respect for elders and the concept of the extended family. Roma family mainstreaming avoids assimilation and ensures the success of the measures implemented.

Empowering Roma women is a key element of any Roma strategy, but it should not pave the way for political implementation guided by a gender ideology. Any anti-discrimination programme should be based on the promotion of natural equality of rights and duties between male and female, but it should not promote any ideological use of sex and sex inequalities for political interests and social engineering.

The public institutions should not destabilise the Roma's concept of family, by promoting anti-family policies (for example, anti-birth policies), and should help in the reconciliation of family and professional life, especially in the case of women. The option of Roma women for virginity should be also respected.

5. Acting with and for them

Direct and continuous participation of Roma in the projects that affect them (educational, social, economic etc.) should be a principle of action. The involvement of parents, grandparents and Roma leaders, are especially important for success due to the strong sense of family and parental authority among Roma.

6. Accompanying and support

The promotion of social integration of Roma people into society requires an adjustment between the two communities. For example, Roma do not regulate time according to commitments defined by society, but according to their social life within the community and the Romani culture.

It is a long-term issue, because it requires a change in mentalities by both parties and the building of stable and durable trusting relationships. To reach the goal, national and EU institutions should offer to provide persons to accompany them on a daily basis; and not simply advisors who are present only sporadically or in short-term projects. A permanent and personal support avoids a merely administrative relationship.

7. Promoting the social and economic autonomy of Roma families

The social and economic empowerment of Roma families is essential for their permanent inclusion. Therefore, paternalistic and overprotective attitudes of public authorities towards Roma families should be avoided by promoting the logic of responsibility among them, and preventing a 'subsidy mentality'. Roma should no longer be treated by authorities as mere receivers of goods and services from public institutions, but as active protagonists in the fulfilment of their needs and duties. It should not be a one-way, but rather a two-way process: giving and demanding. Even in cases where poverty does not permit access to basic goods and services, work should be the way "to pay".

This balanced understanding of social inclusion regarding social benefits (for example, housing) should be promoted in the minds of the local and national authorities, as well as in Roma communities, to enable socially and economically autonomous development.

Access to goods and services, both private and public, entails the possession of public documents, such as a personal identity card, which is usually issued following the inscription of the birth into the civil registry. The lack of an identity public document is an obstacle for the social inclusion of Roma. Therefore, fair legal measures should be adopted and administrative practice should be simplified, in order to provide an identity card to any undocumented Roma.

8. Development of Roma leadership

Roma people need leaders who will help them to make their own integration easier. Leaders should be identified and it is desirable to promote their early public vocation, both by joining the civil service in public institutions as by their participation in political leadership. They can be bridges of understanding between Roma and non-Roma people. So the promotion of a new generation of Roma leaders, responsible for the development of their people, is a challenge for the future.

9. Defining priorities

Tension in society is created mainly by unemployment, poverty, and lack of sufficient education in the Roma communities. Poverty is also the most frequent reason for migration. Most of the Roma people living in Central and Eastern European countries are not nomads. As many others do, they travel to other countries in the EU searching for better conditions of life.

Providing job opportunities for the Roma will give them social and economic autonomy. It will avoid their dependency on social benefits and will motivate them to study as well. Without work, the education programmes will not succeed.

Therefore, public institutions should give priority to social and educational programmes in order to facilitate Roma inclusion into society.

But the individual and spiritual commitment of each person, Roma and non-Roma, to real human values and dignity should be the basic priority, for which the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches can be key institutions.²

10. Linking education and employment

The link between education and employment is hardly visible for many Roma, because they are often stuck in unskilled jobs, for which any kind of formal education is unnecessary.

The active participation of Roma leaders in order to promote an educational and professional culture among all Roma people should be reinforced. In this sense, professional training appears to be a successful bridge between learning by doing and entering the labour market.

11. Micro-projects

The projects should be focused on small, under-developed micro-regions, parts of towns and villages. A map of such regions could be helpful in creating the major projects of the EU. Micro-projects are more efficient in terms of development and public economic resources are better controlled.

12. Access to the health care system

Any Roma EU citizen is entitled to the same health protection as any other EU citizen. If a Roma is a third-country national, treatment equal to other third-country nationals should be provided under the EU and national legislations regarding health care.

13. The Catholic Church, a reliable partner

The programmes for Roma inclusion, throughout their education and in providing them work opportunities can be successful only if they are based on and followed by reliable persons in different places (villages, towns). The most important element of each project is the person. The failure of many large projects is predictable because these projects are not based on local and trustworthy persons.

The Churches, and some other civil organisations, which have already proved their efficiency and reliability, could be the most valuable help in all of these projects. The Churches have a good knowledge of the situation and context in the different places where they are settled, and a good network of personal and institutional relationships, which can facilitate the improvement of the Roma conditions.

² Churches had 80% and even more success in 14 examined indicators of social change, according to the research project co-funded by the EU entitled "Sociálna inklúzia Rómov náboženskou cestou" ("Social inclusion of Roma through the religious pathway" Project SIRONA, December 2010, Bratislava, pages 96-98), coordinated and drafted by Tatiana Podolinská & Tomáš Hrustic, from the Institute of Ethnology Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. View at: http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/socialna_inkluzia_Romov_nabozenskou_cestou.pdf

In particular, the Catholic Church should be taken into account as a relevant partner by the EU institutions in their Roma strategies and social programmes. Throughout her thousands of parishes, communities, congregations and organisations, with the effort of her priests, religious brothers and sisters, and volunteering lay people, the Church is developing in the EU Member States relevant and permanent work on the ground with Roma people to dignify their life, in their countries of origin, and in those countries to which they migrate.

Educational vocation and the educational facilities of the Catholic Church in all European countries is a marvellous channel to help non-Roma to get in contact with the Roma culture and traditions, mentality and perspectives.

The perspective of EU enlargement and with new neighbouring countries as Member States will require an expertise from organisations like the Catholic Church, which has been present in those States for centuries.

Her millenarian expertise and a background of many experiences of her faithful with Roma people can be considered as examples of best practices, which are worthy to be shared. The Church is fully engaged in fighting against poverty, in educating people, and promoting the integral development of every human being; and for those reasons, is able to partner the Roma people in their daily life and integrating themselves in the society, respecting their self-understanding.

The Catholic Church recently beatified a Roma Spaniard (Ceferino Giménez Malla), who was killed in 1936. Roma are faithful people (many of them are Christians), concerned for life and family, respectful of their children and elders, etc. These values are shared with Christian Churches and communities, which can ease the approach between Roma and non-Roma people. As Pope Benedict XVI stated at the reception for 2,000 Roma people in the Vatican in 11 June 2011: *"May your people never again be the object of harassment, rejection and contempt!"*³

II) PROPOSALS

1. Introduction

The improvement of the Roma's living conditions and their inclusion in society require the implementation of diverse political actions. The following proposals are concrete initiatives implementing the general criteria stated above, that can help in the inclusion of a large part of Roma into social life.

³ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110611_rom_en.html

2. Social and economic improvement

a. To facilitate the signing of agreements between public authorities and companies for the employment of Roma, providing public subsidies or tax relief for vocational training and job performance.⁴

b. Promoting self-employment, creation of local and regional plans for employment in areas where Roma are present, as, for example, the successful programme ACCEDER launched by the "Fundación Secretariado Gitano".⁵ EU funds should give priority to the promotion of employment among Roma people.

c. To integrate training and employment of Roma cultural mediators, who should be involved in all processes of inclusion.⁶

d. Helping Roma women to reconcile work and family life.⁷

e. To prevent a public subsidy mentality⁸:

i. Recipients of minimum income subsidies show a lower motivation for professional training. In this regard, these measures should be incorporated in a more sustainable way and "integrated" in a personalised manner, and especially with regard to the actions of training and employment.

ii. Economic aid in occupational training could have a disincentive effect if it is over the standards of the labour market or when it fails to cover minimum living. In this context, to be flexible and to adapt aid programmes to meet the real needs of recipients is an important guarantee of success.

f. To bring public services to areas where the share of Roma population is high, and to improve transport access to those services if they are not reasonably near.

3. Education and professional training⁹

a. To establish an appropriate system of assessment of skills of children with learning gaps in order to achieve an upgrading. When students involved belong to an ethnic minority, as is the case here, such a system is necessary above all to ensure their improvement. Extra classes or adapted curricula, taught in the same school (even in different classrooms), on the basis of non-discriminatory criteria, could help these children to acquire the academic skills and successfully follow the ordinary lessons:

i. It should not be considered as a segregating measure provided that it is in the

⁴ See Guidelines 9 and 10.

⁵ <http://www.gitanos.org/acceder/>
See Guideline 11.

⁶ See Guidelines 5, 6 and 8.

⁷ See Guideline 4.

⁸ See Guidelines 2 and 7.

⁹ See Guidelines 9 and 10.

best interest of Roma children, applied only during a transitory period and aiming their educational improvement in order to advance inclusion.

ii. A certain margin of appreciation and flexibility should be given to each State to assess and face the differences of Roma communities and students in each part of its territory. Moreover, the same flexibility should be recognised by each school authority and by teachers in order to assess the particular situation of education of Roma in every school and classroom. Integration should be promoted but not imposed.

iii. The efficacy of affirmative actions in education has to be tested.

b. To provide financial resources for the development of school support programmes to ease the transition of Roma children to mainstream education.

c. To develop pre-school programmes designed to prepare Roma children for primary school.

d. To include Roma content (for example, language, literature and history) in scholarly curricula, through variable credits, in order to change the perception of common schools as a tool for acculturation. The successful experience of the SIKLAVIPEN SAVORENTSA programme of the “Fundación Pere Closa” could be an example.¹⁰

4. Health¹¹

a. To promote proper feeding in school refectories of Roma children who belong to poor families, as well as providing them with a genuine education in adequate health habits.

b. To train volunteering health workers:

i. Providing information about hygiene and healthy food to the poorest Roma communities, in the places where they live.

ii. To inform them about benefits and risks of vaccination of their children.

c. As access to health protection is usually linked to legal status and health documents, it is necessary to facilitate such documentation.

5. Housing¹²

a. To avoid the creation of “ghettos” placing a high number of Roma families in the same housing and areas. Facilitating a reasonable distribution of Roma families, freely accepted, in different towns and villages, and in different areas of them could help to minimise the social impact in neighbourhoods and make mutual acceptance easier.

¹⁰ <http://www.fundaciopereclosa.org/ca/suport-a-la-formacio/projecte-siklavipen-savorenca>

¹¹ See Guideline 12.

¹² See Guideline 7.

- b.** To provide Roma adequate access to public utilities such as water, electricity or gas, promoting among them economic responsibility as consumers.
- c.** To carry out creative educational initiatives aiming for coexistence with non-Roma in common neighbourhoods, such as for instance mixed sport teams, as well as other educational measures, thus stimulating Roma to take an active role in their neighbourhood assemblies, associations, etc.

6. Citizenship and the fight against discrimination¹³

- a.** To make use of certain Catholic Church parishes with specific pastoral care for Roma, Catholic Church entities (for example, Caritas) and Church inspired NGOs' offices, with appropriate public support, as points of communication for public administrations with Roma (nomads, irregular migrants or those without contact address), and even as accepted permanent address of these Roma for legal purposes.
- b.** To put in place mechanisms and institutional procedures to clarify property rights and resolve questions of ownership in which Roma are involved.
- c.** To fight against Roma trafficking:
 - i.** Following the principle "explicit but not exclusive", States, EU institutions and the anti-trafficking coordinator (foreseen in Art. 20 of the Directive 2011/36/EU of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims) should make explicit the reality of Roma trafficking (mainly children and women) and the strategies to fight against it.
 - ii.** Strict compliance of the guarantees protecting victims and of the punishment of those responsible, as foreseen by that Directive.
- d.** To help Roma parents with the inscription of their children in the civil registry.
- e.** To encourage Roma marriages to legally formalise their marital union in the Registry, making them understand that social benefits could be legally linked to the inscription.
- f.** To monitor the compliance with EU rules on free movement of citizens by the Member States, especially in relation to the Roma, and to allow Romania and Bulgaria access into the Schengen area as soon as they technically meet the legal conditions.
- g.** To promote the relationships and contacts of Roma children with public servants (policemen, justice officers, health professionals...) in schools in order to encourage a friendly personal mutual approach and for promoting Roma vocations to the public service.
- h.** To promote the contact of non-Roma with Roma culture:

¹³ See Guidelines 2 and 7.

- i. In educational institutions at all levels (for example, visits of Roma cultural mediators to primary and secondary schools explaining basic concepts of Roma's values such as: the sense of family, protection of children and respect for elderly people, the awareness of their freedom, openness to life, etc.);
 - ii. In other public cultural and educational initiatives (for example, commemoration of the Roma Holocaust in the public sphere; celebrating the arrival of the Roma in every country);
 - iii. In mass media: especially in public TV programmes, showing the culture, life, history and positive values of Roma people and communities; promoting the presence of Roma actors, presenters and announcers, etc, in TV programmes.
- i. To keep Roma away from the influence of certain religious sects which take advantage of the ignorance of some Roma persons or acting for their own purposes and interests which can even be dangerous for their followers, especially children.¹⁴
- j. To create meeting places and to organise events at local level facilitating Roma and non-Roma encounters: in the civic and cultural centres of the districts, municipalities, schools, etc, during local celebrations, cultural events, exhibitions etc.

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¹⁴ Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, *Report on the situation as regards fundamental rights in the European Union (2002)*, 21 August 2003, Rapporteur: Fodé Sylla, paragraph B.b