

# Five Years of EU Roma Integration Policies: Vanishing Gender Awareness?

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by Serena D'Agostino

## Gender Awareness 1.0: From Major Issue to Horizontal Policy Measure

2011 marked a crucial phase in the process of *politicization* of the so-called Roma issue at the European Union (EU) level. After several years of public engagement for and attention towards the situation of the Roma in Europe – and following the dramatic events affecting the Roma population in numerous EU countries<sup>1</sup> –, in April 2011 the European Commission (EC) adopted a Communication for the establishment of *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*<sup>2</sup> (the 'EU Roma Framework'). The aim of this Communication was to require all EU members to design and implement appropriate national strategies for *improving the situation of Roma*, considered "a social and economic imperative for the Union and its Member States" (EC, 2011: 2).

The EU Roma Framework was developed in line with the *10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion*<sup>3</sup> adopted in the Council Conclusions of 2009. Among these principles, number 5 (i.e. "awareness of the gender dimension") asserted the crucial role of gender in any Roma inclusion policy initiatives, and asked Member States to address Roma women's specific needs in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and activities, and to ensure their political participation and a leading role in consultative bodies or monitoring committees. The adoption of principle number 5 and the recognition of *Romnja*<sup>4</sup> as "more likely to experience social exclusion than both Roma men and women in the majority community" (EC, 2010: 7), mainly built on the 2006 resolution<sup>5</sup> of the European Parliament (EP) on the situation of Roma women in the EU as well as on the advocacy work of Western and Eastern European Romani women activists at both the national and European levels.

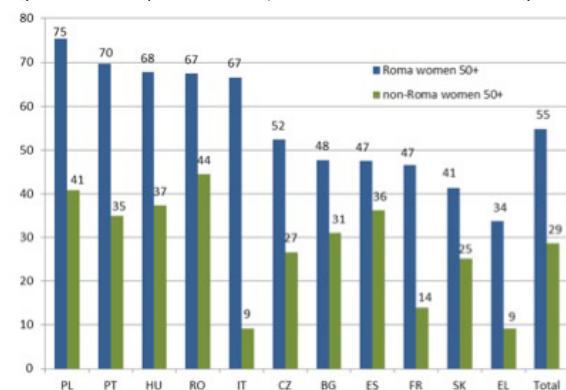
Although the EU Roma Framework itself did not include any specific and detailed section on gender awareness, it created the political *momentum* for further discussion of the issue. Indeed, the years immediately after its adoption showed a remarkable attention towards the gender dimension of Roma integration policies, especially by the EP. In 2013 the President of the European Parliament asked the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) to provide an analysis of the results of its 2011 Roma Pilot Survey<sup>6</sup> disaggregated by gender. The FRA's analysis confirmed that "the situation of Roma women in core areas of social life, such as education, employment and health (was) worse in comparison to that of Roma men" (FRA, 2013: 1). By way of example, in the field of employment FRA's results showed that only 21% of Roma women were in paid work compared with 35% of Roma men (on average across the 11 Member States surveyed). Furthermore, in relation to non-Roma women, the situation of *Romnja* looked particularly worrisome with

The *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* has recently turned five. As for any anniversary worthy of the name, a general assessment of both the first results and the necessary steps forward needs to be made.

This Policy Brief investigates the progress attained by the EU Framework in relation to a specific component of so-called Roma integration policies, i.e. the gender dimension. Recognized as one of the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion in 2009, the *Awareness of the gender dimension* does not yet play a significant role in the design, implementation and evaluation of Roma-related policies. Rather, it seems to have gradually faded in recent years' EU policy-making on Roma inclusion, being relegated to the more featureless category of *horizontal policy measure and/or crosscutting issue*.

regard to healthcare. As showed in Figure 1 below, almost twice as many Roma women aged 50 years and over (55%) than non-Roma women (29%) said that their health is 'bad' or 'very bad' (FRA, 2013: 15).

Figure 1: Bad and very bad health status, Roma women and non-Roma women aged 50 years and over, %



Source: FRA 2013 Analysis based on the Roma Pilot Survey 2011  
 Self-declared general health status, answer categories: in bad health, in very bad health;  
 women respondents aged 50+

The analysis conducted by the FRA contributed to further the EP's initiatives targeting Roma women in 2013, such as the resolution<sup>7</sup> on the *Gender aspects of the European Framework of National Roma Integration Strategies*, and a related study on the *Empowerment of Roma Women*<sup>8</sup>. Until 2013, the centrality of the 'Roma-women issue' into the EP's work on Roma inclusion was particularly palpable and strongly promoted by the Hungarian (2004–2014) MEP of Roma background Livia Járóka. With regard to the at-that-time recent EU Roma Framework, the EP "regret(ted) that despite the adoption of its resolution on the situation of Roma women in 2006 and the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion by the Council (...), the vulnerable situation of Roma and Traveller women ha(d), in practice, remained unaddressed by European and national policy makers". The EP stressed that the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) "must focus on empowering Roma women to take control of their own lives by becoming visible agents of change within their communities and by raising their voices to influence policies and programmes affecting them, as well as on reinforcing Roma women's socio-economic resilience" (EP, 2013: 4).

In December 2013 the Council of the EU issued a Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States<sup>9</sup>, constituting the first legal instrument for Roma integration measures at Union level. This document explicitly referred to the 'gender dimension' only twice, by using simple and generic wording<sup>10</sup>. The Council's Recommendation marked the end of a phase where the political debate around the situation of *Romnja* in Europe was particularly vibrant, and finally formalized the recognition of gender awareness as a *horizontal policy measure* (see the short paragraph on the *Protection of Roma children and women* – Council, 2013: 9) within EU Roma integration policies.

## Gender Awareness 2.0: From Horizontal Policy Measure to Minor Concern

The last three years of implementation of the EU Roma Framework have been accompanied by important political changes at both the national and European levels, such as the 2014 elections of the European Parliament and the subsequent re-organization of the European Commission. Despite the appointment of two MEPs of Roma background – of whom Soraya Post, a Roma woman activist from the Swedish Feminist Initiative Party –, the EP's significant work on the gender dimension of EU Roma integration policies made during the previous legislature seems to have come to a standstill. Rather, a stronger focus on more general issues, such as the fight against anti-Gypsyism, prevails among the current EP's initiatives addressing the Roma.

A similar situation can be found in the European Commission. As foreseen by the 2011 Communication, the EC every year provides assessment reports on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Since the adoption of the Framework, four annual reports<sup>11</sup> (namely, in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015) have been published. Although most of these assessments underline the particularly vulnerable situation of Roma women and demand that Member States pay special attention to it, no specific section is dedicated to gender-related measures, and there has been no attempt so far to integrate into the Framework itself the recommendations proposed by the EP in its 2013 resolution. By comparing the four reports, attention to gender awareness seems even to have decreased: whilst the 2012 assessment mentions Roma women's

rights, for instance in the fields of employment and access to quality healthcare, the 2015 one does not contain any overt reference to gender-related issues and/or specific challenges encountered by *Romnja*. As underlined by the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) in its 2015 Report on *Evaluating Gender in the National Roma Integration Strategies*, "if gender is ignored in solutions, we are pretending that (Roma) men and women are starting on an equal playing field with equal opportunities and challenges, and the EU has pointed out that this is not the case" (ERTF, 2015: 6).

Furthermore, no gender criteria seem to be applied – either at the EU or at the national levels – when selecting organizations and/or individual activists taking part in policy-making and consultation processes. Also, the majority of the civil society actors participating in the European Roma Platforms and/or the European Roma Summits organized by the EC<sup>12</sup> does not deal with gender-related issues, and women's rights are not explicitly addressed in any of the agendas discussed in the last years.

This sort of gender-related "unconcern" can also be detected in the consolidated actions undertaken by the EU and other international bodies. During the first decade of the 2000s the EU (usually via the FRA) participated in several joint initiatives (together with the Council of Europe/COE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/OSCE, and so on) aiming to make Roma women activists more visible in the European political debate on Roma inclusion. Further efforts were made to foster their internal cohesion and create a transnational network of both Western and Eastern European *Romnja* advocates. After the second European Roma Summit in Cordoba in 2010 (where a specific workshop on the gender dimension was organized and to which the main Romani women activists from all around Europe were invited), the EU interest towards this issue definitely decreased. With the exception of a few *ad hoc* initiatives – such as the direct award of action grant to the Council of Europe on Roma women's access to justice in 2016<sup>13</sup> –, the EU seems to have frozen its engagement towards the so-called 'Roma women issue' even at the international level, where the COE continues to maintain its leadership.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

A five-year time period is surely not long enough for fully assessing a newly forged policy framework. Nevertheless, it is sufficient for making some preliminary observations and drawing some first conclusions. In the case of the EU policies for Roma integration, several incidental factors need be taken into account, such as the significant structural changes occurring in the EU political *apparatus* in the last years. The 2014 turnover in the EP followed by the end of the Barroso II Commission (2010–2014) – characterized by the considerable commitment to fundamental rights issues of some strong political personalities, such as the then Vice-President of the Commission Viviane Reding – definitely affected the development of policies on Roma inclusion at the EU level. The consolidation of the EU Roma policy framework in 2011 (with the EC Communication) and 2013 (with the Council Recommendation) represented an important political achievement, followed by a sort of *period of adjustment* for both the Union and its Member States – where creative and dynamic policy-making was gradually replaced by more static and bureaucratic top-down monitoring.

In such a context, some of the specific components of the EU Roma Framework – such as gender awareness – seemed to be *frozen*, and even *downsized*. This approach risks transforming the EU Roma Framework into a gender-blind policy initiative, and to jeopardize the political efforts made by both the EP and *Romnja* advocates in the past. Also, a lack of attention towards the gender-related challenges of Roma socio-economic inclusion would contradict the findings of the existing studies made at the EU level, such as the 2013 FRA analysis.

Therefore, this Policy Brief suggests the following *steps forward* should be made to re-launch the commitment of the EU towards the gender dimension of the Roma integration policies.

### 1. Introducing a specific gender analytical criterion when assessing the progress made by Member States in the implementation of their NRIS.

The current EC annual assessment reports concerning the implementation of the NRIS do not contain any gender-specific analytical criteria. One of the major measures adopted so far by the EC to assess gender mainstreaming within national Roma strategies is the request for a proportionate number of Roma women to be beneficiaries of EU-funded actions. In order to go beyond this mere *counting*, and in accordance with the recommendations made by the EP in its 2013 Resolution, the EC should foster the involvement of Roma women in the preparation, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the NRIS “through women’s organizations, Roma NGOs and relevant stakeholders” (EP, 2013: 5). Furthermore, links between Roma women activists, gender equality bodies, women’s rights and Roma women organizations and social inclusion strategies should be created. The active involvement of *Romnja* advocates by national policy-makers and relevant local authorities should become one of the analytical criteria used by the Commission for assessing the performance of Member States when implementing their NRIS. By way of example, such a criterion could be included in the section on “Cooperation Et Coordination: local authorities, civil society Et National Roma Contact Points involvement” introduced in the 2015 Annual Assessments of some Central and Eastern European Member States (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, and so on).

### 2. Promoting co-operation between EU Agencies for fostering research on Roma women.

EU institutions should promote the production and diffusion of studies and analysis regarding the situation of Roma women in the Member States. Detailed investigations based on gender disaggregated data should be encouraged with regard to each of the four main components of the EU Roma Framework, i.e. Education, Employment, Health and Housing. Along the lines of the Co-operation Agreement between the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and FRA signed in 2010 – having, among other things, the objective “to ensure coherence and synergy of research with a view to optimizing the impact of all initiatives taken in the EU with the aim to improve equality between women and men in Europe”<sup>14</sup> – EU agencies should be jointly involved in this process of knowledge production and work in an integrated and coordinated manner. *Ad hoc* working groups could be established for this purpose. Results should be publicized and used for informing policy development in specific areas of concern.

### 3. Increasing co-operation with other European and/or international actors having gender-specific expertise in the field of Roma rights.

The EU should re-launch its international commitment to empower Roma women by intensifying collaboration with other European and/or international actors, such as the Council of Europe.

As for the first decade of the 2000s, the EU should participate in joint actions and initiatives aimed at enhancing the political potential of *Romnja*. Greater international co-operation with bodies having gender-specific expertise in the field of Roma rights would reduce the risk of overlapping activities, maximize policy outcomes and ensure long-term sustainability. In addition, by partnering up with other European actors in this specific policy area, the EU would avoid losing visibility and isolation from important international initiatives, such as the International Romani Women Conferences organized by the COE<sup>15</sup> and the Strategy on the Advancement of Romani Women and Girls (2014–2020)<sup>16</sup>.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Such as the expulsion of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma people from France in 2010, the Roma murders by neo-Nazi groups in Hungary in 2008 and 2009, the ‘Mailat Case’ in Italy in 2007, and so on.

<sup>2</sup>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, COM(2011) 173 final, 5.4.2011.  
Full text available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com\\_2011\\_173\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion were presented at the first meeting of the European Platform for Roma inclusion on 24 April 2009 and consequently annexed by the Council of Ministers in charge of Social Affairs to their conclusions. The original document, providing a more detailed description of each principle, is available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108377.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108377.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>The term *Romnja* stands for Romani women (pl.) in Romanes, i.e. the Romani language.

<sup>5</sup>European Parliament resolution of 1 June 2006 on The Situation of Roma Women in the European Union (2005/2164(INI)). Full text available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2006-0244+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

<sup>6</sup>In 2011 FRA conducted a survey of Roma and non-Roma populations living in close proximity in areas where Roma live in a higher than national average proportion. The survey covered 11 EU Member States, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

<sup>7</sup>European Parliament resolution of 10 December 2013 on Gender Aspects of the European Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies (2013/2066(INI)).  
Full text available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0545+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

<sup>8</sup>European Parliament (FEMM Committee) study on Empowerment of Roma Women within the EP European Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies (IPOL- FEMM\_ET(2013)493019).  
Full text available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493019/IPOL-FEMM\\_ET\(2013\)493019\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493019/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2013)493019_EN.pdf).

<sup>9</sup>Council Recommendation on Effective Roma Integration Measures in the Member States. Employment, Social Policy, Health Et Consumer Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 9 and 10 December 2013. Available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/139979.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/139979.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>Such as, “paying special attention to the gender dimension” (see Council, 2013: 5) or “take into consideration the gender dimension” (see Council, 2013: 8).

<sup>11</sup>The EC Annual Assessment Reports are available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/index_en.htm).

<sup>12</sup>Further information about the EC's initiatives for Roma integration, such as the 'Roma Platform' and the 'Roma Summits', is available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm).

<sup>13</sup>For further information, see the ANNEX to the Commission Implementing Decision concerning the adoption of the work programme for 2016 and the financing for the implementation of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme – Ref. C(2016) 1883 final of 4.4.2016.

<sup>14</sup>See Article 1 of the EIGE-FRA Cooperation Agreement (p. 2). The full text of the agreement is available at [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/1257-FRA-EIGE-cooperation-agreement\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1257-FRA-EIGE-cooperation-agreement_EN.pdf).

<sup>15</sup>Further information about the COE's initiatives for Roma women is available at <http://www.coe.int/nl/web/portal/roma-women>.

<sup>16</sup>Strategy on the Advancement of Romani Women and Girls (2014–2020). Brochure published (2016) by the Council of Europe (REF. 155214GBR) – available at <https://edoc.coe.int/en/online-resources/6752-brochure-strategie-pour-la-promotion-des-femmes-et-des-filles-roms-en-europe-2014-2020.html>.

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## About the author



**Serena D'Agostino** is a Doctoral Researcher at the Institute for European Studies (IES) and the Department of Political Science of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She is part of the joint research programme "Evaluating Democratic Governance in Europe" (EDGE) and affiliated to the IES cluster "Migration, Diversity and Justice". Her research interests include European policy-making, Europeanization, Equality & Non-discrimination, Migration & Minorities, Minority politics, Roma rights, Roma women, Social Movements.

Twitter: @D'AgostinoSerena

IES Webpage: <http://www.ies.be/users/serena-d-agostino>

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Pleinlaan 5

B-1050 Brussels

T +32 2 614 80 01

[ies@vub.ac.be](mailto:ies@vub.ac.be)