



FIGHTING AGAINST ANTI-GYPSYISM
THROUGH TRAINING OF
PROFESSIONALS AND EMPOWERMENT
OF ROMA COMMUNITIES



**Policy recommendations
to fight anti-gypsyism and
enable the social inclusion
of Roma and Sinti in local
communities**

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Partner organizations



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FOREWORD

These Policy Recommendations have been developed as part of the project called “**Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsyism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities**”, financed by the programme “Rights, Equality and Citizenship (2014-2020)” of the European Union REC-AG-2018/REC-RDIS-DIS-AG-2018.

The project started in August 2019; it is coordinated by the Association Community Pope John XXIII in partnership with the Municipality of Rimini and the Centre for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria.

The “Latcho Drom” project aims at contributing to reduce discrimination against Roman and Sinti communities, as well as to enable their full social inclusion through a pilot pathway, targeted to the said Roma and Sinti communities, to practitioners working in this sector, to the population at large and to local authorities.

This pilot pathway was based on the analysis of literature and legislation at European, national and local level in three Italian areas: Rimini, Cuneo and Turin, as well as on field research carried out through focus groups, involving major stakeholders: Rom and Sinti community representatives, teachers, social workers, police forces.

The pilot phase began in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and is expected to be completed in March 2022. The pilot pathway has been implemented in the areas of Rimini, Cuneo and Turin through the following activities:

Support to Roma and Sinti communities:

Workshops involving children and teenagers

Workshops have been organised in primary and secondary schools of each area involved to enable cultural exchange, the dissemination of knowledge and awareness raising about the culture, language and history of the Roma people.

Measures to guarantee school support and the right to education

The project has guaranteed classroom and after-school support to Roma/Sinti children and teenagers enrolled in primary and lower secondary schools, as well as support to their families for a greater involvement of parents in their children’s education.

Employment and legal aid

The rate of NEET (not in education, employment or training) among young Roma/Sinti is still extremely high. The project has implemented approaches aimed at supporting young people in the transition from school to employment, in the development of competences and support to employment. Legal aid has been guaranteed for persons in difficulty to access services and regularizing stay permits.

Support to practitioners in the sector:

Training courses

Two different types of training have been provided: one for practitioners in local bodies such as social workers and municipal police forces, who may have to deal with instances of anti-gypsyism; and the other for educators and teachers, to help them fight anti-gypsyism and stereotypes, facilitating full inclusion of Roma and Sinti in schools and educational environments.

The project also involves the production and publishing of a Training Package aimed at professionals who work with Roma and Sinti persons every day, especially teachers and social workers, which will be launched and introduced in the course of four local seminars to be held in Rimini, Turin, Cuneo and Sofia (Bulgaria).

Policy recommendations are based on the experience gained during project implementation and reflect results achieved and the evaluations made. The aim of the tool is to provide an instrument for policy-makers at European, national and local level, to draft and implement policies which facilitate real social inclusion of Roma and Sinti groups in Europe.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APJ23

Association Community Pope John XXIII

EU

European Union

NEET

Not in Education, Employment or Training
(young people who are not working or following an educational or training pathway)

CRC

UN convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

DL

Distance learning

CONTEXT OVERVIEW AND CRITICALITIES

The “Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020” from the European Commission to European Parliament and to the Council, published in 2018, states that “Effectiveness in progress towards Roma integration goals is assessed as overall limited with significant differences across areas and countries. Education is found as the area with most progress (improvements in early school-leaving, early childhood education and compulsory schooling, but deterioration in segregation). The self-perceived health status of Roma has improved, but medical coverage continues to be limited. No improvement has been observed in access to employment, and the share of young Roma not in employment, education or training (NEET) has even increased. The housing situation remains difficult. Some progress has been observed in respect to the general objective of fighting poverty. Anti-gypsyism and hate crime continue to be a matter of high concern, despite evidence of some reduction in discrimination experiences of Roma when accessing services in some areas”¹.

As clearly shown by the Recommendation from the Council of the European Union of 12 March 2021 (2021/C 93/01) “During the COVID-19 pandemic, excluded and disadvantaged Roma communities have been exposed to severe negative health and socioeconomic impacts, which risks further aggravating existing inequalities and the risk of poverty and social exclusion. This Recommendation advocates reducing structural inequalities faced by Roma by tackling, where relevant, limited access by Roma to clean water, sanitary infrastructure and healthcare services, including vaccination services, and the lack of facilities and digital skills that would enable Roma to actively participate in society, including in distance education, as well as by eliminating the high levels of economic precariousness, overcrowded households, segregated settlements or camps”.

The 2021-2030 ten-year Plan by the European Commission in support of Roma and Sinti communities is undoubtedly a mature instrument for any inclusion process started by Member States, as well as a point of reference for relaunching actions to be promoted at national level. The Plan consists of Communication no. 620/2020 “A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation” and of Council Recommendation (COM(2020) 621 – 7.10.2020), which set out a list of measures which Member States need to implement in order to achieve

the inclusion objectives of Roma and Sinti in the EU.

The European plan is focused on seven key intervention sectors: equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health and housing. For each of these key sectors, the European Commission has drafted objectives, recommendations and indicators to suggest intervention priorities and monitoring instruments in respect of the progress made.

Within the framework of the Association Community Pope John XXIII in favour of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy, strengthened and structured as part of the project “Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsyism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities” [co-financed by the Programme “Rights, Equality and Citizenship (2014 – 2020) of the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Municipality of Rimini and the Centre for the Study of Democracy (BG) starting on 1/08/2019], factual descriptions are provided, as well as policy recommendations to policy-makers at European, national and local level. The address the following key areas.

¹ Available at the link:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:785:FIN>

ANTI-GYPSYISM

Factual background

The condition of social exclusion and deterioration, in which many Roma and Sinti groups have been living over the past few decades, has contributed to exacerbating discrimination against these communities, which in turn contributes to reducing possibilities for social inclusion.

The Recommendation from the Council of Europe (2021/C 93/01) defines anti-gypsyism as “an unusually prevalent form of racism, which has its origins in how mainstream society views and treats those considered as ‘gypsies’ in a process of historical ‘othering’, which builds on stereotypes and negative attitudes that may sometimes be unintentional or unconscious”, also pointing out that “Since 2005, the European Parliament has been using the term anti-gypsyism in its reports and resolutions”, considering anti-gypsyism the “root cause of their social exclusion and discrimination”.

Recommendations

- The recommendation here is to introduce policies aimed at fighting discrimination and anti-gypsyism at both European and Member State level. These policies then need to be turned into specific action plans, which can finally be concretely implemented at local level, providing guidelines and clear instruments.
- All victims and potential victims of anti-gypsyism ought to be provided with concrete instruments to report any discrimination, for example reference phone numbers and local contact persons.
- Roma and Sinti groups should be the subject of a wide-ranging information campaign regarding the existence of these instruments and made aware of their possible use.
- At the same time, the action plans should include intensive capillary actions for raising awareness in the public opinion, especially at school level, in order to fight the stereotypes and bias which lead to social exclusion of Roma and Sinti groups.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Factual background

Among the general public and in the media, the presence of Roma and Sinti groups is often associated with the issue of safety, more specifically with possible dangers for everyone’s safety deriving from widespread illegality, micro-criminality, or illegal squatting.

When someone feels uncertain about their legal status, citizenship, housing conditions, access to social rights, and – on the other hand – when they are subject to discriminations, denigration on the workplace, marginalisation by public authorities and stigma by mass media, it is impossible for them to feel reasonably safe about their future and that of their family, thus being possibly forced to resort to unlawful means in order to make a living.

Therefore, discrimination against Roma and Sinti community members and their exclusion are two directly linked situations; this finally leads to a vicious circle which needs to be broken.

Recommendations

- The recommendation here is to approve and implement European Directives, followed by national laws including specific provisions for the recognition and protection of the Roma and Sinti minority groups in Europe, as well as positive social inclusion actions.
- Existing European Union legislation, which regulates the movements and stay of EU citizens, should also include specific forms of application in respect of the Roma and Sinti populations.
- Moreover, it is important to enforce anti-discriminatory regulations, as well as to approve measures aimed at preventing and counteracting discrimination, segregation, or any form of stigma, and which prevent detrimental applications of the said rules in matters of criminal, civil and administrative law, or which in any way regard a person as being dangerous solely on the basis of his or her belonging to the Rom or Sinti minority.

STATELESSNESS AND RIGHT TO CITIZENSHIP

Factual background

APG23 has often had to deal with cases of minors who had not been registered at birth – either children of parents with legal stay permits, or children of parents who were de facto stateless.

The most frequent instances of such situations are among Slav Roma, while among Sinti this seems not to be the case. Of course, this situation of disadvantage and violation of a child's fundamental right may jeopardise the rest of their existence, leading to total marginalisation from the community they live in.

Those parents who choose not to register their children at birth, thus failing to officially state their identity, supposedly mean to protect them from any possible “intrusion” on the part of social services.

In Italy, from a regulatory standpoint, with regard to the definition of the legal status of the Roma, Sinti and Camminanti communities, with Law no. 162/2015, on 29 September 2015, the country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961; nevertheless, there is no organic framework and there are no clearly defined criteria for reference. As for confirmation, there was a more specific definition only in respect of procedures with Law Decree 17 February 2017, no. 13, converted with amendments by Law 13 April 2017, no. 46: it has been stipulated that the competence of “Departments specialising in matters of immigration, international protection and free circulation of citizens in the European Union” should also be extended to disputes regarding confirmation of the statelessness condition.

Through Law Decree no. 69/2013, which was subsequently converted into Law no. 98/2013, the intention was to simplify the process aimed at acquiring citizenship (if the applicant is of the required age and cannot give evidence of having resided in the country in the previous 18 years, due to administrative difficulties which apparently do not depend on them but on the negligence of their parents or of officials in the proper registry offices). However, in Italy, the situation of de facto statelessness still seems to be extremely widespread, and these measures can thus be regarded as totally insufficient, with red tape often proving an insurmountable hindrance.

In October 2015 the Italian Lower House of Parliament passed a bill aimed at reforming the legislation on citizenship to include foreign minors who arrived in Italy before their 12th birthday and who have completed a five-year school cycle. Unfortunately this reform has not yet become law and has not completed the required Parliamentary process.

Recommendations

- Pursuant to Art.7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent (CRC) “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents”. The article further stipulates the following: “States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless”². States are therefore invited to make sure that this right is implemented. The necessary procedures are required to determine the condition of statelessness and to ensure a highly advanced level of protection, especially for children.
- A valuable resource, when searching for the proper solution for questions on the subject of statelessness in the light of international principles, is provided by the “Handbook on the protection of stateless persons” approved in June 2014 by the UNHCR. Section 154 of the Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons stipulates that “protection can only be considered available in another country when a stateless person: – is able to acquire or reacquire nationality through a simple, rapid, and non-discretionary procedure, which is a mere formality”. An excellent example in this regard is offered by legislation recently approved by Costa Rica on the subject of statelessness.³
- Finally the recommendation is that de facto stateless persons should be treated, as far as possible, also from a regulatory standpoint, as stateless persons de iure, in order to allow them to acquire citizenship by law.

² <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>

³ <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5714e0f14.html>

RIGHT TO HOUSING AND FORCED EVICTIONS

Factual background

We very often see forced evictions which – even though they have been authorised by local authorities – may actually constitute a violation of fundamental human rights. More specifically the risk here is violating fundamental rights of children, depriving them – in one split second – of things they are attached to and of familiar spaces which, although in disrepair, are their home. Besides, for many children, eviction means that they stop going to school.

In addition, evictions increase the risk of exacerbating resistance and resentment by the Roma communities in respect of the non-Roma population, as well as worsening the vulnerability conditions of the persons concerned.

Recommendations

- Forced eviction should represent the last resort available to local bodies to overcome the problem of overcrowding and disrepair of settlements.
- Local authorities should plan and implement alternative measures to encourage people to leave authorised and informal settlements, creating concrete opportunities to move into conventional housing, or making available authorized and equipped micro-areas where Roma and Sinti groups can preserve their cultural identity, at the same time living in conditions which are dignified and not degrading.
- These two alternatives to settlement should include mentoring paths, enabled by local authorities through suitably trained cultural mediators and in partnership with local associations.
- If forced evictions still remain the only option, then it is necessary to avoid inhumane and degrading measures which breach fundamental rights of individuals, most notably of children.
Article 16 of CRC reads “...no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, or home..”. Evictions need to be preceded by cultural mediation interventions by suitably trained practitioners. These mediators could support Roma and Sinti groups, to help them understand what is happening and to help any minor not to experience the moment of eviction as an intrusion which is an end to itself, so that they may better grasp what is happening.

CHILD PROTECTION

Factual background

The Roma family, by its very nature, is founded on social rules which are different from those of mainstream European families, based on cultural principles and traditions very distant from European concepts. Having said that, it is easy to see how, in specific conditions of distress, the boundary of respect for the universally acknowledged rights of children may be crossed. Regrettably, the necessary networking to intervene in these situations is not always implemented. In our experience we notice that sometimes the discussion is limited to a verbal exchange between volunteers and local bodies. Moreover, in the case of minors not officially registered as living in Italy, or as residents in the Municipality where they live, authorities fail to intervene.

Difficulties arise when these essential interventions cannot be implemented, regrettably, due to lack of funds: sometimes cuts are made to social expenditure by local bodies with budget difficulties; in other cases, they are due to the fact that – when assisting a Roma or Sinti child – assistance is actually provided to a whole community, or at least to a whole family, with the ensuing economic resource management difficulties.

In a Roma or Sinti household there are often more than two children and, in addition, assistance may easily be extended to the whole family, not just to the household, because family interactions go well beyond the concept of household typical of our culture. There may be, in the same home and in a limited space, family members living together who are related in various ways.

Recommendations

- In cases where the best interest of the child is not always protected, the intervention by social services, through monitoring and support activities, is essential and should be provided promptly.
- This intervention can be guaranteed in a leaner way through effective networking between local bodies and associations; it is therefore advisable that each local body should establish a permanent forum with any local association working to support Roma and Sinti communities, to enable monitoring actions and deal with any risk situations.
- Another recommendation is to draft and implement protocols which entail assisting not just the individual child but the whole family, taking into account the specific features of family connections within Roma and Sinti groups.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Factual background

The available official data regarding the level of education of Roma and Sinti is insufficient. Nevertheless, field studies confirm that a very high number of minors from Roma and Sinti communities drop out of school. This situation was made even worse by the Covid-19 pandemic which has made it impossible for a very large number of the poorest Roma and Sinti families to guarantee their children's access to education via distance learning.

Recommendations

Adequate education is one of the strongholds for members of the Roma and Sinti communities to break the vicious circle of poverty, social and economic exclusion or precariousness. As the school is the primary meeting and relationship place for Roma or Sinti children and their peers; every effort should be made to ensure they have access to education.

- The recommendation here is to increase the intervention by cultural mediators who can help the approach to education by Roma and Sinti families. It is worth noting that it would be advisable to hire cultural mediators of Roma and Sinti ethnic origin, rather than any language mediators. It has been noted that schools often hire language mediators based on the country Roma or Sinti children come from, but the latter often do not speak the language of the country in question.
- It seems advisable to draft a specific educational pact for Roma and Sinti children to be shared primarily with their families, making sure that the latter is divulged, approved and supported by the said families. The said pact could include the following:
 1. consider ORALITY in school curriculums as a privileged form of communication, with a view to harnessing collective narrative and history;
 2. organise welcoming projects, not just during the first weeks of the school year, but rather characterised as “welcoming classrooms” for the whole school year;
 3. organise language workshops which are aimed at harnessing oral culture, also with a view to “preserving” the ROMANES language as a valuable expression of cultural identity.

- Last but not least, the recommendation is to conduct campaigns aimed at raising awareness and mentoring Roma and Sinti households, with a view to enabling access for Roma and Sinti minors to child education services. Pre-school pathways, in turn, would thus become instruments to facilitate subsequent enrolling in school and to consolidate the connection between families and school communities.

It is essential to establish standards for the social promotion of members of the Roma and Sinti community, rejecting any action to reduce State support liability, in order to implement both the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁴, and the numerous recommendations of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the institutions of the European Union, which set out objectives and instruments for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti in the following sectors: assistance for large families; access to credit for the purchase of a home, access to education, including at higher levels; access to health and social services, as well as to employment and vocational training sector, promotion and use of cultural expressions.

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⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/at-a-glance>



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