

# National Roma Strategies

## ESN Policy Statement

ESN underlines the importance of local and regional authorities' participation in the design and delivery of the strategies and the need to pay particular attention to the situation of vulnerable Roma children.

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ESN is the independent network for social services in Europe. Our mission is to help change the lives of the most vulnerable in society through the delivery of quality social services. We bring together the people who are key to the design and delivery of vital care and support at the local level to learn from each other and contribute their experience and expertise to building effective European and national social policy.

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The mission of the European Social Network is to help our members change the lives of the most vulnerable in our societies through the delivery of quality social services. Roma and traveller communities are among the groups at the greatest risk of social exclusion. ESN welcomes the Commission's call for national Roma strategies and wishes to highlight the role of local authorities, but also the situation of vulnerable Roma children.

The European Commission put forward on 5 April an EU-wide Framework for National Strategies for Roma Integration calling on Member States to develop a targeted approach for Roma inclusion in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. The [guidance document](#) focuses on four main areas where it says action is needed:

- Education: ensuring that all Roma children complete primary school
- Employment: cutting the employment gap between Roma and other citizens
- Health: reducing the health gap, for example by cutting child mortality among Roma
- Housing: closing the gap in access to housing and public utilities, such as water and electricity

The Commission has asked Member States to submit their strategies by December 2011.

The Commission's guidance to Member States says that national strategies should "be designed, implemented and monitored in close cooperation and continuous dialogue with Roma civil society, regional and local authorities." (Paragraph IV of the Commission guidance, see link above). ESN wishes to underline this call to Member States to **involve local and regional authorities, particularly social welfare and social work services**, in the design and delivery of the National Roma Strategies.

Local or regional authorities in different European countries have a range of responsibilities that may involve working directly with Roma communities, for example:

- Providing specialist social work and care services
- Providing or facilitating access to primary health care
- Creating local training and employment schemes
- Supporting social or outreach activities that seek to overcome the barriers between different communities and promote community cohesion
- Managing sites designated for travellers
- Providing social housing and associated support services

The provision of these and other public services give local authorities **knowledge and experience that is very relevant to the development of the national strategies**.

Member States should seek to raise awareness about Roma issues in public sector bodies to **overcome potential prejudice** about Roma people and **ensure that public services do not discriminate** against them. In areas with a high concentration of Roma (and other ethnic minorities), it would be constructive to promote the recruitment of Roma people as municipal employees, to encourage their representation in municipal councils and ensure a structured participation of Roma civil society in local decision-making processes.

ESN also wishes to highlight the disproportionate number of **Roma children living in institutions** in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Member States facing this challenge should ensure that the National Roma Strategy is consistent with policies on the deinstitutionalisation of children. ESN also recalls the high proportion of Roma children who leave school prematurely and without formal qualification. Member States should pay particular attention to this phenomenon in combating early school leaving (as one of the Europe 2020 targets).