



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

**Prepared by:**  
Centre for Education Initiatives  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIPY	Agency for International Programmes for Youth
CSB	Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
LALRG	Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments
MoC	Ministry of Culture
MoE	Ministry of Economics
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoW	Ministry of Welfare
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment or Training (young people)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRSF	National Roma Strategic Framework
OCMA	Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs
SEA	State Employment Agency
SIF	Society Integration Foundation



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Roma Strategic Framework – the ‘Plan for the Implementation of the Roma Strategic Framework for 2022-2023’ (NRSF) – includes measures in key policy areas such as education, welfare (employment, social services, social security), housing, healthcare and culture policy areas, and makes reference to key sectoral policy guidelines as well as to the Council Recommendation articles.

### Participation

The draft of the NRSF was prepared by the Working Group in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), both Roma and pro-Roma.

The system of policy consultation with Roma civil society and stakeholders in Latvia provided by the Advisory Council for the Promotion of Roma Participation (the Roma Advisory Council) and the Regional Expert Network of Roma Integration Issues, which fosters the regular exchange of best practices, experience, and sharing of information between municipalities and the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP). A representative of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) was included in the working group tasked with preparing a draft of the NRSF; other Latvian municipalities or representatives of the network did not participate in the working group.

The empowerment measures are planned in the NRSF within the framework of the Latvian Roma Platform project activities, and including various forms of training and measures for Roma civil society representatives to promote capacity-building, improving knowledge on participation in decision-making processes, in the preparation of policy planning documents, and developing skills for the preparation and successful implementation of projects and the preservation of cultural identity.

There are measures included in the NRSF which provide Roma NGOs with access to the mainstream state budget and EU fund-supporting programmes aimed at the development of civil society organisations and their initiatives. However, taking into account the weak capacity of local Roma NGOs, targeted activities are needed to support the effective access of Roma NGOs to these programmes, especially at the local level.

Regular support to Roma NGOs and initiatives, as well as for developing some good practices for promoting Roma social and cultural inclusion, are provided by the municipalities at the local level.

The fact that there is concrete mention of the national Roma NGO the ‘Roma Culture Centre’ in the NRSF as an implementer of many activities, while other Roma NGOs are not mentioned either as implementers or possible partners, raises concern about an unbalanced approach toward equal access for Roma NGOs and activists concerning participation in the drafting and implementation of the NRSF.

### Relevance

Several measures are directly targeted at Roma and address specific Roma problems in key areas such as education, employment, combating antigypsyism, promoting awareness of Roma arts, culture, and history; mainstream measures are planned in the NRSF in the areas of healthcare, housing, employment, and development of civil society.

The significance of combating antigypsyism is highlighted and addressed in the NRSF by several targeted measures included in the implementation plan.

No data according to ethnicity is available in governmental and municipal institutions in key areas such as healthcare, housing, employment, social services, etc., but the NRSF will conduct a qualitative survey on the situation of Roma in key areas in 2023.

There are no targeted activities for promoting and ensuring Roma access to the housing-support activities mentioned in the NRSF. Measures regarding Roma education and participation are realistically achievable, but housing measures are too mainstreamed and it could be a challenge for Roma to access housing support activities.

### Expected effectiveness

Many interview respondents from Roma and pro-Roma NGOs as well as from governmental institutions and municipalities consider that the NRSF is elaborated as a balanced and extensive policy document, which includes targeted and mainstreamed measures in various key areas in order to improve the situation of Roma in Latvia – and that the strategy can realistically be implemented as planned.

However, representatives of Roma NGOs have not been involved in the process of planning funding associated with the state or EU Structural Funds at the national level, and they were not informed by the NRCP and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) about the possibility to participate in this process in order to address the needs of Roma, as well as other urgent challenges. The NRCP should develop effective cooperation with the MoF in order to improve Roma NGOs' and pro-Roma NGOs' access to participation in the decision-making process concerning the planning and evaluation of the EU Structural Funds.

The NRSF foresees concrete activities for the period 2022-2023, and after this period the Ministry of Culture (MoC) will prepare the NRSF for the next period.

### Alignment with the EU Strategic Framework

The NRSF has a balanced approach between targeted and mainstream measures. Several measures are directly targeted at Roma and address specific challenges faced by the Roma in key areas, including the development of Roma culture and combating antigypsyism; mainstream measures do not identify the Roma as one of the target groups, although in some cases Roma are mentioned as one of the target groups.

The mainstream measures have not provided for specific activities aimed at involving and promoting the access of Roma to services or financial support within the framework of these measures (programmes, projects, initiatives) and no detailed information is available about how to evaluate the scope of Roma participation and quality of services which they will be able to access within the framework of these measures.

The involvement of the Ombudsman's Office as a national equality body in the elaboration and the implementation of the NRSF is crucial and shows that the promotion of equal treatment for Roma is one of the Ombudsman's priorities.

## INTRODUCTION

According to statistical data provided by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB), at the beginning of 2021 there were 4,838 Roma people living in Latvia, which represents about 0.3% of the total population.<sup>1</sup> According to data provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), in 2021 there were 6,803 Roma people registered in Latvia.<sup>2</sup> However, the representatives of Roma NGOs have stated that the real Roma population in Latvia may reach 12,000 Roma people. Thus, despite the lack of fully reliable and comparable data, a gradual decrease in the number of Roma has been observed in recent years, one of the reasons being that Roma have emigrated to foreign countries in search of employment and to be reunited with family.

### *National Roma Strategic Framework*

The National Roma Strategic Framework – ‘The Plan for the Implementation of the Roma Strategic Framework for 2022-2023’ (NRSF) – was designed by the Ministry of Culture (MoC) in accordance with the ‘Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation’ (2021/C93/01) approved by the Council of the European Union on 12 March 2021 (The ‘Council Recommendation’). The design and adoption of NRSF as a separate policy-development document is a significant step towards improving the effectiveness and sustainability of national Roma inclusion policy. The NRSF was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on 3 May 2022.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that the pre-existing policy on Roma integration was implemented specifically under the ‘National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy’ (NIPSIP) coordinated by the MoC. Until 2020, Roma inclusion policy was implemented as part of the mainstream policy based on the NIPSIP. The set of national policy measures for Roma integration<sup>4</sup> was included in the ‘National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Guidelines Implementation Plan’ for periods 2012-2016, 2017-2018, 2019-2020. Targeted policy monitoring of the implementation of the set of national policy measures for Roma integration was not provided specifically. The evaluations of the Implementation Plans of NIPSIP were conducted in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers’ Regulation No.737 of 2 December 2014 ‘Regulations for the Development and Impact Assessment of Development Planning Documents’.<sup>5</sup>

The preparation of the draft of the NRSF was ensured by an inter-governmental Working Group in cooperation with NGOs. The Working Group included delegates from the MoC, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the Ministry of Welfare (MoW), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Economics (MoE), the Agency for International Youth Programmes (AIYP), the State Employment Agency (SEA), the Ombudsman's Office, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG), the Society Integration

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[https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP\\_PUB/START\\_POP\\_IR\\_IRE/IRE010/table/tableViewLayout1/](https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START_POP_IR_IRE/IRE010/table/tableViewLayout1/)

2 <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/media/7146/download>

3 The NRCP is available in Latvian on the MoC website  
:<https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/24998/download>

4 <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/336/download>

5 The evaluation report on NIPSIP, which is conducted by the MoC based on the results of independent assessment studies, provides the information on implemented Roma policy measures as well as good practices, such as the coordination of Roma advisory mechanisms, the increased participation of local Roma NGOs in the development of civil society. The report concludes that, according to the data, the Roma are still an ethnic group at risk of social exclusion and discrimination. *Informatīvais ziņojums "Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādņu 2012.-2018.gadam īstenošanas gala ietekmes novērtējums"*, Kultūras ministrija, 2020. Other evaluations are available on official state web site: <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/documents/6239>.

Foundation (SIF), as well as representatives from NGOs.<sup>6</sup> The Working Group was specially established by the MoC, which is responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the NRSF and is the NRCP.

The new NRSF includes measures in key policy areas such as education, welfare (employment, social services, social security), housing, healthcare, and culture policy areas, and makes reference to key sectoral policy guidelines as well as to the Articles of the Council Recommendation. The horizontal objectives of the Council Recommendation are reflected in the NRSF, but are not fully integrated in all key areas. For instance, combatting antigypsyism and discrimination is addressed by concrete measures as well as in the areas of culture and education, but not in areas such as employment and healthcare.

The NRSF consists of five main sections:

- description of the current Roma situation at the national level,
- specific measures planned to be implemented in 2022-2023,
- responsible institutions,
- results and outcome indicators,
- impact assessment on the state and local government budget, including information on the necessary budget funds for the implementation of planned measures and sources of funding.<sup>7</sup>

The NRSF includes a concrete list of activities and measures, Roma-targeted measures, as well as mainstream measures within which Roma are one of the target groups, but not specifically mentioned as such. According to the NRSF, the MoC plans to support, on an annual basis, regional NGOs, including through capacity-building activities for Roma NGOs, the development of collaboration between NGOs, and dialogue with local authorities and governmental institutions. Projects funded by the MoC are contributing to the activities of Roma NGOs at the regional level, and the implementation of the Latvian Roma Platform project's activities, including activities targeted at the capacity-building of Roma representatives and promoting the participation of Roma young people and women, will be continued during the 2022-2023 period by the MoC.

### **About this report**

This report is elaborated based on an analysis of the process of designing and adopting the NRSF, including the participation of Roma NGO representatives, and describes NRSF's relevance to the needs of Roma people in their diversity, as well as the expected effectiveness of the NRSF. Structured, in-depth interviews with public administration and specialists from state governmental and municipal institutions who are responsible for the implementation of the NRSF or who work actively on Roma inclusion and on promoting participation, civil society (Roma and non-Roma NGOs), and Roma mediator;<sup>8</sup> fourteen interviews and one survey (questionnaire) were carried out in total.

The data was analysed by experts of the Center for Education Initiatives.

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<sup>6</sup> Detailed information is available on the MoC website: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/dokumenti-3>.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed calculations of the additional funding required for the implementation of the NRSF measures is also provided in the NRSF.

<sup>8</sup> In-depth interviews were carried out in person and in online video format with 13 key informants – the main stakeholders of the Roma inclusion and promotion participation policy (representatives of the MoES, the MoW, the Ombudsman's Office, Roma and non-Roma NGOs, Jelgava City municipality, and Ventspils City municipality), and one completed questionnaire was provided by the NRCP. Interviews were conducted with the use of specifically adopted questionnaires for each group of stakeholders as well as an interview-questions matrix, and focused on the assessment of the given topics.

# 1. PARTICIPATION

## 1.1. Roma participation in the NRSF preparation

The preparation of the draft of the NRSF was ensured by the Working Group through collaboration with NGOs – both Roma NGOs<sup>9</sup> and pro-Roma NGOs. It is also significant that a director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights participated in the Working Group, because the latter provides regular assessments of the Roma situation and national minority policy development, such as national reports on Roma, to the FRA.<sup>10</sup> However, non-Roma NGOs which actively collaborate with Roma community representatives, especially with Roma women and youth, were not invited to participate in the Working Group.<sup>11</sup>

All representatives of Roma NGOs and Roma mediator provided concrete proposals for NRSF activities during the Working Group meetings, and most elements of these proposals were included in the draft NRSF, except in the case of the Roma Culture Centre. The latter provided a list of proposals and initiatives targeted at the development of Roma culture and fighting antigypsyism as well as social inclusion activities, and their proposals were only partly included in the draft strategy. Equally, during the official public consultation process in August 2021, only the Roma Culture Centre submitted proposals, arguing for the allocation of designated funds for the implementation of initiatives, which suggestion was not included in the final text.<sup>12</sup>

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

According to the information provided by the MoC, during the preparation of the draft of the NRSF the proposals submitted by NGOs were taken into account and included in the NRSF as far as this was possible.<sup>13</sup> What is more, one Roma NGO (the Roma Culture Centre) and one non-Roma NGO (the Latvian Center for Human Rights)<sup>14</sup> will participate in the implementation of the NRSF.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that only the Roma Culture Centre is mentioned in the NRSF as an implementer from among all Roma NGOs raises concern about the unbalanced approach toward equal access for Roma NGOs and activists in the drafting and implementation of the NRSF. Local and regional Roma NGOs have much weaker capacity, experience with participating in a

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<sup>9</sup> The MoC invited to participate in the Working Group representatives from all active Roma NGOs. Three NGOs confirmed they participated - The Roma Culture Centre, Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS', and the foreign organisation International Roma Union – while the Roma mediator and family assistant of Ventspils City Social Services participated in the Working Group, taking into account her experience working with socially disadvantaged Roma families and specialists from municipality institutions and non-Roma NGOs:<sup>9</sup> <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/dokumenti-3>

<sup>10</sup> *Franet National contribution to the FRA Fundamental Rights Report - LATVIA 2021*, The Latvian Centre for Human Rights, p. 13: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fr2021\\_latvia-fr2021\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fr2021_latvia-fr2021_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> For example, the NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia and the NGO Creative Association for Youth TREPES. Both NGOs have been included in the Roma Advisory Council since 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Available only in the Latvian version: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/19938/download>

<sup>13</sup> For example, appropriate funding is available for the implementation of the proposed initiatives; initiatives correspond to the Council Recommendation and its principles; all members of the Working Group support the proposed measures.

<sup>14</sup> The representative of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights considers that discussion on including certain of the NGOs' projects in the NRSF is needed, especially if there is no direct link between these projects and the NRSF before the drafting process.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by the NRCP.

decision-making process, and level of political influence compared to the Roma Culture Centre, which has more political and social capital, as well as the capacity to bring its proposals to the NRSF.<sup>16</sup> Other NGOs which have good experience of working on Roma issues have only one possibility to implement their local activities, which is to participate in the open call for proposals with other non-Roma NGOs.

The possibility of representatives of Roma NGOs and Roma activists participating in the process of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the NRSF depends on the capacity of local or national NGOs and their experience in participating in a decision-making process and their political capital. That is the reason why the participation of many representatives of Roma NGOs has been rather decorative than had an effective impact on Roma policy making.<sup>17</sup>

Some representatives of Roma and non-Roma NGOs, as well as representatives of governmental institutions, indicated that the monitoring and evaluation measures are not described in detail in the NRSF – there is no specific chapter about this included in the NRSF. In addition, there is no detailed information about the mechanism of evaluation of the results of the implemented measures of the NRSF and on their impact on the situation of the Roma.

Many representatives of Roma civil society stated that the Roma should be involved in the process of the EU Structural Fund planning, like other civil society groups, and that they were not informed about the possibility to participate in such processes in order to address the needs and urgent problems of the Roma. The NRCP noted that the responsibility for such involvement lies with the Ministry of Finance (MoF).<sup>18</sup> A transparent approach should be used by the MoF, and additional informative support should be provided to the Roma NGOs.

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

The system of policy consultation with civil society and stakeholders in Latvia is based on the possibility to participate in the 'Advisory Council for the Promotion of Roma Participation' ('Roma Advisory Council'),<sup>19</sup> which is a consultative institution of the MoC aimed at monitoring and developing the implementation of Roma participatory measures. During meetings of the Advisory Council representatives of NGOs have the opportunity to participate by providing their opinions, addressing relevant issues, voicing the needs of Roma, and evaluating the results of the implemented measures of the NRSF. In February

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<sup>16</sup> During the interview with the representative of the Roma Culture Centre and the foreign organisation International Roma Union it was emphasised that the heads of these NGOs had organised regular meetings with ministers in key areas, members of Parliament Councils, and active representatives of political parties. A director of the Roma Culture Centre will also be contracted as an advisor by the Ombudsman's Office. In addition, the representative of the Roma Culture Centre and the foreign organisation International Roma Union also regularly participated in events at the European Union level.

<sup>17</sup> From an interview with a representative of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

<sup>18</sup> The public (including NGOs) could submit to the MoF during the official public consultation process written proposals and comments on the 'Operational Programmes of the European Union Structural Funds for 2021-2027' (*Eiropas Savienības struktūrfondu darbības programmas 2021. - 2027. gadam*), which outlines investments within the framework of the European Structural Funds, including the European Social Fund +, <https://www.esfondi.lv/sabiedribas-lidzdaliba>. The Operational Programmes: <https://www.esfondi.lv/planosana-1>.

<sup>19</sup> The Roma Advisory Council includes specialists nominated by the MoC, MoE, MoES, MoW, MoH, Ministry of Environment and Regional Development, SEA, AIPY, SIF, and LALRG, as well as representatives from NGOs working in the areas of civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc.

2022, the composition of the Roma Advisory Council was renewed by the MoC.<sup>20</sup> The requirement for Roma and non-Roma NGO participation in the Roma Advisory Council is at least two years of experience in promoting Roma participation in society – in the field of civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, or housing. According to the MoC, the Roma Advisory Council will include representatives from six Roma and non-Roma NGOs. Only two Roma NGOs are represented.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that the work of the Roma Advisory Council is included in the NRSF as a separate targeted measure (Measure 4.7). At least three meetings are planned per year.

Some representatives of Roma NGOs said that they were not planning to participate in the renewed Roma Advisory Council because there is no technical capacity to regularly participate in the meetings of the Roma Advisory Council. They also reported a lack of confidence that their views and interests would be taken into account and addressed in the framework of the NRSF (only certain NGOs with a high level of capacity usually receive support).<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the cooperation and consultation process with municipalities is also possible through the 'Regional Expert Network of Roma Integration Issues' established by the MoC in 2014.<sup>23</sup> This aims to foster the regular exchange of best practices, experience, and sharing of information, as well as to facilitate cooperation between experts of local governments, representatives of Roma communities, and the NRCP. The work of the Network will also be developed in the framework of the 'Latvian Roma Platform' project (Measure 4.1).

It should be noted that Latvian municipalities were not included in the Working Group set up to prepare the draft of the NRSF, but instead a representative of LALRG<sup>24</sup> was included as a member of the Working Group. Some representatives of NGOs deplored the fact that municipalities which are active at supporting the Roma (for example, Ventspils city municipality and Jelgava city municipality) were not represented in the Working Group and in the Roma Advisory Council as active stakeholders.<sup>25</sup>

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

According to the information available on the official website of the MoC, support activities are funded by the MoC for NGOs on an annual basis aimed at promoting the civic participation of the Latvian population, and at implementing measures for promoting intercultural dialogue and preserving the cultural traditions of national minorities, including the inclusion and participation of the Latvian Roma community.<sup>26</sup> This practice is supported by the representatives of local Roma NGOs because there is an opportunity for small local

<sup>20</sup> Detailed information on the Roma Advisory Council's function is included in the Annex to this report: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/kulturas-ministrija-izsludina-konkursu-nevalstisko-organizaciju-atlasei-darbam-konsultativaja-padome-romu-lidzdalibas-veicinasanai>

<sup>21</sup> According to the NRCP, the representatives of following NGOs have participated in the updated Roma Advisory Council since April 2022: Roma NGOs – the Roma Culture Centre and Kraslava Roma Association; non-Roma NGOs - Creative Association for Youth TREPES, Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia, Association of Youth Organisations 'IMKA Latvia', and IIC.

<sup>22</sup> Many active Roma NGOs did not submit an application for membership in the Roma Advisory Council in 2022: for instance, the Roma associations *Romanu Čačipen* of Jelgava City, the NGO Maro (Balvu district), Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Talsi district), the NGO Me Roma (Daugavpils district) and the foreign organisation International Roma Union.

<sup>23</sup> There are representatives from 18 local government institutions involved in the Network as experts on Roma integration. Previous Annual Reports on the implementation of measures for promoting Roma participation are available at the MoC website: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/dokumenti-3>

<sup>24</sup> More information about LALRG is available on the official website: <https://www.lps.lv/en>.

<sup>25</sup> From an interview with representative of the NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/nvo-atbalsts>

Roma NGOs to implement local initiatives in order to promote the participation of representatives of the local Roma community in cultural and social life at the grassroots level. These initiatives include distributing information about services, rights and responsibilities, as well as developing sustainable dialogue with municipalities and local non-Roma NGOs.

The empowerment measures are also planned in the framework of the 'Latvian Roma Platform' project activities, including activities targeted at supporting the work and involvement of Roma mediators in municipalities, and promoting the participation of Roma young people and women (Measure 4.1).<sup>27</sup>

Regular support for Roma NGOs and initiatives, as well as developing some good practices to promote Roma social and cultural inclusion (for example, by supporting Roma mediators and teaching assistants), are provided regularly by the municipalities at the local level,<sup>28</sup> based on the mainstream strategic and planning documents.

In addition, Roma NGOs' participation and representation at the local level and cooperation with the municipalities are mapped in a study implemented by the Ombudsman's Office.<sup>29</sup> An overview of best practices regarding Roma participation, empowerment and representation at the local level are included in the study.

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

According to the information provided by the NRCP, various training opportunities are essential for capacity-building and improving the knowledge of Roma civil society representatives, thus capacity-building measures are planned in the framework of the NRSF.<sup>30</sup>

The participation of the Society Integration Foundation (SIF) in the Working Group is a positive step towards improving access for Roma NGOs to the state budget and EU funding programmes aimed at supporting the development of civil society organisations and their initiatives. The measures proposed by SIF are included in the NRSF and supported by the members of the Working Group, including representatives of Roma and non-Roma NGOs. There are no measures targeted specifically at the Roma, but Roma are identified as one of the target groups.

According to the representative of SIF, the challenge is to develop a dialogue between SIF and national minority NGOs, including Roma NGOs, in order to improve their participation and involvement in terms of access to the above-mentioned programmes. Special motivational activities are needed to improve Roma NGOs' participation in the programmes. For instance, information about access to these programmes should be provided through the Roma Advisory Council.

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<sup>27</sup> More information on the project activity of the Latvian Roma Platform is available on the MoC website: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/latvijas-romu-platforma-vi>

<sup>28</sup> For example, Jelgava city, Ventspils city, Jūrmala city, Daugavpils city and Balvu district municipalities. More information about the empowerment of Roma communities at the local level is available in the Ombudsman's Study on the Roma situation in Latvia *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Riga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p.48. The study is available in Latvian at: [https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu\\_situacija\\_latvija\\_2022\\_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUe3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0](https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu_situacija_latvija_2022_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUe3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0)

<sup>29</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Riga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, capacity-building and participation activities for Roma NGOs and civil society representatives (Measure 4.1) and the activity 'Programme for the promotion of the participation of minority NGOs' (Measure 4.5) will be implemented.



The representative of the Jelgava city municipality called for holding workshops for Roma NGOs and activists on project design and implementation in the future, which would be crucial to improving Roma participation at the local level.

Some representatives of Roma NGOs<sup>31</sup> stated that the capacity of local Roma NGOs is insufficient for fundraising in relation to the framework of programmes that support NGOs, and that competition for the projects is too strong. One of the better options might be to define a small quota for the Roma NGOs at the local level – for example, support for one project per region per year.

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<sup>31</sup> Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Sabile), Roma organisation Maro (Vijaka), the Roma Culture Centre, NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia.

## 2. RELEVANCE

The main challenges facing the Roma community identified in the Latvian NRSF are reflected in the recommendations highlighted in the Council Recommendation, which include:

- Promoting Roma participation in education;
- Promoting Roma employment;
- Involving Roma in health promotion training;
- Improving access to housing and social services for the socially disadvantaged Roma families;
- Promoting Roma participation in the protection of rights and interests;
- Promoting Roma participation and preserving cultural identity and raising awareness of the general population of Roma culture and history.

### 2.1. Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

As stated in the NRSF, prejudice against the Roma is widespread in Latvian society<sup>32</sup>: The survey results show that 27.2% of respondents in Latvia would not want to work with Roma in the same work team, 29% of respondents would be opposed to having Roma persons as neighbours, and 49.4% would not want a Roma to become their child's spouse. Only 6% of respondents say that Roma are close to their friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances.<sup>33</sup> Almost 42% of respondents think that Roma cannot be trusted, while 38% believe that they are a burden on the social security system and increase the crime rate.<sup>34</sup> Data from the 2019 Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union show that 35% of Latvians believe that discrimination against Roma people is widespread.<sup>35</sup>

Negative stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma are one of the problems which Roma face in the labour market – especially from employers.<sup>36</sup> As the Roma mediators highlighted in the study conducted by the Ombudsman's Office, prejudices and stereotypes against Roma also persist in housing, such as when Roma try to rent a house or a flat, especially in the private sector.<sup>37</sup>

There is a lack of data on cases of antigypsyism in society. However, data show that Roma do not have enough information and knowledge of how to protect their rights and to access appropriate advocacy in such cases of unequal treatment. Usually, Roma victims of unequal treatment find it difficult to provide evidence of such treatment. Roma have a low level of motivation to address these situations because they do not trust in the possibility

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<sup>32</sup> The NRSF, pp. 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> M. Kaprāns, I. Mierīņa, A. Saulītis. *Starpkultūru stereotipi un aizspriedumi Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2021. available in Latvian: [http://fsi.lu.lv/userfiles/Ethnic%20stereotypes\\_SAPC.pdf](http://fsi.lu.lv/userfiles/Ethnic%20stereotypes_SAPC.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> M. Kaprāns, I. Mierīņa, A. Saulītis (2021), p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union*, 2019: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

<sup>36</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p. 48. The study is available in Latvian: [https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu\\_situacija\\_latvija\\_2022\\_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUe3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0](https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu_situacija_latvija_2022_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUe3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0)

<sup>37</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p. 8.

of really resolving such situations, even with the support of advocacy from the Ombudsman or human rights NGO.<sup>38</sup>

The significance of combatting antigypsyism is highlighted and addressed in the NRSF through several targeted measures that are included in the implementation plan. For example, activities for promoting Roma participation and preserving their cultural identity and social memory, awareness-raising and training activities on Roma rights, equal treatment, hate speech, and advocacy.<sup>39</sup> However, antigypsyism is not being addressed from a structural and institutional perspective as recommended in the EU Roma Framework or the Council Recommendation, or based on input from Roma NGO<sup>40</sup> that such problems exist.

The representatives of the Ombudsman's Office played a special role in the elaboration and implementation of the NRSF. It should be taken into account that the Ombudsman's Office is planning to provide its evaluation of the implementation of the NRSF's measures and recommendations for improving the NRSF, despite its representatives' participation in the process of the drafting of the NRSF.

In the opinion of the representative of the Ombudsman's Office, fighting antigypsyism and discrimination requires a horizontal approach and is addressed well enough in the NRSF.

However, fighting antigypsyism and discrimination is addressed in the NRSF through awareness raising and training activities, public campaigns, culture and commemoration activities, as well as in the area of education, but not in other key areas such as employment and healthcare,<sup>41</sup> which shows that the fight against antigypsyism and discrimination are not fully integrated into the NRSF as a horizontal area.

## 2.2. Education

The level of education of the Roma remains unacceptably low. According to the results of the study 'Roma in Latvia' (2015), 8.9% of the Roma have not attended school, 34% of Roma have completed primary education, while only 17.2% of the Roma population have a higher than basic education.<sup>42</sup> Data of the monitoring of Roma education provided by the MoES show that in 2017, 34.2% of Roma children in educational institutions completed special basic education programmes, but 7.5% of Roma pupils did not receive compulsory primary education. These problems are formulated in the NRSF section "Description of the situation".

In addition, the following main challenges are identified in the area of education:

- large number of Roma children in educational institutions enrolled in special education programmes;<sup>43</sup> The large number of Roma children in special education identified in the Ombudsman's study raises doubts as to whether special education

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<sup>38</sup> According to the interview with Roksana Rudeviča, who was an advisor on Roma issues in the Ombudsman's Office in 2021. According to the representative of the Ombudsman's Office, in general, the data about society's attitudes towards Roma which are reflected in the NRSF are appropriate and sufficient.

<sup>39</sup> For example, an annual informative event for the public and other informative, educational, positive experience promotion events and antigypsyism campaigns (Measures 4.1 and 4.30 of the NRSF); seminar 'Discrimination, hate speech, hate crimes, what can I do in the EU?' targeted at Roma (Measure 4.27 of the NRSF); commemorative events for remembering victims of the Roma Holocaust (Measure 4.2 of the NRSF); information campaign and advocacy measures provided by the Ombudsman Office (Measures 4.24 and 4.25 of the NRSF).

<sup>40</sup> From an interview with the representative of the foreign organisation International Roma Union.

<sup>41</sup> According to the Council Recommendation Article 8) and Article 9c).

<sup>42</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency "Latvian Facts", 2015, p. 6: [https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi\\_latvija\\_petijums\\_eng1.pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi_latvija_petijums_eng1.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Riga: Latvijas Republikas tiesībsargs, 2022, pp. 22-23, 47.

programmes for students with congenital mental disabilities are unjustifiably being prescribed to Roma children;<sup>44</sup>

- a significant number of Roma pupils have not finished compulsory primary and secondary education, and the drop-out rates of Roma students are significant;
- the high illiteracy rate among Roma parents negatively affects/ed the participation of Roma children in education, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the negative impact of COVID-19 on the education of Roma children, especially of their involvement in the education process;<sup>45</sup>
- a lack of information on Roma culture and history, especially the Roma genocide, in school curricula.

The following targeted measures are included in the NRSF to improve the situation of the Roma in the area of education:

- awareness-raising activities concerning Roma social inclusion issues for the representatives of municipal pedagogical-medical commissions for improving the accuracy of testing methods in the process of determining the need for the special education programme for Roma children (Measure 4);<sup>46</sup>
- the development of the practice of Roma teaching assistants in educational institutions where Roma children study to ensure more individualised cooperation with Roma parents; (Measure 4.11);
- measures to prevent early school leaving and drop-out of Roma pupils at all levels of education and to facilitate the return of Roma to education and the labour market (Measure 4.12);
- supporting activities for improving dialogue and cooperation between Roma mediators, teaching assistants, representatives of education boards and parents of Roma children in order to improve Roma pupils' access to preschool and primary education at the local level (Measures 4.13 and 4.15);<sup>47</sup>
- cultural diversity training for teachers and students on Roma history and culture in the Museum of Roma History and Art (measure 4.28),<sup>48</sup> as well as the inclusion of information about Roma culture and history (Roma genocide) in curricula.

In addition, the process of monitoring the education of Roma pupils in general education programmes, including the pre-school education programme, has been improved by the MoES. In particular, a mechanism for mapping the Roma children of pre-school age has been developed. It aims at identifying those Roma children who do not attend pre-school education institutions (Measure 4.14). Only Roma education monitoring is included as a targeted measure in the area of education in the framework of the NRSF; other measures are mainstreamed.

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<sup>44</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas tiesībsargs, 2022, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p. 25-26.

<sup>46</sup> In addition, one of the main recommendations in the Ombudsman's study is the official request that the MoES provide information to the Ombudsman by 1 November 2022 on the work of municipal pedagogical medical commissions in relation to potentially unreasonably placing Roma children in special education institutions or providing education through inappropriate special education programmes. The Ombudsman also calls for information on whether Roma children who are taught under special education programmes are provided with Roma teaching assistants in order to increase the inclusion of Roma children in the education process. *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> This measure will be implemented under Task 3.1.2 of the Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027.

<sup>48</sup> Implemented by the Roma NGO Roma Culture Centre within the framework of the state programme 'Latvian School Bag'. The MoES cooperates with the NGO Roma Culture Centre to find possibilities to organise joint activities and to support initiatives for improving the situation of Roma in the area of education. The representative of the Roma Culture Centre also is a member of the 'Advisory Council on Minority Education Issues'.

A positive step is that the issues of Roma inclusion are included both in the NRSF, and in sectoral policy planning documents. This is also an innovative approach to include Roma as one of the target groups of key sectoral policies, which proves that the responsibility for Roma inclusion and promotion of Roma participation is shared between all governmental stakeholders (sectoral ministries), not just the MoC. Especially, this is crucial for the area of education: the education of Roma pupils is mentioned as one of the high-level priorities in the *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027*:

*“To provide sufficient pedagogical and support staff for children and young people who need it (in the teaching and study process), incl. support for the inclusion of re-migrant children in education and support measures to support and involve Roma pupils in education by reducing the number of Roma pupils who do not complete compulsory primary education.”<sup>49</sup>*

As regards the Roma education measures, it is difficult to identify a specific amount of funding specially targeted at Roma as well as the number of Roma beneficiaries who have received support in the frameworks of ESF projects because these projects are targeted at all students, without ethnic specificity. Usually, Roma pupils' needs and the number of beneficiaries is based on the interpretation of available data.<sup>50</sup>

According to the representative of the MoES, the most effective practices for increasing the participation of Roma in education are informing the Roma community and specialists from municipalities about Roma education issues and responding to the problems identified in the monitoring. This includes contacting specialists of the Education Board in a particular municipality and informing them about the availability of support in the framework of appropriate projects.

Regarding Roma children in educational institutions with special education programmes, the MoES informed that the education system is gradually being changed to reduce the number of children in special education. During these changes, many children, including Roma, who were educated within special education programmes are going to be included in mainstream schools with additional support from teaching assistants. Taking into account these essential measures, a detailed analysis of the impact on Roma children's transfer of special education programmes to mainstream schools as well as of placing Roma children in special education institutions needs to be done in order to eliminate any unreasonable placing of Roma children in special education institutions, or their inappropriate provision of education within special education programmes.

Regarding lifelong learning for adults, the success of this measure depends on the motivation of Roma to participate in educational programmes (distance learning, professional vocational education) as well as on access to information about opportunities and consulting support.

### 2.3. Employment

According to the results of studies and statistical data, the following challenges for Roma in the area of employment have been identified:

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<sup>49</sup> Task 3.1.1. “Ensure an inclusive education approach at all levels of education” of the *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027*. In VI paragraph of the “Impact assessment on state and local government budgets”, a concrete task is specified: The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>.

<sup>50</sup> From an interview with the representative of the MoES.

- the share of Roma involved in the labour market is three times smaller than the average in Latvian society as a whole;<sup>51</sup>
- the rate of unregistered unemployment among the Roma population is several times higher than the official unemployment rate, and the long-term unemployed Roma rate is extremely high – at the end of 2019, 36% of all registered Roma unemployed were long-term unemployed, but in 2020 the figure was 39.1%.<sup>52</sup>
- low levels of education, especially illiteracy, are one of the main obstacles to Roma accessing the labour market and support measures provided by the SEA; 91% of the unemployed Roma registered in the SEA had a primary or lower education level.<sup>53</sup>

The following measures are included in the NRSF for improving the situation of Roma in employment:

- targeted activities for improving the reading and writing skills of SEA-registered Roma unemployed persons (i.e. the promotion of employment-related measures for Roma) (Measure 4.16);
- to provide, on an annual basis, individualised career counselling – assistance with choosing education and a profession, retraining, the selection of suitable vacancies, job search, and temporary employment measures to unemployed persons, including the Roma (Measure 4.16).

The MoW's representatives from social policy planning and development, unemployment reduction policy, and social work development policy sectors were involved in the process of the preparation of the draft of the NRSF – identifying measures, funding planning and sources, and setting a schedule. Roma NGOs which participated in the Working Group supported the initiatives proposed by the MoW.<sup>54</sup>

The proposed unemployment reduction policy measure (Measure 4.16) is exclusively targeted at the Roma and not included in the mainstream policy framework – *the Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027*.

The initiative proposed by the Roma Culture Centre during the meeting of the Working Group aimed at establishing Roma working/employment villages in municipalities was not supported by the MoW due to this practice not being considered socially inclusive but promoting a segregated approach, and not corresponding to the Council Recommendation principles. Other measures in the employment area that were proposed in the Working Group without any preliminary assessment, study, or mapping of the situation of Roma, justification and argumentation with data were not supported by the MoW.

The survey and qualitative study are necessary for understanding whether the work of social services is effective, as well as the access of Roma to social services.

## 2.4. Healthcare

According to the NRSF, in the 2019 report *Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion* prepared within the framework of the ESF project 'Research and Monitoring of Inclusive Labour Market and Poverty Risks', Roma are mentioned as one of the groups facing poverty and social exclusion. Experts point out that health-related

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<sup>51</sup> *Roma in Latvia*. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency 'Latvian Facts', 2015, p. 4: [https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi\\_latvija\\_petijums\\_eng1.pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi_latvija_petijums_eng1.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Data provided by the SEA. The NRSF, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Data provided by the SEA. The NRSF, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> From interview with the representative of the MoW.

inequalities are related to cultural differences, problems related to the status of poor or low-income persons, and illiteracy.<sup>55</sup>

The main challenges of Roma identified in access to healthcare include the fact that socially disadvantaged Roma families' access to healthcare support measures is insufficient. The knowledge of sexual and reproductive health in socially disadvantaged Roma families is very low; there is a lack of information in socially disadvantaged Roma families about HIV and hepatitis treatment measures, as well as drug addiction prevention state programmes and other state healthcare initiatives and projects. The usual channels of communication and information exchange for reaching groups at risk of social exclusion, including Roma, are insufficient, so it is necessary to develop more effective and sustainable communication channels.<sup>56</sup>

Roma as a target group are mentioned in a main sectoral policy document – the draft of the *Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027* (Annex 1 “Public health assessment”, I Chapter “Main public health issues”, Section “D. Health inequalities”)<sup>57</sup> as one of the population groups at high risk of territorial, poverty, and social exclusion, who are at risk of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, and whose access to certain health services is difficult owing to a low level of education and social security, as well as to their economic situation.<sup>58</sup> It is the first time that Roma were mentioned as one of the target groups in the sectoral document of the healthcare policy. The NRSF reflects the healthcare activities which are included in the sectoral policy document.

Measures included in the NRSF to address Roma challenges in healthcare aim at ensuring the better access of Roma to mainstream healthcare support measures, in particular through the development of dialogue between medical institutions and Roma mediators in order to inform and educate representatives of socially disadvantaged Roma families about issues related to sexual and reproductive health, HIV rehabilitation, prevention of the use of addictive substances, and the availability of health services in municipalities (Measure 4.17). Provision of training for Roma mediators was also planned in the framework of the NRSF. These measures are included also in a draft of the *Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027* (Task 1.3.6, and 1.4.2).

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

The following problems are identified in the official ‘Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion’ (2019)<sup>59</sup> provided by MoW: access to housing is challenging for socially disadvantaged Roma families,<sup>60</sup> the level of housing facilities for Roma families is low – 42.1% of the dwellings do not have a toilet, 26% do not have access to a water supply, and there is an overcrowding problem in Roma households.<sup>61</sup> As stated in a study conducted by the Ombudsman’s Office in 2022, due to poor living conditions Roma often do not live in the social houses/flats provided by the social services

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<sup>55</sup> *Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion* (Ziņojums “Ikgadējs nabadzības un sociālās atstumtības mazināšanas rīcībpolitikas izvērtējums”). Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2019., p. 348. The Report is available in Latvian:

[http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title\\_file/Nabadz\\_soc\\_atstumt\\_mazin\\_ricibpol\\_izvertejums\\_Zinojums.pdf](http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/Nabadz_soc_atstumt_mazin_ricibpol_izvertejums_Zinojums.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency ‘Latvian Facts’, 2015, p.91.

<sup>57</sup> The draft of the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027 available in Latvian: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40498718>

<sup>58</sup> The draft of the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027 available in Latvian: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40498718>

<sup>59</sup> Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion, p.23.

<sup>60</sup> Experts estimate that 75 to 80% of the Roma population in Latvia live in socially disadvantaged families. The NRSF, p.7.

<sup>61</sup> Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion, p. 348.

in municipalities, and this condition may affect Roma families' access to social assistance, including different benefit payments.<sup>62</sup>

In housing, the NRSF proposes mainstream measures. The Roma are not mentioned as one of the target groups in the *National Industrial Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027*. There are no targeted measures included in the NRSF which could address the housing challenges of socially disadvantaged Roma families. However, it is assumed that Roma could benefit from the supporting measures provided to socially disadvantaged people in the framework of the *National Industrial Policy Guidelines*. For instance, under Task 4.1.4.1 "Access to social housing for particularly disadvantaged people, incl. orphans and children left without parental care after reaching the age of majority, promoting equal opportunities in the labour market and improving professional mobility";<sup>63</sup> Task 4.1.4.2 "Providing support for sustainable, low-running and construction-cost housing primarily in areas with new job potential"; "Improving access to housing for the disadvantaged persons", Task 4.1.4.3 "Support for individuals to receive a grant for the purchase or construction of housing",<sup>64</sup> and Task 4.1.4.4 "Improving energy efficiency in residential buildings and resource efficiency."<sup>65</sup>

In the opinion of the representative of the Ombudsman's Office, measures regarding housing measures are too mainstreamed and it could be a challenge for Roma to access housing support. There are no targeted activities for promoting and ensuring access for the Roma to the housing support activities mentioned in the NRSF. Many Roma and NGO representatives doubt that Roma from socially disadvantaged families in particular can afford practical access to housing measures defined in the NRSF (access to social housing, housing renovation state initiatives and grants, energy efficiency programmes).<sup>66</sup>

## 2.6. Social protection

No study or research has been conducted and no ethnic data is available about the access of Roma to appropriate social protection systems and their social protection skills.

It should be highlighted that Roma as a target group are mentioned in the *Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027* (Section 12.1 "Evidence-based policymaking") related to the challenge of data collection:<sup>67</sup>

*"Insufficient information on specific target groups who may be at risk of poverty and whose situation cannot be derived from the EU-SILC survey, for example, information on people with disabilities (based on their own health assessment) can only be obtained partly, but for specific groups*

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<sup>62</sup> Romu situācija Latvijā. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> Measure 4.18 of the NRSF plans to provide support to municipalities for the renovation and construction of their social and municipal rental housing, ensuring the availability of a total of 1,800 high-quality social and municipal rental housing (1,200 dwellings).

<sup>64</sup> Measures 4.21 and 4.22 of the NRSF plan 1) to develop a mechanism that enables individuals to receive a grant for the purchase or construction of a home, where the amount of the grant to be awarded is determined by the number of children in the family as well as 2) to provide support for individuals (families with children; for families with 4 or more children up to 30% of the loan) to purchase or build housing under the Housing Guarantee Scheme.

<sup>65</sup> Measure 4.23 of the NRSF plans to increase energy efficiency in residential buildings and the efficient use of resources, including by providing support within the framework of the programme 'Renovation of apartment houses' and 'Energy efficiency of private houses'.

<sup>66</sup> Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Sabīle), the Roma Culture Centre, the foreign organisation International Roma Union, the NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia.

<sup>67</sup> The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>



*such as the Roma, people released from prisons, people with insufficient, low or unsuitable skills, etc. the information is not analysed at all."*

The social protection measures are mainstream measures, and not specifically mentioned in the NRSF as targeted at Roma. These measures are part of social services provision provided by municipalities,<sup>68</sup> which includes mainly support from social services, schools, probation services, 'Orphan's Courts', and cooperation with Roma mediators, teaching assistants, and Roma NGO. For example, the development of a family assistant service in the municipalities, including the promotion of the social skills of Roma families and training Roma representatives as family assistants to build trust between Roma families and social services, is planned within the framework of the NRSF.

## 2.7. Social services

According to the data, Roma are well-aware of social benefits and other material support provided by municipalities, although they often do not understand the procedures that would allow them to receive them.<sup>69</sup> The data shows that 67.4% of Roma households received different social benefits or other forms of financial support in the last 12 months.<sup>70</sup>

Another problem related to the access of Roma to social benefits is that many Roma with a low level of education register as unemployed in the SEA in order to obtain the status of poor or economically disadvantaged persons and receive social assistance and benefits, but not to get jobs.<sup>71</sup>

Regarding the access of Roma to social services and the development of social work, the following measures are included in the NRSF:

- Involving representatives of Roma communities in the provision of family assistant services in municipalities; training to develop family assistants' skills (especially Roma mediators) and social skills (for Roma families); promoting trust and dialogue between Roma families and social services; improving access of Roma parents to the social benefits and services, and developing more effective monitoring of the situation of socially disadvantaged Roma families (Measure 4.9);<sup>72</sup>
- In the framework of the Latvian Roma platform project, at least four awareness-raising and motivation-raising activities will be implemented in relation to the involvement of the Roma target group in social support programmes (Measure 4.1).
- In the framework of the ESF project activity 'Programme for motivation and provision of support services to people at risk of discrimination and social exclusion, including Roma', the support activities are also planned to be implemented for promoting Roma social inclusion, raising awareness of their rights, helping them to engage in education, and obtain qualifications or employment. These measures are also addressed in the NRSF, but there are no specific activities targeted directly at Roma (Measure 4.8).

A qualitative survey about Roma's access to support measures, services, and information was conducted in the framework of the evaluation of 'Policies for Reducing Poverty and

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<sup>68</sup> The Latvian social security/ protection system includes the social insurance system, social benefits, as well as the system of social services and social assistance.

<sup>69</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency 'Latvian Facts', 2015, p.3.

<sup>70</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency 'Latvian Facts', 2015, p.22.

<sup>71</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency 'Latvian Facts', 2015, pp.5-6.

<sup>72</sup> This measure is implemented under Task 2.6.3 of the Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027.

Social Exclusion' in 2017,<sup>73</sup> and 2019.<sup>74</sup> The MoW has data available on how many Roma receive social benefits, but there is a lack of data on the number of Roma who need certain social services and support activities.<sup>75</sup> The feedback from Roma representatives is very important for understanding the real situation of the Roma such as the circumstances and reasons why Roma face barriers to accessing social services and information. It is important to find appropriate methods to collect and disseminate information to Roma and key persons (Roma mediators, NGO representatives, community leaders) who could provide information to socially disadvantaged Roma families.

## 2.8. Child protection

No study or research has been conducted and no ethnic data is available specifically on Roma child protection. The child protection measures are mainstream measures and are not specifically mentioned in the NRSF as targeted action on Roma children and Roma families, as recommended in the 'EU Roma Framework'. These measures are part of social services provisions provided by municipalities, which include mainly support from social services, schools, probation services, Orphan's Courts, and cooperation with Roma mediators, teacher assistants, and Roma NGOs. For example, the development of a Roma family assistant service, as well as Roma mediation and teacher assistant practices in municipalities with a relatively large Roma population.

The special focus on the provision of child protection is addressed in the study conducted by the Ombudsman's Office, which shows that Roma teaching assistants promote cooperation with parents of Roma children (parents' trust increases when there is a Roma representative in the institution) and provide important assistance to children who have difficulties with the Latvian language.<sup>76</sup> In addition, there are special measures for promoting the better access of Roma children to formal and informal education implemented at the municipal level (Daugavpils city municipality, Jelgava city municipality, Ventspils city municipality). Roma mediators have close dialogue with socially disadvantaged Roma families, schools and social services, and play a significant role in the provision of Roma child-protection activities.

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

As stated in Section 2.1, the attitude of almost 45% of mainstream society towards Roma is based on stereotypes and prejudices, which may be a basis for the manifestation of intolerance, hate speech, and antigypsyism. One of the reasons for this situation is a lack of knowledge and information in mainstream society of Roma culture and history, in particular of the Roma genocide and their socioeconomic situation as well as the cost of the unequal treatment faced by Roma in Latvia.

In addition, Latvian Roma have been part of the Latvian cultural space since the sixteenth century, 98% of them have Latvian citizenship, and as an officially recognised national minority have deep roots in Latvian traditions, values, language, and religious beliefs. Latvian Roma do not have a country of origin and only Latvia has responsibility for

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<sup>73</sup> Ziņojums 'Motivācijas paaugstināšanas un atbalsta pakalpojumu potenciālās mērķa grupas profilēšana un vajadzību izpēte'. Rīga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> *Annual Evaluation of Policies for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion* (Ziņojums 'Ikgadējs nabadzības un sociālās atstumtības mazināšanas rīcībpolitikas izvērtējums'). Rīga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2019., p. 348. The Report is available in Latvian: [http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title\\_file/Nabadz\\_soc\\_atstumt\\_mazin\\_ricibpol\\_izvertejums\\_Zinoju\\_ms.pdf](http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/Nabadz_soc_atstumt_mazin_ricibpol_izvertejums_Zinoju_ms.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> From an interview with the representative of the MoW.

<sup>76</sup> Romu situācija Latvijā. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, p.9.

supporting the preservation of Latvian Roma cultural heritage and promoting the development of its culture.

Regarding the awareness of Roma arts, culture, and history and combatting negative stereotypes and antigypsyism and promoting tolerance towards Roma, the NRSF includes the following measures:

- informative activities on Roma history, culture, and identity, including Roma radio broadcasting, launching events on social networks, and antigypsyism campaigns implemented by the NGO Roma Culture Centre (Measure 4.30);
- expansion of the exposition of the Roma History and Art Museum (digitalisation of materials; availability of audio recordings of lectures in different languages) and the yearly organisation of the 'International Roma Culture Festival' (Measures 4.29 and 4.31);
- commemorative events *in memoriam* of the victims of the Roma Genocide during the Second World War (measure 4.2).

The Roma Culture Centre is mostly involved in the implementation of NRSF-related measures to promote awareness of mainstream society about Roma arts, culture, and history. Some of the representatives of Roma NGOs who are active at the local level but not directly involved in the implementation of NRSF measures consider this situation to be unbalanced, non-transparent, and unclear.<sup>77</sup>

According to Roma mediators from Ventspils city municipality and Balvi district municipality, Roma cultural development activities need to be organised regularly not only in Riga but also at the regional and local level, because a significant part of Roma communities live in other regions and there is mainstream prejudice about the Roma in many municipalities. Representatives of local Roma NGOs and activists should be invited to participate in Latvian Roma cultural activities – for instance, in the 'International Roma Culture Festival', public awareness activities about Roma history, culture, and identity, as well as commemorative events.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Sabile).

<sup>78</sup> From an interview with Roma mediators from Ventspils city municipality and Balvi district municipality.

### 3. EXPECTED EFFECTIVENESS

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

The NRSF includes measures from key policy areas such as education, welfare, housing, and health policy and has references to key sectoral policy guidelines. The implementation of the measures of the NRSF is closely related to the goals and tasks specified in the 'National Development Plan for 2021-2027', although Roma are not addressed as a target group therein.

In Annex I of *the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027* ("Detailed description of the situation") Section 2 "Achievements in the field of national identity" mentions that the *National Roma inclusion strategic policy framework* is included among the preconditions specified by the EU funds for the 2021-2027 programming period in relation to the specific support objective "4.1.8 Promoting socio-economic integration of third-country nationals and of marginalised communities such as the Roma". In cooperation with all stakeholders and co-responsible institutions, including the MoW, the MoES, MoE and the MoH, it is planned to develop the NRSF so that Roma support measures will be identified in key areas (education, employment, health and social services, and housing) as defined in the Council Recommendation.<sup>79</sup>

The subsection "Future challenges for the development of civil society" claims that Roma are one of the groups in society with low levels of participation and civic participation. In order to implement one of the specific objectives of the Council Recommendation "to promote participation by providing cooperation mechanisms and building trust", *better coordination is needed in the next programming period (2021-2027) between all stakeholders, involving NGOs as equal partners in civil dialogue and in the development and implementation of sectoral policy solutions*.<sup>80</sup>

The measures included in the NRSF will be implemented as follows:

- in the field of education within the framework of *the Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027* coordinated by the MoES;<sup>81</sup>
- in the field of employment and social security within the framework of *the Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027* coordinated by the MoW;<sup>82</sup>
- in the field of housing within the framework of *the National Industrial Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027* coordinated by the MoE;<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/320841-par-saliedetas-un-pilsoniski-aktivas-sabiedribas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-qadam>.

<sup>80</sup> The subsection "Future challenges for the development of civil society" in the Annex I of the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027. The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/320841-par-saliedetas-un-pilsoniski-aktivas-sabiedribas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-qadam>

<sup>81</sup> Roma pupils are mentioned as one of the high priorities in *the Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027* (Task 3.1.1.). The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitiba-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-qadam>

<sup>82</sup> The Roma as a target group are mentioned in *the Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027* (Section 12.1. "Evidence - based policy making") in relation to the challenge of data collection. The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-qadam>

<sup>83</sup> The Roma as target group are not mentioned in *the National Industrial Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027*. The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/321037-par-nacionalas-industrialas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-qadam>

- in the field of the development of civil society and culture within the framework of *the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027* coordinated by the MoC;<sup>84</sup>
- in the field of health within the framework of *the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027* coordinated by the MoH.<sup>85</sup>

There is no direct coherence between the NRSF and *Latvia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)*.<sup>86</sup> Measures are planned in the NRRP for providing specific support for the inclusion of the social disadvantaged groups and poverty reduction, as well as minimising the risk of long-term unemployment. Nevertheless, the fact that the Roma are not identified in the NRRP as one of the socially disadvantaged groups (the groups identified are: persons with mental disorders and seniors with functional disorders, and persons with disabilities) does not mean that Roma provisionally could not benefit from the NRRP measures as persons with a low level of education or an insufficient level of education in the labour market, or as persons at risk of social exclusion. In this regard, the main challenge is how the Roma from socially disadvantaged families will access the support and services planned in the framework of the NRRP.

The Roma are not identified as a special targeted group in the local plans or strategic frameworks of municipalities. There is no chapter included in the NRSF on cooperation with local governments and their involvement in the implementation of the NRSF.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.2. Responsibility for NRSF coordination and monitoring

Coordinated action between all stakeholders is important for the effective implementation of the NRSF. The MoC as NRCP is responsible for the implementation of the NRSF; the co-responsible institutions for the implementation of the NRSF are the MoES, the MoW, the MoH, the MoE, as well as partly the Ombudsman's Office and the SIF. This horizontal scope – whereby Roma as one of the target groups are included in sectoral key policies – is a positive step towards an integrative approach to Roma policy-making. Additionally, it demonstrates that the responsibility of developing Roma inclusion and promoting participation is shared between all governmental stakeholders (sectoral ministries), not just the MoC. The challenge is to provide for balanced cooperation between the NRCP, co-responsible ministries, and Roma communities to improve the situation of Roma in all key areas.

The NRCP is part of the structure of the MoC. The functioning of the NRCP is ensured by one official from the MoC who is institutionally subject to the procedures and regulations of the MoC. All funds necessary for the work of the NRCP are provided from the budget of the MoC. The NRCP is not a separate structural unit; only one representative of the MoC works as the NRCP coordinator, who also deals with other sub-policy areas in addition to this responsibility. Taking into account the situation in Latvia, the capacity and workload of the NRCP is sufficient.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The Roma are mentioned in *the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027* as one of the national minorities that has a right to preserve and develop their language, ethnic and cultural identity as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (Article 114). The Guidelines available in Latvian: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/320841-par-saliedetas-un-pilsoniski-aktivas-sabiedribas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-qadam>

<sup>85</sup> The Roma as a target group are not mentioned in *the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027*. The Draft of the Guidelines available in Latvian: [https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/legal\\_acts/b8342cd9-318a-4f99-b147-0a144bcfb231](https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/legal_acts/b8342cd9-318a-4f99-b147-0a144bcfb231)

<sup>86</sup> *Latvia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan* available in Latvian: [https://www.esfondi.lv/upload/anm/01\\_anm\\_plans\\_04062021.pdf](https://www.esfondi.lv/upload/anm/01_anm_plans_04062021.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> From an interview with a representative of NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia.

<sup>88</sup> According to the information provided by the MoC (NRCP) the situation in Latvia must be understood as a set of several factors: the small Roma community in Latvia; there are no travellers in Latvia;

Within the framework of the project 'Latvian Roma Platform' a Roma project assistant is employed. That person also partially works on issues within the competence of the NRCP.

The Ombudsman's Office expects that the MoC as the NRCP will request information on the implementation of the NRSF from the ministries who share related responsibilities and, on that basis, the implementation report will be elaborated.<sup>89</sup> The Ombudsman's Office considers that the dialogue and coordination between the Ombudsman's Office and the MoC are effective. The invitation to the Ombudsman's Office to participate in the Working Group is a positive step towards improving the cooperation.

Also, representatives from other governmental institutions appreciated the coordination work and cooperation with the MoC (NRSP), especially the initiative to establish the Working Group for the elaboration of the draft of the NRSF.<sup>90</sup>

In addition, respondents highlighted the significance of the development of dialogue and consultation and the involvement of Roma in the consultative mechanisms, committees, and other decision-making platforms at the national as well as at the regional and local levels.<sup>91</sup>

It is important to ensure consultations with Roma civil society in order to develop relevant policies in key areas, and to provide and carry out awareness-raising work for Roma so that they are aware of the decision-making process, policy planning, and opportunities associated with the state budget.

### 3.3. Quality of the plan

The NRSF includes measures from key policy areas such as education, welfare, housing, and health policy areas, as suggested in the Council Recommendation, and makes reference to key sectoral policy guidelines. The measures included in the NRSF are also part of other sectoral policy planning documents.<sup>92</sup> To answer the question of which mainstream sectoral policies should be developed in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the NRSF and make it more effective, the NRCP considers that issues of Roma equality, inclusion, and participation must be considered horizontally, according to the competencies of each responsible ministry and institution.<sup>93</sup>

The description of the situation of the NRSF is based on national and international research on the situation of the Roma,<sup>94</sup> as well as on a survey of the attitudes of the population

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and the policy for Roma inclusion in Latvia is horizontal – i.e. for each area (education, employment, health care) the ministry of the respective area is responsible. In this regard, the capacity of the NRCP is sufficient to ensure the preparation of policy planning documents, the monitoring of their implementation, and the preparation of reports on the progress of Roma inclusion policy, as well as for ensuring the implementation of the Latvian Roma Platform project.

<sup>89</sup> From an interview with the representative of the Ombudsman's Office.

<sup>90</sup> From an interview with representatives of the MoES, the MoW.

<sup>91</sup> From an interview with representatives of the MoES, the MoW, Roma mediator from Ventspils, the Roma Culture Centre, and the foreign organisation International Roma Union.

<sup>92</sup> The Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027,<sup>92</sup> the Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027, the Social Protection and Labour Market Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027, the National Industrial Policy Guidelines 2021-2027, draft of the Public Health Guidelines 2021-2027.

<sup>93</sup> From an interview with the representative of the MoC (NRCP).

<sup>94</sup> Roma in Latvia. Riga: Market and opinion Research Agency 'Latvian Facts', 2015. The study available in English: [https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi\\_latvija\\_petijums\\_eng1.pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi_latvija_petijums_eng1.pdf)

Ziņojums 'Motivācijas paaugstināšanas un atbalsta pakalpojumu potenciālās mērķa grupas profilēšana un vajadzību izpēte'. Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2017.

towards diverse groups in society, including the Roma.<sup>95</sup> The expected results for the assessment of the implementation reflected in the NRSF are based on official statistical data, studies, and situation analyses provided by the responsible ministry (institution) for each key area. To assess the implementation of the NRSF concrete policy results and outcome indicators have been defined in accordance with the evaluations carried out in each key area – civil society, education, employment, healthcare, social services, housing, etc.<sup>96</sup>

### 3.4. Funding

Almost all measures of the NRSF are associated with specific sources of funding, while for those for which the source of funding is undefined specific procedures are in place to request such funding from the state budget. The NRCP foresees that, given the fact that almost all the NRSF measures are also included in other sectoral policy planning documents, and specific sources of funding are defined in these documents, there are no obstacles to the implementation of NRSF measures.<sup>97</sup>

The measures included in the NRSF will be financed from the state and local government budgets, EU financial instruments, as well as through private initiatives.<sup>98</sup> Funding for the implementation of the NRSF measures will be allocated in accordance with the procedures specified in Latvian regulation, depending on the specific source of funding.<sup>99</sup>

The NRCP identified that a problem may arise with the implementation of those NRSF measures for which funds are not included in the main umbrella policy document – the *National Development Plan for 2021-2027* within the indicative set of investment projects and in the Law 'On the Medium-Term Budget Framework for 2022, 2023 and 2024'. These measures can be implemented if the applications for priority measures submitted by the responsible line ministries are supported when preparing the state budget.<sup>100</sup>

For many Roma representatives, the chapter on financing the implementation of the NRSF is too difficult to understand.<sup>101</sup> They point out that Roma NGOs have not been involved in the process of planning state funding or EU Structural Funds, and they were not

<sup>95</sup> Aptauja par iedzīvotāju viedokli par etniskajām attiecībām Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS, 2019. Available in Latvian: <https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/media/142/download>; M.Kaprāns, I.Mieriņa, A.Saulītis. *Starpkultūru stereotipi un aizspriedumi Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2021. Available in Latvian: [http://fsi.lu.lv/userfiles/Ethnic%20stereotypes\\_SAPC.pdf](http://fsi.lu.lv/userfiles/Ethnic%20stereotypes_SAPC.pdf);

<sup>96</sup> According to the information provided by the NRCP, these evaluations are: Aptauja par iedzīvotāju viedokli par etniskajām attiecībām Latvijā. Rīga: SKDS, 2019.; M.Kaprāns, I.Mieriņa, A.Saulītis. *Starpkultūru stereotipi un aizspriedumi Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2021.; *Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union*, 2019.; Roma in Latvia. Rīga: Market and opinion Research Agency "Latvian Facts", 2015: [https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi\\_latvija\\_petijums\\_eng1.pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/sites/km/files/romi_latvija_petijums_eng1.pdf); *Sabiedrības saliedētības politikas ekspertu grupas ziņojums*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas valsts prezidenta kanceleja, 2016. Pieejams: <https://www.president.lv/lv/media/5066/download>; *Ziņojums 'Ikgadējs nabadzības un sociālās atstumtības mazināšanas rīcībpolitikas izvērtējums'*. Rīga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2019.; *Ziņojums 'Motivācijas paaugstināšanas un atbalsta pakalpojumu potenciālās mērķa grupas profilēšana un vajadzību izpēte'*. Rīga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2017: <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/izqlitiba>; <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=610>.

<sup>97</sup> Information provided by the NRCP.

<sup>98</sup> Detailed information on the planned funds for the implementation of specific measures is available in the NRSF Chapter 5 *Impact Assessment on the State and Local Government Budget*.

<sup>99</sup> Information provided by the NRCP.

<sup>100</sup> Based on the information provided by the NRCP there are the following measures: Measure 4.9 "Implementation and development of the family assistant service in local governments", Measure 4.16 "Promoting Roma employment" Measure 4.21 "Support for individuals to receive a grant for the purchase or construction of housing", and Measure 4.31 "The organisation of the International Roma Culture Festival".

<sup>101</sup> Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Sabile), the Roma Culture Centre, The foreign organisation 'International Roma Union'.

informed about the possibility to participate in this process in order to address the needs and urgent problems of Roma. The NRCP does not define any specific activities for involving Roma in the process of planning EU Structural Funds at the national level; the NRCP noted that the responsibility for such involvement is the MoF's.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.5. Monitoring and evaluation

Information provided by the NRCP stipulates that the evaluation of the NRSF will be performed in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 737 of 2 December 2014 'Regulations for the Development and Impact Assessment of Development Planning Documents' and carried out within the budget of the MoC.<sup>103</sup>

Many stakeholders pointed out that there is no dedicated chapter related to the institutional mechanism of evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the NRSF or information explaining how monitoring of the implementation of the NRSF will be provided.<sup>104</sup> Some activities regarding the monitoring of the NRSF are available (the study on the situation of Roma in Latvia; a public opinion poll on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the Latvian population in the field of anti-discrimination and tolerance; an assessment of the anti-discrimination situation; the monitoring the education of Roma pupils in general education programmes) in the list of measures but they are dispersed within the text of the NRSF.

One of the proposals from the Roma NGO to the NRCP was to contract an independent expert who will evaluate the results of the implementation of the NRSF measures and present the report to the Roma Advisory Council.<sup>105</sup>

As for the monitoring of the progress of the NRSF that is achieved as well as the situation of Roma, a study on the situation of Roma in Latvia (Measure 7.1 of the NRSF) will be carried out in 2023 and the NRSF monitoring system will be improved within the framework of the project 'Latvian Roma Platform VI'. According to the information provided by the NRCP, the MoC plans to organise consultations with the Central Statistical Bureau in order to identify and to collect data to better map of the situation of Roma as well as conduct an effective evaluation of the implementation of the NRSF. However, such an initiative is not included in the set of planned measures of the NRSF.

In addition, a study on the human rights situation of Roma, especially at the local level, was conducted in 2021-2022 by the Ombudsman Office.<sup>106</sup> The study and recommendations were sent to parliament, the government (including the NRCP), and local governments in order to support better Roma participation at the local level. This report is included in the NRSF (Measure 4.26).

While it is important to evaluate and monitor exactly how Roma will benefit from the implementation of the NRSF, there is limited ethnic data available in governmental and municipal institutions in key areas. In many such areas, a mainstreaming approach is used (housing, health, civil society development), and the challenge will be how Roma will in practice benefit from the mainstream measures planned in the NRSF. Many stakeholders

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<sup>102</sup> Making written proposals and comments on the 'Operational Programmes of the European Union Structural Funds for 2021-2027' (*Eiropas Savienības struktūrfondu darbības programmas 2021. - 2027. gadam*) was possible for the public (including NGOs), and could be submitted to the MoF during the official public consultation process: <https://www.esfondi.lv/sabiedribas-lidzdaliba>. The Operational Programmes: <https://www.esfondi.lv/planosana-1>.

<sup>103</sup> Information provided by the NRCP.

<sup>104</sup> For instance, representatives of the MoES, the MoW, and Roma and non-Roma NGOs.

<sup>105</sup> From an interview with the representative of the foreign organisation International Roma Union.

<sup>106</sup> Romu situācija Latvijā. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas tiesībsargs, 2022.



who were interviewed pointed out the importance of collecting additional data in key areas by using a qualitative approach.<sup>107</sup>

A representative of a non-Roma NGO stated that the indicators associated with results identified in the NRSF are vague, and it will be difficult to improve these indicators using the measures defined in the NRSF.<sup>108</sup>

There are no references to the FRA outcome and process indicators included in the NRSF.

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

Based on all the information that has been collected, NGOs in general believe that the NRSF has the potential to meet its objectives and contribute to a realistic extent to solving the main challenges faced by the Roma. More specifically, many respondents consider that the NRSF has been elaborated as a balanced and extensive policy document which includes targeted and mainstreamed measures in various key areas in order to improve the situation of Roma in Latvia;<sup>109</sup> most of the main needs of Roma (job opportunities; education; the involvement of the Ombudsman) are taken into account in the NRSF. However, the condition for achieving tangible progress and sustainable development of Roma policymaking is that the targeted measures defined in the NRSF are implemented through and in close cooperation with Roma NGOs and activists, especially at the local level, and dissemination and exchanges of best practices are fostered between municipalities.<sup>110</sup>

However, some problems identified in the NRSF ("Description of the situation") are not reflected in certain measures of the NRSF.<sup>111</sup> The main challenge of the implementation of the NRSF is related to the access of Roma to mainstream measures due to a lack of capacity of Roma civil society, the low level of motivation of representatives of Roma communities to participate in social and cultural life at the local and regional level, the insufficient cultural, social, and economic capital of Roma families in relation to access to social services, supporting programmes, and the development of social mobility.<sup>112</sup> In addition, there is a lack of Roma NGOs included in the implementation of the NRSF's measures; for example, in the culture promotion area.<sup>113</sup>

Some activities of the NRSF do not fully correspond to the participatory conditions and skills of Roma marginalised communities, which could be a challenge in relation to fostering effective Roma participation in mainstream activities and measures. In addition, there is no clear description in the NRSF of the responsibilities of the NRCP and co-responsible governmental institutions, and especially of municipalities, regarding the coordination of the implementation of the NRSF and design of the future NRSF.

<sup>107</sup> The MoW, the Ombudsman's Office, Jelgava city municipality, Ventspils city municipality.

<sup>108</sup> From an interview with a representative of the NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

<sup>109</sup> From an interview with the representative of the MoES, MoW, the Ombudsman's Office, Jelgava city municipality, Ventspils city municipality, Roma mediator from Ventspils, the Roma Culture Centre, The foreign organisation International Roma Union, and the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

<sup>110</sup> From an interview with the representative of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

<sup>111</sup> For example, a high proportion of long-term unemployed Roma; low number of Roma involved in the labour market; high rate of Roma children in educational institutions completed special basic education programmes; the negative impact of COVID-19 on the education of Roma children; a large number of the majority Latvian population who do not want to work with Roma in the same work teams; and employers who do not want to employ Roma. The problem was addressed in an interview with the representative of the MoW.

<sup>112</sup> From an interview with representatives of Roma mediator from Ventspils, the Roma Culture Centre, The foreign organisation International Roma Union, Roma NGO 'Maro' (Vijaka).

<sup>113</sup> Society Integration Association 'ALTERNATIVAS' (Sabile).

Detailed information on the monitoring of the implementation of the NRSF is not included in the NRSF, and this may hinder the transparent evaluation of the progress of NRSF implementation, as well as the assessment of the impact of specific NRSF measures on the Roma community.

A number of main risks have been identified which could provisionally affect the sustainability of implementation of the NRSF:

- precautionary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 virus, such as restrictions on gathering, which may impede on-site activities (NRCP);
- other political priorities could minimise the significance of Roma inclusion policy;<sup>114</sup>
- low motivation of Roma to participate in the process of the implementation of the NRSF's measures;<sup>115</sup>
- funds from the state budget not provided.<sup>116</sup>

Based on the results of the implementation of the NRSF, a policy for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation will be designed and developed for the next period 2024-2025 to promote a long-term impact.

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<sup>114</sup> From an interview with representatives of the MoES, Jelgava city municipality.

<sup>115</sup> From an interview with representatives of the MoES, MoW.

<sup>116</sup> From an interview with the representative of the MoW.

## 4. ALIGNMENT WITH THE EU ROMA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

### 4.1. Reflecting diversity among Roma

The measures included in the NRSF are targeted at all members of the Latvian Roma communities as a whole.<sup>117</sup>

There is no information on the situation and measures included in the NRSF which directly address the challenges of specific groups of Roma communities, such as women, LGBT+, people with disabilities, etc.

Roma mediators play a significant role in the involvement of all social groups of Roma communities in the implementation of the NRSF. For example, the Roma mediator from Ventspils municipality is also a member of the non-Roma NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia, and is involved in the 'Advisory Council for the Promotion of Roma Participation', providing support to the Roma in sensitive healthcare situations (HIV, drug addiction). The Roma mediator from Balvi municipality provides advocacy and support to Roma persons with disabilities and pensioners.

### 4.2. Combining mainstream and targeted approaches

The NRSF uses a balanced approach between mainstream and targeted measures: some measures are directly targeted at Roma and address specific Roma problems in key areas, including the development of Roma culture and combating antigypsyism; there are also mainstream measures included in the NRSF that do not identify the Roma as one of the target groups, even though they can be mentioned in some cases.

The challenge is that the mainstream measures do not provide for specific activities for the involvement and promotion of the participation of Roma people in relation to accessing services or financial support in the framework of these measures (programmes, projects, initiatives). Furthermore, there is no detailed information on how to evaluate the scope of Roma participation and quality of services which they receive under the framework of these measures.

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

The NRSF was designed by the MoC in accordance with the Council Recommendation, taking into account specific recommendations in key areas which are relevant to the situation of Latvia and national circumstances.<sup>118</sup> All measures included in the framework of the NRSF refer to concrete articles of the Council Recommendation.<sup>119</sup>

The involvement of the Ombudsman's Office, a national equality body, in the elaboration and the implementation of the NRSF is crucial, and shows that the promotion of equal treatment for Roma is one of the Ombudsman's priorities – this corresponds to Council Recommendation Articles 14 and 15.

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<sup>117</sup> The NRCP pointed out that there are no travellers in Latvia who would need specific support measures.

<sup>118</sup> According to the information provided by the NRCP, the situation in Latvia must be understood as composed of several elements: the small proportion of the Roma community in Latvia; there are no travellers in Latvia; the policy for Roma inclusion in Latvia is horizontal – i.e., for each area (education, employment, and healthcare) a specific ministry is responsible for the respective area.

<sup>119</sup> See the NRSF chapter IV "Measures to achieve the objective of the plan"  
<https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/24998/download>

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The design and adoption of the NRSF as a separate policy development document is a significant step towards improving the effectiveness and sustainability of the national Roma inclusion policy, because pre-existing policy on Roma integration was implemented specifically under the 'National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy' coordinated by the MoC, in which no horizontal approach was used. The NRSF includes measures from key policy areas such as education, welfare, housing, and health policy areas, and refers to key sectoral policy guidelines.

The preparation of the draft of the NRSF was carried out by an inter-governmental working group in cooperation with Roma and non-Roma NGOs.

Many respondents believe that the NRSF was elaborated as a balanced and extensive policy document that includes targeted and mainstream measures in various key areas aimed at improving the situation of Roma in Latvia – and that such a strategy is realistic;<sup>120</sup> and that all the main needs of Roma people are taken into account in the NRSF.

In many mainstream measures Roma are not identified as one of the target groups. The mainstream measures do not involve specific activities for involving and promoting Roma access to services or financial support, and no detailed information is available on how to evaluate the scope of Roma participation and the quality of services which they receive in the framework of these measures.<sup>121</sup> Empowerment, training, and capacity-building measures are planned in the NRSF, including activities targeted at supporting the work and involvement of Roma mediators in municipalities, and promoting the participation of young Roma people and Roma women. Roma mediators will continue to provide constant support to socially disadvantaged Roma families on social and health issues at the grassroots level (access to social benefits, settlement of debt obligations, provision of bank payments, support for disabled Roma persons and children). In addition, regular support for Roma NGOs and initiatives concerning the promotion of Roma social and cultural inclusion is provided regularly by the municipalities, but this support is not reflected in the NRSF.

The main challenge of the implementation of the NRSF is related to the access of Roma to the mainstream measures due to the lack of capacity of Roma civil society, the low level of motivation of representatives of Roma communities to participate in social and cultural life at the local and regional level, and the insufficient cultural, social, and economic capital of Roma families to access to social services and development of social mobility.

Some measures included in the NRSF provide Roma NGOs with access to the state budget and EU funds, supporting programmes aimed at the development of civil society organisations and their initiatives. However, this access is rather formal because of the insufficient capacity of local Roma NGOs to obtain funding within the framework of mainstream supporting programmes, and the competition associated with calls for project proposals is too high among NGOs. Special targeted activities should be implemented in order to provide better access to Roma NGOs to mainstream EU funds that support programmes, including the empowerment and capacity building of Roma NGOs, and

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<sup>120</sup> From interviews with representatives of the MoES, the MoW, the Ombudsman's Office, Jelgava city municipality, Ventspils city municipality, the Roma mediator from Ventspils, the Roma Culture Centre, and the foreign organisation International Roma Union.

<sup>121</sup> For example, information on how many Roma have received support from programmes and support measures is necessary for measuring the effectiveness of these programmes in relation to the empowerment of Roma NGOs and the Roma community. From an interview with a representative of the NGO Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia.

adjusting funding eligibility criteria and consulting Roma NGOs on the development of operational programmes and calls for proposals.

Roma NGOs have not been involved in the process of state or EU Structural Fund programming at the national level, and they were not informed by the NRCP and the MoF about the possibility to participate in this process in order to address the needs of Roma including urgent problems in areas such as education, employment, social security, and housing.

Policy consultations between governmental bodies and civil society and stakeholders mainly take place during regular meetings of the Roma Advisory Council in which representatives from two Roma and four non-Roma NGOs participate. Some representatives of Roma NGOs stated that they do not participate in the Roma Advisory Council's meetings for many reasons; for instance, they have insufficient technical capacity to participate regularly in online meetings and a lack of confidence that their views and interests will be taken into account and addressed in the framework of the NRSF.

The cooperation and consultation process with municipalities is developed through the 'Regional Expert Network of Roma Integration Issues', which fosters the regular exchange of best practices, experience, and information-sharing in order to make the implementation and design of the national Roma inclusion policy more effective. Nevertheless, representatives of this promising cooperation network were not included in the Working Group for the drafting of the NRSF.

Because prejudice against the Roma are widespread in Latvian society, the significance of combatting antigypsyism is highlighted and addressed in the NRSF through several targeted measures. In addition, there are plans to conduct a public opinion in the field of anti-discrimination and tolerance, as well as an assessment of the anti-discrimination situation.

The involvement of the Ombudsman's Office, a national equality body, in the elaboration and the implementation of the NRSF is crucial and shows that the promotion of equal treatment for Roma is one of the Ombudsman's priorities. In the study '*Roma situation in Latvia*' conducted by the Ombudsman's Office in 2022, Roma NGOs' participation and representation at the local level and cooperation with the municipalities, as well as best practices, are identified.<sup>122</sup>

Measures mentioned in the NRSF regarding Roma education and participation are realistic, but housing measures are too mainstream and it could be a challenge for Roma to access housing-support-related activities. Many Roma representatives have doubts especially about the ability of Roma from socially disadvantaged families to access the housing measures defined in the NRSF. Measures in the healthcare area are aimed at ensuring better access for Roma to mainstream healthcare support measures.

Despite the fact that, according to the NRSF, a study on the situation of the Roma in Latvia will be carried out in 2023, one of the biggest challenges in the NRSF is the understanding of the real situation of the Roma because there is limited ethnic data available in governmental and municipal institutions in key areas. In this regard, feedback from Roma representatives (Roma mediators, NGO representatives, and community leaders) is significant for understanding the real situation of Roma, such as the circumstances and reasons why Roma face barriers to accessing social and other services. It is important to find appropriate channels to disseminate information to socially disadvantaged Roma families.

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<sup>122</sup> *Romu situācija Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022.

There is no dedicated chapter on the institutional mechanism of evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the NRSF, or explanation of how the implementation of the NRSF will be monitored.

### **Recommendations to national authorities**

1. **To the NRCP:** The Roma Advisory Council should play a more significant role in the decision-making process regarding the NRSF implementation, evaluation of the results, and outcome indicators, and in drafting of a list of measures and initiatives for the next period. The recommendations agreed in the meetings of the 'Roma Advisory Council' should be submitted for discussion in **Parliamentary Committees**.
2. **To the NRCP:** The Roma Advisory Council has to include representatives of regional Roma NGOs and motivate them to provide enough space for discussion about the local initiatives and real needs of Roma communities at the local level; a professional facilitator could be invited to organise communication between stakeholders during the Roma Advisory Council meetings. In addition, it is important to improve cooperation and mutual dialogue with **active local Roma NGOs** in order to identify the reasons for not submitting applications for membership in the Roma Advisory Council and to motivate representatives from these NGOs to participate in the Roma Advisory Council.
3. **To the NRCP:** should the NRSF measures not be implemented properly and not reach specific Roma target groups, a special meeting of the Roma Advisory Council should be organised to discuss problematic issues and address them with representatives of specific Roma target groups – Roma youth, women, people with disabilities, etc.
4. **To the NRCP:** A communication plan or activities aimed at actual information dissemination in appropriate ways and channels to the Roma community, especially to socially disadvantaged Roma families, should be developed.
5. **To SIF and local municipalities:** It is important to provide specific measures targeted at promoting and strengthening the capacity of small/regional Roma NGOs and their participation in the decision-making process at the local, regional, and national levels. The representatives of **regional Roma NGOs** should be motivated and supported to participate in the coordination mechanisms at the local and national level.
6. **To the NRCP:** the NRCP should develop effective cooperation with **the Ministry of Finance** in order to improve Roma NGOs' and pro-Roma NGOs' access to better participation in the decision-making processes in relation to the planning and evaluation of the EU Structural Funds at the national level, especially in the field of the specific objective 4.3.4 "Promote active inclusion to promote equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, and improve employment, in particular for disadvantaged groups" in the framework of the 'Operational Programmes of the European Union Structural Funds for 2021-2027'.<sup>123</sup>
7. There is a need to develop better cooperation between responsible governmental institutions, especially **the NRCP** and **Latvian municipalities**, through the '*Regional expert network of Roma integration issues*' in order to support positive activities that ensure equal access to employment for Roma in public institutions

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<sup>123</sup> Political goal no. 4. "A more social and inclusive Europe through the European Pillar of Social Rights".

at the local and regional level, as well as to ensure Roma equality, inclusion, and participation throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of EU funding programmes, and to enhance better the channelling of EU funds to the local level.<sup>124</sup>

8. **To the NRCP:** Awareness-raising and informative activities should be implemented in the mainstream media more effectively – for example, by using positive role models for minorities, including Roma, in the mainstream culture sphere (in movies, theatre performances, etc.). More measures should be taken under the NRSF to promote good practice in Roma integration and participation.
9. **To the NRCP and the MoW:** Additional data must be used<sup>125</sup> in order to understand the situation of the Roma in Latvia, as well as to evaluate the progress of the implementation of the NRSF that is achieved. For example, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of Roma should be identified in the studies which are planned in the NRSF. Also, a survey or a qualitative study should be carried out on the effectiveness of social services in terms of Roma inclusion and the access of Roma to social services, social protection, and child protection, as well as on anti-gypsyism and discrimination against Roma in key areas.
10. **To the Ombudsman and the NRCP:** the situation of potential structural and institutional antigypsyism should be investigated and properly analysed as well as meaningfully addressed in the NRSF for the next period.
11. **To the MoES:** A detailed analysis of the impact on Roma children's transfer from special education programmes to mainstream schools as well as placing Roma children in special education institutions needs to be done in order to eliminate any unjustified placing of Roma children in special education institutions, or their education in inappropriate special education programmes.
12. **To the MoH:** Awareness-raising activities and training should be organised for healthcare professionals to improve their skills, knowledge, and attitudes in relation to Roma and ultimately the access of Roma to health services and support programmes.
13. **To the MoE and the MoW:** The provision of quotas targeted at Roma families and households could improve the access of Roma to support measures (social-housing support programmes for socially disadvantaged families; business incubators; subsidised employment programmes), while collaboration between project implementers, Roma NGOs, and Roma mediators could help many socially disadvantaged Roma families to benefit from these projects' programmes and initiatives.

### Recommendations to civil society

14. **Regional Roma NGOs** should participate more actively in decision-making mechanisms – i.e., participate in the committees of municipalities, in the Roma Advisory Council, and in public discussions on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the NRSF.

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<sup>124</sup> In accordance with Council Recommendation Articles 18 and 19.

<sup>125</sup> For instance, from FRA (for instance, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. Roma – Selected findings*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings\\_lv.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_lv.pdf)) and Equinet studies (for instance, Roma and Traveller Inclusion: Towards a new EU Framework learning from the work of equality bodies, Equinet, 2020: [https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Roma\\_Traveller-Inclusion\\_Equality-Bodies.pdf](https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Roma_Traveller-Inclusion_Equality-Bodies.pdf)).

### **Recommendations to other stakeholders**

15. It is important to develop dialogue between **the MoES** and **Education Boards** at the municipal level and **NGOs** and **representatives of Roma communities** in order to ensure immediate responses and identify appropriate activities that lead to effective solutions to specific problematic situations in the area of education.
16. Develop a cooperation network between **local Roma NGOs** and **municipalities' youth centres and NGOs** in order to promote the greater involvement of young Roma people in cultural and social life at the local level.
17. Involve **representatives of Roma communities** and Roma families in meetings and/or informative days at the local level where **specialists from municipalities** (social workers, pedagogical staff), **Roma teaching assistants and Roma mediators** can provide information on social issues (education challenges, access to benefits and other support) in an accessible language.
18. **The representative of the LALRG** should be included in the regional expert network on Roma integration issues to improve cooperation and consultation processes among **local municipalities, the NRSP, and Roma civil society**.



## REFERENCES

### List of interviews

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Organisation/ institution</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Format</b>
<i>Roma civil society and activists and non-Roma NGOs</i>			
Roksana Rudeviča	Director of Roma NGO - the Roma Culture Roma Culture Centre ("Romu Kultūras Centrs")	10.03.2022	In person interview
Normunds Rudevičs	President of Roma NGO - The foreign organisation "International Roma Union" (ārvalstu organizācijas „Starptautiskā Romu Apvienība” pārstāvēniecība)	10.03.2022	In person interview
representative	Society Integration Association "ALTERNATIVAS" ("Sabiedrības integrācijas biedrība „Alternativas”)	28.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Malda Avramenko	Roma mediator and family assistant of Ventspils Social Service	15.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Rasma Zaharenko	Roma mediator in Balvu municipality, member of Roma NGO "Maro"	09.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Anhelita Kamenska	Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights	27.05.2022.	Online video interview (Zoom)
Inete Ielīte	Chairman of the Board of non-Roma NGO – "Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia" ("Latvijas Sieviešu nevalstisko organizāciju sadarbības tīkls")	10.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Ramona Liepiņa	Director of non-Roma NGO – "Creative Association for Youth TREPES" ("Radošās apvienība jauniešiem „TREPES”)	10.03.2022	In person interview
<i>Public authorities with responsibility in key areas</i>			
representative	NRCP, the Ministry of Culture, Social Integration Department, Social Integration and Civil Society Development Division	06.04.2022, 06.05.2022	Questionnaire, email
Olita Arkle	Senior Expert of the Department of Education, the Ministry of Education and Science	28.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Evija Kūla	Senior Officer of the Department of Social Policy Planning and Development, the Ministry of Welfare	16.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Reinis Lasmanis	Deputy Director of the Secretariat, Director of the Civil Society Support Department, Society Integration Foundation	24.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
<i>National equality body</i>			
Inete Razevska	Head of the Social, Economic and Cultural Rights Division, the Ombudsman's Office	16.03.2022	

<i>Regional and local authorities in key regions</i>			
Sņežana Zenovjeva	Specialist in Social Integration issues, "Public Centre" of Jelgava City Municipality Institution; regional expert of the regional expert network of Roma integration issues (coordinated by the MoC)	25.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)
Aļesja Caune	Senior social worker for family and children's issues, Ventspils Social Service, Ventspils City Municipality; regional expert of the Regional expert network of Roma integration issues (coordinated by the MoC)	31.03.2022	Online video interview (Zoom)

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*Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation 2021/C93/01,* [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC\\_2021\\_093\\_R\\_0001](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2021_093_R_0001)

*Eiropas Savienības Atveseļošanas un noturības mehānisma plāns* (Latvia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan), (available in Latvian) <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/322858-par-latvijas-atveselosanas-un-noturibas-mehanismu>

*Eiropas Savienības struktūrfondu darbības programmas 2021. - 2027. gadam* (The Operational Programmes of the European Union Structural Funds for 2021-2027)

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*Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2021.-2027. gadam* (The Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027), (available in Latvian) <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>

*Latvijas romu integrācijas politikas pasākumu kopums* (The set of national policy measures for Roma integration), <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/336/download>

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[https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu\\_situacija\\_latvija\\_2022\\_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUE3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0](https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/romu_situacija_latvija_2022_1648646871.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1hYLUE3qk7pSiwJGRh5wPpm3rai1BcdmC6OelmOL8A56BK54oUKfbSjx0)

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## ANNEX 1: 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 not recognised as a specific problem in national policy frameworks	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	relevant targets well defined
Prejudice against Roma	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	adequate but with room for improvement
Hate crimes against Roma	irrelevant	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Hate speech towards and against Roma (online and offline)	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Weak effectiveness of protection from discrimination	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	appropriate	adequate but with room for improvement
Segregation in education, housing, or provision of public services	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Forced evictions and demolitions leading to homelessness, inadequate housing, and social exclusion	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Statelessness, missing ID documents	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Misconduct and discriminatory behaviour by police (underpolicing/overpolicing)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Barriers to <i>de facto</i> exercise of 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 pre-school education and ECEC services for Roma	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent

Lower quality of pre-school education and ECEC services for Roma	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
High drop-out rate before completion of primary education	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Early leaving from secondary education	critical problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Secondary education/vocational training disconnected from labour market needs	significant problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Misplacement of Roma pupils into special education	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
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	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to second-chance education, adult education, and lifelong learning	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Limited access to and support for online and distance learning if education and training institutions close, as occurred during the coronavirus pandemic	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Low level of digital skills and competences and limited opportunities for their development among pupils	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	some targets but not relevant
Low level of digital skills and competences and limited opportunities for their development among adults	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	some targets but not relevant

## 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	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	some targets but not relevant
Poor access to (re-) training, lifelong learning and skills development	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Discrimination on the labour market by employers	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Risk for Roma women and girls from disadvantaged areas of being subjected to trafficking and forced prostitution	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Primary labour market opportunities substituted by public work	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Barriers and disincentives to employment (such as indebtedness, low income from work compared to social income)	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	some targets but not relevant
Lack of activation measures, employment support	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant

## 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)	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant

Limited access to emergency care	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to primary care	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to prenatal and postnatal care	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to health-related information	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Poor access to preventive care (vaccination, check-ups, screenings, awareness-raising about healthy lifestyles)	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Poor access to sexual/reproductive healthcare and family planning services	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Specific barriers to better healthcare of vulnerable groups such as elderly Roma people, Roma with disabilities, LGBTI and others	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
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)	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Lack of access to drinking water	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant

Lack of access to sanitation	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Lack of access to electricity	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Limited or absent public waste collection	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent
Restricted heating capability (families unable to heat all rooms/all times when necessary) or solid waste used for heating	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Lack of security of tenure (legal titles are not clear and secure)	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lacking or limited access to social housing	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Overcrowding (available space/room for families)	significant problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
Housing-related indebtedness at levels which may cause eviction	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
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)	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited or lacking access to green spaces	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Roma excluded from environmental democracy	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent



*Social protection*

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<b>Significance:</b>	<b>Identified by strategy:</b>	<b>Measures to address:</b>	<b>Targets defined:</b>
High at-risk-of-poverty rate and material and social deprivation	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant
Income support programmes fail to guarantee an acceptable level of minimum income for every household	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Limited access to income support schemes (low awareness, barrier of administrative burdens, stigma attached)	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	adequate but with room for improvement
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)	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Low flexibility of income support programmes for addressing changing conditions of the household	minor problems	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.,	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement

due to travel costs) or limited availability				
Services providers do not actively reach out to those in need	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Limited ability of social services to effectively work together with other agencies (e.g., public employment service) to help clients	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement
Discrimination by social service providers	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of adequacy of programmes for addressing indebtedness (providing counselling and financial support)	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	adequate but with room for improvement

### 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 not considered in the NRSF	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Specific vulnerability of Romani children as victims of violence not considered	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Segregated or discriminatory child-protection services provided to Roma	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Activities aimed at strengthening parental responsibility and skills not available or not reaching out to Roma parents	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	adequate but with room for improvement	some targets but not relevant
Illegal practices of child labour	irrelevant	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	irrelevant	absent	absent
Early marriages	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent

Barriers to children's registration; statelessness	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Biased treatment of Roma youth by security and law enforcement	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent
Inadequate child/adolescent participation	irrelevant	irrelevant	absent	absent

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

<b>Problems and conditions</b>	<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 problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	adequate but with room for improvement
Exclusion of Roma communities from national cultural narratives	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	adequate but with room for improvement
Romani history and culture not included in school curricula and textbooks for both Roma and non-Roma students	significant problems	identified and analysed sufficiently	appropriate	adequate but with room for improvement
Lack of inclusion of Romani language in schools, and development of necessary educational materials and resources for Romani language preservation and teaching	minor problems	irrelevant	absent	absent
Lack of memorialisation of Roma history through establishing monuments, commemorative activities, and institutionalising dates relevant to Roma history	significant problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	some targets but not relevant

## ANNEX 2: THE ROMA ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Roma Advisory Council has the following functions:

- promoting Roma participation in all areas of society - civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc.;
- strengthening cooperation between the state administration and other involved institutions for the promotion of Roma participation in the areas of civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc.
- identifying the problem issues in the areas such as civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc. and provide proposals for the solution;
- providing consultations, recommendations and information to ministries and other state institutions regarding the issues of Roma participation in areas such as civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc.;
- promoting cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations in the planning and implementation of Roma participation measures in areas such as civil society, education, employment, health care, social services, housing, etc.;
- evaluating the results of the implemented Roma participation measures and providing information in order to prepare reports to the European Commission in accordance with the Council Recommendation.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> The Roma Advisory Council's regulations: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/21364/download>

## ANNEX 3: EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Examples of best practices on the promotion of Roma participation and social inclusion at the local level are provided below.

According to the representative of the Social Integration institution "Public Centre" of Jelgava municipality, who is a member of the Network, possible measures of the draft NRSF are discussed in meetings of the framework of the Latvian Roma Platform project and the Roma Advisory Council meetings.<sup>127</sup> The ideas and initiatives from the Jelgava municipality are taken into account in the NRSF. The main priority areas in Jelgava municipality are education and integration of Roma. The municipality has been providing financial support for Roma mediators and teacher assistants for the last 10 years, which helps socially disadvantaged Roma families and the local Roma community, especially to provide better access for Roma children to education, empower the local Roma community, and advocate its needs. The local Roma NGO "Romanu Čačipen" is supported annually by the Jelgava city municipality in order to organise cultural and social activities (for example, International Roma Day, Mother's Day, a festival of national minorities) aimed at involving representatives of the Roma community in the social and cultural life as well as at developing intercultural dialogue, and raising awareness of mainstream society on Latvian Roma culture. This Roma NGO is also included in the Association of Jelgava National Cultural Societies. A regular dialogue between Roma NGO "Romanu Čačipen" and the municipality has been developed.

The municipality also supports the toy library "Ringla" since 2018 where Roma and non-Roma families with children spent leisure time together with the assistance of Roma activists.<sup>128</sup> Social rehabilitation and other social services including social hygiene services are provided to socially disadvantaged Roma families by the municipality's institutions and NGOs (for example, NGO "Centrs - Atbalsts"). The cooperation with the Jelgava division of SEA has been developed in order to motivate Roma to participate in the labour market and to register as unemployed persons if they do not work. Roma people are also involved in the "Public Centre" as employees, so as to promote positive practices in the employment area.<sup>129</sup>

The situation with the supporting action to the Roma community in Jelgava municipality is highlighted as best practice at the local level in the framework of the Latvian Roma Platform project (best practices meeting) as well in the study "The situation of Roma in Latvia" conducted by the Ombudsman's Office in 2022.<sup>130</sup>

A senior social worker of the Social services of Ventspils municipality, who is a member of the Network, informed that the initial discussion on the possible measures of the NRSF was organised in 2021 in the framework of the Latvian Roma Platform project.

Ventspils municipality provides support for Roma mediator and teacher assistant, which helps socially disadvantaged Roma families, especially to provide better access for Roma

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<sup>127</sup> Until 2022 representative from Jelgava City Municipality was a member of the Roma Advisory Council.

<sup>128</sup> More information about this initiative: <https://www.biblioteka.lv/jau-tris-gadus-latvija-darbojas-toy-rotallietu-centri-bibliotekas/>

<sup>129</sup> From interview with the representative of the Social Integration institution "Public Centre" of Jelgava city municipality.

<sup>130</sup> Romu situācija Latvijā. Rīga: Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs, 2022, pp.17.

children to education.<sup>131</sup> Education, social services and healthcare are key areas of Roma inclusion, and cooperation with the Roma mediator provides improvement of the situation of Roma in these areas. The Roma mediator also actively cooperates with the non-Roma NGO "Dialogi" on healthcare and social issues in order to provide representatives of the Roma community better access to state rehabilitation and health programmes, disseminate information on social benefits, work opportunities and the significant role of education for better social inclusion. Roma mediators also work as a family assistant in Social service. For a municipality, it is important to provide a sustainable development of the dialogue between the municipality and the Roma community by supporting and empowering the Roma mediator and the teacher assistant, as well as the Roma civil society and families. The Roma mediator as an adviser has also a close cooperation with the Housing Division of the Ventspils municipality, the municipality's real estate organisation, and bailiffs, which helps Roma families to resolve many problematic housing issues (finding a better social apartment, indebtedness and overcrowding problem etc.). The Roma mediator also works as a family assistant and provides support for socially disadvantaged Roma families who face illiteracy, poor health, and low income. The Roma mediator also works closely with the police, children protection specialists, and pedagogical staff.<sup>132</sup>

Ventspils municipality's Roma mediator stated that it is important to involve Roma representatives at the local level, especially in Committees in municipalities, to provide better advocacy and consultation on the access of Roma to housing services, and on cases of administrative offences. It will provide appropriate protection of the rights of Roma persons.

In the opinion of the Roma mediator, one of the effective approaches to promote Roma participation and empowerment could be the active involvement of representatives of Roma communities in meetings, where information on opportunities to receive benefits is disseminated in "easy language" and explanatory work is provided. For example, informative days for Roma families in social services and meetings between social pedagogical staff, the Roma teacher assistant, and the Roma mediator in the school to discuss all problematic issues based on trust and respect (one meeting in two months) can usefully be organised.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The Roma mediator and the teacher assistant work in municipalities have been developed by (or thanks to) the Latvian Roma Platform project activities, where Roma activists are motivated at the local level to cooperate with municipality administration and its institutions in order to improve Roma situation in key areas.

<sup>132</sup> From interview with a senior social worker of the social services of Ventspils municipality.

<sup>133</sup> From interview with the Roma mediator.

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