

**PROMISES AND PRACTICALITIES:  
THE EVOLUTION AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF EU ROMA POLICY**

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**Abstract**

The historical development of Roma policy in Europe has been characterized by discrimination, assimilation and some would say failure. Other see an attempt in recent years by Europe to reflect solidarity through Roma inclusion policies. Progress has been made towards a social Europe, but policy on the Roma minority remains on the margins. This paper deals with the historical development of EU Roma policy. The EU Youth Guarantee would be a powerful tool for young Roma, but the necessary institutions are often lacking. The same applies to the new EU Strategic Framework for Roma, which is a positive development compared to its predecessor, adding three new pillars. An interview with Dr. László Andor, former Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, on Roma policies was conducted, adding to the existing literature on the subject. Inclusive targeting proves to be the best measure for effective Roma policy making. In the future, a re-evaluation of the migration issue, a move away from the securitization approach, or the enlargement of the EU to include the Balkan countries could breathe new life into the importance of Roma policy. But the practical relevance of EU policies is often limited, as they struggle to adapt to social realities on the ground. Although the article deals primarily with recent history, attention is made to early policy dating back to the arrival of the Roma in Europe in the late Middle Ages.

**Keywords:** Roma policy; social inclusion; European Union policies; marginalization;

**Discipline:** Politics Science

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**Absztrakt****ÍGÉRETEK ÉS GYAKORLATI MEGVALÓSÍTHATÓSÁG: AZ EURÓPAI UNIÓS ROMA POLITIKA FEJLŐDÉSI PÁLYÁJA ÉS JÖVŐBELI IRÁNYAI**

A roma politikák európai történeti fejlődését alapvetően a diszkrimináció, az asszimilációs törekvések, valamint – egyes értelmezések szerint – a kudarc jellemezte. Más megközelítések ugyanakkor az utóbbi években az európai szintű szolidaritás megnyilvánulásaként értelmezik a roma inklúziós politikák erősödését. Noha a „szociális Európa” irányába történtek előrelépések, a roma kisebbséget érintő szakpolitikák továbbra is periférikus helyzetben maradnak. Jelen tanulmány az Európai Unió roma politika történeti fejlődésének vizsgálatára irányul. Az Európai Unió Ifjúsági Garancia programja potenciálisan hatékony eszközt jelenthetne a roma fiatalok támogatásában, azonban a szükséges intézményi feltételek gyakran hiányoznak. Hasonló megállapítás tehető az új EU Roma Stratégiai Keretrendszer vonatkozásában is, amely előrelépést jelent elődjéhez képest, különösen három új pillér bevezetésével. A kutatás keretében interjú készült Dr. Andor László, az Európai Bizottság korábbi foglalkoztatásért, szociális ügyekért és társadalmi befogadásért felelős biztosával a roma politikák témájában, amely kiegészíti a rendelkezésre álló szakirodalmat. Az inkluzív célzás módszertana a vizsgálat alapján a leghatékonyabb megközelítésnek bizonyul a roma politikák kialakítása során. A jövőre vonatkozóan a migráció kérdésének újraértékelése, a biztonsági megközelítés meghaladása, valamint az Európai Unió nyugat-balkáni bővítése potenciálisan új lendületet adhat a roma politika jelentőségének. Mindazonáltal az uniós szakpolitikák gyakorlati relevanciája gyakran korlátozott, mivel azok nehezen alkalmazkodnak a helyi társadalmi viszonyokhoz. Bár a tanulmány elsődlegesen a közelmúlt fejleményeire koncentrálni, kitekintést nyújt a roma népesség késő középkori európai megjelenéséig visszanyúló korai szakpolitikai előzményekre is.

**Kulcsszavak:** roma politika; társadalmi befogadás; Európai Unió szakpolitikák; marginalizáció;

**Diszciplína:** politikatudomány

**Introduction**

The complex interplay of domestic and international influences shaped Roma policies in Central Europe from 1989 to the early 2000s. The post-1989 transition brought democratic transition and political liberalization which led to the formation of Roma advocacy groups and recognition of Roma as an ethnic group. Attempts to fight economic discrimination and social exclusion started to be made, however, the progress was rather uneven (Tamás, 2007, 165–167).

The 1990s can be considered as a major change as Central European states were looking for integration into the European Union. The European Union has demonstrated a commitment to addressing human rights and anti-discrimination concerns

through the adoption of several key measures. These include the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) and the Race Equality Directive (2000). These policies pressured the candidate countries to tackle the problem of Roma exclusion as one of the conditions for joining the EU. Roma issues were increasingly considered in the discourse on European integration by the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the momentum for reform began to falter after Central European countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 (Tamás, 2007, 171–173).

It appears that the EU was prepared to make a strong formal commitment, but was confronted with the practical realities of accession, particularly regarding structural challenges such as economic

and social exclusion and inequalities, which would have required more comprehensive action.

In times of rising Euroscepticism, the efforts to give young people a sense of belonging and identity with the EU are probably more relevant than ever before. The focus on Roma is specifically important as they make up the largest minority which is marginalized in many societies and therefore often live in poverty or are at risk of social exclusion. This article focuses on the development of the European Policy on Roma since 1990. It comprises three principal sections. The first delves into the history of the Roma in Europe. The second section offers an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform policy-making practices regarding marginalized communities. These are theories on social exclusion, community development and participation. The third part of the article focuses on an analysis of the policies themselves. The Youth Guarantee and the EU Roma Frameworks are the two policies discussed in the paper. Policy-making goes hand in hand with the debate between mainstreaming and targeting policies.

In January 2024, an interview was conducted with Dr. László Andor, the former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion from 2010 to 2014. During this period, he addressed the policies pertaining to the Roma population at the EU level. He continues to do so presently in a Brussels-based think tank. I posed questions regarding European policy on young Roma to him. His responses in this article are intended to supplement existing literature on the subject and to address the question of the future trajectory of EU Roma policy.

### History

Present policy needs to be viewed in light of policies of ethnic cleansing, forced assimilation and genocide. This chapter delves into the History of the Roma in Europe, with a focus on Hungary. Today they make up the largest minority in the EU and are often pushed to the margins of societies. But their

History in Europe is older than the one of nation states we know today. The Roma arrived in Europe already hundreds of years ago.

Linguistic and historical evidence indicates that the ancestral speakers of Romany, the Roma, originated in India as it is mostly agreed that their language is part of the so-called Indo-European (Dvořáková, 2022) or Central Indo-Aryan Family (John, 2013). Thus views on the reasons of their exodus diverge. Vijay George John identifies two principal arguments presented in existing literature. The first posits that the group belonged to a low caste, unified by their language, and traversed the region as a mobile community. The second suggests that the exodus was a response to military actions in Asia, a perspective that the author also espouses (John, 2013, 1). He builds on the scholarship of Turner (1926), Hancock (2006) and Fraser (1995) to propose that Romani language originated as a koine, that is to say, a mixed linguistic variety which developed within the Indian armies that were incorporated into the Ghaznavid Army following the invasions of India in the year 1000.

These soldiers, originating from an area where Central Indo-Aryan languages are spoken, later were incorporated into the Seljuk Turks' army after they defeated the Ghaznavids. In 1071 they were allowed to settle in what is eastern Turkey today, from where they later migrated westwards. John concludes that this understanding of the exodus is strengthened by linguistic, sociohistorical, and genetic evidence in his analysis (John, 2013, 25–28, 50).

The first documentation of Roma in Hungary can be traced back to 1416, when a municipal record from Brassó mentions a donation to an 'Egyptian, and his companions', equating Roma with Egyptians. It is also believed that they were in Transylvania around 1400, at the same time as other groups from the Balkans and Wallachia were migrating to Central Europe. In several regions of Hungary, the Roma were settled in the early 15th century. While Roma were often persecuted in Western Europe,

the political realities of Hungary offered a more tolerant environment. The Ottoman threat called for all able-bodied men to be recruited to build fortresses and make weapons, which led to Roma being recruited for important communal and military roles. By the 16th century, Roma communities continued to grow. The growing population was protected by local lords and nobles through legal safeguards. In the west, Roma faced a lot of persecution, prejudice and oppression as they settled down in Western Europe. They were accused of being spies and the first expulsion orders were given to them as early as 1479 by the Holy Roman Empire. More such orders for their expulsion were given in the 16th century across Western Europe, but the implementation of these orders was rather haphazard. The Roma faced a largely monocultural, Christian Europe in which they were alien (Kemény, 2005, 1–8).

During the era of Ottoman occupation of Hungary, the Roma population was engaged in a range of roles and activities, including musical performance, blacksmithing, bullet casting, and military service within the municipal structures. By the mid-16th century, Roma communities, including a "Roma town" in Buda, had emerged (Kemény, 2005, 8–10).

The 18th century brought attempts at forced assimilation under Habsburg rule. A series of decrees aimed to settle the Roma permanently, prohibit their nomadic lifestyle, and encourage their integration into Hungarian society. Measures included bans on speaking the Romani language, prohibitions on intermarriage, and the forced removal of children from Roma families for re-education. However, these policies largely failed due to resistance from both Roma communities and the Hungarian nobility, who were reluctant to allocate land and resources for their settlement. By 1787, Habsburg had given up the attempts to control the Roma population. The governing council eliminated the Department for Roma Affairs and ceased the funding of

the re-education of Roma children (Dvořáková, 2022; Kemény, 2005, 15–17).

This can be considered as the Empire's step back from the active management of the Roma, leaving them marginalized within society. By the end of the 19th century Hungary had become a home to an increasing Roma population. Nevertheless, Roma people experienced numerous social and economic issues despite their population increase. Many of them were day-laborers and a big amount lived in bad housing conditions. This is evident from the 1893 Roma census. As for the cultural aspect, Roma musicians played an important role in the shaping of Hungarian music during this time, as they accounted nearly 12% of the wage earners (Kemény, 2005, 32–33).

Policies against Roma reached their peak in the Nazi era. Backed with their racist ideology, seeing the Roma as racially inferior, the Nazis killed them systematically. Thus, their fate was slightly differently handled in the occupied and allied countries of the German Reich (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2023). The Roma Holocaust, today mostly referred to as Porrajmos, in Hungary reached its peak in 1944 and 1945, where there was a strong collaboration in the persecution and extermination with the Hungarian Arrow Cross party (Katz, 2007, 70–71). Their persecution could partially be based on so called 'Gypsy legitimization cards', which were introduced in Hungary in collaboration with Interpol already before the war. Their ghettoization began in 1943. 'Gypsy Work Battalions' were introduced by decree of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior in 1944. In February 1945, the fascist Arrow Cross government ordered mass deportations of Roma after the deterioration of the Horthy government (Baumgartner, n.d.).

After the war, discrimination continued. Katz analyzes how the narratives of Roma have been marginalized in the holocaust narratives, she pointed out that prejudice and discrimination has played a role

in the exclusion of their narratives from the collective memory. Roma's oral traditions, the dislocation of the Roma during the war coupled with a lack of centralized leadership or state representation have also contributed to the fragmentation of their testimony (Katz, 2007, 72–74).

Communism did not bring liberation for Roma. Assimilation policies started to be introduced. The aim was to achieve their complete proletarianization. This forced assimilation is explored by Tamás Hajnáczy. In 1961, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party passed a law aimed at improving the situation of the Roma population, particularly in the areas of education, employment and housing. This key resolution outlined a policy of assimilation, rejecting the recognition of Gypsies as a separate nationality and advocating their integration into wider Hungarian society. The minority was considered in categories such as integrated, integrating and non-integrated. Implementation of the policy was carried out by force, such as the elimination of settlements as a tool of forced assimilation (Hajnáczy, 2020, 57, 59). The author concludes that the policies were grounded in prejudices and a superficial understanding of the Roma population, which led to systemic marginalization rather than integration. The governments' approaches often reinforced segregation rather than dismantling it, as the policies focused excessively on controlling and regulating the Roma population rather than addressing their systemic disadvantages. The progress seen in statistics concerning employment, housing, and education was inherently flawed. Many children were enrolled in school but did not complete elementary education, most of the workers were confined to unskilled labour and segregated modern settlements replaced slums. Hajnáczy concludes that the central contradictions in the policies, aiming for assimilation while neglecting systemic inequalities and cultural preservation, led to their ultimate ineffectiveness (Hajnáczy, 2020, 81–83). After the dissolution of

the Soviet system, the forceful assimilation came to its end.

The transition resulted in significant challenges for Roma populations, including elevated unemployment rates and the tendency to be held responsible for societal problems. Chapter Four will also consider more recent policies, introduced since 1993, as they are still relevant to current policy. This chapter concludes that the historical policies towards the Roma population have been characterized by expulsion, discrimination, forced assimilation, genocide and ethnic cleansing, persecution, re-education and marginalization. The history of the Roma in Hungary is characterized by waves of migration, a diverse range of social roles and shifting policies that have sought to integrate and control them. When protection was provided or positive attempts were made towards the Roma, these policies were driven by the economic value of Roma labor and their contributions to local economies. In the opinion of some, the EU Policy attempts to change the narrative, while others may say it has traits of past policies. The following chapters deal with theories of social exclusion, community development and participation as well as the recent and current EU policy towards the minority.

### **Social exclusion, community development and participation**

Ruth Levitas defined concepts from which poverty and social exclusion can be assessed. She defines three different concepts. First, the redistributive discourse (RED), which sees poverty as the core problem for social exclusion. This concept is surely oriented towards a more equal society and sees problems in prevailing inequalities. Second, the social integration discourse (SID), which focus on paid work, usually employment (Levitas, 1999). It connects the people to the labor force, which is the viewpoint of the European Union. Third, the moral

underclass discourse (MUD). Here, the focus is not primarily on the individual and its labor market involvement, but rather much more on embedding the individual into a group, which get attributed moral and cultural causes for being poor (Levitas, 1999). The EU's approach is,

“to work on the social integration question primarily through the labor market. In Hungary, since 2010, the main policy through which the government has been addressing the long-term unemployment and exclusion of Roma people is the public employment scheme. And that in fact matches the main approach which the EU is engaged in, which is to acknowledge that if you increase the employment rate in a disadvantaged community, then poverty and social exclusion on aggregate is also reduced and addressed.” (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

In their introduction, the editors of the Book ‘Romani Communities and Transformative Change: A New Social Europe’ take a multidimensional approach with a focus on recognition and redistribution to achieve social justice (Ryder et al., 2021, 13). Poverty and social exclusion must be seen as multi-dimensional, on a basis of radical understanding of human rights. They base their arguments on theories of redistribution and recognition of Nancy Fraser (1995, 2007) as well as the critical race theory, which sees dominant and hegemonic ‘races’ maintaining racial inequality for their own sake (Ryder et al., 2021, 18). Their perspective shares a clear RED approach.

As different approaches on the meanings of social exclusion exist, this is also the case for methods of community development. The following sections summarize the discourse on Romani community development: inclusive community development and participation, and the debate between targeted projects and mainstreaming.

### **Inclusive community development and participation**

Inclusive community development aims to give citizens an active role in the development process, based on existing skills and cultural practices (Acton et al., 2014, 13). The three main steps within the concept of inclusive community development are the participation of Roma in public affairs to raise their voice, the fight against discrimination and an interplay between the fight against prejudices and socio-economic disadvantage (Rostas, 2019b, 94). The issue of Roma participation can be best assessed with Arnstein's Participation Ladder (Table 1). Iulius Rostas provides a detailed description in the fourth chapter of his book on pages 174 to 176.

*Table 1. Arnstein's (1969, p. 217) ladder of participation*

1 Citizen control	Degrees of citizen power
2 Delegated power	
3 Partnership	
4 Placation	Degrees of tokenism
5 Consultation	
6 Informing	
7 Therapy	Non participation
8 Manipulation	

With a focus on the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania, he provides evidence that the participation of Roma ranks in the bottom four rungs between manipulation and consultation (Rostas, 2019c, 176–184). The lack of participation which suppresses the voice of Romani communities, the insufficient fight of discrimination and the inadequate combating of socio-economic differences manifests itself in Policies. A crucial element of inclusive community development is empowerment. Roland Ferkovics et al. point out that empowerment can be viewed from different perspectives, liberal and liberating. In contrast to liberal empowerment, liberating empowerment can be understood as structure-changing (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 36).

The lack of the impact of Roma communities on policy progresses is one of several issues which are criticized. Furthermore, the rationale of Romani inclusion policy in the EU is called into question. Members of the communities are seen as cheap workforce who can be employed in low-skilled work (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 40). The economic arguments for the empowerment of Roma are powerful, but they are not significantly inspired by social justice. To summarize the main points of the text, bottom-up policies with an approach of social accountability, minority targeting through affirmative action, social justice accompanied with just distribution of resources, and understanding the multidimensional aspects of the communities and giving them a loud voice are the core aspects on the way to a sustainable empowerment of Romani communities.

László Andor pointed out another problem, which can be called representation by the elite. Mainly privileged Roma make it to the stage of representation and participation, who are hardly capable of speaking for severely disadvantaged groups (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). Questions of how a promising quality of representation and participation of disadvantaged Romani communities can be achieved must be part of future research. However, there are fundamental challenges along the way. These relate primarily to the level of education, which serves as a contradiction at the EU level. Educated people are needed to deal with EU funds and governments programs.

At this point, László Andor underscores the significance of access to quality education and presents two explanations for enhanced Roma involvement.

Firstly, this could be achieved through the implementation of local programs designed to enhance the capabilities of local municipal leaders and activists, enabling them to collaborate in the delivery of programs.

Secondly, the establishment of a body comprising

a certain number of educated officials could prove beneficial in addressing the policy issues concerning the Roma population and their participation (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

### **Targeted or mainstreaming policies?**

The debate between targeted projects and mainstreaming deals with the question of whether Romani community development must happen through direct assistance or could be part of broader policies. An example for mainstreaming are the EU policies prior to 2011. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy for 2011 to 2020 specifically targeted Roma, which means that it “deviates from the EU’s general approach when it comes to the racial and ethnic neutrality of its policies (Rostas, 2019c, 149).” In the analyzed literature, many authors see mainstreaming as insufficient, because of the risk not to reach the most deprived who are forced to compete with others for funding (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 43; Rostas, 2019a, 122).

For reasons of diversity, in its ‘roadmap to facilitate consultation on a new Roma initiative’ in 2020, the European Commission pointed out the need to consider the specific needs of young people. This should be seen against the background that Roma youth does not have access to the benefits of measures aimed at youth in general, such as the Youth Guarantee (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 41, 44). In other words, there is a need for a special policy on Roma youth, because youth policy in general fails to address the complex issues concerning the hugest European minority. ‘Structural racism’ in Europe against Roma communities prevails which hinders the process of active support (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 38–39). Special support for Roma, as forms of affirmative action face anchored obstacles.

The importance of inclusivity of targeted policies, programs and projects without artificial separation was emphasized by the expert:

“You cannot genuinely desegregate the Roma from ‘the others’ [...]. I think the point exactly is to avoid any kind of artificial separation in a village [...]. Because in reality there is a mix. There are different types of families in different places. I think the point is not to separate in an EU program, some kind of training program, or kindergarten development program for the Roma. But to say, in a village, where the majority is Roma, everybody should benefit. Because there would be a greater cost and damage if you just want to promote the Roma. As opposed to a policy which is inclusive. And already in the kindergarten, already in your training program, the people are together and then you help developing their opportunities together.” (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

During his time as Commissioner, people turned to him with good intentions of promoting the case of the Roma and started counting and estimating the population. Or in other words, aimed to create this artificial separation of the population, which he opposes (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

It is usually necessary to tailor the program to the target group to meet their needs. In conclusion it can be said that targeted opposed to mainstream policies are needed and that targeting should generally be inclusive if possible.

### EU Policies on Roma

The way towards a Social Europe encompasses a systemic view-change, seeing Romani communities as “victims of an unfair system”. It’s about a change from a charity- to a duty-perspective (Ryder et al., 2021, 18). The eastern enlargement and the subsequent economic crisis prompted the EU to direct attention towards the Roma population in its member states. Up until the present moment, two frameworks have been in place, which have pro-

vided the coordinating mechanism for member states to establish national integration strategies. This part focuses on the development of the EU Roma framework and assesses the value of the Youth Guarantee for young Roma.

### The National Roma Integration Strategies and the New EU Roma Strategic Framework

The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (New EU Roma Framework) for the years 2020 to 2030 (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2020) follows the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) for the years 2011 to 2020. Due to the time frame, the used literature mainly focuses on the older EU Framework, which is criticized from different angles. Roma activists would have preferred an EU strategy directly coordinated by the commission, and not a Framework through the Open Method Coordination (OMC). They see the framework as insufficient to target discrimination, harassment, hate speech and violence (Rostas, 2019c, 153). The OMC is a soft form of governance, which aims to achieve its goals with peer pressure and persuasion (Ferkovics et al., 2021, 35). In other words, member states that achieve the common goals put pressure on all members to reach them as well. They can offer support with mandatory reports which describe how the goal is reached. However, as indicated by the interviewee, this is, in fact, an effective mechanism:

“Since 2000 and 2011 it's been what we call the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester, which has been the main transmission of the EU policy towards the Member States. And that's also the channel for the European Commission to install specific issues in national reform programs. And the European Semester is a forceful policy. It's based on annual checklists, consultation and on delivery.” (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

Before the NRIS was adopted, the Council of Ministers advised the member states in 2009 to consider the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion (2010), which are a tool for both policymakers and practitioners managing programs and projects for Roma. Of course, the problem of non-legal obligation remains. Stronger legal commitment by Member states may help, but this is difficult to achieve. Still, both frameworks are considered a very strong instrument.

The EU Roma Civil Monitor (2012-2025) supervises the quality and the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks, which can also be considered a strong mechanism. The NRIS is mostly focused on education, health, employment, and housing. These accounts are measurable, which is of importance when analyzing the impact of a policy (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). In the New Framework, a three-pillar approach, focusing on Equality, Inclusion and Participation is added.

Chapter four of the New EU Roma Framework

presents the EU actions which should complement the national strategies (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2020). These are summarized in table 2.

The EU actions mainly deal with the added three pillar approach of the Framework, which is desirable. Participation can be described as on the levels between consultation and placation. Representatives are asked for their opinions and are working together with the Commission. But in the end decision-makers have the final say. But a strong influence by the representatives remains. Here comes again the critique mentioned in the previous chapters, that mainly privileged people become representatives. The question of whether disadvantaged Romani communities are represented at the EU-level at all arises, which can be the scope of another study. The dimensions of education, health, employment, and housing are not found on the level of EU-Actions. Overall, the focus of the Framework is on mainstreaming. The Framework very much takes a SID approach towards social exclusion.

*Table 2. EU Actions within the EU Roma strategic framework*

<b>Action</b>	<b>Concrete Measures</b>
Enforcing EU Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitoring and enforcing the Racial Equality Directive</li> <li>○ Infringement proceedings</li> <li>○ Reinforcing recording and reporting of hate crimes</li> <li>○ Counter illegal hate speech</li> </ul>
Mainstreaming Roma equality in EU policy initiatives and mobilizing EU funds for Roma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Guidance and training on mainstreaming</li> <li>○ Support targeted programs through monitoring</li> </ul>
EU action and support to promote Roma participation, inclusion, and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dialogue meetings with Roma civil society organizations</li> <li>○ New cycle of Roma civil society capacity-building</li> <li>○ Election of a platform representative for engagement of women and youth</li> <li>○ Traineeships or junior positions for Roma youth in national Roma platforms</li> </ul>
EU action and support to promote equality and fight antigypsyism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Campaign with UNESCO</li> <li>○ Series of seminars and communication activities</li> </ul>

### **The value of the Youth Guarantee for Romani communities**

The reinforced Youth Guarantee today ensures young people up to and including the age of 29 an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. The estimated proportion of NEETs reached by the Youth Guarantee in Hungary is around 10,6% for the years 2008 to 2017 (Factsheet: Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative in Hungary, 2019). As a comparison, this proportion counts 66,8% in Germany (Factsheet: Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative in Germany, 2019). The Youth Guarantee has been criticized. It lacks quality standards that prohibit unpaid internships. Young people must be given good long-term opportunities, as opposed to short-term ones. The Commission could develop a protective legal instrument for this (Muraille, 2022, 3).

In a council recommendation from 2020 all EU member states committed to the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee (European Council, 2020). The council recommendation does not mention Roma at all.

According to the former Commissioner, the policy should be one of the most important ones for young Roma. To ensure the effective implementation of the policy, it is essential to establish a comprehensive network of labor market organizations at the national level. The absence of such a network in Hungary makes it difficult for disadvantaged groups to benefit from the policy as there is no network to support them in taking advantage of it (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). The practical value of the Youth Guarantee thus depends on the nature of the member state's social support system.

My interview partner acknowledges the practical obstacles for young Roma to benefit from the EU's policy. The Youth Guarantee prerequisites vocational training, which already excludes many young

Roma. This is why he says that it *should* be an important policy but does not make it to be one on the ground. It would be about providing a bit of assistance and advice to find a decent job. But it fails first because of the social realities of the Romani population, and second because of the insufficient social service systems. There would be much more to do (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). The Youth Guarantee must thus be adapted to the specific circumstances of each locality. It can be one of the most important tools to target young Roma in a mainstreaming policy, if the implementation can be based on a strong network of institutions and agencies.

Both the New Roma Framework as a targeted and the youth guarantee as a mainstreaming policy must therefore be tailored to local realities. When my interviewee speaks about the social realities, he also means the ways in which poverty shapes the daily lives of segregated Romani communities. They are often absolutely deprived of main capabilities (Sen, 1983), such as having a good vocational training and a decent job. Because of their lower chances in education, marginalized communities also develop less skills, which would be needed for a successful implementation of the EU's policies. From a relative poverty-perspective (Townsend, 1985) Romani communities are relatively poor and have relatively less chances to enter quality jobs compared to the rest of society. The absolute deprivation of not being disfavored for well-paid quality jobs is related to the relative deprivation of not having the same skills as others. These realities must be addressed, if the EU's policies aim to be successful. Understanding Romani communities' social realities remains significant in the future.

### **Where is the EU's Policy on Roma heading to?**

Today, the EU is often criticized for being too far away from its citizens. My interviewee also sees this problem. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the

way the Structural Funds in the EU work out. The EU must find its ways to connect the local level with the EU level much more, instead of having several layers. Although the problems of young Roma and their communities in Eastern Europe are recognized and addressed in the Roma Framework, not much progress has been made on the ground. The east enlargement and the aftermath of the financial crisis brought the topic onto the EU's agenda. As a reaction, in 2011 the first Framework concerning Romani issues was adopted. Today, their issues are increasingly marginalized (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024).

This contradicts with the Unions attitude towards Human Rights. Roma issues matter. It cannot be in the interest of member states with a growing Roma population to have them on the margins of society.

“If you ignore the social exclusion of the Roma, but this population pattern continues, it means there will be an ever-increasing share of a disadvantaged community vis a vis, the let's say white majority society. And that would be some kind of ticking bomb. It would not only be unfair and unpleasant, but it would at some point threaten with some kind of social breakdown.” (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

This work aimed to highlight the importance of engaging with marginalized communities. Embedded in times of rising euroscepticism, I think that it could otherwise undermine the cohesion of the European Union. Migrating poor Roma from east to west can be a future scenario that will feed into criticism of the EU which questions the freedom of movement. László Andor sees only two possible scenarios for how the issue can be brought back to a higher level of attention. The first can be the integration of the Western Balkans, because of their large Romani population. They may bring it back to the agenda of the EU. The second emerges from

migration policy, if it can be accessed not through just the security lens:

“Contrary to the stereotypes, most of the European Roma are not mobile. They're not migrants, they are a settled population. [...] But there comes the similarity that even if the Roma are not mobile anymore, there is a comparison between the lack of adequate integration of recent migrant populations and the Roma population. So, it would help if migration would not be looked at just through the security lens.” (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024)

Both are unlikely, leading to pessimism about the future of EU Roma policy. The current situation represents a marginalization of the issue, given that it was addressed from 2011 onwards and a framework is in place until 2030. The interviewee indicated that the prevailing view within the EU is that if the policy has not produced the desired outcomes, the responsibility lies with the local authorities. The subject remains dormant in the background, with reference being made to the current framework for the Roma community. Furthermore, there is a paucity of discourse on Roma issues in Brussels, with László Andor's think tank representing one of the few entities engaged with this topic. From his life experience as Commissioner, he knows that very much depends on the people in office, especially when a policy gets marginalized. It really depends on whether the people in office want to pursue a specific policy or not. It today looks like, that they don't care about the issues of Romani communities anymore. He acknowledges that The EU policies don't have much influence and competences to change the social realities in the member states on the ground (L. Andor, personal communication, January 2024). This conversely means that even if the topic would be on the EU Agenda, it can't make a big difference on the ground.

### Conclusion

The Social Policy of the EU is in general a marginal policy, which is especially the case concerning Romani communities. Nevertheless, their issues made it onto the EU's political agenda at the turn of the millennium. This historic achievement could be repeated with further EU enlargement to include the Balkan countries. In this way history can repeat itself. We need to learn from past mistakes and try to apply inclusive targeting. The Youth Guarantee would be one of the most important tools if its implementation could be based on a strong network of institutions and agencies that supports people in need. The New Framework is an improvement on the old one because it considers three additional new dimensions. The first Roma Framework's success was limited, also because of the eurozone crisis and introduced austerity measures. From the interview we know that the EU policy on Romani communities won't be able to change social realities on the ground if continuing as they are, and that their issues are not even present in Brussel's debates today.

It very much seems that in today's Europe, inclusion depends on a growing and stimulatory economy. The New Framework's impact is questionable, as still much relies in the hands of the member states and their national strategies. Targeted policies are needed as opposed to mainstream policies, and the former should be generally inclusive where possible. As the largest minority is pushed to the margins of society and remains in isolation, it underlines the importance of targeted policies.

As I mentioned at the end of the chapter on history and then in the chapter on the current policies, views on the current quality of the EU policy diverge. EU Policy shows attempts to change the narrative on Roma towards a more egalitarian and justice-based approach. Thus, the focus on the economic aspect remains. Inclusion depends on the economy. The EU works on the social integration

question primarily through the labor market. There is not much room for justice-based and egalitarian practice, however it cannot be neglected that EU policies are very much influenced by those. But it seems that on the field, the aim is to integrate Roma as workforce to boost the economy. This approach bears resemblance to the policies adopted during the defense against Ottoman attacks, when the Roma were incorporated into military roles, or the ottoman occupation where they started to be integrated into the economy. Concluding this article, I would argue, that current policies on Roma have similarities to past policies on the ground, but progress has been made in the intention, especially in policies at the EU level.

### About the Interviewee

Dr. László Andor was EU-Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion from 2010 to 2014. He is currently working in and managing a think tank with focus on social Europe. They are promoting research, for example about the implementation of the pillar of the social rights. They are one of the unique organizations which still pays attention to Roma. At the same time, he receives a variety of invitations as an ex-Commissioner. The interview took place in a café in Budapest, in January 2024. Consent to the use of his name and the content of the interview for this research was given in the audio recording and by email.

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