

**II EUROPEAN ROMA SUMMIT  
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**ROUNDTABLE:  
ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES: PROGRESS AND LIMITATIONS**

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**Check Against Delivery**

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Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency of the European Union for inviting me to speak here today on the important subject of Roma policies, progress and limitations. I am pleased that I have the honour to mark with you the International Roma Day here, in Cordoba, at the Second European Roma Summit. Nonetheless, I have a feeling of unease about the fact that we mark another year of failure to adequately address discrimination against the Roma in the European Union.

At the end of last year, the Fundamental Rights Agency released the results of its EU-MIDIS survey – a survey of over 23 000 individuals from ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds about their experiences of discrimination in the European Union. The survey results reveal shocking levels of discrimination and harassment experienced by the Roma on a daily basis. Every second Roma respondent was discriminated against at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. Roma who were discriminated against experienced, on average, 11 incidents of discrimination over a 12 month period.

On top of this, approximately 75% of Roma – depending on the country where they were living – did not report their most recent experience of discrimination anywhere. Beyond statistics, cases of hate crime against Roma involve truly shocking violations against Roma’s fundamental rights in the EU. Over the past few months, a number of Roma, including children, have died as a result of attacks, or they have suffered severe injuries as a result of racially motivated crime. **The issue of Roma inclusion is a question of human rights implementation.**

When faced with facts like these, we must question our policies, resources and actors that we have in place, as well as the benchmarks that we have set ourselves. So, how can we better live and work together in the European Union to ensure that we are telling a different story on International Roma Day in 2011?

We have the political commitment at EU level; that is why we are all gathered here today. We are all committed to the common basic principles of inclusion and equality. But improving the situation of the Roma population is about more than just principles of social inclusion. It is about *all* actors contributing to turning these principles of inclusion and equality into *real* rights. As Eleanor Roosevelt said many years ago, human rights “begin in small places, close to home [...] in the world of the individual person; [...] in places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

Giving these rights meaning in places, such as at the doctor’s surgery, at school or on the High Street, cannot be simply done by pledging commitment to principles or formulating new policies. It needs health authorities, education authorities and, indeed, actors in the private sector to transform these principles and policies into action. And, we must provide these actors with the tools they need to make such a

joined-up EU approach to human rights implementation work. A partnership approach is necessary.

Take housing, for example. **Housing** is the most visible sign of social exclusion experienced by the Roma community. Poor housing conditions and residential segregation have a negative impact on education, employment and health. Therefore, poor housing prolongs the cycle of deprivation and social exclusion experienced by the Roma.

Our research finds that many regional and local authorities in the EU are reluctant to adopt and implement adequate Roma housing policies and measures; in many instances, they do exist at national level. At the same time, if there is a local authority willing to adopt strong equality and non-discrimination policy in the housing sector, it can face difficulties, because of racist prejudices among the local population or because of a rival political party playing on such racist sentiments.

**The right to equal treatment – that is also, to be able to access housing.** And we have policies that are designed to enable people to realise this right. But to make the right become reality for the Roma requires a functioning partnership between policy makers, local authorities, local politicians and the local population in particular.

The much discussed **Framework Strategy for Roma Inclusion in the EU** could underline the need for human rights compliance, particularly in relation to non-discrimination and equal access to housing, healthcare, education and – last but not least – prevention of hate crime. However, an EU Roma Strategy can only provide a general policy direction, and set targets and benchmarks to measure progress. To make such a framework strategy for Roma inclusion in the EU is meaningful, we need to engage relevant actors at all levels, but especially *local*

*authorities, local politicians and, most of all, the local population.*

Such a partnership approach also means involving **the Roma community at grassroots level**. It means *empowering the Roma*.

The work of both the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) and the Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) in **Ireland**, for example, benefits from the significant participation of Travellers, from the planning stage through to implementation. The organisations set out a framework for Traveller accommodation for a fixed four-year period. Here, I must also mention the importance of an overall policy framework that was developed at national government level to tackle the issue of Traveller accommodation. The government must provide legislation, guidelines and support for local authority initiatives.

The importance of setting targets and indicators to measure progress cannot be overstated. This example also shows that where Travellers have informed and contributed to policy making, the effectiveness of policies is greatly increased. Their involvement also acknowledges the *joint* responsibility to improve their living conditions and thereby their situation in society as a whole. Effective, accountable and adequately funded Traveller representative organisations are vital to building and sustaining capacity within the local communities. Therefore, a multifaceted interagency approach is key to address education, employment, health and other issues in an integrated manner. The adoption of a partnership approach only adds legitimacy.

**Another vital aspect in this partnership approach is the role of Romani women, as recognised in the European Parliament Resolution from 2006.** Romani women face significant challenges. But, they also have enormous

potential to contribute to improving the situation of Roma. This role should be respected and strengthened. As we know from the United Nations development context, it is essential for people to realise their human potential.

Over the past couple of days, the Fundamental Rights Agency conducted a Roundtable discussion with Romani women, examining the way forward: **‘On a road to Equality’**. Romani women, together with the Agency, identified possible actions that the current EU Presidency, the Commission, but also the EU Member States could take up for discussion at the Platform of Roma Inclusion. Suggestions include support for ethnic data collection, recognition of multiple discrimination and the promotion of an open coordination mechanism for mainstreaming and realising full equality of Roma women. This of course implies swift action to remedy forced sterilisation that Romani women have been subjected to, even in recent years, in some EU Member States. The availability of microcredits to Roma women for entrepreneurship and self-employment was also cited as a valuable instrument to address discrimination, ensure development and foster social inclusion of not only Romani women but Roma societies.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude.

We cannot come back next year and repeat the same worries. So, let us use the roundtables here today to discuss how to make rights *meaningful* for the Roma children at school, for families searching for somewhere to live and for the sick in need of healthcare. How – you may ask? By working together, adopting a partnership approach, comprising policy makers, local authorities and, of course – first and foremost – the Roma communities, including Romani women.

Thank you for your attention.