

# ERNE

## European Roma integration good practice exchange and policy NETwork

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# POLICY RECOMMENDATION PAPER

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## Background

The European Commission has published the 'EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020' and sets goals for Roma Inclusion in the educational systems ensuring that all Roma children complete at least primary school.

"(...) 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" (COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: "An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020", COM 2011(173), Brussels 5.4.2011).

The European Commission foresees that each Member State will have to submit a national Roma inclusion strategy explaining how they will reach the goals set in the framework.

This postulate formulates however a number of huge challenges to the member states and actors in the sector and benchmarks are still far away to be reached:

"Educational achievement within the Roma population is much lower than the rest of the population, although the situation differs among Member States. (...) Surveys suggest that in some Member States, only a limited number of Roma children complete primary school (...) 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." (see above)

In front of this situation, the member states and even beyond the local and regional actors in the education systems (municipalities, schools, universities, colleges, VET training centers, NGOs etc.) are confronted with the need for solutions, approaches, good practices and initiatives which they are currently not able to provide. Especially the challenge of offering an integrated approach in the education systems and not running into segregation and special school offers for Roma children etc. (as it is currently visible in single member states) creates the need for new and innovative approaches, systems and policies. Only with an integrated and coherent / target group relevant system the situation of the integration of Roma children and adults can be reached and sustainably ensured.

According to the document "Improving the tools for the social integration and non discrimination of Roma in the EU, European Commission, DG Employment, June 2010" there are three crucial levels that should be envisaged when approaching the improvement of integration of Roma in education:

- **Ensuring access to preschool and school systems:** Entering a school or preschool level appears to be one of the crucial factors when dealing with the integration of Roma through education. Approaches on this level do of course partially relate to infrastructural discussions e.g. the provision of kindergartens and pre-school facilities in general, however several examples of good practices exist already in the European member states which can be analysed, discussed and possibly transferred.
- **Ensuring the stay in the system:** Similar as within the general discussion of the education system challenges the reduction of early school leaver quotes appears to be the second crucial field where

analysis, research and exchange of good practice approaches are needed within the member states and actors of the education system. E.g. only about 42% of children with Romani background do even finish primary school level. (Open Society Institute, International Comparative Data Set on Roma Education, 2008. Data on primary education is available for 6 Member States: Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia.)

- **Ensuring the transfer between and permeability of system levels:** The interfaces between different levels of the education system, also between the education system and the labour market, between the general education system and vocational education and training are considered to be the most crucial elements for a successful integration and full participation in society through education and work. The interfaces between systems carry the risk that children and participants are not able to bridge these interfaces with own motivation, knowledge and life spirit which leads to the fact that persons drop out of the systems especially in periods and phases of transition between systems.

While these three levels identified are considered to be crucial challenges in general for the education systems in the European member states it is obvious that in front of the special target group envisaged in this framework (Roma children and adults), these challenges are even more problematic and member states but especially the actors within the different education systems and levels are in need of solutions and approaches. At the same time projects and results of good practice are available in the different countries related to all three identified levels which unfortunately are hardly put into a wider and transnational context, are hardly disseminated and transferred.

Therefore with the ERNE project we intend to identify, analyze and exchange the already existing best practices in partner countries and to elaborate policy recommendations in order to foster the integration of Roma children and adults at each educational level.

The network is concentrating on the analysis of solutions for the four identified levels and through this paper is providing policy recommendation and transferable good practices for preschool education.

## Goals

The main aim of this policy recommendation paper is to elaborate concrete recommendations for policy makers to sustainably influence the policy making and decision making level in the partner countries as well as on European level regarding the integration and support of Roma children in the education system at pre-school level.

All partner organisations have rich experiences with different approaches and methods for the integration and support of Roma children in the education systems and their best practices are identified in the ERNE research about the integration of Roma children in the pre-school educational system, which is the basis of this paper.

The Policy Recommendation Paper was also presented to experts in the field to ask their opinion and to further improve the Paper itself. Furthermore, a public conference took place in Florence with the participation of stakeholders, decision and policy makers in the field to discuss the good practice approaches identified and search for solutions for the integration of Roma children and adults through education and in order to share the findings of the research.

Through the interviews with experts it was finally possible to in depth analyse the crucial elements and levels of the education systems related to the challenges existing for the integration of Roma citizens. The results achieved will allow for a transfer of good practices within the partner countries and partner organisations as well as concrete policy improvements. The network itself is following a strategy for enlargement during the project implementation process as well as a sustainability strategy for a long lasting existing of the network for the benefit of integration of Roma children and adults through education in Europe.

## Situation of Roma children in the educational systems in the EU

“In most European countries the legislative context provides, in theory, access for Roma children to pre-school education. However, the real situation is very different. Real access is restricted on account of unemployment and family poverty; geographic isolation; unwelcoming and unattractive school environments; and cultural factors which include parents seeing the family and the home as the most appropriate place for early childhood education.” (in: Towards quality education for Roma children: transition from early childhood to primary education”, UNESCO and Council of Europe, Paris, 2007)

The UNESCO comes in the above-mentioned report about the education of Roma children in Europe to dramatic conclusions: the 50 percent of Roma children in Europe fail to complete primary education. In certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the majority of Roma children attend “special schools” established in the 1950s and 1960s for children with learning disabilities. This is when segregation of Roma people starts.

Therefore in most of the European countries the integration of Roma through education has become one major policy in the education systems as all member states are concerned with the establishment and implementation of an integration plan for Roma citizens until the year 2020. Moreover besides the fact that for some European member countries integration of Roma and travelers has been already a challenge for the last 50-70 years, for a considerable number of European countries this challenge has been only recently identified due to free movement processes, opening of labour markets etc.

Existing concepts and approaches (if any) are in most of the times coming from older times, since special schools and institutions have been established in the 50-ies and 60-ies of the last century, therefore there is a huge need of innovation for the whole sector.

## Situation of Roma in the partner countries

### Croatia

There are more than 300 Roma people living in separate settlements in Koprivnica, where P1 is based, and a few hundreds more in surrounding villages. Children are often without required social and pre-school set of skills and competences; they are often in inferior position to their peers in classroom, exposed to prejudice, stereotypes and stigma both as Roma people and as poor. Language barrier in combination with family deprivation and bad financial situation seems to be the key problem and the reason why they are often held back not being able to overcome the gap. Their parents following their traditional perception of raising children put pressure on children to leave school at the early age, get married and to get qualification instead being a participant lifelong learning frame.

### Germany

The district of Neukölln, in Berlin, can look back on four years of intensive debate on the issue of immigrants coming from South-Eastern Europe, especially from Romania and Bulgaria and especially since their entry in the European Union. The predominant proportion of the families who have immigrated from these countries are ethnically Roma. It is clear that education, healthcare and accommodation comprise the three most important areas to act upon on a local level, as these people are usually coming from extremely disadvantaged living conditions. Therefore there is a direct need for resources and policy.

Despite the eased process of official registration a large proportion of these immigrants were not officially registered, or because they migrated onwards again or because they only got themselves legally registered at a later time, thus the increasing wave of immigration of those wanting to stay long-term was at first not recognized. Therefore as the physical space in the integrated secondary schools in North-Neukölln is already at full capacity, extra small classes had to be set up in schools in South-Neukölln, that are dedicated to migrants especially from Romania and Bulgaria and with no knowledge of German.

Because of the linguistic barriers there is an urgent need in secondary schools for additional teaching staff, interpreting and cultural mediators as well as practical learning methods. Moreover the children must attend nurseries as early as possible, in order to facilitate early language learning and to raise their educational prospects regardless of background.

### Austria

In the Document: “Roma in Austria - An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 - Political and legal measures”, reported in 2011 to the EC by the Austrian Federal Chancellery, the relevant aspects of education policy are expressed in that way (excerpts):

*Austria’s overall education policy (which is not aimed expressly at Roma) encompasses a number of Roma-specific activities. These include, in particular, teaching in Romani or funding Roma institutions that support children’s educational development, e.g. by offering early years language support, training nursery teachers or even providing afternoon or whole-day nursery sessions.*

And

*In principle Austria avoids the implementation of segregation measures in the education sector. On account of linguistic differences, e.g. where several different languages are used in the teaching of ethnic groups, pupils may be taught in groups which are based on their origin. This is however offset by the sense of community which is promoted within the classroom itself, within the school as a whole or outside the school environment.*

Austrian Federal Chancellery 1014 Vienna, 2011, pg. 12

Pre-school education regulations in Austria follow in principle – like all legal regulations – the Human Rights, the Austrian Constitution and the regulations in the treaty of 1955 for the II Republic Austria. Additionally the general approach concerning minorities in Austria is defined in the ratification of the Framework commitment in the law concerning national minorities from 1998 (Rahmenübereinkommen im BGBl. III Nr. 120/1998) and the law concerning “Volksgruppen” (Volksgruppengesetz 1976). Since 1993 “Roma, Burgenland-Roma, are accredited in the meaning of this law.

For Pre-School regulations is important that these are not, like school law in general, are national and central issues, but in the Federal Republic Austria the legislation for Pre-School issues happens at provincial, decentralized level.

So, there exists no common, compiled overview about all relevant regulations concerning minorities and/or Roma in all provinces.

But, some regulations at national level are relevant for all Pre-School activities in the provinces, especially concerning support of language competences in early childhood, in the identification of language competences in early childhood as a base for targeted support measures and the national education framework for all elementary education institutions (Bildungsrahmenplan für Elementarpädagogik, 2009)

The overall approach for education of Roma in the pre-school / elementary education phase is expressed in the strategy document “Roma in Austria” by the Austrian Federal Chancellery in 2011:

#### Pre-school education

*In 2008, following an agreement between the Federal Government and the Provinces (pursuant to Art. 15a of the Constitutional Law) “on the expansion of pre-school facilities, the introduction of compulsory early language support in pre-school institutions and the creation of a national pre-school education plan”, the “Early Support 1+1” education model was introduced for all pre-school children. Children whose knowledge of German is inadequate are given support in pre-school institutions to enable them to cope with the level of German required of them, in accordance with standardised language skills models, on entering primary school.*

*Moreover, following the introduction of compulsory free half-day nursery education, since September 2010 children in their last year before starting compulsory education have been required to attend suitable pre-school institutions for at least 16-20 hours on at least four days a week in all Austrian Provinces. This half-day attendance is free of charge and eases the burden on families. As a result, all children should receive the best education available to them and the best start in life, irrespective of their socio-economic background. In addition, in order to achieve this objective, early years teachers are being given initial and further training in the assessment of language skills and early years language support.*

*Examples of measures taken in the Provinces include: the provision of dedicated support measures in Viennese pre-school institutions for children with language support needs, which is aimed in particular at the educational needs of migrant children. Some nurseries in Vienna are also supporting non-German speaking children by employing early years teachers who speak their mother tongue. This maintains a connection with their cultural roots.*

Austrian Federal Chancellery 1014 Vienna, 2011, pg.12f.

By the reason that in the Federal Republic Based on some previous discussions and explorations the consequence of the concrete situation in Austria is that there could not be given e detailed overview about strategies and policies of institutions and organizations in the area of Pre-School education in Austria concerning minorities in general and Roma, Sinti et.al. in special, see quotations in the paragraph above.

## Italy

Regarding the area of Florence, where P6 is based, a high percentage of the Roma population is coming from Romania. As in Romania discrimination against Roma is even stronger than in Italy, they are often excluded from the public health care, education and the labour market also in their own country. So when they come to Italy they often don't have access to basic health care services (as they don't even have the health insurance card in their country) and they often live in camps and overcrowded homes without the basic hygienic conditions. Therefore when they first get in contact with the educational system, at the primary school, they are already in a disadvantaged situation in comparison with the other students.

Regarding the national level it's Abruzzo the region where Roma communities are more established. Since a certain time, in the town of Giulianova (Teramo district – Abruzzo), lives a Roma community counting about 200 people. Among them there are 90 minor and 60 of them are children in the period of the compulsory education. In 1998, the Roma children exclusion was substantial; most of the Roma minor were signaled to the judicial authority and the presence of Roma youngster into L'Aquila boot camp (minor jail) was at the first place in Italy, taking into consideration the relationship between territory extension and inhabitants.

Early school leaving of Roma female children is high and is often due to cultural reasons. At the age of 9/12 Roma female children change their role in the families and inside the group identity. They are considered women and they start to collaborate with the other women in order to support the family. In this period, Roma female children can meet people of the opposite sex exclusively at the attendance of a relative, in order to protect them from bad encounter. This cultural background produces the not regular school attendance and, therefore, the desertion from the process of teaching/learning.

## Romania

Statistics in Romania show that just over half of all Roma children (51%) attend school and that 7% of Roma men and 3% of Roma women completed secondary school compared to 73% of men and 61% of women in the general population.

The main barriers to educational attainment of Roma students are poverty among Roma families, low access to information The reduced life standards are in most cases the main cause that leads to bad hygienic standards, lack of proper clothes, and school supplies. Additional, in some situations, other causes are connected to the lack of competency in the local language by Roma children, poverty among Roma families, prejudices against Roma children and low teacher expectations of Roma students, but difficulties of integration can also arise because parents do not know how to or where to go to enroll their children in

classes. Moreover, the lack in basic hygiene and necessary immunization can be seen as a health problem in public schools and can justify the exclusion of Roma children from school. In Romania for example, school directors assert that Roma children cannot be integrated into school because they would cause schools to fail health inspections.

Statistics from Romania suggest that socioeconomic characteristics have a prevailing influence on the school attendance of Roma children. For example Roma children who live in mixed communities are twice as likely to attend school regularly than those who live in Roma neighborhoods, villages, or settlements, as well as children, whose father is employed or whose mothers had completed more than eight years of schooling, were more likely to attend school regularly. Therefore socioeconomic characteristics need to be taken into account, when examining the impact of education programs on education enrollment, attendance, and attainment indicators for Roma students.

Unlike compulsory schooling, there is no evidence that the proportion of Roma completing secondary school has increased over the last two decades. Preschool activities, that are not compulsory, revealed to be almost inexistent in Roma communities.

In order to facilitate Roma school attendance training programmes for non-Roma teachers started in 1997 to teach using the Roma language. As a result, the number of Romanian children studying in the Roma language has increased from 150 in 1992 to 1717 in 1998, but this represents only a very small fraction of the Roma children in Romania.

## Some examples of best practices in the partner countries

Participants of the focus group interviews were asked to provide and discuss some best practice examples in the field of Roma integration in the pre-school system, and to select two of them that they consider the most interesting ones to be shown to the project partners of other countries. In the ERNE project research we summarized these best practice examples chosen for each country and hereby we reassumed them briefly.

### Croatia

The **Public Library Fran Galovic provides services, activities and programs**, aimed at raising awareness of Roma people needs, their language and culture, such as Roma corner (collection of books for children and adults that deals with Roma themes), ICT training (basic computer and information literacy training for all library users, including groups of Roma elementary school students and Roma young adults), reading workshops for Roma parents and children, round tables for social inclusion of Roma and for their successful education with the participation of key stakeholders, Roma associations, politicians, social service providers, and so on. So far all these programs attracted more than 500 Roma and non-Roma children, teenagers and young adults, which increased to 80 the number of Roma children and teenagers who have a library membership card.

Another best practice is the presence of **Roma teaching assistants in the elementary school “Braća Radić”** in Koprivnica in order to help Roma children to adopt Croatian language, facilitate understanding of abstract terms, facilitate communication between parents and teachers, and be mediator in conflicts. The Roma teaching assistant helps also in the additional activities of the school such as collaboration with associations, police department, public open university, library. The positive effects of these services are

not visible immediately, impacts are expected in the long run. Thanks to these services there are fewer Roma pupils who have been held back and more Roma pupils seem to finish their compulsory education (primary education).

## Germany

**Just in Time** is a project set up in October 2012 and aimed at helping young people with an immigration background to integrate into German society, encouraging them to overcome prejudices they hold against one another and also helping them to develop and use their free time constructively. Different activities are organised, such as sightseeing excursions, games in the park, cooking courses, in order to teach them also other skills such as cooking, time keeping, using public transport, how to behave acceptably socially. The excursions are important as most of the young people stay in their neighbourhood and know nothing of the town in which they live or about the transports. Activities are lead by social workers and young volunteers, otherwise known as mentors, usually in pairs. Another section of the project is to develop one-on-one mentoring between a volunteer and a pupil who have the same interests. The idea behind recruiting young mentors, students for example, is that the small age gap between the two allows for an easier connection. The aim is to form these relationships naturally through group activities.

In Berlin especially in the district Neukölln there is no access to pre-school educational Networks or projects. It is common understanding that small children and the integration activities work best in addressing the parents – especially the women. Therefore there are different projects addressed to the parents, such as the **Volkshochschule (VHS, which means adult education centre) Neukölln** that is offering German language courses also for Roma, in an innovative way (language tandem system, whereby a German teacher teaches together with a Roma mediator), taking into consideration the special characteristics of the families. There are also **small projects tailored to the local needs** (including Roma communities' needs) and financed by EU/federal/regional programme 'Soziale Stadt', in order to develop the 11 neighbourhoods of Neukölln.

## Austria

There exist a lot of good and best practice examples for **early language support in Pre-School institutions**, see eg.:

[http://www.integrationsfonds.at/sprachliche\\_fruehfoerderung/good\\_practice/](http://www.integrationsfonds.at/sprachliche_fruehfoerderung/good_practice/)

but, most of the examples are targeted to all ethnic, language, nationality groups, not focussed single on Roma.

This principle is related to the approach in principle, not to establish additional measures with elements of segregation, but individualizes and person-targeted support concerning the needs and demands of each person and each group.

A special approach of some institutions in Austria is to **support Pre-School activities in other countries**, eg. Caritas in Romania, see eg.:

<http://www.caritas-linz.at/auslandshilfe/projekte/europa/rumaenien/bildung-schenkt-zukunft/>

## Italy

In the context of Giulianova - Abruzzo, dominated by a high level of Roma juvenile delinquency, it seemed necessary to start a project for the romani population in order to prevent the disadvantage and to give answers to the needs, involving first of all the compulsory education schools, families and children. In 1998 the 3 year **project “Roma social mediation”** had started, in which 40 families counting 60 children were selected by the association Opera Nomadi Abruzzo. The association planned together with the families an individual integration path involving different environments starting from school and work places. Three cultural mediators were present in the school and follow continually Roma children both at school and at home, starting from elementary school to high school. The association started also an education course for the teachers of the school to let them know better romani culture, as well as an awareness raising activity has started amongst companies in order to advocate for a social responsibility and to encourage to experiment Roma people employment. From 1998 to 2000, 40 families and about 60 children have benefitted from the service and the results are extremely positive and the National observatory for adolescence and childhood of the Welfare evaluated this project as one of the first 8 projects among 90 national projects supported by the funds of the law 285/96.

Another best practice is the **Distance learning school program for Roma female pupils**, at the Public junior high school “Foscolo-Fermi”, managed by Associazione RomSinti@ politica. As early school leaving of Roma female children is high because of cultural traditions, it was found necessary to start a project based on the idea to overtake the cultural gap and let female Roma children to gain a right to education, essential not to be excluded in the future. As according to the Italian laws what is mandatory is the gained level of education, not the school attendance, the association RomSinti@ politica together with the school involved, have planned a meeting with the parents to explain the education project and agree upon the study program that the Roma female children were going to realize. A part of the study program was taught at school, the other part in the family home and supported by Roma cultural mediator. At the end of the school year, the Roma female children have the exams in order to be admitted to the attendance of the following class. The project was very successful: between 2000 and 2005 40 Roma female children were involved in it and in June 2005, 23 Roma female children have obtained the elementary license and later the junior high school leaving qualification.

**Local best practices from Florence**, where P6 is based, are those of the La Cooperativa Sociale “Il Cenacolo”, they had a project on social integration through hip-hop dance workshops, where older boys and girls taught these dances to the smaller ones (but it was not aimed only at Roma). The same organization has also some other initiatives, such as the “Approdo” bar or the “Isola” daycare center in a disadvantaged district in Florence (where also the focus group interviews took place) to foster the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and migrants, as well as informal meeting possibilities between these groups and local communities.

## Romania

One of the best practices presented by Romania is a project of a **public bilingual kindergarten in Kalderash Community Sărulești**, funded by UNICEF. The school has a bilingual (Romani–Romanian) and culturally adapted curriculum, themes on Romani culture and history are largely present in the lessons’ planning.

Beside the regular pre-school education activities, there were also developed some interesting extra-curricular activities, mainly meant to develop the ethnic conscience and to build the self-esteem of Roma children. The school dedicated a particular attention to the selection of a Roma teacher for the kindergarten, who is a native speaker of the Romani language and of course has abilities in working with pre-school children, as well as the selection of children attending the kindergarten, who are all coming from low-income families. In order to facilitate the relationship between the Roma community / families and the kindergarten, a Roma mother from the community was employed as a school assistant during the whole project, in order to convince the Roma parents to enroll and keep their children in the kindergarten. The direct beneficiaries of the bilingual kindergarten were 20 Roma children with ages between 4 and 9 years. Indirectly, the whole Roma community from Sărulești (600 Roma families) benefited from the fact that their children began attending preschool education.

Another best practice is the **Mobile Kindergarten for Roma children**, funded by the Ministry of Education and Research, Amare Rromentza Center. The background of the project was the fact that the poor school participation of Roma children is also due to the poor participation of Roma children in kindergarten/pre-school education. This project proposes a possible pattern for changing school: mobility, both in space and in method, by creating Summer-kindergartens that are open for a month, addressed to Roma children who never attended pre-school institutions and by setting up information and counseling points in 10 counties. The school administration of the county, together with the school, signed partnerships for the use of one classroom in the school. The counselor have also selected a teacher for each Summer-Kindergarten and supervisors for assisting the children in the schools but also on their road to school and back home. Each kindergarten teacher has evaluated the initial level of the children, in terms of knowledge and abilities. After this, they have developed a curricula, adjusted on the children needs. The curricula and the methodology were different and particular for each kindergarten, from case to case. The total number of the children at the summer kindergartens were 85, with the age between 5 and 8 years. After the 4 weeks of activity, the children were well prepared and ready to enter in the primary school, in the 1<sup>st</sup> class.

## Recommendations by educationalists

Hereby we summarize the recommendations and needs that educationalists expressed during the focus group interviews in the partner countries. Recommendations have been revised later on the basis of 2 interviews carried out with experts in the field: Barbara Hoffmann, expert of intercultural education at *Cooperativa Sociale L'Abbaino*, a social cooperative based in Florence (IT), active in the field of inclusive education at pre-school level and Franjo Horvat, President of the Roma Association *Step by Step*, based in Koprivnica (HR), which aims to improve the quality of life and inclusion of Roma in the local community. For a complete view of the interviews please see the Annex.

- A **double-support** (children and parents) would be necessary, because the general impression is that Roma parents mostly use the playroom as a “parking” instead of considering it a resource and an opportunity, or they consider school as a duty and they don’t take advantage of it.
- A **cooperation between schools and the Police** would be useful with the participation in parent–teachers meetings, in order to provide legal service and clarify consequences regarding early aggression on schools, problem of skipping school, physical punishment, leaving children unattended, behavior on buses, etc.
- The most important tool for cooperation with Roma families is to have personal relationship with them. Therefore the **presence of educators** in the Roma settlements is recommended. The educators are able to create a relationship with the single persons and they transmit the necessary information regarding administrative and health care issues and at the beginning they accompany the families to the healthcare visits or the public offices. Moreover, it would be also useful to elaborate **informative brochures** regarding all administrative and health care issues, available also in Romani language and with images, in order to facilitate comprehension of the health care system and the work of other public offices.
- The use of **cultural mediators in the educational and the healthcare system** would be the most useful tool as they are part of the local Roma community and speak the language, therefore they can create a bridge between Roma population and the local community or the education system. Moreover, a strong collaboration between these mediators, the teachers and the families is needed since the beginning in order to discover immediately the main problems and resolve them effectively. However, mediators have to be very competent, otherwise there is the risk that some families may depend too much on these mediators and don’t become independent (when the mediator becomes a kind of „parent“ and „helps too much“). The mediator should be just the first step, the starting point and his/her final objective is to leave the family when it becomes completely independent and autonomous.
- **Social assistance**, such as meals at the school, school bus for children, after-school opportunities is absolutely necessary to foster integration and mediators should inform the Roma families since the beginning regarding these supporting possibilities. Moreover, these information should be available also in their language, as support is more effective when it’s easily accessible (near home) and when there is already a relationship of confidence.
- Another important **facilitator could be the class-group**. It would be important since the beginning not to let prejudices arise, but to get to know each other first and start cooperation. Taking advantage of the others, in the case of disadvantaged Roma children, starts when the class-group

excludes them, therefore Roma children self-convince themselves that anyway they can't manage to do it (to learn, to be part of the community, to succeed) and they start finding excuses. The prevention of these kind of situations would be essential and schools could play an important role to help in the socialization of children and families (by creating informal meetings, events, etc.). Here teachers and educators have an essential role, they have to be able to create a good atmosphere, without any prejudice, where the Roma families feel welcomed and respected as the others. Furthermore, they have to educate also the other children regarding how to approach to Roma (and other) cultures.

- Roma integration process should start “from the bottom”, not from the state: everyone should look around in his/her own environment and start to open towards the others, get to know the people around and approach the others as single individuals in order to deconstruct his/her own stereotypes. It would be necessary to **create informal meeting possibilities** to families, such as informal events in courtyards to involve families living there, and schools/teachers/mediators could help to give more visibility to these projects.
- The most important competences needed for educators in order to work with Roma population are the cultural and linguistic competences. The lack of these competences can lead to many misunderstandings (such as the stereotype of the “deprived” Roma children) and to deepen the gap between people from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, often Roma culture is not valorized: while other cultures are seen with curiosity and respect, and foreign communities are invited to events to share their traditions, this is not the case of Roma culture. Therefore initiatives that aim to **improve the intercultural competences of educators and teachers** would be necessary.
- Regarding the communication in classes the most important thing is **not to separate Roma and local children**, but to include them with an accent on showing their talents.

## Policy recommendations based on the collected best practices

- To create more **possibilities for municipalities to be direct beneficiaries of EU funds**, thereby showing more confidence in the practice and experience of local people (including Roma partners).
- Local authorities should invest in initiatives aimed at the **involvement of Roma children and their families in local events** (such as games and leisure activities in courtyards, excursions, cooking courses, etc.)
- The cooperation with **cultural mediators and teaching assistants in nursery schools and schools** should be encouraged, as these are the places where desegregation starts. With the help of these mediators events and programmes can be organized at the schools (dance classes, storytelling, etc.) where Roma culture can be promoted and the Roma pupils could “feel their belonging”, they could finally valorize their own culture.
- Fundings should be available for adult education centers, cultural centers, schools, libraries, etc. in order to organize **language courses for Roma people** with the participation of Roma mediators. Observed best practices show that in order to reach the smallest children and help their integration it’s essential to focus on the family as a whole, therefore language courses aimed at parents are a useful tool. The knowledge of the local language is essential in order to guarantee the integration of Roma kids on a long-term basis, otherwise they won’t be able to follow the training programme later on.
- The **involvement of Roma cultural and linguistic mediators (1 mediator per class)** should be a requirement in schools attended by Roma children, but also in all kinds of project applications aimed at the integration of Roma. They are also important to show a good example of Roma who completed high school and also because they are aware of the needs and problems of the Roma population.
- Support should also be given to **update teachers’ training competences** and to elaborate innovative teaching methods. A cross-sectoral cooperation and appropriate support programmes are required in order to foster the integration of Roma children in the educational system.
- In order to overcome the educational disadvantage (that starts with the language barrier) and gaps faced by Roma children **access to high quality non-segregated early childhood education** should be fostered.
- Investments are needed in the training of mediators, nursery nurses, teachers in order to inform them about Roma language and culture and to **improve their intercultural competences**.
- According to surveys the poor school participation of Roma children is due to, between other reasons, the poor participation of Roma children in kindergarten/pre-school education. In fact, Roma families, usually, don’t avail of pre-school education services for their children, mainly because they also have prejudices (for the fear that their children will be completely adapted to the others, lose their cultural identity, etc.). Therefore their integration starts at primary school, which may be too late. For this reason the ERNE partnership proposes to fund initiatives at local level in order to **involve Roma children in pre-school educational activities** and to inform their families about these possibilities (for example with the creation of local information points).
- To **promote projects and awareness raising campaigns** in the topics of anti-discrimination, tolerance, aimed to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes and promote diversity trainings targeting non Roma parents, local authorities, nursery school and school staff.

- To create a **database on EU funded Roma projects** that can help also future applicants and also to make the lessons learned from other projects available in a clear and accessible way.
- **More support** would be necessary through daily after-school assistance, homework support, involvement of parents and Romani language tuition for parents and pupils.
- In order to promote a continuity over time and to have benefits on a long-term base it is suggested to **publish calls for tender for longer term projects**, so that important achievements could be made sustainable. This is important also because through short-term projects the best practices are sporadic and occasional and they don't permit to obtain results on a long term. Moreover, these projects shouldn't be "good practices" but the standard, otherwise they just involve those few people who participated at the project itself.
- On a policy level, the ERNE project partners recommend to **develop a separate EU strategy for Roma and Education** through a consultation process with the most successful stakeholders, such as NGOs staffed by Roma as well as local, regional and national authorities, associations, schools, universities, educational centers, etc.
- As desegregation in schools is still in use in many member states we consider crucial to actively **promote desegregated education**, granting projects specifically aiming at school desegregation.
- Romani language should be used for **bilingual and bicultural/intercultural education** in early childhood to provide a bridge between languages and cultures. Also Romani bilingual books should be produced and promoted, as this would foster both the language learning and the cultural valorization process.
- The direct **involvement of Roma families and communities** is recommended in the planning and organization of services aimed at them. They must be given the possibility to suggest and to decide regarding the services, they have to be asked about their needs, because they know it better than anyone else.

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## Annex: Interviews with experts



### #1 Interview:

**Linked to which educational sector:** pre-school

**Name of the interviewed person:** Barbara Hoffmann

**Organization the persons represents:** expert of intercultural education at *Cooperativa Sociale L'Abbaino*, a social cooperative active in the field of inclusive education at pre-school level. They are in charge for the management of

kindergartens and other services (daycare centers, playrooms, toy libraries) for children and families in collaboration with the City of Florence.

Here should be some information about the questions we could ask

Please give us some ideas:

- *Which factors can facilitate and/or make more difficult the integration of Roma students at the educational institutions?*
- *What are the pros and cons concerning cultural/linguistic mediators at the educational institutions?*
- *Could you give us an example of good practice you value most in your work.*
-

## I. OPINION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS:

According to Mrs. Hoffmann, all in all the recommendations are good and valid, however she commented on some of them:

Informative brochures in Roma language regarding available services (healthcare, administrative issues, etc.) in the territory are a good idea, but the most important tool for cooperation with Roma families is to have **personal relationship** with them. In Florence, for example, some time ago there were many Roma camps (now there is just 1 left because the other ones are closed) and the only thing that really worked well was the **presence of educators** in the camps. The personal contact is much more useful than printed materials. The educators are able to create a relationship with the single persons and they transmit better the information and at the beginning they accompany the families to the healthcare visits or the public offices.

Regarding the initiatives to improve the **intercultural competences of educators and teachers**, according to Mrs. Hoffmann it would be very important, because even the most motivated and open-minded teachers have often prejudices against Roma pupils and they don't know anything about their culture, traditions and history. In Florence, usually, teachers think that Roma children are "deprived" (they are dirty, they have head lice, etc.), which could have been true when children were coming from the Roma camps but this is not the situation anymore. The other problem is that Roma culture is not valorized: while other cultures are seen with curiosity and respect, and foreign communities are invited to events to share their traditions, this is not the case of Roma culture. It would be necessary to change this point of view.

Regarding the policy recommendations based on the collected best practices, Mrs. Hoffmann agreed that **Roma families, usually, don't avail of pre-school education services for their children**. Therefore their integration starts at primary school, which may be too late, it should start before in order to guarantee a smooth and successful integration. But one of the reasons why Roma families don't send their children to kindergarten is because also Roma families have prejudices, they are not so motivated to participate in these initiatives (for the fear that their children will be completely adapted to the others, lose their cultural identity, etc.).

In general, the **presence of a cultural and linguistic mediator is fundamental**. In Florence there are some schools with many Roma pupils and the presence of cultural mediators helped a lot in their integration. Events and programmes were organized at the schools (dance classes, storytelling, etc.) where Roma culture was promoted and the Roma pupils could "feel their belonging", they could finally valorize their own culture. But a good quality mediation is fundamental in this process.

Concerning the **support provided to Roma pupils** there has been a nice project promoted by the Laboratorio permanente per la pace (Workshop for Peace), a daycare center for children funded by the City of Florence and managed by the Cooperativa Sociale L'Abbaino (where Mrs. Hoffmann works): Arabic, Rom and Chinese older students (16-17 years old) helped the younger ones,

especially Rom, in their mother tongue, to do their homework. But it was a small project and involved just 7-8 children.

Therefore, Mrs. Hoffmann agrees and **underlines the importance of the recommendation regarding the need for longer-term projects**, because although there are many nice projects (just as the one mentioned above), they are sporadic and occasional and they don't permit to obtain results on a long term. These projects shouldn't be "good practices" but the standard, otherwise they just involve those few people who participated at the project.

Regarding the linguistic issue, **it would be important to foster that Roma learn the local language on one hand, but at the same time also to valorize their culture**. The problem is that many teachers and the people in general think that Roma don't have a culture to be valorized. Society thinks they have to be assimilated, that they are integrated when they live in a nice apartment, have a good job, their children go to school and wear the same clothes as the other children. Therefore Roma children and youth may think that they are accepted just when they don't have anything from their own culture. The **use of bilingual books** could foster both the language learning and the cultural valorization process, as suggested also by the last recommendation in the list, and regarding this Mrs. Hoffmann mentioned a publishing house called SINNOS in Italy who published bilingual books (with tales, short stories for children), also in Roma language.

Therefore, in order to foster the integration of Roma 2 elements are fundamental: the **personal relationships** and the **direct involvement of Roma families and communities in the planning and organization of services aimed at them**. We must give them the possibility to suggest and to decide regarding the services, and we have to ask them what do they need, because they know it better than us.

## II. ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ABOVE:

- **Pros and cons regarding the mediators** : Mrs. Hoffmann mainly sees the pros in the presence of Roma cultural mediators at schools and public health system. But they must have a good preparation in cultural mediation. The only risk she sees is that some families may depend too much on these mediators and don't become independent. When the mediator becomes a kind of „parent“ and „helps too much“. The mediator should be just the first step, the starting point and his/her final objective is to leave the family when it becomes completely independent and autonomous.
- **Factors that facilitate or make more difficult the integration of Roma at school**: the most important factor is to have a mutual confidence. Teachers and nursery nurses working at kindergartens, nursery schools, daycare centers, etc. should welcome Roma families in the same way as the other ones, without prejudices. Although maybe Roma families don't always come motivated or happy, but nursery nurses have to be able to create a good atmosphere where the Roma families feel welcomed and respected as the others.

- **Best practices:** the best practices are those of the La Cooperativa Sociale “Il Cenacolo”, they had for example a project on social integration through hip-hop dance workshops, where older boys and girls taught these dances to the smaller ones (but it was not aimed only at Roma). The same organization has also some other initiatives, such as the “Approdo” bar or the “Isola” daycare center in a disadvantaged district in Florence (where we held our focus group interviews) to foster the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and migrants, as well as informal meeting possibilities between these groups and local communities.



## #2 Interview:

**Linked to which educational sector:** Roma representative

**Name of the interviewed person:** Franjo Horvat

**Organization the persons represents:** President of the Roma Association "Step by Step" which aims to improve the quality of life and inclusion of Roma in the local community, a representative of the Roma minority in Koprivnica-Križevci County, Roma coordinator

### 1. What are the biggest challenges and problems that Roma face when they are integrating with the majority population?

- The biggest problem is that Roma don't know Croatian language good enough, especially those who are living in Roma settlements. Then start a problem because children can't follow the teaching program. This is perhaps the biggest obstacle. Also Roma assistants should be include from the first grade of elementary school, if there is no possibility to organized preschool for these kids. In the preschool is necessary to include all, from the personal hygiene to the Croatian language, and teach children that they have to sit still and listen. Currently we implemented action "In our shoes," and we are open for cooperation with all who wish to join to see the real situation in these Roma settlements.

### 2. What do you think we all should do to improve these mentioned problems?

- For a start all local institutions should include in order to solve the issue of preschool education for children who are living in Roma settlements. Roma who are living outside of Roma settlements, along with the majority population, they know the language through communication with neighbours, while those in the Roma settlements used only Roma language. Solution of that would be preschool. Three years ago we managed to organize preschool and we followed that kids results in school and it was more better. The next year we was requested finicial assistance from the ministry but it was

denied because that kindergarten does not comply with the conditions and because there is no finance. In our environment we should all do something together to help so it would be nicer and easier to live together. It is necessary to include Roma as many as possible. Now we have more Roma children finishing school, the last 10 years the number is slightly increased. Elementary school Brace Radic Koprivnica is one of the few that are really trying and stands on the issue of the Roma population. All institutions should be involved in solving the problems of the Roma, not just schools. In my opinion in every institutions should be hire a Roma who have completed high school, because they know needs and problems of the Roma population and how to help other Roma. They think that they are worth less and have no motivation for education. Which is understandable on the one hand because experiencing various discrimination. All local institutions should involved, it could change a lot. We must aware the majority nation that this is a problem of all of us and not exclusively a problem of the Roma, and to go all work together on this issue.

**3. What do you consider as a solution of the language barrier that you specify as a big problem?**

- I think the solution can be preschool and inclusion of Roma assistants in schools at least the first two classes so children can finish classes with a higher grades and thus gained the motivation for further education. With Roma assistant right from the start their results can be much better. Children who do not know the Croatian language are distracted and restless because they do not understand. We should work all together to organized preschool education for children so they can learn the Croatian language and basic of behavior, while the second step should be Roma assistants in schools. It is not a personal assistant for one student, it is one helper per class in which are Roma children.

**4. From your perspective, how are Roma accepted among the pupils in schools? Does integration is getting better?**

- I should point out that children from Roma settlements are less accepted than those who already live in the integration of the majority population. Teachers should teach the other children to accept Roma as their friends. If Roma children have a chance in life they can be very successful. In every institution should be employed at least one Roma, so when it comes to a problem he will know the situation of the problem and how to solve it. That would be the best solution for all of us. I must say that in our

county is perhaps the best cooperation between Roma and local institutions in Croatia. Cooperation is definitely there but it is not enough because we have to work more intensively if we want to solve the problem.

**5. What is the perception of Roma for education? Does increasing the number of Roma who continue their education after elementary school?**

- It certainly increases the willingness to completing their education, and we have plenty of them who have completed high school and even more. But I have to mention that we don't have a way how to motivate children to go to school because neither those who have finished school haven't a permanent job. We have good cooperation with Croatian Employment Service, where they are given the opportunity to work through public works, but again that isn't permanent job. Now we agree that Roma will not work on public works only in the city but also in Roma settlements so they can clean that part.

**6. Does the employment rate of Roma increase past few years?**

- For now we manage to employ them only through public works. There are bad experiences between employers and Roma. But I repeat that if the Roma have an opportunity they can become one of the exemplary citizens. We have several examples of Roma who were given the opportunity, they fight for themselves,
- gained something and now they are equal to the majority population..