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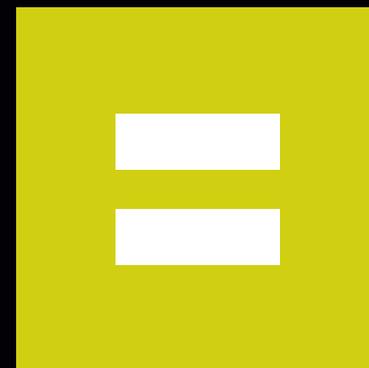
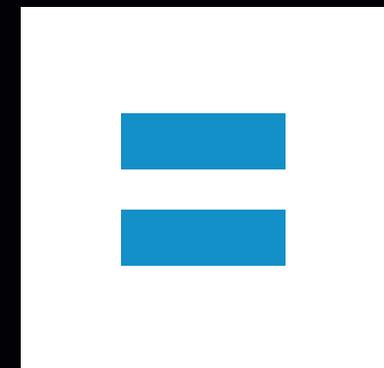
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FINANCING



COMBATING ROMA/TRAVELLER DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



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The Roma/Traveller community is an ethnic minority living in all EU countries and which comprises around ten million people after the enlargement of the EU to the Central and Eastern Europe candidate countries. Moreover, the Roma/Traveller minority is probably one of the more marginalised ethnic groups in the EU and discrimination is still one of the main obstacles to their incorporation within society as full-fledged citizens. In recent years, abundant documentation has been produced indicating huge disparities between Roma and non-Roma in key areas such as education, employment, health-care, housing and other fields. Efforts to bridge these gaps have rarely reached the level of comprehensiveness or effectiveness required to address long-standing structural problems.

Despite the increase and improvement of the European and national legal instruments promoting equal treatment the anti-discriminatory legislation will be only effective as far as the mechanisms established to implement its provisions are also effective. In this sense, the Roma EDEM project aims at reducing the existing gap between anti-discrimination legislation and institutional practices, while including the Roma/Traveller issue in the European political agenda. For the achievement of this general objective, the project develops training and awareness raising activities mainly in the field of monitoring anti-discrimination legislation and policies at local level in education and employment, as well as the empowerment of the Roma/Traveller associations in all participant countries (Spain, Hungary, Portugal, the Czech Republic, United Kingdom -Northern Ireland- and Romania). The project combines a local and European approach in all activities, counting with a trans-national association made up of five specialised bodies for the promotion of equal treatment and two NGOs with a proven experience in the fight against discrimination.

The activities planned for the two year implementation phase of the project included seminars on equal treatment in education and employment in each of the countries involved, international seminar on the monitoring of anti-discrimination legislation and policies, the production and dissemination of material for Roma providing information on equal rights, resources and examples of good practice in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Czech, Hungarian and Romanian as well as in Romani.

For more information, please visit www.gitanos.org/romaedem

Given the prevalence of discrimination against Roma and Travellers in education and employment, the promotion of good practices is essential both to the Roma community generally but also to the wider non-Roma/Traveller community, including employers and teachers.

In this sense, the exchange of good practices was one of the most important parts of the International Seminar on the monitoring of anti-discrimination legislation and policies focusing on Roma/Travellers held in Madrid on the 24th and 25th November 2005, counting with the participation of over 90 officials, international experts, NGOs and Roma/Traveller representatives and associations from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

On the second day of the seminar, good practices in the public domain and in civil society were presented in the fields of employment and education, and from these the partners selected six for inclusion in this handbook with the aim of identifying its main characteristics, key elements for success, as well as potential transferability.

The objective of the good practices handbook is to provide a useful promotional tool offering successful and transferable models in the promotion of equal treatment, while studying the elements which these practices have in common thereby providing a valuable reference.

Three of the six practices selected, from Spain, Portugal and Hungary, mainly focus on promoting Roma access to employment, while the other three, from Romania, the Czech Republic and Northern Ireland, address Roma access to education at different levels as well as attention to cultural diversity in schools.

The key elements common to all the good practices selected making them successful and possible models to be used in similar contexts, could be summarised as follows:

- **Integrated approaches:** successful programmes were designed taking into account the complex situation of the Roma people, paying special attention to the relationship between social exclusion and discrimination in a broad range of fields: employment, education, housing, justice, media, etc.

- **Involvement and empowerment of the Roma community and associations:** all projects put a priority on the participation of Roma individuals, families and associations in the development of actions, stressing their leadership role in the labour and education processes.

- **Intercultural working teams:** the fostering of contact, communication and shared activities between Roma and non-Roma was included in all experiences, mostly from the initial programme management stage itself, including working teams, thus fostering intercultural environments.

- **Targeted but non-segregated services:** the integral and mainstream approach and the intercultural environment just described were complemented with targeted flexible and adapted actions addressing the Roma community insofar as methodology, tools and services provided. This cultural diversity approach was developed carefully avoiding any kind of ethnic segregation.

- **Creation of role models:** programmes have created role models for the Roma students, their families and employment seekers in order to improve their educational and labour situation, as well as their overall standard of living.

- **Strong partnership:** strong partnerships were created involving public administrations in the field of employment and education at national, regional and especially local level; NGOs, teachers, families, trade unions and enterprises, as well other public and private entities in the fields of health services, law enforcement, justice, etc.

- **Data collection:** all programmes contributed to the collection of data on the situation of the Roma community regarding employment and education, offering the possibility of reorienting their actions and strategies in order to tackle discrimination and social exclusion more efficiently.

- **Transferability:** programmes could be models suitable for European countries with limitations in the Roma access to general education, training and employment resources. They could also be adapted to address inequalities faced by other groups of marginalized and excluded population such as disabled people, migrant and refugee population, etc.

- **Anti-discrimination focus:** all programmes present antidiscrimination components, with a particular focus on the ideological elements that give rise to discrimination (prejudices, stereotypes), the structural factors that act as a barrier to equality, and the communication gap between Roma/Travellers and the rest of society.



ACCEDER Programme

Field Employment

Entity Fundación Secretariado Gitano

Country Spain

General Objective Fostering access of the Roma population to mainstream training and employment

Brief Description The Multi-Regional Anti-Discrimination Operational Programme of the European Social Fund, the ACCEDER Programme, aims at fostering access of the Roma population to mainstream training and employment from 2000-2006 through 46 specialised employment offices whose methodology is based on individualised comprehensive pathways to employment while at the same time making a concerted effort to foster pro-active policies with the Roma population.

Regarding individualised comprehensive pathways to employment, the actions focus on developing and improving employability which entails integrated learning and training in respect of professional techniques and skills and social skills for employment, ability to take the initiative and be autonomous, linguistic skills and capacity to understand and internalise company objectives. These principles are implemented and organised under guidance, training and labour insertion (welcome and information, guidance, advisory, monitoring and referral actions, actions implementing vocational prelabour-training and training activities tailored to the Roma population), as well as labour market study and mediation (actions focusing on analysis and research for employment, actions to support hiring and labour market accompaniment actions).

The fostering of pro active policies aimed at the Roma population entails in practical terms fostering community based services and employment opportunities linked to these (socio-educational, socio-health and socio-cultural services); training and awareness raising for social intervention professionals, awareness raising among Roma regarding the importance of training and employment, technical assistance for government administration and social organisations, and development of studies and research to gain greater insight into the Spanish Roma population.

- As of December 2005, 28.231 people had gone through individual employment pathways, and over 14.742 salaried employment contracts had been signed.
- More than 160.000 hours of vocational training had been given throughout 190 courses.
- Implementation of actions in 45 locations in 13 regions throughout Spain.
- Direct impact on the Roma population as regards improvements in employability.
- Awareness raising on the need of adaptation of training and employment systems to the specific reality facing the Roma community.
- Identification of discrimination cases and support to victims.
- Data collection on Roma employment.

Main Outcomes

- Integrated approach and long term planning.
- Involvement and empowerment of the Roma community and associations.
- Equal balance between social and economic perspective.
- Intercultural working teams.
- Targeted but non-segregated services.
- Adaptability in the use of specific methodology and tools.
- Strong partnership and leading role of the target group and its representative entities.
- Individualised employment itineraries (training and employment) process.
- Nation - wide dimension.
- Use of ERDF.

Key Aspects

Anti discrimination Focus

ACCEDER is actively contributing to breaking down the stereotypes linked to the Roma people in employment through permanent contact with enterprises and employers. In this sense, the Programme is increasing contact between Roma and non Roma workers and employers. Through the individualised comprehensive pathways to employment the Programme is also tackling the structural barriers faced by Roma in the labour market, increasing their employability and access to mainstream employment and vocational training services.

The Programme has also permitted the identification of discrimination cases; some of them published in the FSG annual reports *Discrimination and Roma Community*, and has offered support to victims in the defence of their rights through legal counselling, mediation and legal action. These case studies have also permitted an in-depth analysis of the discrimination dynamics suffered by Roma in employment. Finally, we should also stress that the project is helping to gather accurate data on Roma and employment having produced different publication and studies on the subject such as the *FSG Employment Observatory* updating ACCEDER results in terms of contract signed, sectors of activity, gender balance, as well as the comparative study *Roma population and employment*.

Partnership

Involvement as co-funders of over 100 departments of the public administration (state, regional and local) and private entities. Active participation of the private business sector (3.000 companies), the Roma associative movement, social networks, the media and other entities.

Transferability

ACCEDER could serve as model especially suited to CEE countries since its approach is based mainly on social integration rather than cultural identity, concentrating efforts to improve the live conditions of the Roma community through full incorporation into vocational training and regular employment. In this sense, the Council of Europe Development Bank has already signed an agreement with the FSG to provide technical assistance to projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the Romani community in CEE countries.

The Program could also serve as a model for other territories with different social and cultural characteristics and with limitations in terms of certain population access to general training and employment resources (other minorities, migrants, etc.). Due to the size of the Programme, the management



and coordination system is a key element for its success, given that such a system can be transferred to other large-scale education, employment and social intervention projects.

Regarding ACCEDER integrated approach of actions, which comprises the whole individual employment pathway, the programmes operates with a multiregional strategy, taking the peculiarities and specific needs and characteristics of every territory into account, starting with their shared elements in this field, so that they become transferable.

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Contact

Teachers' assistants for socially or culturally disadvantaged children

Field Education

Entity Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

Country Czech Republic

General Objective To support Roma children in their education process.

Brief Description Roma teachers' assistants started working in the Czech Republic in 1993 thanks to the financial support of non-profit organisations. From 1998, their competencies were established by a Governmental Decree, and were later defined by a Guideline of the Ministry of Education.

Since 1 January 2005, the post of Roma assistant was changed to *teacher's assistants for socially or culturally disadvantaged children*. According to law, they are considered educational personnel and are paid out of the national budget. The position has been established with the objective of promoting equal opportunities providing an educational model that reflects the real educational needs of all students from primary school, especially those coming from culturally or socially different environments. Usually, teacher's assistants work in schools with a high number of Roma students and are either Roma themselves or having an in-depth knowledge of this community.

Their main activities focus on helping students to adapt to the school environment, and to overcome communication barriers, helping teachers in educational activities and give attention to cultural diversity and finally, promoting cooperation with the families and their community. In this sense, apart from direct educational activities in the classroom, teacher's assistants also carry out social work within the Roma community, having big significance for the children and becoming positive models to follow.

- Main Outcomes**
- Existence of over 300 teacher's assistants for socially or culturally disadvantaged children in the Czech Republic.
 - Provision of tools to tackle discrimination, to promote cultural diversity, and to influence positively in the Roma students environment (lower absenteeism, better school rates, etc.).

- Training programs established for the qualification of assistants, but also for teachers, in order to promote cooperation and respect to diversity in the entire educational team.

- Fostering Roma access to the labour market.

- Involvement of Roma community members in the Czech school system.
- Intercultural pedagogical teams.
- Individual approach with the children and their families.
- Attention to cultural diversity and the Roma specific educational needs.
- Creation of role models for Roma children.

Key Aspects

Thanks to the introduction of teacher's assistants in schools, the pedagogical team becomes more culturally diverse and a teaching style more focused on the needs of Roma students is created in the school regarding teaching methods, communication, etc. The presence of a Roma teacher's assistant helps to break down prejudices and the engrained stereotyped approach to Roma. It especially helps teachers to overcome prejudices and stereotypes who not only have working experience with Roma but also receive specific training together with the assistants consisting of shared activities and objectives between Roma and non-Roma.

Anti discrimination Focus

Assistants are also helping to promote cultural diversity within the schools, facilitating and adapting general rules and regulations to the Roma community. At the same time, Roma are participating more actively in school life where they have a representative and someone they can trust. Finally, the creation of this post have also benefited Roma employment and is therefore helping to tackle the serious discrimination suffered by the Roma community in gaining access to the labour market.



Partnership The role of the teacher's assistant entails essential and wide cooperation among different stakeholders, mainly schools, regional and local administrations, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Transferability Experience in introducing the teachers' assistant post in terms of financing, school insertion, agenda, etc., could be used by other European countries. Educational programmes developed for teachers and assistants focusing on the real Roma educational needs are also very mobile. Lessons learnt in the selection of candidates could be shared as well, besides, the preparation and training of the whole educational team before inserting the assistant in the school is essential, especially if he/she is Roma. In this sense, anti-prejudices training and seminars focusing on the role of the teacher's assistants are very appropriate, and are reflected in the following transferable experiences:

- Nova skola, o.p.s. (www.novaskola.org)
 - Tandem course (methodology for the cooperation between teachers and assistants).

- Annual State wide Meeting of Teacher's Assistants (lectures and workshops).

- Step by Step CR (www.sbscr.cz)
 - *Kukadla-Jakhora* project (seminars and social work focused on increasing the number of Roma becoming teacher's assistants at preschool level).
 - *Support for Roma Integration* project (methodology for the cooperation between teachers and assistants).
 - *Anti-prejudice Education* project: training to identify, recognize, and eliminate prejudices.
- Educational-psychological preparation for teacher's assistants
 - Cabinet of Multicultural Education. Pedagogical Faculty of the Masaryk University in Brno (www.ped.muni.cz/wsocedu/kmv).
 - Humanitas-Profes, o.p.s. (www.humanitas-profes.cz).
 - Regional Educational and Informational Center of the Moravian-Silesian Region (www.kvic.cz).
- Secondary School specialization: pedagogy for assistants in the secondary school system
 - VOS, Secondary Pedagogical School and Commercial Academy in Most (www.vos-oamost.cz).
 - Prof. Zdenek Matejcek Secondary School – Ostrava-Poruba (www.skolspec.cz).

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Contact

Integrated Central Employment Programme for Roma People

Field Employment

Entity County Employment Office of Pest

Country Hungary

General Objective The aim of the program is to recruit, train and help place disadvantaged Roma and other unemployed persons living in similar situations.

Brief Description Since 2003, the *Integrated Central Employment Programme for Roma people* have offered the County Employment Office of Pest the possibility of implementing recruiting, training and placing activities in 8 different locations with limited groups of 15-25 unemployed people.

After the selection of participants, those taking part in the programme are employed in the public sector up to a maximum period of 2 years. In order to avoid economic problems arising from increases in the cost of living, a support of 90%-s of public work has been provided during the duration of the program. Throughout the period of employment, participants have also been included in a complex closing up programme. In addition to traditional human resources, motivation training and refresher courses, closing up training includes activities which help to improve standards of living and encourage healthy lifestyles and behaviour. This support not only polishes personal skills but the so called "collective characteristic" is also addressed and additional elements are ensured by different partner organizations (family support, police, etc.). In this sense we should stress that those taking part in the programme are considered as target groups for these organizations.

- Main Outcomes**
- Implementation in 7 local employment offices throughout 8 locations of the Pest County, with the participation of 653 persons (284 women).
 - Vocational training tailored to labour market needs through an integrated method with 216 people qualified.
 - Individual approach and early place at primary labour market of 370 people.

- Monitoring of place permanence with 21% of employed people keeping their job for more than six months.
- Improvement of the participants' labour situation, as well as their overall standard of living.
- Wide social acceptance and reputation among the Roma community, with an important number of applications on waiting list.
- Regular cultural programmes to develop Roma culture and identity (reading and writing meetings, round table discussions) carried out.

- Integrated approach in the organization and services provided.
- Targeted but non-segregated trainings and services.
- Focus on complex and harmonious development of personality.
- Vocational training tailored to labour market needs and the participants skills.
- Collective program: participation of networks of different organisations.
- Individual approach, flexible and adapted services.
- Promotion of place and permanence in primary labour market.
- Set up of a Roma Partnership Round Table as social background of the program.

Key Aspects

Non-discrimination was regarded as the basic principle of the project's partner organizations: during the setting-up and implementation stages of the project it was ensured that no member of the target group would be discriminated against in any way due to his/her ethnic origin, age or gender. Special emphasis was put on activities to heighten awareness of legal issues: the project provided an opportunity for both the employers and employees to get an overall picture of domestic anti-discrimination law in the field of employment.

Anti discrimination Focus

In addition to combating discrimination an important element of the project was to introduce the economic benefits of equal treatment for business activity. Over the long term, business activities will benefit from having employees from a variety of different ethnic and social groups. Moreover, a slight change in the behaviour of service consumers can be observed. More and more customers pay attention to the background of the product or services they intend to buy, i.e. by whom and how it was produced. They do not tend to favour services or products that have obviously been carried out or produced by damaging the environment or neglecting the human rights of employees. Furthermore, the size of the groups affected is significant, therefore constituting a considerable market which could be reached today with a targeted strategy.

Partnership

- Police headquarters of Pest County
- Hungarian Red Cross of Pest County
- Regional Development Research Centre of BME
- State Public Healthcare and Health Officers' Service of Pest County
- National Employment Public Funds
- Regional Employment and Training Centre of Kecskemét
- Labour Market Intervention Centre of Budapest
- Local government offices
- Town management
- Building industry non-profit company of Érd
- Family Support Services
- Local Governments of Roma Minorities



The Integrated Central Employment for Roma people programme, implemented at local level by the County Employment Office of Pest could be adapted in any kind of region or municipality, taking into account its local characteristics. At Hungarian level, the programme has been already extended to Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county, but could also be easily transferred to other countries, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, where the same level of local partnership and involvement of different organizations could be reached.

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Transferability

Contact

Roma children want to learn

Field Education

Entity Roma Centre for Social Intervention and Studies – Romani CRISS

Country Romania

General Objective To improve Roma access to high school.

Brief Description As result of the experience gained by Romani CRISS through education activities undertaken in the Roma communities, we are able to confirm that Roma parents and students were not aware of the subsidised places reserved for Roma by Ministerial Order, both in high schools and vocational schools, and therefore applications were not submitted on time and the subsidised places went unawarded.

In this sense, the purpose of this initiative was to develop human resources which would :

- disseminate information at local level regarding educational policies targeting Roma children;
- create working models for Roma children support;
- involve various social actors (parents, educators, teachers, high school teachers, school principals) in implementing the affirmative action measures for Roma children.

To this end, Information and Counselling Offices have been set up in different counties throughout the country in order to carry out an information campaign targeting students and their families on the affirmative action measures made available through the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Information and Counselling services for Roma were established in the locations selected by Romani CRISS after the identification and hiring of counsellors, signing partnership agreements with elementary schools and Roma associations, and acquiring premises with all the needed equipment. The structure for the information and counselling offices was also established,

comprised of a Roma organisation representative, a teacher, and representative of parents' interests.

Apart from providing information on the educational policies addressing the Roma community, mainly issuing recommendations to students on how to fill out the application form, the centres have also maintained contact with high school principals, parents' committees and small Roma communities, and have accompanied the students to the public sessions where these subsidised places are awarded. In short, it has served as a link between the school, and the Roma community.

- Project implementation in 13 counties of Romania.
- Direct impact on Roma and improvement of their access to schooling.
- Over 2.100 Roma students informed.
- More than 723 children counselled on how to apply for subsidised places.
- Identification of segregation and discrimination cases in schools.

Main Outcomes

- Setting up of models for the support of Roma students.
- Involvement of the community and local leaders in the Roma students support, changing parents' attitude towards school.
- Human resources development on disseminating information at local level regarding the educational policies addressed to Roma children.
- Increase of contact and improvement of communication between NGOs and other entities at local level (inspectors, schools, high-schools, committees of parents, community in general).
- Setting aside cultural barriers.

Key Aspects

Anti discrimination Focus

The project has developed efficient data collection techniques regarding discrimination at local and regional level: our ongoing relationship with the community has made it possible to identify and report cases of segregation and discrimination without undue delay. The capacity to react to cases of discrimination has increased thanks to the physical closeness with the communities (human resources available in real time, low intervention costs, etc.), both in the fields of mediation and legal action. Therefore, close follow up of the implementation of compensatory measures as result of litigation or mediation processes in all discrimination cases identified has been possible.



Furthermore, the project has a direct impact on the Roma population, increasing Roma access to school services and their participation in the Romanian education system. Information and counselling offices have also provided the possibility of adapting the general norms of school entrance to the specificities and needs of the Roma community.

Partnership

The project has counted with wide partnership and involvement of stakeholders such as:

- Ministry of Education and Research
- County School Inspectorates
- Educators, teachers and school principles
- Roma NGOs
- Parents

Information and Counselling Offices can be considered a positive experience because they lead to an improved access to information, and thus a better access to quality education. This initiative can be taken over by the Ministry of Education and Research and multiplied at national level in locations where the project has not been implemented yet.

Furthermore, the initiative could be also developed in some other countries in order to support Roma access to schooling, especially if subsidised places and other affirmative measures are available for Roma students, but also for providing general information on Roma education issues.

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Transferability

Contact

Roma Social Promotion Programme

Field Employment

Entity Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (SCML)

Country Portugal

General Objective Promotion of social reintegration of young Roma through professional and school training.

Brief Description The Programme develops a set of activities addressed mainly to young Roma but also to non Roma people who abandon school precociously. In this sense, the Programme receives, integrates, supports and solves the future of the participants through a set of strategically actions in order to fight discrimination and social exclusion. Through its formative strategy (different levels of carpentry, dressmaking, cookery and pastry) the Programme tries to connect vocational training with professional work.

A pre-professionalization pathway for the young people between 12 and 14 years old also intends to develop similar abilities to enter the professional training properly said. It is mainly focused on the adaptation to the training process, the internalization of rules, and the integration in the group of pairs. The project aims to be an answer for pupils who having abandoned school and without any specialization, can be engaged in formative pathways with professional qualifications, thus preventing social exclusion.

The formative route developed by the Programme takes into consideration the base qualification of the participants individually, their ethnic and cultural characteristics, the particular character of their education, their cognitive development and their capacity of apprehension of knowledge. The appraisal, construction and integral growth of the individual in terms of respect for personal identity is also essential, besides the constructive integration of the differences.

Main Outcomes

- Integration of Roma young people having abandoned school and without any specialization in the alternative education system.
- Direct impact on the Roma young population and specifically as regards improvement in their professional training and job opportunities.

- Improvement of participants exercise of citizenship's rights and obligations.
- Training courses offered to over 600 young Roma people, out of which 65 achieved professional qualification.
- Over 4.600 hours of school and professional training provided in 2005 throughout five different courses.

- Participación and empowerment of the Roma community.
- Work field activities carried out with the participants' families, stressing their involvement in the training process.
- Individual approach to all participants.
- Targeted, flexible and adapted services.
- Attention to cultural diversity.
- Provision of economic support for the training, meals and transport.
- Psycho-pedagogical support.
- Use of ERDF.

The Programme contributes actively to break the stereotypes associated to the Roma community, fostering the contact between Roma and the non-Roma young people attending the training courses in an intercultural atmosphere. On the other hand, civic as well as informal education skills are complementary areas of training in which the problems of racism, discrimination, exclusion and xenophobia are discussed.

Attention to cultural diversity, especially regarding the Roma culture and traditions is also one of the main principles of the training provided by the PPSC. Education and vocational training activities area are indeed an important step concerning the access to the education system and citizenship

Key Aspects

Anti discrimination Focus

with the ultimate objective of allowing the Roma young people access to employment, where this community suffers structural discrimination.

The Programme also has a permanent contact with companies and employers, where partnerships are established, aiming to break the discriminatory barriers in the Roma access to the labour market, increasing their job possibilities and professional development. Educational development as well as work a field with the families is part of the anti-discriminatory activities carried out.



- Schools
- CPCJ
- Institute of Social reintegration
- Services of the SCML
- Court of Family and Minors

Partnership

The Roma Social Promotion Programme may be a model especially suitable for transferability, being based on social integration concentrating mainly in increasing vocational training and regular employment opportunities.

Transferability

The experience of the multicultural training centre on the promotion of teacher's awareness of pupil's adaptation in the school and social settings; the development of individual paths of training and learning curriculum focused on individual skills; and the implementation of new methodologies in a training context; can be adapted to any organization dealing with ethnic minorities and other excluded population.

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Toybox. Early years development through play

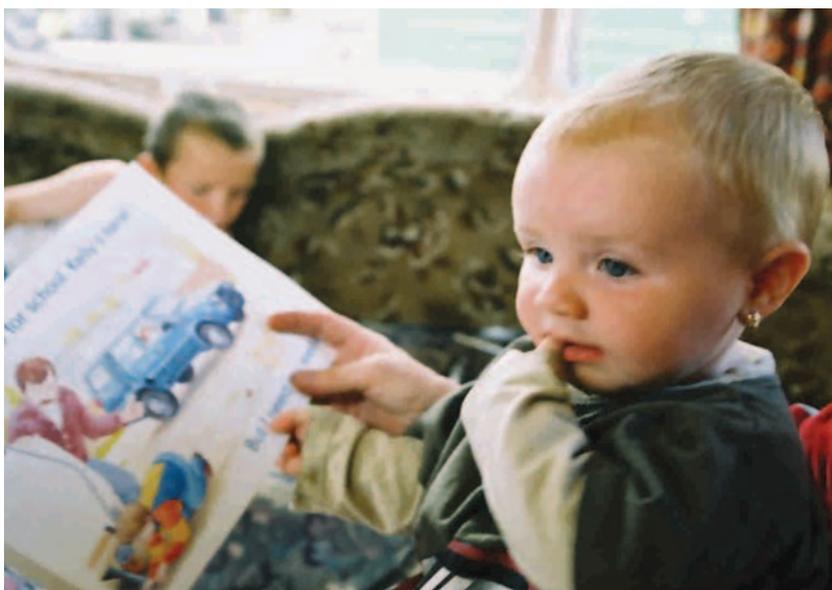
Field Education

Entity Save the Children

Country North of Ireland

General Objective Encouraging the enrolment of Traveller children in preschool, alongside improved developmental readiness.

Brief Description Toybox is an Early Years development programme working with Irish Traveller children aged 0-4 and their parents, in their own homes. Its aims are to support parents to understand and share in the developmental significance of play, to reduce some of the inequalities experienced by Traveller children in relation to their cognitive, co-ordination and social skills, and to encourage the enrolment of Traveller children in preschool.



Beginning in August 2003, Toybox is delivered to children across the North of Ireland by Save the Children and NIPPA, a regionally based Early Years organisation – with the support of several local Traveller support groups. A key impetus for the programme was the realisation in 2000 that Traveller children were three times less likely than settled children to attend preschool, and that this left them disadvantaged when their compulsory schooling began at age 4. One reason for poor enrolment is Traveller parents' lack of confidence that the preschools will provide a safe and positive environment for their children.

Adapting the High/Scope Early Years methodology, Toybox play development workers bring age-appropriate toys and sensory materials to each child in their home on a weekly basis, leaving the materials afterwards and changing them regularly. By actively encouraging parental participation in this process of play, the programme contributes to confidence and trust building. As a result, parents have been signposted to their own learning opportunities, as well as strengthening their understanding of education.

- Since 2003, Toybox has provided support to 270 children aged 0-4, representing approximately 65% of Traveller children of eligible age.
- As the project operates regionally under central management, it has been able to continue service provision to some children when their families have moved location within the North of Ireland.
- According to government statistics, Traveller children's enrolment in preschool has increased from 46% to 69% over the period.
- Levels of social skills, co-ordination and concentration amongst participating children have grown significantly.
- Parental confidence has increased in relation to knowledge of the developmental value of play, and of opportunities for their own training.
- Training is provided to integrated preschool settings to better understand and respect Traveller culture.

Main Outcomes

- Government recognition of the value of Toybox programme is reflected in its recent Children & Young People's funding programme.

Key Aspects

- First-ever provision of development-focused service to Travellers in the North of Ireland to be delivered on a regional rather than area-specific basis.
- One-to-one provision in a child's own home environment.
- Aims to increase parents' willingness to enrol their children in integrated preschool settings.
- Strong focus on data collection, measurement and outcomes, in contrast to usual experience of input-led service provision to Travellers in the North of Ireland.
- Unprecedented stability and high morale of staff team reflects the value of the work and how Traveller parents perceive it.

Anti discrimination Focus

The programme has been successful in encouraging more parents to enrol their children in preschools and, as a result of this, to face compulsory schooling with fewer disadvantages. The programme has also increased Travellers' access to the education system, as well as their participation in the educative process of their children. A vital element of this process has been to provide cultural and anti-discrimination training to preschool workers to ensure an appropriate environment for the children. The programme aims to strengthen its focus on monitoring and critiquing the cultural appropriateness and anti-racist commitment within integrated preschool environments.

Partnership

- Strategic management is provided by Save the Children and NIPPA, the main regional Early Years NGO.
- The role of a leading Dublin-based Traveller NGO, Pavee Point, in supporting the strategic management, is currently being explored (to replace the role formerly undertaken by Traveller Movement NI which is now defunct).

- The operational steering group comprises the two strategic partners, six local Traveller NGOs, and representatives of both Health Visitors and teachers.

The programme is currently being evaluated. A practice manual recording the process and experiences of the programme's development and delivery is also being prepared. Two issues have been identified as being critical for detailed consideration. Firstly, how Travellers themselves can have a real sense of ownership of the Toybox programme management. Secondly, how the Toybox model of individualised support in a home setting can be adapted to address inequalities by other groups of marginalised and 'excluded' young children, for instance those with disabilities, and those within migrant and refugee populations. It is therefore intended to explore in detail the transferability of the Toybox programme as a culturally supportive and anti-discriminatory model of rights-based service provision.

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Transferability

Contact