

HANDBOOK

Rethinking practices of policy officers involved in Roma issues



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Part I - Local-authorities	4
1. Mapping	5
2. Consultation	5
2.1. Procedures.....	6
2.2. Representation	6
Part II - State	8
1. Comprehensive Design	8
2. Police.....	10
3. Prisons.....	14
Part III - Media	15
1. Manifesto	15

Introduction

This handbook is part of the actions of the European CoSpIRom (Common Spaces for the Integration of Roma) Program. The program addresses the issue of support for national and transnational programs related to the integration and non-discrimination towards Roma (REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2017). The main objectives of the program are:

- to promote common spaces, of equal interaction, as effective tools for combating discrimination.
- to tackle stereotypes and discriminatory practices by enriching positive images for both sides (majority population - Roma communities).
- to challenge symbolic boundaries.
- to strengthen the personal and collective identities of Roma in order to acquire skills and strengthen citizenship.
- to contribute to improving national (and European) Roma integration strategies.

The handbook addresses those involved with Roma policy making, either locally or nationally. Its development has been based on the principles of social justice that apply to all citizens, and it incorporates the pragmatological material deriving from the implementation of the CoSpIRom actions.



Part I - Local-authorities

Local authorities play important roles in the efforts for Roma or other cultural groups' integration, as they constitute the mechanisms that should feed central administrations with reliable data on the social circumstances for their areas of responsibility and evaluate the success of the actions carried out within them.

Local authorities also play key roles in social inclusion policies since they plan and implement local policies and can have a more direct and more personalized view of local populations and their characteristics.

Therefore, the specific characteristics and needs of the Roma communities should be taken into account in the design of successful social integration policies.

There are three main features which should be taken into consideration from the outset:

1. **Local Political initiative** to implement such policies, not just as an adoption of actions but as a supported choice. The adoption of projects is often accompanied by a lack of consultation, a lack of knowledge about the actions to be carried out and the sole criterion for drawing resources from national operational plans - such as the PA (Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework). In the past (e.g. in Greece, period 1996-2000) it was established on several occasions that large amounts of grants have been directed at the wrong actions, whether intentionally or not, with a minimal involvement of the beneficiaries themselves and with even less contribution to social inclusion.
2. **Holistic planning and operational plans**, as it has been shown that the change of attitudes towards social inclusion cannot occur in a fragmented manner, but only uniformly, within a set of ancillary actions surrounding the central objective, i.e., education of Roma children: We can't convince a Roma parent to start sending their children to school if they don't have light to read, food to eat and support during school.
3. **Mainstream applications**: when attempting to promote social inclusion in a field (e.g., strengthening education), through subsidized programs, this action should be supported by day-to-day practices in public administration, self-government and other areas. Implementing a program for the educational inclusion of Roma children often encounters several challenges in different levels. First, it faces difficulties from the educational community, which sees the increase of student population and the formation of classes with different learning needs as problems. An additional difficulty in the implementation of such a program is the lack of proper training of teachers, a training that could support them in managing cognitive and cultural conflicts. Often added to these difficulties are issues such as saturated and degraded building infrastructure in schools attended by Roma children, as well as the need to convince Roma parents of the value of education.

Local authorities, in our opinion, could focus on the following when they plan social policies for the Roma:

1. Mapping

As mapping we mean the preparatory actions necessary in order to understand the specific characteristics and needs of the populations we are going to deal with. This process requires:

- **On-the-spot/fieldwork investigation** and observation, but also a study of good and bad practices previously applied on the same subject and reflection on the actions taken
- **Understanding the fieldwork:** Which areas are addressed, and which are their special characteristics. What is our aim, which thematic areas are in priority, what is the specificity of the local Roma population? For example, there is no point in aiming at integration into higher education if the local population is completely illiterate, or in employing Romani-speaking mediators if the population speaks another language (e.g., Rumanovlach), or in distributing prefabricated houses if the population is already established in urban areas.
- **Taking the social and income morphology into consideration.** It is particularly important to investigate it, since it will give us an idea of the community's own contribution. A typical failed example is the notorious "Gypsy housing loans". In this case, poor and uneducated people, without income criteria, were requested to pay for installments, water and electricity bills etc. The result was new social problems, evictions, power cuts, etc.
- **Taking accessibility problems into consideration.** For example, if some Roma students are required to attend a particular school within their Local Education Authority, and the school happens to be overcrowded, there is an immediate risk that the school will go into decline. Experience has shown that when there is a large concentration of Roma students in a school, non-Roma parents tend to move their children to other areas and gradually the school turns into a ghetto, while at the same time in an overcrowded school, conflicts between students can be more common. On the other hand, if the school is too far from the residence of Roma students and there is no provision for their transfer from the local authorities or the education administration, the project to attract Roma students will fail or will be limited to their enrollment in school for other reasons (e.g., receiving allowances that require a certificate of attendance from the school).

5

2. Consultation

Consultation is usually a local matter regarding its directness, but also national when it includes representatives of secondary or higher bodies in the community.

However, in practice, calls for consultation, regarding the Roma, are usually made without the use of a plan adapted to the community in question —the particular characteristics of the community are not taken into account — and are often solely a pretext, leading to a priori conclusions. Self-appointed representatives, who may not speak on behalf of their community, often appear and participate in the consultation. Also, any results or reached conclusions are not disclosed or used to inform the



respective policies. In other words, consultation can sometimes be a rather superficial, non-substantive process.

The following points are highlighted:

2.1. Procedures

- **Consultation model.** In how many phases, who will the participants be, will it be informative? Will the conclusions be advisory to the administration or informative to mandatory actions?
- **Profile and number of participants.** How many will participate? (no more than 25 people are allowed) Who will participate and why? What level of knowledge will be required? How will the process be coordinated and documented? How will the results be disseminated?
- **Ensure the participation of those with no voice.** The policies and actions under development often concern sections of the population who don't have access to the policies under discussion, either because of lack of knowledge or of other social constraints. Thus, it may seem that Roma who are in a better economic and social positions have better access to the consultation table, even though the discussed actions are directed to parts of the Roma micro-societies which are not that 'visible'. Such cases are Roma women, children and adolescents, those who live - indeed - in extreme poverty. Successful examples of such practices can be drawn both from similar efforts of the United Nations in the Third World or from successful operational programs in more affluent societies, where (e.g., in the Scandinavian region) children's views are also taken into consideration in the consultation process, with the use of tools such as drawing and the help of experts.
- **Communication of results.** To which bodies and key persons will the conclusions or minutes of the meeting be sent? Will there be a plenary session or a general assembly of residents to present the final conclusions? Will the conclusions allow us to safely build on commonly accepted measures and actions developed?

6

2.2. Representation

It is important that we keep in mind the aims of the work we want to put into practice. Is it our work to try to integrate the Roma into society with a universal character (e.g. guaranteeing access to goods and services) or is it local in nature with a number of specific features that differentiate our future beneficiaries even within the local community itself? For example, does housing concern all or part of the local Roma population? Does school dropout affect all or part of our population?

When selecting the participants to a consultation, one could take into account the following:

- Not all Roma are the same, not all Roma have the same interests
- Not all participants are socially integrated to the same degree



- The need to ensure that the Roma representatives invited to a consultation are actual representatives of the community and not just of themselves or of the extended family to which they belong
- The need to ensure representativeness:
 - in the same settlement
 - in an area
 - in terms of occupational and financial categories
- The need to serve goals through meeting or meetings. For example, in a consultation on sewerage projects in a settlement, it makes sense for engineers, institutions and community representatives to have a greater role and presence. Whereas when the final proposals that will emerge from the technical meetings are communicated to the neighborhood or the community, in order to finalize the formation with the contribution of the residents, 'scientism' and the quotation of specialized knowledge of the experts should be avoided because it can undermine communication.



Part II - State

1. Comprehensive Design

The planning of actions by the state must ensure:

- **The holistic planning of actions:** the multiple levels of discrimination that affect the Roma require simultaneous, integrated and highly synergistic sets of actions. For example, when planning housing actions, we should link them to existing or new actions to strengthen education, actions to make a goods and services accessible to residents, support and information on the management of new sites, etc. It is also important that the services involved are informed in advance so that co-operation is more effective.
- **Their integrated form:** in the light of the above, it is essential that each intervention is accompanied by common coordination packages of aid which reinforce the initial objective. For example, to promote cooperative forms of employment in a region (Third Sector), it is necessary to have simultaneous and interdependent actions within the Job Centre, Local Authority Bureaus, Vocational Training and the Media.
- **The mainstream character:** Integrated social inclusion programs are not always enough as they are usually based on the logic 'beginning-middle-end' (of the program). Sustainability of any positive results of each program is best ensured when its results are integrated into the day-to-day administration. As a good practice and a guide to this, we would suggest the methodology for implementing the Community initiative 'Equal' of the third programming period, during which the good practices of actions are transferred to thematic network committees, whose final conclusions are proposed for incorporation into the established practices of administration and self-government. Also, 'good intentions' are not always enough, but must also be reflected in the budgets of the agencies and bodies. Good practices for this, but also sufficient material for the philosophy and effectiveness of such methods, are easy to draw from actions on equality between men and women (e.g., gender budgeting) and equal access policies for people with disabilities (e.g., accessibility for people with disabilities).
- **Ensure networking and evaluation at national level.** It would be ideal if the programs and actions of self-governing and social bodies for the Roma were to be networked and communicated with each other. Unfortunately, we know that this is not the case, or at least it does not exist on a scale that would be necessary to motivate positive changes. The role of the coordinator for the activities of such a network should be played by the central state and, incidentally, by the regions (e.g. social observatories). Indicative gaps that could be filled by such mechanisms could be:
 - Dissemination from central websites of EU directions on Roma social inclusion, national policy and operational policy guidelines in simple and understandable language. It has often been found that crucial decisions or policy changes on social inclusion are known to senior ministry officials,

specialized agencies and selected regional officials. All the others would have to search for this type of information on their own.

- Accessible databases containing data on the various programs being implemented, good and bad practices and the produced sociometric data.
- Common basic standards for research and consultation in order to compare and evaluate the results of our actions both by region and during implementation times.



2. Police

The common space with Roma and the police was designed as one of the main actions to achieve the CoSpIRom project objectives. The 5 workshops carried out by Cospirom were aimed at: (a) facilitating Roma awareness of their rights and obligations (b) strengthening Roma through contacts of equal participation and (c) mitigating the mutual stereotypes and prejudice of Roma and the police.

It is common to see that for several police officers and police mechanisms, the stereotyped image of the Roma, as a whole, as a potential offensive community as well as the contact point for dealing with any offensive actions is based on the use of informants.

We have also seen actions that hinder Roma's social integration at the same time as it is being promoted by public services such as education, for example, showing zero tolerance for minor infringements, such as the lack of a proper child seat in the cars of Roma parents taking their children to school. On the other hand, there seems to be considerable tolerance for offensive practices such as early marriages, the occupation or 'squatting' of public or private spaces, etc. on the basis of cultural specificities or customs (e.g. juvenile marriages, "stealing" of underage girls for marriage, etc.).

Roma in Europe usually constitute a 'closed group'. The same applies to the Greek Roma, who are a 'closed' group of Greeks with linguistic and cultural specificities that have been shaped over the centuries, in terms of interaction with the dominant culture that directly or indirectly excludes them from important human and political rights or even - in some historical periods - has gone to pogroms and extermination, i.e. during the Holocaust.

This centuries-old negative experience of the Roma has helped defense and survival mechanisms form within the community, as well as differentiated value systems in comparison to the dominant population. The challenge of the legitimacy of the general rules by the Roma, which may act against their survival, often results in a breach of the rules, a breach of the law and a different understanding of the values of the average person (e.g., school education, employment, political action, etc.). To sum up, we shall mention the most important points we have identified:

- **The mother tongue, in most Roma, is not the dominant language** but the Romani. Therefore, especially for children in young ages with limited or no schooling, some concepts may be confusing. We often need to confirm that what has been said has been understood and there have been no confusions.
- **Roma are not a homogenous community in terms of values and behavior.** There are rich and poor Roma, Roma living off illegal trade and Roma who are legal entrepreneurs, Roma illiterate and Roma graduates, Roma law-abiding and Roma with abusive behavior - as indeed in every distinct social group. So, if stereotypes concern some particular cases, they certainly distort the reality when we apply them to everyone, even to Roma people that may follow other values and behaviors.

- **Lack of confidence.** As a closed community, it's forbidden to talk to the police about something happening in the community. Any Roma who does so is stigmatized by the community and discredited by experiencing social exclusion. It is important that we move from the search for 'informers' to finding publicly and visibly community partners-representatives.
- **Ignorance of rules-customary law.** Since the majority of Roma - especially from the age of 30 and over, are functionally illiterate, they often do not know that practices and customs that can constitute actions from misdemeanor to felony (e.g., early marriages). In cooperation with educational and self-governing bodies, seminars and regular contact with the community would be useful in informing the local population about key issues of legality, delinquency and its consequences.
- **Operation within the community on the basis of a family.** Often opponent families systematically block any contacts between them, while relations between different Roma linguistic communities can be anywhere from reluctant to hostile (e.g., they would not easily live in the same area, such as the Rudaras with the Horahane Roma; different Roma origins). Knowledge of the social anthropology of the local Roma population is first and foremost valuable and is considered a prerequisite for the development of a preventive anti-criminal policy in cooperation with other local actors.

Evaluating information about who says what and for whom; it is important to take the organization of the Roma through customary formations such as 'the wider family' into account. Similarly, pressure coming from strict customary rules might affect a potential Roma offender and, therefore, should be considered a mitigating circumstance (e.g., multiple-day weddings, compulsory abandonment of underage children by a mother with an extramarital relationship, ignoring parents' choices in marriage, consequences for those who report something illegal, etc.).

- **Representation.** The Roma are not granted minority status in Greece, in other words, they are not considered by law to be a minority, they are recognized as Greek citizens without any discrimination. Thus, there are no institutionalized processes to designate representatives (there may be self-called representatives), there is no plan for incorporation of the customary Roma law into the national legislation (e.g., concepts and practices for child marriages) and we do not have specific community consultation procedures. So, when we talk to the community, we should pay a lot of attention to who we talk to and who we think are representatives of the community. Often, the self-called (arbitrary) representatives are called, who represent their own interests and/or their families' and become legitimized by the community, just because we are talking to them!
- **"Blind implementation of legislation".** It sounds democratic that all citizens are treated in the same way, but in practice there are various problems. We probably cannot deal with incidents of violence in the same way when they come from, for example, a person with disabilities or a fully able person, an abused woman who attacked her partner or a husband who repeatedly abuses

his wife, a man who stole food to eat it from a man who stole food for fun or to make a profit.

Other investigations have also shown that the Roma-Police relationship is characterized by:

- **Zero tolerance.** Police officers often show zero tolerance for petty crime to members of the Roma community. Several times this may contradict actions by other agencies that promote social inclusion. For example, if we are trying to convince the Roma that children should go to school, it is contradictory if at the same time police set up a checkpoint at the settlement exit to the school at 7:30-8:30 in the morning to check if the car has been checked by the competent service (KTEO), lack of child seat in the car, etc.

- If social integration programs (programs of universities, municipalities and churches) are in place in one region, it is necessary to constantly coordinate and involve the police with the bodies of these actions.
- It is good to keep the Roma informed of the possible consequences of the lack of conditions required by the Traffic Code in their vehicles rather than carrying out unannounced checks. After all, it is not certain that, especially illiterate Roma, know what is allowed and what is not, as Greek daily life is scattered with examples of traffic law violations, even on main commercial roads (parking on the sidewalk, double parking, disabled parking violations, etc.).

- **Selectivity in arrest.** For a large proportion of young Roma who are identified and referred to the judiciary, the case is eventually put on the record in the absence of incriminating evidence. This suggests discrimination towards a particular social group when seeking for suspects, who, as a practice, replicate stereotypes and perpetuate mutual suspicion.

- Seminars on stereotypes and prejudices against police officers related to daily work on the street (Two-wheeled police, officers supervising them, etc.).
- Organization of Local Crime Prevention Councils with the participation of Roma and support from the police.
- Incentives for the inclusion of people of Roma origin in the Police and the judiciary system.

- **Two-way Stereotypes.** For the Roma, police, more than any other service, perpetuates the stereotype of "we" and "others", of the (hostile) majority society. When they give a ticket to a Roma, while not issuing one to the double-parked car on the commercial road creates a sense of injustice and confirms the stereotype that "they" are against "us", because we are Roma.

For the police officer who often notes the lack, concealment or deliberate falsification of data by the Roma, the impression is created that (a) the whole of "this group" behaves that way (b) they always do so (c) there is no hope of improvement and the only appropriate practice is strictness and/or intimidation. As several police officers have told us, they had not imagined that in the process of seeking suspects for an offensive action, the confused and/or contradictory answers they receive from any

Roma present are primarily due to the fear that *'because I am a Roma, I will definitely get arrested'* and secondarily, that, as a socially excluded group, 'there will be some minor infringement' and it cannot be directly estimated 'what punishment it brings'.

- "It is difficult to deal with someone fairly, especially when you don't realize that the problem exists, or you don't think the problem is real".
- There are many people who say: "I don't see color, I'm treating everyone the same." Increasing the number of police officers from different backgrounds is another way to combat subconscious prejudice.
- We often need to listen more carefully to the citizens and find a common understanding with them rather than to prejudge the outcome because of the high levels of delinquency of the group they belong to.

- **Cultural identity is respected, but human rights come first.** Zero tolerance for petty crime is often combined with the authorities' 'flexibility' towards Roma customary elements that are contrary to modern human rights.

For example, the arrest of an illegal seller at the farmer's market is no more important than the right of children to school and education, the destructive custom of child-early marriages (expressing the needs of older times) or children labor.

- Zero tolerance for human rights violations such as domestic violence, violence against children and women, racist behavior, child exploitation, etc.
- Flexibility and individualized treatment of minor violations with simultaneous information, in synergy with local networks or with other institutional bodies such as education and local authorities.
- Immediate intervening, after complaints of racist or discriminatory behavior towards Roma, by private professionals or public services.



3. Prisons

Prisons are a key link in the chain of justice and the suppression of crime. Prisons, for the last two hundred years, have been considered as correctional and not punitive facilities. However, in practice, the latter is often the case. The peculiarities of socially excluded groups as well as the stereotypes and prejudice of service workers often lead to discriminatory treatment by the police, the courts and of course the prisons. Social services have reported cases of wrongful arrest and convictions of Roma, based solely on a common last name with that of the suspect, whom the police were informed of. In one of the cases, the sentence of the first one arrested was not revoked, although the real perpetrator was later arrested and taken to prison. In addition, the unjustly arrested man was released one year later after an intervention by an NGO's, without ever identifying his real name.

Given that prisons can well become a "crime academy" but also a common place for a positive restart for the prisoner, we consider it a unique opportunity to fill Roma prisoners' educational and vocational gaps. Our conclusions are set out below:

- **Information and/or training of officers** on the treatment of special cultural groups who often show illiteracy, difficulties with understanding language, ignorance of the regulations or procedures of the prison and release, and distorted images mainly based on information by other prisoners.
- **Identification of the offenders:** it has been observed that Roma are released from prison without an identity card. In some cases, there has been lack of identification of the perpetrator(s) with the person in prison, raising questions of legality. The social services in prisons should address, as a matter of priority, and settle legal ambiguities of detainees.
- **Develop options to make use of incarceration time** towards education or acquisition of professional skills. Where personalization is possible, an individual educational development program could be developed in cooperation with the prisoner.
- **Provision of information.** Ways of informing Roma prisoners about the functioning of the prison, the procedures of imprisonment, the role of the guardians and staff, the link between detention and the offense.
- **The use and risks of the Internet.** During the implementation of 'common spaces of Young Roma prisoners and the police' in our program, we observed that there was a lot of ignorance, both of the educational possibilities offered by the Internet and of the dangers of using the Internet. Many young people were unaware that online harassment is a crime while many were ignoring the possibility of being deceived over the Internet.

Part III - Media

1. Manifesto

The Manifesto reflects the interaction between young Roma, media people and the research group during the three advocacy meetings held in each partner's country.

Before the text was finalized, the partners exchanged experience of each local implementation. This Manifesto aims to act as a roadmap that could potentially raise awareness among the people involved in spreading news and the media, in order to avoid stereotypical ideas being replicated for them and to, therefore, help create conditions of social justice.

1. The media should use their role and power responsibly

Today, the media has considerable power and, at the same time, great responsibility for the reproduction or mitigation of social stereotypes. The Media need to be aware of their roles and responsibilities in matters of social cohesion, justice and citizenship.

2. Dealing with stigmatized and socially vulnerable people is an extremely sensitive process

Stereotypical representation of the Roma in public discourse/space creates significant obstacles that get in the way of building mutually respectful relationships between members of different communities.

Contact between different cultural groups is a process of integration. It is a process through which the person in power creates the rules and "builds/constructs" the other in a way that serves the needs of the imposition of the former. This process is against developing mutual recognition and, hence, social justice.

3. It is important that Roma citizens are recognized as subjectivities

Representing Roma citizens as faceless members of a culturally cohesive group is a practice that runs counter to the basic democratic demand for each individual to be recognized as a distinct and autonomous person. Thus, by referring to a person's identity as a Roma in the event of negative behavior, is unnecessary if not harmful.

4. Build bridges between Roma and the media

There is a need to strengthen effective communication and recognition of the community in reference: not to talk about them but with them.

Moreover, it is of great importance to build relationships based on mutual respect.

5. Make their voice heard equally

The media should create appropriate conditions to hear the voices of people from this marginalized group, as an expression of inclusion practices.

As a matter of social justice, it is necessary to create those conditions so that the Roma can speak/share their representations about their communities and about the Other. Moreover, the promotion of information about important moments in the history of the Roma, both internationally and locally by the media is crucial (i.e., their participation in the resistance, etc.).

6. Promote successful examples of Roma

The media should be given the opportunity to present stories that challenge the dominant narrative about the Roma. It is crucial also, that they are present and at the same time, they reflect on these stories.

7. Recognition of personal prejudice by media people

Like all people, media people also hold prejudice. We are discussing the need for reflection on our own prejudices and we are emphasizing the need for a critical approach to them, in order to admit and attempt to eliminate them.

In the representation of Roma issues, many professionals are involved in providing information other than journalists, who also need to be aware of stereotypes they can perpetuate.

For example, camera crews should also be educated about how to shoot images and create representations of individuals and situations.

8. Critical approach to sources of information

The media should critically approach sources of information so as not to replicate prejudice and stereotypical perceptions about the Roma.

It is also important to negotiate the right ways in which the news should be disseminated.

9. Respect for personal data

It is important to protect personal data for all citizens, and therefore, for the Roma also, in the context of their constitutionally established equal treatment.

10. Attention to the exotic trap

In some cases, the media is attempting to project positive images/representations of the Roma, but often, they are presented as an exotic group based on a perception of their lifestyle, related to having fun, dancing, playing music, traveling as an expression of freedom. These practices are ways to shape the identity of the Other and can promote discrimination that does not facilitate/serve inclusion.