



Structural Funds: Investing in Roma inclusion at the local and regional level

Transnational Seminar

Rome, Italy – 25/26 February 2010

Social Inclusion Working Group - EURoma Network

1. EURoma NETWORK

EURoma is a European Network joining together 12 EU Member States with the aim of promoting the use of the Structural Funds in favour of the social inclusion of the Roma population. This initiative was launched by the Spanish Government in 2007 taking into consideration the potential added value of the Structural Funds to improve the situation of the Roma in the European Union.

EURoma Network is composed of representatives from public administrations: ESF Managing Authorities and the public bodies responsible for Roma issues. The Network works as platform for exchanging information and experiences, sharing strategies and approaches and generation of knowledge. Education / Social Inclusion / Employment Working Groups allow to focus on specific topics and to open activities to other stakeholders beyond Network members.

2. BACKGROUND

The Social Inclusion Working Group (WG) has discussed, among other issues, the role and capacity of local and regional administrations in the establishment of effective actions towards the social inclusion of Roma. Analyses from different Member States (MS) showed the scarce knowledge that many local and regional administrations have on Roma needs and the, unfortunately, recurrent lack of political will of local and regional administrations to tackle Roma inclusion as such. In some countries this situation may be compounded by the fact that the Roma are not recognised as a specific group but rather included under the 'vulnerable' or 'excluded' group categories.



Structural Funds: Investing in Roma

It is widely agreed that the main obstacles preventing local and regional action are related to a lack of political will and to the persistent inexistence in some cases of a wider national plan that would imply some sort of obligation by localities to develop actions aimed at the Roma, as the most socially excluded group. Furthermore, in some cases local and regional authorities may encounter certain constraints when trying to access Structural Funds (SF), which are related to complex administrative procedures, co-financing requirements, lack of information, etc.

Despite the existence in some MS of incipient initiatives to share and, in the best of cases, to coordinate actions run by municipalities regarding the social inclusion of Roma, these do not seem to be working very efficiently, or not as well as they could.

Although it was acknowledged that the situation varies greatly from MS to MS, the Working Group recognised the potential added value and the role of EURoma in facing this situation and promoting a framework for learning, exchanging ideas and promoting reflection and knowledge on the concrete practices taking place in different localities within MS.

Therefore, the WG decided in its Managing Committee meeting in Budapest (6-7 May 2009) to organise a transnational seminar aimed at sensitising and informing localities and regional authorities from different MS on the need, strategies and means to tackle social inclusion of Roma. Bringing administrations from different MS together, in some cases to present positive experiences and in other cases to facilitate learning from others, is expected to have a positive impact on the fostering of more and better interventions for the Roma at the local level. Moreover, the European Social Fund (ESF) Managing Authorities could use this opportunity to reflect on the potential improvement for their own functioning, in order to promote more and better implemented interventions towards the Roma.

Italian EURoma partners offered to host this transnational seminar in Rome, 25-26 February 2010.

3. AIMS OF THE SEMINAR

The main aim of the EURoma network is to promote the use of Structural Funds for the social inclusion of the Roma. In this sense, local and regional administrations are becoming key actors in the development of social inclusion policies and programmes. Nevertheless, it is not always the case that those municipalities with large Roma populations and high levels of social exclusion and poverty access Structural Funds as a tool for promoting social inclusion.

Consequently, EURoma members suggested the organisation of this transnational seminar with the main aim of **encouraging and promoting a wider and more efficient use of Structural Funds for the social inclusion of Roma at local and regional levels.**



The **specific objectives** pursued are as follows:

1. *To raise the awareness of **local and regional administrations** regarding their key role in tackling the **social inclusion of the Roma**.*

Municipalities and regions are becoming more and more relevant actors when dealing with social inclusion policies as a consequence of the principle of subsidiarity, the process of decentralisation in most countries and the increase of their competencies, but also because they are the best positioned for better knowledge and understanding of the needs encountered at the local level.

Local and regional administrations are the real decision-makers when managing social services, employment resources, educational centres, urban planning, etc. All these fields are directly linked to social inclusion policies.

Any European strategy or state-wide plan to improve the social inclusion of the Roma population won't succeed without the involvement of local and regional administrations.

2. *To encourage the use of **Structural Funds** for the **social inclusion of the Roma**.*

The social inclusion is one of the main objectives of the cohesion policy and the Structural Funds are its principal economic tool; therefore, Structural Funds should be considered as a potential resource to invest on the social inclusion of the Roma population.

Moreover, the Structural Funds have proved to be more than an economic resource when dealing with the social inclusion of the Roma. They provide funds and services, but they also allow to articulate policies in the mid-term. The use of SF facilitates integrated actions, coordination between public services, adapted and long-term initiatives, synergy with other public and private resources, etc.

3. *To identify existing experiences at local and regional level as potential solutions to the challenges faced by local and regional administrations in the decision-making and implementation of effective policies for the social inclusion of the Roma.*

Main concerns for local and regional administrations are how to approach the social inclusion of the Roma, what to do, how to do it and with whom. Existing local and regional experiences in EU countries will provide with the opportunity to give an answer to questions raised by local and regional administrations on successful measures, optimal approaches and main partners to tackle the social inclusion of the Roma.

Roma migration has become a new phenomenon in the last years and it requires adapted responses and specific approaches beyond mainstreamed migration measures. It is a phenomenon that affects most of EU countries in different degrees, either as origin or destination countries. There are not many strategic or intervention plans at national level dealing with Roma migrants; most answers usually take place at local level. Some of the existing local experiences will be analysed.

4. STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

25th February	
9.00	Welcome and Introduction by Italian authorities, EURoma members and Technical Secretariat
9.30	Conference Panel: <i>“The added value of the local and regional dimension in the social inclusion of the Roma”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expert <i>“The local dimension in the use of Structural Funds: the case of the Roma”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EU Commission representative
11.00	Coffee Break
11.30	I Round Table: <i>“Key investments in the social inclusion of Roma”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiences from local and regional programs (combination of programs focusing on Education, Employment, Housing)
13.30	Lunch Break
15.00	II Round Table: <i>“Roma migration and local responses”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiences from local and regional programmes in the different MS
17.30	Closing session

26th February	
9.00	III Round Table: <i>“Effective partnerships in the social inclusion of the Roma”</i> ▪ Experiences from different programmes
11.00	Coffee Break
11.30	IV Round Table: <i>“Harmonisation of local and regional programmes with national and EU policies”</i> ▪ Experiences from MS
13.30	Closing remarks ▪ Italian authorities and EURoma members
14.00	Lunch

Every session will be open for debates/discussions.

The seminar will seek to combine theoretical and practical dimensions, underlain by a critical and realistic perspective on problems and possibilities.

5. PARTICIPANTS

1. Representatives of local and regional administrations.
2. EURoma members
3. Social Inclusion Working Group members
4. Italian authorities