

# RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE INTEGRATION OF ROMA YOUNGSTERS INTO EDUCATION

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A joint position paper by  
Caritas Europa and ERIO

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Original project “STEP-IN” co-financed by  
the European Commission: DG EAC-Joint  
Actions of the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth Programmes



## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Appalled by the abject poverty and social exclusion of many of Europe's Roma, Caritas Europa and 7 main other organisations<sup>1</sup> devised a project to increase school attendance and career prospects for Romani Children. The project was co-funded by the European Commission, DG for Education and Culture, Joint Actions, Leonardo, Socrates and Youth Programmes.

The project was entitled: STEP IN, an acronym for Studying Training and Educational Paths for the Integration of young Roma. From the outset, the belief of the 14 partners in STEP IN was that education would be the most effective way to integrate young Roma into the local community, providing Roma with the same opportunities as their peers.

### Goals

The two goals of the project were: Firstly, to prevent early school leaving through encouraging different approaches to education and secondly to support social integration through professional training as well as through looking at employment opportunities<sup>2</sup>. By the end of the project, participants agreed that the STEP IN project, with some modifications, could be considered as an example of good practice, which the EU should consult when programming education projects for Roma children.

### Catering to Different Needs in Participating Countries

STEP IN was implemented in seven member states: Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, France, Slovakia, The Netherlands, and Belgium. The two year project focused on children between the ages of 13 and 18. Central to the project was an educational model, which focused on a combination of three types of educational input: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal activities. These activities included study support, artistic and manual activities, sports, and cultural activities. Having this wide array of activities proved to be successful. For example, non-formal activities, such as sports and art, helped to forge positive relationships between Roma groups and children from the majority population. An important aspect of the STEP IN project was that it allowed for flexibility between countries. The Roma situation was different in every participating country. For this reason, the necessary flexibility was built into the project design so that it would cater to specific needs arising in the different countries.

1 The participants were Caritas Ambrosiana (Italy), Caritas Bucharest (Romania), Asociatia Aproapele (Romania), Bulgarisch-Deutsches Sozialwerk (Bulgaria), Secours Catholique (France), Diecezna Charita Nitra (Slovakia), Cordaid (The Netherlands)

2 "Roma: A Possible Integration, Pathways for the social and educational integration of young Roma", STEP IN Studying training and Educational Paths for the Integration of young Roma, October 2006, p. 16.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Evaluation**

At the completion of the project, the organizations shared their experiences and came up with “do’s and don’ts”. Among many other successes of the project, one achievement was that all pupils involved, finished their school year successfully. After the STEP IN project was completed, project partners came together during a final conference in the European Parliament to evaluate the results.

The recommendations presented in this position paper combine the results of a thorough study on the Roma situation in the EU, including studies on the impact of EU initiatives, with the practical lessons learned from the STEP IN project.

### **Recommendations on practical and policy levels**

The final conference of STEP IN brought together practical educational experience, academic analysis, knowledge of EU initiatives and expertise in social and educational policy on national and European level. In order to represent this unique combination of theory and practice clearly, the recommendations given in this document are divided into two strands:

- 1 Recommendations on a practical level, concerning the integration of Roma youngsters as a direct result of STEP-IN’s implementation (A), followed by ideas for possible indicators as a follow-up for tracking youngsters involved in educational projects (B).
- 2 Recommendations for future EU programming for Roma and Education (A) followed by Policy recommendations(B).



## RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROJECT LEVEL

### **A: Recommendations concerning the integration of Young Roma as a direct result of the project's implementation**

1. Combine education support in formal, informal and non formal activities
  - 1.1. Formal education activities:
    - Should be planned with teachers, when necessary in consultation with parents and pupils.
    - Are important to make up for basic learning gaps.
  - 1.2. Informal education activities are important to:
    - Involve young Roma people, capture their interest.
    - Promote cooperative and non-conflictive relations and to establish in a playful way codes of conduct expected in schools.
    - Reinforce Roma identity.
2. Involve parents in the preparation phase and throughout the project.
3. Start the activities with smaller children, preferably of Kindergarten age.
  - The mother and child, who at this age have a strong bond can both be involved and be integrated in mainstream education from the start.
4. Promote the active involvement and participation of the Roma in projects:
  - In the project design.
  - As partners in implementation.
  - In the evaluation.
5. Build a multidisciplinary, multi-sector partnership:
  - Involving branches of local government, schools, community service providers, voluntary organisations, third sector organisations, Roma organisations etc.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROJECT LEVEL

6. Use positive role models of successful Roma people, i.e. showing examples of adult Roma who have been successful in their educational career and/or their professional life to the young Roma, responding to every child's tendency to imitate their elders.
7. Develop projects based on long term working relationships, such as for instance with local authorities, local education institutes, local enterprise etc.
8. Recognise the need to provide material aids (school resources, such as stationary and school books) to promote school attendance in regular non-segregated schools.
9. Take into account:
  - The living conditions of the Roma group, particularly when they are living in sub-standard accommodation.
  - Take into account the status of Roma in the community, particularly when they are subject to isolation, segregation, social exclusion and discrimination by the majority population.
10. Depending on where the budgets for education are administered, lobby for integration in education, equal opportunities, improving the school curriculum, pre-school education, creation of more friendly school environment, culturally designed education programmes, teacher training on how to work with minorities and general Roma education policy to:
  - The Ministry of Education.
  - The County School Inspectorate.
  - The Department for Social Services and Child Protection.
  - Legislative bodies.
  - Municipal authorities responsible for education.
11. For a more open view towards diversity, promoting an integration of Roma culture (history and traditions) into the curriculum and into the training curriculum for teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROJECT LEVEL

### **B: Recommendations concerning indicators as a follow-up for tracking young Roma people involved in educational projects of this kind.**

In line with the recommendations under 2, for a structured EU Strategy on Roma Education, Caritas Europa and ERIO believe that educational projects for the Roma need to have a longer-life span (approximately 10 years).

The effectiveness of future projects should be evaluated on success indicators: These success indicators should be used to evaluate quantitative and qualitative data available during the project implementation and after project completion<sup>1</sup>.

This would strengthen and enrich an EU strategy on Roma education and inform future organisations working with the Roma on the “Do and Don’ts” for projects.

We recommend the practice of using different methods for measuring the success of a project including Indicators measuring causality or proxy indicators concerning less linear causes and effects.

The following suggestions were developed by the participants of the Final Conference of the STEP IN project as an example of possible indicators that could have been employed in this project, had it been a longer term project.

They could therefore function as suggestions for indicators of future educational Roma projects:

1. Collaboration with schools and local authorities, to set up a data gathering system to follow the students after they have left school, looking at degrees of successful integration by:
  - Monitoring access to third level or vocational schools.
  - Monitoring access to work/work apprenticeship schemes.
  - Monitoring the capacity to hold down a job for a longer time.
2. Data on exit from the camp, finding other housing solutions in non-Roma areas, not as a break with the community but as agreed solutions.

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<sup>3</sup> In line with the principles outlined under 2, this evaluation ought to be conducted in a participative way, i.e. in close partnership with the Roma target group. (For example parents committees or NGOs led by the Roma themselves).

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROJECT LEVEL

3. Degree of self-perception, self awareness and autonomy. Indicator would be the number of focus-groups trained per year on self-esteem and identity building.
4. Data on participation in different activities, sharing of interests with non-Roma people (e.g. joining a football team).
5. Data on number of pupils who decides to keep working for their own people in Roma organisations (active integration). Number of Leaders, trained trainers for their own group. Partnership with Roma NGO's and contacts with other Roma communities.
6. Data on the extent of the involvement of a parents group in order to disseminate information about the opportunities provided by the project to the community.
7. Data on number of trainings per year in diversity, for teachers, school officials and local administrators responsible for education.
8. Data on racial discrimination cases to find out to what extent equal opportunity and discrimination-free policies are successful in a particular school or region.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY LEVEL

### **A: Policy Recommendations for future EU programming for Roma and Education**

1. General principle that should guide all projects: To actively promote de-segregated education, always with the aim to improve education. This should include granting projects specifically aiming at school desegregation.
2. To program longer term projects (up to 10 years) or else in the case of successful projects such as STEP IN, to allow for a follow-up, a second phase of the project. This second phase should be based on an evaluation of the experiences and international exchanges that have taken place in the first phase of the project.
3. To create more possibilities for municipalities to be direct beneficiaries of EU funds, through micro projects such as were available under the PHARE programme, thereby showing more confidence in the practice and experience of local people (including Roma partners). Include joint control bodies, with Roma members, of EU funds.
4. To promote the compulsory participation of Roma NGO's as equal partners in the projects. To provide specific grants for capacity building of Roma / Non – Roma NGO's working with Roma issues.
5. To require a redefinition of certain rules and formats of programmes and projects (the strict age category of 13-18 formed a constraint in STEP IN). For projects with Roma people, the target group must be enlarged, e.g.; if one works with the young Roma, it is mandatory to work with their families too. The very young (3yrs and up) should be represented as much as possible in the target group.
6. To require project applicants for education projects to include educational and professional guidance of educators involved in teaching Roma children. The involvement of Roma mediators should also be a requirement in project applications.
7. Targeted at Roma and Non-Roma people: To consider funding more projects with a psycho-sociological content aiming at creating responsible citizenship and empowerment of small groups (like families, neighbourhood groups, etc.). To provide psycho-sociological guidance would engender a commitment on a personal level and help people to discover and develop their own potential in taking charge of improving their circumstances. Values such as tolerance of "the other" should be promoted in these projects.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY LEVEL**

8. To promote projects in anti-discrimination, tolerance, aimed at breaking down prejudice and stereotyping and diversity trainings targeting non Roma parents, local administrators, school administrators and teachers.
9. To develop a central data bank on Roma projects carried out in the EU. Record and disseminate recommendations to future applicants for EU funding for Roma and education.
10. To make the lessons learned from other projects available in a clear and accessible way.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY LEVEL

### **B: Policy Recommendations to the EU for policy**

On a policy level, concerning projects and programmes in the field of integration through education of the Roma, Caritas Europa and ERIO recommend to develop a separate EU strategy for Roma and Education through a consultation process with the most successful stakeholders involved so far.

The stakeholders consulted should include NGO's staffed by Roma as well as NGO's and local and regional authorities with a proven track record of successful projects in the field of education.

Centralising Roma and Education issues in this way, would allow for a mechanism to be created that could lead to an impact assessment linking the financial input of the EU and the outputs for a successful integration of Roma into education.

Our recommendation for a separate EU strategy for Roma and Education is strengthened by the newsletter on the Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion of May 2006 , where education is often reported as a big stumbling block for the Roma.

Despite the EU's 273 Million EURO investment between 2001 and 2006 in Roma projects, the lack of integration into mainstream education for the Roma remains a stumbling block. Mainstreaming of Roma Programmes is advisable to an extent, but for education, Caritas Europa and ERIO see a 'targeting of policies' as an indispensable tool to make real progress in a structured, consistent and coherent way. The EU member states are still failing to commit to a clear policy direction, not helped by the fact that taking care of Roma issues does not win any votes.

This view is furthermore backed up by the following passage from the Commission report entitled: *A Fairer Deal for the Roma in an Enlarged EU* , on the contribution of the Phare programme (77 MEURO) to the Roma issue. It concludes: 'many of the interventions were project specific, which means that many more resources need to be committed over a long period of time in order to make a real impact'.

The extremely ambitious goals of the Lisbon Council in the field of education (to name a few: No more than 10% of early school leavers, at least 85% of 22 year olds in the EU should have completed upper secondary education, the percentage of 15 year old low achievers should have decreased by at least 20% compared to 2000) will work more as a threat than as an advantage to Roma youngsters.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY LEVEL**

Roma youngsters are still very far behind in these statistics. The risk is that policy makers will disregard negative outcomes for the Roma as they will distort a rosier view of Lisbon outcomes.

Caritas Europa and ERIO actively promote de-segregation in schools and are aware that this practice is continuing in many member states, overtly or covertly by channeling Roma children into remedial schools. An EU strategy for education on Roma would support national governmental strategies that should rule out the practice of de-segregation, which is often quoted as a problem that originates at the local level. Caritas Europa and ERIO welcome the principles of good practice that are mentioned in the Commission publication *A Fairer Deal for the Roma in an Enlarged EU*, and especially the principle of empowerment, ‘active involvement of Roma people themselves’.

Furthermore, CE agrees with the recommendations for a continuity over time, ‘so that initiatives can be sustained and fully evaluated’. This ties in with our recommendation to issue calls for tender for longer term projects (up to 10 years), so that important achievements in education projects can be properly evaluated and lessons learned could be made into sustainable practices and be reciprocated on national and trans-national levels.

Although we are aware that this is a contentious issue, on a more general level, we suggest to Member States to reconsider ‘ethnic’ categories in statistics in a secure way, in order to make the problem for specific ethnic groups such as the Roma more visible, this would enable the EU to keep track of improvements and failures in Roma targeted programmes.

Previous attempts to improve the Roma situation have not been successful. Although the Roma are the largest minority in the European Union, they remain largely disintegrated in EU society. Member States have not corrected the inequalities the Roma face. Due to these facts and from their experience from the STEP IN programme, Caritas Europa and ERIO believe that the best way forward to tackle the Roma situation is to formulate an EU wide Roma education strategy.

A uniform programme conducted by the EU on the basis of a separate EU strategy for Roma and Education, that must be implemented by the Member States, building in a separate chapter of the Open Method of Coordination, targeted specifically at the issue of Roma and education, would be a step in the right direction. This would equally give the basis for prioritising Roma education in anti-discrimination policies, social inclusion policies, equal opportunity initiatives etc.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICY LEVEL

A structured effort at such an education strategy, that capitalizes on many lessons learned (but not shared), could lay the foundation for real improvement to the quality of life of many Romani children and their families. A longer term, more structured EU approach such as we advocate for here, would be a genuine EU initiative to reach the Lisbon goals for all of Europe's citizens.