

# **Preventing Social Exclusion through the EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY**

## **Early Childhood Development and the Inclusion of Roma Families**

*On demand of the State Secretary  
for Social Integration and Combating  
Poverty Philippe Courard*



This Discussion Paper was prepared on behalf of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The first draft was presented at the 4th European Roma Platform, held in Brussels on 13 December 2010. The paper was finalized in consultation with Roma and Early Childhood Development (ECD) experts in a follow-up meeting organized by the Belgian Presidency in Budapest on 23 February, 2011.

*This paper was developed jointly by UNICEF and the European Social Observatory in collaboration with the Belgian Federal Planning Service (Ministry) for Social Integration*



STATE SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND COMBATING POVERTY



## Acknowledgements

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The sections on the Roma and ECD are based on original work by Dr. John Bennett, European ECD Expert, who is leading the preparation of a Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) series of studies. The RECI studies are supported jointly by the Open Society Foundation, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF. Dr. Bennett wrote the sections on ECD and the Roma into an original draft of the paper that was written by Romana Careja, Senior Researcher, and Bart Vanhercke, Co-director of OSE.

The preparation of the document was closely supported by Gordon Alexander, Director, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Deepa Grover CEE/CIS Regional Advisor-ECD, and Margaret Wachenfeld, Senior Policy Advisor, UNICEF Brussels. Magda Matache of Romani CRISS (Romania) provided thoughtful insights on the first draft of the paper.

The writers wish to thank Sarah Klaus, Director, Early Childhood Program, Open Society Foundation for her invaluable comments and suggestions. Costel Bercus, Magda De Meyer, Koen Geurts, Brigitte Kessel, Mafalda Leal, Isabelle Martijn, Valeria Nicolae, Ilona Negro, Sophie Ost, Peter Vandembemt, Norah Van Den Daele, and Matthias Verhelst and Jan Jarab provided inputs in preparatory discussions. The paper was finalized through consultation with a number of ECD and Roma experts (listed below) and has also benefitted from the comments of Mihai Surdu, Roma Education Fund and Liana Ghent, International Step by Step Association.

Whereas the credit is shared, any remaining errors as well as the views expressed in this paper are the sole responsibility of the authors.

UNICEF: In Europe, UNICEF is a member of the Decade for Roma Inclusion and advocates and works for the rights of Roma children and their families ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).

OSE: the European Social Observatory is a Brussels-based research, information and training centre that specialises in the social dimension of the European Union ([www.ose.be](http://www.ose.be)).

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*The Follow-up Meeting, Budapest, 23 February, 2011 was organized by the Belgian Presidency and held in Budapest with the kind agreement of the Hungarian Presidency. The meeting was opened by Mr. Philippe Courard, State Secretary for Social Integration and Combating Poverty and chaired by Mr. Julien Van Geertsom, President of the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration, Belgium. Hungarian Minister of State for Social Inclusion, Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, made a statement at the end of the meeting. Attendees and contributors at the Follow-up Meeting included, Aniko Bernat (Tarki Social Research Centre), Christoph Leucht (EFC Forum for Roma Inclusion), Costel Bercus (REF), Dan Doghi (OSCE, ODIHR), Deepa Grover (UNICEF), Edit Kerskemeti (Hungarian National Committee for UNICEF), Frank Pierobon (DG Education & Culture), Györgyi Vajda (HU Ministry of Public Administration and Justice), John Bennett (ECD Expert), Liana Ghent (ISSA), Maria Pakozdi (HU Ministry of National Resources), Marijana Jasarevic (World Bank), Mihai Surdu (REF), Reka Velenyi (Eurochild), Sarah Klaus (OSF), Zsuzsa Ferge (HU Academy of Sciences), Nele De Kerf (BE Cabinet for Social Integration and Combating Poverty), Isabelle Martijn (PPS Social Integration)*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) has a range of policy instruments, including legislation, policy coordination and funding, that can be activated with a view to promoting the social inclusion of Roma. Yet, there is widespread agreement that in spite of the surge of political attention to the issue, European policies both at the EU and national level do not seem to have touched poor Roma communities to the extent required. Hence there is an urgent need to bring together existing actors, institutional means and existing pools of experience with a view to elaborating coherent strategies and viable instruments.

This Discussion Paper seeks to provide a way forward with regard to one of the most promising strategies for the social inclusion of Roma, namely, early childhood development (ECD). Without denying the relevance of the complex set of problems which impact on the situation of Roma populations in ‘old’ and ‘new’ Member States alike, this Discussion Paper explains that early childhood factors are a critical determinant of children’s chances for the rest of their lives. For this reason, investments in families, early development and early childhood services can bring important returns not only for the individual child but also for society as a whole. The Discussion Paper briefly explores the situation of Roma families in Europe and the problems with which they are confronted. It outlines the policies implemented at national level as well as the key legal instruments available at EU level; and it highlights some of the experiences that are being developed by the NGO sector. A number of concrete recommendations are addressed to EU and domestic policymakers.

In sum, the Discussion Paper lays out key arguments for a comprehensive approach to give all poor and excluded children a good start in life and set them on a positive trajectory. The most recent scientific findings on ECD provides a strong, evidenced-based underpinning to act on Europe’s commitment to social inclusion, including to fundamental rights and children’s rights in particular. Within such a comprehensive approach to ECD, ‘*explicit but not exclusive targeting*’ and ‘*mainstreaming*’ of Roma is required. The Discussion Paper argues that Roma children could have a right to start life with the same chance that other children have, but that this is not the case at the moment. If forces are joined, this goal could be reached within a decade. It would make an important contribution to a key ambition of the Europe 2020 Strategy to create an inclusive and educated society. At the same time, the urgency of including the Roma within European societies provides a strong argument for Member States and the EU alike to seriously engage in the *social dimension* of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Clearly, this Discussion Paper is just the starting point of the discussion and should by no means be seen as a “take it or leave it” expert point of view: Roma inclusion calls for a collaborative effort involving many actors, not least Roma themselves – as parents, as community members, as educators and as policy makers. The current paper aims therefore at nourishing the on-going consultation of all stakeholders - including government authorities, NGOs and international organisations - with regard to how we can together create appropriate policies, enforce their implementation and monitor their progress. Above all, Roma representatives, NGOs, regional and local stakeholders should be part of the discussion: *Nothing about us, without us.*

# 1. INTRODUCTION: SEIZING THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Through the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU and its Member States equipped themselves with a framework to address poverty and deprivation. Specific attention was given to child poverty and child well-being, with some EU Member States setting explicit targets within set timeframes. More recently, the EU has proposed an ‘inclusive growth’ strand in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The accent on inclusion provides a further opportunity to adopt a comprehensive EU approach to achieving well-being for children, including the most marginalised such as the Roma. In this Discussion Paper we argue that this opportunity should be seized, in particular through focussing on one of the most promising strategies for the social inclusion of disadvantaged children, namely, early childhood development (ECD) programming.

The challenges to social inclusion cannot be overestimated. To start with, the launch of the Europe 2020 Strategy coincided with a period of economic crisis in which many EU Member States have introduced austerity policies, often with severe budget cuts to welfare benefits and social services, just at a time when families with young children need increased support. However, even before the economic crisis, child poverty within the EU was acute and many countries were far from meeting the then current targets set by the Lisbon Strategy. In 2008, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children was 20% - and up to 33% in the newest Member States (Belgian Presidency, 2010). The economic crisis has set back much of whatever progress had been achieved, with poverty and social exclusion increasing across the Union.

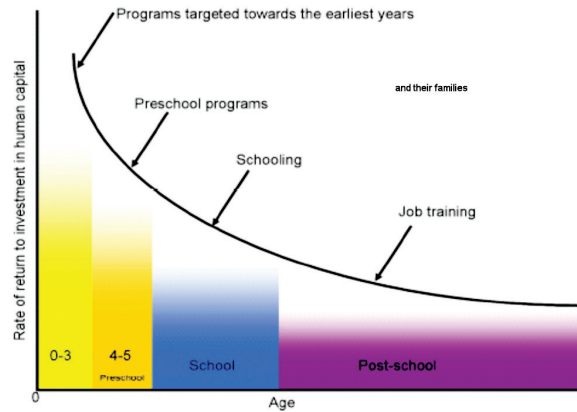
The downward spiral of social exclusion of Roma that was evident in many countries even before the crisis has recently increased (European Parliament, 2009). In consequence, the situation of Roma in Europe has become more visible on the political agenda of the EU and the Member States, and equally among international organisations and civil society. There is widespread agreement that efforts to improve social inclusion have not touched poor Roma families to the extent required. Compared to majority populations, the living conditions of many Roma families remain extremely poor. In regard to young children, this raises serious concerns about their nutrition, health and early development. Yet, the plight of Roma children remains to a large extent outside the poverty debate. Xenophobia and anti-gypsyism pre-date the financial crisis but appear to have been aggravated by it, leading to greater segregation of Roma populations in many countries. Strategies for child poverty reduction are still struggling to grapple successfully with the complex interactions between material deprivation, physical exclusion and discrimination practised against Roma populations.

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Education is one of the most critical areas of intervention for Roma children. Indeed, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, from its inception in 2005, has made education one of its four priority concerns along with employment, housing and health. Early childhood education programmes have been researched extensively for their effect on preparing children for school. Progress in making national early education programmes genuinely inclusive will be decisive both for Roma children and for larger social inclusion goals at both national and European levels. Inclusive early childhood education services are essential to improving school readiness and to giving young Roma children an equal starting point as they enter primary school, while reducing the likelihood that they will enter “special schools”.

At the same time, research also indicates how important the family and community environment is for young children. There is new and growing scientific evidence showing how important the period from pre-natal to three years is in terms of health, neural organisation, language acquisition and cognitive development. According to the Nobel prize-winning economist, James Heckman (2008), support and programmes for disadvantaged families in this period provide to societies the greatest return on investment:

**Fig. 1. Returns on investment at different periods of the life cycle**



Source: James Heckman, 2008

The reason is clear: early life factors have a critical influence on child outcomes, even stronger than education, although, in practice, it is difficult to separate the two as the educational level of mothers and the family environment strongly influence the child. The combination of poverty, low parental education, and weak developmental interaction between parent and child can seriously impede the development of the child.

There is a further reason for investing in Roma children and families. The Roma population in Europe numbers between 10 to 12 million people, though certainly not all suffer from poverty or marginalization. This population is expanding rapidly, with fertility rates well above the European average, meaning that Roma groups include a large proportion of young people and children. It is estimated, for example, that about a half of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe is less than 20 years old. Improvement of their life chances would clearly represent a major opportunity not only for the Roma themselves, but also for the countries in which they live.

It is the combination of this huge opportunity combined with gaps in knowledge, policy planning and concrete action that has led the Belgian Presidency to choose Early Child Development (ECD) as the theme for the 4th Roma Platform meeting. The choice is driven by the fact that not only is attention to Roma issues on the rise but also because the issue of ‘combating child poverty’ has become a leading theme for the Open Method of Coordination and for the *European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion*. In other words: there is a political window of opportunity to tackle the issue of Roma poverty through the perspective of early childhood services. In addition, the issue may persuade Member States and the EU alike to seriously engage in the social dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In line with the Integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion Road Map, proposed by the Spanish Presidency of the European Union (second half 2010), the Belgian Presidency considers it essential to single out the issue of ‘ECD’ with a view to turning political momentum into practice. This is, of course, just a first step and it is hoped that future Presidencies will pick up on other issues provided in the Roadmap, which has been endorsed politically by the Social Affairs Ministers of the Member States.

The particular focus of this paper by no means implies that the other dimensions of Roma inclusion (especially unemployment, housing and health) are deemed less important. While this paper is focused most particularly on ECD and services, these efforts need to be nested within a broader approach to tackling Roma child poverty. Recent literature on early childhood interventions reveals that the positive effects of early childhood programmes on children’s development weaken over time if not supplemented by good school programmes and broader national efforts to address child poverty and well-being. In sum, early childhood services are critical but not sufficient. To address Roma child poverty and well-being requires the activation of a battery of a broader measures which include (a) providing direct services to children and families, (b) improving the living conditions of Roma families, (c) improving the situation and dynamism of Roma communities, (d) the provision of inclusive, high quality primary and secondary education; (e) narrowing the gap between Roma communities and majority population and (f) changing the attitudes of the majority population towards Roma.



## 2. EVIDENCE OF ROMA EXCLUSION

From its inception in 2005, the Decade of Roma Inclusion named four priority concerns to guide its focus of work: employment, housing, health and education. In all four areas, Roma families and children suffer discrimination. The following box provides some indication of the exclusion of the group and the mainstream prejudices at work against them:

### BOX 1: Indicators of Roma exclusion

**World Bank Note on the “Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion (2010)** - On the occasion of the 2nd EU Roma Summit in Cordoba, April 8-9, 2010, the World Bank presented a Policy Note focusing on the economic benefits of eliminating the productivity gap between Roma and majority populations in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia. These four countries represent more than two-thirds of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis is based on quantitative data from seven household surveys in the four countries and information from interviews with 222 stakeholders – government and non-government officials and Roma and non-Roma. The Policy Note finds that Roma want to work but cannot find jobs in the countries studied. Often, public perception holds that Roma do not want to work and are overwhelmingly dependent on social assistance programs, such as guaranteed minimum social assistance. Yet, according to the Note, labour force participation rates are higher among Roma males than those of non-Roma in 3 out of the 4 countries, although very high numbers are unemployed. In other words, Roma men are willing to work, but cannot find jobs. 20 per cent of Roma men looking for jobs remain unemployed, while among Roma women, the corresponding figure is 39 per cent are seeking jobs but cannot obtain work. The Note also finds that, contrary to common perceptions, the vast majority of Roma do not depend on social assistance in the four countries studied. While some Roma do receive guaranteed minimum income social assistance, as might be expected given the high levels of poverty, the vast majority do not.

**Early education enrolments of Roma children (UNICEF, 2010):** The lack of disaggregated data on Roma children makes it problematic to know exactly how many Roma children are enrolled – and, in turn, makes it hazardous to formulate adequate policy for Roma children. UNICEF estimates that enrolments of Roma children in pre-school education (36-72 months) ranges from 0.2 per cent in Kosovo to 17 per cent in Romania.<sup>i</sup> According to MICS data from 2005/2006, only 3.5 per cent Roma children are enrolled in preschool in FYRoM (Macedonia)<sup>ii</sup>, compared to 16.9 per cent for all children who attend preschool. In Serbia, only 3.9 per cent of Roma children were enrolled in preschool compared to 33.4 per cent of Serbian children.<sup>iii</sup> In other words, Roma children attended preschool eight times less than the rest of the population in Serbia.<sup>iv</sup> MICS data 2005/2006 for FYRoM show that the higher the mother’s level of education, the more likely it was that she would enroll her children in preschool. For example, for mothers with no education only 0.7 per cent enrolled their children in preschool, whereas for mothers with secondary education the percentage was 28 per cent. On the one hand, this may indicate that women who have attained some level of education are more likely to see the benefits of their children’s early learning. On the other hand, it might also indicate that mothers who have attained secondary education are more likely to be employed and thus use preschools because they provide day care.

**Hungarian Census Data on mental disability among Roma children** - the 1990 Population Census data in Hungary found a very high rate of disability among the Roma minority, who represent 1.4 per cent of the total population, but number 2.5 per cent of disabled persons. 58 per cent of Roma disabled were reported as having mental disabilities, compared to 19.5 per cent in the overall disabled population. Again, 41 per cent of Roma disabled were found to be under age 14, compared to 9 per cent of the total disabled population. In addition, 34 per cent of Roma disabled age seven and over had no schooling, compared to 11 per cent of the total disabled population over age seven. Such diagnoses are certainly influenced by social stigma and systemic bias, e.g. regular ‘scholastic aptitude tests’ are often tuned to the dominant culture and language. Yet, it must also be recognised that the combination of grinding poverty, poor nutrition, deplorable housing conditions, and difficulties of access to essential pre- and post-natal services heightens the risk of disability. To close the vicious circle, the presence of a child or family member with a disability puts further strain on family budgets and on parental time with other siblings.



With respect to the low employment rates of Roma adults, historical and structural factors are also at work. In the socialist CSEE countries, Roma men were traditionally employed in heavy industry and state enterprises. Studies co-ordinated by Surdu (2009) show, for example, that in Romania, most Roma men had employment and access to a house during the communist period and that the highest levels of education were achieved by Roma children during the years 1960-1980. In the transition from socialism to market economies, the Roma have been the greatest losers; heavy industry and state enterprises collapsed, and the new service economies that emerged had little place for poorly qualified workers. Traditionally, Roma women have worked rarely outside the home and their current chances of so doing are seriously limited by lack of education. The current economic recession and reduced social welfare regimes have further undermined the economic situation of Roma families and left many households without employment and social welfare benefits.

At the same time, EU citizens, including of Roma origin, have the right, in principle, to move and live anywhere in the European Union, provided that they meet certain conditions. This is an important right for achieving European integration and is included in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 45). However, research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)<sup>v</sup> shows that many Roma EU citizens travelling to another Member State in search of better conditions continue to experience racism, discrimination and exclusion. Even governments, supported to some extent by public opinion, consider the immigration of Roma into their countries as a question of ‘social dumping’ -- that is, they blame Central and South Eastern European (CSEE) governments for ‘encouraging’ Roma to emigrate westward. Although the case of France has recently made the headlines, other Western governments, like Italy and Germany, and to a much lesser extent Sweden and Denmark, have adopted similar measures.<sup>vi</sup> Local – and in some cases even national authorities increasingly address Roma immigration through policing, public order and security-focused measures, which further stigmatizes and excludes Roma groups.

Roma families seeking basic health and education access for their children are also at a great disadvantage. Many Roma families must contend with spatial segregation, which distances them from medical centres and schools. Even when they live in urban areas, access to health services and medicines may be too expensive for households without an employed adult. Harsh living conditions, such as deplorable shelter and housing, also add to the health hazards of Roma children, as the figures on pneumonia below indicate. In general, disaggregated data does not exist on these matters, but UNICEF work in FYRoM – a country with comprehensive health services – provides the following data:

**Table 1: FY Republic of Macedonia: data on comparative access to health**

MICS indicators	Macedonians	Roma
% of children with moderate malnutrition	1,5	5,8
% of newborns with low birth weight	5,4	6,9
% of children that have health cards	89,8	75,5
% of hospitalized children due to pneumonia	21,5	52
% of mothers delivered in health institution	99,2	82,1
% of fully immunized children	88,3	74,7
% of non-immunized children	0,9	3,4
% of children with diarrhea that were not treated	13,3	22,7

Source: Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), UNICEF, FYRoM, 2005/2006

Access to education is also problematic for Roma children. A recent study by UNICEF estimates that only one Roma child completes primary school for every four non-Roma children in the CSEE region (UNICEF, 2010). For example in Bulgaria, 20 per cent of Roma children never go to school. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 50 per cent of Roma children start primary school, but only 32.6 per cent finish. Secondary school has even lower rates of enrolment of Roma children. Hungary has 46 per cent enrolment of Roma children, with a 12.9 per cent completion rate. In Montenegro, 1.5–11.7 per cent of Roma children enter secondary school and 3.7 per cent is the completion rate. In the Czech Republic, Roma children have a completion rate in secondary education of 1.2 per cent. In FYRoM, 4.9 per cent of age-appropriate Roma students are estimated to be enrolled in secondary education, of whom 11.6 per cent graduate. An estimated 1.6 to 4 per cent of Roma enter tertiary education in FYRoM, and only 0.6 per cent of Roma adults have completed a tertiary education. Part of the reason for such low enrolments and completion rates stems from the late start of most Roma children in education. In general, by the time Roma children reach pre-primary education, they are already significantly disadvantaged compared to their peers in the majority population. Apart from language, other barriers loom large, including those linked to the financial costs of access to public education. When Roma children do access schooling, at whatever age, further barriers often exist within education systems that too often fail to provide inclusive education, with welcoming classrooms, bilingual education and culturally appropriate curricula.

Underlying these realities is widespread prejudice and discrimination against Roma children and groups. As expressed by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg: “The necessary legal and institutional frameworks are in place, but anti-Roma sentiment in political discourse and the media is still a major problem. Prejudice among the majority population remains strong and has negative repercussions on the lives of many Roma.” Although most evidence concerning discrimination comes from Eastern European countries, the situation of Roma and Travellers in Western Europe is also critical. Reports from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) as well as the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) repeatedly signal that in spite of some improvements, Roma, Sinti and Travellers continue to face disadvantage and discrimination in numerous aspects of life. Extremely disquieting are the reports of discrimination from public authorities, such as police. With respect to access to education, low attendance and high rate of dropouts among Roma are also found in all Western countries.

In sum, across Europe, exclusionary practices are intimately linked within a long mainstream tradition of not considering the Roma population as equal fellow citizens. It is reflected in the practice of creating legislation and institutions that take into account primarily mainstream needs and sensitivities, and the reflex of segregating ‘them’ from ‘us’. Mainstream practice obliges then the minority group to fly for safety into Roma settlements or urban ghettos. In turn, this generates among the Roma distrust of mainstream order and services, and reluctance to enter into contact with the majority population, more than is strictly necessary.

This state of affairs has obvious negative consequences upon young Roma children and their access to much needed public services. There is an urgent need to break the vicious circle of inter-generational transmission of severe social exclusion and poverty, but the current climate makes even more challenging to improve outcomes for all young children in a systemic, integrated way. The situation is a serious blot on Europe’s human rights record. In addition, as outlined above, the social and economic implications are extremely negative for the EU as a whole and, in particular, for countries with large Roma minorities. There is a need to act more urgently for Roma children, as childhood is short and the window of opportunity closes quickly.

### 3. ROMA EXCLUSION FROM A CHILD DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

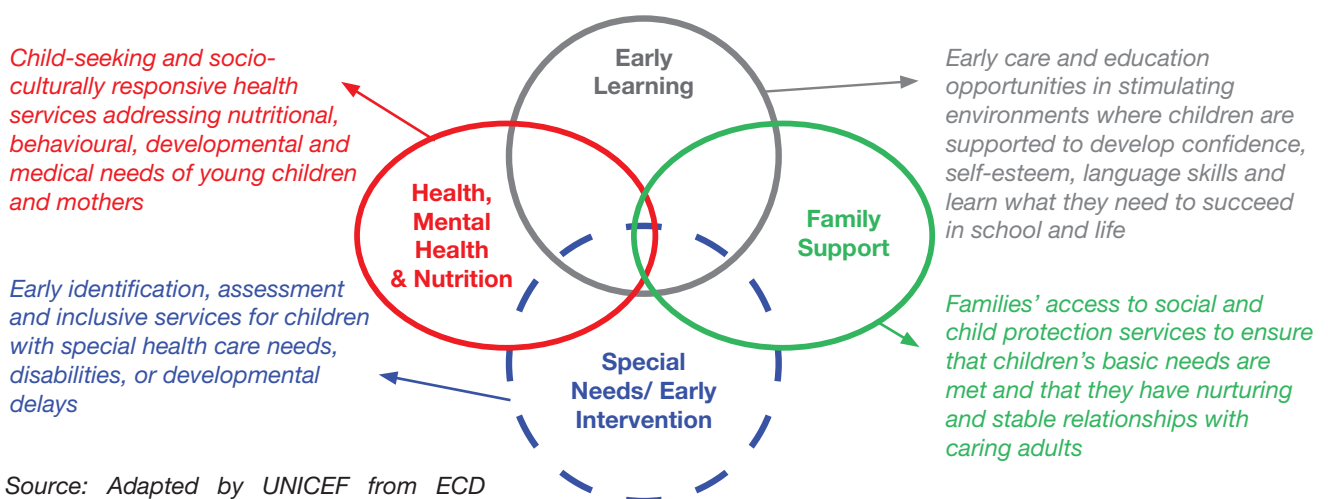
From a child development perspective and the basic need of children to have a good start in life, Roma exclusion may be summarized as follows (Bennett, 2010):

- a) *The access of Roma mothers to basic health services, including pre-natal and infant health services, is far lower than among mainstream populations* (Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI), 2009). A significant proportion of Roma mothers do not receive appropriate prenatal care and some give birth unaccompanied by a health professional. Frequently, Roma mothers lack a balanced nutritional intake during pregnancy and because many are very young, do not have sufficient information about healthy pregnancies, such as good eating habits, avoidance of stress, as well as the need to eliminate smoking and alcohol during pregnancy. Outreach health services and Roma health mediators have a critical role to play in supporting Roma families not only for the physical health of children but also in counselling them to take in charge the psychosocial aspects of interaction, communication and play, but such services are still rare. Lack of contact with the health services can be disastrous for the health of infants, particular in stressful situations where proper nutrition and the care of either mother or child cannot be assumed by families.
- b) *Roma children live in environments that often function at basic survival levels*, with negative effects on infant health and development prospects. Many Roma children are born into desperately poor households where, in many cases, no adult is employed. Housing and community infrastructure are often unhealthy, without sewage, running water or heating. Roma children are hospitalized for pneumonia and respiratory illnesses at double the rate of children from mainstream backgrounds; ear and skin infections are rife (UNICEF, 2010). Although it is true that the learning difficulties ascribed to Roma children at the age of entry into primary school are often exaggerated by inappropriate assessment techniques, there is also the reality that Roma children suffer from the effects of low birth weight, poor health and nutrition status, stunting, vulnerability to respiratory and other avoidable sicknesses that can affect their learning abilities.
- c) *After birth, Roma children may not be issued birth certificates*: The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has on many occasions drawn attention to the weak level of birth registration in Roma communities. The practice is widespread and its consequences can be significant. The lack of official identity papers of some Roma children renders them invisible in many municipalities, and denies them citizenship and access to a range of services vital to their development such as education, health care and social protection. If the Roma child does not show up on the official identity registers at the time s/he is due to enter compulsory education, it is more likely that s/he will not enrol or start on time. The lack of birth registration and identity papers among the Roma lowers school enrolment rates, hinders the achievement of universal coverage, and keeps Roma children from realizing their right to education.
- d) *Roma children, especially those from very poor Roma families, are at risk of being taken from parents and placed in institutions*. In a number of EU Member States (particularly in Central and Eastern Europe), Roma children appear to be dramatically over-represented in institutional care and in some cases, represent the majority population in institutions. Among the Roma, family poverty appears to be the main reasons for placement in institutional care, although institutionalisation has a major systemic component with health and social services actively contributing. Where there is a lack of family- and community-based services, social workers often lack the capacity to support poor families and tend to recommend institutional placements of children from very poor Roma families because they see no alternative. Research has long demonstrated that even when material conditions and diet in institutions are adequate, (which

cannot be assumed in all cases), placement in institutions as such has profound detrimental effects on ECD. Studies show that children in institutions suffer from a lack of emotional and physical contact, together with a lack of regular stimulation and interaction, resulting in specific developmental delays and challenging behaviour. More recently, there has been increasing evidence that institutionalised children tend to develop health problems and secondary disabilities, even where they were initially non-disabled.

- e) During the child's early years at home, *Roma parents may often lack information and parenting skills to support their children's language and social development*. Because of their isolation, Roma communities rely on traditional understandings of child-rearing. Lack of contact with the health systems adds to the likelihood of birth accidents and the likelihood of mothers suffering unduly from post-partum illness and depression. In addition, there is strong family and social pressure on young Roma women to marry young (sometimes well below the legal age) which adds to the probability of difficult pregnancies, low birth weight of babies and other infancy health risks. Regular visits from the local district nurses and health visitors play a critical role in counseling and supporting mothers during pregnancy and in providing information that may not be directly related to physical health, e.g. family ecology, child development, stimulation and language development. In addition, many Roma mothers are not only functionally illiterate, but are constantly absorbed by survival issues.
- f) *At preschool age, preschool is often not available to Roma children*. Preschool coverage for Roma children across the years 3-6 is extremely low. In South-Eastern Europe (SEE), it ranges from 0.2 per cent in Kosovo to 17 per cent in Romania. This lack of access has been identified by the Roma NGOs as a major contributory factor in the educational failure of Roma across the region. According to World Bank data, in CSEE, educational enrolment among primary-school age Roma children is on average a quarter of the corresponding rate for non-Roma children (UNICEF 2007a: 4). Without having the exact corresponding numbers, low pre-school attendance for Roma children is also recorded in Western Europe (ECRI). The precise causes of such low enrolments are multiple, but among them, enrolment criteria that effectively give priority to the children of working parents figure prominently. Such criteria can effectively bar access to children coming from households where no adult is in formal employment.
- g) *Frequently, formal kindergartens and preschools do not offer appropriate programmes for children from excluded backgrounds*. Programmes for these children need not only rigorous quality standards but they also need to provide – to both children and families - a comprehensive range of services to ensure early development and learning. Young children coming cold, hungry and in ill-health to class will be unable to participate as they ought. The following diagram illustrates the range of services that can assist children from poor backgrounds:

**Fig. 2: Critical components of an inclusive early childhood system**





- h) *At school-entry age, many Roma children are segregated into special classes, schools and institutions.* A tradition of high-stakes testing has become established in the CSEE countries to assess whether children could follow a mainstream primary school curriculum. The result has been the segregation of Roma children into “special” classes and schools, despite the clear stance of the European Court of Human Rights against such practices. Because of assessment methods that do not take into account the situation of Roma children, e.g. poor health levels, home use of a Roma language with little knowledge of the national language, a disproportionate number of Roma children are assigned to special education institutions, special schools or special classes, thus effectively excluding them from the mainstream education system. In some countries, between 50-80% of Roma children enrolled in school are systematically routed into all-Roma schools (‘black’ schools) or into “special schools” and special classes which have been established for children with learning difficulties. Special classes are often presented as a bridge to mainstream education but in almost all cases are much poorer in infrastructure, pedagogical materials, and teacher qualifications etc. Although segregation is almost always synonymous with poor quality education, some Roma parents opt for special schools as, being better financed, they are able to offer their children food, clothes and books – critical incentives for parents who are very poor, but perverse incentives in the longer term for Roma children and the broader society. In addition, the predominantly Roma environment in these schools offers their children some security against bullying or rejection by classmates. Unfortunately, the level of curriculum and learning is low in these schools and classes and certificates from such schools are often worthless for employment purposes.
- i) *Once enrolled in primary and secondary education, Roma children may often be subject to discrimination, bullying and the soft bigotry of low expectations:* European surveys show that many Europeans, including teachers, have very negative opinions of Roma, which are often based on stereotypes, prejudice and lack of understanding of Roma history and their present living conditions. Sadly, these attitudes can be reflected in public education. With few exceptions, insufficient efforts are made to prepare public kindergartens and primary schools for Roma children. Mono-cultural curricula and practices make public institutions unwelcoming places for Roma children and parents and do little to overcome the prejudices of mainstream children. In fact, mainstream parents are among the most vocal groups clamouring for ‘white’ schools for their own children and for the segregation of Roma children into ‘black’ schools. Even when included into mainstream education, teachers will often not hold Roma children to rigorous standards but treat them to the soft bigotry of low expectations. Because of this, and by reason of extremely poor quality in segregated Roma only schools or classes, many Roma children reaching 4<sup>th</sup> or even 8<sup>th</sup> grade are functionally illiterate. In addition, according to Save the Children research, they are often subject to violence in school, both physical and verbal, from their majority peers.
- j) *At the end of primary and secondary school, completion rates for Roma children are much lower than among their mainstream counterparts and positive job outcomes may be effectively barred by labour market discrimination.* This has been noted on numerous occasions by the UN Committees on the Rights of the Child and on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination when examining country reports by EU Member States. Even when Roma children gain access to mainstream primary schools, dropout rates are far higher than for any other European minority group. A survey conducted by UNDP found that two out of three Roma do not complete primary school, as compared with one in seven in majority communities (Ivanov, 2006). In South East Europe, for example, only 18% attend secondary compared with 75% of the majority community, and less than 1% attends university (Ivanov, 2006). Even if they complete primary or secondary education, the formal labour market may remain closed to young Roma adults, not only for the usual reasons that curtail youth employment but also for reasons of discrimination.

## 4. MAKING THE CASE FOR EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN, INCLUDING ROMA

Since it has been clearly established that the early years period from pre-natal to 3 years is critical for the future development of individuals, the challenge is to respond to this crucial window with the right combination of initiatives. A first step implies that governments and local authorities need to cease thinking of early childhood intervention only in terms of pre-school enrolment, which is made available to children from the age of 4 years, and instead provide multifaceted, early childhood services as shown in Figure 1 in Annex 1. These services include early childhood health (including pre-natal health services for mothers), development and education initiatives that are flexible and accessible to all families, including the most marginalized. The task is daunting, but the proven returns to individual children and society are enormous. (For an illustration, see Annex 2)

Why then, should Roma families and children receive special attention and support? Many cogent arguments have been put forward to justify attention to Roma children and families in Europe.

- a) *An ethical/human rights argument:* The current situation of many Roma children undermines Europe's authority and reputation on human rights issues and its legal commitment to uphold fundamental rights, recently reaffirmed in the Lisbon Treaty. Although varying degrees of inequality are accepted by electorates in European countries, the level of poverty experienced by many Roma is extreme, all the more so as centuries of neglect and discrimination by mainstream societies against the group has produced the situation. In particular, the condition of young Roma children contravenes agreed human rights texts, such as the UN Conventions on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Directive 2000/43 on Equal treatment on grounds of racial and ethnic origin and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
- b) *A macro-economic argument:* As noted above, some 10-12 million of Roma live in Europe. The European Union cannot afford to ignore the potential of this population. It must begin now to improve basic health conditions, to educate Roma children and to provide hope to families by providing jobs and housing. If the situation is not tackled urgently – and concrete outcomes achieved – an intolerable burden will be placed on welfare, health and education services and on the next generation of Europeans (see Annex 3: The World Bank Argument for Investing in Roma Children).
- c) *A return on investment argument:* Because of the interaction between environment and human development, the negative impact of poverty is more intense in early childhood and has a far greater impact on outcomes than poverty experienced in later life (WHO, 2007). Persistent poverty during the pre-natal and post-natal period is particularly negative in relation to children's cognitive development; poor fetal growth and low birth weight are likely results, in turn linked to the development of later childhood cognitive and behavioural difficulties as well as vulnerability to disease (obesity, heart disease, diabetes, mental health problems) in adult life. In addition, as adverse economic conditions and parenting practices are linked, children living in extreme poverty conditions may not experience successful role models, or acquire in early childhood period the fundamental skills and motivations that underlie all learning, such as adequate concept and language acquisition, self-regulation, and confidence to interact or express themselves. In comparison, remedial education interventions targeting young school drop-outs or adults with poor basic skills are far more costly and of limited benefit (Alakeson, 2004). Thus interventions at early ages among marginalized populations is a public policy initiative that does not only promote fairness and social justice: it can have a far greater impact than interventions later in life (e.g. reduced pupil-teacher ratios, public job training or tuition subsidies) when these deprivations have already manifested themselves in terms of diminished capacity to contribute to

their community and society (Heckman, 2006). See Annex 2 for a brief summary of the economic benefits of early childhood services.

- d) A human capital argument: An important goal of education systems is to provide young people with the technical skills and knowledge base needed evolving economies and societies. Early childhood programmes set the child on the journey toward knowledge and skills, but above all, they instill important 'soft' skills that are critical for creativity and working in teams. In high quality programmes, positive dispositions toward society and learning are absorbed and basic life skills acquired, such as autonomy, co-operation with others, problem-solving and persistence. In turn, these skills are reinforced by good schools, or as expressed by Carneiro and Heckman (2003) skills beget skills, that is, learning in one life stage begets learning in the next. In sum, to ensure a well-educated workforce, governments need to invest in high quality early childhood programmes and in learning opportunities throughout the life cycle.
- e) A preparation for school argument: Early childhood programmes have been researched extensively for their effect on preparing children for school and on later school outcomes. It has been repeatedly and convincingly proven that investments in early childhood education and improving school attendance and completion are the most promising interventions to break the intergenerational transmission of social exclusion. Moreover, effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Thus, appropriate ECD services are essential to improving school readiness and to giving young Roma children an equal starting point as they enter primary school, reducing at the same time the likelihood that they will enter special schools.

The Europe 2020 Strategy contains an explicit target of reducing of early school leaving to 10% only. With the current figures standing at 80% for Roma school leaving during secondary education, there is clearly a long way to go to meet this target. As long as young adults fail to gain the competences and work attitudes that employers need, this has direct consequences for the national workforce and its ability to compete. Appropriate access to early childhood is necessary if Roma children are to enter school with any chance of success and completion.



## 5. TAKING STOCK – REVIEWING EXISTING INITIATIVES FOR YOUNG ROMA CHILDREN AT EU AND DOMESTIC LEVELS

Any assessment of progress on ECD and how effective it has been in support of Roma inclusion would require knowledge of what resources have been allocated to ECD and how much has been invested in other child related areas. This would require in depth examination of national settings that is beyond the scope of this paper. What is possible though is a succinct review of the policy environment at European and Member States level, and whether this has moved in favour of Roma children, and in what way does this need to go further? In a first step initiatives at EU level are examined, followed by the initiatives at national level.

### 5.1. At EU level: a broad array of policy instruments but not always effective

The most relevant legal and policy instruments for addressing the Roma situation are the instruments related to fundamental rights and anti-discrimination. Of major interest are: the Lisbon Treaty, which made the protection of children's rights an objective of the Union for the first time and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, with several legally binding articles, particularly relevant to children.<sup>vii</sup> The many EU human rights instruments, such as the EU Directive 2000/43 on Equal treatment on grounds of racial and ethnic origin and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, should and could be better used to protect the rights of ethnic minorities and their children. At the international level, the reporting procedures of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child could focus on Roma children and on the responsibility of Member States to guarantee non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right of children to participate.

The drive to promote social inclusion and combat child poverty has been a strong feature of EU level action, particularly within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).<sup>viii</sup> These initiatives have contributed to an understanding that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon requiring for its alleviation integrated, multi-dimensional and long-term approaches. Poverty encompasses not only income deprivation but also other forms of deprivation and loss of dignity: lack of access to appropriate housing, health services, and education, and a more general lack of opportunity in society. The OMC has boosted data collection on social inclusion issues, both at the EU and national level. The new Europe 2020 Strategy provides an important opportunity to adopt a systemic EU approach to tackling child poverty as a key political priority for the Union.

Other European institutions have also become active in promoting attention to the issue of Roma. In June 2009, the European Council adopted 'Conclusions on Inclusion of the Roma', and invited the Commission and the Member States to designate specific policies for the situation of Roma (Council of the European Union, 2009). The Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion (2008) has been developed as an open mechanism of cooperation between Member States, civil society actors and European institutions with the purpose of supporting initiatives, mutual learning and better understanding of Roma issues. The "10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion", formulated by the Roma Platform, aim to guide public policies and projects for Roma. A further guideline, *Framework for Co-ordinating National Roma Strategies*, is promised from the Commission in April 2011, which will advise countries on developing context-specific responses to the situation of Roma in their countries.

The EU has also funded several pilot programmes focusing on young children. For example, the pilot project "Pan-European Coordination of Roma Integration Methods", funded by DG Regional Policy, focuses on improving the access of Roma children to quality early childhood education, and the

enhancement of child development for Roma children aged 0-6. An important goal of this initiative is to provide the necessary evidence for introducing and scaling up early childhood education and care (European Commission 2010a). Another project explicitly designed to draw attention to the high returns of ECD has been launched by DG Employment in collaboration with UNICEF (RGS1).

In the context of Enlargement, the Commission's Directorate-General for Enlargement continuously monitors legislative and administrative action in accession countries on anti-discrimination. In its regular bilateral meetings with governments, it consistently addresses the Roma situation (European Commission 2010a). The impact of its yearly Progress Reports is lessened, however, by the persistence of discriminatory practices against immigrant Roma groups and their families in established Member States. These groups are often denied social welfare support and sanitary housing conditions; their children may be barred from health services and schools; or when they are returned to their country of origin, insufficient attention is given to by the richer countries to the environments to which families are forced to return.

In sum, although a broad and rich array of laws, frameworks and initiatives exist, the political will to *implement* social inclusion policies in favour of Roma populations seems to be weak. Various EU institutions have made funds available to ensure that instruments for the social inclusion of Roma are created in the newest Member States and in candidate countries. That these funds are not always spent is often attributed to weak administrations in the CSEE countries or to the limited capacity of Roma civil society organisations to absorb European funds. On the other hand, accession countries note that the attention given to the social inclusion of Roma before accession is greater than the attention given afterwards. In sum, they suggest that EU programmes tend to perform at bureaucratic and legalistic levels and do not give teeth to inclusion policy through formulating concrete targets and monitoring progress.

Co-ordination of programmes and their evaluation seems also to be weak at European and national levels. In the CSEE countries, a plethora of programmes often exist and receive funding from different sources but without a clear sense of how successive programmes relate to each other, what they are achieving, what's working and what isn't. The fundamental question - What are Europe's goals and objectives for early childhood education and care? - often goes unanswered: Is it to facilitate the labour market? Or to help working parents? Or to reduce poverty? Or to prepare children for school? Or to focus on the holistic development of the child, including the practice of democracy and citizenship.

The co-ordination of programmes and services is even more disordered. There is a need therefore to appoint a lead ministry to ensure a common vision, set agreed targets, identify common indicators and evaluation procedures, and co-ordinate the efforts of different actors, including the programmes undertaken by international bodies. In some countries, the ministry of education is given responsibility and in others, it may be the ministry of social affairs or health or an autonomous children's ministry or agency. The selection of one ministry not only improves accountability but also - because information is channelled toward that ministry - can improve the coherence of different programmes and avoid costly overlapping. The co-ordination of different programmes, such as child poverty strategies, Roma inclusion and the health and development of young children, is a serious challenge for both the EU and many governments and needs to be addressed urgently.

In addition, the child poverty and Roma inclusion agendas seem to exist as two separate debates that do not interact sufficiently or come together in practice. Crucially, EU strategies do not address sufficiently the specific features of Roma poverty. The principles identified for effective action - applying fundamental rights and anti-discrimination instruments; adopting multi-dimensional approaches; ensuring coordinated action across ministries and sectors; supporting families and communities; starting early and focusing on early health and development - are all highly relevant for Roma children, but they tend to under-estimate the very adverse situations that Roma children

often confront. Clear targets for the reduction of child and family poverty among Roma have rarely been set. In parallel, specific strategies for Roma inclusion do not provide an agreed framework for addressing children, but tend to remain locked into sectoral approaches. In sum, the co-ordination of agendas, programmes and energies seems particularly weak.

EU activity on early childhood has also tended to prioritise the needs of working parents and the labour market over those of children, as for example, in the Barcelona targets. It has shifted only recently to viewing early childhood care and education as a key intervention to promote child development and inclusion. This shift is visible in the May 2010 *Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training*, confirming that “participation in high-quality early childhood education and care, with highly skilled staff and adequate child-to-staff ratios, produces positive results for all children and has highest benefits for the most disadvantaged... Providing adequate incentives and support, adapting provision to needs and increasing accessibility can broaden the participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds”. The recent Communication on early childhood education and care (ECEC) from DG Education and Culture (COM 2011 66, Brussels, 17.2.2011, final) marks a further evolution in the EU’s attention to social inclusion and early development:

*ECEC can play a key role in overcoming the educational disadvantage faced by Roma children, as highlighted by pilot actions on Roma inclusion currently underway in some Member States with contributions from the EU budget.<sup>1</sup>... In respect of children with special needs, Member States have committed themselves, through adherence to the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, to inclusive education approaches.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, some 2% of the European school population remains in segregated settings. ECEC offers potential for greater inclusion of children with special education needs, paving the way for their later integration in mainstream schools.*

## 5.2. At national level, patchy results

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At national level, Roma exclusion is first and foremost treated through anti-discrimination policies. Under the influence of Directive 2000/43/EC, National Equality Bodies were created with the aim of collecting claims and monitoring discriminatory practices. The fact that each country was responsible for endowing these institutions in terms of legal status and resources led, however, to very unequal situations. Many of these Equality Bodies are dependent on governments and have very limited powers, which raise questions regarding their overall efficiency. Although a number of such Equality Bodies can investigate complaints, most conclude their procedures with non-binding recommendations. The extent to which Roma who experience discrimination find these recommendations effective is not yet known (European Commission, 2008).

Other measures taken at national level include intercultural educational strategies aiming to develop bridges between different ethnic groups. In many countries, however, such strategies consist largely of support measures that target Roma and Travellers as “disadvantaged learners” rather than promoting intercultural understanding as a key dimension of national education policy and part of its core pedagogical objectives. This is a critical point: many of the ills and disadvantages that Roma suffer are caused by discrimination and segregatory reflexes among majority populations. The issue needs to be tackled primarily at early childhood and school levels by changing the attitudes of both children and parents toward the Roma minority. More often than not, however, human rights and intercultural understanding are present only in specific projects which do not affect the structure and operation of the general education system. As such, they are unlikely to bring about the necessary ideological and systemic changes and, for this reason, their added value as well as their sustainability remains questionable (EUMC 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Further details: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/themes/roma/about\\_en.cfm?nmenu=2](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/roma/about_en.cfm?nmenu=2)

<sup>2</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) has been signed by all Member States, and ratified by most.

In many countries, in particular in the CSEE region, special units within the administration have been created to ensure that problems specific to Roma communities are taken into account. However, their powers and attributes are likely to differ from country to country. A comprehensive analysis of their impact is still missing, but it seems clear that their influence on decision-making and implementation varies widely across countries. A similar analysis concerning the effects of including Roma representatives in policy debates on issues such as education and health or in the elaboration of governmental strategies to tackle poverty is also absent. The evidence gathered so far suggests that the involvement of Roma organisations in shaping and implementing policies is limited “and even this limited participation is characterized by low effectiveness“ (Decade Watch 2009: 59).

Local level involvement to implement measures in favour of Roma populations is practised to some extent throughout Europe, but again, a systematic assessment of local government performance is still lacking. In some instances, programs in Eastern European countries, which showed some degree of success - for example, health and education mediators - were discontinued once funding became the responsibility of local authorities. In Western European countries, the exact dimension of this cooperation, and in particular its impact on early childhood education and access to health care, remain largely unknown, due to lack of data (European Commission 2010a).

This overview shows that in spite of the recognized disadvantage of Roma children, severe gaps exist at EU, national and local government levels, in terms both of policies (numerous aspects are not addressed at all) and implementation (more effort, coordination and resources are needed). The following section identifies these gaps and proposes some solutions for consideration.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION AT EU AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT LEVELS

### 6.1. At EU level, strengthen support to early development

#### ■ 1. USING THE EU'S 2020 STRATEGY

As explained in the introduction, the EU Heads of State and Government recently agreed to operationalise the “Inclusive Growth’ strand of the new Europe 2020 Strategy, through:

- A Flagship Initiative called the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- A Flagship Initiative on “Youth on the Move”;
- An Integrated Guideline 10 which calls for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
- A headline target aiming to reduce the share of early school leavers from 15% to 10%;
- A headline target aiming to lift 20 million people out of poverty and exclusion.

The Europe 2020 Strategy represents a real opportunity: first, the objectives are defined within the key instruments of the new Strategy (which provides a framework for monitoring outcomes at the EU level); second, the objectives have now been quantified (from earlier experience in the field of employment, we know that setting concrete targets can make a significant difference). In principle, these tools can contribute strongly to Roma inclusion if the issue is mainstreamed in each of these instruments:

- (a) Member States should present National Strategies for the Inclusion of Roma as part of their National Reform Programmes. Within these National Strategies, there should be a particular focus on Roma children with the objectives of breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty and improving the well-being of Roma children. A coherent approach to early child development should be part of this strategy.
- (b) Member States should translate the headline targets (regarding early school leavers and the reduction of poverty) into ambitious national and regional targets which address the most marginalized children, including Roma children. The early school leaving target should address the entire trajectory of education, starting with early childhood care and education. Member State targets on poverty should include a specific target on child poverty, while adopting specific multi-dimensional approaches and focusing on the most marginalized, including Roma children.
- (c) The forthcoming Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion should pay specific attention, in all of its actions, to marginalized communities, including the Roma.

Another promising way to improve Roma inclusion through Europe 2020 would be to develop participatory governance indicators, which would greatly improve the European Commission’s capacity to monitor and assess national practices with regard to the involvement of a variety of actors (including Roma organisations and different levels of government) in social inclusion policies. Finally, the Social OMC should continue the practice of conducting peer reviews on Roma-related issues under the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS).

#### ■ 2. SHARPENING THE FOCUS OF FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

A valuable opportunity to review the use of the EU funds, (ESF, ERDF, AFRD) is offered at the moment through the current reviews of EU funding for Roma, of the Instrument for Pre-Accession



as well as of future financial perspectives post 2013. The focus on the social inclusion of Roma could be improved in these funding streams:

- (a) By allowing the financing of public services for marginalized communities over a longer period of time and under strict conditions, such as clear definitions of public service and marginalized communities as well as lowering the co-financing rate. In particular, while the financial crisis lasts, funding should be channelled not only to establishing child and family services for excluded groups, but also to providing the operating costs of effective services until such time as they can be taken over effectively by the public authorities.
- (b) By funding to improve outcomes for Roma adults through employment activation and job training, with special attention to Roma women. This point is crucial as it does not make sense to train Roma women and men if there are no jobs for them after training;
- (c) By funding to improve school readiness and school completion rates among Roma children in order to ensure that the next generation of Roma enter the labour market with the same skill sets as non-Roma – in achieving this aim, the early childhood sector has a major role; and
- (d) By ensuring social transfers, housing and community renovation to provide present relief and hope to (desperately) poor Roma households and settlements. Community renovation includes infra-structure renovation but should aim, above all, for local capacity building: *Nothing about us without us*.

As regards the geographical scope of such interventions, the European Commission could be asked – along the lines of a recent proposal from the European Parliament – to identify Priority Areas for EU spending. In such a place-based approach, micro-regions could be identified within the EU where inhabitants are hardest hit by poverty and social exclusion on the basis of a number of criteria such as accessibility of workplaces, distance from city centres, high rate of unemployment, volume and quality of public services. These issues are particularly relevant for Roma populations (European Parliament, 2010).

Finally, note the innovative character of the recent amendment of ERDF art 7(2) on housing for marginalized communities, which makes funding conditional on (a) an integrated approach (housing together with education, employment etc.) and (b) spatial integration (as opposed to desegregation and isolation). It would seem important that such conditionality would be applied to other EU resources: EU projects can only be funded if they are “inclusive”, i.e. do not support – either directly or indirectly – segregation (the Hungarian experience in this respect may serve as a ‘good practice’ to be studied by other countries).

Given the limited coverage of early development services in many countries, especially for children 0-3 years, active consideration should be given to creating and resourcing a Special ECD Funding Facility that could rapidly support innovative early development programmes and allow a scaling up of successful initiatives, giving particular attention to Roma communities in this area.

### ■ 3. BOOSTING DATA COLLECTION

There is a serious lack of accurate information on the social situation of the Roma in Europe. In order to move from discourse to action, there is a compelling need for reliable national data on the status of Roma populations. Indicators and benchmarks are necessary to accurately assess the situation of Roma populations and to evaluate EU and national policies, including assessments of the extent of discrimination against Roma. Current practice - *No data, no problem, no progress* - gives rise to obscuring the level of disadvantage and discrimination against Roma families both at local and

national levels. The present reluctance of Member States to collect ethnic data is understandable but partly misguided. Disaggregated data can be collected at kindergarten/school levels, and used for policy purposes without danger to civic freedoms or confidentiality (see OSI, 2010).

What can be done?

- The European Commission could be invited to issue guidelines on data collection under existing regulations to clarify their application with respect to data regarding ethnicity;
- Child well-being indicators could be developed in the framework of the Social OMC that are relevant to the most marginalized children such as Roma;
- Information could be gathered on children's views from the most marginalized communities, including Roma, through Eurobarometer surveys and other methods.

Ideally, the Social Affairs Council, inspired by the Roma Platform, would provide the Social Protection Committee and its subgroup on Indicators with a mandate to work in this direction, building on good practices in the field of eradicating child poverty.

#### ■ **4. BUILDING AN INVESTMENT CASE FOR INVESTING IN THE 0-8 AGE GROUP AND DEVELOPING LONG-TERM FUNDING**

The case for 'starting early' in social inclusion has been made strongly in western European countries, especially in support of marginalized communities. The returns to society are extremely high. The same argument applies to Roma inclusion: early intervention is critical. Yet, boldness in providing incentives for action in favour of early child development is sorely missing: funding at the level required to make a real impact is not yet forthcoming. There needs to be innovation, not only in ensuring easier access to existing EU structural funds and the Instrument for Pre-Accession but in creating enough critical mass to make a difference within a relatively short timeline.

Research on the financing of early development for Roma children deserves attention from the EU and other partners. We need, for example, much better research to provide realistic assessments to Member States and accession countries concerning the resources necessary to address exclusion issues in early childhood. How, for example, should one intervene at family and community level to improve family income, child environments and parenting skills? How can health, social welfare and education personnel co-ordinate their activities? What, for example, is the approximate unit cost in different countries for a child in a community child development service? What type of staffing is needed and the costs for such staff? The questions are multiple but without research and data, local governments and NGOs work in the dark. We know from other research that unit costs in a high quality, centre-based service are high. If this is too much for the CSEE economies to bear, then we need to find low-cost early childhood alternatives – including community services - rather than directing Roma children into inappropriate formal services at too young an age.

#### ■ **5. PROMOTING A STRONG VISION OF ECD**

The EU should be encouraged to take a lead in defining early childhood services in a more holistic way: as services that begin earlier and include community participation. These services should include maternal and infant healthcare, family support and family well-being, parenting information, early learning, and attention to special needs. The current revision of the Barcelona targets on childcare and forthcoming European Commission Communication on early childhood education provide important opportunities to frame these initiatives within broader approaches to reducing social exclusion and poverty.



The EU is expected to adopt an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child that will include a particular focus on vulnerable children. The Strategy holds the promise of promoting a vision of child well-being that requires an integrated and coordinated approach to the multiple deprivations Roma children often suffer. To achieve that vision will require strong leadership, backed by effective coordination across the EU and within the Member States.

## 6.2 At the national level, move from discourse to action

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### ■ 1. OPT FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICES IN WHICH ROMA AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN ARE GIVEN SPECIAL ATTENTION

*'Explicit but not exclusive targeting'* and *'mainstreaming'* are two of the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion to guide EU institutions and countries when they design and implement new policies or activities. Rather than setting up targeted programmes for Roma children, comprehensive early childhood policy frameworks for all children are needed, within which Roma and other excluded groups can receive greater investment and specialised attention. A universal approach recognizes the rights of all children to survival, development, health and education, and to national services in these fields. There are also other policy reasons to adopt a universal approach.

There can be significant political risks to taking a targeting approach. By constructing Roma as a separate group for welfare assistance, policy-makers may contribute to the negative image of the group and may even inhibit the inclusion of Roma children in the long term. In addition, by targeting on ethnic grounds, there is the risk that mainstream society will not feel concerned and may withdraw support from what they see as a minority issue.

- There are significant costs involved in differentiating programs for dispersed target groups within an overall system. Although Roma children may experience a high degree of absolute poverty, the great majority of children experiencing absolute poverty are found within the mainstream population indicating a need to take a broader approach to addressing the issue within Europe.
- There are significant benefits to be had from mixing groups of children from different backgrounds and ability levels. Firstly, disadvantaged children seem to learn more when they attend programmes that include more advantaged children. In turn, diverse groups bring rich learning opportunities for mainstream children. Research has identified five key benefits for children educated in inclusive classrooms (UNICEF, 2010): (1) Reduced fear of human difference accompanied by an increased awareness of the needs of others; (2) Growth in social skills; (3) Improvements in self-concept; (4) Development of personal principles and (5) The growth of warm and caring friendships and relationships across social or other divisions. In sum, the most effective way to influence thinking about diversity or disability is personal contact. This further demonstrates the importance of starting inclusive initiatives as early as possible. At a broader level, universal ECD services can make a major contribution to social cohesion, which is good not only for Roma but for the majority population.

In putting forward this option, we are well aware of the challenges still facing CEE Member States and pre-accession countries in ensuring general access to early childhood services. Yet, an encouraging sign in recent years has been the determination of these countries to maintain and increase the capacity of their early education services despite great difficulties.

## ■ 2. CREATE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTION OF ECD AND EDUCATION

There are a number of challenges that need to be met in when providing appropriate services to the disadvantaged communities, including the Roma:

- a) The need to conceptualise early childhood interventions not just in terms of pre-school enrolment, which is often made available to Roma children only from the age of 4 years. Early childhood services for disadvantaged communities need to be comprehensive – covering maternal and infant healthcare, family support and family well-being, early learning and special needs. Ideally, the concept needs to be worked out at community level, with the assistance of experienced persons in the field. Views from parents and children as well as from the community health services, social welfare, community development and education personnel need to be heard.
- b) Early childhood services – starting from the pre-natal period – are ideally built on families, and in particular, on the role of mothers. In former times, most CSEE countries had home-visiting nurses, and free paediatric care. The issue is now to expand again such services, ensure wider access to them and improve their quality, moving toward a more child development approach rather than a survival/health focus only. Early childhood services should also include outreach to parents, whose security and parenting skills are closely linked to the well-being of young children.

The success of such initiatives depends greatly on educating and empowering Roma women. Since mothers are, in general, the primary mediators of efforts to improve the growth and development of young children, it is critical that their needs and rights as women are addressed (UNICEF, 2010). These rights include the right to education, employment and full participation in society. The question is: how can Roma women achieve empowerment? A first task is to identify the positive values and practices that they bring to child-rearing and build on these. Then, education must play its role, not only literacy and parenting education, but also strong efforts to raise the educational levels and school completion rates of Roma girls so that the next generation is better equipped to guide the destinies of young children. Roma women need to be considered not only as mothers but as women and citizens in their own right. Already, the employment of Roma school mediators, school assistants, language-teachers and health mediators has provided a good start to this process.

- c) A major challenge, is to identify low-cost home and community early childhood health, development and education initiatives for the development of young children, that are flexible and accessible to Roma families -- e.g. parenting groups, women's health groups, play groups for children, etc. that can be scaled up and from which Roma families can immediately benefit. Such groups also provide important leadership roles for community mothers.
- d) A more comprehensive and updated view of kindergarten is needed. In some instances, including in Western Europe, the institution is seen as a junior school, with a focus on instruction and the preparation of children for the routines and discipline of formal schooling. Obviously, the goal of preparing children for school must be achieved, but kindergarten for marginalized must have a strong element of care and instil in young children confidence in their own abilities and backgrounds. A more constructive perspective is to see the children as valued citizens, and even at their young age, as competent and active learners in their own right. In this perspective, the teacher's role is to support each child's innate drive to discover and learn rather than to teach prescribed behaviours or outcomes.

A more caring perspective would also take into consideration the needs of the particular children and families. The preschool should be a welcoming place for minority groups. Very disadvantaged children also need a comprehensive services approach that is more sensitive

to the full range of children's learning and developmental needs across the day, and addresses parental needs for information and education. A comprehensive services approach to early childhood education goes beyond curriculum and activities for children and focuses also on the home and community environments. Typically, a comprehensive services centre works in co-operation with other community services and pays particular attention to parents. The centre will provide when necessary courses and advice on parenting (in particular, how to support child development), employment and job training. For the young children, a comprehensive services approach may mean the provision of a meal or snack during the day; an extended day of seven hours minimum on the same site; health screening and medical referrals; and regular liaison with social and/or family services for children considered to be at risk.

- e) A strong focus is needed on the transitions from the family to pre-school, and from preschool to primary education. As noted above, these are often the weakest links in the early education chain, and innovative approaches are needed to make these transitions safe and pleasurable for young children.

### ■ **3. MAKING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MORE INCLUSIVE**

The frequent failure of kindergarten or early childhood services to be inclusive of Roma children creates a significant barrier to the later success of these children in school. Preschool should be a welcoming place for minority groups. There is a clear need to tackle negative stereotyping within the majority population, including teachers, far more energetically than at present. According to the European Early Childhood Diversity Network (DECET, 2008), a high quality early childhood service is one where:

- Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries;
- Every child, parent and staff member should feel that s/he belongs. This implies an active policy to take into account family cultures when recruiting staff, designing the curriculum, planning meals and other activities;
- Every child, parent and staff member is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her different identities. This implies that the curriculum does not function to make every child a little 'patriot'. Rather, it will foster multiple identity building and multilingualism by building bridges between the home and the institutional environment as well as with the local community;
- Everyone can participate as active citizens. This implies that staff develop an explicit anti-bias approach and take appropriate action to involve all parents

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA), an influential early years network in CEE/CIS, promotes inclusion, respect for diversity and values of democracy through its Principles of Quality Pedagogy. According to ISSA, it is the responsibility of educators to promote the right of every child and family to be included, respected and valued. All barriers to the access of Roma children – physical, social, financial, cultural, linguistic and pedagogical - must be addressed and removed. Deficit judgments about these children and high stakes testing (that is, tests that decide class placements or the sending of a child to a segregated institute) should simply be abolished. Good progress is being made in the field in some countries, for example, the new Education Law in Serbia requires that early testing should be aimed only to ascertain the particular needs of each child and to identify the necessary supports (protection, material welfare, health...) that a child may need within the mainstream primary school system, to which every child has a fundamental right. Per capita funding for each child in attendance will become the rule, with additional funding allocated to the pre-school centre or school for each child at-risk. At upstream level, teachers require specific anti-bias training. As shown by ISSA's experience in its Education for Social Justice programme, such training promotes teachers' capacities to challenge the personal and institutional behaviours

that perpetuate inequity and oppression. School curricula need to be changed to make inclusion and inclusion attitudes a core part of national education objectives.

Good practices in ECD do exist: outreach to families; multicultural learning resources; child-centred teaching and learning; parental involvement; Roma language teachers, teaching assistants and school mediators; quality and well-resourced learning environments; and respect for ethnic and cultural diversity and bilingual support (EACEA, 2007). It is important to learn from both success as well as failure. We illustrate this with one unsuccessful and three more successful projects in the box that follows.

## **BOX 2: ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ practices in ECD**

### ***The use of CCTs***

Using financial incentives: conditional cash transfers (CCTs) has been tried in a few countries as a means of maintaining Roma children in education. An analysis of the policies in Romania, Hungary and Slovakia showed that CCTs produced mostly negative effects: increased poverty among the families involved; teachers discouraged from reporting absences rather than improving attendance; decreased quality of upper secondary education in rural areas by not attending to issues of supply; an unexpected increase in segregation as the CCTs created further incentives for enrolment in “special” education<sup>ix</sup>. The failure of these programs exemplifies the complexities of Roma education and the cumulative effect of other forms of discrimination to which Roma population is subjected. The CCTs tackled only the “demand” side, ignoring the “supply” side of the education system. Although the CCTs have been used mainly in relation to primary and secondary education, the experience can be relevant for the case of ECEC, especially since several organisations advocate the use of financial incentives for parents of very young pre-school children.

### ***Bilingual kindergarten***

Bilingual kindergarten is a project run in Romania, established with the support of UNICEF. The curriculum was created in cooperation with Romani and Romanian educators. The main aim of the bilingual kindergartens is to teach Roma pupils the Romanian language, resulting in the preservation of the Romani language, the affirmation of Roma identity and of the individual child’s self-esteem. Positive results on the inclusion of children into primary mainstream education and on their overall performance have been observed. The project has been approved by the Ministry of Education and it is hoped that these kindergartens will be included in national public policy.

### ***The Teaching Kit***

The Teaching Kit is an instrument developed specifically to prepare Roma, Sinti and traveller children for entry into the first year of primary school and prevent school failure. It has been developed by the ARPOMT association and receives funding from the Council of Europe, through the project “Education of Roma children in Europe”. The instrument was designed to be implemented by mediators and to involve the family in the process of learning. (ARPOMT /Council of Europe 2005). The evaluation of the pilot project showed that communities strongly supported the use of the Teaching Kit and that adults engaged as tutors for their children, imitated the experts’ role by demonstrating, asking questions, and waiting for children’s responses. In spite of its positive evaluations, national governments make little reference to it in their reports.

## **4. CO-ORDINATING STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN**

Because the concept of early childhood development encompasses many different aspects of a young child’s life, there is a need to coordinate a range of different services to ensure effective interventions for young children, in particular, the alleviation of child poverty, family support, health, care and education services. For marginalized populations, each kind of service is needed but their effect can be weakened if common goals for young children do not exist and weak co-ordination among service providers is the rule. The co-ordination of different programmes, such as child poverty strategies, Roma inclusion and the health and development of young children, is a serious challenge for many governments and needs to be addressed urgently.

## ■ 5. SCALING UP OF ‘GOOD PRACTICES’

Innovation is required, especially in taking strategies to scale, but it may require different and still to be explored partnerships between States and civil society. One of the more recent, creative approaches has been the employment of Roma mediators. The use of health and education mediators is an approach that has the advantage of tapping into Roma community resources. Mediators are Roma individuals, they provide Roma role models, they bridge the gap between Roma communities and the majority population, and they allow for an approach tailored to the needs of specific communities. They also have the potential of sensitizing the majority population to the problems and sensitivities of Roma communities and of mobilizing energies both among Roma and the majority population. The main drawback of the initiative is the relatively insecure position of the mediators and, although an increase in the institutionalization of the position can be seen, the failure to integrate and scale up this approach more widely.

The areas where mediators have been most used are education and health. Some countries developed mediator programs in education at the beginning of 1990s, and thus have accumulated much relevant experience. Reports concerning Roma health mediators are fewer in number. One such report, which surveyed the experiences of health mediators in Romania, Finland and Bulgaria concluded that mediators were able to effectively address several components of Romani health, in particular by reducing bureaucratic and communication obstacles faced by the Romani community (OSI 2005). Other experiences show that Roma mediators and assistants have been successful in enrolling and maintaining Roma children in education. They have also improved the children's health status, raised awareness in Roma communities about education and health care benefits, and sensitized majority communities about the problems and cultural heritage of the Roma community.

There are however, several key issues related to these approaches that need to be carefully dealt with in order to scale up the approach and make it more efficient (Rus 2004, 2006):

*Legal environment and status:* not all countries provide similar legal status to mediators and assistants. Some countries use both mediators and assistants, define them differently and provide them with a different status. Also, between countries, the status of the persons occupying these positions can vary significantly. The legal status is important as it can influence the decision of a person to take over such a position.

*Tasks:* The tasks of mediators/assistants differ between countries, from simple to extremely complex. Governments and communities need to strike a balance between tasks, so they mediators can realistically fulfill them and avoid becoming instruments of schools or subservient to community leaders.

*Training:* The training of mediators differs from country to country. At one extreme, only basic training is offered through NGOs; at the other, intensive or longer duration courses are offered through the educational system, supported by periodic training sessions and training seminars.

*Funding:* there are concerns about the long-term sustainability of some of these efforts, unless they are institutionalized as noted above. For various reasons, primarily due to the resistance of the majority, local authorities may be reluctant to initiate or fund initiatives on behalf of Roma. There is an increasing weariness on the part of Roma community towards new initiatives that will not be sustained.

Equally important, there seems to be limited knowledge transfer from NGO experience to governmental level. Although steps in this direction have been taken recently, more needs to be done. Scaling up of good practices has been the Achilles heel of both education and early child development policies. Projects do not develop sufficiently the necessary infrastructure, personnel



and programmes necessary for the education of Roma children, including buildings, teachers and appropriate teaching materials in Romani languages.

The innovations needed to ensure the social inclusion of Roma require the continued presence and engagement of Roma NGOs and a cadre of trained staff from the Roma community. Sustainable initiatives should reflect an understanding of what Roma communities and individuals want, hope and deem necessary. Given the large degree of variation within these communities, it is difficult to bring to scale one particular type of programme or service delivery. New approaches are urgently needed in this critical area.

## ■ **6. PROMOTE AND FUND COMMUNITY SERVICES WHERE THERE ARE NO SERVICES FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

Linked to this broadened understanding of early childhood services is the promotion of community-based services in isolated settlements, as for example, practised by the Comenius Foundation in Poland (2009). Because of past segregation, many Roma communities live in remote villages or settlements, often lacking infrastructure and schools. In such circumstances, it is necessary to think beyond state health or kindergarten services (which, in all probability will never come to such small settlements), toward investments that support community building. Roma communities need to be supported in finding solutions for their children that are appropriate to their culture and situation.

Even in the most deprived settlements, there are persons with the interest, capacity and relational skills to become health and early childhood leaders at local level. Facilitative leadership is necessary to identify potential community leaders and to use the talents and social synergies that do exist. Through external funding and visiting professionals, these potential leaders can be helped to develop small community programmes that serve the needs of local families and children – including the parent groups, women’s groups, play groups mentioned above. They could receive training to provide opportunities for parents and other local leaders to participate in deciding on the services needed and in service design and implementation strategies. In turn, the voice of such settlements should be heard at the larger local government level where resource allocation decisions are usually made. To maintain sustainability, payments and career ladders for local leaders should be included in community development plans.

Such thinking requires substantial changes from state policy-makers, local government officials, and community leaders. New information is needed on how to organise such services efficiently, to measure the costs involved and the training needed. At the same time, these services offer the potential for building effective early health and learning services in settlements where, at present, none exist. They offer also security to poor Roma settlements and parents who rightly oppose bussing of very young children to larger centres beyond their villages. Community programmes also build capacity and encourage communities and parents be responsible for their children, thereby building up ownership and a vested interest in long-term support to early childhood services. If properly supported from the larger administrative centre, local services can create valuable bridges between mainstream services and the minority, across potential barriers of race, language and culture.

At the same time, States are accountable for providing services throughout their territory. Efforts to improve community capacity can be funded to become part of the national network of early childhood and other services. States have the responsibility to ensure that health and educational services for Roma are delivered equitably, according to national standards and aspirations.

## 7. SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous section addressed the policy lines to be pursued at EU and national level to integrate an effective approach to the ECD challenge for Roma children with the right combination of initiatives. This section summarises those recommendations.

### 7.1. Take advantage of the EU 2020 Strategy to promote inclusion

- *National Strategies for the Inclusion of Roma* should be part of Member State National Reform Programmes. A broad but coherent approach to the early development of Roma children should be part of these Strategies. Early development should be seen not only as the foundation stage of health and learning for young children but also as an important provider of employment for Roma women, including the development of a cadre of Roma experts and professionals in the health and education fields.
- The new *EU headline targets on poverty, nested within the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion*: Member States should aim to translate the targets on the reduction of social exclusion/poverty into ambitious national and regional targets and should include a specific target on child poverty and specific strategies that take a multi-dimensional approach to child and family poverty. Within that, there should be a focus on the most marginalised, including Roma children.
- The new *EU headline targets on early school leaving nested within the Youth on the Move Initiative*: The early school leaving target should address the entire trajectory of education, starting with early childhood care and education, focusing on improving school readiness as well as school completion rates. A target of ensuring two full years of mainstream early education before entry into primary school should be set for all Roma children, to be achieved voluntarily by the year 2020. The target to have 40 per cent of young people with higher education should also be implemented with the Roma.
- Make the link with the work on the EU Communication on the Rights of the Child and the foreseen 2012 Recommendation to fight child poverty and to promote child well-being. This recommendation should give specific focus to children in extreme poverty especially the most marginalised and those subject to discrimination.

### 7.2. Improve the targeting and effectiveness of funding instruments

- To request the European Commission to identify priority areas for EU spending so that funding may be directed more effectively toward micro-regions and / or neighbourhoods where inhabitants are hardest hit by poverty and social exclusion. A primary purpose of such funding should be to address the areas of attention identified by the Roma Platform, viz. employment, health, housing and community renovation. In addition, and in light of recent changes to the Structural Funds and the current review of the post-2013 financial instruments, Member States should be encouraged to exploit all existing funding sources - including accession preparation instruments in candidate countries and pre-accession instruments in enlargement countries - to expand early childhood systems, improve their quality and expand inclusive early childhood services toward excluded children. In a time of financial crisis and austerity, a case can be made for channelling priority funding in new or existing and promising initiatives for children and families in poverty, thus providing children with a fair start in life and avoiding the high costs of social exclusion.



- Give active consideration to create and resourcing a Special ECD Funding Facility to increase funding significantly towards innovative early development programmes and scaling up of promising current initiatives. In funding early childhood projects in marginalized communities, a significant extension of the funding time-frame over a longer time period should be considered. In addition, the operational costs of effective or promising projects should be taken in charge until they can be taken over by local government or national funding bodies. In these projects, capacity building in Roma communities is important, for example, through employing Roma staff and mediators in the culture, education and health fields, and through supporting non-formal, early development programmes taken in charge by Roma women.
- To devote substantial funding to improving school readiness and school completion rates among Roma children in order to ensure that the next generation of Roma enter the labour market with the same skill sets as non-Roma. In achieving this aim, the early childhood sector has a major role to play. Special attention should be given in this project to the enrolment of Roma girls and to their successful completion of primary and secondary education. This strategy will contribute, in turn, to more gender equality, more positive child-rearing practices and improved home-learning environment for young children.
- Apply a stricter conditionality of funding e.g. fund only those projects that do not promote – directly or indirectly – ghettoization, segregation or exclusion. It should be ensured that EU funding is not used to improve physical conditions of institutions that often promote segregation and in which Roma are over-represented. Resources must be re-directed into services that prevent institutionalization, in particular through strengthening community-based services for families with young children, are oriented towards inclusion, employment activation and job training, with special attention to Roma women. The social economy can offer more opportunities in this framework. The European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) must be used in coordination to ensure training and re-training of staff as well as developing an effective social infrastructure.
- To promote consultation and participation of key stakeholders in decision-making regarding use of funds, in particular service providers, service users and NGOs.

### **7.3. Boost data collection and research:**

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- Invite the European Commission to clarify and issue guidelines on the disaggregation of data for the purpose of improving the situation of Roma children. Member States together with civil society institutions should be invited to provide adequate data according to EU guidelines, in accordance with the existing regulations, respecting the individual privacy of its citizens. It is extremely difficult for the Commission to provide realistic advice or for Member States to make evidence-based policy if basic data on Roma populations and children are not collected at national level. In addition, without such data, issues of equity, social justice and inclusion tend to be overlooked.
- Provide the Social Protection Committee and its subgroup on Indicators with a mandate to further developing child well-being indicators (in the framework of the Social OMC) that are relevant to the most marginalized children such as Roma.
- Through tried and tested methods, to ensure that children have the opportunity to express their opinion and participate in shaping policies and practices that affect them, including children from the most marginalized communities such as Roma.

- Invite Member States - including those Member States to which Roma workers and families migrate - to contribute to research on Roma issues. This should include longitudinal, multi-country research on the impact of ECEC services on Roma children, the reach of programs, the cost-benefit deriving from prevention, etc. The funding of such research should be ensured conjointly by the Community and the Member States and a strand on Roma research inserted into the OMC process. An important function of that research should be to evaluate the effectiveness of national projects for Roma children and communities.

#### 7.4. Improve attention to Roma children in EU policies relevant to children

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- Build on the recent EU Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (COM (2011)66, 17.02.2011) which pays particular attention to providing comprehensive ECD services to all children, with a particular focus on the most marginalised, including Roma children, and ensure that the next steps are followed through. In terms of vision and the development of agreed goals for early childhood development, Member States can be inspired by this Communication, which promotes the ideal of equitable and inclusive access for all children, including for Roma children and children with special needs. It underlines the importance of good governance of the sector and the need to ensure high quality, particularly in services attended by disadvantaged children. Above all, the Communication recommends coherence of vision and strong co-ordination between the different policy sectors intervening on behalf of young children:

*A systemic approach to the ECEC services means strong collaboration between the different policy sectors, such as education, employment, health, social policy. Such approaches allow governments to organise and manage policies more simply and efficiently, and to combine resources for children and their families. This requires a coherent vision that is shared by all stakeholders, including parents, a common policy framework with consistent goals across the system, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities at central and local levels. This approach also helps ECEC services to respond better to local needs. Policy exchange and cooperation at EU level can help countries learn from each other's good practice in this important and challenging task.*

- Ensure that Roma children and families receive due attention in all EU initiatives to end child poverty and promote child well-being. Ensure that the implementation of the recently adopted Agenda for the Rights of the Child COM (2011) 60/4 both mainstreams attention to marginalized children, including Roma children, in the actions identified under the Agenda, and provides for specific follow up on the actions for Roma children identified in the Agenda.
- Ensure that Roma children and families receive due attention in the the foreseen 2012 Recommendation to fight child poverty and promote child well-being as well as in the work on child poverty under the *Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion*. The Recommendation should give specific focus to children in extreme poverty, especially the most marginalized and those subject to discrimination.
- Ensure that the forthcoming Framework for Coordinating National Roma Strategies, expected in April 2011, which will advise countries on developing context-specific responses to the situation of Roma in their countries, pays due attention to ECEC.

## 7.5. At the domestic level, make it happen

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- Ensure that all children born in Europe are registered at birth, irrespective of their parents' civil registration status. Facilitate, subsidize and simplify registration and certification processes.
- Expand and strengthen outreach services for young children and families from isolated communities, especially health and community services that in many regions are the only formal systems to have contact with Roma. These services should give special attention to young children in the 0-3 years age group and to mothers during the pre-natal period, addressing (a) maternal health, food security, child-rearing and the family environment; (b) health protection, management and care of new-born infants; (c) support to the well-being of mothers and young children; d) other important aspects of child development that may not be directly related to physical health, such as, family ecology, safety, stimulation, children's play and language and second language development.
- Innovations are required to make existing systems more responsive and flexible in order to accommodate the broad range of services needed for the very young child through, for example, the use of health, education and cultural mediators and other strategies that have the wellbeing and rights of the child as their primary concern and are acceptable to Roma communities. These services should focus particularly on Roma women and girls education. Lack of education must be addressed if improved child development outcomes are to be achieved for the next generation.
- Support poor and Roma families to promote the growth and development of their young children at home through providing a safe and stimulating physical and psycho-social environment. Eliminate the perverse incentives that encourage families living in extreme poverty to relinquish their infants to state-provided residential care institutions or measures that encourage institutions to deprive children of parental care. Provide to parents who need to be away from home during working hours supportive and culturally responsive day care services for infants and toddlers. Respect the choice and support the child-rearing skills of Roma women who wish to remain at home to rear their children.
- Provide at least two years of inclusive, mandatory\* and affordable high quality preschool education as part of the targets of the EU 2020 Strategy. In these services, provide the care and comprehensive services that extremely poor children need, such as, nutrition (a warm meal and snacks at the centre each day), health screening (sight, hearing, medical and dental care), and support to parents and families. Facilitate the smooth transition of children from home to preschool and from preschool to formal schooling. This should include removal of all 'high stakes' testing of children, the elimination of inappropriate placement of children in special schools and classes, and the removal of perverse financial and social incentives that encourage Roma parents to enrol their children in these special schools. Provide anti-bias training, information and materials to all teachers and staff. Prepare the preschools to welcome Roma children and promote their development on an equal basis with other children – this includes the elimination of all financial, logistical and infrastructure barriers. Adapt curricula to embrace inclusion as a core goal of education, acknowledging the existing strengths of children as a basis for equal treatment. Employ Roma teaching assistants in classrooms and provide support for second language learning and bi-lingual instruction. (\*Ensuring that poor and marginalized families are not penalized when their children are unable to participate; high quality, acceptable, culturally sensitive and adequate provision are prerequisites.)
- Invite the European Commission to develop means to monitor action plans of the Member States concerning policies for the inclusion of Roma children and families, within existing reporting schemes. Develop the Platform for Roma Inclusion as a mechanism to exchange good practices between Member States, civil society organizations, NGOs, particularly those that represent the Roma.

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## Annex 1 - The Economic Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions

### ■ BOX 2: BENEFITS: THE EVIDENCE

*Evidence for the advantages of high quality early childhood education and care is accumulating as long-term evaluations become available. Some examples:*

#### **Sweden**

One of the first long-term studies of the effects of early childhood services was conducted in Sweden in the early 1990s. Based on an assessment of children in 128 low and middle income families in two of Sweden's largest cities, the study concluded that early childhood education and care was associated with an improvement in academic performance at the age of 13. Study director Bengt-Erik Andersson concluded: *"early entrance into day-care tends to predict a creative, socially confident, popular, open and independent adolescent."*

#### **France**

A study of more than 20,000 pre-school children found that the longer the child attended pre-school, the more positive the results in all grades of elementary education. Positive effects were lasting – being greater in fifth grade than in first – and the benefits were greatest for children from disadvantaged homes.

#### **United States**

A 2005 study of the effectiveness of the *Early Head Start* (EHS) programme in the United States, based on a random sample of over 3,000 families in 17 EHS programmes, has shown that participating children have better cognitive and language development, are more capable of sustained attention, and behave less aggressively towards others.

Surveying all of these and other long-term studies, Canadian researchers Cleveland and Krashinsky conclude:

*"Overwhelmingly, these studies have found that good child care can have very positive effects on these children and that these advantages can be long-lasting. In particular, good child care can compensate, at least partially, for a disadvantaged home life."*

#### **North Carolina, United States**

A generation ago, the North Carolina *Abecedarian Project* enrolled 112 disadvantaged children in a five year, full day, five days a week programme of child care beginning, in some cases, when the children were only three months old.

Those selected for the programme were judged to be at 'high risk of developmental problems'.

Researchers have since followed their progress through school and into adult life. Compared to similar children who did not have the benefit of the programme, the *Abecedarians* showed higher levels of intelligence and school achievement, higher earnings (an additional \$143,000 when projected over a working lifetime), better health, and less dependence on welfare.

With staff-to-children ratios of 1:3 for infants, 2:7 for toddlers, and 1:6 for four and five year-olds, the costs of the project were high (\$14,000 per child in 2002 dollars – higher than the equivalent costs for secondary education). Nonetheless, the experiment is estimated to have yielded a return of \$4 to every \$1 of public money invested.

#### **Ypsilanti, Michigan, United States**

The *Perry Pre-school Project* ran from 1962 to 1967 and brought pre-school education to African-American three and four year-olds from poor backgrounds. Most of the children, who were judged to be at high risk of school failure, participated in the project for one year, attending each weekday morning for two and a half hours. Afternoon visits by teachers to the homes of participating children were also a regular part of the programme.

Comparing 64 children who participated in the project with 64 similar children who did not, a long-term evaluation found that the *Perry Project* children had higher IQs, averaged almost a year extra in education, had a 44 per cent higher chance of graduating from high school, and spent an average of 1.3 fewer years in special education services.

Followed up at age 27, they were found to have had a 50 per cent lower rate of teenage pregnancy and were almost 50 per cent less likely to have spent time in jail (with a one third lower arrest rate for violent crime).

Monitored again at age 40, they were found to have a median income that was 40 per cent higher than the control group. They were also more likely to own their own homes and 26 per cent less likely to have received welfare payments.

The *Perry Pre-school Project* was intensively managed and well-resourced. Staff-to-children ratios averaged 1:6, with all staff educated to degree level and trained as public school teachers. Staff also made regular once-a-week home visits to support mothers and to invite their involvement in reinforcing the pre-school curriculum at home. Overall, the cost was approximately \$11,300 per child per year (in 2007 dollars). A 1995 evaluation suggested that the returns – mainly in the form of reduced welfare and reduced costs for coping with crime – amounted to approximately \$7 for every \$1 invested in the project. A further evaluation published in 2006 calculated the benefit-cost ratio (the ratio of the aggregate project benefits over the life of the child to the input costs) at more than \$8 for every \$1 invested.

#### California, United States

The 2005 report *The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California* found that children who attended pre-schools were more likely to graduate from high school, earned higher salaries as adults, and were less likely to become involved in crime. The authors claim that even if only 25 per cent of California's children benefited from universal pre-school education, the state could still expect a return of \$2 for every \$1 invested.

#### New Zealand

The latest (2004) survey of the *Competent Children Project* in New Zealand shows that 12 year-olds who participated in high quality early childhood education performed better in reading and math. The differences remained even after family income and parental education were taken into account.

#### United Kingdom

The *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE)* is a long-term study of young children's development. Based on a random sample of the UK's child population, the 2003 *EPPE* report concludes that pre-school enhances children's cognitive and social development and that the effects are greatest for disadvantaged children – especially if pre-schools bring together children of mixed backgrounds. Benefits are positively correlated with measures of programme quality and staff qualifications.

#### Summing up

In a presentation to the United States Congress in 2003, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Professor of Child Development at Columbia University, New York, summarized the benefits of early childhood education as follows:

- High quality centre-based programmes enhance the school-related achievement and behaviour of young children.
- These effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education.
- Positive benefits continue into late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school.
- Programmes that are continued into primary school, and that offer intensive early intervention, have the most sustained long-term effects.
- If properly linked to other services, early childhood services can be expected to deliver additional outcomes, such as enhanced maternal employment, less family poverty, better parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion.

These and other studies on the effectiveness of early childhood education and care are summarized and referenced in chapter III of the background paper to this report – *Early Childhood Services in the OECD Countries, Innocenti Working Paper 2008-01* ([www.unicef-irc.org](http://www.unicef-irc.org)).

## Annex 2. Childcare Services in the EU

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### ■ WHAT ARE THE SO-CALLED 'BARCELONA TARGETS'?

Ensuring suitable childcare provision is an essential step towards equal opportunities in employment between women and men. In 2002, at the Barcelona Summit, the European Council set the targets of providing childcare by 2010 to:

- a. at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and
- b. at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

### ■ HOW DO WE MEASURE PROGRESS TOWARDS THE BARCELONA TARGETS?

Provision is measured as children cared for (by formal arrangements other than by the family) as a proportion of all children in the same age group (children under three or between three years and the mandatory school age).

This indicator is broken down by the number of hours per week during which the children are cared for (up to 30 hours a week /30 hours or more a week). Data are collected through an EU harmonised survey, the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

Formal arrangements are defined as the following services: pre-school or equivalent, compulsory education, centre-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche or another day-care centre, including family day-care, professional certified childminders. The care provided by family members, neighbours or non-certified childminders are therefore not included under this definition of 'formal arrangements'.

### ■ HOW ARE THE MEMBER STATES PERFORMING?

Regarding **the lower age-group (0 to 3 years)**, only five Member States (DK, NL, SE, BE, ES) have surpassed the 33% coverage rate, while five others (PT, UK, FR, LU, SI) are approaching this target. In most of the other countries, much still needs to be done to meet the demand for childcare facilities. While seven Member States (FI, IT, CY, EE, DE, IE, LV) have reached an intermediate level of coverage (between 16 and 26%), eight Member States (EL, HU, MT, SK, LT, AT, CZ, PL) show a coverage rate of 10% or less. Nevertheless, these coverage rates relate to all children, irrespective of how many hours per week they attend a childcare facility. Attendance hours vary widely from one country to another, and in numerous countries a particularly high proportion of childcare facilities operate on a part-time basis only. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are prime examples, with under-3s attending childcare centres almost exclusively on a part-time basis.

**Source:** European Parliament, Briefing Item Social policy - 05-03-2009 - 11:40. Available online

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IMPRESS+20090219BRI50012+IT+EM-022-EN+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

# ENDNOTES

- i. Sykora for UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS op. cit. 2010 p. 12.
- ii. UNICEF FYRoM MICS op. cit. 2007 p. 95
- iii. UNICEF Serbia MICS op. cit. 2007 p. 185.
- iv. UNICEF Serbia MICS op. cit. 2007 p. p. 16. What is important to underline, and what the MICS data do not illustrate, is the difference between enrolment, attendance and quality learning. Where more Roma children may be enrolled at the beginning of the year, the child may drop out later in the year. Furthermore, the statistics do not show the quality of the preschool service, for example if this is more oriented towards day care such as nutrition and sleep and less oriented towards early learning and development. Where Roma children might attend the free public kindergartens close to their community, the level of the education may not be according to early learning standards.
- v. See the various reports from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency on Roma, [http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/roma/roma\\_en.htm](http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/roma/roma_en.htm)
- vi. For example, in 2008 Italy declared state of emergency” over Roma immigrants. Germany is deporting 12,000 Roma (an estimated half of which are children and adolescents who grew up in Germany) back to Kosovo. Sweden has this year deported 50 Roma from Eastern Europe for begging, even though begging is not a crime in this country. Denmark deported 23 Eastern European Roma in July 2010. In Belgium, 700 Roma were forced to exit Flanders in July 2010, and given only temporary shelter in Wallonia. The UK government announced legislation that would lead to the eviction of tens of families of Roma and travelers, with the foreseeable effect that they will be pushed them into illegality (Ciobanu 2010).
- vii. In addition, Directive 2000/43/EC protects all people – including Roma – against discrimination on grounds of race or ethnic origin, but there is however a noticeable gap between the legal framework in place and its implementation, and it varies between countries.
- viii. EU action for social inclusion encourages Member States to formulate National Strategic Reports (previously National Action Plans, NAP/Incl) to alleviate poverty and authorises them to use up to 14% of European Social Funds in favour of this policy.
- ix. Friedman, E. et al. (2009) *Conditional cash transfers as a tool for reducing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma*. Roma Education Fund, Working Paper 4.

*On demand of the State Secretary  
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