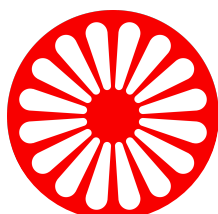




## Roma Inclusion through Education



### Strategy paper on Expressing the EU Ambition: Education of Roma 2018-2028

presented during **"Romani Ambassadors"** international meeting,  
Brasov, Romania at July 2018



**Project:** Integration through Exchange of experience in Training of Youth Romani  
**(Romani Ambassadors)**

**Donor:** Erasmus + Programme and the Centre for International Cooperation in Education (DZS) from Czech Republic with reference number 2017-3-CZ01-KA205-046733

**Aim:** examine, analyze and exchange experience among experts, mediators and teachers in the field of Romani education and employment

**Outputs:** Strategy paper on inclusion of Roma through education and a training guide for Roma mediators in employment

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Thirst for Life Association (Bulgaria) | Qendra UET (Albania)

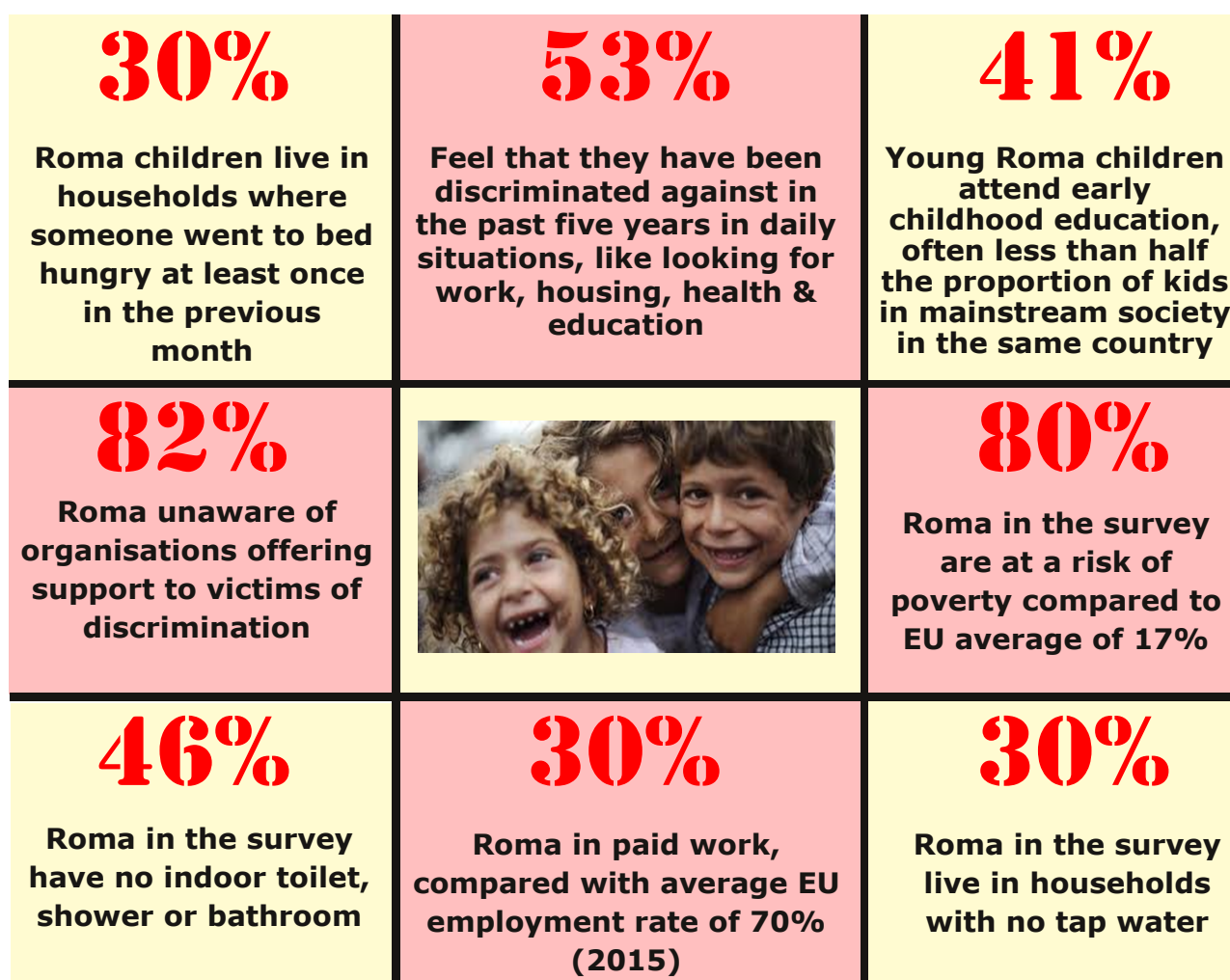
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## INTRODUCTION

The results of the 2011 survey in 11 EU Member States and the EU MIDIS 2016 FRA Survey covering 9 EU Member States confirm that Roma children are largely behind in educational achievement and show a **considerable gap between Roma and non-Roma children attending schools**. Despite efforts to expand and improve education for Roma children over the years, **as many as 50% of Roma children in Europe fail to complete primary education and only a quarter complete secondary education**. Participation in education drops considerably after compulsory education where only 15% of young Roma adults have completed upper-secondary general or vocational education. The levels of illiteracy amongst young Roma remain comparably high for Europe where almost 50% of Roma are illiterate or moderately literate. Without completing compulsory education, many young Roma are unable to meet the basic requirements for vocational education programmes. These low participation rates in education for Roma and Traveler children and youth are particularly alarming since educational factors have a direct and an acute impact on life chances. **What emerges from the data is that Roma youth are by far the most disadvantaged youth within the EU.**

### The 2nd EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey, 2016 (EU-MIDIS II): Roma



The survey is identifying the educational prospects for Roma Youth and children as presented below:

- **Roma children in the countries surveyed lag behind their non-Roma peers on all education indicators.**
- **A very small proportion continued school after compulsory education.** The data suggest that half of the Roma aged 15-18 years old do not attend school (48%). 69% of Roma children in Greece and 77% in Romania of compulsory-school age attend school; in all other survey countries it is 90% and over. Only 5% of Roma aged 18-24 across the nine Member States continued school.
- There is a **high proportion of Roma without any formal education** across all age groups surveyed, particularly those who are over 25 and those who are in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Croatia.
- **School segregation remains a problem in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia** despite being legally prohibited and the European Court of Human Rights' recent case law. In Slovakia (62%), Hungary (61%) and Bulgaria (60%), most Roma children (aged 6-15) attend schools in which all or most of their schoolmates are Roma. However, the ethnic composition of schools may reflect the ethnic composition of the people living around the school.



**53%** of young Roma children attend early childhood education, often less than half the proportion of children their age from the general population in the same country.

**30%** of Roma children in the countries surveyed live in households where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the preceding month.

The survey findings indicate that despite the efforts of Member States, they are still falling short of most of their integration targets, a key element of the EU's 2011 National Roma Integration Strategies Framework.

The results underline the need for:

- Early childhood learning support and integrated schooling
- Better employment opportunities and greater social protection to eradicate poverty
- Targeted education and training to specifically help Roma youths and Roma women in their transition from primary to secondary education, and thereafter find work.

Based on the **PAL project research**<sup>1)</sup>, although cultural and socio-economic contents vary widely, the schooling of Roma/Gypsy children raises a whole series of problems in all the countries of Europe: **limited access to schooling, infrequent attendance, dropping-out, marginalization and discrimination in schools, poor marks or failure.**

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<sup>1)</sup> <http://projectpal.eu/research/analysis-of-data-collected-and-research-finalization/>

In several countries, Roma children attend the **poorest schools or face discrimination in schools**, where they are the minority. Some children are unfairly sent to "**special education**" centers for students with learning difficulties. In other cases, the children may be denied access to education because they lack documentation. Or they are simply unable to attend classes because they live far from the nearest school. **Beside of that the education is the main area in which the situation of Roma improved.** More Roma children participate in early childhood education and care (53% in 2016, up from 47% in 2011) – with most significant improvements in Spain, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania – and fewer leave school early (68% in 2016, declining from 87% in 2011). *These figures are still too high and segregation in education remains an issue in some countries, with more than 60% of Roma children separated from other children in Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria.*

In its 2016 report, following its thematic visit to Poland on vocational education and training for Roma, the **Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee of Expert on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM)** noted that relatively little focus is put on vocational education and training. Vocational education refers to post-compulsory education that prepares young people to work in the trade, craft and technical professions through specialized technical and vocational schools, colleges and institutes, whereas vocational training refers to skills and competency training for specific jobs.

Vocational education and training are still insufficiently recognized as priorities and solutions which offer possibilities to mobilize and empower Roma and Traveller youth and ensure their economic self-sufficiency. Vocational education can also be seen as a kind of "**transmission belt**" into the labour market for those who did not continue post-compulsory education and have taken on family responsibilities at an early age. Greater emphasis should be placed on vocational education and training as a safety net for at-risk Roma and Traveller youth while examining ways of opening the labour market for Roma and Traveller employment at the same time.

Half way through the **Decade of Roma Inclusion**, it is clear that there is still much to be done. Progress made this far has not led to substantial, visible changes in everyday lives of the majority of Roma. Increased migrations of Roma from 'New' to 'Old' Member States has resulted in governmental reactions which are controversial and highly politicized. *Over the last five years, there has also been a rise in far right, extremist groups and parties, with clear anti-Roma agendas, and various forms of anti-Roma violence are reported regularly across Central and Eastern Europe.* Given the current state of affairs, the **Roma Education Fund believes that closing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma is both a matter of urgency and top priority for improving the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.** Higher and long-term investments in the education of Roma are required, alongside more effective actions to address related facets of exclusion - employment, health and housing, as they have a mutually reinforcing effect. Discrimination and intolerance toward Roma is cross-cutting all facets, including education, and



measures must take into account the need to address this deep-rooted tendency.

The **European Commission's Annual Growth Survey**<sup>2)</sup> showed that much needs to be done by Member States and the EU to implement the Europe 2020 strategy and to achieve its main targets, supported by flagship initiatives<sup>3)</sup>. For a number of Member States, addressing the situation of Roma in terms of employment, poverty and education will contribute to progress towards Europe 2020 employment, social inclusion and education targets.

EU Roma integration goals should cover, in proportion to the size of the Roma population, **four crucial areas**: access to education, employment, healthcare and housing. These minimum standards should be based on common, comparable and reliable indicators. The achievement of these goals is important to help Member States reaching the overall targets of the Europe 2020 strategy. In the area of access to education, ***Member States should ensure that all Roma children have access to quality education and are not subject to discrimination or segregation, regardless of whether they are sedentary or not. Member States should, as a minimum, ensure primary school completion. They should also widen access to quality early childhood education and care and reduce the number of early school leavers from secondary education pursuant to the Europe 2020 strategy. Roma youngsters should be strongly encouraged to participate also in secondary and tertiary education.***

Educational achievement within the Roma population is much lower than the rest of the population, although the situation differs among Member States. While primary school attendance is compulsory in all Member States, Member States have a duty to ensure that primary education is available to all children at the compulsory ages. According to the best available evidence from the Labour Force Survey 2009, an average of 97.5% of children completes primary education across the EU.

The Commission adopted a Communication on **Early Childhood Education and Care**, which highlighted that participation rates of Roma children are significantly lower, although their needs for support are greater. Increased access to high quality non-segregated early childhood education can play a key role in overcoming the educational disadvantage faced by Roma children, as highlighted by pilot actions on Roma integration currently underway in some member States with contributions from the EU Budget.








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<sup>2)</sup> COM(2011) 11, Annual Growth Survey: advancing the EU's comprehensive response to the crisis.

<sup>3)</sup> Out of seven flagship initiatives, the most relevant in this context are the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs and the Innovation Union.

Based on the surveys examined and the information collected from the project experts, **7 common Pillars** for supporting the Roma youth education had been unanimously decided and set by project partners. The targets are presented in brief below:

### 7 COMMON PILLARS FOR ROMA YOUTH EDUCATION

1	Engagement and motivation of families	
2	Optional School and Kindergarten Curricula	
3	Creative Education of Romani children	
4	High education support for Romani children and youth	
5	Professional development of teaching of Romani children and youth	
6	Vocational Education Restart	
7	Romani Ambassadors	

## OBSTACLES TO SCHOOL EDUCATION

Education is the main area in which the situation of Roma improved. Among the success around education are the legislative reform, inclusive structures, increasing participation of Roma, improved multicultural competences, support for Roma students and teachers and reaching out to parents. Among the remaining challenges are: still **high early-school leaving rates, difficulty of promoting effective transition for Roma to upper secondary and tertiary education, language deficiencies and discrimination.**

Findings from research after implementation of **PAL project** show the Roma children still **face language barriers and ethnical intolerance from teachers and peers.**

According to responders, we can say that the most important reason why Roma children do not have credible success in the school system is **POVERTY.**

The problem of **high dropout** rates is explained by substantial poverty among the Romani families, expensive education, practice of early marriage and demotivation of the existing curriculum.

The PAL project and network based on their work with Romani and the long experience are proposing the following initiatives to be adopted at the national and European level:

**EDUCATIONAL REFORM:** The state should support Roma parents and children with the necessary school equipments (pens, pencils, and notebooks), learning support (after school teachers, Roma assistant and Roma mediators), free cultural and creative learning and provision of scholarships for high-schools and universities. The **CURRICULUM** available in the schools in Europe **is not corresponding to the multi-cultural diversity** and needs to be adapted in terms of *remedial teaching, motivation, specific programs and school support, equal treatment, changing school program (involvement of cultural ombudsman and family dialogue and support, parental work), stimulating talents, (mainly artistic as music, dance and crafts) and changing strategy and proposing an innovative skills evaluation and interests for Roma children, based on resolving tasks in games, composing and expressing themselves by music or images.* Language barriers could be overcome with pre-kindergarten and pre-primary school period for Roma and migrants' children to learn language and adapt to the new environment. **Roma assistants and mediators are shown as a good solution.**

Supporting the integration education would be crucial and the **establishment of national legislation framework and network of educational institutions that empower Roma is the expected positive measure.** Additional research have been presented as part of the report "*Equalities and exclusion: The EU anti-discrimination framework and trends in jurisprudence, regarding the human rights of Roma in the areas of education and employment*". (See [here](#))



**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:** The 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school-leaving recommends the inclusion of target measures for the most vulnerable groups, including Roma. As follow up of the Paris Declaration, the Commission stepped up its support for **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**. One of the priorities is **to foster the education of disadvantaged children and young people, including Roma, by ensuring that education and training systems address their needs.** Supporting the development of inclusive education will enhance the forms of Self-Reflection and Tools for improving inclusive early childhood education. More detailed information about the issues is presented in the discussion paper "Roma Are Equal: Alternatives to Poverty, Racism and Exclusion in Education and Employment"(See [here](#)). Awareness raising campaign, entitled "It is not too late" (See [here](#)) was supported as part of PAL project and engaged more than 10.000 people in EU.

Roma are in average a very young population. So, it is important to deal with this segment of population which will be soon fully responsible citizens of states and EU. Youth is a period of life when a most people are rebellious against existing situation with causes that are justifiable or even not. But if they are in situation that they can't lose anything because they don't possess anything, they can't lose status in society because they are social excluded, they can't threaten their future because they do not have any expectation, with low self-esteem, labeled identity; they could dare anything. Prevention of radicalism among youth starts with inclusion, integration and dignified level of existence. If we don't want to have Roma settlements like "no go zone", "nest of criminal" - we should give youngsters an opportunity for better life, possibilities for creative spare time, fun, sports etc. Similarly it is important to prevent early drop out of school as a second chance opportunity for education. With better education they will have better opportunities for employment. The worst scenario is that their youth is spent on streets.



## PILLARS FOR SUPPORTING THE ROMA YOUTH EDUCATION

The project "Integration through Exchange of experience in Training of Youth Romani" (**Romani Ambassadors**) is a one-year youth exchange of experience initiative funded by the Erasmus + Programme and the Centre for International Cooperation in Education (DZS) from Czech Republic with reference number **2017-3-CZ01-KA205-046733**. The aim of the action is to examine, analyze and exchange experience among experts, mediators and teachers in the field of Romani education and employment opportunities.

The project is aiming to prepare a strategy paper about the inclusion of Roma through education and a training guide for Roma mediators in employment.

The project experts had discussed and proposed **7 main pillars** for supporting the Roma youth educational process and created in line with the implemented research and the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion.

In order to **establish a strategy paper on expressing the EU ambition: education of Roma 2018-2028**, is necessary to implement **POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION**. The position of Romani minority is still so far from the average level of the others EU citizens that needs special treatment, prevention, protection and measures. Our general recommendation is that EU states in national prevention policy implement positive discrimination in the field of education.

By our opinion, the most effective way to achieve the best results is synergy of Roma projects and important documents as EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. There are many problems Roma facing and it is necessary to focused on concrete goals and strengthen effects.



Our **CONCLUSION** is that positive discrimination for Romani is the necessary part of strategy. In the same time among the rest of population is equal necessary awareness rising about **Roma culture and their situation to accept measures of positive discrimination to avoid a negative reaction, protest, hate speech and other discrimination of public**. Roma should consider what is better for their community: **positive discrimination leads them, on the one hand, to the risk of collecting data according to the national key, and on the other hand, a better starting position.**



### **Pillar 1**

#### **Engagement and motivation of families**

As the family is the core key of the education process, the Romani Ambassador project's experts propose, as a pillar for the educational integration, the active involvement of the Romani families and parents in the learning process. As the family values of the Romany community are quite high, the role model of the parents' and the family support are important tools for increasing the percentage of children education and decreasing drop-out rate.

Encouraging creative thinking in educational process are extremely crucial, to increase the interest at schooling and learning process of the children and teenagers. The process is often used for children with attention problems and migrants. The presentation of the knowledge in terms of gaming and competition is always a powerful and effective tool

#### **In other words...**

Roma parents are not always aware of the importance of sending their children to school and the investment required. They are therefore, as a rule, not sufficiently involved in their children's school education. For financial reasons, many parents oblige their children to start working at an early age or to stay at home to look after their siblings. Roma families' greatest concern is finding ways of satisfying their daily needs. Early marriages and births make it difficult for Roma children to go to school. Indeed, many young people form couples before the age of 16 and the birth of the first children prevents young girls from attending school.

#### **How this can be achieved in practice?**

- Workshops for Families, where the aim of the school education and its benefits will be explained;
- Exchange of experience with other partners;
- Open Day for families to visit school and facilities
- Awareness Raising Campaign for motivation



### **Pillar 2**

#### **Optional School and Kindergarten Curricula**

Pre-school education assistant teachers, acting as "cultural intermediaries", play a crucial role in helping Roma children to learn the official language of the country and fostering their integration into schools.

The language problem exists in particular in Eastern European countries where the Romani language, despite its historical avatars and the fact that it is only a spoken language, has been well preserved. The surveys conducted by the UNDP show that 54% of the Roma interviewed talk Romani at home

#### **In other words...**

Another major obstacle is the problem of not knowing the official language of the country where the Roma live. Most Roma children start school with a very poor knowledge of the official language of the country, which makes it impossible for them to take their education very far. They are therefore at a disadvantage compared to the other pupils, who have a good command of the language and therefore do not have the same problems in continuing their education.

The need to develop teaching material in the Romani language is becoming increasingly noticeable. The existence of school textbooks in the Romani language can help encourage Roma children to go to school and study and also encourages their parents to send them to school

#### **How this can be achieved in practice?**

- Adapting the training school and kindergarten curricula for education of Roma Children;
- School training books in Romani language;
- Training of schools assistants, mediators and Romani coordinators and kindergarten teachers to use new teaching methods and the optional curricula



### **Pillar 3**

#### **Creative Education of Romani children**

The creative thinking and educational process are extremely settled the last 5 years, aiming to increase the interest at schooling and reading process of the children and teenagers. The process is often used for children with attention problems and migrants. The presentation of the knowledge in terms of gaming and competition process is always powerful and effective tool

#### **In other words...**

The Roma's access to education depends directly on the standard of education offered to them. It is often noted that the standard of school education given to Roma children is lower than that given to the remainder of the population. Teachers' lack of motivation to work with children from another culture, prejudices towards Roma families and the lack of training are factors which contribute to the low standard of education received by the Roma. Through this approach, the majority population is provided with tools and competences to help them understand the Roma culture, and the Roma are provided with tools and competences to understand mainstream culture. As a result, promoting mutual understanding helps tackle prejudice on both sides. However, this approach does not imply that concessions should be made regarding fundamental human rights.

#### **How this can be achieved in practice?**

- Creative learning curricula and materials for teachers;
- Introduction courses and national competitions;
- Additional national funds for Creative education.



### **Pillar 4**

#### **High education support for Romani children and youth**

The current pillar aim is to contribute to the emergence of a critical mass of Roma, higher education graduates, confident and proud of their Roma identity, academically and socially adept, equipped with skills and competences that enable them to become professionals in their fields, as well as remain solidly connected to the Roma community and support its further advancement and inclusion into the wider society.

#### **In other words...**

Surveys suggest that in some Member States, only a limited number of Roma children complete primary school. Roma children tend to be over-represented in special education and segregated schools. There is a need to strengthen links with communities through cultural/school mediators, churches, religious associations or communities and through active participation of the parents of Roma, to improve the intercultural competences of teachers, to reduce segregation and to ensure compliance with the duty to primary school attendance.

#### **How this can be achieved in practice?**

- Grants and Scholarships for Roma students and pupils and updating about their results and use;
- Classes and topics connected with Roma culture;
- Free materials shared by the governance and local stakeholders.





## Pillar 5

### Professional development of teaching of Romani children and youth

The role of the school mediators, assistants and teachers in the educational process is very important for the effective implementation of the integration process. The Romani children should be supported of teachers, which have been trained to work with the specific group or assistants/mediators to be actively involved in the daily education process.

### In other words...

School structures and the standard of educational services are major aspects of the principle of the right of access to schools. Most Roma children attend schools or classes where they are in the majority. In many countries, the schools attended mainly by Roma are situated in the districts where the Roma live and the standard of education provided is lower than in other schools. In Bulgaria for example, the fact that most Roma live together in ghettos has had a decisive influence in terms of spatial segregation

Roma children often attend "remedial schools for children with mental disabilities". In most cases, the Roma children who attend these schools do not actually have any mental health problems.

### How this can be achieved in practice?

- Creation of training curricula for teachers, working with Roma children;
- University Degree for teachers working as primary teachers in basic education with Romani language and working at segregated schools;
- Exchange of experience



## Pillar 6

### Vocational Education Restart

Vocational education and training are still insufficiently recognized as priorities and solutions which offer possibilities to mobilize and empower Roma and Traveller youth and ensure their economic self-sufficiency.

Vocational education can also be seen as a kind of "transmission belt" into the labour market for those who did not continue post-compulsory education and have taken on family responsibilities at an early age

### In other words...

Vocational education refers to post-compulsory education that prepares young people to work in the trade, craft and technical professions through specialized technical and vocational schools, colleges and institutes, whereas vocational training refers to skills and competency training for specific jobs.

### How this can be achieved in practice?

- Information meetings and hubs for informing youth Roma and children about vocational learning opportunities and second chance education;
- Supporting Youth Initiatives for VET and self-perception meetings;
- Enhancement the participation of children and youth in vocational training courses and VET classes in different topics for Roma children and youth.
- Direct Connection among trainings and employers



## Pillar 7 Romani Ambassadors

The importance of the Romani mentors, so called “ambassadors” in terms of role models is assessed as possible tool for effective implementation of the integration process of Roma people. Presenting the success and the good results of the education in the personal development is essential.

### In other words...

Self-motivation is very important for the personal development of every child, but mostly for children from marginalized groups. The support of mentors in the roles of individual inspiratory and idols is one of the easiest ways to change the youth perception of the benefits of the educational process.

### How this can be achieved in practice?

- Creation of Romani Role Models network, where prosperous Roma people, are sharing their success;
- Exchange of good practices and stories for awareness raising of the community;
- Mentoring Process and self-motivation

## ENSURE THE INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL MEANS FOR NATIONAL POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Building on the experience of the Member States including these participating in the Roma Decade, the Commission calls on Member States to align their **national Roma integration strategies** to the targeted approach set out above and extend their planning period up to 2020. *Member States that do not have national Roma strategies in place yet are called upon to set similar goals, in proportion to the size of the Roma population living in their territories and taking into account their different starting points as well as the specificities of such populations.*

Member States' national strategies should pursue a targeted approach which will, in line with the **Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion**, actively contribute to the social integration of Roma in mainstream society and to eliminating segregation where it exists.

### TEN COMMON BASIC PRINCIPLES (CBP) ON ROMA INCLUSION

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness for the gender dimension

6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of European Union instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma

To ensure that effective policies are in place in the Member States, the Commission proposes that National Roma integration strategies are designed or, where they already exist, are **adapted to meet EU Roma integration goals**, with targeted actions and sufficient funding (national, EU and other) to deliver them. It proposes solutions to address the current barriers to a more effective use of EU funds and lays



the foundations of a robust monitoring mechanism to ensure concrete results for Roma.

National level is important because of legislative system, where rights for minority are insured and in case if not respected the persecution followed. EU level is important because is wider framework than national, with common denominator for all member states, is navigational compass for inclusion national strategies and legislation. Finally, EU funds co-financed projects to improve Roma position, social inclusion and integration. On EU level exist a **Roma national platform** and other presenters' bodies of Roma which could influence on EU, national, regional and municipal level. Besides EU and national is important community level, where Roma live. Roma have a proverb that village has Roma like village is. When neighbors are prepared for dialog, they are tolerant to minority, and then can live with Roma like good neighbors.

*Based on the decision made during the 3rd Roma summit held in Brussels on 4 April 2014 around 500 representatives of EU institutions, national governments and parliaments, international organizations, mayors, civil society organizations (including Roma organizations) and local and regional authorities were invited to express their views on how to deliver further on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma integration strategies. **Going local on Roma inclusion both in the EU as well as in enlargement countries** was the center topic of the summit.*

Further coordination of member and development of instruments enforce the national

- Making policies inclusive for all Roma at local level;
- Making EU funding reach the local and regional authorities to support Roma integration;
- Making Roma integration a local reality in enlargement countries;

and European policies in the field were suggested together with the following topics:

The Commission is also **CRITICAL** towards the actual implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. The coordinated efforts between the European, national and local levels actors through creating National Roma platforms will bring all Roma experts together and support their cooperation. EC had established 28 national contact points for the implementation of national Roma integration strategies consisted mostly of public institutions (ministries and government offices). The **SOLUTION** for effective coordination of the efforts of all the National Roma integration Strategies and Initiatives is to be created a **European non-governmental Network for Roma, Gypsy and Travelers Support** that *will exchange experience and cooperate for the vast integration goals in the fields of education, employment, health care and housing of Roma people.*

Currently the partners from the project "Fighting discrimination and Anti-Gypsyism in education and employment in EU" (PAL) had established a European Network (**PAL Network**) that will provide activities for strengthening awareness raising and training priorities and policies based on the best available evidence, and guides the cost-effective use of tools, interventions and systems, in order to ensure and monitor progress towards national and European goals. The Network is counting currently **74 members from 23 European Countries and will be officially established during 2018 in Belgium.**

## CREATE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA AND THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY AGENDA

**In the case of Roma inclusion in education, it is essential to ensure that arguments in favor of human rights and economic efficiency are closely linked.**

Using only the human rights argument can actually be very counterproductive, especially if it generates a perception that Roma need to have special rights or a special interpretation of their rights, at the same time as often being perceived as not accepting all their obligations as citizens. On the other hand, economic arguments alone are not sufficiently strong to fight entrenched discrimination. Economic reasoning can be most convincing for technocrats, but is often not so for politicians or the public at large.

As was mentioned earlier, a number of assessments show that the cost of ensuring that Roma have adequate access to basic services is largely offset by the high cost of lower life outcomes that results from systematic Roma exclusion. As far as the human rights agenda is concerned, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament, in particular, have adopted a number of texts describing the rights of minorities and equal opportunities. Some of these resolutions refer directly to education.



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REF stresses good governance in education systems, and **good governance requires that policies and programs conform to a country's legislation which in turn should conform to European standards.** One of the issues here is that, once a country joins the EU, one of the key incentives for policy makers and officials to take action on human rights loses its force, as the EU has relatively little influence on how existing member countries deal with their minorities, especially in education as education remains primarily the responsibility of individual member states in the EU framework.

## STRESS THE CENTRALITY OF ROMA PARTICIPATION

Participation of beneficiaries is always important, and the development literature has stressed the positive impact of participation: When well-designed and implemented participatory approaches increase commitment from the participants in a project, they increase sustainability through reducing the risk of conflict by creating a forum to discuss issues and problems. Greater participation also improves the efficiency of the actions implemented through the project by increasing trust and creating communication channels between the various stakeholders. The shortcomings of participation are also well known: it takes time, it can take more resources in the short term with benefits only felt in the medium and long term, and it requires adapted institutions, specifically trained staff, and well-designed methods. Badly designed participation mechanisms can actually produce a worse outcome than no participation at all.

**In the case of Roma education, participation is essential for a number of reasons. One reason is the need to empower Roma communities.** Until quite recently, Roma rarely represented a strong and well-organized political force at the local and national level, and therefore, with a few exceptions, their participation in legislative and elected bodies is weak. Thus they have a reduced ability to influence not only policies but also specific programs. Unless they become a force that counts in the democratic power game, Roma's achievements in influencing economic reforms will be very limited. Providing a voice and visibility to the minority's elite is therefore essential, both because this elite is still small and requires support to be heard and that successful participation can stimulate Roma interest in getting involved in public life. This is true at the regional, national, and local level. The benefits of participating in society's collective engagement are not obvious to people who have been discriminated against for so long. **Participation creates commitments and also motivation.** Efforts to open space for participation, if well managed, can create the trust and confidence that is required for successful programs.

**A second reason why participation is important is that Roma parents tend to be less involved than other parents in school assignments and interaction with school staff.** This is due to many factors, such as Roma's own lower level of education, their perception that they will not be heard, or the fact that the coping mechanisms required to deal with poverty do not give them the time and resources necessary to participate effectively. **The experience with Roma education projects shows that low parental involvement can change very rapidly, and that it is not as much of a problem as some would maintain.** If parents are listened to at the level of the school, and they get the minimum support and explanation required through outreach programs such as school mediators, their attitudes change rapidly. The programs also show that when parents' participation can be enlisted, it has a direct and rapid impact on the success of Roma children in school.

**A third reason why participation of Roma organizations and Roma staff in implementation is important is that stereotypes on both sides have often eroded trust between the Roma and non-Roma communities.** The Roma communities usually respond much better to Roma organizations and Roma staff. These organizations can be excellent intermediaries between non-Roma organizations and the Roma community. Roma staff and organizations are often also excellent role models, which can show relatively closed communities that integration does not necessarily mean losing one's identity and exposing oneself to discrimination.

*To reinforce these guiding principles, it is important to involve the local community in the design and implementation of interventions. Local community members know what is needed, why it is needed, what the barriers are, what can be done, what is affordable to users, and what can be maintained.*

*Participation increases community ownership and the ability of residents to maintain and operate an intervention, thus increasing the chances that it will be sustained over time.*

Such an active role for disadvantaged Roma communities also contributes to their social inclusion. At the same time, the participation of non-Roma communities is also critical to gain their support for the intervention, avoid stigmatization of Roma, and foster interaction and cooperation between Roma and non-Roma on the basis of mutual interests.

To this end, it is helpful to partner with civil society organizations that have established relationships of trust with disadvantaged Roma communities. Civil society actors can play an important role in reaching out and engaging these communities, since underlying mistrust towards authorities often prevents disadvantaged Roma from actively participating in official projects. Similarly, Roma mediators and community social workers can facilitate the identification, planning, and implementation of community-level interventions. They can help close the communication gap between local authorities and Roma, thereby helping to improve the format of interventions and increase their uptake by the intended users.

## **PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING WHAT WORKS**

Partnership is essential to move forward the agenda of reducing the education gap between Roma and non-Roma and to achieve the necessary reform in education systems. Fast development of decentralization means that central governments by themselves often have a limited ability to ensure that national policies are well implemented. Local partners are therefore needed, but partnerships require some prerequisites, which first and foremost require better understanding of **the impact of policies and documenting what works and what does not work is of utmost importance.**

Quite a lot has been written on Roma education in Central and Eastern Europe, but there is still very little knowledge about what works and what does not work– and about the impact of recent reforms. **It is clear that those countries like Hungary, which made a strong commitment to integration of minorities in their education system and translated this commitment into concrete policies and budgetary allocations, are more successful.** Although some serious issues remain in Hungary, the country's Roma population has much better education outcomes than Roma populations in Slovakia, Bulgaria, or Romania. This progress is important because it helps combat the negative stereotypes about Roma and education that still strongly influence the attitude of the public at large, governments, and even development agencies and donors. Among these stereotypes, the most common are that Roma parents are not interested in education, that Roma maintain old traditions, such as very early marriage, which are not compatible with the modern way of thinking, that Roma cannot integrate with other children and need special education or separate education, and that programs which target better education outcomes for Roma do not work well, are costly and unsustainable, and have no impact on the labor market. Hungary's experience exposes these stereotypes for what they are.

We already know well that some policies have long lasting positive impacts, and understanding why and how this is so can provide quite clear directions on what to do. The success of certain policies has been documented through the Council of Europe's work on education<sup>4)</sup>, OSI, the World Bank, UNDP, and a

<sup>4)</sup>In particular, the ongoing project: "Education for Roma /Gypsy children in Europe." [country?]

number of universities involved in this area. The benefits of good policies are also confirmed by the first feedback from REF-financed projects. These include knowledge that:

- **Desegregated education** is better than segregation when it comes to improving the performance of Roma children in school, and that some models are working.
- **Scholarships** are very important for secondary and tertiary education. We know that these scholarships have a strong impact on school participation by Roma, but they are more effective if mentoring is also included and advisory services are available.
- **Enrollment in one year of pre-education** is probably the most effective investment for helping children to succeed in primary school and even beyond, in secondary education.
- **Recognition of the values of culture and indigenous language** create an environment that favors integration.
- **Parents' involvement and community involvement** is central to increasing enrollment rates, and also to improving the performance of children.
- **Placing Roma in special schools or classes** for children with learning disabilities is a disaster and should be abolished without delay.
- In Central Europe, most people have positive attitudes toward the idea of **public funding for Roma education**<sup>5)</sup>.
- **Countries that have comprehensive policies with good incentive systems are succeeding better** than the ones who avoid the issue.
- More needs to be found out about: how best to organize the work of Roma mediators in education; how to ensure that teachers use what they learn from special training in multicultural education; and, how to set up an incentive system for school desegregation in decentralized environments.
- Most crucially **more needs to be understood and done to scale up** what we know to programs that have national and regional impact.

Even when some successes are clear, governments need to be convinced of the effectiveness of good policies, and the opposition of particular interest groups must be circumvented. **Demonstrating the validity and cost effectiveness of some policies and programs requires studies and analysis, as well as in-country monitoring systems.** Problems with obtaining relevant statistics will be an issue for any monitoring mechanism. For very good reasons, Roma often decline self-identify in surveys and censuses, and this usually results in a critical underestimation of the number of Roma. Also, because many Roma are involved in informal economic activities, they tend to hide, like everybody else involved in the informal sector, many of their sources of income and the activities in which they are involved. Furthermore, because of a strategy of avoidance of administration common to all very poor people, the poorer Roma communities of some countries tend not to register children at birth, and they may not register weddings and other family events. These behaviors create measurement difficulties and hamper policy formulation, but they can be and are being overcome. Information on Roma is improving throughout Europe.

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<sup>5)</sup>This comes from an OSI opinion poll, "Changing mainstream attitudes towards Roma inclusion." Unpublished discussion paper, 2006, Budapest.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Access to education

- Informing the population on the importance of education and professional qualification in order to prevent Roma children from following the family educational tradition where parents are illiterate or have a low educational level;
- Continuing support and mediation between the family and school;
- Addressing the vulnerability of the Roma women and especially those with many children through support to access education/care services (kindergarten, after school programmes);
- Addressing illiteracy among the Roma by facilitating access to education for the Roma in view of attaining at least secondary education and continue implementation of programmes to encourage the participation of the
- Roma population in the education system (initiate incentives for adults participation in School after school / Second chance type programmes);
- Continuing prevention of school dropout among Roma children

## CONCLUSIONS

Roma inclusion in education systems is possible and, in the last few years, some notable progress has been made. Indeed the changes have begun to be reflected in the few statistics available. New elite, committed to working for their communities as facilitators, teachers, school masters or in grassroots NGOs, are appearing. Sustaining this positive trend requires concerted efforts.

It is important that education systems are more open to multicultural approaches and that people accept that being citizens of the same country does not mean being exactly the same, having the same cultural references, or having the same economic background. It is also important that pedagogues be more focused on each child and on interactions with others in the classroom, and that the school staff interacts meaningfully with parents and the community outside of the classroom.

The main philosophy behind a pan-European effort to make school systems inclusive to the Roma should be that it will benefit all children and society as a whole. What is needed is a more child centered, community centered approach, whereby all children, even with their differences, can improve as part of a broader society. This can only be achieved if governments work on changing their institutions and if Roma become full participants in the system.