

European guidelines for ensuring incusion of Romani children into educational system

Ljubljana, 2017

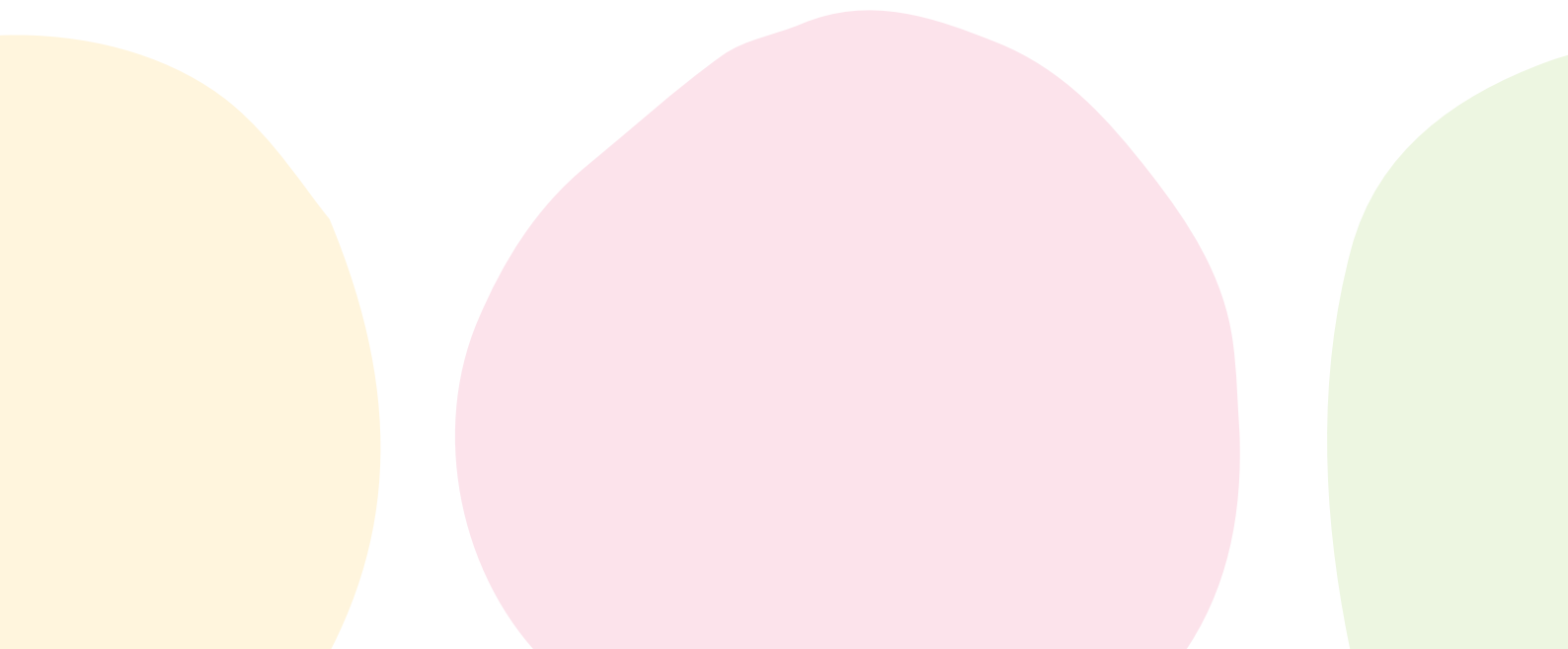


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Introduction: Romani and Education



The Roma are one of the oldest and largest ethnic groups in Europe. They do not have a country of their own, but they live in practically all the countries of Europe and Central Asia. They originate from northern India and, according to existing information, came to Europe in “migration waves” between the 9th and 14th century (Crowe in McDonald et al. 2001, p. 17). The number of Roma in Europe is estimated at 10 to 12 million. Historically speaking they were always victims of discrimination, xenophobia, and exclusion, and are also one of the poorest people in Europe. Despite many political initiatives in the last two decades the living and working conditions of Roma have not improved much and they have remained socially, economically, and geographically marginalized, while Romani children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups (Ghent, Tankersley, 2009).

Even though the level of education of Romani children and adults varies depending on the country, as well as whether they are in an urban or suburban area, about 50 percent of Romani children (apart from some rare exceptions) in Europe do not finish elementary school. Studies show, however, that in the long term a low level of education is one of the central issues in ensuring the social inclusion of Roma since the lack of education constitutes an obstacle when searching for and finding employment, creating a healthy lifestyle, and actively integrating into society. Due to these reasons education is proven to be the main concern with respect to Roma (Vonta et al., 2011). Representatives of this minority that have acquired elementary education have more possibilities to engage in the economic development of the country they live in, as well as more opportunities to engage in decision-making concerning matters within their communities and society as a whole (Kirlova, Repaire, 2003, p. 3).

All European countries with Roma population face problems regarding the exclusion of Romani children from the educational system. In her work Macura-Milovanović supports her explanations concerning factors that cause such a state by referring to a special United Nation's publication about children, entitled *Barriers to the Education of Roma in Europe*, which clarifies many co-dependent factors for such a situation: the racism of non-Romani parents who oppose the enrolment of Romani children in schools; the discriminatory practice of educational authorities and the bureaucratic process connected with school enrolment; the poverty of the Roma, which prevents them from financing schooling; the social and physical exclusion of Roma from processes in society; and living in segregated and ghettoized settlements, which are located far from schools (Macura-Milovanović 2006).

Kirlova and Repaire (2003) also observe that there are numerous obstacles preventing the inclusion of Romani children in schools and education in general, and they draw attention to political and institutional issues, social and economic factors, as well as cultural barriers relating to traditions and the organization of education systems. In this context it is important to ensure or to create schools that would be inclusive institutions and, as such, would focus on the social structure of obstacles with respect to learning and participation, which depend on the dynamics of social interaction (Lesar 2010).

If we strive to create inclusive schools, we must ensure that the curriculum, teaching methods, the atmosphere in class and school, the ways of establishing and maintaining discipline, means of delivering punishment, etc. are not exclusive for any pupil. In this respect the role of a teacher is of extreme importance, as teachers are the ones who are in everyday contact with pupils coming from different backgrounds, families, cultures, and even different nationalities, who perhaps speak a different language, and so on. In this context every teacher should be able to exercise a high level of responsibility and consideration for each and every pupil, as common schooling contributes to the development of open societies and individuals who can live in mutual

respect and cooperation with different people (ibid). With respect to creating schools that would be inclusive institutions and to creating practices that would enable the establishment of an inclusive environment to the largest possible extent we must be aware of the obligation imposed by numerous international documents. Next we shall introduce some of the key documents and worldwide movements that aim to ensure equal possibilities regarding education for everyone, including representatives of the Romani community.

Efforts to provide equal opportunities for education for all

International organizations, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, continuously affirm the importance of and advocate the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal access to education. The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) constituted an important progress in assuring the rights of every child to survival, development, protection, and engagement from the beginning of the child's life onwards. Both organizations, along with many other countries, which are bound by the Legislative and Policy Framework for Roma Education, support integrating in the education system all marginalized children and children who are in any way excluded, including Romani children.

UNESCO underlines key areas that should be given special attention with regard to making efforts to improve conditions for the inclusion of Romani children in early childhood programs and for their later inclusion in high-quality elementary education programs. In this respect UNESCO highlights the importance of developing personal trust in Romani parents and influential representatives of the Roma community, of establishing a positive attitude of schools and employers with regard to training Romani teacher assistants, teachers, and school staff, of ensuring institutional support and training for Romani NGOs concerning effective advocacy, of including Romani NGOs in broader regional and national activities and campaigns, as well as of strengthening individual countries' networking in order to influence policies at the national and European level. UNESCO also emphasizes networking with other institutions so as to establish comprehensive consideration and create conditions for the development of the future Romani leaders of national and international movements, ensure the just application of laws, and promote the integration of Romani women in public institutions and their inclusion in decision-making processes (Vonta, et al, 2011).

The European Union and its member states have expressed their intentions with respect to eliminating poverty, rejecting discrimination, and reducing the social exclusion of minorities, including the Roma. These objectives are proven with numerous documents referring to Roma issues, including matters concerning the rights of Roma and their inclusion. Many smaller-scale initiatives, planned to improve the economic status and the social inclusion of Roma, were also launched, but there is no systematic overview of the results that these initiatives were supposed to ensure. To stimulate and achieve progress with regard to improving the status of Roma in Europe we had to go beyond previous declarations and create appropriate measures to improve the economic status and promote the social inclusion of Roma. These measures should include clear national objectives regarding progress, a regular review of achievements with respect to objectives, and the sharing of experience about the best strategies and approaches to improving the economic status and social inclusion of Roma that prove to be efficient in a certain environment. To achieve the best results the process of creating national objectives should be inclusive, able to ensure the cooperation of every participant, and based on the needs and capabilities of each country (Vonta, et al, 2011).

Decade of Roma inclusion

The Decade of Roma Inclusion has ended in 2015. Has it brought the expected results? The OSF estimates¹ that is not the case:

“The Decade of Roma Inclusion has ended. This unprecedented collaboration between 12 European countries, encouraged by the World Bank and the Open Society Foundations, started in 2005 in Sofia, Bulgaria. At that time, the prime ministers of these countries made a promise to “close the gaps between Roma and the rest of society,” and committed their domestic public institutions to fulfill this promise by 2015.

Did governments deliver on the promise? In short, no. The Roma Inclusion Index shows some progress in literacy levels, completion of primary education, and access to health insurance. But all in all, the daily life of Roma remains a struggle no other ethnic group in Europe faces.

On average, in the decade countries, only one in ten Roma completes secondary school, almost half of Roma are unemployed, and more than one in three Roma still live in absolute poverty, meaning they are severely deprived of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health care, and shelter.

One change is noticeable: when the decade began, there was less money and more political will to deliver; today there is more money, but less political will.

The decade, the EU Framework, and EU funds are not without merit. They might help in raising awareness about challenges and

¹ <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/why-europe-s-roma-decade-didn-t-lead-inclusion>

possibilities for change, but they should not serve as fig leaves for governments to conceal their lack of commitment at home. Such international interventions and funds can help only if they expand participation in sharing domestic political power and public budgets beyond the narrow elites.”

In 2003 the first regional conference on the Roma issues at the highest level took place in Budapest, entitled “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future”.

Before the conference the World Bank conducted a study on the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe entitled “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle”, which showed the following:

- The Roma are the largest and the fastest growing minority in Europe, as well as the most vulnerable group at risk of poverty in countries in middle and eastern Europe.
- The Roma are poorer than other inhabitants and are more liable to fall into poverty and stay poor.
- The Roma’s poverty is multi-layered and is due to a low level of education, inappropriate living conditions, and poor health, which lead to a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion; in the early 1990s the Roma were often the first employees to be dismissed and they were constantly prevented from re-entering the job market.
- Numerous Romani children do not attend school and many are educated in segregated schools.
- The Roma have shorter lifespans than the average in the countries where they live.
- Social and cultural factors influence the access to social services providers and interactions with them.

The conference participants were unanimous – such facts have no place in the 21st century and it is necessary to provide the Roma with better life conditions and ensure their inclusion in broader society. These goals are supposed to be achieved with the international initiative “The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.” (Vonta et al, 2011).

The latest European guidelines for ensuring the successful inclusion of the Roma

It is a fact that after the expansion of the European Union between 2004 and 2007 the Roma community constitutes one of the largest ethnic minorities in the EU. Despite this the Roma are still faced with economic, social, and political discrimination, which is unacceptable for modern Europe. In December 2007 the EU member state leaders agreed for the first time that Roma throughout the EU are facing very specific issues, and therefore appealed to all member states and the European Union itself to improve their situation in every respect. They observed that the situation of the Roma is far worse than the circumstances other ethnic minorities deal with. In 2007 a group of experts for the social integration of ethnic minorities and their full engagement in the job market identified 14 barriers that representatives of ethnic minorities face when seeking employment – the Roma encounter almost every one of them (Vonta et al, 2011).

The European Commission report dated July 2008 states that the situation of the Roma is characterized by constant discrimination both on individual and institutional level, as well as long-lasting social exclusion. With the purpose of improving this state the European Commission decided to organize summits regarding the Roma (the European Roma Summit) that bring together the representatives of European institutions, national governments, civil society, and Roma organizations. The first summit took place in September 2008 and the second one in April 2010 (Vonta et al, 2011).

1 The EU Platform for Roma Inclusion



The European Union and the European Commission make various efforts for a more successful social inclusion of the Roma (legislative framework, European structural funds, EURoma Network, financing politics and EU projects, European Roma summits, European platform for Roma inclusion, various research and studies, as well as cooperation with the Romani civil society and international organizations). The first meeting of the *“European Platform for Roma inclusion”* on 24 April 2009 in Prague, which was dedicated to exchanging best practices and experience with regard to Roma inclusion between members states, ensuring analytical support, and encouraging the cooperation of all parties involved in the Roma issue, including the organizations that represent the Roma within the common European platform, resulted in the *10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion*. These common basic principles serve as guidelines for EU institutions, member states, candidate countries, and potential candidates with regard to creating and implementing new policies or activities. The common basic principles on 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 Roma.

In the context of these principles member states should try to improve or to ameliorate the situation of Roma in the European Union, where the most effort should particularly be put into the education, employment, health, and living conditions of Roma.

The last meeting within the European platform (Brussels, November 2017) was dedicated to discussions about challenges related to the transition of Romani children and youth from education to employment. REYN (Romani Early Years Network) expressed concerns as hardly any attention was paid to the childcare and education of the youngest children, and to the recognition of the importance of providing access to high-quality programs for the youngest children²:

“The EU Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017 mainly focused on Roma people and the job market. Discrimination was recognized as being a main obstacle for Roma, others pointed out that more efforts are needed to equalize opportunities in education. It was hardly mentioned, however, that young people’s success starts with education at birth.

The main topic of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017, was the “transition from education to employment”. As the *EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová*, highlighted, Europe cannot afford to let the young Roma not fulfill their potential.

There was a general understanding at the meeting that the disadvantage at the labor market is rooted in the lack of quality education. *Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, Head of Department for Equality and Citizens Rights at the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)*, asked: “Can anyone claim that segregated education can provide people with the skills for today’s competitive world?” Unfortunately, the situation of the youngest children was hardly discussed.

² http://www.reyn.eu/news_posts/eu-platform-roma-inclusion-2017-missed-chance-childrens-education/

The event also failed to recognize that the best education starts at birth. As the evidence shows, the brain reaches its development peak at one year of age, and it is in the first years of life that education has the most impact on a person's life.

If the EU wants Romani and Traveller young people to be freed from the vicious cycle of poverty and to develop their full potential, the answer is affordable quality education and care at birth."

2

An EU
Framework
for National
Roma integration
Strategy up
to 2020



Among those EU documents that are especially directed toward the integration and education of the Romani population the paper *“An EU Framework for National Roma integration Strategy up to 2020”* (European Commission, 2011a)³ deserves special attention.

The EU Framework for National Roma integration strategies centres around four key areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing. With regard to education, which is one of the four key strategic areas, the document pursues the goal that every Romani child should at least complete elementary education.

Concerning the key area of education we hereby summarize the document as follows:

“Educational achievement within the Roma population is much lower than the rest of the population, although the situation differs among Member States.

While primary school attendance is compulsory in all Member States, Member States have a duty to ensure that primary education is available to all children at the compulsory ages. According to the best available evidence from the Labour Force Survey 2009, an average of 97.5% of children completes primary education across the EU.

Surveys suggest that in some Member States, only a limited number of Roma children complete primary school. Roma children tend to be over-represented in special education and segregated schools. There is a need to strengthen links with communities through

³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1444910104414&uri=CELEX:52011DC0173>

cultural/school mediators, churches, religious associations or communities and through active participation of the parents of Roma, to improve the intercultural competences of teachers, to reduce segregation and to ensure compliance with the duty to primary school attendance. The Commission plans a joint action with the Council of Europe to train about 1000 mediators over two years. Mediators can inform and advise parents on the workings of the local education system, and help to ensure that children make the transition between each stage of their school career.

It is well known that children who miss out on, enter late into the school system, or leave too early will subsequently experience significant difficulties, ranging from illiteracy and language problems to feelings of exclusion and inadequacy. As a result, they will have a harder time getting into further education, university or a good job. Therefore, initiatives of second chance programmes for drop-out young adults are encouraged, including programmes with an explicit focus on Roma children. Support should also be given to reform teachers' training curricula and to elaborate innovative teaching methods. Attendance of multiply disadvantaged children requires a cross-sectoral cooperation and appropriate support programmes. The High Level Group on Literacy and the Literacy Campaign the Commission is launching as a contribution to the Europe 2020 flagship "New Skills and Jobs" will stress the importance of combating illiteracy among Roma children and adults.

The Commission adopted a Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care which highlighted that participation rates of Roma children are significantly lower, although their needs for support are greater. Increased access to high quality non-segregated early childhood education can play a key role in overcoming the educational disadvantage faced by Roma children, as highlighted by pilot actions on Roma integration currently underway in some Member States with contributions from the EU budget.

This is why Member States should ensure that all Roma children have access to quality education and are not subject to discrimination or segregation, regardless of whether they are sedentary or not. Member States should, as a minimum, ensure primary school completion. They should also widen access to quality early childhood education and care and reduce the number of early school leavers from secondary education pursuant to the Europe 2020 strategy. Roma youngsters should be strongly encouraged to participate also in secondary and tertiary education.

The Commission produces annual reports (until 2020), using information from each country, as well as from NGOs, international organisations and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.”

As part of the Europe 2020 strategy for development the European Commission also adopted a special document regarding preschool children – *“Early Childhood Education and Care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow”* (European Commission, 2011b). The European Commission thereby mentions not only access to and the scope of activities for preschool children, but also stresses the importance of high-quality activities for children since their birth to their inclusion in obligatory education, which is an important basis for successful lifelong learning, social inclusion, personal development and employability later on.

The document states: ECEC has an important role in reducing the rate of leaving school, and so key challenges as well as possible solutions in this field should be highlighted in Member States’ National Reform Programmes to address the Europe 2020 priorities. “The need to learn from good practice and experience across the EU, and so improve the quality of policy in ECEC, is pressing”.

Proposed issues for policy cooperation among Member States are:

ACCESS TO ECEC

- Using ECEC effectively to support inclusion and to reduce early school leaving;
- Widening access to quality ECEC for disadvantaged children, migrants, Roma children (such as incentives for participation for disadvantaged families, adapting provision to the needs of families and increasing accessibility and affordability);
- Collecting evidence on the advantages and impact of universal versus targeted provision;
- Designing efficient funding models and the right balance of public and private investment.

QUALITY OF ECEC

- Finding the appropriate balance in the curriculum between cognitive and noncognitive elements;
- Promoting the professionalisation of ECEC staff: what qualifications are needed for which functions;
- Developing policies to attract, educate and retain suitably qualified staff to ECEC;
- Improving the gender balance of ECEC staff;
- Moving towards ECEC systems which integrate care and education, and improve quality, equity and system efficiency;
- Facilitating the transition of young children between family and education/care, and between levels of education;
- Ensuring quality assurance: designing coherent, well-coordinated pedagogical frameworks, involving key stakeholders.

IN SUPPORT, THE COMMISSION WILL

- Promote the identification and exchange of good policies and practices through the Open Method of Coordination on Education and Training with Member States (ET2020);
- Support the development of innovative approaches by developing transnational projects and networks under the Lifelong Learning Programme;
- Provide support for research into these areas under the 7th Framework Programme on Research and Development;
- Encourage Member States to invest in these areas through the Structural Funds, in particular through support for the training of staff and for the development of accessible infrastructure.

3

Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care



An important document, created by the European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (2012-2014), is the *“Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care”*. The document was created so as to improve, monitor, and evaluate the quality of early childhood education and care systems. The group identified and analysed success criteria of effective policies to develop guidance for national policy makers. It focused on five main aspects of quality in early childhood education and care: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, governance and funding. Five key aspects are described below:

ACCESS

- Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children: The potential benefits of high quality universal provision are particularly significant for children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups. ECEC provision should be made available from birth to the age at which children start compulsory primary school. To respond to parental circumstances and encourage all families to use ECEC services, provision needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the programme.
- Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity: Successful inclusion in ECEC is based on: a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of ECEC which involves local organisations and community groups; approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents; an assurance that all children and families are welcome in an ECEC setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use ECEC services; a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value ECEC services and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected – this

training can be supported by parenting programmes which promote ECEC; by close cooperation between the staff in ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector.

WORKFORCE

- Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role: Recognising the ECEC workforce as professionals is key. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children's outcomes. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.) helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.
- Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents: Good working conditions benefit staff and contribute to their retention. Policy measures affect the structural quality of ECEC provision including locally-determined arrangements on the size of a group; children to adult ratios; working hours, and wage levels which can help to make employment in an ECEC context an attractive option. Good working conditions can also reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in ECEC.

CURRICULUM

- A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way: Children's education and care as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development are important. The curriculum should set common goals, values and approaches which reflect society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECEC settings in encouraging children's development towards their full potential. All children are active and capable learn-

ers whose diverse competences are supported by the curriculum. At the same time the implementation of the curriculum needs to be planned within an open framework which acknowledges and addresses the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic manner. A well-balanced combination of education and care can promote children's well-being, positive self-image, physical development and their social and cognitive development. Children's experiences and their active participation are valued, and the significance of learning through play is understood and supported.

- A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice: A curriculum is an important instrument to stimulate the creation of a shared understanding and trust between children; and between children, parents and ECEC staff in order to encourage development and learning. At a system or national level a curriculum can guide the work of all ECEC settings and contexts – and at a local or setting level, it can describe the practices and priorities in the context of each centre. An essential factor in developing a collaborative approach to the curriculum is the ability of individual staff to analyse their own practice, identify what has been effective and, in partnership with their colleagues, develop new approaches based on evidence. The quality of ECEC is enhanced when staff discuss the implementation of the curriculum within the context of their centre/setting and take account of the needs of the children, their parents and the team. The curriculum can enhance this approach by promoting children's learning through experimentation and innovation; and encouraging cooperation with parents on how ECEC provision contributes to supporting children's development and learning.

EVALUATION/MONITORING

- Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice: Systematic

monitoring of ECEC allows for the generation of appropriate information and feedback at the relevant local, regional or national level. This information should support open exchange, coherent planning, review, evaluation and the development of ECEC in the pursuit of high quality at all levels in the system. Monitoring and evaluation is more effective when the information collected at a provider level is aligned with the information collected at a municipal, regional and system level.

- Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice: Systematic monitoring of ECEC allows for the generation of appropriate information and feedback at the relevant local, regional or national level. This information should support open exchange, coherent planning, review, evaluation and the development of ECEC in the pursuit of high quality at all levels in the system. Monitoring and evaluation is more effective when the information collected at a provider level is aligned with the information collected at a municipal, regional and system level.

GOVERNANCE/FUNDING

- Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations: Given the cross-sectoral nature of ECEC provision government, stakeholders and social partners need to work together to secure the success of ECEC services. Legislation, regulation and guidance can be used to create clear expectations about the importance of collaborative working which supports high quality outcomes for children, families and local communities.
- Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders:

Structural or legislative arrangements support access to ECEC by giving families the right to access affordable ECEC provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of ECEC recognise that providing additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups can be an effective strategy for increasing access especially for children from migrant, disadvantaged or low-income families. Monitoring the uptake of ECEC ensures that funding is used effectively. In order to make progress towards universal entitlement to provision measures to emphasise the attractiveness and value of ECEC services need to be in place.

4 EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child



The next important EU document is *“EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child”* (European Commission, 2011), which was created by the European Commission and which proposes 11 actions for the promotion of children’s rights and their wellbeing. In this context the document stresses the special attention that should be paid to Romani children, as they are a group of children that is at an especially high risk.

An important basis for programmes intended for Romani children is also the document *“Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”* (Commission Recommendation, 2013), which was created within the Social Investment Package and which points out the issues regarding inequality and the urgency of such measures, which would reduce children’s level of risk. The Recommendation calls for a children’s rights approach and integrated strategies based on three pillars:

- access to adequate resources;
- access to affordable quality services; and
- children’s right to participate.

Appendix: Additional readings

Early childhood exclusion strikes harder than pessimists thought⁴

REYN's comments regarding the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma – Selected findings; a European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) report

Earlier this week, the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) published a report showing that only half of Romani children attend early childhood education. This is rather alarming as such, but what is even more important is that it only took into account children attending preschool (four years of age to age of compulsory education). Looking at particular countries, numbers are still alarming – for instance, with just 28% of Romani children attending preschool in Greece, while the national average reaches 84%.

The report *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma – Selected findings* presents findings from nearly 8,000 face-to-face interviews with Roma, and their households, accounting for almost 34,000 persons. It has been highlighted during the launch of the report that the data needs to be interpreted carefully as it relied on self-identification of interviewees. Still, the findings present a very clear, yet very negative image of situation of Roma in nine EU member states – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain.

⁴ http://www.reyn.eu/news_posts/early-childhood-exclusion-strikes-harder-pessimists-thought/

Here is one major finding: only half of Romani children attend pre-schools. Unfortunately, the study does not specify how many children from Roma families have access to other forms of early childhood education and care, at younger age in particular. In many countries, education systems for children under three years of age are not well developed and are often inaccessible to most Romani families, especially those in excluded neighbourhoods, camps and ghettos.

At Romani Early Years Network (REYN), we work with comprehensive understanding of early childhood development. REYN is concerned about the situation of Romani children and their families as depicted by the study. FRA has also found that 80% of Roma families surveyed are at risk of poverty (EU average is 17%): 30% live in households with no tap water. One third of Romani children grow up in households where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month. In Romania and Bulgaria, countries with the largest Roma populations in Europe, only 45% or 54% respectively have health insurance coverage.

The situation is clearly not positive. But what is the most worrying? These findings are from member states of the European Union, the most productive economy of the world. With vast majority of EU Roma facing risks of poverty there is no reason to be optimistic about countries below EU economic indicators. In poor countries, Roma are the poorer. When medical care is not available, it is definitely not available to Roma.

We all know that systemic measures are lagging behind, even where good practices exist. And we know that there is a need for more advocacy efforts at all levels. It is crucial to make use of data in our efforts. At REYN we benefit from a wide network of practitioners who use data and case studies to bring change at local level. And that makes our evidence based advocacy stronger.

Why Europe's "Roma Decade" Didn't Lead to Inclusion⁵

OSF's thoughts on the achievements concerning the Decade of Roma project

The Decade of Roma Inclusion has ended. This unprecedented collaboration between 12 European countries, encouraged by the World Bank and the Open Society Foundations, started in 2005 in Sofia, Bulgaria. At that time, the prime ministers of these countries made a promise to "close the gaps between Roma and the rest of society," and committed their domestic public institutions to fulfill this promise by 2015.

Did governments deliver on the promise? In short, no. The Roma Inclusion Index shows some progress in literacy levels, completion of primary education, and access to health insurance. But all in all, the daily life of Roma remains a struggle no other ethnic group in Europe faces.

On average, in the decade countries, only one in ten Roma completes secondary school, almost half of Roma are unemployed, and more than one in three Roma still live in absolute poverty, meaning they are severely deprived of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health care, and shelter.

One change is noticeable: when the decade began, there was less money and more political will to deliver; today there is more money, but less political will.

How did this happen? One contributing factor is, paradoxically, the accession of Eastern European countries to the European Union. Ten years ago, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania saw the decade as an opportunity to demonstrate their

⁵ <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/why-europe-s-roma-decade-didn-t-lead-inclusion>

fulfillment of EU accession criteria on human and minority rights. As they were granted membership in the EU, the decade quickly lost its relevance for them.

Another influence was the financial crisis, which brought with it anger and economic anxiety. Against this backdrop, a backlash ensued against governments and the EU committing millions of euros “for Roma.” Opportunistic politicians quickly realized the potential of empty slogans like “Gypsy criminality,” “Roma privilege,” and “unwillingness to integrate” to gain quick and cheap votes. Others realized they risked losing votes if they did anything positive for Roma.

This toxic mix increased opposition to Roma children in ethnic-majority schools and Roma families living in ethnic-majority neighborhoods. Anti-Roma riots, forced evictions, violence, and killings became part of life for Roma—particularly in Hungary and Bulgaria, where the decade was born. The economic crisis catalyzed anti-Gypsyism as an effective weapon in domestic politics.

In western EU countries, the fear of Roma immigration coupled with long-entrenched anti-Roma stereotypes fueled antimigration and anti-EU politics. Mainstream political parties, wary of far-right electoral gains, implemented a dual strategy of hardline anti-Roma politics at home, with sympathetic policy gestures internationally. For instance, domestically France and Italy took a hard line against Roma. Italy launched a policy of fingerprinting Roma and placed them in apartheid-like encampments, while France bulldozed Roma settlements.

At the same time, at the international level, both countries pushed for measures on Roma inclusion in eastern EU countries in order to discourage those Roma from migrating to the West. This was one of the major reasons behind the creation of the EU Framework for Roma Integration Strategies, which called on all EU member states to develop a targeted approach to Roma inclusion, and to submit their strategies by the end of 2011.

This hypocrisy had devastating effects on Roma in eastern EU countries like Bulgaria, for instance. Although the EU provided generous funds, Bulgaria did not use them to prevent evictions or offer alternative housing. It simply signed on to the EU Framework, just as it signed on to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, to create the appearance of pushing positive change, while in reality making few real efforts.

Indeed, last summer, the government calmed ethnic-majority protesters by demolishing hundreds of Roma houses. Today, Bulgaria and countries like it have ample funds to improve the situation of Roma—but national political elites don't dare risk punishment at the ballot box by enacting policies favorable to Roma.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion and the EU Framework for Roma Integration were two of the most significant international political developments for Roma in the last 10 years. Did they improve life for Roma in Europe? On the contrary—for many, life has gone from bad to worse.

What the Decade Revealed about Change in Institutions

This status quo exposed by the Decade of Roma Inclusion—the international appearance of progress concealing a devastating regression at home—works well for a narrow elite. Too many politicians, civil servants, experts, staff of international organizations, donors, and local NGOs comfortably entrench themselves in the industry of report writing, conferences, and usually EU-funded projects.

These activities might lead to limited improvements, but at the domestic level they have been ineffective at creating equal access to public services for Roma.

We, who claim to be most concerned about and committed to inclusion, need to change the way we work. This starts with some hard truths about the real obstacles to inclusion.

Anti-Gypsyism, as a form of exclusion, is not haphazard. It is embedded in our domestic institutions and structures. It runs through public offices, schools, hospitals, the labor market, the welfare system, police, and elections. A Roma child denied schooling with everyone else is not the result of one rogue, racist teacher—a whole system, built and entrenched over time, has led to this.

Anti-Gypsism, as a form of exploitation, brings political power to some—anti-Roma campaigns bring in votes—and economic gain to others. Increasing the number of Roma children in schools for those living with disabilities, for instance, increases those schools' revenues. Nor is anti-Gypsyism a unique instrument. The poor, the young, women, migrants, Jews, Muslims, LGBTI, and people with disabilities are excluded and exploited too, although the instruments against them—male supremacy, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and others—are different.

Individually, these groups are not powerful enough to challenge comfortably entrenched elites and institutionally embedded exclusion. It is essential to form broad coalitions among all those excluded and together force change in public institutions.

The decade, the EU Framework, and EU funds are not without merit. They might help in raising awareness about challenges and possibilities for change, but they should not serve as fig leaves for governments to conceal their lack of commitment at home. Such international interventions and funds can help only if they expand participation in sharing domestic political power and public budgets beyond the narrow elites.

Only when the excluded and the exploited are a constituent part of setting priorities for public institutions and funds will we experience a change in the way schools educate, hospitals cure, police protect, the economy works, and elections give free voice. Only then will we have trust in our public institutions.

EU Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017, a missed chance for children's education⁶

REYN's comments regarding the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017

The EU Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017 mainly focused on Roma people and the job market. Discrimination was recognized as being a main obstacle for Roma, others pointed out that more efforts are needed to equalize opportunities in education. It was hardly mentioned, however, that young people's success starts with education at birth.

The main topic of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion 2017, held in Brussels on 27 to 28 November, was the "transition from education to employment". As the *EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová*, highlighted, Europe cannot afford to let the young Roma not fulfill their potential.

There was a general understanding at the meeting that the disadvantage at the labor market is rooted in the lack of quality education. *Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, Head of Department for Equality and Citizens Rights* at the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), asked: "Can anyone claim that segregated education can provide people with the skills for today's competitive world?"

Unfortunately, the situation of the youngest children was hardly discussed. The event also failed to recognize that the best education starts at birth. As the evidence shows, the brain reaches its development peak at one year of age, and it is in the first years of life that education has the most impact on a person's life.

If the EU wants Romani and Traveller young people to be freed from the vicious cycle of poverty and to develop their full potential, *the answer*

⁶ http://www.reyn.eu/news_posts/eu-platform-roma-inclusion-2017-missed-chance-childrens-education/

is affordable quality education and care at birth.

Recently, REYN co-signed a joint statement to the European Commission. Together with other 50 civil society organizations, we called for a stronger recognition of Early Childhood Development and Health in the current policies as well as in the post-2020 EU strategy for Roma inclusion.

Training module “5 Steps to Quality - Training Package for Early Childhood Training Providers”⁷

Published by ISSA (International Step by Step Association) in 2016

The goal of this training pack is to introduce the European Quality Framework for Early childhood Education and Care (EQF) to ECEC professionals to help them become better acquainted with it in the context of their own practice.

The EQF comprehensively deals with the most relevant issues of quality in ECEC. Therefore, effectively disseminating the EQF’s content throughout the ECEC sector in Europe (and beyond) towards policymakers, researchers and professionals in the field will benefit the quality of ECEC. With this training for ECEC professionals, the EQF can support the work that is being done on quality within each professional’s own provision.

Training module available online: http://files.eun.org/SEG/5%20Steps%20to%20Quality%20-%20Training%20Package_ECEC_%20final%20version.pdf

⁷ <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/publications/5-steps-to-quality---training-.htm>

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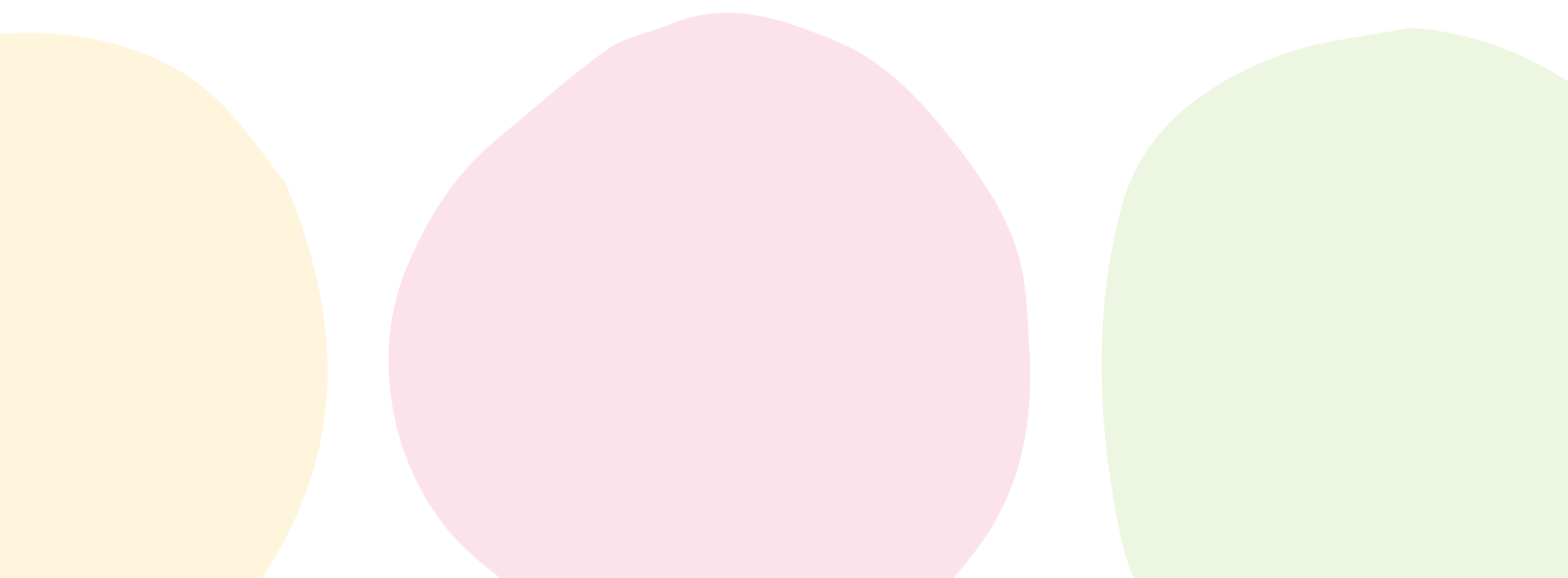
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