



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

Prepared by:
Phiren Amenca
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DENK	Political Movement Denk
EU	European Union
FRA	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
NCDR	National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRSF	National Roma Strategic Framework
ORWS	<i>Onderwijs aan Woonwaggen, Roma en Sintikinderen</i> [Education of Traveller, Roma and Sinti children]
RCM	Roma Civil Monitor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The post-2020 'Dutch National Roma Strategic Framework' (NRSF) follows in the footsteps of the previous national Roma integration strategy under the motto "no specific policy measure for a specific group/ minority". It is a general overview of mainstream policies, combined with very few specific policy measures. There is no action plan, no specific objectives and indicators, only vague responsibility, and no clear monitoring and evaluation plan.

The added value of the recently approved NRSF consists in the fact that it includes efforts to bring together policy measures according to the EU horizontal and sectoral objectives and to create a certain coherence. Also, it reflects the interest of the coordination body, the 'National Roma Contact Point' (NRCP), in initiating dialogue and consultation with stakeholders; in addition, for the first time, several efforts/instruments for combatting antigypsyism are mentioned.

Participation

The participation of Roma civil society was more consistent in the development of the NRSF. Some community leaders gave their input on the draft strategy, although they did not express too much optimism about the changes that this strategy will bring. There is a need for more meaningful involvement of the community in all phases of the policy cycle to better reach the target group, and to build trust and capacity.

Relevance

Although the topics included in the NRSF are of vital importance to the Roma in the Netherlands, the document is too general. Taking into consideration the fact that the Roma community is small (20,000-40,000 persons), the problems associated with the small subgroups of the latter are relevant – i.e., the situation of stateless Roma, the Roma LGBTQI+ community, and the Yenish community are completely invisible. These and many other issues were not included in the NRSF, and this is considered by the community members as a failure to acknowledge their diversity. Until now, communication has only occurred with the same 3-4 community representatives. It seems that for the authorities, due to the small Roma community, the effort of going into a greater level of detail in the elaboration of the NRSF might have been too much.

Expected effectiveness

To be effective, the NRSF policy measures must fit the needs of the target group, reach the target group, and produce the expected results. To achieve this, a key role should have been played by communication and cooperation between authorities and communities, political will, and the commitment of the communities and authorities.

Alignment with the EU Strategic Framework

Overall, the Dutch NRSF is aligned with the 'EU Strategic Framework' and 'Council Recommendations', but one big deficiency of the NRSF is the lack of information about the diversity of Roma and their challenges, as well as of policy measures that could address them.

INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, there are between 20,000 and 40,000 (approximative 0.24% of the Dutch population) Roma, Sinti and Travellers (woonwagenbewoners-caravan dwellers), living all over the country, in mobile or permanent houses, who have arrived in the Netherlands in successive waves, from various countries (in the case of Roma, mainly from Eastern Europe), as mentioned in the NRSF. Each group faces different challenges i.e. reduce access to mobile houses for the woonwagenbewoners, difficulties in accessing the labour market for Roma, etc. Irrespective of the differences between these groups, they are all confronted with discrimination and antigypsyism.

The '2020-2030 EU Roma Strategic Framework' (EURSF) and the 'Council Recommendation for Equality, Inclusion and Participation' adopted on 12 March 2021 are the new guidelines for 26 EU Member States that support them to continue and improve the efforts started a decade prior, with the previous '2011-2020 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies'.

In response to this new EU framework, the Netherlands drafted in September 2021, the document 'Policy measures in the Netherlands for the equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma and Sinti'. The document represents the 'Dutch National Roma Strategic Framework' and is an integrated set of policy measures that combines mainstream and targeted measures aimed at Roma inclusion.

National Roma Strategic Framework

The NRSF adopted on 30 September 2021 follows, as with the previous national Roma integration strategy, the principle that the Netherlands has "no specific policy aimed at a specific group". The current NRSF is a memorandum of eight pages that describes the policy relevant to improving the position of Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands, and includes mainly mainstream policies with some specific Roma-targeted measures "where necessary". No action plan nor indicators accompany the Dutch NRSF.

As mentioned in the NRSF, the document was drafted by an interim government, with the possibility for amendments by the new government, if deemed necessary.

The document was drafted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Directorate for Society and Integration, which also includes the 'National Roma Contact Point'. According to the director of the Directorate for Society and Integration, who was in charge of the coordination of the NRSF drafting, various ministries as well as Roma civil society were consulted and offered their input.

The drafting of the current NRSF was not preceded by an evaluation of the previous NRSF.

About this report

This report is part of a larger Roma Civil Monitoring exercise associated with the implementation of the NRSF. Its focus is the assessment of the newly adopted NRSF and more specifically of the following:

- Participation of Roma throughout the policy development process of the NRSF
- NRSF's relevance to the needs of Roma people in their diversity
- Expected NRSF's effectiveness
- Alignment of the NRSF with the 'EU Roma Strategic Framework'.

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

Data for this report were collected from the target community's members, representatives of Roma and non-Roma NGOs, representatives of ministries, municipalities, and other public institutions.

The data collection process included:

- Interviewing 40 Roma¹ and non-Roma key informants (20 women, 20 men, age 18-67, from various cities in the Netherlands) via in-person meetings, online or via phone discussions, emails exchanges, questionnaires; with community members (the interviews covered Roma, Sinti, Yenish, *Woonwagengewoners* (*reizegers/travellers*)), representatives of ministries, municipalities, and various institutional representatives such as associated with research institutes, museums, etc.
- Review of data from various national and international institutions' reports, media, social media, internet.
- Participatory observation during meetings with the authorities and community members or events.

The data collection and analysis took place between March and July 2022. The report was drafted by Ms Georgeta Pintilie, an independent researcher.

The coordinator of the development of this report is the Phiren Amenca International Network, which is coordinating the 'Roma Civil Monitoring' coalition in the Netherlands and consists of the following Dutch Roma organisations: Zas Angle, Step Up 4 Youth, REYN, Woonwagen Belangen Nederland, and Radio Patrin. The initial Roma Civil Monitor coalition meeting took place in Amsterdam on 26 March after receiving the applications of interest from the respective organizations. The meeting aimed to conduct an initial assessment of the needs of these Roma civil society organizations from all over the Netherlands and to meet them with the objective of the Roma Civil Monitor 2021-2025 project. The representatives of all these NGOs were interviewed for the purpose of this report and asked for feedback on it.

¹ The word 'Roma' is used as an umbrella term for a number of different groups of Roma descent, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichals, and Boyash/Rudari. Groups like the Ashkali, 'Egyptians', Yenish, eastern groups (including the Dom, Lom, Rom, and Abdal), and travelling groups, including ethnic Travellers or groups referred to under the administrative term '*Gens du voyage*', and people who identify as Gypsies, Tsiganes, or Tziganes too, are covered by this term, without such an approach constituting a disaffirmation of the specific characteristics of these groups.

1. PARTICIPATION

1.1. Roma participation in the NRSF preparation

The Dutch NRSF was drafted in 2021 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Directorate for Society and Integration under the coordination of its director. It must be mentioned that at the time the NRSF was drafted, the Netherlands had an interim government.

In June 2021, the so-called 'flexible dialogue' consultation mechanism was introduced online, at the initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs, organised by Movisie, a national knowledge institute for a coherent approach to social issues, with a long tradition of working on topics related to Roma in the Netherlands, together with Roma. The purpose of the flexible dialogue was to create a communication channel whereby Roma from various groups are able to communicate with representatives of different ministries and give their feedback on national and European policies/initiatives.

The Roma participants at the first flexible dialogue – who were, in the vast majority, representatives of Roma non-governmental organisations – received via email, after the online meeting, at the end of July 2021, the NRSF draft for comments and input from the NRCP. They had one month to submit their reactions to the draft. In September 2021, the NRCP informed everyone via a follow-up email that nine reactions were received (without mentioning their content) and some parts of them were incorporated into the NRSF. Some were dismissed because they were not about the NRSF, while others concerned additional policy recommendations that might be taken up by the forthcoming cabinet. Other reactions concerned specific targeted policy areas that fall outside of the scope of this NRSF, which is much more general and less targeted. Therefore, all concrete suggestions were not taken up in the document, which contains a general description of the main objectives, and not a list of concrete actions and measures as in an action plan. Several questions and comments in these reactions were about the communication and information from the government on specific topics such as the subsidy scheme for young people, or feedback from decision-making authorities. The email also mentioned that the comments and suggestions that were not included in the NRSF could be the topic of further discussions between the target groups and specific ministries or institutions responsible for the respective topics.

Despite the declaration of government officials that Roma civil society was consulted and offered input in the NRSF preparation, Roma participation was limited to those individuals that attended the flexible dialogue. Roma civil society could have profited more from open consultation instead. The previous national Roma integration strategy, its results and lessons learnt were not evaluated according to the NRCP. The draft for the new NRSF was prepared solely by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and then presented to the Roma who were asked for input. The input received from the Roma was not shared and discussed with them, therefore it is not clear what the contribution of Roma was to the new NRSF. After the reactions to the NRSF draft, Roma were not informed what the next steps regarding the new NRSF would be.

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

The Dutch NRSF does not specify anywhere if and in what way Roma will be involved in the NRSF implementation, monitoring, or evaluation. As the Dutch NRSF does not have an action plan and it is in fact just a general enumeration of projects and activities carried out by various ministries, institutions, and especially municipalities, there is a possibility that Roma who are employed or involved to a certain degree in the implementation of those projects and activities may contribute to the implementation of the NRSF.

There are Roma working in the public sector such as in municipalities and schools who are hiding their identity publicly, according to the interviews with both representatives of institutions and authorities, as well as community members. Examples of Roma working in the public sector in one of the projects mentioned in the NRSF are those from the 'Advisory Board for Roma and Sinti Participation and Emancipation'² within the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The advisory board members (only Roma and Sinti) are selected based on their applications, and undertake the task of the selection of projects submitted by the Roma and Sinti to be financed by the special fund for Roma and Sinti participation and emancipation within the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports. The final decision belongs to the ministry, but the advisory board plays a key role.

Community members who were interviewed declared that they are willing to work in the public sector, but they are constantly rejected because they do not have certified qualifications:

"We are doing the work of the social workers and other employees of the municipality or schools, but we do not get paid because we do not have the diplomas." (Interview, Roma woman)

On the other hand, authorities do not seem very committed to hiring Roma or Sinti:

"We cannot hire a certain person from the Roma or Sinti community because this will start discussion and tension between other community members. 'Why did you choose her/him and not me?!' Plus, they do not have the necessary diplomas." (Interview, authority representative)

There are community organisations with an obvious record of active participation and support for the community in the field of education, the labour market, housing, administration, etc.:

- *Woonwagen Belangen Nederland*, an NGO representing the travellers or caravan dwellers (*Woonwagenbewoners/reizegers*) in the Netherlands, reacted to the fact that the number of pitches is insufficient for community needs and to the fact that many municipalities in the Netherlands decided to eliminate this style of living – a practice that was called 'extinction policy', for various reasons. This NGO took the issue to the National Ombudsman, which led to an investigation with the title 'Traveller is looking for pitch: An investigation into the reliability of the government for travellers'³ and a recommendation to the municipalities to stop implementing the 'extinction policy'.
- Roma Utrecht, a Roma NGO from the city of Utrecht, brought to the attention of Party Politieke Beweging Denk (Political Movement Denk) the issue of antigypsyism and the need of it to be incriminated as a form of racism. Consequently, the Party Denk brought the issue of antigypsyism to the Dutch Parliament through a motion which was passed with 127 votes for, and 23 votes against.⁴

These examples are proof that the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners need to be acknowledged as social partners and be supported to develop their organisational capacity for their benefit and the benefit of the whole of Dutch society.

² Adviescommissie voor de participatie en emancipatie Sinti en Roma, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0042173/2019-05-01>

³ National Ombudsman, Traveller is looking for pitch: An investigation into the reliability of the government for travellers 2017, <https://www.nationaleombudsman.nl/nieuws/2017/kabinet-moet-einde-maken-aan-discriminerend-standplaatsenbeleid-woonwagenbewoners>

⁴ Member Öztürk's motion on combating anti-Gypsyism within the broader approach to racism and discrimination, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/moties/detail?id=2020Z19122&did=2020D41255>

It is unclear how many Roma there are among the staff and paid experts at any level of administration involved in the implementation of the NRSF, if there are any at all. There is a need to involve Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners directly via paid jobs to implement, monitor, and evaluate policies, projects, and activities that target them directly to increase their effectiveness and efficiency. This is a matter of reaching the target group and a matter of trust.

1.3. System of policy consultation with civil society and stakeholders

In 2021, at the instruction of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Directorate for Society and Integration, a communication channel was created – so-called ‘flexible dialogue’. The purpose was to put together Roma, various ministries, and other stakeholders to exchange information and obtain feedback on public policies of interest for Roma.

The flexible dialogue is organised by Movisie, a national knowledge institute for a coherent approach to social issues, with a long tradition of working on topics related to Roma in the Netherlands, together with Roma.

The first flexible dialogue took place online, in the summer of 2021, and many Roma community members and Roma NGO representatives were invited and therefore participated. For the first time, representatives of the Woonwagenbewoners attended this type of meeting. The first flexible dialogue was mostly an opportunity for participants to get to know each other, an opportunity for the Roma to address questions to various representatives of ministries and to inform them about topics of concern. From interviewing various participants, it appears their reactions were mixed: some were content to have been included in the discussions; other were pessimistic regarding the results of these kind of meetings, considering that the time was too short and the topics and the crowd too broad to lead to concrete results.

The second flexible dialogue took place in March 2022 in a hybrid format, online and in person. The Roma audience was diverse in terms of the groups, age, and gender.

Although the participation at these communication meetings was greater than before, many participants expressed their pessimism:

“Every time, we meet, talk and nothing changes. I do not think personally that anything will change for better, but I appreciate the opportunity to meet other Roma people.” (Interview, Roma).

The flexible dialogue is a pilot project which will be assessed in 2022 to see in which form it will continue its existence.

The consultation system needs to ensure a certain regularity that involves periodic meetings, with agendas that include topics of interest for Roma, and to ensure that participants are better informed about the topics to be discussed so as to attract Roma participants with interest and expertise in the topics and increase the efficiency of the meetings. There is also a need for the Roma to have the opportunity to meet with the other stakeholders associated with the topics, to network, and exchange knowledge and experiences.

Roma civil society should be included in all consultative and cooperative processes that concern them.

1.4. Empowerment of Roma communities at the local level

The size of the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners populations in each municipality varies significantly across the Netherlands. The size of the community influences the local policy towards the community. Due to decentralisation, each municipality has a different approach to the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners communities.

Municipal authorities play a significant role, directly or indirectly, in the implementation of anti-poverty policy, housing policy, education, social protection, social services and anti-discrimination. The NRSF mentions the key role of the municipalities in its implementation, both due to their competencies and their direct connection with beneficiaries. Although municipalities shoulder the largest load in terms of implementation, there is a need for support from the central level government in terms of resources – especially financial ones, as well as administrative and even political ones. There is a need for strong cooperation between the national government and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities on topics of national interest such as fighting poverty, for example, and housing policy.

According to the interviews, there are municipalities that have good, supportive, and productive relations with community members. But in the majority of cases, the relations are tense and involve difficulty with communication, and community leaders cannot initiate cooperation with the local authorities or are even blocked in their activities.

There is a network of municipalities in which the Roma live in significant numbers, and where the national and local authorities implement projects, but unfortunately no consultative structures with the local Roma communities were set up to ensure the co-creation of measures and a sense of ownership of the results.

The local authorities should more strongly support the capacity building and the involvement of the community representatives at the local level.

There have been efforts by community representatives, especially from the Woonwagenbewoners, to participate in local and national elections in order to represent and give voice to their communities. In the 2022 local elections, nine members of the Woonwagenbewoners ran for the position of local councillor in their municipalities.

1.5. Capacity-building of Roma civil society

The NRSF does not provide for the capacity building of Roma and does not promote in any way collaboration with Roma. Further, the Roma community representatives who were interviewed confirmed that there are no opportunities for capacity building that are organised by the local or national authorities.

The vast majority of the Dutch Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners NGOs lack the basic skills that are required to write, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects. None of them have their own office because they cannot afford to pay the rent. They do not have stable financial sources to implement community activities. Many of them do not have a website or a social media account.

For the vast majority of Dutch Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners NGOs, the source of funding for their projects is dedicated financial support from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports for Roma and Sinti emancipation and participation for projects associated with one of the following topics:

- remembrance of the Second World War,
- combatting discrimination and prejudice,
- strengthening of advocacy and representation,
- stimulating education, including scholarships,
- job creation,
- respect for culture and identity,
- advice and guidance intermediaries.

Communities and authorities should work together in project implementation, monitoring, and/or evaluation because it has been proven from the examples mentioned in the previous section that this has the potential to contribute to the capacity building and better outreach of the target group and the efficiency of projects.

There is a need for the Dutch Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners NGOs to find ways to build capacity through taking advantage of national and international opportunities, and by partnering in national and international projects, co-organising events, and attending national and international events on topics of mutual interest.

2. RELEVANCE

2.1. Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

The NRSF acknowledges the findings of the 2018 EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) report *'Roma and Travellers in six countries'*⁵ that shows that 76% of Roma and Sinti feel discriminated against in the Netherlands. The reported prevalence of hate-motivated harassment as well as of physical violence amongst the six reviewed countries was highest among Roma in the Netherlands (83% and 13%, respectively) (FRA, 2020). According to the FRA report, only 13% reported the most recent incident of discrimination in the last five years – thus it seems likely that the Roma underreport hate-motivated crimes or discrimination against them. Based on the report, there seems to be a difference between Roma and Sinti regarding the knowledge of the existence of anti-discrimination legislation – only 5% of Roma are aware of the equal treatment law compared with 55% of Sinti and Woonwagenbewoners, and in terms of a national equality body (the 'Anti-Discrimination Office' or 'College of Human Rights') 59% of Sinti and Woonwagenbewoners know about its existence compared with only 12% of Roma. This indicates that measures taken by the government to raise awareness of the existence of the law and remedies have not been effective as regards the Roma. In addition, according to the survey results, the majority of those who did not report discrimination or crimes against them said that they avoided doing so because they thought that 'nothing would happen or change', or because they did not trust the authorities.

Many of the Roma, Sinti and Woonwagenbewoners who were interviewed for this Roma Civil Monitoring report said that they frequently encounter institutional discrimination. They said that the reduced rate of reporting is partially due to the lack of knowledge of their rights, legislation, and institutional set up, but also to a lack of trust in institutions and authorities, and fear of possible repercussions.

In the Dutch NRSF, some of the Dutch authorities' efforts to fight discrimination and antigypsyism are mentioned:

- *'No room for discrimination'* – Guidance for municipalities for combating anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Gypsyism and LGBTI+ discrimination elaborated by MOVISIE.⁶ Concerning the part regarding antigypsyism, two persons of Roma and Sinti background were consulted, together with two academics. The concern expressed during the interviews with Roma community members and other stakeholders relates to the weak power of this guideline in terms of its use and implementation by authorities. It is just a guideline, and nobody can enforce it.
- As of 15 October 2021, the Netherlands appointed a 'National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism' (NCDR),⁷ a new position in the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Its role will be, among other tasks, to draft a multi-year national programme against racism and discrimination with the contribution and consultation of other stakeholders, including those from the Roma community. The NCDR has already had several meetings with various minorities groups, including one with Roma to make first contact and to become informed about the issues of

⁵ FRA, Roma, and Travelers in six countries, September 2020, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf

⁶ Movisie, 2022, Geen ruimte voor discriminatie, <https://www.movisie.nl/publicatie/geen-ruimte-discriminatie>

⁷ Nationaal Coördinator tegen Discriminatie en Racisme (NCDR), <https://www.bureauncdr.nl/>

racism and discrimination experienced by Roma in the Netherlands, and to understand what the viable solutions may be.

- According to the NRSF, the Netherlands wants to strengthen the municipal anti-discrimination services and the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, including in financial ways.

Other initiatives or activities that have taken place nationally that can support the fight against antigypsyism and discrimination in the Netherlands include:

- In October 2020, a motion by Dutch MP Selçuk Öztürk, party DENK, on antigypsyism was adopted by the majority of the Dutch national parliament.
- In the response letter to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's recommendations for the Netherlands regarding the combating of Roma stereotypes, the Director of the Social Support Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport mentioned that "the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) working definition of antigypsyism is an important instrument for the recognition of the indescribable suffering inflicted on the Sinti and Roma communities and an instrument for entering into dialogue with the Sinti and Roma communities in the Netherlands". Therefore, the Netherlands adopted the official use of the IHRA definition of antigypsyism as a legally non-binding working definition of antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma.⁸

Despite all the above-mentioned efforts, discrimination and antigypsyism are still present in the Netherlands.

In June 2022, the Stentor investigative newspaper revealed that Woonwagenbewoners (caravan dwellers) are blacklisted in many municipalities, being considered a risk group for committing crimes.⁹ More and more municipalities have their own hotline, such as the municipality of Zwolle, on which citizens can report "suspicious" situations. Reportedly, "when tips come in about suspicious situations, caravan dwellers are more likely to be associated with serious crime than other residents". This also happens in municipalities such as Putten, Zwolle, Nederweert, Eijsden-Margraten, Schiedam, and Leudal. These blacklists are based on a national model of a '*Checklist for the Purpose of Signal Analysis*'¹⁰ that has been drawn up by the Ministry of Justice and Security to assess the value of such signals.

The National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism (NRDC), the Ministry of Justice and Security, the College of Human Rights, and the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations' representatives reacted to the information revealed by the Stentor newspaper, declaring that further investigation will be carried out. The NRDC wants to investigate if their exclusion and stigmatisation are occurring based on grounds referred to in Article 1 of the Constitution on equal treatment and non-discrimination.

⁸IHRA antigypsyism definition, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/nl/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-roma-discrimination>

⁹ Boer, A. (2022) "Ophef over zwarte lijst woonwagenbewoners bij gemeenten: 'Stigmatiserend en zelfs discriminerend' De Stentor, 07.06.2022, <https://www.destentor.nl/ opinie/stelling-woonwagenbewoners-mogen-niet-op- een-zwarte-lijst-bij-gemeenten-staan~a45f6e5e/>

¹⁰ Checklist for the purpose of signal analysis, https://hetccv.nl/fileadmin/Bestanden/Onderwerpen/modelprotocol_ ondermijning/Bijlage_1. Checklist_signaalanalyse.pdf

Lawyer Sjoerd Jaasma, who specialises in Woonwagenbewoners cases, declared: "This is of course stigmatising and even discriminatory, it seems to me. The cases that are alike must be treated the same way and that does not seem to be happening here".¹¹

In July 2022, both Ministers Hanke Bruins Slot (Interior and Kingdom Relations) and Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius (Justice and Security) condemned the blacklisting, considering it incorrect that Woonwagenbewoners are explicitly mentioned and thus the focus is placed on a specific group. "The fact that Woonwagenbewoners, but also tenants and owners of caravans, are mentioned as a group on the checklist for signal analysis contributes to stigmatisation".¹²

It is unknown if the caravan-dwellers have become victims of the method or how many municipalities have so far worked with the controversial blacklist. The checklist will be adjusted, and all municipalities will be informed of this. The Dutch government will investigate further whether more lists are used in the Netherlands that are discriminatory and/or stigmatising for Woonwagenbewoners.

As a general conclusion, the new additions to the institutional and legal set up that targets discrimination and racism should pay particular attention to combatting antigypsyism by increasing awareness among the Roma of the instruments to be used to report acts of antigypsyism and build trust in the public institutions in charge of combatting antigypsyism and other forms of racism and discrimination. Also, there should be an increase in effort to eliminate all forms of institutional antigypsyism and other forms of racism and discrimination against Roma.

2.2. Education

According to 'Education for Traveller, Roma and Sinti Children' (ORWS), a national platform financed by the Ministry of Education which promotes the education of Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners in the Netherlands,¹³ most children of Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners attend primary education. The problem they are confronted with, especially in the case of Roma, is the language deficiency, since they speak another language at home, and do not attend kindergarten.

According to the answers received from the Roma interviewees, the low level of kindergarten attendance of Roma children is due to the shortage of places in kindergartens, the cost of services, the high level of unemployment among Roma women, many stay-at-home moms, and the fear of parents that their children will be bullied and mistreated.

The Romani Early Years Network expert Aljosa Rudas, based in Leiden, said in the interview that authorities together with school mediators and community leaders should work together to ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of kindergarten services complemented by an awareness-campaign in the Roma community regarding the importance and benefits of attending kindergarten for Roma children which exceed the development of language and social skills, but can also contribute to the development of cognitive skills, the perception of the world, moral outlook, and self-esteem.

Since 2020, 'TOY for Inclusion', a play-hub pilot initiative of the Romani Early Years Network has been implemented in the Netherlands by the Salvation Army and a Roma

¹¹ Binnenlands bestuur, 07.06.2022, <https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/lijst-gebruikt-om-waarde-van-signalen-te-toetsen>

¹² https://www.destentor.nl/zwolle/ministers-door-het-stof-na-zwarte-lijst-met-woonwagenbewoners-verkeerd-en-stigmatiserend~ac9fbd57/?cb=a0faa9c6d39811898c16a56e5636f098&auth_rd=1

¹³ ORWS Onderwijs aan Woonwagen-, Roma- en Sintikinderen, <https://www.owrs.nl/>

NGO in Enschede.¹⁴ The pilot project is a set of non-formal education activities setup in an inclusive and intercultural environment for Roma families and children from the ages of 0 to 4 (preschool age). In 2022, another play hub has opened in Lelystad, where approximately three hundred Roma are living.

This form of education is not intended to replace kindergartens, but it has been implemented with satisfactory results for Roma children in many European countries. Therefore, local authorities might consider financing and implementing it in cities with a larger Roma population.

Also, to increase the access to early childhood education of vulnerable groups, including Roma, Dutch authorities should pay more attention to these groups in the implementation of the action plans elaborated through the 'European Child Guarantee framework'.¹⁵

For a couple of years, a special scheme¹⁶ for primary education school boards involving one million EUR in subsidies per year, has been in place to support Roma and Sinti children. Primary schools can apply for subsidies from the Ministry of Education to support the Roma children under their care if they can prove, via a parent's signed statement or registration of ethnicity, that they have at least four children of Roma and Sinti origin in their school. However, due to the reaction of parents, who consider ethnic registration to be discriminatory, the condition has been eliminated since 2021.

Apart from the sensitivity of ethnic registration in the Netherlands, especially for the Dutch Roma and Sinti after WWII, many community members are curious of the results of these subsidies, taking in consideration the fact that all the reports on Roma and Sinti education in the Netherlands are negative:

"We want to know where the money went; how was it used?" (Interview, Roma representative).

Also, community members were critical about the existence and the results of the ORWS:

"There is a group of non-Roma who are giving advice about us, without us." (Interview, Sinti representative)

Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagengewoners interviewees declared that there is a need for school intermediaries (mediators) from the community who have access to and the trust of the community to work directly with families and children. The only issue is who will finance them.

"The school intermediary project was stopped because it was considered inefficient, but ORWS has got funding for years and the results have not changed." (Interview, Sinti representative)

The ORWS representative considers that there is a need for better communication at the decision level and more stability at the institutional level so that the public servants involved in the education process and all the collateral institutions would be able to build a constructive dialogue and plan:

¹⁴ TOY for Inclusion Netherlands, <https://www.reyn.eu/toy-for-inclusion-conversations-play-hub-coordinator-from-the-netherlands/>

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

¹⁶ Government funds for Roma and Sinti in primary education, <https://www.owrs.nl/themas/bijzondere-bekostiging#:~:text=Bijzondere%20bekostiging%202021%2F2022,waarvoor%20de%20bekostiging%20wordt%20toegekend>

"It is hard to build something when every now and then the public servants are changing positions and ministries. We need stability and better communication." (ORWS representative)

Attendance in secondary education is low, and even lower at higher levels of education. Many community members who were interviewed blame the bullying, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by their children in schools for school absenteeism.

The authorities consider that children do not receive the support needed for improving school performance at home, due to parents' lack of knowledge or interest.

For Roma and Sinti youth, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is supporting a pilot project¹⁷ in seven municipalities (Enschede, Sittard-Geleen, Nuenen, Son en Breugel, Nieuwegein, and Ede en Lelystad) to promote, through the deployment of intermediaries, participation by young Sinti and Roma in education and guidance for them about employment. In this pilot, intermediaries play a significant role in guiding Roma and Sinti youth to education and employment. These intermediaries come from either the communities themselves or are professionals. Since 2020, seven municipalities with Roma and Sinti populations have applied for a grant to run the pilot (the Dutch government has made available a grant of a total of 735,000 EUR). The project started in 2020 but due to the COVID-19-related restrictions could not develop as planned, but at the beginning of 2023 an evaluation will be available through which lessons can be learnt in terms of efficiency of the methods used.

To evaluate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary education, at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the 'National Cohort Survey' of the 'Netherlands Initiative for Education Research' (NRO) published new data on the effects of school-closing due to COVID-19 restriction measures, based on the final school tests in May/June 2021.¹⁸ According to the ministry's report, pre-schoolers learned (much) less than in previous years, especially because the distance-learning interfered in the teacher-pupil dynamics, resulting in negative consequences for the social-emotional development, behaviour, and language development of pre-schoolers. Although Roma and Sinti children were not mentioned in the report, one of the report conclusions which might be especially important in the case of Roma children indicates that during the coronavirus crisis pre-schoolers with a risk of (language) disadvantages could make less use of preschool education. More than a quarter of the schools included in the sample said that these pupils would start primary school with a greater disadvantage than before.¹⁹

Among other measures that the Dutch government took to address the consequences of COVID-19, funds for schools for preventing backlogs or catch-up classes starting with early child education until middle-level professional education (MBO) should be mentioned, as well as funds for maintaining apprenticeships, training on the job, and practical learning.²⁰

¹⁷ The Netherlands, Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations (Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties) (2020), Jaarverslag en slotwet Gemeentefonds 2019. Memorie van Toelichting, <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-35470-B-4.html>

¹⁸ *Technisch rapport – Gevolgen van 16 maanden corona voor het primair onderwijs* (2022), <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/onderwerpen/corona-onderzoeken/documenten/rapporten/2021/10/12/technisch-rapport-primair-onderwijs-16-maanden-corona>

¹⁹ *Idem*

²⁰ Minister of Education, Culture and Science (2020), 'Compensatie studenten en ondersteuningsmaatregelen onderwijs COVID-19', Letter to the House of Representatives, 15 May 2020, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/05/15/kamerbrief-compensatie-studenten-en-ondersteuningsmaatregelen-onderwijs-covid-19>

In May 2020, OWRS implemented a concise survey²¹ to gain insight into whether and how Roma and Sinti families and children had benefitted from the supporting measures of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science – however, the results are not yet available.

2.3. Employment

The NRSF mentions that the assistance to access the labour market “is used equally for all jobseekers, including Roma and Sinti” and that municipal authorities and the Employee Insurance Agency have a wide range of tools and facilities to help people find work, including wage cost subsidies, job coaching, workplace adjustment, training, and counselling.

However, the representation of the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners in the labour market is very weak according to the Social Inclusion Monitor report of 2020.²² They live mainly on “social benefits, self-employment, paid employment and unknown activities” (Risbo, 2020).

Many interviewees mentioned discrimination on the labour market and the fact that they must hide their origins and their names – namely, Eastern European names or addresses, - i.e., caravan sites.

Some young interviewees mentioned that it is difficult to get an internship or apprenticeship due to the prejudices of mainstream society. The NRSF mentions the pilot project (see the project described in the previous section) run by seven municipalities to support youth to access employment by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Also, the municipalities and Employee Insurance Agency can provide a diverse range of services to increase the chances of employability. Many Roma do not know about these services, or do not trust that they will get the help they need. In these cases, Roma community intermediaries could be especially useful in disseminating the information and building trust.

The NRSF indicates that a ‘Recruitment and Selection Equal Opportunities (Supervision) Bill’ with measures aimed at countering labour market discrimination was submitted to the House of Representatives for debate in December 2020, and that a comprehensive investigation programme ‘Further integration on [sic] the labour market’²³ was set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to study, inter alia, the most effective tools for countering discrimination during recruitment and selection, and to identify ‘what works’ to improve the labour market position of persons with a non-Western migration background and to counter discrimination of Roma and Sinti on the labour market.

The COVID-19 restrictions hit very hard self-employed Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners, as well as those working in the entertainment industry or on mobile fairground attractions or in the informal sector. They have received very little or no state support to date.

2.4. Healthcare

The NRSF mentions the general procedure for accessing healthcare in the Netherlands. The NRSF indicates that Roma in the Netherlands sometimes have difficulty accessing

²¹ OWRS ‘Leerachterstand door Corona’ (2020), <https://www.owrs.nl/nieuws/owrs-leerlingen-kwetsbaar-en-op-achterstand>

²² Risbo, *Social Inclusion Monitor – Follow-up research into the living and living conditions of Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands*, 2020, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/02/29/monitor-sociale-inclusie-meting-4>

²³ Further Integration programme on the Labour market (VIA), [Programma Verdere Integratie op de Arbeidsmarkt | Kamerstuk | Rijksoverheid.nl](https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/programma-verdere-integratie-op-de-arbeidsmarkt)

healthcare insurance, especially if stateless, although it is indicated that healthcare insurers are not allowed to refuse to accept people for financial reasons or due to pre-existing medical risks.

According to the information from the interviews with Roma community members, there are no serious issues in relation to their access to healthcare in the Netherlands. Problems are indicated for undocumented and stateless persons. Even in this case, there are opportunities to access healthcare to a certain level via organisations like Doctors without Borders, or the Red Cross.

2.5. Housing, essential services, and environmental justice

Roma in the Netherlands live in permanent housing; some of the Sinti live in permanent houses, but a substantial proportion of them live in mobile houses, on caravan sites too. The vast majority of Woonwagenbewoners live on caravan sites in mobile homes, but there are many living in permanent housing as they had no choice, being left without their mobile homes either because their caravan site closed, or because the owner of the caravan died and the rest of the family were not part of the lease contract so could not continue to live in the caravan, etc. Due to the fact that it is not possible to obtain statistics based on ethnicity, there is no clear information about how many of the people living in the caravan sites are Sinti, Roma, and Woonwagenbewoners.

There are no environmental-hazard-related issues with the caravan sites.

Housing in all forms is a severe problem nowadays in the Netherlands because of the very strong demand and limited supply. This generates overcrowding, among other problems. In the case of the people living on the caravan sites, due to the living conditions (limited space and the impossibility to extend the living space), many families feel restricted to having just one child. The community considers this a form of demographic control, because they are faced with the dilemma of choosing between increasing the family or continuing to live in a caravan and preserve their culture, as the option to move into a bigger caravan is impossible in the short or medium term. The Woonwagenbewoners interviewees said that they feel that they are powerless. They feel that it is not only their right to decent housing that is denied them, but also their cultural identity.

The power to change this is completely in the hands of local municipalities, which can decide to create more caravan sites, or to reduce their number; to improve living conditions and facilities or to increase surveillance via helicopters.

The Woonwagenbewoners are highly active at contacting authorities and lobbying for more space and better living conditions. Some local municipalities are more receptive, (e.g. the municipality of Apeldoorn) than others.

The hurdles are even greater for individuals with disabilities who want to live in a caravan. For the latter, there is considerable bureaucracy involved in getting help with the adjustments required to facilitate living in such housing:

"I discussed with the constructor from the beginning when they were redoing the site. I specified all my needs and still the result was not one that made my life easier. The doors were too narrow for the wheelchair, the ramp too steep, etc. Because of this I need to contact the municipality to ask for extra help. Everything takes so long, and I need to explain every time why I need what I need. It is simply exhausting." (Interview, Sinti)

The NRSF mentions the National Ombudsman's recommendations of 2018 to the municipalities regarding the development of local pitching policy with respect to the human rights of the Woonwagenbewoners. According to the evaluation made by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, in May 2021 in the Netherlands there were 8,854 mobile-home pitches, which number has remained unchanged for the last two years, but

may be increased by 150 pitches over the next two years. It is mentioned in the NRSF that 50 million EUR will be made available by the national government for housing, including caravan sites, but the Woonwagenbewoners are pessimistic about any meaningful changes in their current situation.

Due to the large number of war refugees from Ukraine, in recent months many local authorities, facing a housing shortage, have decided to install caravans in various places. This started a wave of protest from the Woonwagenbewoners, some of whom have been on a waiting list for more than ten years for a caravan spot (authorities postpone giving them sites because of the lack of suitable places). The media has extensively covered the Woonwagenbewoners' actions and protests.²⁴ Unfortunately, the authorities could only promise that they will look further into finding a solution.

2.6. Social protection

The Roma living legally in the Netherlands declared that they have access to social protection. The problems are severe when it comes to the undocumented and stateless Roma.

The NRSF does not have a chapter on social protection, but it mentions the role of municipalities in combatting poverty and national efforts that combine the central government, local administrations, and NGOs to combat child poverty.

2.7. Social services

Municipalities play a key role in providing many social services. There are many NGOs that help Roma to access social services, including Roma NGOs, which unfortunately have been doing this for years without any recognition or support, mainly because the NGO members do not have the formal qualifications. They have easy access to the community and the trust of the community, and they know the social services system.

There are access problems when it comes to undocumented and stateless Roma, especially after the age of eighteen.

The NRSF does not have a chapter on social services.

The municipalities should find ways to support the professionalisation of these people to enable them to be employed by the public sector for the benefit of the Roma community and society in general.

2.8. Child protection

The NRSF mentions the Centre for Crime prevention (CCV),²⁵ financed by the Ministry of Justice and the fact that...

"Since 2016 the CVV has appointed an advisor to safeguard and fuel the existing policy. The CVV [has] also developed a barrier model for multi-problem families with a Roma background in which it signals the exploitation of children, notifications, and interventions to tackle abuse. And the CCV has developed an integral approach to tackling exploitation within family networks."

²⁴ Vertegaal, C. (2022) "Woonwagenbewoners alweer terug in hun bezette chalets na nekklem-incident met beveiliging. 'Het is discriminatie'" Noordsholland Dagblad 22 July 2022, https://m.noordhollandsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20220722_69973868?utm_source=lm.facebook.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=%2F&fbclid=IwAR3Sq0pT_skMGNqvo6p8u4nkyPxs_NW8q2_FyDIEzWOfz8oPXWC1HUyIpc0

²⁵ CCV, <https://hetccv.nl/onderwerpen/multiprobleemgezinnen-met-een-roma-achtergrond/>

There are those in the Roma community who consider the activities of CCV and child-protection services to be abusive and believe that the focus is on crime and not on the protection of children, thus promoting the prejudices and bad image of the Roma. Other members of the Roma communities consider that child exploitation is a serious topic that should be tackled within the community and that the solutions should come from the community in cooperation with various institutions.

There is a need for an integrated approach which addresses and condemns the effects of child abuse, but also which analyses and addresses the causes, bearing in mind the increased level of vulnerability and social determinants of the lives of children and parents.

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

In 2015, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports implemented a special grant scheme to enable activities by and on behalf of the Dutch Sinti and Roma communities, with a total budget of 4.1 million EUR.²⁶ A Roma and Sinti advisory committee is part of the selection process for projects to be financed.

An annual amount of 500,000 EUR is available for projects that address one or more of the below-mentioned themes, but there is no budget allocation according to theme:

- Remembrance of the *Porajmos* and WWII
- Combatting discrimination and prejudices
- Strengthening advocacy and representation
- Stimulating enrolment into formal education and the completion thereof
- Job creation
- Respect and understanding of Sinti and Roma culture and identity
- Coaching and consulting intermediaries

In 2019, a mid-term evaluation was done, but there were no major changes in the grant scheme. There have been a lot of mixed reactions within the Roma community because the projects which received funding were not made public and people wanted to know how the money was spent. There is a need for an impact evaluation, but the ministry did not plan one for this fund.

By the end of 2022, the fund will be exhausted and it is not yet clear if and in what form or through which ministry support for Roma participation and emancipation will continue.

So far, the grant has financed exhibitions about Roma history and combatting antigypsyism or supported Sinti and Roma speakers at schools and other institutions. Radio Patrin, a Roma-language radio program, has been financed for years by this grant scheme.

Regarding WWII and the Holocaust in education, according to the experts at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the National Delegate on Holocaust Remembrance, Education and Research, the genocide of Sinti and Roma is not explicitly mentioned but 'suggested' in school curricula, so schools are encouraged to include it in their own curricula. As for teaching materials, there is no independent quality control mechanism in the Netherlands for the training of qualified teachers in relation to the topics of WWII, the Holocaust, and the genocide of the Sinti and Roma, the *Porajmos*.

The focus of the memorial centres in the Netherlands is the Holocaust in terms of both their exhibitions and in educational programmes. The *Porajmos* receives attention on a smaller scale. Every year, the Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre organises transport for the commemoration of the Sinti and Roma, and every five years there is a special

²⁶ Decree establishing the subsidy ceiling and adopting policy rules on the Policy Framework [...] and emancipation of Sinti and Roma in the Netherlands (11 April 2015); Decree establishing the Advisory Committee on Participation and Emancipation of Sinti and Roma (12 May 2015).

commemoration programme.

The Netherlands does not have a museum that focuses exclusively on the history and persecution of the Sinti and the Roma. '*De vergeten genocide, het lot van de Sinti en Roma*', or 'The forgotten genocide, the fate of the Sinti and Roma' is an online exhibition available at: <https://romasinti.eu/nl/>, an initiative of the *Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei*. The IHRA has contributed to this exhibition with financial support and expertise.

Currently, the Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam is undergoing renovation, but according to Annemiek Gringold, the director of the museum, once it opens the museum will include elements about the Roma and Sinti Genocide as well.

Although 2 August is not recognised in the Netherlands as the European Roma Genocide Remembrance Day, on 27 January the Roma and Sinti are invited to attend the official commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In 2020, for the first time in the Netherlands, prime-minister Rutte issued an apology on behalf of the government for the wartime persecution of Jews, admitting that little was done to protect them from the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany. To date, no official apologies to Roma and Sinti have been issued.

In September 2021, the Netherlands officially unveiled its first National Holocaust Memorial in Amsterdam, which consists of 102,000 brick walls, each bearing the name, the date of birth, and age at the time of death of all 102,000 Dutch Jews, Sinti, and Roma who were deported or killed by the Nazis during WWII. The monument was funded mainly through donations.

Both Roma and Sinti communities, as well as Yenish, expressed their need to have an official support for preserving their language and culture. This need was very much expressed especially by the young Roma in various occasions. There is a need for support in organizing language courses and cultural gathering.

3. EXPECTED EFFECTIVENESS

3.1. Coherence with related domestic and European policies

The Dutch NRSF is a general overview of mainstream Dutch policy measures. The Roma-targeted policy measures are quite reduced in terms of financial power and national impact, considering the size of the target group.

Overall, the policy measures enumerated in the current Dutch NRSF are coherent with European social and economic policies, with the 'EU Roma Strategic Framework', and the 'Council Recommendations'.

3.2. Responsibility for NRSF coordination and monitoring

The NRCP is administratively located under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and oversees the coordination of Dutch policy and acts as the link between the EU and the Dutch government. The NRCP is responsible for reporting progress with the NRSF to the EC every two years. The NRCP also coordinates the interdepartmental Roma and Sinti consultations. Although the interdepartmental and interministerial cooperation, coordination, and monitoring system is not particularly clear, the NRCP assured us in an interview that there are constant updates between departments, including among other ministries that run Roma projects or policy measures.

According to the NRSF, at the NRCP's instruction flexible dialogue with the communities and representatives of ministries was set up, as well as a Roma and Sinti knowledge platform.²⁷ This platform is hosted by the Verwey-Jonker Institute and Movisie. It is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and it follows and shares international developments, studies, and strategies to improve the social position of Roma and Sinti.

One issue that came up in the interview with the representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment was the need to improve the communication, transparency, and visibility of the projects/programmes/policy measures that directly or indirectly target the Roma community, as well as mainstream ones.

In 2022, the NRCP is preparing a call for tenders for the new Social Inclusion Monitor report (see Section 3.5 below).

One important recommendation for the NRCP is to include in the conditions for the tenders for the Social Inclusion Monitor report that the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners are not just target groups and interviewees, but that research should be participatory and involve the community members in the phases of data collection and analysis, either based on their capacity or by providing training to them.

3.3. Quality of the plan

The Dutch NRSF is a general overview of pre-existing initiatives regarding Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands. There is no action plan which specifies terms, tasks, objectives, financial allocation, indicators, responsible bodies, etc.

Most of the initiatives/projects/programmes are part of mainstream policies, thus it is difficult to detect coherence between them in promoting the equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners in the Netherlands.

²⁷ Kennisplatform Inclusief Samenleven (KIS), <https://www.kis.nl/about-us>

3.4. Funding

The Dutch NRSF does not specify the amounts dedicated to each initiative in the document. Most of the initiatives/projects/programmes enumerated in the NRSF are mainstream ones and they are already financed by the national budget.

3.5. Monitoring and evaluation

No specific monitoring and evaluation plan for the NRSF has been set up. The NRSF mentions the 'Social Inclusion Monitor' report,²⁸ which is done in the Netherlands every two years. The Social Inclusion Monitor report aims to provide the best possible image of the situation and expectations of Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands. The last report²⁹ was published in 2020 and includes many recommendations which cannot be traced in the current NRSF.

Therefore, if the Social Inclusion Monitor report is the monitoring instrument for the NRSF, its recommendations should be reflected in the NRSF. In 2022, there will be a public tender for drafting the Social Inclusion Monitor. Hopefully, the Roma community will be involved significantly, not just as respondents.

3.6. Assessment of the expected effectiveness and sustainability

"As long as we are not involved in the policy cycle of the policies that target us, the problems will not be solved." (Interview, Sinti representative)

"One can take the reports issued 20-25 years ago and can see clearly that the essential problems we are confronted [with] today were mentioned then too. This means not [a] great deal has changed. Why?" (Interview, Sinti representative)

Although most of the community interviewees were pessimistic regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of the NRSF, the authorities consider that the current NRSF is a step forward and will contribute to the equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands.

Taking into consideration that before drafting the current NRSF there was no evaluation of the previous strategy and that many of the policy measures from the previous strategy document are included in the current NRSF, one could conclude that the problems of Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners are endemic and need more time and resources, or that it is necessary to implement a needs assessment for the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners and adjust the current NRSF accordingly.

²⁸ Social Inclusion Monitor, https://www.risbo.nl/uk/r_project.php?prj=471

²⁹ Risbo, Social Inclusion Monitor 2020, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/02/29/monitor-sociale-inclusie-meting-4>

4. ALIGNMENT WITH THE EU ROMA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

4.1. Reflecting diversity among Roma

As mentioned in the NRSF, there are up to forty thousand Roma living in the Netherlands, but the real number and their division into specific groups is unknown, as ethnic registration is illegal. In the Netherlands, Roma and Sinti are considered as one ethnic group. The vast majority of Roma live in houses and apartments, while Sinti live in houses/apartments as well as in caravans along with the Woonwagenbewoners (Travellers/*Reizigers*). The Dutch authorities do not consider the Woonwagenbewoners to be an ethnic group, but just as Dutch people who like to live a nomadic lifestyle; they are not explicitly included/named in the NRSF. Recently, they were included in the National Inventory of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Apart from all the above-mentioned groups, in the Netherlands there are also Yenish, a group that has an extremely low profile – almost invisible to the authorities, mainstream society, and even to the other Roma groups, according to the statements of a Yenish community member. The Yenish group was not mentioned at all in the NRSF.

The name of the NRSF is '*Policy measures in the Netherlands for the equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma and Sinti*'. Although the NRSF includes a footnote describing the use of the term Roma, and the representative coordinating the drafting of the NRSF mentioned that all groups were included in the policy document, it is obvious that the Dutch NRSF does not reflect the diversity among the Roma.

Apart from the variety of the groups, the intersectional diversity within the Dutch Roma community is not reflected at all in the NRSF. The challenges experienced by the Roma women, seniors, persons with disabilities, EU-mobile citizens, non-EU nationals, stateless and undocumented, and LGBT+, that are for many years outlined by national and international reports, are not addressed by the current NRSF. For example, according to FRA report of 2020³⁰ Roma, Sinti and Woonwagenbewoners women are registering lower access rates in almost all areas including labour, education, health. Stateless and undocumented Roma have many obstacles in living a normal life due to their status (see the Additional finding section). Similarly, the other subgroups mentioned above face challenges that need to be acknowledged and solutions need to be proposed in a document as NRSF, which specifically targets Roma. It is they who are confronted the most with discrimination, injustice, and hardship, and it is they who would be most in need of inclusive public policies.

Roma-led NGOs should develop and include in their portfolio projects and activities for these specific target groups, together with other Roma led NGOs or with mainstream NGOs that work on the similar topics. The authorities should support initiatives of/about Roma women, Roma youth, Roma LGBT+, etc.

4.2 Combining mainstream and targeted approaches

Since 2011, one of the principles of public policy in the Netherlands has been 'no specific policy aimed at a specific group' approach. The previous Dutch NRSF followed this principle and the current one is a combination of mainstream measures and "when necessary,

³⁰ FRA, Roma, Sinti en Reizigers in Nederland 2020, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-and-travellers-survey-country-sheet-netherlands_nl.pdf

specific measures” (NRSF p. 2). One question that remains is who decides which approach is adopted and implemented.

4.2. Usage of instruments introduced by the Council Recommendation

The organisation of the NRSF document follows the structure of the Council Recommendation, according to the national situation and set up.

5. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

The topic of stateless Roma or Roma with “unknown nationality” is not mentioned in the current Dutch NRSF.

In the Netherlands, according to the Personal Records Database (BRP), almost 6,000 people are currently registered as stateless.³¹ This is only a part of the 30,000 people whose nationality is unknown to the BRP, meaning that they can neither prove their nationality nor prove that they do not have one. Among the registered stateless there are Moluccans, Palestinians, persons from Syria, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, but also Roma.

The exact number of Roma who are stateless or have “unknown nationality” is not known, but it is estimated that there are several hundred stateless Roma living in the Netherlands. They have been living in the Netherlands since the General Pardon of 1977 (involving a group of stateless Eastern European Roma who in 1977 received residence permits for the Netherlands), including their (grand)children and the groups who came to the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s, including women and men of all ages. Due to their status, their access to health care, education, voting, employment, housing, etc., is denied to them, especially after the age of eighteen.

The Ministry of Justice and Security has commissioned a study from the Verwey-Jonker Instituut who will research the nationality and residence status of these groups of Roma in the Netherlands; the reasons for their (continued) status as ‘stateless’ or ‘nationality unknown’ and the opportunities current laws and regulations offer to abolish these statuses. The study is expected to be finalised in the second part of 2022.

The Netherlands lacks clear procedures to legally determine statelessness, which leads to the denial of forms of protection that are available under the conventions to those with stateless status.

In 2016, a legislative proposal for a procedure to determine statelessness was issued and later adopted by the Dutch Parliament,³² but it does not include the necessary legal protections for stateless people, i.e., the right to reside. Currently, statelessness can only be identified through other administrative procedures and only legally residing stateless people are granted travel documents and have access to facilitated naturalisation.

In May 2022, Parliament approved an amendment to the Dutch Nationality Act which allows stateless children without legal residence in the Netherlands to opt for Dutch nationality after five years’ of ‘stable and habitual’ residence.

One of the provisions of the statelessness law says that the person must prove with documents that they are stateless, which makes it a very difficult, bureaucratic, and costly process, and many Roma are unable to accomplish this procedure.

Those Roma who have been trying to find a way out of statelessness said that there is no clear information and guidance. Every municipality has its own way of addressing the issue, some offering expensive legal support, some offering no support at all. The reasons why these people are stateless vary considerably so the approach to modifying this status varies, which makes tackling this challenge complicated. This leads to peculiar situations such as when one family member is stateless while the rest of their family have a determined nationality.

The need expressed by the Roma in the interviews was for assistance and clear guidance concerning the process of exiting statelessness.

³¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/nederlandse-nationaliteit/staatloosheid>

³² <https://www.internetconsultatie.nl/staatloosheid/details>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current NRSF continues in the same line as the previous approach, under the motto “no specific policy measure for a specific group/ minority”. It is, as was the previous strategic document, a general overview of mainstream policies, combined with very few specific policy measures. The NRSF includes no action plan, no specific objectives and indicators, vague responsibility, no clear monitoring nor evaluation plan, etc.

The current NRSF reflects an effort to group the related policy measures according to EU horizontal and vertical objectives. Also, it reflects the interest of the coordination body, the NRCP, in initiating dialogue and consultation, while several efforts/instruments for combatting antigypsyism are mentioned for the first time.

Recommendations to national authorities

1. Include, in a meaningful way, Roma in the entire policy development cycle related to policy measures of direct or indirect interest.
2. Fight negative prejudices and stereotypes against Roma at the level of mainstream society.
3. Conduct an evaluation of the former NRSF policy.
4. Establish formal consultation processes and procedures (with specified periodicity) with Roma representatives, including explicit reporting about specified commitments.
5. Provide support for the capacity building of Roma and Roma local action groups.
6. Provide juridical support for Roma with the status of statelessness and unknown nationality.
7. Implement the action plans in the ‘European Child Guarantee’ framework for early childhood education with a focus on Roma children.
8. Support initiatives of/about Roma women, Roma youth, Roma LGBT+, etc.
9. Support for preserving language and culture.
10. The NRCP should include in the conditions for the tenders for the ‘Social Inclusion Monitor’ report that the Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners are not just target groups and interviewees, but the research should be made participatory and involve the community members in the data collection and analysis process, either based on their capacity or by providing training to them.

Recommendations to European institutions

11. Support Dutch Roma civil society by putting pressure on institutions to fight efficiently against antigypsyism.
12. Create opportunities for Roma civil society in Europe to build their capacity and support Roma communities more efficiently.

Recommendations to civil society

13. Create a Roma-led support network by cooperating and communicating better.
14. Look actively for more opportunities for capacity building at the national and international level. There is a need for the Dutch Roma, Sinti, and Woonwagenbewoners NGOs to find ways to build capacity through taking

advantage of national and international opportunities, by partnering in national and international projects, co-organising events, and attending national and international events on topics of mutual interest.

15. Actively monitor the results of the NRSF.
16. Promote cooperation between various minority groups for combatting racism and hate in any form.
17. Partner with Roma civil society representatives in projects to help their capacity building.
18. Denounce discrimination and antigypsyism via official channels.
19. Roma NGOs should promote activities and projects aiming at topics addressing challenges of Roma women, , senior Roma, Roma with disabilities, EU-mobile citizens, non-EU nationals, stateless and undocumented Roma, and Roma LGBT+.

REFERENCES

List of interviews

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Contact</i>	<i>Number</i>
Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Directorate for Society, and Integration, NCRP	<i>in person, email, online</i>	3
Advisor Criminal Exploitation & Family Structures and Crime, The CCV The Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety	<i>email</i>	1
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, National delegate on Holocaust remembrance, education and research, Department of Social Support, Victims and Remembrance WWII	<i>in person, phone, email</i>	2
Jonker Institute	<i>online</i>	1
National Holocaust Museum	<i>in person, email</i>	1
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science Directorate of Primary Education in person	<i>in person, email</i>	1
Office National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	<i>online, email</i>	2
ORWS, Support Education to children of Travellers, Roma, and Sinti	<i>phone</i>	1
Movisie	<i>in person, online</i>	3
Roma community members, 5 women, 8 men, age 18-67	<i>in person, online, phone</i>	13
Sinti community members, 5 women, 2 men, age 20-68	<i>in person, online, phone</i>	7
Woonwagenbewoners community members	<i>in person, phone</i>	4
Yenish community members	<i>phone</i>	2
Non-Roma NGOs	<i>in person, phone</i>	4

Key policy documents and reports

EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en

FRA, Roma, Sinti, and Travellers in the Netherlands, 2019, available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-and-travellers-survey-country-sheet-netherlands_nl.pdf

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Roma Civil Monitor, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in the Netherlands*, 2020, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-3-netherlands-2019-eprint-fin.pdf>

Smits van Waesberghe E., Asmoredjo J., Out M., *Een verkennend onderzoek naar centrale belangenbehartiging voor Roma en Sinti, Een inventarisatie naar meningen binnen de twee gemeenschappen* [An exploratory study of centralised advocacy for Roma and Sinti, An inventory of opinions within the two communities], 2020, available at: https://www.verwey-jonker.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/318020_Verkennend-onderzoek-naar-centrale-Roma-Sinti_WEB.pdf

ANNEX: LIST OF PROBLEMS AND CONDITIONS

Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Antigypsyism not recognised as a specific problem in national policy frameworks	Significant problems	Understood with limitation	Adequate but room for improvement	Absent
Prejudice against Roma	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Hate crimes against Roma	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Hate speech towards and against Roma (online and offline)	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Weak effectiveness of protection from discrimination	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
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	Significant problems	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Misconduct and discriminatory behaviour by police (under-policing/under-policing)	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Barriers to <i>de facto</i> exercise of EU right to free movement	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Education

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Lack of available and accessible pre-school education and ECEC services for Roma	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lower quality of pre-school education and ECEC services for Roma	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
High drop-out rate before completion of primary education	Minor problem	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently,	Present but insufficient,	Absent
Early leaving from secondary education	Significant problems	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently,	Present but insufficient,	Absent
Secondary education/vocational training disconnected from labour market needs	Significant problems	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently,	Present but insufficient,	Absent
Misplacement of Roma pupils into special education	Significant problems	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Education segregation of Roma pupils	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Increased selectivity of the educational system resulting in concentration of Roma or other disadvantaged pupils in educational facilities of lower quality	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to second-chance education, adult education, and lifelong learning	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to and support for online and distance learning if education and training	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

institutions close, as occurred during the coronavirus pandemic				
Low level of digital skills and competences and limited opportunities for their development among pupils	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Low level of digital skills and competences and limited opportunities for their development among adults	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Employment

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Poor access to or low effectiveness of public employment services	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET)	Significant problem	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	Present but insufficient	Absent
Poor access to (re-) training, lifelong learning, and skills development	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Discrimination on the labour market by employers	Significant problem	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	Present but insufficient	Absent
Risk for Roma women and girls from disadvantaged areas of being subjected to trafficking and forced prostitution	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Primary labour market opportunities substituted by public work	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Barriers and disincentives to employment (such as indebtedness, low income from work compared to social income)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of activation measures, employment support	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Healthcare

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Exclusion from public health insurance coverage (including those who are stateless, third country nationals, or EU-mobile)	Minor problem	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	Absent	Absent
Poor supply/availability of healthcare services (including lack of means to cover out-of-pocket health costs)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to emergency care	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to primary care	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to prenatal and postnatal care	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to health-related information	Significant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Poor access to preventive care (vaccination, check-ups, screenings, awareness-raising about healthy lifestyles)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Poor access to sexual/reproductive healthcare and family planning services	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Specific barriers to better healthcare of vulnerable groups such as elderly Roma people, Roma with disabilities, LGBTI and others	Irrelevant	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

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Poor physical security of housing (ruined or slum housing)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of access to drinking water	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of access to sanitation	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of access to electricity	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited or absent public waste collection	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Restricted heating capability (families unable to heat all rooms/all times when necessary) or solid waste used for heating	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of security of tenure (legal titles are not clear and secure)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lacking or limited access to social housing	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Overcrowding (available space/room for families)	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Housing-related indebtedness at levels which may cause eviction	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Housing in segregated settlements/ neighbourhoods	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Housing in informal or illegal settlements/ neighbourhoods	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Exposure to hazardous factors (living in areas prone to natural disasters or environmentally hazardous areas)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited or lacking access to public transport	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited or lacking internet access (e.g., public internet access points in deprived areas, areas not covered by broadband internet)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited or lacking access to green spaces	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Roma excluded from environmental democracy	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
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Social protection

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

Social services

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Limited quality, capacity and comprehensiveness of help provided by social services	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited access to social services: low awareness of them, low accessibility, (e.g., due to travel costs) or limited availability	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Services providers do not actively reach out to those in need	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Limited ability of social services to effectively work together with other agencies (e.g., public employment service) to help clients	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Discrimination by social service providers	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Lack of adequacy of programmes for addressing indebtedness (providing counselling and financial support)	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

Child protection

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Child protection not considered in the NRSF	Critical problem	Understood with limitations	Present but insufficient	Absent
Specific vulnerability of Romani children as victims of violence not considered	Significant problem	Understood with limitations	Present but insufficient	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	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Illegal practices of child labour	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Large-scale and discriminatory placement of Romani children in early childhood care institutions	Irrelevant		Absent	Absent
Persistence of large-scale institutions rather than family-type arrangements	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Early marriages	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Barriers to children's registration; statelessness	Significant problems	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Biased treatment of Roma youth by security and law enforcement	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent
Inadequate child/adolescent participation	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Absent	Absent

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

Problems and conditions	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:
Poor or lacking awareness of the general population of the contribution of Roma art and culture to national and European heritage	Significant problem	Mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	Present but insufficient	Absent

Exclusion of Roma communities from national cultural narratives	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent
Romani history and culture not included in school curricula and textbooks for both Roma and non-Roma students	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent
Lack of inclusion of Romani language in schools, and development of necessary educational materials and resources for Romani language preservation and teaching	Significant problem	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent
Lack of memorialisation of Roma history through establishing monuments, commemorative activities, and institutionalizing dates relevant to Roma history	Minor problem	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Absent

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