



ROMA-NeT

The Education Challenges of Roma Inclusion

AN URBACT II PROJECT





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The focus of the ROMA-NeT project is on the integration of Roma populations in European cities. The nine ROMA-NeT partners came together to share expertise, to explore experiences and to spread good practice.

These good practices will influence and improve local policy development and deliver capabilities for stronger community cohesion between Roma and their neighbouring communities across a whole city.

Education is the foundation for Roma inclusion across Europe in all countries and in all settings urban and rural. Most children are struggling to continue, or participate at all, in some form of education. Education remains a significant cause of inter-generational discrimination and inequality towards Roma.

The experiences in ROMA-NeT cities are very similar to those described in 'The Situation of Roma in 11 Member States'¹ that: (i) one out of every two children attend pre-school or kindergarten; (ii) nine out of ten Roma children aged 7 to 15 are reported to be in school; (iii) participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school age; and (iv) only 15% of young Roma adults complete upper-secondary general or vocational education.

Our experience shows that significant efforts should be made to support Roma children

and families to ensure that they are included, resourced and fairly treated in school from an early age. For example, in Slovakia almost 60% of non-Roma children attend pre-school and kindergarten whereas less than 30% of Roma children attend. In Greece less than 10% of Roma children attend pre-school, kindergarten or school against almost 50% attendance by non-Roma children.

In May 2012, the European Commission put in place the 'National Roma Integration Strategies'² and the priorities for every Member State are clear. Two key goals are: (i) to widen access to quality early childhood education and care; and (ii) to put in place measures to ensure that Roma children complete at least primary school. Although many Member States have developed strategies to include ways to address the shortcomings in education for Roma, the question that remains is how these will be translated into

action by cities with significant and quantifiable results.

Good practice does exist and the education authorities in cities should look elsewhere to find out how others have created effective interventions in educational practices. ROMA-NeT cities provide some examples of interventions that have been tried and tested and that can make a genuine and measurable difference.



THE STORY SO FAR

KEY ISSUES



ROMA-NeT partners found that a number of factors continue to constrain access to education for many Roma children and these are the challenges that cities have to face up to:

- Teachers that are not adequately trained to deal with ethnically mixed classes.
- Segregation of Roma children either through a lack of understanding of their 'special' needs or through the residential area where Roma live and are schooled being segregated.
- Lack of enforcement, and inadequate provision to allow for full or compulsory education in early childhood education and care.
- Insufficient support for teachers from inter-cultural mediators.
- Ill-equipped or under-supported educational mediators.
- Poor communication due to language barriers between Roma families and the educational establishments.
- Low attendance at school during compulsory education years.
- Even lower attendance at secondary or tertiary level education.
- Low educational level of parents of Roma children affecting their ability to support children through education.
- Low educational and employment aspirations and role models across the community.
- Lack of understanding of Roma culture and heritage.
- Prejudice and harassment experienced at school.

POTENTIAL RESPONSES

None of these are an 'easy fix' and different countries and cities must consider a diverse range of measures to overcome such a complex and difficult set of issues.

'...the right to education is a fundamental human right protected under Article 28 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified by all EU Member States and under Article 14 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.'³ Each Member State and each city is required to make the appropriate resource, political and policy response to ensure this fundamental right.

The case studies below show how one or two actions can make a difference in the long term towards:

- Supporting teaching staff to deal with an increasing level and type of diversity in their classrooms.

- The development and support of inter-cultural mediators and teaching staff in schools.

- Interpretation facilities.

- Desegregation through ensuring Roma children are placed in mainstream schools and supported to attend and remain in education.

- Stronger enforcement (with an understanding of the very specific cultural needs of Roma families) of attendance in compulsory education.

- Finding innovative ways to encourage attendance of Roma children at school from the youngest possible age and consistently into secondary and tertiary education.

- Awareness of aspirational role models from within the Roma community.

- Awareness of Roma culture and heritage within the wider

communities in which they live.

- Zero tolerance of prejudice, harassment and racism in schools and the education system.





Case Study: Mum plays the wolf!

(Strengthening the relationship between the kindergarten and the families)
By Trefán Jánosné, vice mayor and Béla Kézy, expert

The little children - Roma and Hungarian alike - sit together in awe in the largest room of the kindergarten, watching the one-of-a-kind theatre performance. "That's my dad there!" - whispers one brown-eyed boy proudly to the little blonde girl sitting next to him. - "And my mum is the wolf!" - replies the girl.

In the kindergarten of Nagykálló, parents perform "Little Red Riding Hood" to their children. The children are surprised that the play has been "directed" by one of the kindergarten teachers. She has been working with parents - many of whom are Roma - to learn their parts. This "Parent Theatre" is one element of a complex programme aimed at better integrating the parents of disadvantaged children.

Why?

Nagykálló is a small settlement of a little over 10,000 inhabitants, located in the North-Eastern corner of Hungary. Over 15 % of the local population is Roma, most whom live in extreme poverty.

There are 321 children in the main kindergarten of the town. Half of them live in poor families and 72 of them are Roma. While in the kindergarten, they are in a

nice environment, receive proper food, a quality education and, most importantly, attention - this changes immediately when they return home in the afternoon.

The kindergarten teachers realised early that raising mentally and physically healthy children cannot be done by the kindergarten alone - parents also have a very important part in the process.

Some parents, especially those with many children, don't put enough emphasis on education for their children, nor do they successfully engage with teachers and educational establishments. In response to this complex problem, the kindergarten launched a pilot programme aimed at involving the parents more actively in the kindergarten life; supporting parents to develop the important skills and knowledge to deal with the challenges of family life.

The programme

The programme was launched eight years ago - and in that time it has become an integral part of the pedagogical programme of the kindergarten.

It has **five main elements**:

- Parent club:
 - parent academy - lectures on various topics related to family life and parenting.
 - museum visits for the parents, joint visits to exhibitions

(Roma families would not visit museums and exhibitions otherwise).

- evening clubs to facilitate informal discussions between parents and promote healthy eating habits.
- Parent theatre: regular theatre plays performed by parents - with the active support of kindergarten teachers during preparation.
- Parent Reading club:
 - reading stories for children as an integral part of kindergarten education.
 - joint visits to library events with children.
 - re-introducing story-telling and reading to poor families - helping parents to overcome reading problems and inhibitions to read aloud.
- Parent sports club - making exercise part of the family life:
 - organising sports programmes for families - playful

competitions for joint teams of parents and children.

- organising bicycle and walking tours for parents.
- Parent workshop - parents with different social and financial status working together to help the kindergarten:
 - preparing toys for the kindergarten.
 - regular maintenance of indoor and outdoor toys in the kindergarten.
 - creating room decorations and small presents for children.
 - preparing costumes and installations for the parent theatre.
 - improving the environment of the kindergarten (gardening, planting flowers and trees).

The results

During the eight years since the programme has been in operation, more than 600 families - parents and children - have been involved and educated. Although it is difficult to quantify the results, from the feedback from parents it is clear that the programme has accomplished a lot. Parents in poor (and specifically Roma) families feel that they are now useful, valuable members of the local community, and that they are appreciated for what they do. Family ties are strengthened, parents acquire new knowledge and skills that make them better, more caring parents.

Integration is happening without being forced. People with different backgrounds, from Roma and non-Roma families, do positive things together for their children. They work together towards shared goals, build different forms of informal relations and share information and knowledge.

A similar programme is in place in Torrent, Spain with equally good results

Casa Caridad Valencia has set up a kindergarten where children from 1-3 years receive education appropriate to their age, with qualified personnel, and following the national curriculum and educational laws. In parallel, the programme also implements "The School-Family Programme" which targets families with children at the kindergarten.

Some 56% of the families who attend are from the Roma population and are of Spanish origin, 42% are of non-Spanish nationality including a significant number of immigrant families of different nationalities, and 2% are non-Roma Spanish nationality.

Similarly, parents attend workshops to learn and enrich their knowledge, develop their communications and language skills and to help them deal with the challenges of their daily lives, particularly with regards to the care of their children.



Key Messages

- Integration is not a one time action. Consequently, it cannot be promoted through one-off projects - the right processes and mechanisms need to be in place.

- Integration takes time and cannot be forced.

- Kindergartens and schools are good channels to involve people from Roma families.

- There is a need for a clear goal and a structured programme. However, flexibility, readiness to experiment and change certain elements are keys to success.

- It is important to always learn (mainly from other practitioners) and to constantly add new elements to the process.

- While commitment of the kindergarten personnel is essential, it is not sufficient on its own - they need to be professionally trained to

be able to support the process.

- It is surprising how much can be accomplished using existing resources: the programme has run for eight years with only minimal additional funding - thanks mainly to the commitment and creativity of the kindergarten teachers.

- In order to achieve lasting results, this programme should be extended to primary schools as well (in fact, this is already being planned in Nagykálló).

KEY RESOURCES

1. *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 'The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Survey results at a glance'* (2012) Luxembourg, p. 12.

2. *European Union (2012), European Commission Directorate-General for Justice 'National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework'*. Belgium, p. 7.

3. As quoted in *FRA 'The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Survey results at a glance'* (2012) Luxembourg, p. 12; from UNESCO (2010) *Education for all Global Monitoring Report 2010. Reaching the marginalized*, Paris, UNESCO, p. 155.

Additional resources:

• *European Commission Roma Portal* (<http://ec.europa.eu/roma>).

• *'For Diversity, Against Discrimination'* information campaign
www.stop-discrimination.info

• *Vademecum: The Ten Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion*, Publications Office of the European Commission, 2009.

• *Preventing Social Exclusion through Europe 2020: Early Childhood Development and the Inclusion of Roma Families*, European Social Observatory (OSE) and UNICEF in collaboration with the Belgian Federal Programming Service (Ministry) for Social Integration, 2010.

• *European Commission Justice and Roma web portal*
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/national-strategies/index_en.htm.

• *Baseline Report: ROMA-NeT a transnational partnership*. Morton Hyde, Ann, Published by URBACT and European Union, May 2010.



ROMA-NeT good practice guides

This guide to working with Roma communities forms the first part of a background overview of Roma communities across EU cities and countries and includes good practice ideas from a number of cities within the ROMA-NeT partnership.

These guides have been produced to help cities build a snapshot in their understanding of the issues facing Roma communities and therefore facing cities. By sharing good practice from across the EU, we hope to offer you some pathways to consider and a range of useful contacts and resources at your fingertips.

The other guides currently are:

- ROMA-NeT – An Introduction to the Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The Education Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The Health and Social Care Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The Housing Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The Employability Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The Policing Challenges of Roma Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – Roma on the Move in Europe – the Challenges for Inclusion
- ROMA-NeT – The planning and governance for Roma Inclusion

Further guides may be available in the future. All of these guides are available from the ROMA-NeT team: info@roma-net.com



URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants.



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www.urbact.eu/

