

## Roma remain Europe's 'most discriminated and vulnerable ethnic group'

Written by Valeriu Nicolae on 9 April 2015



For over two decades 8 April has been highlighted on our calendar as the day when we reconfirm that the Roma community are the most discriminated and vulnerable ethnic group in Europe.

International Roma day continues to be more a reason for embarrassment than celebration. The status of the Roma since the day was declared in 1990 has scarcely improved and the numbers attesting to their social exclusion are staggering - 71 per cent of Roma live in poverty according to research conducted by the world bank.

"Unfortunately, the impressive rhetoric of politicians in Brussels has not yet translated into much beyond words"

Some positive steps have been taken by the European Union, and the EU framework of national Roma inclusion strategies represents significant progress in terms of commitment. Unfortunately, the impressive rhetoric of politicians in Brussels has not yet translated into much beyond words and

papers.

Generation after generation of Roma children continue to fall into vicious cycles of discrimination, exclusion and poverty. Far too many Roma children are begging, collecting garbage or being exploited by criminal gangs. Too many are dropping out of school and struggling at the margins of society - just 29 per cent complete secondary education.

Addressing the disastrous situation of Roma children could be key to tackling the social exclusion confronting all Roma. For its strategy to prosper, the European Union needs to ensure the focus of its funding and policies is improving the lives of the most vulnerable children. Focusing on children could work for other disadvantaged groups too.

For example, decision makers from Europe and around the world are currently debating the post-2015 agenda that will replace the UN millennium development goals. These new goals to reduce poverty, end hunger and improve health are universal and therefore apply to EU member states. To succeed, it is important the post-2015 framework is focused on reaching those most at risk, including in Europe's backyard.

However, it's essential that the wellbeing of children is not just a priority within the documents of the EU and the UN, but is implemented at grassroots level and integrated into the existing policies and commitments of EU member states.

Clear action plans, accountability and the well-defined responsibility of all groups involved in addressing the exclusion of the Roma are critical for future success. A European agency for social inclusion, innovation and children based in one of the member states with a large Roma population could be the best mechanism to ensure policies and funding reach those who need it most - the poorest and most at-risk children.

The issue of vulnerable children needs to change if we no longer want to feel ashamed to celebrate international Roma day.

## About the author

Valeriu Nicolae is regional advocacy director for the Middle East and eastern Europe of World Vision

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