

## Roma Inclusion: a Need, a Challenge and a Duty

This was the topic of the Dialogue Seminar which took place this 27 June at the European Commission. About 12 million Roma live throughout Europe today. To foster their inclusion, the EU recently adopted an EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020. Churches welcomed the adoption of this framework, especially as it looks beyond the current EU and considers support to enlargement countries for the social and economic inclusion of Roma. However, this framework should better distinguish short and long term perspectives: access to employment, healthcare, education and housing should be achieved speedily while more fundamental societal changes may require more time. Churches' representatives advocated more ambitious goals in access to justice, including the granting of official documents. Concerning education, the aim should be to ensure that all Roma children complete at least secondary school in order to get better jobs, and vocational training for adults should be envisaged. Confessional schools can play an important role here.

“Unemployment and lack of education are the two major challenges faced by Roma in Europe“ stated Mgr János Székely. The Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom-Budapest referred to many successful initiatives of integration and education run by the Churches in Hungary. But he also recalled that, besides creating jobs and providing education, the formation of consciences is crucial: “Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology”. Roma inclusion is a two-way process: public authorities and Churches can help Roma people become aware of their responsibilities and duties towards society.

Archbishop of the Church of Sweden Dr Anders Wejryd reported on the process of reconciliation and inclusion of the Roma Community by the Churches in Sweden: “Churches need to reflect about the role that they have played in excluding Roma people. The Church has committed members when it comes to the rights of minorities. Therefore the Church can be of importance in the public debate and also when forming opinions locally.”

Talking about The contribution of the churches in the EU strategy on Roma inclusion Church representatives emphasised the need to change discriminatory attitudes in majority societies towards Roma. They recommend that Member States actively tackle public discrimination and racism. At the same time, education about Roma culture, history and identity, as diverse as it may be, seems vital and would be recommended as a subject for teaching in schools.

EU Officials admitted that the EU Commission had not been fully able to evaluate the use of EU funds spent on Roma Integration at local level in past years. The new Roma Strategy therefore aims at bringing a better assessment and regulation of EU funds. While recalling that Roma inclusion lies within the competence of Member States, Mr László Andor, the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion announced that the new Framework will make the EU Funds more accessible and focused on a territorial approach. “Churches are major social actors in the field of Roma integration: we need to work together and we count on your support” he concluded.

After the endorsement of the Roma Inclusion Framework by the European Council on 25 June, Member States will now have to elaborate the national inclusion plans. It is therefore

crucial that governmental and non-governmental actors and Churches coordinate at national levels in order to achieve the goals of the Roma Strategy.

Source: [www.comece.org](http://www.comece.org)