

Grundtvig-Lernpartnerschaft 2010-2012

Roma-Integration in Europe (ROMA.SINTI.EU) 2010-1-PL1-GRU06-11414-4

Grundtvig Memorandum

Lodz, 28. Mai 2012, all partners

Grundtvig Partnerships can and do influence change in practice, but the new relationships and collaboration are beginnings... not ends in themselves.

Joint work that challenges thinking and practice is the critical core of any collaboration. It matters what people do when they come together in a network. Such networks impact on students when there is rigour and challenge to the collaborative work. Joint work which challenges thinking and practice is not easy. It requires people to be honest, transparent and willing to examine their own beliefs and current ways of doing things. This Grundtvig partnership has had challenges and disagreements, but hopefully this Memorandum will offer some insights on a way forward in working with the Roma communities across Europe.

The terms 'Roma' describe many different and distinct groups across Europe. Roma can be nomadic or partly nomadic or settled. Ethnically or culturally people may belong to Roma communities, even if they do not travel. Whether settled or nomadic, Roma communities can often be isolated from other communities and from mainstream service provision and viewed with suspicion in the areas where they live.

Why work with Roma communities?

- Many minority groups have low levels of attainment in education, but the Roma have the lowest level of attainment of any groups
- No ethnic group in European society labours as much under the burden of stereotypes and generalisations as Roma. Racism and anti-ziganism is prevalent and on the increase in many EU countries, as political groups target them as scapegoats for various social and economic ills e.g. crime and benefit fraud.
- There are significant issues of Health, Education, Housing and Labour together with gender roles affecting the lives of Roma communities adversely.

- The migration of Roma offers new challenges across Europe as Eastern European Roma begin to travel westwards and this is prompting racist and violent reactions within frustrating, difficult economic times.

A definition of cohesion and integration:

- Cohesion is principally the process that must happen in *all* communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together;
- Integration is principally the process that ensures that existing residents and newer residents adapt to one another.

One of the outcomes of this project is that there is a difference between Integration, which means that the minority should adapt to the majority and Inclusion, which means that the majority should be open to a wider variety of different lifestyles and assure all rights are available to the minority.

An inclusive and cohesive society is one where:

- there is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment

Social cohesion within any EU communities requires these three key principles:

1. A framework of rights and responsibilities, that creates a sense of citizenship and the obligations that go with membership of a community
2. An emphasis on mutual respect and civility is fundamental to creating inclusion and cohesion
3. Visible social justice, prioritising transparency, fairness and trust

In practice this means:

- There is a strong sense of trust in local institutions to act fairly
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools, leisure facilities and other institutions within neighbourhoods.

Issues:

1) Access to education

Segregation within Educational institutions is not a positive experience for children- Also it can be difficult when communities are travelling, leading to interrupted learning. Roma children often face racism and bullying when they do attend school. They may need extra encouragement and support to help them with admission and maintaining a regular attendance. Very low numbers of Roma children of secondary age are regularly in school. It is essential to raise the achievement of Roma pupils.

Parents fear that school may introduce their children to drugs and difficult relationships with non-Roma and can even affect the way they speak and see themselves. Parents can also see schools as places where their children will be bullied and abused.

Whose aspirations?

After hundreds of years of hostility from various societies Roma communities have grown accustomed to providing for itself in order to survive. The fact that Roma still exist as distinct communities, with their own separate languages and culture, is a testament to their ability to adapt and thrive under the worst conditions. They have been able to do this by taking on a lot of the responsibilities that the state often assumes for others.

Roma are able to educate themselves in their vocational ways, police their community, care for and house themselves. They look to each other for help.

Roma may have distinct advantages to living together within society. Roma communities are places where people feel safe. In many cases they require nothing at all from statutory service providers and just want to be left alone.

What they are seeking though is Equality. Equality in the criminal justice system, by the police, in housing, health, labour and the planning systems, together with equal treatment by the education system has to be mainstreamed. The standard experience of the police has usually been when they are in an enforcement role against Roma. Training of such officials would increase their understanding and obligations under Equality legislation.

Equality must be the goal of anybody, who is sympathetic to the needs of Roma. It is not enough simply to 'tolerate' Roma culture, but rather to celebrate it – there is a long tradition of music and arts with many Roma becoming famous for their accomplishments, however we should be aware of stereotyping.

History

Various communities have begun to acknowledge the tragedy of the Porrajmos (Holocaust). The remembrance of all kinds of atrocities enables society to move forward having acknowledged the pain caused historically. To do more, service providers should seek to compliment the Roma culture and way of life rather than attempt to substitute it, they could foster pride and knowledge in its heritage, perhaps by supporting Gypsy History across Europe.

Informing the community

Roma cannot access official services if information about them is provided in a format they do not understand. For many elder Roma, children and young people, who cannot (or choose not to) read and write, written information is useless. CDs and DVDs may be more appropriate, however many Roma are actively engaged on the Internet and utilize social networking sites e.g. Savvy Chavvy.co.uk,

Obligations:

We all have a duty to promote equality of outcomes and to fight racism and discrimination.

In particular, local authorities should consider how they work with the local media to ensure that their reporting of Roma issues are balanced and non-inflammatory. You should encourage the media to correct any false or negative stereotypes.

Accommodation:

The exclusion of Roma is often linked, although not confined to Housing issues.

Travelling Roma can find it difficult to maintain continuity in accessing service provision, when moving from place to place and without a formal address it can be difficult to register with schools or health services. We urge official services to find solutions for this issue.

Where Roma lack suitable accommodation, this can underline their exclusion still further. A person is homeless if they have Accommodation, but if it consists of a moveable structure and there is no place where they are entitled or permitted to place it or live in. This means that people on unauthorised places, if they have no alternatives, are homeless.

Practical steps

- Ensure that all service provision is culturally acceptable and accessible to Roma.
- Consult with local Roma communities. Consider various imaginative ways to do so – some Roma for example communicate face to face.
- Roma communities may be suspicious about established authority, particularly if their only contact with agencies such as the Police has been through evictions from unauthorised sites. We would urge authorities to widen their recruitment and representation policies.
- We would urge all authorities to create temporary stopping places for travelling people.
- Roma communities could be encouraged to organise themselves into representing their concerns to local agencies.
- Advocacy and capacity building are probably two of the biggest current needs for Roma in local authority services.
- Ensure that Roma have their dignity and traditions respected by others and have the same reasonable expectations placed upon them as any other citizen.

Authorities are encouraged to:

- Monitor racist, religious and criminal incidents closely and take action to resolve tensions that may follow
- Counter rumours and scaremongering with myth-busting strategies
- Work with local media to ensure that reporting of local issues is balanced and does not exacerbate tensions
- Work closely especially with young people in the community from different faith and cultural groups

Communication is key

- Representation on a political level by Roma is to be encouraged to offer a voice to local groups.
- There is a rising awareness amongst Roma and the wider community of the opportunity to access funding for development and their involvement should be encouraged, but within a framework that discourages individuals from 'maintaining' current issues, so that funding continues to flow, rather than creating sustainable development.
- It is important to consider how communication is made and what achievement is measured. Success is a multi-faceted concept, which means different things to different people within any society. An individual may be financially successful, but socially, emotionally and intellectually lacking. The development must reflect the wishes Roma themselves.
- Ethnic minority staffing is seriously under-represented at all levels within Education, Health, Police, local authorities and Military functions across the EU and this should be addressed to reflect the overall make up of society.