Potential contribution of the Structural Funds to the National Strategies. Open debate among participants on how this EU Framework can be transposed into the different national contexts and how the SF can support them. Debate based on a questionnaire previously administered to participants.

Italy welcomes the European Commission’s Communication. It strikes us as a first step in defining a real commitment to fostering the integration of Roma people and an integrated strategy at European level. The EC calls for concrete commitments and sets specific deadlines to support the socio-economic integration of the Roma people. Through the Communication we believe that the EU will strengthen the collective efforts made in recent years by the members of the European Network Euroma aiming to improve the conditions of the Roma population.

A specific point of interest is the issue concerning the definition of guidelines on data collection on the Roma community. In several occasions, this objective is outlined in the task of the Network Euroma in order to have consistent and reliable data available on interventions dedicated to Roma under the Structural Funds. Getting guidelines by the European Commission in this regard would facilitate the collection, monitoring and evaluation of national and European strategies in compliance with the regulations and the existing anti-discrimination legislation in the Member States.

Another point which may lead to promising developments is the definition of the national policies or set of policies and the establishment of a National Contact Point (NCP). This could be an opportunity – especially for MS such as Italy with a strong decentralization - to push for
a coordination of tasks and responsibilities between the national and regional level and to come to light many initiatives implemented at local level.

Considering the second point of the debate, how the guidelines related to the financing and the use of EU funds will affect the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion, it is true there are different funds and instruments accessible to Roma but MS do not make sufficient use of available EU funds to address the needs of the Roma. The reasons are: 1) often MS are not familiar with these financial tools and 2) they are often managed by different authorities.

In this contest it would be helpful to define a specific budget line for Roma people within the Structural Funds as a specific Initiative or priority in the OP’s to ensure a real and effective use of European resources in keeping with the “target but not exclusively” principle.

Regarding the issues mentioned in the Communication, the Ministry of Labour considers employment a major vehicle for the inclusion of Roma people: in this connection for the future we believe that it would be important to enhance the employment opportunities increasing investment in “self-employment”, instruments for training and microcredit facilities. Furthermore, National strategies for integration should be based on an integrated approach. The experience of previous Community Initiatives, such as Equal, has shown how the integrated approach is the most effective way for real inclusion of disadvantaged people.

The Ministry is also interested in investigating the issue of Roma children. Investing in new generations could promote the development of the Roma community at large.

Moreover, in December 2010 the Italian government approved the “Third two-year Plan of action and intervention for children” The Plan identifies different actions aiming at promoting the integration of Roma children in different sector of health, education (eg. paths in educational support, integrated training provision in VET, protection of the right to health and access to health care, particularly for the Roma living in camps, intercultural training for teachers and managers education on issues concerning the education of Roma pupils, enhancing the potential of the second generation such as socio-cultural mediators in their family).

Concerning changes or adaptations in the existing OPs should be approved by the State and Regions conference.
Review of the latest and upcoming developments at national and European level regarding Roma and Structural Funds. Exchange and update of information among members.

At the end of 2010, the Ministry of Labour established a National Group for inter-institutional coordination for the integration of Roma people, coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies - DG POF with Isfol technical and scientific support. This Group draws from the experience of the Network that was more related to the ESF.

This Group seeks to acts as a forum for discussion and development of a national strategy, from the different policy areas highlighted by the Commission: education, housing, employment and health.

The Steering Committee of the Group held its first meeting last Feb. 1st, 2011 and at the end of May we will organise a first meeting of the National Group involving different actors, both at regional and national level.

The decision-making body of the table is a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the following Directorates:

- Labour market
- Vocational Training Policies
- Immigration
- Social Inclusion
- Protection of working conditions
- Volunteer Associations and social formations? Third sector associations?
- Office of the Diplomatic Advisor (Technical Secretariat of the Minister and PC)

Members of the National group will include representatives of the Central Government (Interior, Education, Chairperson of the Council - UNAR, Foreign Affairs, other agencies at national level (ANCI, UPI), regional Departments (employment, vocational training, immigration, inclusion), and local representatives together?, as well as Roma associations.

As part of the activities of inter-institutional Group in the autumn 2011 we’ll organize a European seminar on the topic of Roma children. In this contest we will contact you in order to collect best practice in this field.
Isfol is also mapping the different departments, at national and regional level, involved in the integration of Roma people, the lines of financing, the existing methods of coordination and operational tools. We try to re-build the framework of competencies which are fragmented at regional level and give visibility to/provide an overview of the approved interventions.

**Roma inclusion in the National Reform Programmes and role of the Structural Funds.**

Review of the NRP submitted by Member States to the European Commission by the end of April.

The Italian National Reform Programme does not explicitly mention social inclusion of Roma people. The approach used by NRP is indirect: 2.3 MEuros are intended to promote social inclusion for women, disadvantage people such as migrants and ethnic minorities. Phasing-out Regions aim to increase learning and employment opportunities for disadvantage people in regional OP’s through a dedicated “Social inclusion” Axis.

Regarding the strategies, the Italian government aims to combat poverty. Improving employment and revise public spending are an effective way to reduce poverty. Involving social intermediaries (NGOs, Associations) to combat poverty and delivering active policies to increase employment rates are the key measures indicated by the Italian government.

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