



# ROMA-NeT Newsletter N°2

September 2011



Almería - Spain



Connecting cities  
Building successes





Almería-Spain

## LEARNING CLUSTER EVENT IN ALMERÍA

Inclusive housing policies and area based regeneration programs

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### Dear Reader,

This is the second newsletter of ROMA-NeT URBACT II project. Our second learning cluster event in Almería discussed integrated and area based approaches to tackling exclusion and segregation including the application of an

integrated area based approach to service provision; tackling segregation using housing improvements; and inclusive approaches to area based regeneration. This issue gives an insight into inclusive housing policies and area based regeneration programs.

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### Speech of the Mayor of the city of Almería, Luis Rogelio Rodríguez-Comendador Pérez

During the ROMA-NeT second learning cluster meeting, Mr. Luis Rogelio Rodríguez-Comenandor Pérez, Mayor of the City of Almería welcomed the participants saying.

“The URBACT II European project ROMA-NeT aims to establish a dialogue based on common values and mutual interests of different communities. The choice of Almeria to host this second learning cluster is, in my opinion, particularly significant. Since the development of policies and actions is affected by a huge number of administrations it is crucial to recognise its important contribution to



active community engagement and inclusion of Roma into the whole society.

The Roma population, as it is called in their own language, is in the worst position within the social structure in all European countries. They face poverty, underemployment, unemployment, crime

and social rejection at the same time dealing with extensive concentration in substandard housing.

Both the Spanish national survey and the European one show that this group is the most rejected of all strands of the population, including immigrants of any origin.

However, the integration of Roma in Spain demonstrates signs of hope that could be fostered through the European programs such as URBACT ROME-NeT.

We conclude that the integration of this group will only be sustainable if normal working and housing conditions are provided.

Similarly, governments should monitor and punish any form of discrimination against Roma people when accessing employment or housing. Therefore agreement between the stakeholders from different levels is fundamental for successful implementation of coordinated actions.

In this regard, I thank for the constant commitment and harmony proclaimed on behalf of all political groups represented at the municipal level. Their joint collaboration receives special importance at the moment of adopting measures aimed to encourage the improvement of integration scenario and ethnic minorities' social inclusion.

Ultimately, due to this learning Cluster of the European Project URBACT ROMA-NeT, Almería becomes a clear reference for policies in European integration of Roma; I'm sure it will be translated into a Local Action Plan that will conceive the basis for a practical and effective model addressed to combat against the social exclusion."

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## Inclusive housing policies and area based regeneration programs

3 by Eszter Somogyi, Thematic expert

Cities participating in ROMA-NeT share the common feature that each has at least one socially and physically deprived neighbourhood with a high rate of Roma population. They also share the goal to establish measures for the integration of marginalised Roma communities into the local society.

The second thematic learning cluster of ROMA-NeT discussed the problem of segregated neighbourhoods and possible interventions focusing on area-based programs with inclusive housing policy measures and integrated social services. This article highlights the main points discussed during the meeting.

Segregated deprived neighbourhoods differ significantly according to their location, size and the level of concentration of physical and social deprivation as the examples of ROMA-NeT cities show. Such neighbourhoods can be located outside, at the edge, or in the integrated part of the core city. Furthermore they can be socially homogenous with deep social deprivation or socially more mixed. Regarding size, they spread from a few hundred up to several thousand people. The housing quality ranges from shacks, through self made

constructions, old substandard housing, to housing estate units. The lack of public utility services is a frequent problem both because of the lack of infrastructure development and the termination of service contracts due to large arrears. As the latter one indicates, the affordability of housing and utility services is a critical problem, as is the illegal housing situation, that people have to cope with in deprived neighbourhoods.



Basically three approaches can be applied to tackle the problem of segregation of deprived Roma neighbourhoods.

1. Regeneration is a relevant option mainly when a neighbourhood is socially more mixed and has a spatially more integrated location.



2. Eradication is more a must when the neighbourhood has an isolated location and it is socially deeply deprived.
3. In large segregated neighbourhoods the combination of the two approaches can be a solution, especially when it has a fairly good location in a more integrated part of the city.

The area-based integrated approach is an efficient tool to improve the situation of deprived neighbourhoods as it concentrates physical and social measures into the area at the same time and in such a way that synergic effect can be achieved. The programs should be of a long term and highly participative nature. This means the direct participation of the community in the planning and implementation of all programmes being applied.



Inclusive housing policies should focus on three main goals:

- to improve the housing conditions,
- to increase affordability ;
- to decrease the level of spatial segregation of the marginalized groups among them Roma.

To ensure access to better quality housing the most appropriate form is the provision of social housing. As marginalised people are not able to contribute with own resources to owner occupied housing. However in some cases private rental housing can be an option provided a sufficient rent subsidy is available. As marginalized groups, among them Roma, are often discriminated on the private rental market

mediation by a social organisation between the landlords and the affected families may be needed. To increase affordability, housing allowance schemes should be introduced but as the income level of such families usually are extremely low income generation programs are also needed to ensure the sustainability of housing measures. Dispersal programs are important to tackle the problem of segregation which means that housing options should be provided in more integrated parts of the city. The programs have to include measures that promote the social integration of marginalised families into the new receiving communities.

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## European outlook – good practices

The case studies prepared for the Almería learning event will provide you with an insight into:

- How an NGO in Ostrava, founded by volunteers, now a professional organisation is providing multi-sectoral services and outreach programs for socially excluded Roma by working together

with the local communities, the local authorities and institutions.

- A rehousing and social integration program in Madrid aimed at re-housing 2900 families.
- A socially sensitive regeneration program in Budapest – Magdolna quarter.

The detailed case studies can be found at our website.

[http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/Projects/Roma\\_Net/documents/media/Case\\_study\\_inclusive\\_housing\\_policies\\_E\\_Somogyi.pdf](http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/Projects/Roma_Net/documents/media/Case_study_inclusive_housing_policies_E_Somogyi.pdf)



Committee of the Regions -Brussels

## OTHER NEWS AND NEWS FROM PARTNERS

High Level Meeting in Slovakia  
Seminar in the Committee of the Regions  
Open Days 2011  
Govanhill Law Center in Glasgow  
Housing in Torrent  
Bobigny- associated partner

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### Košice at the High Level Meeting organised by the European Commission

As the continuation of the series of High Level Events (HLE), organised in Hungary in 2009 and Romania in 2010, the European Commission organised the next HLE in Slovakia on 23-25 May

2011. The overall objective of the event was to mobilise the increased use of EU funds aiming to significantly improve the social inclusion of the marginalised Roma communities in Slovakia as well as to share experience on what has worked and how in the field of Roma Inclusion. ROMA-NeT was presented by Ladislav Perhač.

More about the meeting can be found here: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/conferences/roma2011/programme\\_en.cfm?nmenu=2](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/roma2011/programme_en.cfm?nmenu=2)

### ROMA-NeT at a seminar in the Committee of the Regions

The City of Budapest, EURO CITIES and the Committee of the Regions organised the seminar *Cities and Regions – joining forces for inclusion of Roma populations* on 31 May 2011 in Brussels.

The aim of the seminar was to look at the new Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (EC Communication published in April) from the perspective of local and regional authorities, identify potential and obstacles for its implementation on the ground and to address the availability and use of



EU-funding under the current framework and the reform of structural funds post 2013.

ROMA-NeT was very well presented during this seminar, both by the Deputy Mayor of Budapest and by the Mayor of Udine. Lead Expert of ROMA-NeT moderated the morning session.

Key messages of the seminar:

- Cities and Regions are essential partners and must be involved in the development and the implementation of the EU Framework for national Roma Integration Strategies.
- Long term social transformation requires active and long term commitment from Cities and Regions, it is therefore essential that Cities and Regions are fully consulted and their views taken into account in the development of the EU Framework.
- EU and National Strategies do not guarantee to bring about change that is necessary at local level in Roma communities, it is therefore essential that the Framework Strategies identify a clear role for Cities and Regions as they are

best placed to understand, and to respond to the situation at local level. It is at local and regional level where Roma inclusion policies can be made most effective and where they can be efficiently implemented for real change.

- Cities that receive high numbers of migrant Roma find that maintaining their position as '*Open – Socially Inclusive Cities*' places undue pressure on the human and financial resources. The challenges and the strain on social service provision in such Cities are significant. There are no readily available EU resources to counterbalance these substantial costs to the receiving Cities.
- The process of accessing EU funds for Roma Inclusion is not always straightforward and there are a number of real barriers that can limit and constrain access to available funds. Capacity building is essential at all levels, including in the City and Regional administrations, to ensure there is adequate capability to access and absorb EU funds.



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## ROMA-NeT selected to be present during the Open Days in October 2011

ROMA-NeT was selected to present at the workshop "Meet the projects - Social cohesion in European cohesion policy" that will be organised by DG Regio. More information will be in our next newsletter.

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## Govanhill Law Centre

Govanhill, situated in the south side of Glasgow, has a long history of housing Glasgow's new migrants. Most recently, Govanhill has welcomed an estimated 2,000 Romanian and Slovakian Roma migrants—believed to be the largest concentration of Roma in Scotland.

Govanhill Law Centre is a free and confidential legal resource for the Govanhill community. We provide legal advice and representation on housing, employment, benefits, education and discrimination. We can assist anyone living in the Govanhill area, with a focus on enforcing the rights of Black and Ethnic Minority communities and in particular the Roma community. We employ two fully qualified solicitors and a Slovakian speaking Caseworker. In the past year we have opened over 70 substantial casework files for Roma clients, on topics including complex benefits appeals, defending evictions in court and recovering unpaid wages from rogue employers. In 2010, 38% of our clients identified themselves as Roma.

We have uncovered significant evidence of destitution and poverty suffered by Roma families. Many families are living in sub-standard, over-crowded flats, and are often the victim of illegal eviction and harassment by rogue landlords. The police in Scotland rarely investigate or prosecute landlords for breaking landlord-tenant law. We have built up a strong partnership with local police and last week for the first time, the police have charged one of our

client's landlords with a criminal offence. If the landlord is prosecuted, it will send out a strong message that illegal evictions will not be tolerated in our community.

We are currently advancing human rights and discrimination arguments on behalf of a number of Romanian and Slovakian Roma clients in complaints with HM Revenue and Customs, Jobcentre Plus, Department of Work and Pensions and Glasgow City Council in subjects such as refusal to provide National Insurance numbers, undue delay in processing Housing Benefit appeals and passports incorrectly deemed fraudulent when accompanying Tax Credits applications. These actions severely impact on the community, with families living in destitution, and leaving many at risk of homelessness.

As well as representing clients individually, we undertake campaigning and lobbying work to motivate change for the benefit of our community.

We are currently campaigning against the proposed closure of the Bilingual Support Unit (BSU) at a local secondary school which provides specialist language support to pupils with little or no English, and allows young people to access and remain in mainstream education. A number of Roma young

people have flourished at the BSU, passing exams and having a real chance to access higher education (see our consultation response here: <http://www.govanlc.com/GhLC010711.pdf.pdf>.)



## Housing in Torrent

TORRENT is a medium-sized city situated in the province of Valencia with a number of characteristics that typify it as a Mediterranean city:

- Mediterranean city of approx. 85,000 inhabitants
- Great city: recently recognized by the GV (Generalidad Valenciana) which requires policymakers to revise the city's long-term development
- Services and agriculture sector, with 20% unemployment rate

- Broad social fabrics with a relative ability of social pressure.
- In demographic expansion with a 12% rate of immigrants.
- A significant presence of Roma.
- An important social demand and needs that grow faster than offer of health care, social, educational services etc.

The severe economic crisis in the world economies has, had a huge impact on the everyday realities of many people in Spain. The decrease in employment opportunities has made it difficult for many families to maintain an average standard of living. As a

consequence many usual wage-earning families have become dependent on state minimum subsistence. Due to unemployment, mortgage and spending pressures families often experience internal tensions which result in crisis at personal or family level. Collectively these cause a much more serious deterioration of circumstances than one produced simply by economic crisis.

Housing is not just a commodity that could be an indicator of economic growth; it is a primary need, a constitutionally recognised fundamental right. And it is linked to its own social organisation.

In the 1980s the Gitanos (Roma) population was concentrated mainly in two slum settlements (shantytowns) along the gully that crosses the city. During that time the consensus was to concentrate on housing, children's involvement in the school educational system and the implementation of measures to alleviate the precarious situation which affected families, such as lack of healthcare documents, baby nutrition, financial assistance etc.

During the 1990s families from shanty towns were allocated accommodation and resettled in two housing blocks, 150 families. The current status of the issue is summaries in the following paragraphs:

Distribution of housing problem

1. Most of the city is organised in four-storey flats, although there are also areas of residential character such as Vedat and surroundings
2. There is also an old town dominated by one- or two-floor houses, these old houses are inhabited mostly by older people
3. Another area with defining characteristics is the central park with new buildings of more than five levels, where expansion has now slowed down due to the economic crisis.

4. A final area is Xenillet and Benissaet neighbourhoods with older homes, few facilities, more dilapidated housing than in other areas and where social circumstances show characteristics of social and economic exclusion

Currently, the City Council of Torrent has the following housing resources:

- 1) Management of financial assistance from other agencies for the payment of rent (support for young people, help with welfare pensions to pensioners or people with limited family income)

2) Financial Assistance  
The City Council within the framework of its budget provides aid to the families who have a charge of rent payments. There are two aid modes: if it is a new rent, the support will be provided at initial outlay; if it is an already formalised lease, the support will be provided by a maximum period of two months

3) Dealing with the Instituto Valenciano de Vivienda regarding social housing. The regional public authority. continues to follows the policy of resettlement from the 90s . The block of 90 social houses have a low rate of rent and all facilities included.

4) Low rent municipal housing is distributed among the population. The Council has five houses distributed around the city. They are in good condition and with a low rental figure which does not exceed € 50 per month.

5) A dispersal programme to spread some of the Roma families into new homes in the PARC CENTRAL neighbourhood. As a result of town planning some families have been rehoused in modern, new and fully equipped homes in eight-storey buildings situated in areas of the city's economic growth.





## FUTURE CHALLENGES

In relation to housing, or more accurately the lack of suitable housing, this issue requires a full debate to consider and make proposals on five main issues:

1. The government must realise that housing is a key issue for the development of a fair society and that a commitment to provide long-term support groups such as youth, elderly or low income is crucial
2. Motivate the beneficiaries of social or subsidised housing to take better care of their buildings by allowing renovation, construction etc to be accepted as a mode of payment
3. Using certain properties as “housing bridge” so that some families can be moved there and with a proper support to then move to a home under normal conditions
4. Programming the plans for dispersal of families across the city in order to demolish ghettos
5. Integrated housing policies are necessary to address these complex issues as is working with the target group to build understanding that housing may be a right but that it also comes with responsibilities - having and managing a property demands a certain level of individual and family commitment.

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## Bobigny - associate partner of ROMA-NeT

Bobigny is situated in the Seine Saint Denis borough, (region of Ile de France), which is 6 km from the centre of Paris. The number of inhabitants is 48 156.

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The town of Bobigny is particularly concerned by the situation faced by the Roma population hence why we have joined the ROMA-NeT partnership; to learn of the situation of other European towns.

Bobigny is confronted with several issues, most of which involve the resolution of the administrative situation of these populations to bring them within common law. In our case a distinction has to be made between two groups:

1. The “Travellers” (*Gens du voyage*), where the challenge is the mode of housing: today the city signs agreements for temporary occupation with families and has implemented a winter camping area with a group of “Travellers.” Most of the Travellers have French nationality and access to legal assistance.
2. the other concerns populations of Romanian or Bulgarian origin, “Roma”: in which case no legal basis exists. They have no access to assistance beyond medical assistance, except for those who are properly documented.

Actually, around 600 Roma have been listed in Bobigny. Their life conditions are very worrying and dangerous. They live in caravans and rudimentary shelters without electricity or drinking water.



This kind of dilapidated housing can cause health problems, which increase in intensity during winter due to rudimentary heating. Indeed, such problems have already caused fire and death.

The city cannot develop a housing policy specifically for the “Roma” populations whose presence in France is undocumented. Regulatory tools do exist for housing populations in situations of insecurity and/or exclusion in general. But the town suffers from a severe lack of human and financial resources for the municipality and for the families.

Moreover, local authorities like Bobigny are faced with the government policy to demolish camps without offering any alternative solution.

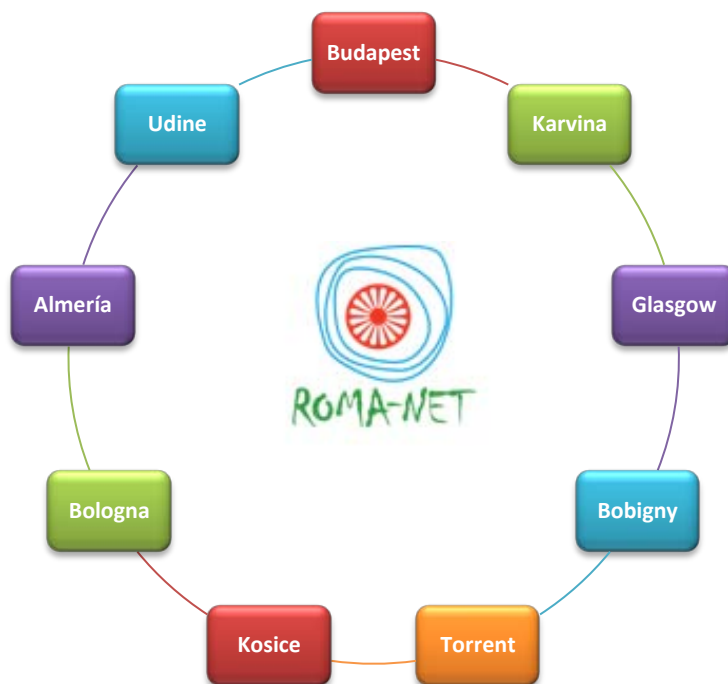
Bobigny tries to offer a local social support service, with places at school for the children and providing toilets and access to drinking water where they live. There are also organisations and associations that try to help the social and economic integration of Roma. The municipality keeps a direct contact with associations and populations.

The town looks for suitable solutions for this population. It is quite difficult: the municipality has to find and rehabilitate places that can receive the families and also introduce follow up procedures for the children. This is difficult given that the density of population in the area is already around 7000 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

At the moment the main project is to create a place with suitable temporary accommodation with social support. The aim is that in three years time the

families will have jobs and a place to live. However we face some difficulties to find suitable places and adequate funding.

The elected representative and the administration of Bobigny are committed to pursue these difficult objectives. Participating in ROMA-NeT is so important as we are exposed to the practices in other Cities which enhances our determination and builds our capacity to tackle our local problems.



To know more about our project please visit us at: [www.urbact.eu/roma-net](http://www.urbact.eu/roma-net)

Subscribe for the Roma-Net Newsletter: please send an e-mail to [bordacse@budapest.hu](mailto:bordacse@budapest.hu)

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 300 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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