

Roma Inclusion - Can cities be the driver of change?

What we need is not so much a clever solution but a new culture of working together with Roma communities

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In a society where we are constantly led to believe that anything is possible and that being a celebrity is a valid 'career' choice, it should be easy for our young people to aspire to greatness whatever their race or background. Shouldn't it?

But what if you are a young Roma adult? In real terms it means you most likely did not complete your education, you probably live at the wrong address, in the wrong part of town, overcrowded and undervalued. It's likely that your parents can't support the family themselves so you had to finish school early to supplement their income. But without qualifications, the only opportunities open to you are at best in the informal job market: unskilled, poorly paid just like your parents and grandparents before you. Does that make your hopes and your dreams any different, any less important, than those of any other young adult? In May 2010 in Budapest, Viktoria Farkas, a young Roma woman who has personal aspirations told the ROMA-NeT partners that *'Employers don't really offer jobs for Roma people. Only a few people may understand how life is on the Gypsy row - what it means to have and to educate a child there. What it feels to have on your skin the non-acceptance, the exclusion whether in school, on the street, from wider society, and to be excluded from the*

job market. How is it possible to prove our competencies when we know that we don't have much chance in life?

Confined to the margins of society - because they are Roma

In Europe today there are hundreds of thousands of ordinary young people confined to the margins of society, often surviving in poverty, in sub-standard, even deplorable living conditions - *because they are Roma*. Young people who grow-up knowing that much of society is closed to their ambitions, many are resigned to the situation, aware that their full potential is diminished, *because they are Roma*. Even today these youngsters are compelled to embark upon the same cycle of exclusion that has plagued their people for generations, *because they are Roma*. In a society where equal rights and respect for diversity have been championed for decades; not only is this morally indefensible it is down right wasteful and the economic justifications to change the situation are compelling.

In an increasingly aging Europe, no country, nor city can afford to ignore the untapped potential and the contributions that could be made by this already enormous and growing section of the population. Even in these days of economic downturn our nations continue to face shortages of skilled workers, employing a variety of

tactics to attract much needed skills including encouraging economic migration. Yet European cities consistently fail to recognise the most shocking neglect of one of our core economic resources, the disregarded human capital that already exists in their segregated and marginalised communities. Roma are the largest minority group in Europe, but most have been written off, living and working outside the mainstream parameters of registered employment, health insurance and income tax. Contrary to the stereotypical image of Roma, their lives are neither inactive nor lazy. For many, achieving basic subsistence demands constant innovation, arbitration, determination, and ongoing resilience to survive. Imagine the growth potential if European Cities could harness and maximise that kind of capacity from an additional 10 million people living in the European Union. What that could mean for economic growth and the future of our nations..., let alone the moral and social justification associated with ensuring successful integration of Roma into society. Economic crisis, competing priorities and dwindling public finances create an environment where Cities can easily turn away and find other, more publicly supported, actions than investing in Roma. But they should be aware that such short-term, non-controversial decisions will have long-term irreparable consequences as the

cycle of decline and segregation becomes more and more deeply entrenched.

Roma exclusion - more than an Eastern European issue

For a long time Roma exclusion was regarded as mainly a central and eastern European issue: during the pre-accession years the European Commission pushed integration of Roma as a priority for the countries of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. By 2001 reference to the Roma Minorities in the Accession Partnership documents referred to: 'fighting against discrimination (including within the public administration), fostering employment opportunities, increasing access to education, improving housing conditions; and providing adequate financial support'.

Simultaneously in 2000, the bell began to toll, for the end of blatant ethnic exclusion, or so we thought, when the EU adopted its Racial Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC – RED) aimed at combating discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin and prohibiting direct or indirect discrimination in employment, education, social protection, property matters and services.

With some consensus that tackling exclusion and facilitating integration of

Roma would contribute significantly to the achievement of the aims of the Lisbon Strategy, came a succession of targeted Roma policy directives: The Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2003, the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area and the first EU Roma Summit in 2008 which, reassuringly, resulted in the definition of 10 Common Basic Principles to effectively address the issue of Roma inclusion in policy implementation. Yet despite this compelling evidence of gathering momentum, support for the case for Roma integration and a genuine willingness to fund the policy changes and initiatives designed to promote Roma inclusion have so far failed to deliver significant change. In fact recent Open Society Institute evidence suggests that the living conditions and economic situations for most Roma in Europe have not improved and may actually have continued to decline.

In the last few years the complex situation of Roma exclusion is a phenomenon that is spreading and growing across Europe. EU membership in 2004¹ and 2007² for countries with significant Roma populations has brought about a new dynamic to the complex situation of Roma exclusion. Namely that in significant numbers Roma have begun

¹ Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland,

² Bulgaria and Romania

to exercise their freedom of movement

The 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion are

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of Community instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma

and have chosen to live and if possible work in another EU country. Even in those old member states that have well developed anti-discrimination, equality and social inclusion policies, the behaviour, living conditions and exclusion of Roma migrants is challenging the political, economic and social responses from receiving nations and cities. A recent Fundamental Rights Agency study³ concluded that 'Roma from other EU Member States are now part of the townscape of almost every Member State of the European Union'.

Shift towards Cities – drivers of change or not ?

Until now, the Cities of Europe and their municipal authorities have not played a big part in the development of Roma inclusion policy. Municipalities have

³ The Situation of Roma EU Citizens Moving to and settling in other EU Member States' 2009 http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Roma_Movement_Comparative-final_en.pdf

generally been passive in their approach to Roma inclusion, sometimes supporting the action of NGOs and often taking the view that the Roma population have access to the same services as the majority population. Historically, many of the core Roma inclusion policies such as education, employment, health, housing, infrastructure, the fight against poverty and increased equality have been the responsibility of National Governments with non-governmental organisations working to provide the service delivery role at local level, through collections of essential projects often constrained by insufficient resources and short-term unsustainable funding streams.

It has long been recognised that deep-rooted cultural divides, even between Roma and their own country-nationals, and systemic institutional discrimination have fuelled exclusionary practices prominent across Nations, but they are also factors that have significantly limited previous attempts at inclusion. And there has been very little genuine progress made in attempts to reach out or to engage with the Roma community. But why should this be when many Cities have adequate levels of know-how to make advances on Roma inclusion? The key component that has been missing is not the know-how, the what to do, but much more the wanting, the genuine commitment to improvement, to change and to

eradicate discrimination and exclusion in the Roma communities. What is still missing in many Cities is a clear-cut acknowledgement of the need to respond to the levels of exclusion that exist in the Roma communities, the political commitment and the volume of resources over the long-term that will be necessary to make a discernable difference.

There has however been a recent shift in emphasis and growing expectations of greater involvement from the Cities and municipalities of Europe in the issue of Roma inclusion. The European Parliament's resolution of 31 January 2008 stressed the importance of involving local authorities and promoted full participation of the Roma community at grassroots level in order to ensure their ability to fully benefit from the inclusion policies being defined. In persistently disadvantaged neighbourhoods often there are barriers to services which are beyond the ability of individuals to overcome. Reductions in vital education, child care, health services, home care support, transport, employment, training and access to financial services can have a compound effect on poverty and exclusion that can only be reversed through local authority driven interventions and community collaboration.

Yes, cities should have the necessary know-how and they are better placed to provoke involvement, maintain commitment and to bring about sustainability than the NGOs that tried to champion Roma inclusion in the past. Cities have the breadth of experience and the strength of human resources to bring together stakeholders to build common objectives that will generate synergy between services and ensure that more relevant, more accessible and more supportive services are available for young Roma people. Cities are best placed make use of the people they have with strong community based know-how, honed over time and spanning all facets of the district, and to re-deploy their skills to address Roma issues and to capitalise on available expertise.

Thus far however the skills for developing projects and implementing interventions for Roma communities belongs more to the NGO sector than with local authorities. But with the shifting emphasis on Cities, local authorities, need to grow the confidence and harness the skills to drive forward and deliver joint and integrated interventions that can overcome the widespread Roma exclusion from basic and essential services.

ROMA-NeT to pioneer the way – other Cities can follow

There is a strong case for sustainable inclusion via a bottom-up approach which promotes joint responsibility and places significant importance on the development of human, social and professional capital to tackle the complexity of the problems.

ROMA-Net: a network of nine European cities, supported by URBACT, plans to pioneer a way forward. At this early stage the 9 partner Cities of ROMA-NeT clearly recognise that Roma exclusion is multi-layered, deep-rooted and complex. No-one has said that this will be easy, and they are not deterred by the complexity of the issue, but rather committed to finding the right way forward for an integrated approach that puts dialogue with the Roma community at the heart of their actions.

We support an integrated, co-operative and co-ordinated approach where commitment from local authorities can create:

- opportunities for Roma to participate in training measures and to create labour market opportunities;
- locally generated social projects, varying in scope and eligibility conditions;
- real access to social welfare provisions – whether in

education, health or social care, housing, etc, all of which must be underpinned by Roma communities providing support, mediation, advocacy, self-representation and active participation in the supply of local service provision.

A key start for the ROMA-NeT City partners, that could be followed by other Cities was to examine - critically analyse - what and how core services, and other special initiatives, are currently being, or have been in the past, supplied to other disadvantaged groups in the key areas of education, health, housing and employment. Initially, to establish the Critical Success Factors for each initiative and then to question if and why they failed to reach, failed to attract, or simply by-passed the Roma community. Working through the process, and involving the community should provide an opportunity to adjust and realign services in a way that is more relevant and appropriate for community need. Although it is unreasonable and potentially unsustainable to expect Cities to develop a whole raft of new services, what they can do is create intermediary links, pathway projects and mediators to make existing services more accessible and more appropriate for young Roma adults. Cities will have to confront the long-standing dilemma of '*Roma-specific*' or '*Roma-targeted*', keeping in mind that

segregation may be a short-term remedy but is never the long-term answer.

Evidence from mapping studies carried out in the ROMA-Net cities show that, as suspected, there is a vast array of untapped expertise to be drawn out from successful implementation of a wide range of community initiatives across the partner cities. For example, a highly innovative educational initiative used to illicit the opinions of young disadvantaged children in Almeria could easily be transferred to engage adults in the Roma community and provoke in them a sense of belief that the system is interested in what they have to say and what their needs are. Bologna City is well known for its success in developing and delivering innovative approaches to health services, and although these services have somehow by-passed their resident Roma community, with some additional components, they can be made more relevant and accessible going forward. Glasgow has a strong track record in area regeneration and though a new migrant Roma population is challenging these seasoned professionals, it is clear that with some concentrated efforts, they will create a community relationship and foundation for improvement and change. Udine has demonstrated significant expertise in developing realistic employment and training projects but they fail to attract unemployed Roma to their activities.

Using a slightly different recruitment procedure and supportive in-work services they can however, be much more relevant for the Roma community.

Good practice experiences can be drawn from the collections of initiatives supplied by NGOs in different countries,

one of the most successful has been mediation or intermediary services to link the Roma communities to vital public services. Such initiatives have been applied successfully in many sectors, the concept is explained in Good practice example 1.

Good Practice Example 1 - Sectoral Mediators working at community level

1. Using mediators, in the fields of health, education and social services, to create connections between the public service and the Roma community has proven to be good practice.
2. Roma mediators as classroom assistants have been used in many cities in Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia and are now seen as a critical link to engage parents in school activities to ensure children attend and remain in education.
3. Mediation has been applied effectively in many countries and in different formats, for example in Hungary to provide health promotion information to elderly members of Roma communities.¹ In Dupnitsa, Bulgaria are used to help solve the problem of electricity being disconnected and non-payment of electricity expenses.

4. In Karvina dedicated fieldworkers provide intermediary assistance to implement all major initiatives being undertaken in the city and are involved in all aspects of the community. Their responsibilities range from assisting with housing applications, co-ordinating health forums to accompanying children to ensure their school attendance.

The value added from mediator practices

5. Success of mediators can largely be attributed to the fact that the majority are chosen from the Roma community, thus creating a faster build up of trust and the ability to break down barriers with formal organisations as well as providing role models for the community.
6. Another critical and positive aspect is the fact that the positions provide good quality jobs for members of the community. They show Roma undertaking responsible employment, performing in professional roles which projects a positive image and can contribute to raising the aspirations of other.
7. For the foreseeable future while Roma inclusion remains an underdeveloped practice, the role of community mediators will remain crucial to support less capable members of the community to utilise the services of the main social and public sectors such as health, education, social care, social welfare, housing and general advocacy services.
8. Although the role of mediators has been widely used there are a number of areas where the potential has not been adequately applied, for example:
 - as relationship builders between fully trained work ready Roma individuals and employers in need of new workers but who have an inherent mistrust of Roma:
 - to support new entrants, men and women, into the world of work either for the first time or as adult returners.
9. The important role that mediators have in the process of community empowerment has also not been fully recognised. However it is a role that can be promoted and developed through ROMA-Net activities as they aim to generate greater community participation and to empower and strengthen the community voice. An extension of the mediator is the community or local champion and for widespread engagement and effective communication each local support group would benefit from the input of a collection of community champions.

Housing, and tenure of housing and land is a major issue in many Roma communities. The situation is complex and is often difficult to deal with in a way that is constructive for all sides. Although an integrated approach to housing combined with community development is frequently cited as good practice for Roma communities, there are not that many such initiatives in existence. There are a few examples where NGOs have been able to access national level EU programmes and other donor funding to support community led development and regeneration type interventions, sometimes in partnership with a municipality, but mostly driven by the NGO. Examples of integrated Urban Regeneration activities led by municipalities and focusing on Roma communities are hard to find. Good practice example 2 considers a situation where the local authority and an NGO worked together with positive results.

Good Practice Example 2 - Integrated Community Housing

The project focus is how to involve Romany people in reconstructing their homes and help them pay their debts and obtain valid rent-contracts?

Description

Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic, has a Roma population of approximately 12,000 - 3% of the population. These Roma people live in tenement buildings which have suffered from neglect for many years. A private non-profit organisation and the local authorities are working together to renovate the buildings and help solve the debt problems of many Roma people.

Crucial factors

- Local authority to refurbish a Roma community centre. Centre is on the ground floor of a building where many Roma families live. The centre provides education, advice and leisure time support for Roma children, youngsters and adults, involving the local authorities, police and social work institutions to improve the situation of Roma people in Brno.
- Many of the Roma families are in debt and live in run-down apartments without paying rent.
- International non-profit organisation is involved and wants to do more for the Roma families than just reconstructing the centre.
- Idea emerges to have tenants help the authorities to reconstruct their own homes, so that they could pay back their debts and negotiate valid leases.
- well attended tenants' meeting- reactions generally positive but families were afraid that once the building was refurbished the local authorities would evict because they do not hold valid lease agreements.
- The NGO and the local authorities set up a 'work-for-debt' programme. The tenants are given the opportunity to work for the local authorities. This work consisted mainly of cleaning of the unused spaces. The money earned was deducted from their debts. People who worked their debts away could sign a new and valid lease for one year.

Results

- Number of people worked in and around the buildings and not only cleared their debts, but have also started to make regular rent payments.
- Two tenant committees have been set up: a total of forty-one people willing to be involved
- The project is unique because many local authorities in Eastern Europe are reluctant to allow Roma people to live in inner city areas. In this case the local authorities took a relaxed approach towards the families' illegal rent situation.
- This is the first time an integrated approach has been used to solve problems with Roma people.

Learning experiences:

- It proved difficult to achieve concrete results during tenant meetings, to which the Roma people are not accustomed. Roma tenants should be seen as active citizens instead of a problem. Both sides, local authorities and Roma families, needed time to adapt. And an attitude of apathy does not change overnight even where both sides are cooperating.
- Within the local authorities there are still people who do not agree with any non-standard approach towards solving debt problems. Also the general public is sceptical.
- After so many years of neglect, there are a whole range of problems to be addressed. It is not possible to solve one problem without addressing the others.
- It is important to keep the decision-making process as transparent and straightforward as possible and to make important decisions during meetings in which all participating organisations take part. Corruption is something that can ruin a project like this.

Key to success - 'the active involvement of residents in the management and administration as well as financial support and commitment from the local authorities'. The project has a voluntary Self Administration and Management Committee. This example should be looked upon as a model of good practice relevant in all Cities.

A culture of with Roma must replace the for Roma attitude

What we need then, is to overcome and break down the barriers that all too often have presented insurmountable challenges to engaging the Roma community. Cities have to dispel the notion that there can be some 'quick fix' solution, and realise that it is not so much about haste or innovation but much more about sustained actions capitalising on expertise with long-term commitment. Through the URBACT local support groups ROMA-NeT partners will each bring together vital service providers, the local stakeholders and crucially members of the Roma community to start the dialogue and create the basis for joint action planning. Instead of applying sweeping homogenous interventions meant for the benefit of the Roma, what is needed is a new culture to work **with** Roma: from inception throughout delivery.

The ROMA-Net partnership promotes an integrated and supportive approach from the outset, providing the perfect platform from which to share the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists. By focusing on the broader context of what has been successful, we plan to capitalise on good practice, previous experience to re-model our thinking around the issues of Roma

inclusion. With the support of our experienced local stakeholders, including Roma community beneficiaries themselves, we can translate good practice into meaningful interventions that are relevant, sustainable and will have longevity because they are founded on approaches that we and Roma communities know can work.

Although there is no quick-fix, no solution nor blueprint that can guarantee success there is a very real opportunity for the Cities to pull resources, to capitalise on successes and to engage with the community in a way that will permeate all aspects of their lives. We aim to provide a positive and achievable vision for the future that can capture the imaginations of the young men and women in the Roma community; engendering in them the sense of ownership required to bring about the necessary change. What we need is not so much a clever solution but a Society that recognises, and is prepared to be fully committed to the concept of greater equality for all. In so doing, Europe will not only benefit from a more diverse and inclusive society; but also from a pool of viable workers who are contributing to wider society, to economic growth and in the future of their own communities.

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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