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Biased Elites, Unfit Policies: Reflections on the Lacunae of Roma Integration Strategies

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In this article, I argue that policymakers employed unconscious biases and racist beliefs in the formulation and the implementation of the current EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies ('EU Roma Framework') and its corresponding national strategies. Using Critical Race Theory, I explore how these policies have reinforced the commonly held belief in the need to civilize and otherwise change the habits of the Roma, and consequently have further reinforced the power imbalance between the Roma and the dominant majority groups (hereinafter used interchangeably with 'non-Roma'). I analyse examples of Roma versus universal policies comparatively, emphasizing biases in formulation, implementation, and discourse. I show that the objectives of the EU Roma Framework and national Roma strategies toward Roma education involve ethnic presuppositions and are far less ambitious than the avowed Europe 2020 strategy; this policy mismatch will likely lead to further educational discrepancies post-2020. Finally, I conclude that policies focused on the Roma are doomed to fail if no prior and concurrent actions are taken to change prejudiced attitudes and the behaviours of non-Roma, in particular those biases influencing policy formulation and implementation.

Introduction

Every citizen of the EU is legally entitled to equal and non-discriminatory access to fundamental rights, including the rights to education; yet not all people can, in fact, exercise those rights. Although intended both in theory and in law to be available to all, in practice fundamental rights often translate into privileges for members of dominant majority groups.

Anti-Roma sentiments and behaviours have hindered the realization of Roma rights in the EU. According to a 2016 FRA survey, one in four Roma have been discriminated against in the most recent year surveyed, and four in ten Roma experienced discrimination in the five years preceding.[1] Across the EU, the poor and the visible Roma have been denied access to quality universal education, have

encountered discrimination while applying for jobs, or have received inferior health care. For example, in Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria, more than 60% of Romani children aged 6 to 15 years old have been placed in majority-Romani or Romani-only schools. The abusive placement of Romani children in special schools has persisted in Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Ref. 1, p. 1). Such rights violations have produced even more material, social, psychological, and symbolic disadvantages and costs for Romani families. Rights violations have also added to the non-Romani (Gadjo) privilege, an intangible asset built up not only by past inequalities and injustice against the Roma but also by policies and discourses controlled by decision makers primarily for the benefit of members of dominant majorities.

The pro-Romani policies and measures implemented at the local, national and regional levels in the 2000s did not yield significant results in the Romani communities and neighbourhoods. Moreover, the EU Roma Framework that emerged in 2011 reproduced,[2] to a large extent, commitments and measures unsuccessfully tested previously by EU governments such as those in Romania and Bulgaria. As a result, a few years before the EU Roma Framework comes to an end, no noticeable changes in EU marginalized Romani communities can be observed if we compare data surveyed by FRA in seven countries in 2008, eleven states in 2011 and nine countries in 2016.[3] Yet, the racialized and the exotic 'other' status of the Roma in EU countries has continued and become more visible in the EU.

As the impoverished Roma continue to be discriminated against and labelled as a uniform community of 'others', it becomes ever more necessary to engage in a critical analysis of Roma-related policies with a view to advancing a paradigm shift that raises the voice of Romani communities and produces concrete results.

In this article, I use analytical and descriptive tools to explore the gaps and limitations of the EU Roma Framework. I draw parallels between the educational measures included in the current national and EU Roma policies, earlier Roma policies and Europe 2020,[4] an EU universal policy document. First, I use policy and discourse analysis to show that ethnic presuppositions have influenced the formulation of Roma educational measures to date. Further, I demonstrate that member states continue to neglect the implementation of their Roma policies, and I examine the lack of interest for the marginalized Roma as a function of Roma racialization. I argue that the exclusive attention to primary education of the minorized further racialized the Roma, and I explore the failure of policies to tackle racism in the attitudes and the behaviours of the dominant majorities. Ultimately, I conclude that the trivial results of Roma policies cannot be completely imputed to biases and racial beliefs in policy making, but that there is a major link between the latter and the growth of *gadjo*-ness.[5] I use Critical Race Theory as my theoretical framework and analyse reports, surveys, interviews and evaluations by international and local human rights organizations working in EU countries. I also examine reports and public documents published by intergovernmental organizations and national governments. I enhance this analysis with my direct experience as a Romani activist in law and policy advocacy at national and EU level.

The Racialization of Public Policies and Discourses

'God has created the school for the Gadje [non-Roma],' a Romani grandmother from Serbia recently explained to her granddaughter.[6] Looking beyond the portrayal of Romani culture as one that rejects education, her statement speaks to the continuous exclusion of Roma from the public school systems. For much of public education's history, scholars, the law and policy makers have reproduced and echoed the same notions about Roma. Gadjo[7] stakeholders have designed legislation and policies for Romani children relying on a popular idea that Romani cultural patterns reject education, an assumption that neglects and simplifies the multiplicity of Romani identity. Scholarly research has likewise advanced the image of the uncivilized and uneducated 'Gypsies.'

The Seeds of Gadjo-ness in Education

What scholarship has failed to critically analyse are the early experiences of the Roma in public education and the racism and rejection experienced by Romani groups within public school systems. Notably, the institutionalization of public school systems coincided with the expulsion of, and oppressive policies against, Roma across Europe: 'persecution continued from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries for most of the European Roma… continued into the twentieth century'.[8] Yet, the narratives about Romani culture as opposed to education were constructed by neglecting to inquire whether public education was historically a real choice for Romani people expelled and rejected all over Europe.

In some European countries, public education was intended neither for Roma nor for poor children. The contexts in which laws and policies were written were not in favour of equal education for all. For example, in Serbia, an 1882 law regulated compulsory six-year education, but at the end of the nineteenth century only one-fifth of Serbian children were in school.[9] The actual development of the public school system only happened in the first half of the twentieth century, when belief in the Roma's 'racial inferiority' was on the rise, as were killings of the Roma. In 1927, the Czechoslovak government declared Roma 'asocial' and ordered Romani children to attend special schools, a policy which de facto persists to date in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.[10]

Historically, education served a racialized function in the case of Romani children: to civilize the uncivilized by estranging the children from their families:

> [A]ll the children of the New Boors, Gypsies, above five years old, were carried away in wagons, during the night of the 21st of December, 1773, by overseers appointed for that purpose; to order that, at a distance from their parents, or relations, they might be more usefully educated, and become accustomed to work. Those Boors who were willing to receive and bring up these children, were paid eighteen guilders yearly from Government.[11]

In the Hapsburg Empire, Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II imposed the forced assimilation of Roma, including attending school and church, as well as giving their children up for adoption to non-Roma families (Ref. 10, p. 3). Gradually,

the more Roma have been problematized as inferior 'Others', the more public education was seen as the key mechanism to detain and civilize the Roma, but not to provide them with equal and quality education:

> The Gypsies have been long enough among civilized people to prove, that they will not be allured by the mere example of others, to free themselves from the fetters of old customs and vices... Their reformation would be a difficult task, as the attempts made by the Empress Theresa evinced: 'you must begin with children, and not meddle with the old stock, on whom no efforts will have effect'. (Ref. 11, p. 3)

There are also documented accounts of Roma trying unsuccessfully to enter early education systems:

> During the winter, a family of Gypsies, of the name of Cooper, obtained lodgings at a house opposite the school. Trinity Cooper, a daughter of this Gypsey [sic.] family, who was about thirteen years of age, applied to be instructed at the school; but, in consequence of the obloquy affixed to that description of persons, she was repeatedly refused. She nevertheless persevered in her importunity, till she obtained admission for herself, and two of her brothers.[12]

Hoyland's research in communities around London also discussed poverty and mobility as factors preventing Romani children from school: '[m]ost of those who have children, are desirous of their receiving an education; though but few have the means of procuring it' (Ref. 12, p .4). These records are just a few scant examples, but they call for further research analysing historical documents or records providing information about Roma experiences with the early public education system in view of understanding some of the Romani discourses, fears and guarding mechanisms regarding educational systems. Finally, while the early literature focused primarily on the Romani nomadic lifestyle and advanced the idea of rejection of education as a Romani cultural feature, it failed to explore in-depth instances of racism, the rejection of Romani children from schools, and the anti-Roma policies that influenced the trajectory of Roma discourse, relations and experiences with the school systems. In general terms, the misrepresentation of the Roma as an uncivilized and uneducated race helped build a low-ranking 'Gypsy' identity, supported the social and political making of *gadjo*-ness, and reinforced Roma racialization.[13] It also informed the development of inadequate and inefficient Roma policies and a fixation on policies to enrol Roma in primary school, as opposed to providing them with long-term equal and quality education.

Ethnically Biased Elites

Misrepresentation is not harmless regarding social, political, and economic rights. As Ella Shohat notes,

> [t]he denial of aesthetic representation to the subaltern has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation. The struggle to 'speak for oneself' cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard.[14]

Thus, findings of post-colonial authors also relate to Romani education.

Very few Romani leaders and scholars have been substantively engaged in the design of modern Roma-related policies, and when they were, their participation involved power misbalance and ethnic symbolism. Gadjo political leaders and decision makers exerted most influence on the development of Roma inclusion policies. But, as research and policy documents show, so far Roma policies at the national and European level have failed the Roma. Therefore, it is important to discuss how and by whom decisions were made. In *Why nations fail?*, Acemoglu and Robinson pose a pertinent question for understanding inequality by looking at policy failure in other regions or countries and asking how decisions are made, who gets to make them, and why these people decide to do what they do.[15] Acemoglu and Robinson also address the issue of 'narrow elites' in discussing policy failure (Ref. 15, p. 4).

Thus, I will explore the question of who gets to make decisions for the Roma by looking at some decision makers who participated in Roma policy formulation and Roma-related debates at the EU, national and/or local levels. I argue that ethnically biased elites have contributed to the failure of Romani policy development and implementation by proposing explicitly discriminatory measures against Roma, using a discriminatory public discourse, neglecting Roma policy formulation, or suggesting low and biased goals in interventions advancing Roma inclusion. In this section, I focus on explicitly racist public discourse.

From the local level to the global, in the past decade, in parallel with commitments from pro-inclusion governments, some policy makers have explicitly suggested implementing anti-Roma actions. For instance, in 2010, the government of France announced a bill proposal to fingerprint Romani citizens of the EU along with other migrants. 'A biometric system will allow us to detect repeated requests for repatriation assistance and help us prevent the undue payment of return aid to people who come once, twice', stated Martine Rodier, the French minister of immigration and integration.[16] The French government withdrew the proposal after the European Commission threatened infringement proceedings for violating the EU Freedom of Movement Directive.[17] Italy went through a similar process a few years earlier.[18] In 2014, Claudio Gambino, the mayor of Borgaro Torinese, proposed separate buses for Roma in his city: '[t]o guarantee the security of our citizens, we need two buses. One for citizens, the other for Roma people'.[19] Alan Mellins, a city councillor in Maidenhead, UK stated that the fastest method to expel the Travellers who had settled without permission on a site in Maidenhead was to execute them.[20] Lastly, far-right parties and extremist organizations have become more vocal in exhibiting anti-Roma rhetoric and violence across Europe.[21]

In the past few years, some influential politicians, known for their explicit racist views against Roma have been invited to contribute to the formulation and discussion of Romani policies. The European Commission has organized several high-level events on Romani issues, known as the European Roma Summits, constituting some of the most important public events on EU Roma policy. In 2014, as Nicolae underlines in an op-ed, three of the key speakers at the Roma Summit had a history of anti-Roma discourse and actions.[22] Traian Basescu, then President of Romania, was sanctioned several times by the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination for racist statements

about Roma.[23] Olguta Vasilescu, the Mayor of Craiova, Romania, is not only a founding member of an extremist party with an anti-Roma agenda (Romania Mare), she also voted in favour of a law proposing to replace the term Roma with the derogatory term 'tigan' (Ref. 22, p. 5) in her capacity as Member of the Romanian Senate. Zoltan Balog, the Minister of Human Resources in Hungary and the official responsible for the Roma national strategy in Hungary, testified in court in favour of a segregated Romani school run by a church.[24] Throughout Europe, though, racist politicians have been invited to contribute to discussions about anti-racism policy measures.

Far right parties with an anti-Roma agenda have also gained a powerful voice in several EU countries. Politicians such as Zoltan Bayer, a member of the ruling Fidesz Party in Hungary, became very virulent and aggressive against Roma. In 2013, Bayer stated that:

> A significant part of the Roma are unfit for coexistence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals, and they behave like animals. When they meet with resistance, they commit murder. They are incapable of human communication. Inarticulate sounds pour out of their bestial skulls. At the same time, these Gypsies understand how to exploit the 'achievements' of the idiotic Western world. But one must retaliate rather than tolerate. These animals shouldn't be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved – immediately and regardless of the method.[25]

The amplification of such anti-Roma voices has not only reinforced current anti-Roma sentiments but it has also provoked anti-Roma violence. The European Roma Rights Center documented 61 incidents of anti-Roma violence between 2008 and 2012, and the murders of seven Romani adults and two children. In June 2008, Human Rights First also documented the killing of a 14-year-old Romani boy in Fenyeslitke and the threat from the perpetrator to 'kill all the Roma in the village'. Far-right parties and organizations also organized marches and rallies across cities and villages in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria.[26] Given their explicitly racist agenda and views, this contingent of elites could not possibly have deconstructed existing Roma policies and measures in search of new approaches, directions and strategies, centred on much broader and more meaningful Romani participation. This being said, implicit biases also influence the Roma agenda, as I will discuss in the next section.

Racialized Modern Modes of Thought in Policy Making

The current elites had managed to reframe education with regard to Roma from a tool to 'extirpate Gypsey habits' (Ref. 12, p. 4) to a means to deliver 'inclusion'. Not only have EU elites stopped using the derogatory term 'Gypsy',[27] the European Commission (EC) decision makers have also ensured financial contributions for the purpose of Roma inclusion. However, beside enrolment to primary education – which I see as the fixation of most Roma policies – the pro-Roma educational policies and measures implemented in the 2000s at the local, national, and regional levels have not had significant results in Romani communities and neighbourhoods as the 2012,

and 2016 FRA reports show (Ref. 1, p. 1).[28,29] Moreover, not only do Roma continue to be failed by mainstream policies, they also face greater safety risks due to racist beliefs at all levels. In this context, a far-reaching question needs to be addressed: why do policymakers focus so much on education policy for the Roma, when the problem rather lies with long-held racist *doxa*,[30] or commonly held beliefs in institutions and societies? Part of the answer is that both conscious and unconscious biases evident in some modern-day research carry the aura of 'science', convincing some policy makers that they must civilize the vulnerable Roma. 'Education has thus become a means of both assisting and "civilising" Roma, of both care and control,' concludes Matras.[31]

Some scholars continue to conceptualize Romani culture as opposed to education. As Bruggemann underlines, Roma have been pathologized as people who consider education as well as reading and writing as 'alien' processes.[32] A knock-on effect of such views is that they feed the linked frameworks of thought on *gadjo*-ness, Roma otherness and alienation, and Roma rejection of the *Gadje* and their institutions. It also distances readers and policy makers from the multiplicity of Romani identities, their self-transformation and hybridity. Finally, it informs the certainty of decision makers that the problem stays with the Roma's disinterest to participate in primary school education. So, the imperialist thought 'to educate the primitive'[33] has yet to be challenged in Roma-related policies.

The agenda of 'Roma integration,' into the 'superior' European culture is still implied in some national and EU policy documents. In June 2011, the EC adopted its first EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Although there is a consensus that this EC political document is relevant and necessary, certain formulations and measures in the EU Roma Framework and its corresponding national strategies reproduce the system of power imbalance between Roma and non-Roma and maintain Roma racialization.

The EC designed the current EU Roma Framework to focus mainly on 'convincing' Roma to enrol in first grade rather than on putting an end to anti-Roma racism in schools, one of the biggest problems that keep Romani children from attending school. When it set its Roma integration goals, the EU Roma Framework, although it acknowledged the discrimination and segregation of Romani children in schools, committed itself primarily to measures targeting Romani children and their families. For example, the

> Commission plans a joint action with the Council of Europe to train about 1000 mediators over two years. Mediators can inform and advise parents on the workings of the local education system, and help to ensure that children make the transition between each stage of their school career. (Ref. 2, p. 2)

Although probably, in practice, some mediators do address anti-Roma racism through awareness activities involving teachers and pupils, the EC elites failed or avoided to explicitly target racism through this policy measure. If one of the objectives of the Framework had been to ensure equal education for Romani children, then the EC would have aimed for those mediators, both Roma and non-Roma to inform

and advise teachers and broader school personnel, on combating racist behaviours and prejudices. If it had been aimed at tackling discrimination, the EC would have suggested that mediators inform Roma and non-Roma parents about human rights, the consequences of racism, etc. Furthermore, although the EU Roma Frameworks mentioned the need to improve the intercultural competences of teachers, it failed to address the need for human rights education for both teachers and pupils, which could have been a more articulate answer to racism in school. Finally, although, as a matter of principle, the document calls for non-discriminatory access of Roma to education, health, employment and housing, it does not suggest any clear measures to target racists and racism, especially in educational institution settings. Applying the principle of non-discrimination in the realization of fundamental rights can only be achieved with the participation of citizens and institutions.

Presuppositions regarding the Roma cultural disinterest in education have also informed the formulation of policies that aim to educate Romani children at inferior levels, compared with their non-Romani peers. School seems to have been conceived with the purpose of educating the *Gadje*, while merely 'civilizing' the Roma. One of the most relevant features of the EU Roma Framework is the link it has with the EU growth policy known as Europe 2020. The EU Roma Framework's objective of reducing the number of Roma who leave secondary education early is consistent with Europe 2020's goal to reduce the percentage of EU early school-leavers to under 10%. The two documents share two other key goals: reducing the risk of poverty and increasing employability in the EU.

However, there is no close correspondence between the two EU policy documents when it comes to the objectives and benchmarks for higher education and employment opportunities. The EU Roma Framework aims to ensure that all Romani children have access 'at least' to primary school and 'encourages' the Roma to 'also' participate in secondary and tertiary education. In contrast, Europe 2020's goal is to increase 'the share of the population aged 30–34 having completed higher education from 31% to at least 40% in 2020' (Ref. 3, p. 2). It adds that 'by 2020, 16 million more jobs will require high qualifications, while the demand for low skills will drop by 12 million jobs' (Ref. 5, p. 2). Across the EU countries, only 1% of the Roma are enrolled in third-level education[34] and only 12% in secondary education.[35] As the 2014 EC report on the implementation of the Roma national strategies underlines, 'beyond compulsory schooling, enrollment differences between Roma and non-Roma become even larger'.[36]

What would happen if the two strategies were to be implemented efficiently? If they were, by 2020, Europe 2020 would raise the percentage of the non-Roma in tertiary education to 40%. However, there is little hope that the Romani population would be similarly affected, given that present strategies contain no specific measures to counteract the high levels of past and present segregation and discrimination against Roma. If the implementation process were to go smoothly, the EU Roma Framework would ensure that all Romani children enrol in primary school. Still this would only minimally contribute to increasing the numbers of Roma graduating from secondary and tertiary education, as research shows that discrimination and

segregation, as well as poor quality of teaching, continue to inform dropout rates amongst Romani children. More than halfway through the EU Roma Framework implementation, we see no positive outcomes for secondary and tertiary education of Romani children and youth (Ref. 1, p. 1).

Thus, even in an optimistic scenario, the opportunity gap between Roma and non-Roma will be maintained post-2020. The prospect of a high demand for qualified workers, mentioned in Europe 2020 will not intersect with the Roma Framework's hope to ensure that all Roma graduate from primary school. Basically, the EU Roma Framework focuses on poverty reduction and reducing early school leavers, but neglects higher education and gaining higher skills and qualifications. The level of primary education among the Roma would probably improve, but the targets set up for Roma youth would not help them become competitive in a new, high-tech labour market post-2020.

Based on current FRA data (Ref. 1, p. 1; Ref. 28, p. 4), it is more probable that the EU Roma Framework strategies by 2020 will have as little result as those from the Roma national policies implemented by governments in Romania and Bulgaria in the 2000s. Roma, as well as Romani rights NGOs, should be ready to face not only an integration fatigue among the governmental officials but also more blame of, and more racism against, Roma. To avoid such a scenario, it is important that governments, especially those in the CEE (Central and East European Countries) take this EC commitment more seriously: they should redesign their strategies, focusing on dismantling anti-Romani racism, consider the feedback from the EC and NGOs, and then allocate funds, and monitor their efforts accordingly. Additionally, the EC should be more persistent in its requests that governments show concrete and measurable results. In these processes, governments and the EC alike should employ more Roma and better qualified professional non-Roma. Thus far, those hired to manage Roma portfolios have often been biased, racist and inexperienced.

To diminish the opportunity gap of marginalized Roma, clear anti-racism measures should have been addressed by both the EU Roma Framework and Europe 2020. Europe 2020 should have envisaged targets and actions meeting the challenges different youth groups on the continent face based on their ethnicity, status, access to rights and opportunities, etc. In turn, the EU Roma Framework and its corresponding national strategies should have aimed for clear indicators and systematic measures to diminish discrimination and increase the participation of Romani youth in higher education. But all this would have required awareness, political will, and knowledge about the challenges and the aspirations of Romani youth from the EC officials, both those holding the Roma portfolio and others.

Some of the national strategies developed under the EU Roma Framework reproduce a vocabulary and approach of otherness. For example, the Romanian National Strategy states that '[o]ne out of six Roma parents invokes ethnic discrimination as the reason for their children's weak school attendance.'[37] In its Current Challenges in Key Domains section, the Strategy does not mention at all segregation in education, or discrimination in access to healthcare, as structural barriers for Romani children's education and health status. In fact, the Objectives set by the Strategy do not mention anti-discrimination measures at all.

The specific objectives of the current Romanian Roma Strategy do include some steps to reduce discrimination and segregation in schools, but continue to use a language of otherness. For instance, the national measures include 'campaigns for prevention and fight against discrimination in schools and mediation of conflicts within the education system, involving students and parents from the Roma minority' (Ref. 37, p. 9). The document also suggests providing only Romani pupils with civil rights education. Yet, the real challenge and need would be to actively involve non-Romani parents and children in the fight against discrimination and anti-Romani racism. Although the Strategy aims to organize campaigns and extra-curricular activities for the prevention of, and the fight against, discrimination, it fails to recognize the stringent need to seriously address the issue by including human rights, diversity and non-discrimination in the national curriculum. Finally, even though the Romanian Roma Strategy promised to establish 'an effective detection, monitoring and prompt intervention system for eliminating incidences of discrimination and school segregation' (Ref. 37, p. 9), such an institutional mechanism has not been put in place to date (2017).

While paying lip service to Roma integration rhetoric, policy makers in fact have failed to address the continuous racism, social power, and privilege of dominant or majority populations and their impact on Romani children. Europe's marginalized Romani children are prevented from having an equal start in education. Worse, they continue to have inferior access to educational services and from a young age on they carry a heavy baggage of intergenerationally transmitted inequalities and state sponsored injustices. They are born in a society in which discrimination, prejudice, and stigmatization of Roma can manifest themselves explicitly, at any age and from any social category.

This approach has also been granting *gadjo*-ness more symbolic and material value and powers (Ref. 13, p. 4). While Romani children come up against all these ethnic burdens, children and families from dominant majority populations benefit from 'unseen' privileges. Some of these 'passive' and unobserved advantages or privileges involve non-Romani parents not having to worry about their children being bullied or discriminated against at kindergarten, rejected from kindergarten enrolment, or sent to a segregated classroom. In addition, non-Roma do not have to find ways to prepare themselves to be resilient and confront discrimination and stigma at an early age. Non-Roma can go to kindergarten and school confident that the teacher speaks the same language, shares similar cultural features, and that the teaching materials will inform them about their history and culture; also, most of the educators and peers are of their own ethnicity. Non-Romani children do not experience teachers and peers making offensive remarks and holistically blaming them as a group. Non-Romani children do not have to learn how to hide their ethnic identity. Roma do and, therefore, such privileges need to be understood and addressed in education.

Evidence gathered in the US shows that the privileges granted to the dominant majority population pass almost unnoticed amongst Whites. Further evidence shows that in combating racism in the US it is more effective to raise awareness of white advantages than of African Americans' disadvantages.[38] Also in Europe, the dominant majority populations are barely aware of the pre-established ethnic advantages

they benefit from, even in the rare situations when they acknowledge the Roma disadvantages. Yet, Romani policies still do not address racism, power dynamics, and *gadjo* privilege.

Sub-standard Policy Documents and Non-implementation

In a 2013 public intervention, Victor Ponta, the Prime Minister of Romania, stated that Roma NGOs had been responsible for Roma policies in the past 20 years, that they had failed, that consequently the Government would take the lead, even if only for a year:

> In the past 20 years there has been used a lot of money, there have been organized many debates, and unfortunately, it proved not to be an efficient system. So, the Government's decision is to use the financial resources better for concrete projects, such as the Ferentari project, the largest district of Bucharest, a special project dedicated to Roma integration and the furthering of their living conditions.[39]

Why would Roma not fit under the same umbrella as other Romanian citizens in terms of the protection of their rights by the state institutions? In the case of the Romanian Prime Minister, not only did he confuse the mandate NGOs hold with that of public institutions. His frame of thought also reflected the racialization of the Roma by Romanian government representatives. In his view, Roma should have been dealt with by their own representatives. Such an ethnically biased mode of thought often leads to substandard policy documents for Roma, and Romania's 2011 National Roma Strategy is a good example (Ref. 2, p. 2).

The racialization of the Roma contributed to sub-standard policy papers and non-implementation of Roma policies to which governments had committed themselves. For example, the EU Roma Framework aims to achieve by 2020 some results regarding Roma education: ensure that all Romani children complete at least primary education, provide Romani children access to quality and non-discriminatory education, and reduce the numbers of those who leave secondary school early. The EU has also asked the Member States to design or adjust existing policies to meet the Framework's goals. In fact, most countries with large Roma populations in CEE had implemented targeted Roma policies before 2011, and although most failed to produce results, the governments of the countries concerned continued to follow the same policy pattern. Thus, not surprisingly, the 2016 FRA survey conducted in nine EU countries concludes that Romani people aged 16–24, along with other age groups, faced

> persisting low levels of educational achievement… The highest proportion of Roma without any formal education in all three age groups is found in Greece… High proportions can also be seen in Portugal, Spain and Croatia, while the survey found low proportions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria. (Ref. 1, p. 1)

There have been considerable gaps in the formulation and implementation of the national strategies by the EU governments. The EU Roma Framework has encouraged member states to address four main areas of intervention: education, employment, health, and housing. But then again, previous national strategies in CEE suggested sectoral interventions in these four priority areas, too. This

approach was piloted from 2005 to 2015 in nine and later 12 countries as part of a regional governmental commitment known as the Decade of Roma Inclusion.[40] By 2012, when the new Roma strategies were formulated, independent reports had pointed out the gaps in formulation and implementation of the Decade National Action Plans. As Bernard Rorke has shown in a report analysing the Roma strategies adopted in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia (countries with the largest Roma populations in the EU), the 2012–2020 national strategies 'are replete with weaknesses already evident in the Decade NAPs [Decade of Roma Inclusion, national action plans]'.[41] Despite the Decade's poor outcomes in Roma communities[42], governments failed to address errors and gaps detected in the formulation of the Decade. The new national strategies followed a similar sectoral, short-term approach. Still, the Slovakian Roma Strategy reflects on some of the lessons learned and also underlines anti-discrimination and minority rights amongst its priorities.[43]

Civil society organizations have criticized the poorly conceived policies as follows: 'There are no indications of how the national strategies will be implemented in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, and Romania,' complained the European Roma Policy Coalition.[44] In 2012, the EC also asked the governments to revise the national strategies based on the country-specific gaps identified by EC policy experts. Although the EC used rather diplomatic language to analyse the strategies submitted by the member states, it still provided recommendations to the governments to improve the policy documents by addressing the so-called *structural pre-conditions*, such as allocating proportionally appropriate financial resources, monitoring and enabling policy adjustment, fighting discrimination, working with local and regional authorities and civil society, and establishing national contact points for Roma integration.[45] In 2013, an EC document insisted that '[t]he present communication focuses on these structural pre-conditions as… effective changes are still insufficient' (Ref. 45, p. 11). It did acknowledge that 'some steps' had been taken 'at the policy level in the Member States, in particular, to better coordinate all stakeholders active on Roma integration' (Ref. 45, p. 11).

Nevertheless, the implementation process does not appear very promising. At the national level, governments have failed to identify the real problems and, consequently, to produce results. For instance, in 2011, when the EU required new Roma policy commitments from the Member States, the Romanian government suggested a strategy that operated with exactly the same approach, language, and directions as its previous 2001 strategy – consequently reproducing the same errors. The Roma strategy adopted by the Romanian government in 2001 recorded a few notable improvements in the Roma enrolment rates for primary education but, overall, it did not lead to social, educational, or economic advancement among the marginalized Roma communities.[46] Even though a larger portion of Romani children attend compulsory education, a 2011 FRA survey shows that Romania is behind most EU countries surveyed: 22% of Roma children, compared with 6% of non-Roma, are still not attending compulsory education (Ref. 46, p. 11). Moreover, the 2016 FRA survey finds that 'there are no substantial changes in compulsory schooling of Roma in Romania' (Ref. 1, p. 1).

Moreover, in some countries some of the good practices underlined by their governments for the EC report had already been in operation for over a decade. For example, as the main activities in its new strategy, Romania counts summer kindergartens, reserved places for Roma in high schools and universities, the training of Roma mediators, the increasing use of the Romani language in schools, and second chance and early childhood education.[47] The reserved places for the Roma in higher education were made available to Romani youth as early as the 1990s, but due to other systemic gaps, including limited access to early childhood services and poor quality of primary and elementary education, actual progress has been slow. From 1998 to 2012, the number of Roma with college degrees remained around 1% for males, while it increased for females from 0.7% to 1.6%.[48] As the educational programs showed slow progress, one would expect that the government would have made efforts to improve, to innovate, and to analyse mistakes made in order to come up with additional educational measures to achieve better outcomes by 2020.

Some of the measures that governments suggested as positive developments should have been questioned by the EC and other relevant institutions. Romania continued to report summer kindergartens for Romani children as positive developments years after NGOs first used them as a temporary measure in the early 2000s.[49] One month of kindergarten activities cannot deliver to Romani children the knowledge and skills that other children gain during 1 to 2 years of pre-school. Also, it prevents Roma–non-Roma interactions. But most importantly, by maintaining this parallel, economical, low quality, short-term system, the institutions exclude Romani children from exercising their right to pre-school education. The government has yet to shift its focus to ensuring equal and non-discriminatory participation of all Romani children in mainstream early childhood education along with other children. Thus, the EC should have acknowledged the limitations of such measures, and questioned them, instead of accepting them as positive developments.

In 2015, the EC seemed rather pleased with the progress of most EU governments. Nevertheless, it also concluded that:

> [t]ranslating national strategies into action at local level is in an early phase and needs to be supported with sustainable funding, capacity building and full involvement of local authorities and civil society, and robust monitoring to bring about the much needed tangible impact at local level, where the challenges arise. (Ref. 49, p. 12)

Indeed, local authorities should have played a significant role in implementation, and their accountability should have been as relevant as that of the national governments. Local Roma groups and initiatives should have had a say in the implementation of the strategies concerned, not only from an empowerment perspective but also because Romani people have experience and knowledge about their communities.

Overall, the advance of the EU Roma Framework on the EU agenda has involved diplomatic, political language and heavy criticism from NGOs, along with slow EU processes and often artificial responses from governments. The infrastructure for Roma policy has improved at the EU and national levels, but at the community level one still sees little political will and insignificant implementation of measures to really

improve the situation. Thus, more than halfway through the implementation cycle, the marginalized Romani communities themselves see little of the added-value and the hoped for success that the national strategies promised.

Why do some governments in Europe continue such dysfunctional policy patterns? One possible answer is that decision makers do not know what exactly is needed to advance Roma inclusion, and as a consequence they suggest unsuitable policies and measures. This argument was probably more valid, for example, in Romania and Bulgaria in 2001, but after the 2000s Roma strategies had proved to be a failure, there was no reasonable explanation to suggest similar policy papers again in 2011. However, now that the trend has continued, it is hard to suggest that the governmental institutions have the political will to produce effective policy documents. More probably, as the Roma have no social power, policy makers have employed unconscious biases and racist beliefs in the formulation or the implementation of the current EU Roma policy and its corresponding national strategies.

From Targeting the Oppressed to Meeting the Oppressor

A large proportion of European citizens entertain strong prejudices against the Roma, a legacy perpetuated over generations. A 2015 survey by Pew Research Center shows that 86% of the Italians, 60% of the French, and almost half of the Spaniards, British and Germans have unfavourable opinions about Roma.[50] In day-to-day interactions, in many different areas and situations, children, parents, teachers and representatives of institutions alike find themselves in circumstances where they judge, mistreat, reject or discriminate against the Roma in their environment.

Prejudice by itself, not to mention the damage caused by discrimination and violence, is far from being inoffensive for people in communities with a history of oppression, marginalization, and powerlessness.[51] As few measures have been taken to raise awareness of this, for instance during educational practice, Roma continue to experience violence and discrimination, as shown by their recent experiences in Europe: racially motivated crimes in Hungary, segregation in schools in the Czech Republic and Greece, and forced expulsions in France. Indeed, prejudice and discrimination have evolved into hate crimes and anti-Roma violence and rhetoric even in some of the most progressive European countries (Ref. 51, p. 13). Broadly speaking, along with other factors, prejudice and discrimination have hampered the realization of Roma rights.

During the 2000s, Roma policies in various EU countries paid little attention to changing perceptions about the Roma and tried to reduce racism against them. And even in 2011, both the EU Framework and the Council conclusions associated with it continued to neglect these goals. Only in 2015 did a EC communication put more emphasis on prejudice and discrimination in advancing the Roma Framework (Ref. 49, p. 12). Still, in general terms, Roma inclusion was understood as a process that would predominantly target the Roma themselves.

We cannot minimize the role that the majority populations play, as active participants in realizing Roma rights and ensuring their equality before the law. The status

quo of exclusion persists not only because of historical inequalities or poverty but also because ordinary people continue to practice exclusion, often completely unaware of the consequences of their prejudice.

For Romani children, the level of unfairness, prejudice, and discrimination that exists in their interactions with the non-Roma influences their level of participation in schools and their academic attainment. These interactions happen every day: Romani children share classrooms and playgrounds with non-Roma peers; non-Roma teachers interact daily with Romani children and adolescents and teach them a curriculum that is not sensitive to the experiences or needs of minority individuals. For example, in several desegregation initiatives implemented in EU countries,[52] Romani children have only been moved from a segregated environment to one that is hostile, where they are surrounded by peers and teachers who hold strong prejudices against them.

For adults, the same circumstances that majority populations enjoy within a rights framework often turn into unspoken and unconscious denials of rights for the Roma. For instance, non-Roma employers often interview potential Roma job candidates and reject them just because of their skin complexion. In one survey of companies in the Czech Republic, almost half of respondents said they would not employ Roma).[53] In addition, Romani families and community members interact with non-Roma representatives of institutions which, lacking a systemic program of non-discrimination education, are not only culturally insensitive and biased but sometimes they also display negative attitudes and discriminatory actions against Roma.

What may we hope for, then, from a desegregation initiative if Romani children are still surrounded by peers and teachers who hold prejudices against them and repeatedly remind them through actions, attitudes and words that they are not equal? How could a potential employer objectively interview a Romani person, if he or she grew up without any anti-bias education?

In the EU Roma Framework context, most states have missed the opportunity to propose measures to prevent and combat prejudice and anti-Roma racism. The concept of Roma inclusion has been narrowed to actions directed mainly at the Roma. The documents aim to improve Roma access to education, health, housing and employment, but they often fail to provide concrete goals and measures to decrease anti-Roma discrimination and prejudice: 'awareness-raising and anti-discrimination measures are a precondition to the success of Roma inclusion', but 'these measures are not prioritized enough within most NRIS [National Roma Inclusion Strategies]' (Ref. 9, p. 12). Worse even,

> [d]espite the Commission's efforts to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia, in many Member States, especially those with the largest Roma communities and which have been strongly hit by the economic crisis, anti-Gypsyism, far right demonstrations, hate speech and hate crime have been on the rise. (Ref. 49, p. 12)

If these policies were to have optimal effects, implementers should have widened their scope, moving from a developmental and poverty-oriented approach to Roma inclusion, and aiming, among other goals, to target majority populations through interventions that stress human rights, and diminish discrimination and prejudice.

Thus, the EU Roma Framework and the national strategies need to add clear targets for the non-Roma population. They must tackle prejudice and racism not only through random and often inefficient awareness-raising campaigns or trainings, as suggested by the 2013 European Council recommendation,[54] but also through concerted anti-bias measures implemented in schools at all levels, in the training of teachers, doctors, journalists and all other professionals working directly with the Roma or influencing public opinion, etc. The EU Roma Framework and its corresponding strategies at national levels need to target the non-Roma population, and everyone in Europe – both Roma and non-Roma – should benefit from a non-biased education that is sensitive to cultural, religious and all other forms of diversity.

Conclusion

The gaps between policy commitments and the actual outputs of implemented policies reveal a sense of failure all over Europe. Although one can point out various isolated 'good practice' projects, the 2000s policies for Roma did not produce noteworthy systemic changes. Rather, in formulating their new strategies for the EU Framework, governments neglected to learn from their previous failures and continued along the same paths, setting up unrealistic objectives and elusive anti-discrimination measures.

Along with limited funds, an inability to monitor progress, and poor implementation, one can also question the approach that states took to ensure Roma inclusion. In order to advance Roma inclusion, it is important to reflect critically on the integrationist, developmental approach that exclusively targets the Roma, and to open it up more to cultural pluralism, and to efforts targeting racism, discrimination, implicit and explicit biases, and those who exclude minorities. Thus, inclusion policies should not aim only to improve the social and economic situation of the Roma, but also to involve those who exclude them, creating a process of learning, awareness, and acceptance. Among the lessons learned from the previous policy experiments at both national and regional levels is the need to push for more integrated, more comprehensive, and better resourced inter-sectorial and participatory approaches for Roma inclusion.

In addition to improving the linkage between approaches, it is also crucial to better correlate the policies targeting the mainstream population and the Roma. Revisiting the EU Roma Framework and its corresponding national strategies should deliver concrete goals and benchmarks for secondary and tertiary education to keep up with the aims set by EU 2020; this would not only reduce the existing discrepancies and the distinct non-Roma privilege in education, but it would also prevent massive differences after 2020. Moreover, mainstream policies, such as EU 2020, should take into account the particular situations of minorities and aim to provide them with equal opportunities as they are designed and implemented. Mainstream policies should be able to reflect a human rights approach, and the approaches should be inter-sectorial and long-term.

Finally, effective policies for the Roma require real political will in implementation and, in particular, the presence of non-biased decision-makers in the formulation process, people who can design policies based on data and talk with the communities.

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