



Civil society monitoring report on the quality  
of the national strategic framework  
for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation  
**in Belgium**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASBL	Non-profit association
CIRE	Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners
CMGVR	Roma and Travellers Mediation Centre
COCOM	Joint Community Commission (Flemish-French speaking in Brussels)
CPAS	Public Centre for Social Action
EC	European Commission
FOYER	Regional Integration Centre
GGC	Community Commission
Minderhendenforum	Forum of Minorities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020
NRSF	National Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030
NRP	Nation Roma Platform
SPP SI /POD MI	Federal Public Service for Social Integration (NRCP)
UNIA	Equal Opportunity Body
VGC	Flemish Community Commission
VZW	Non-profit association

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Belgian National Roma Strategic Framework (NRSF) for 2021-2030 follows the structure of the previous National Roma Integration Strategy for 2012-2020 (NRIS), albeit in a more comprehensive way, and focuses on the sustainability and continuation of activities that have been proven successful and are being implemented, for the larger part, by a few pro-Roma civil society organisations. While this can be seen as positive, small Roma-led grassroots organisations are excluded from the consultation process for the design and implementation of the NRSF, mostly due to the lack of capacity of these organisations to understand the process, submit project proposals and implement activities.

The document is in coherence with the national and European legislation combining mainstream and specific measures at various administrative levels (federal, regional, local). The biggest strength of the Belgian NRSF is that it declares the funding for all of its activities (goals).

Weaknesses, however, remain the lack of participation of a broader Roma civil society coalition in the consultation process, and that not enough attention has been paid in detail to the serious problems of the Roma in Belgium such as the housing of Travellers, protection of Roma children, and lack of official recognition of the Roma Holocaust.

### Participation

The participation of Roma in the elaboration of the Belgian NRSF was limited to a very small number. The NRSF activities target Roma participation through the employment of service providers, for example, mediators, who are to work further with local Roma communities and provide opportunities for funding of grassroots organisations. There is no detail on how Roma are going to be involved in the monitoring of the NRSF.

### Relevance

Above all, the concept of antigypsyism is not well reflected at the institutional level in Belgium. The NRSF refers to the concept of antigypsyism only once as a horizontal objective, while the document mostly refers to the concept of discrimination. Housing policies for Travellers remain irrelevant while the media is still maintaining the negative image of Roma. While these two issues can be qualified as the most widespread and most visible when talking about Roma in Belgium, these are not addressed in the NRSF under the section dedicated to fighting antigypsyism and discrimination at different levels, including institutional. The NRSF lacks adequate actions for combating the stereotypes and discriminatory practices against Roma communities in Belgium.

### Expected effectiveness

While the collection of ethnic data in Belgium is prohibited, the NRSF envisages the collection of proxy data from partners based on a special interview template. There is no dedicated budget for monitoring the NRSF. The NRSF promises to follow the indicators for Roma inclusion and the monitoring standards of the European Commission. Without clear monitoring indicators and data, the implementation of the NRSF will be very challenging.

### Alignment with the EU Strategic Framework

Overall, the Belgian NRSF is aligned with the EU Roma Strategic Framework. Special attention is placed on the seven sectoral objectives of the EU Roma Framework, while there is also a reference to Eastern European Roma, Syrian Dom communities, Roma women, children, and LGBTQ+.



# INTRODUCTION

## *National Roma strategic framework*

The Belgian National Strategy for Integration of Roma (NRSF)<sup>1</sup> was adopted in June 2022. The previous National Strategy for Integration of Roma 2012-2020 (NRIS)<sup>2</sup> has been a reference for the actions related to Roma within the period from 2012 until 2021.<sup>3</sup> The updated NRSF takes forward the positive elements from the previous document by continuing the implementation of successful practices, which are described in detail in the action plan – part of the NRSF. This renewed version, like the previous one, uses a combined measures approach that contains both mainstream measures (for example, the integration of newcomers in the German community), as well as targeted measures, such as those related to Travellers.

The authority that coordinates the preparation and implementation of the NRSF and serves as a National Roma Contact Point is the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration –SPP SI/POD MI.<sup>4</sup> The Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration fights against poverty and it is the responsible federal institution for social economy and federal urban policy. The objectives of this federal structure are: upholding the right to social integration; tackling poverty and social exclusion in all their forms; acting for social cohesion and sustainable development of large cities; ensuring integration by giving priority to social assistance; and guaranteeing the minimum income and social assistance. The PPS SI/POD MI is directed by two ministers and secretaries of state: the Minister for Pensions and Social Integration, in charge of persons with disabilities and combating poverty, and the Minister for Development Cooperation and in charge of urban policies. The National Roma Contact Point is coordinated by the Minister for Pensions and Social Integration.

The main role in the implementation of the NRSF is delegated to the Belgian Regions (Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels Capital), and especially a few big NGOs working with Roma and providing services to the Roma population (*Foyer vzw*<sup>5</sup> and *Centre de Médiation des Gens du Voyage et des Roms*<sup>6</sup>).

The Belgian NRSF is a document that has been elaborated by the technical secretariat of the Belgian NRCP. The new NRSF is a 40-page document in which approximately half of its volume is dedicated to the analysis of the situation of the Roma population in Belgium, as well as information about the implemented projects and actors at the regional level. The second part of the NRSF, titled the Action Plan, includes 32 actions corresponding to

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<sup>1</sup> *Belgian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2020-2030*, accessed 23 October 2022, <https://www.mi-is.be/nl/de-nationale-strategie-voor-de-integratie-van-roma?fbclid=IwAR1lqeQeUoQIrPPYBGWzCpsELX43t7rngRhJfmvVjny6hHNOrcq9ouCvg8Y>

<sup>2</sup> *Belgian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2012-2020*, accessed 23 October 2022, <https://www.mi-is.be/nl/de-nationale-strategie-voor-de-integratie-van-roma?fbclid=IwAR1lqeQeUoQIrPPYBGWzCpsELX43t7rngRhJfmvVjny6hHNOrcq9ouCvg8Y>.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Roma Inclusion Measures Reported under the EU Framework for NRIS Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Report on the Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies - 2019 - Belgium*, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52019SC0320>.

<sup>4</sup> *Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration*, accessed 23 October 2022, <https://www.mi-is.be/en>.

<sup>5</sup> Foyer Vzw, n.d., <https://www.foyer.be/?lang=en>.

<sup>6</sup> Centre de Médiation Des Gens Du Voyage et Des Roms, n.d., <https://www.cmgv.be/>.

the seven objectives<sup>7</sup> of the EU Roma Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation. Most of the actions from the Action Plan are financially secured. These actions are divided among the three regions of Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels Capital while there are also actions coordinated at the federal level.

Not all the regions have actions that correspond to all the seven objectives of the EU Roma Strategy. Overall, the Belgian NRSF is a reflection and continuation of the policies and actions taken within the last ten years by a few government structures and pro-Roma organisations, which are described in the Action Plan of the NRSF, and their continuation is envisaged in the new period. Many of the actions in the NRSF 2021-2030 are projects that have already been implemented in the recent past or projects that are currently implemented and are being prolonged on a biannual basis.

During the preparation of the NRSF, there was a consultation process established with representatives of the regional authorities, the Belgium Equality Body *UNIA*, and organisations that work with Roma: *Foyer vzw*, *Centre de médiation de Gens du voyage et Roms en Wallonie*, *CIRÉ asbl*, and *Diogenes asbl*. Two consultation meetings were held, due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, online on 26 May and 9 June 2021 where recommendations were given for the content of the new Belgian NRSF.

While there are several Roma-led civil society organisations in Belgium, the consultation process on the new Belgian NRSF failed to include Roma representatives from Roma-led organisations and structures. Instead, it included only non-Roma representatives working for institutions or pro-Roma organisations.

The NRSF does not define clearly the monitoring and evaluation instruments, as well as it does not determine how the participation of Roma representatives' structures will be incorporated into the process.

### **About this report**

This report is part of a larger Roma Civil Monitoring exercise associated with the implementation of the NRSF. Its focus is the assessment of the newly adopted NRSF and more specifically of the following: Participation of the Roma throughout the policy development process of the NRSF; The NRSF's relevance to the needs of the Roma people in their diversity; The NRSF's expected effectiveness; Alignment of the NRSF with the 'EU Roma Strategic Framework'.

The purpose of the report is to provide participatory and inclusive monitoring input and reflections on the design and content of the NRSF, by civil society actors, to both national authorities and the European Commission.

The drawing up of this report has applied the following methods:

- Meetings (4): with the representatives of the civil society organisations; with the technical secretariat of the National Roma Contact Point; with the representatives of the regional authorities concerning local policies; with representatives of the municipalities and structures working on Roma issues.
- Interviews (5): At the federal (national) level, there are two bodies with which short interviews were conducted before the approval of the NRSF. Additionally, interviews were held with the representatives of local authorities, Roma and non-Roma NGOs.
- Analysis of reports and notes (4): There are a few reports, a collection of articles, opinion papers, and recommendations prepared by social actors addressing the

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<sup>7</sup> The seven objectives of the EU Roma Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030 are equality, inclusion and participation (horizontal) and education, employment, housing and health (sectoral).

authorities for more comprehensive policy regarding the Roma population in Belgium.

- Books published (3): One of the organisations active in the field of integration has published in the period of 2016-2020 three books on the situation of Roma and Dom communities in Brussels.

# 1. PARTICIPATION

## 1.1. Roma participation in the NRSF preparation

The preparation of the NRSF has been undertaken by the Secretariat of the National Roma Contact Point, coordinated by the Ministry for Pensions and Social Integration. The preparation of the NRSF was assured by organising two online consultation meetings on 26 May and 9 June 2021 under the Belgian National Roma Platform. The main actors consulted are representatives of Federal and regional authorities: of the Flemish Community Commission [*Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie*]; of the Public Services of Wallonia [*Service public de Wallonie*]; of the municipalities of Gent and Sint-Niklaas; of the Belgian Equality Body UNIA, and civil society representatives: from Foyer vzw; Centre de médiation de Gens du voyage et Roms en Wallonie; CIRÉ asbl, Diogenes asbl, CAW Antwerpen, and Forum of Minorities.

The participation of Roma was limited to a very small number, assured via two Roma school mediators (from Foyer and CAW Antwerpen) and one Roma activist. This accounts for about 15% of the consulted persons. While in the period 2010-2021, six local and five international Roma organisations were registered in Belgium, none of them was invited, nor any representative of the Roma Travellers community. Within these two consultations, a few working groups had the task to prepare a set of recommendations around the sectoral objectives for the NRSF 2021-2030.

## 1.2. Roma participation in the NRSF implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

The Belgian NRSF envisages Roma participation in its implementation. In the 32 actions listed in the document, the participation of Roma is mentioned as employees: Roma mediators (actions 6, 13, 15, 29) and Roma stewards (actions 6, 20, 21). On the other hand, Roma are being mentioned as participants in consultative and monitoring meetings, such as the Roma Platform (Action 10) funded by the DG Justice of the European Commission since 2016.

Concerning the monitoring, the NRSF lacks concreteness. The document mentions that the indicators developed by the EC will be used for the monitoring and evaluation process without any additional information on what kind of consultation processes or research are planned. The PPS SI will “try to link measurable indicators to the objectives as much as possible. Given the limitation on ethnic data, proxy data supplemented by qualitative data from research and consultations with Roma civil society organisations, local authorities, etc. can be used”.<sup>8</sup>

There is no overall assessment or special report on the effectiveness and implementation of the Belgian NRIS 2012-2020. The 2018 Roma Civil Monitoring Report was prepared by the Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the measures taken between 2012 and 2018. Concerning the evaluation of the NRSF 2021-2030, part D3 of the NRSF states that: “the NRSF actions will be evaluated by sending the partners [civil society organisations and institutions] a template that will encourage, within the legal limits [collection of ethnic data is prohibited], the creation of the necessary data for the follow-up of the plan”.<sup>9</sup>

According to the NRSF, the NRCP will report the implementation to the European Commission every two years starting from 2023. Based on the Council’s Recommendations

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<sup>8</sup> NRSF, p. 18

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2013,<sup>10</sup> the Belgian NRCP has reported towards the European Commission only once in 2017. The implementation report was published in 2019.<sup>11</sup> No other information on the evaluation of the NRIS has been published up to the date of this report.

### 1.3. System of policy consultation with civil society and stakeholder

There is no structured consultation process with civil society organisations and institutions with regard to Roma integration in Belgium. Meetings are being organised only on demand by the Secretariat of the NRCP.

Funding for these meetings is provided under the National Roma Platforms projects of the Belgian NRCP funded by the DG Justice of the European Commission. Such funding for Belgium has been in place since 2016 on a bi-annual basis. The NRSF does not provide any indications as to whether the same format will be used for further consultations or whether a different form of consultations will be introduced in the future.

When it comes to consultations at the government level, there are several government institutions that are taking part in the National Roma Contact Point consultations:<sup>12</sup> Flemish Community Commission [*Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie*],<sup>13</sup> Flemish Equal Opportunities, Integration and Civic Integration Department [*Vlaamse overheid, Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, Afdeling Gelijke Kansen, Integratie en Inburgering*],<sup>14</sup> The Public Service of Wallonia [*Service Public de Wallonie - Direction interdépartementale de la Cohésion sociale (DiCS)*],<sup>15</sup> Common Community Commission of Region Brussels Capital [*COCOM/GGC*],<sup>16</sup> and the Ministry of the German-speaking community [*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*].<sup>17</sup>

The tasks of the National Roma Contact Point are to follow-up on the annual monitoring of the implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework; formulate recommendations regarding needed changes and updates of the National Roma Inclusion Strategy – including stakeholder consultations within the National Roma Platform; ensure the link between the National Roma Strategic Framework and the European framework.

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<sup>10</sup> Council Recommendations on Effective Roma Integration Measures in the Member States 2013, accessed 5 November 2022:

[https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/139979.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/139979.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Roma Inclusion Measures Reported under the EU Framework for NRIS Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Report on the Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies - 2019 - Belgium. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019SC0320>

<sup>12</sup> Belgian National Roma Contact Point, accessed 23 October 2022:

<https://www.mi-is.be/nl/het-belgisch-nationaal-roma-contactpunt?fbclid=IwAR1lWP2hEhGLYvtj0Eq4Q2SWU7M2Z5tdRuI8RrBfNvi9GFOSbFpV9osW4eM>.

<sup>13</sup> Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://www.vgc.be/>.

<sup>14</sup> Vlaamse Overheid, Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, Afdeling Gelijke Kansen, Integratie En Inburgering, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/organisaties/administratieve-diensten-van-de-vlaamse-overheid/beleidsdomein-kanselarij-bestuur-buitenlandse-zaken-en-justitie/agentschap-binnenlands-bestuur/gelijke-kansen-integratie-en-inburgering>.

<sup>15</sup> Service Public de Wallonie - Direction Interdépartementale de La Cohésion Sociale (DiCS), accessed 23 October 2022: <https://spw.wallonie.be/guide/guide-services/15960>.

<sup>16</sup> Common Community Commission (COCOM), accessed 23 October 2022: <https://be.brussels/about-the-region/the-community-institutions-of-brussels/cocom>.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of the German-Speaking Community, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://ostbelgienlive.be/>.

The consultation process with civil society is often limited to presenting position papers, presenting outcomes of the projects or discussing main Roma issues: employment, health, education, discrimination, and poverty reduction. This is the reason why the Belgian NRSF dedicates large sections to listing the existing projects and actions of civil society organisations. In this process, Roma participation is often limited to one or two employees of the associations that work on some of these issues. Not all recommendations given by civil society organisations to the NRCP are taken into consideration in the NRSF (e.g., homelessness among Roma in Belgium, child protection, addressing schooling among travellers, and others).

#### 1.4. Empowerment of Roma communities at the local level

The empowerment of Roma at the local level is not an explicit objective of the NRSF. It is not envisaged to be done directly by the institutions. In the process of the NRSF implementation, the Roma are a target group – they are targeted by social and integration services. In some of the measures, Roma participate more actively in the implementation of the projects as Roma mediators/stewards. There is no participation of Roma in the monitoring at all.

However, in four of the actions foreseen (Actions 3, 8, 10 and 11) there is the possibility for empowering local Roma communities through funding of grassroots Roma associations that can implement activities – either for service provision or for community empowerment. Action 10 is focusing on the Roma Platform, namely on the participation of and consultation process with Roma.

In 17 of the actions,<sup>18</sup> projects are mentioned that have already been implemented, as well as projects that have multi-annual financing from the Regions that involve/employ Roma individuals at the local level: projects of Foyer vzw (Roma mediators, stewards, ESF employment, and support for Travellers); of Centre of Mediation for Roma and Travellers in Wallonia (mediation, support for Travellers); of the Network of Intercultural mediators (Health mediators); of the Diogenes Association (homelessness), and CAW Antwerp (mediation).

#### 1.5. Capacity-building of Roma civil society

There are no actions planned for the capacity building of Roma civil society. The local Roma organisations are grassroots-based and they function on a voluntary or a small-scale-projects basis. The members of the associations are volunteering and there are very limited administrative skills developed within their structures.

There is only one Roma-led organisation that receives financial support for administrative functioning from the Municipality of Molenbeek in Brussels by delegating its employees to work for the *MolenRom asbl*.<sup>19</sup>

Three of the Roma-led community-based organisations had short-term projects supported by the local authorities in Brussels in the previous period (*Kham vzw*<sup>20</sup>, *ESMA asbl* and

<sup>18</sup> Actions 2, 6,7,12, 13, 14, 16,18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 29, 30.

<sup>19</sup> MolenRom, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/MolenRom/>.

<sup>20</sup> Kham Vzw, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069994742711>.

*Rom en Rom asbl*<sup>21</sup>) and two of the organisations have received support from the regional authorities (*Balkan LGBTQIA vzw*<sup>22</sup> and *ESMA asbl*<sup>23</sup>).

The Roma platform does not provide any investment in the Roma associations, such as trainings on capacity development, as its only aim is to provide space for consultation and information exchange. While no capacity building is provided and Roma-led organisations have not yet developed administrative and policy skills, very few of them are taking part in the National Roma Platform meetings. Overall, the Roma civil society in Belgium remains has very limited resources for functioning and a low level of advocacy skills. The organisations are very rarely consulted, and their opinion is rarely taken into account.

On the contrary, the pro-Roma (non-Roma-led) organisations are well structured and have the capacity to influence local and regional policies. They have a certain number of Roma employees (mediators, stewards) who participate in the implementation phase of the project activities. Within these organisations, the Roma employees have possibilities for professional development and they often articulate and bring into the spotlight the problems Roma communities and individuals face. In practice, the associations working with Roma target groups, such as Foyer and the Centre of Mediation for Roma and Travellers in Wallonia, provide training possibilities for its staff members, including Roma.

#### **Some grassroots Roma civil society organisations in Belgium:**

*Molenrom asbl* is an organisation based in Molenbeek, created by a few of the employees of the Municipality of Molenbeek as a response to the complaint of the inhabitants about the presence of Roma in the public space. Currently, the association is supported by the prevention service of the Municipality of Molenbeek by delegating two of its employees to work with Roma families and children within the association.

*Kham vzw* is an organisation based in Anderlecht, working on a voluntary basis with youngsters, organising training in the Romani language for social workers, expositions to foster the positive images of Roma, as well as opportunities for young Roma to take part in youth exchanges and commemoration of the Roma Holocaust.

*Rom en Rom asbl* is an organisation based in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, active in providing humanitarian aid and social assistance. The association works closely with the most vulnerable Roma from Romania and Slovakia, active in local lobbying.

*Balkan LGBTQIA vzw* is an organisation addressing the issues of the Roma LGBTQIA community at the Brussels level. Their activities and projects aim at making the difficulties Brussels Roma LGBT community faces more visible.

*ESMA asbl* is an organisation promoting Roma culture in Brussels and Wallonia. They organise cultural activities and debates around the culture of Roma community and its place within the society.

*Roma dignity Project of the Yahad in Umun organisation* is a space of research and exhibition concerning the Roma Holocaust in Transylvania and other regions of the globe.

*REU Jekhipe vzw* is an organisation based in Sint Niklaas, working on mobilisation and empowerment of Roma communities coming from the western Balkans.

*IRU asbl* is a community-based organisation in Brussels organising small activities in the Roma community in the Nord quarter of the Brussels 1000 Municipality.

<sup>21</sup> Rom En Rom Asbl, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://romenrom.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> ESMA-Carrefour de Cultures, accessed 23 October 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067008830859>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem



## 2. RELEVANCE

### 2.1. Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

Above all, the concept of antigypsyism is not recognised at the institutional level in Belgium. The NRSF 2030 refers to the concept of antigypsyism only once as a horizontal objective, while the concept of discrimination is mostly used throughout the NRSF.

Another big issue within the Belgian context is the impossibility of the Belgian Roma Travellers to exercise their right to housing. On 7 May 2019, the Belgian police launched an action to illegally seize the caravans and property of Belgian Travellers across the country, depriving them of their only home. The Belgian equality body UNIA came out with an opinion that although police action was legitimate, the used brutality was disproportionate, i.e. far milder measures foreseen by the law could have been used.<sup>24</sup>

Third, Belgian media continues to maintain a negative image of the Roma.

The European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has conducted a research published in 2020,<sup>25</sup> that was used as a reference in the Belgian NRSF. According to FRA's survey for Belgium, "one in five Roma and Travellers had faced discrimination in various areas of life the year before the survey". The survey also showed that only a small proportion reported or filed a complaint about this incident. This may be because travellers (32%) and Roma (19%) have low awareness of the mechanisms for reporting discrimination. There is a negative perception about Roma in Belgium. The latest May 2019 Eurobarometer shows that 22% of Belgians surveyed would not feel comfortable with a Roma as a direct colleague, 38% do not trust a Roma as a political leader and 41% do not like a Roma as a son-in-law or daughter-in-law.<sup>26</sup>

Countering anti-Roma discrimination, as confirmed by the research findings, is reflected in the NRSF. The first five actions of the NRSF are grouped under the objective of fighting and preventing antigypsyism and discrimination:

*Action 1: Efforts Are Made to Sensitise Roma and Travellers on the Existence of the Equality Body (UNIA)*

From the written formulation of this action, it is not very clear if this is a statement, an action from the past that has been already performed or an objective.

*Action 2: Developing Positive Stories: Touring exhibition: Reflections. Roma in Belgium*

This action is the project of the *AP Hogeschool Antwerpen*<sup>27</sup> with the financial support of the EU, implemented in 2020. So far, the exposition was shown in a few localities in Belgium. Mentioning it as an objective brings the question of whether the very same exposition will continue to be shown as a part of the NRSF implementation or whether a new similar action will be taken.

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<sup>24</sup> UNIA, *TWEEDE RAPPORT OVER DE SITUATIE VAN DE WOONWAGENBEWONERS IN BELGIË TENGEVOLGE VAN DE ZOGENAAMDE POLITIEOPERATIE « STRIKE » VAN 7 MEI 2019 [UNIA, SECOND REPORT ABOUT THE SITUATION OF TRAVELERS IN BELGIUM AS RESULT OF THE SO CALLED POLICE OPERATION STRIKE]*, (UNIA, n.d.), accessed 10 October 2022.

<sup>25</sup> FRA, *Roma and Travellers in Six Countries – Roma and Travellers Survey*, 23 September 2020: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/roma-travellers-survey>.

<sup>26</sup> NRSF, p. 12

<sup>27</sup> AP Hogeschool Antwerpen (Artesis Plantijn Hogeschool Antwerpen)- Roma, n.d.: <https://www.ap.be/project/roma>.



### *Action 3: Improve Roma Integration through Project Calls*

This is a call announced every two years by the Ministry of Social Action of Wallonia. It targets, intersectionality and migrants in general, including Roma. There are no projects targeting only and specifically the Roma. It is in correspondence with the 'Durban Declaration' and the 'National Action Plan Against Racism' in which Wallonia takes a part.

### *Action 4: Raising Awareness and Providing Information about Roma*

It is a campaign of the Integration centers in the German-speaking community of Belgium. Its preparation is foreseen to take place in 2022.

### *Action 5: Combating racism against Roma.*

This action is a follow-up to a conference against racism held in the Brussels Parliament in 2021. In the final report, there are recommendations for the public authorities specific to the Roma without mentioning how these should be achieved:

- Ensuring good cohabitation between local residents and Travellers;
- Exploring the possibility of temporary occupation of vacant land;
- Establishing a social management structure that provides a framework with clear rules and monitoring, i.e. to establish/finance a structure responsible for the management of the Travellers sites;
- Strengthening housing inspection capacity (i.e. preventing discrimination in cases where Roma would like to rent a property but are being refused because of their ethnicity) conducting more tests and reinforcing them with calls or 'mystery shopper' surveys;
- Ensuring that there is a specific training and meetings for specific groups of public servants and Roma on how to prevent/report cases of discrimination, provided by UNIA (Equality Body).

This action plan is foreseen to be approved after a series of consultations during 2022 and it is expected to last until 2025.

The NRSF lacks adequate actions for combating the stereotypes and discriminatory practices against Roma communities in Belgium, particularly in the fields of housing and child protection (*see below*).

## 2.2. Education

Since 2020, education in Belgium is compulsory from the age of five until the age of 18. According to the FRA report from 2020,<sup>28</sup> the school attendance of Roma who moved in from Eastern Europe is 95% in comparison to 39% for the Travellers community. The good level of school attendance among the migrant Roma partially is a result of the work of school mediators, who exist as a practice since 2010 in several localities across Belgium. On the contrary, the school attendance situation among the Travellers remains a huge problem as nowadays it is very difficult to meet literate Roma Travellers. In most of the cases concerning Travellers, after primary school, the number of dropouts significantly raises.<sup>29</sup> The biggest reason for it is the lack of regular residence for Travellers within the cities. Often, the Travellers communities are pushed by the police to change their place.

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<sup>28</sup> FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in Six Countries – Roma and Travellers Survey*. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/roma-travellers-survey>

<sup>29</sup> Koen Geurts, *Les Roms En Action* [EN translation here], Foyer 2014. Available at: [https://roma.foyer.be/?page\\_id=1700&lang=fr](https://roma.foyer.be/?page_id=1700&lang=fr)

This leads to difficulties related to school attendance as well as tracing the parents in order to organise home visits by the school mediators.

The NRSF foresees three actions related to Education.

*Action 8: Call for Projects 'Fight Against School Dropout'*

This is a financial instrument of the Wallonia and Brussels Capital regions to support external to the school organisations to create partnerships with the schools in order to produce additional pedagogical activities or raise awareness on educational issues. Specific target on Roma and Travellers students are going to be supported.

*Action 16: Promoting Literacy and Education for Travellers and Roma*

This action will support the Centre of mediation for Roma and Travellers in Wallonia and the Foyer vzw in Brussels to employ Roma mediators. The aim of the Roma mediators is to prevent the drop-outs, to improve the interaction between parents, students, and teachers and to raise awareness concerning the compulsory school education.

*Action 17: Support Cultural Mediation and School-family Relations in Consultation with Families of Roma Students*

This is a general action of the German-speaking community concerning the newcomers, including Roma. There is a short explanation of the legal structure and instruments aiming at the integration of children coming from other countries. There is no data about the number of Roma living in the German-speaking region of Belgium.

The support from Roma school mediators is one of the most positive measures undertaken in Belgium, as mentioned in the country evaluation of Belgium in 2019<sup>30</sup> by the European Commission. In the last two years, Roma school mediation was withdrawn in the Flemish region, but there are still a few organisations such as CAW Antwerp that maintain this work, although on a limited scale. Here, we do not see any action taken by the Flemish authorities, while one-third of the Roma live in the cities of Antwerp, Gent, and their surroundings. Maintaining the school mediation is an important element of the integration of the Roma population.

In the Education section of the NRSF, there are no new initiatives or actions that treat the dropout rate and school attendance by Roma Travellers. As mentioned above, only 39% of school-age Travellers are included in the school educational system. Still, the reliability of this data is low as it does not show for how long Traveller children are remaining in school given the ability to register and deregister children from schools; and in reality, Travellers' school attendance is even lower compared to the general population.

The situation of Travellers is complex and a more integrated approach should be undertaken, as this complexity is not reflected within the text of the NRSF. There is no research concerning what percentage of Roma and Travellers students graduate from secondary school and how the school obligations in secondary school are met. There is a lack of information about the continuation of Roma students to higher educational levels.

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<sup>30</sup> European Commission, *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Roma Inclusion Measures Reported under the EU Framework for NSiR Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Report on the Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies - 2019 - Belgium*. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/96a20b39-d094-11e9-b4bf-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

There is no data about the number of Roma children in alternative school systems, such as CEFA<sup>31</sup>/CDO<sup>32</sup> where the educational approach is more flexible.

The lack of this information makes it difficult to propose adequate measures and perspectives for better qualification or integration into the labour market. Still, NGOs report that many Roma are circulating in the grey economic sector and often without social protection. For these reasons, further elaboration on research and action in the field of educational success for Roma and Travellers are essential, yet not reflected in the NRSF.

### 2.3. Employment

The employment of Roma is under the general conditions of employment in Belgium. There are several types of employment which concern the Roma population: as self-employed and as employees. Till 2014, the labour market was limited to the citizens of Bulgaria and Romania and the only way to work was either as self-employed or as an employee under the list of professions in shortages. As of 2014, the job market opened to Romanians and Bulgarians as well, but then other obstacles appeared – language skills and qualifications. The managing authority of the ESF took these elements into account and has supported a few organisations across Belgium to work on the activation and preparation of Roma for the labour market. During the implementation of these projects, there was the conflict in Syria so the Dom communities who reached Belgium were included in this process as well.

The employment possibilities in Belgium are widely diverse. Many Roma work in construction, food service and hotel industry, cleaning, logistics, and transportation, etc. Most of the employed Roma work under contractual obligation. There is a certain number of Roma who run their own companies or are freelancers. Still, the ones who are low-qualified and work as freelancers face problems with paying their social security packages and this impacts their social rights. The professions occupied by Roma maintain low qualifications because of a lack of school diplomas, as well as limited knowledge of the national languages. Parallel to that, there is the seasonal occupation, which is mostly preferred by Roma coming from Bulgaria and Romania for a short stay.

In the last seven years, few big organisations received support within the ESF financial mechanism to help Roma in the labour market follow a training path: administrative help, language learning, professional training, and employment. A serious number of Roma took advantage of this opportunity and found employment. This is also reflected as a model within the Roma communities.

In the new NRSF, there are five actions aimed at employment among the Roma.

#### *Action 18: Use of the ESF Call 457 on Awareness and Activation*

The ESF 457 Call for Projects<sup>33</sup> was announced in 2019 with an implementation phase in 2019-2021 (prolonged). The same call is included in the action plan. This is one of the projects in Brussels and Flanders regions that brought a good result, and most probably it will be included in the next ESF planning.

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<sup>31</sup> L'ENSEIGNEMENT EN ALTERNANCE (CEFA), accessed 23 October 2022:

[http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=23820&navi=2288&fbclid=IwAR3oP7n-YobZj4qaFcY\\_dRkp9Q0Nqp\\_SEe\\_9fppCCiKnH\\_7Ksb6-xPQ1YbE](http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=23820&navi=2288&fbclid=IwAR3oP7n-YobZj4qaFcY_dRkp9Q0Nqp_SEe_9fppCCiKnH_7Ksb6-xPQ1YbE)

<sup>32</sup> Part-Time Vocational Secondary Education, accessed 23 October 2022:

<https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/leerlingen/hoer-haal-ik-mijn-diploma-secundair-onderwijs/deeltijds-beroepssecundair-onderwijs?fbclid=IwAR0YDTIifVc2Z681IFWT4aGl9cydExLzERWPRUYyOrvPZaV1zpJVDdwGCrI>

<sup>33</sup> ESF Call 457, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.esf-vlaanderen.be/nl/oproepen/oproep-outreach-activering>

### *Action 19: Promote the Socio-economic Integration of Travellers and Roma*

This is one of the regular activities of the Mediation Centre for Travellers and Roma in Wallonia,<sup>34</sup> and it is part of its mission. This action is very general and does not foresee any concrete activity. It is not clear if there is any specific aspect of this regular activity.

### *Action 20: Focus on an Integrated Approach to Accompany Roma to the Labour Market and Build on Empowerment and Development Opportunities*

This activity is supported under the 'Multi-annual Plan of the Flemish Community Commission 2022-2025'.<sup>35</sup> Within this strategic plan, there are resources foreseen for supporting the Roma and Travellers service within Foyer wzv where Roma mediators and stewards are employed. As part of this action are the next two actions: 21 and 22. This action is related to Employment as it is clearly defining the employment of Roma mediators, who will facilitate the communication process with the institutions, but it can be easily placed also under Education as most of the activities of the mediators and stewards are directed toward the inclusion of Roma students in the Dutch-speaking educational system.

### *Action 21: Roma Stewards*

This is the project supported by the Flemish authorities. It is also part of the Multi-year Plan of the Flemish Community Commission.<sup>36</sup> This action aims at the employment of Roma and Dom employees who will guide the beneficiaries into the labour market and facilitate Roma students' school of.

### *Action 22: Roma@work ESF Project*

This is the project supported by the ESF (extended until 2023) and implemented by the Flemish authorities and the VDAB (The Flemish Employment Agency) Brussels. This project foresees the employment of four Roma mediators and two employees who will be responsible of accompanying Roma who are looking for jobs. This is one of the continuing projects of Foyer vzw.

## 2.4. Healthcare

In general, the health care sector in Belgium is well-developed. Access to urgent medical care is one of the guaranteed rights even for people without any insurance or documents. The most common problem in the health sector in Belgium is the language barrier while in contact with health workers. And for more than 15 years intercultural mediation is filling this gap in communication. There are also organisations such as *Medimigrant vzw*,<sup>37</sup> which provide legal aid in the health sector for people with difficulties in accessing health care or a regularisation based on health issues. One-tenth of their beneficiaries per year are Roma.

In the health care sector, the Federal Service for Public Health<sup>38</sup> unites more than 50 intercultural mediators placed in hospitals and organisations. They have more than 110,000 interventions in more than 20 languages per year. One of these languages is Romani. Foyer vzw has a service for intercultural mediators as part of the network of intercultural mediators in the health sector. Among the employees, there is also a Roma

<sup>34</sup> Center for mediation for travelers and Roma in Wallonia: <https://www.cmgv.be/>

<sup>35</sup> *Multi-Annual Plan of the Flemish Community Commission 2022-2025*, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.vgc.be/subsidies-en-dienstverlening/stedelijk-beleid/roma-werking>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem

<sup>37</sup> Medimigrant Vzw, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.medimmigrant.be/>.

<sup>38</sup> Federal Service for Public Health, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.health.belgium.be/nl/gezondheid/organisatie-van-de-gezondheidszorg/kwaliteit-van-zorg/interculturele-bemiddeling-de#Inleiding>.

mediator. Additionally, there are mediators with Bulgarian, Turkish, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Romanian, Arabic, and other languages who also facilitate the communication between health practitioners and Roma and Dom people in Belgium.

### *Action 23. Community Health Workers*

The action lists the activities of the intercultural health mediators and underlines their most common activities as: Improving access to health care; supporting disadvantaged groups in their access to health services; reporting problems and inequalities with the access to health care.

### *Action 29. The Cultural Mediators in Roma Communities Informing about the Access to Health Care*

This action is reporting on an event in 2018 when a number of recommendations were addressed to the authorities. In this action, two health centres of the 'Doctors of the World' are mentioned, which have also a certain number of beneficiaries of Roma origin. The opening of the two centres is part of the 'Brussels Region's Action Plan for Combating Poverty'.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.5. Housing, essential services, and environmental justice

The issue of housing remains a core issue for Belgium. There is no adequate policy regarding homeless Roma families for the last ten years. In the NRSF, there is no clear position on how the problem of the Travellers housing community will be solved.

Part of the Belgian local Roma still lives in caravans. Because of different reasons related to culture, lifestyle, and mistrust of the majority population, they prefer to live in caravans. In Belgium, caravans are recognised as housing places. The remaining issue in Belgium, however, is that the local municipalities/authorities do not provide places for placing the caravans. In many cases, Travellers can stay at these sites for a short time only. Even though there are financial resources for building such resident places, many municipalities have no interest in investing in this as the general population does not tolerate having Travellers close to their habitation. The 2019 police action strike,<sup>40</sup> when 90 caravans in Belgium were confiscated without providing alternative housing for the families, additionally enforced the negative image of the Travellers as a reason for delinquency. There are two important points to be considered here.

The NRSF does not cover these aspects of institutional discrimination. The proposed action plan of the NRSF lacks comprehensive policy guidelines and measures to provide the exercising of the most essential housing right.

The lack of permanent resident places for caravans for Travellers impacts the school attendance of the Travellers' children. Families must displace their caravans almost every two weeks after police interventions, sometimes at a distance of 40 km. This leads to the permanent displacement of an entire community, which otherwise would live in their caravans in a designated place permanently.

The newly arriving poor Roma families from Slovakia and Romania have been occupying temporary shelters for years, organising themselves in illegal camps or living on the street.

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<sup>39</sup> *Brussels Region Action Plan for Combating Poverty*, accessed 5 November 2022: [https://www.ccc-ggc.brussels/sites/default/files/documents/graphics/rapport-pauvrete/rapport-pauvrete-2008-nl/4-actieplan\\_08.pdf](https://www.ccc-ggc.brussels/sites/default/files/documents/graphics/rapport-pauvrete/rapport-pauvrete-2008-nl/4-actieplan_08.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> *Situation Des Gens Du Voyage Après l'opération de Police Dite « strike » Du 7 Mai 2019*, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.unia.be/fr/publications-et-statistiques/publications/situation-des-gens-du-voyage-apres-loperation-de-police-dite-strike-du-7-mai-2019>.

Compared to the general number of Roma, these are less than 1%.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the issues of homelessness are not targeted in the NRSF and are not reflected in comprehensive way except in the work of the *Diogenes wzv* (Action 30).

*Action 24. Promote Access to Essential Services*

This action mentions the activities of the Centre for Mediation of Travellers and Roma in Wallonia as facilitating access to basic services; providing administrative support, searching for low-cost accommodation; and mediation with owners and real estate agencies for providing housing for Roma.

This action is the regular activity of one of the organisations working on Roma. There is nothing new introduced.

*Action 25. Supporting Municipalities in the Reception of Travellers*

The activity is underlining the introduction of the Decree from 2019, which grants municipalities up to 30,000 EUR lump sum for organising camping sites for Roma travellers. The amount can be used for hiring a local manager who organises the logistics and basic services for the travellers. The proposed action is based on a previous experience in the Wallonia region.

*Action 26. Promote the Establishment of temporary accommodation for Travellers*

This action is based on the same decree as the previous action. It states that the Wallonia region will continue supporting the creation of temporary resident stays for travellers providing access to basic infrastructure such as water, electricity, and sanitation.

*Action 27. Investing in "Housing First Projects" and Providing Comprehensive and Integrated Support for Tenants*

This action is based on the same decree as Actions 25 and 26. The Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma develops partnerships for renting vacant houses with the Wallonia Society for Housing.<sup>42</sup>

*Action 28. Finalisation of the Implementation of Ordinance Decrees Amending the Brussels Housing Code in Order to Recognise the Habitat of Caravan Dwellers in Accordance with the New Urban Planning Regulations*

This activity is focusing on updating Article 191 from the Housing Code related to housing in caravans.

*Action 30. Funding Mediators and Operators Working Around Access to Housing*

This is the activity of the half-time Roma mediator from the Diogenes association<sup>43</sup> who works with homeless Roma regarding the 'housing first' projects. It is financed by the Community Commission of Brussels.

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<sup>41</sup> FEANTSA, accessed 5 November 2022: [https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/BRU\\_3690\\_RapportMigrants\\_EN\\_1\\_BD.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/BRU_3690_RapportMigrants_EN_1_BD.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Wallonia Society for Housing, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.flw.be/>.

<sup>43</sup> Diogenes Association, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://www.diogenes.brussels/fr>.



### *Action 31. Establishing a List of Temporary Residences for Caravan Dwellers*

This action is about the cooperation of Perspective Brussels<sup>44</sup> and Citydev<sup>45</sup> in the creation of a database of free temporary places for caravans in cooperation with the local authorities.

### *Action 32. Making It Easier to Obtain a Reference Address*

In Belgium, there are three organisations where Roma living in caravans can register their permanent address at: in Brussels – Foyer vzw; in Wallonia - Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma; and in the Flemish part - Caritas. This action does not say more than what is already known. The action is not clearly defined.

## 2.6. Social protection

The social protection in Belgium is well organised. Once the citizens obtain their permanent or temporary resident permits, they can fully enjoy all the access to social protection measures ensured by the State. This can be the social welfare: the guaranteed minimum income under the form of Integration income which is combined with assistance and preparation for the labour market. It is often accompanied by a package of basic health services. After a certain period of activity on the labour market, every citizen has a right to access unemployment benefits. All these measures are guaranteed to all Roma and Dom people as well. For accessing these rights, there are plenty of structures that are assisting citizens such as syndicates, social welfare centres, as well the assistance from organisations specialised in working with Roma such as Foyer vzw, Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma, CAW, *Inburgering and Integratie (citizenship and integration)*, and others.

### *Action 7. Improving Roma Integration*

This action is part of the Integration policy of Belgium. Similar actions exist in Wallonia, Brussels, the Flemish region, and in the German-speaking community. The activity itself is set up of integration trajectory which includes an integration module aiming at receiving knowledge regarding the construction of the Belgian society, access to different rights, and language training. In some of the communities, there are also options for professional training.

### *Action 12. Support an Institution That Specialises in Mediation of Caravan Dwellers*

There is a description of the regular activities of the Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma, including mediation activities, access to social rights, and administrative support.

### *Action 13. Contribution of the Flemish Community Commission to the Roma and Travellers Service of Foyer vzw in Brussels*

There is a description of the regular activities of Foyer vzw, including mediation activities, access to social rights, and administrative support.

### *Action 15. The French Community Commission Contribution to the Non-profit Organisation 'Le Foyer'*

## 2.7. Social services

The social service system is well organised in Belgium. In the last strategy period, useful special Roma services were initiated within the social welfare centres of Brussels and Anderlecht, which are under the coordination and financial responsibility of the POD MI.

<sup>44</sup> Perspective Brussels, accessed 5 November 2022: <https://perspective.brussels/fr>.

<sup>45</sup> Citydev, n.d.: <https://www.citydev.brussels/fr>.

One of them has been converted to working with travellers and homeless people (Anderlecht), and the second one is maintained as a Roma service. Unfortunately, such initiatives are neither part of the evaluation of the NRIS, nor part of the NRSF and its action plan. Access to social services is guaranteed to all citizens including all Roma with a residence permit. The ones with no legal status have access to basic rights, such as education and urgent health care. Access to housing still remains an issue.

Actions 12,13,15, mentioned above, can also relate to the point of social services.

## 2.8. Child protection

Child protection is not a direct target in the NRSF. The activities of organisations such as Foyer vzw, CAW Antwerp and the Centre for Mediation for Travellers and Roma include, as an objective, the wellbeing of Roma children mostly through mediation services between schools and parents.

In the NRSF, there is no reflection of the homeless Roma with children who sleep on the streets in self-organised barracks, and child protection services engagement is not determined in the Belgian NRSF. Very often the Roma activists vocalise these sentiments as “the last accepted form of racism”.<sup>46</sup> There is institutional discrimination from the structures that should deal with child abuse as they remain silent when it comes to the Roma children of Belgium who sleep on the streets or who are begging, while this is not the case if non-Roma children are discriminated against as institutions immediately provide the needed social care and protection. The international standards for child protection are not applied to the Roma children of Belgium and this issue is not reflected in the NRSF either. This is the most visible issue with Roma in Belgian society that is feeding the negative stereotypes about Roma.

## 2.9. Promoting (awareness of) Roma arts, culture, and history

The Roma art, culture and history are not reflected in the NRSF. There is mention of a project in Action 2, which is an already implemented project in the previous strategic period. At the local level, there are a few projects concerning Roma art and culture but in the NRSF this theme is missing.

The Roma Holocaust is still not recognised in Belgium. Even though Roma were persecuted during the Nazi regime,<sup>47</sup> the NRSF does not include it as an objective for the next ten years at all.

### *Action 2: Developing Positive Stories: Touring Exhibition: Reflections. Roma in Belgium*

This action is the project of the AP Hogeschool Antwerpen with financial support from the EU, implemented in 2020. So far, the exposition was shown in a few localities in Belgium. Mentioning it as an objective brings the question of whether the very same exposition will continue to be shown as a part of the NRSF implementation or whether a new similar action will be taken.

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<sup>46</sup> *The Last Accepted Form of Racism Is against the Roma*, 5 February 2022: [https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20220204\\_95677938?&articlehash=GxBEBcxgH3l0bw3%2Bdmq420WpcaujILXgSh%2FJwmGiZpYCK%2B8UBqUCaEUSHwYDdyVihL2Npr5Ke0qyhzL6HvtjIDoAkdNgIlr12jhHW8%2BHG WmE%2FsWSkeSpo7mfUPxxnYCI3tDZ0ESGoi%2B%2BMyR31NShMXE%2FyF7aMLjICgOAtiS0QxUzmPds0w%2B V33vEaa6LSw7imBEiGTpouisp3xcoZUSw9WIDgRJRmRihYHEL6drnlV4evZgZVIMxsOgnjaXvNvr%2B%2FV%2FOVF 1ukTHR7xEz04%2FF%2BNdfy%2Brc%2FOBfRE1hj0LRWs%2BAH40AFrqYkIJA4KdmLI1jmtCTFKXATf9btn7moj7a 4g%3D%3D&fbclid=IwAR0ILHyBinPzaIxHZe7V1j5DBjFz5JGysGqnojqvcEakifJF\\_aNAtDOautU](https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20220204_95677938?&articlehash=GxBEBcxgH3l0bw3%2Bdmq420WpcaujILXgSh%2FJwmGiZpYCK%2B8UBqUCaEUSHwYDdyVihL2Npr5Ke0qyhzL6HvtjIDoAkdNgIlr12jhHW8%2BHG WmE%2FsWSkeSpo7mfUPxxnYCI3tDZ0ESGoi%2B%2BMyR31NShMXE%2FyF7aMLjICgOAtiS0QxUzmPds0w%2B V33vEaa6LSw7imBEiGTpouisp3xcoZUSw9WIDgRJRmRihYHEL6drnlV4evZgZVIMxsOgnjaXvNvr%2B%2FV%2FOVF 1ukTHR7xEz04%2FF%2BNdfy%2Brc%2FOBfRE1hj0LRWs%2BAH40AFrqYkIJA4KdmLI1jmtCTFKXATf9btn7moj7a 4g%3D%3D&fbclid=IwAR0ILHyBinPzaIxHZe7V1j5DBjFz5JGysGqnojqvcEakifJF_aNAtDOautU).

<sup>47</sup> EXPOSITION Collection Permanente, accessed 5 November 2022:

<https://kazernedossin.eu/fr/expo/collection-permanente/>.



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*Action 11. Reflecting Diversity*

In this action, intersectionality is mentioned as a target. The diversity of Roma and the need for specific emphasis are mentioned, yet no concrete actions are envisaged.

### 3. EXPECTED EFFECTIVENESS

#### 3.1. Coherence with related domestic and European policies

The Belgian NRSF is a product of dialogue between federal entities and authorities and it is in coherence with the EU and national policies. The action plan is based on a common shared vision with the aim of being formulated at different levels according to the competencies of the relevant institutions. The NRSF consists of actions under the horizontal and sectoral objectives defined in the EU Roma Strategic framework and takes into account the findings from the last country report developed by the FRA. At the national level, the NRSF actions are, too, reflected by the National Action Plan Against Racism<sup>48</sup> (the engagement of Belgium in the Durban Declaration from 2001) and the legislation concerning the integration sector and housing decrees.

#### 3.2. Responsibility for NRSF coordination and monitoring

At the end of the NRSF, there is a section on coordination. Coordination of the NRSF is defined by different political and governing levels (with their contributions and competencies). Further, the intergovernmental structure called the Belgian National Roma Contact Point (including representatives of the regional and federal authorities) is coordinated by the PPS SI with its secretariat. The last element of the coordination is the Belgian National Platform for Roma, which assembles within projects, financed by the EC in 2016-2021, though there is no clear definition of how it is linked to the coordination of the NRSF. The interviews with the stakeholders show that the platform is mostly used as a space for sharing experiences and discussion of concrete projects or issues. The consultation is mostly informative and is done by means of preparing recommendations for the coordination of the NRSF. Real and effective participation of the Roma community representation is missing from the consultation and coordination processes.

The coordination and monitoring of the NRSF is done by the National Roma Contact Point in consultation with the federal and community-level structures of the regions of Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels. Compared to the previous period, this is a new mechanism for monitoring and coordination. The NRSF does not provide any further detail on how this mechanism will function, what data will be collected or who will have access to it. It only mentions that every two years the National Roma Contact Point will prepare a monitoring and evaluation report, which will be sent to the EC. The actions of the NRSF will be evaluated by partners using a predefined template in order to plan the follow-up of the actions. As previously stated, Roma participation in the coordination and monitoring of the NRSF is lacking (see Section 1.3 of this report).

#### 3.3. Quality of the plan

The Belgian NRSF has seven parts: definitions, general framework, Roma in Belgium, processes and procedures, good practices, action plan, and coordination. The general objectives of the NRSF are not clear; it looks more like an action plan than as a strategic policy document. This action plan lacks a timeline, milestones, and indicators to measure the achievements. A very big part of it is a reflection of the work done by two-three non-profit organisations. The expectation of the civil society is that after two years of implementation, they will be able to effectively participate in its evaluation and adapt the document so that it becomes more of a strategy than an action plan.

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<sup>48</sup> Belgian Government, *MESURES FÉDÉRALES DU PLAN D'ACTION NATIONAL CONTRE LE RACISME 2021-2024* [Federal measures of the action plan against racism], 2021-24, accessed 1 October 2022:

<https://sarahschlitz.be/wp-content/uploads/sites/300/2022/07/NAPAR-Mesures-federales-du-Plan-dAction-National-contre-le-Racisme.pdf>.

### 3.4. Funding

It is not clear from the NRSF itself how the aforementioned activities will be financed. After the interviews with the representatives of civil society organisations from Belgium, we found that the foreseen activities are actually ongoing activities of the organisations, for which funding is envisaged for the next two to three years through the regional and local authorities. In particular, the work of the mediation teams and concentration of different services is envisaged to continue.

The action plan does not include funding possibilities at the local and regional levels for initiatives with a focus on Roma. In general, the funding opportunities available in Belgium are for promoting equality and do not specifically target or mention Roma, e.g., the vice-mayor of the City of Brussels has a budget for supporting projects focused on equality. At the same time, there can be observed low or no demands from grassroots organisations for Roma-targeted projects to be funded.

### 3.5. Monitoring and evaluation

It is foreseen that an evaluation tool will be added: a template to be filled by partners. The NRSF indicates that the qualitative and quantitative indicators<sup>49</sup> proposed by the European Commission will be used for monitoring the progress. At the same time, the document does not formulate any indicators or targets related to the planned actions – this is a major weakness of the document that makes it not very credible.

Under 'Partners' it is not clear if these are the government structures or if it includes representatives of civil society organisations as well. The document does not elaborate further on that. There are no concrete indicators mentioned in the NRSF.

### 3.6. Assessment of the expected effectiveness and sustainability

The NRSF in general should be a reference document for the next ten years when it comes to introducing policies, changes in the legislation, initiating actions, announcing calls, etc. In order to have an impact on Roma communities as well, Roma participation is essential. So far, the participation of Roma is limited to the daily work of mediators or stewards. The Roma self-organisation participation is not defined clearly and, in most cases, it is an informative nonstructured consultation. If not changed, this process risks leaving the Roma representation at the same stage as it is now. Furthermore, the empowerment of Roma is not reflected at all as a tool to combat antigypsyism.

The NRSF envisages the collection of proxy data, as the collection of ethnic data in Belgium is prohibited. There is no dedicated budget for monitoring. These are the weak sides of the NRSF.

The activities planned in the NRSF only partially address the challenges Roma face in Belgium. Activities are formulated in a way that is more conducive to solving short-term problems and providing short-term solutions, e.g., educational mediators who must ensure that Roma children do not drop out of the educational system. At the same time, the deep problem - the broad negative public attitudes towards the Roma - remains unaddressed. The main problems visible to society regarding the Roma - housing conditions (especially for travellers), child homelessness, and begging are not set as challenges to be addressed in the NRSF.

During the interviews with the interested parties, it became clear that the majority of the activities included in the action plan of the NRSF are the activities carried out by several pro-Roma organisations. Although this is a good practice to ensure the sustainability of

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<sup>49</sup> PORTFOLIO OF INDICATORS, n.d.:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/portfolio\\_of\\_indicators\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/portfolio_of_indicators_en.pdf).

programmes that have been proven to work, it can also be seen as a problem, as all these activities are carried out by a small number of organisations and there is a lack of diversification of stakeholders. In this process, Roma organisations continue to have low capacity in terms of project management, limited human resources, understanding processes, lobbying, and influencing Roma policies.

## 4. ALIGNMENT WITH THE EU ROMA STRATEGY

### 4.1. Reflecting diversity among Roma

Overall, the Belgian NRSF is corresponding to the criteria of specific action based on diversity.

The action plan foresees specific measures for the traditionally long-time residing Roma-Travellers in Belgium. It combines also the action of inclusion for Roma coming from Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. There are also services, school, and health mediation introduced for the new group of Syrian Dom people.

The NRSF includes as target groups Roma women, children, and LGBTQ+ (Actions 2, 3, 20).

### 4.2. Combining mainstream and targeted approaches

Overall, the Belgian NRSF presents a balanced mix of mainstream and targeted activities.

In most of the actions related to the integration process, the Belgian authorities use the mainstream approaches as a result of a well-developed social infrastructure for integration and hosting of other nationalities and migrants. The plan also introduces specific actions/services for Roma communities. Activity 29 is a mainstream activity directed at all migrants and newcomers. A specific measure within this programme is the support of Roma health mediators to improve the access to health care services. The activities directed at Travellers are explicit but not exclusive as they could support other people living in similar conditions such as traders at fairs.

### 4.3. Usage of instruments introduced by the Council Recommendation

The NRSF is constructed on the Council's Recommendations<sup>50</sup> taking into account the national context and problematics.

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<sup>50</sup> Council Recommendations on Effective Roma Integration Measures in the Member States 2013. Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H1224\(01\)&from=en](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H1224(01)&from=en)

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Compared to the previous NRIS 2012-2020, the NRSF 2021-2030 is more comprehensive and it follows the structure of the previous NRIS. Most of the actions are taken forward in the new NRSF.

The Belgian NRSF 2030 is a document designed in coherence with the national legislation and it combines mainstream and specific measures. It is a product elaborated within the inter-institutional dialogue at the federal and regional levels. The consultation process in the preparation of the NRSF is settled mostly with a few pro-Roma organisations working in the field of Roma Integration.

A major part of the actions envisaged in the action plan of the NRSF are the regular activities of the large pro-Roma organisations, which can be interpreted as good sustainable efforts in the field of Roma Integration but it can also be interpreted as a lack of diversification of service providers and inability to capacitate grassroots Roma organisations.

Meanwhile, the participation of Roma in the drafting of the NRSF 2021-2030 is very limited. The few examples of consultation are limited to the invitation of a few Roma mediators to contribute to the definition of the problematic areas during the National Roma Platform meetings. The consultation process with the Roma civil society organisations remains very weak and the NRSF does not foresee any mechanisms for strengthening this cooperation.

### ***Recommendations to national authorities***

1. The Belgian National Roma Contact point should introduce a structured consultative mechanism with the Roma civil society representatives.
2. The NRCP should use the specific funding dedicated to the National Roma Contact Points in order to increase the capacity of Roma self-organised structures in the field of policy design and cooperation.
3. National authorities should pay special attention to guaranteeing and respecting children's rights in Roma communities and avoid double standards in the implementation of children's policies.
4. National authorities should take measures together with partners from the Roma sector for the official recognition of the Roma Holocaust in Belgium.
5. To elaborate more comprehensive policies on addressing the right to housing of the Roma Travellers community.

### ***Recommendations to European institutions***

6. To support a national Roma coalition in preparing shadow reports on the implementation of the Belgian NRSF.
7. To provide specific financial instruments for the constitution and functioning of the national Belgian Roma coalition.

### ***Recommendations to the civil society***

8. To make use of the existing opportunities for local actions and to cooperate at the national level on issues related to the design, implementation, and monitoring of national policies.

### ***Recommendations to other stakeholders***

9. Other civil society actors working on intersectional issues should look proactively for cooperation in the field of Roma inclusion.

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## ANNEXE: LIST OF PROBLEMS AND CONDITIONS

### *Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination*

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Antigypsyism is not recognised as a specific problem in national policy frameworks	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Prejudice against Roma	significant problems	understood and analysed sufficiently	present but not sufficient	adequate but with room for improvements
Hate crimes against Roma	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Hate speech towards and against Roma (online and offline)	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Weak effectiveness of protection from discrimination	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	adequate with room for improvements	adequate but with room for improvements
Segregation in education, housing, or provision of public services	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Forced evictions and demolitions lead to homelessness, inadequate housing, and social exclusion	critical problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Statelessness, missing ID documents	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Misconduct and discriminatory behaviour by police (under-policing/under-policing)	significant problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Barriers to the <i>de facto</i> exercise of the EU right to free movement	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

## Education

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Lack of available and accessible preschool education and ECEC services for Roma	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lower quality of preschool education and ECEC services for Roma	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
High drop-out rate before completion of primary education	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Early leaving from secondary education	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Secondary education/vocational training disconnected from labour market needs	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Misplacement of Roma pupils into special education	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Education segregation of Roma pupils	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Increased selectivity of the educational system resulting in concentration of Roma or other disadvantaged pupils in educational facilities of lower quality	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to second-chance education, adult education, and lifelong learning	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to and support for online and distance learning if education and training institutions close, as	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

occurred during the coronavirus pandemic				
Low level of digital skills and competencies and limited opportunities for their development among pupils	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Low level of digital skills and competencies and limited opportunities for their development among adults	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent

### Employment

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Poor access to or low effectiveness of public employment services	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Poor access to (re-) training, lifelong learning and skills development	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Discrimination in the labour market by employers	minor problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Risk for Roma women and girls from disadvantaged areas of being subjected to trafficking and forced prostitution	minor problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Primary labour market opportunities substituted by public work	minor problems	identifies and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Barriers and disincentives to employment (such as	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

indebtedness, low income from work compared to social income)				
Lack of activation measures, employment support	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined

### Healthcare

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Exclusion from public health insurance coverage (including those who are stateless, third-country nationals, or EU-mobile)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Poor supply/availability of healthcare services (including lack of means to cover out-of-pocket health costs)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to emergency care	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to primary care	minor problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Limited access to prenatal and postnatal care	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to health-related information	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Poor access to preventive care (vaccination, check-ups, screenings, awareness-raising about healthy lifestyles)	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Poor access to sexual/reproductive healthcare and family	significant problems	identified and analysed	appropriate	relevant targets well defined

planning services		sufficiently		
Specific barriers to better healthcare for vulnerable groups such as elderly Roma people, Roma with disabilities, LGBTI and others	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Discrimination/ antigypsyism in healthcare (e.g., segregated services, forced sterilisation)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Unrecognised historical injustices, such as forced sterilisation	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Inequalities in measures for combating and preventing potential outbreaks of diseases in marginalised or remote localities	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

*Housing, essential services, and environmental justice*

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Poor physical security of housing (ruined or slum housing)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of access to drinking water	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of access to sanitation	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of access to electricity	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited or absent public waste collection	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Restricted heating capability (families unable to heat all rooms/all times when	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

necessary) or solid waste used for heating				
Lack of security of tenure (legal titles are not clear and secure)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lacking or limited access to social housing	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Overcrowding (available space/room for families)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Housing-related indebtedness at levels which may cause eviction	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Housing in segregated settlements/ neighbourhoods	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Housing in informal or illegal settlements/ neighbourhoods	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Exposure to hazardous factors (living in areas prone to natural disasters or environmentally hazardous areas)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited or lacking access to public transport	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited or lacking internet access (e.g., public internet access points in deprived areas, areas not covered by broadband internet)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited or lacking access to green spaces	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Roma excluded from environmental democracy	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

Lack of housing sites for Travellers	critical problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but not sufficient	some targets but not relevant
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### *Social protection*

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
High at-risk-of-poverty rate and material and social deprivation	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Income support programmes fail to guarantee an acceptable level of a minimum income for every household	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to income support schemes (low awareness, barrier of administrative burdens, stigma attached)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Ineffective eligibility rules (well-designed means-testing ensures that those who need support can get it; job-search conditions ensure the motivation for returning to work)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Low flexibility of income support programmes for addressing changing conditions of the household	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Discrimination by agencies managing income-support programmes	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Risk of municipalities misusing income support to buy votes	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent



*Social services*

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Limited quality, capacity and comprehensiveness of help provided by social services	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to social services: low awareness of them, low accessibility, (e.g., due to travel costs) or limited availability	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Services providers do not actively reach out to those in need	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
The limited ability of social services to effectively work together with other agencies (e.g., public employment service) to help clients	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Discrimination by social service providers	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

*Child protection*

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Child protection is not considered in the NRSF	critical problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
The specific vulnerability of Romani children as victims of violence is not considered	critical problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Segregated or discriminatory child-protection services provided to Roma	critical problem	irrelevant	absent	absent

Activities aimed at strengthening parental responsibility and skills not available or not reaching out to Roma parents	critical problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Illegal practices of child labour	critical problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Large-scale and discriminatory placement of Romani children in early childhood care institutions	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Persistence of large-scale institutions rather than family-type arrangements	irrelevant	absent	absent	irrelevant
Early marriages	minor problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Barriers to children's registration; statelessness	irrelevant	absent	absent	irrelevant
Biased treatment of Roma youth by security and law enforcement	irrelevant	absent	absent	irrelevant

*Promoting (awareness of) Roma arts, culture, and history*

Problems and conditions	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
Poor or lacking awareness of the general population of the contribution of Roma art and culture to national and European heritage	significant problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Exclusion of Roma communities from national cultural narratives	significant problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Romani history and culture are not included	significant problem	irrelevant	absent	absent

in school curricula and textbooks for both Roma and non-Roma students				
Lack of inclusion of the Romani language in schools, and development of necessary educational materials and resources for Romani language preservation and teaching	minor problem	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of memorialization of Roma history through establishing monuments, commemorative activities, and institutionalizing dates relevant to Roma history	significant problem	irrelevant	absent	absent

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