

Roma Empowerment and Support for Inclusion

**Synthesis Report
of the Case Studies
in Ghent, Belfast
and Rome**

Policy Recommendations



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“I also have a tomorrow and can be somebody”



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PURPOSE Based on the information provided in the three case studies (Belfast, Ghent and Rome), around the projects funded by Bernard van Leer Foundation and implemented by partner organizations, this report brings together the findings of the studies and summarises the cross-national **issues** consolidated around **four issues**:

1. Parenting support;
2. Children's access to quality early childhood services;
3. Influencing public awareness ON Roma inclusion and early childhood development
4. Capacity building and empowerment of Roma actors.

1. PARENTING SUPPORT Parenting issues addressed through the projects¹

The three projects all aimed to address the multiple disadvantages suffered by Roma communities due to poverty and exclusion. They all recognised the need for change at several levels – empowerment of the Roma community, acceptance and support from the wider public and a favourable policy environment which would improve access and quality of service provision. The particularly **vulnerable situation of mothers with young children** was a priority focus in all cases and isolation and lack of skills and knowledge reinforced by barriers to access services, all pointed to an urgent need for positive action.

Types of activities provided

In all three locations, Roma communities lacked access to public service provision and missed out on benefits and support as a result of this. This gap was most keenly felt in Rome where the physical segregation of Roma into peripheral camps with no facilities or illegal settlements ensured their physical isolation and social exclusion. Despite more favourable policy environments in Ghent and Belfast, Roma communities in these cities also failed to access public services for which they were eligible and had a right to expect. So in Rome a high priority for the project there was the **advocacy and lobbying** for an end to the encampment situation, but in all three locations, parents also

¹ The projects implemented are: in Rome - Sar San 1 and 2 and Stop Roma Apartheid (called afterwards Aver Drom); in Ghent - Brugfiguren Intra-European Migratie; in Belfast - Roma Community Development.

needed help to **access health, adult education, social and family support and legal assistance** for example to document their status.

The most useful approaches

Building trust among the community was a key essential first step. The only way to do this was through face to face personal contact over a sustained period. Group activities involving both women and children together were another key approach as cultural norms do not permit mothers to leave their very young children with others.

All three projects adopted **innovative, informal approaches** for learning and skill sharing. The focus was on experiential activities related to real life and building on and valuing the human and social capital of participants such as Roma language, culture and context. High levels of illiteracy were the norm so formal classroom teaching was out in any case. In Belfast, approaches to training and English language for illiterate people proved successful and could be replicated more widely.

In all three projects **parents were recognized as partners** and their input was appreciated and respected. Their problems were treated with dignity and they were encouraged to rely on their parental and human strengths in solving them.

Places of intervention

Visits to families by individual project staff played an important role in all three projects, especially in Rome. Group activities were most successful when based in a trusted location either within the community itself (in camps in Rome) or in a local Roma community association premises (RRCANI in Belfast). Bringing external resources or trainers into these environments proved to be an effective way of delivering additional support. A physical place where the community feel safe is a proven advantage and the role of the RRCANI premises in Belfast could be a model for the physical space proposed for Roma in Rome.

Where parents visit mainstream facilities (such as schools and preschools) careful thought needed to be given to the way in which they would be received and how the visits would be facilitated. For example, in Ghent, Roma parents were not pro-active in school activities and would probably only have contact

if there was a problem. With the support of the **mediators** (BIEMs) they were invited for coffee and classroom visits so that they could become familiar with the environment and how education was conducted. The mediators were also able to help overcome language barriers. The **building of trust moved from personal between family and mediator to family and school** and in turn facilitated the children's attendance and wellbeing in the education system.

Type of professionals involved

Having workers from the community or at least very familiar with it, was vital. In all three projects it was not possible to find qualified and experienced workers from the Roma community so volunteering leading on to training, formal employment and professional development was a must. In all three projects, the role of Roma volunteers and workers was absolutely critical in engaging the wider community and in giving inspiration to others (especially young mothers) of what they personally could achieve. Additionally, Roma workers did bring particular expertise in terms of language, cultural and practical community norms. In all three locations there is a need for larger numbers of trained and experienced Roma community workers and hopefully this can emerge from young people who successfully complete their secondary education locally as the communities in all three locations become more mature (they are all less than 10 years old). Having Roma women as volunteers can be meaningful for a short period of time, but it is not sustainable on the long run. In many cases Roma women cannot 'afford' to volunteer in instances where they had to provide for their families and they are under family and community pressures. Having Roma women as volunteers also came against the idea of their empowerment: through employment their contribution and expertise are proved and acknowledged and that helped them gain a respected status in the community.

All three projects successfully demonstrated effective **collaboration between mainstream management and Roma workers** within the project structure and also between **Roma staff and external service providers** where they facilitated a bridge to the community and individual clients.

Main outcomes

The relatively short term nature of the projects precludes any objective analysis of changes in health, economic status or wellbeing which could be attributed to the interventions. However there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence from com-

community members, staff and volunteers about the personal impact on them and their families, most of it very positive. Mothers reported increased self-esteem, capacity and confidence about how they could influence their own and their children's futures. They also felt they were better informed and had gained new skills. English language training helped mothers in Belfast to engage with the wider community. Employability training in Belfast widened their horizons and enabled some women to enter paid employment. Documenting family status in Italy facilitated access to public services and financial support to which families were entitled. Families in Belfast also gained access to family support services and financial support. The work done by the mediators in Ghent in helping the family resolve welfare and economic problems, was key to their successful role of accessing education for the children.

There were also some negative outcomes. Initial success in enrolling Roma children in mainstream nursery and school provision often did not result in sustained attendance until specific and focussed family support was provided. This was the case in all three locations. Parents' confidence and trust in the education system had to be rebuilt on a different foundation – resting on personal confidence in the project worker who was the direct interface with the family.

Mothers received the most attention under the projects and therefore benefited the most. Fathers proved reluctant to join in parent activities due to availability and cultural norms but were positive and supportive of their wives' engagement. Young people benefited from targeted activities for them in Rome and proved to be enthusiastic activists / advocates for their communities. Community leaders / elders were in the background but presumably influential in the wider dialogue each project had with Roma community structures and wider networks in all three Cities. In Rome in particular, their support will be essential as the move to resettle Roma outside the camps takes shape and younger Roma workers and activists may find themselves caught up in power dynamics in a political and social context which remains volatile. Roma workers in community projects may also face resistance or hostility within their own communities if they are seen as stepping outside traditional roles. The experience so far as documented in all three projects has been positive but this possibility should not be overlooked.

The achievements which emerge most strongly from the case studies are **changes in expectations and attitudes** – among Roma parents about what is possible for them and their children and among service providers about how they can engage successfully with Roma communities. If these changes can be broadened to wider populations and sustained over time, they represent a

sound basis on which to build strategies for inclusion. Without these changes in expectations and attitudes (which are themselves based on productive experience of working in these three projects and acquiring new skills, knowledge and approaches), Roma communities will remain excluded and service providers unresponsive to their needs.

The most relevant partners/partnerships

In order to build trust of the community and overcome negative or even hostile attitudes among service providers, the projects have all started by building strong relationships between **project staff (Roma wherever possible) and individual families and groups in the community**. Once that link is established, the project workers then act as a bridge between the community and external services. Attempts to link directly without any facilitation or support have not been successful.

In Belfast and Rome, the bridge builders were employed by the projects, in Ghent by the local authority. Following the end of the project, workers moved to RRCANI and to the local authority, showing that there is a graduation route from time limited projects.

Main lessons learned

In all three locations, an important lesson learnt was that activities with children and relating to their welfare could not run in isolation – the multiple problems faced by the household needed to be addressed as well. It also emerged that failure to access services was due to barriers on both sides of the relationship – prejudice, discrimination and inflexible approaches among service providers on the one hand and mistrust, lack of knowledge and understanding of the new context and language and cultural barriers in the Roma communities on the other. One important lesson is that much of the value of the interventions is contained in the process they followed – establishing contact, getting to know each other, building trust through sustained and regular activities and support. Keeping promises was very important in building trust and being able to access practical support and solve problems for families was key to the relationship in all three projects. The other key lesson is that improvements in Roma community lives and their inclusion in mainstream society is a **long term process**, outside the timescale of these projects. The successful interventions need to be sustained in order to have impact beyond

families and individuals, particularly given the transient and changing nature of Roma communities (due both to tradition and to socio-economic pressures).

Potential for scalability

All of the successful approaches used in the three projects are able to be replicated elsewhere and more widely. **The constraints are funding** (see below) and the pool of available people within the Roma community who have the skills and are willing and able to take on the mediator/ bridge role of community facilitator or community worker. However, the projects have demonstrated how inexperienced women without formal, certified education, but with substantial experience and knowledge about community can learn through volunteering, gain skills, knowledge and confidence from training and support and eventually move on to paid employment.

Sustainability

The mediator/bridging roles which these projects have facilitated are not generally established within public service delivery systems. Funding for them tends therefore to be one-off or short term. Decision makers need to be persuaded of the long term benefits of inclusion of the Roma community to justify the additional investment in these roles. However there are some promising indications of sustainability through follow on funding in Belfast and the presence of an established Roma community organisation has proved to be significant in securing this. In Ghent, the role of the mediator / bridge became funded by the city of Ghent. However, there is no guarantee that after the coming elections, the new city government will continue to fund it.

Children age groups targeted

All 3 projects supported families with children from pre-school to school leaving age. But there was a strong focus on children under 5 and their mothers, and access to services relevant to them.

2. CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Types of services provided

All three projects facilitated and supported families to **access health, education, legal and economic family support and recreation for their children**. The Ghent project initially focussed only on access to education

but it became clear that this could not be achieved unless the project workers also addressed the wider needs of the families. This meant one-to-one case work with individual families either through home visits (Ghent), or individual advice delivered at a community location (Belfast, Rome) and follow up with statutory authorities.

The projects in Rome and Belfast included mother and toddler activities and a range of facilitated play groups and organised recreation events and trips for younger children; while in Ghent, the focus was on children's enrolment in education and the family's interactions with the school.

The most useful approaches

Unlike other services, education presented a particular challenge in all 3 projects because of the history of Roma children being marginalised, falling behind or dropping out of school. As a result of this, parents lacked trust in the system. They could not see the relevance of formal education to their children's lives and they feared that their children would be bullied or marginalised. For their part, the teachers and kindergarten staff had experienced failure to successfully include Roma children in their usual lessons and did not know how to proceed.

The approaches used for activities with children in Rome and Belfast were carefully **tailored to the context and needs of the Roma community** – delivered in the community, based on real life activities and situations, encouraging creativity, play, self-expression and confidence – and were very different to mainstream provision. In Rome the mothers were very struck by the impact of these activities on their children, the eagerness they showed to get involved and the progress in their development and the knowledge and skills the children acquired. Equally, the work of project facilitators with the children had a **profound impact on elementary school teachers** both in observing their practices and methods and seeing the change in the children's response and progress. One overarching lesson from this is that **child centred inclusive education approaches** would be very beneficial to all Roma children in schools as indeed they would be to every individual child. In Ghent, **bringing parents into the school environment** to observe classes and to meet teachers facilitated by the mediators helped to build their confidence to send their child to school and their understanding of the system. A holistic approach to family involvement with the school would also be a very positive step for children of marginalised groups. In Ghent project was also important

that thanks to mediators parents started to involve younger children into the free of charge kindergartens which helped children transition to primary school.

Places of intervention

As mentioned above, initial contact with Roma mothers and children was most successfully carried out **in their own community or home**, and sustained while trust was established. A safe place to access services (such as RRCANI), where mothers could bring their children, was a major advantage in terms of take up of tailored support. However, Roma parents and children can also successfully engage with service providers outside their communities (as with schools/preschools in Ghent and Rome) if their **contact is carefully facilitated** and supported to enable positive relationships to develop.

Types of professionals involved

The Rome project involved around 20 staff and volunteers covering the wide range of project activities including management, early years teacher, legal, social activities, advocacy, training, monitoring, administration. **Five of the team were Roma** - one cultural mediator, 3 activists and a driver. As with the other projects, additional specialised professional advice and support (health, welfare, material support, etc.) was accessed via partner organisations.

The Ghent team involved only 4 mediators, linked with four schools, recruited for their cultural links with the community who received professional training to become social workers. Their original focus was on access to education but the mediators became involved with a wider range of professions and service providers as they were drawn into resolving the issues of the families they worked with.

Strategic oversight and direction of the RCDP in Belfast was provided by the project partners MNI and SBR from their own staff. The RCDP Project had 4 staff none of them full - time - Project Manager/ Community Development Coordinator, Roma Community Development Assistant and two Roma Child-care Support Workers who were initially taken on as volunteers and graduated to paid work. Apart from the Project Manager, all the team developed their skills while on the job. All of them were drawn from the community or (in the case of the Project Manager), had prior experience of working with it.

Main achievements

In Rome women were supported to obtain health cards, provided with advice, accompanied to health facilities, hospital admissions and to acquire vaccinations for children. To the extent practicable with fewer resources, similar support was provided in Ghent and Belfast. In Rome and Belfast, parents received knowledge and skills in parenting, health care of themselves and their children and support to enable them to access services independently. The result was **improved access to services and reduced health vulnerability** of children, mothers managing the health issues of their families and acquiring documents with more autonomy; mothers helping one another. Similar models were applied to social / legal assistance, social support, welfare, protection and outcomes were similar in terms of enhanced capability and access by the mothers and reduced vulnerability of the children.

In education, the major achievement was **retention of Roma children** enrolled with the support of project teams (50 children in Rome, for example) and the increased trust of parents in the system, their enhanced ability to support their children's education and better understanding and knowledge of Roma by teachers who were more able and willing to adapt approaches to inclusion of Roma children in the classroom.

Numbers benefiting from improved access to services were high considering the time and resource limitations of the projects – 250 women and children in Rome (74 health interventions, 87 social interventions and 58 legal interventions); Belfast 1500 advice sessions reaching 100% of the target group and Ghent – about 250 children across the four schools (exact number not available) and their families.

The most relevant partners/partnerships

The most impactful relationships were between **Roma mothers and the Roma workers / facilitators** in the projects. Women seemed to benefit most from peer group models and examples of what a Roma woman could do for herself and with and for children. One of the important roles of these workers was to open the door for their communities to contact with the outside world and important gatekeepers and service providers. Without such an intermediary, contact with that world was much more difficult.

None of the projects would have succeeded in improving the lives and prospects of young Roma children without an extensive network of contacts with other **voluntary community organisations, local authorities and service providers**. Approaches in all cases were holistic, addressing the whole range of issues facing the families and therefore requiring a multi-disciplinary response.

Finally, winning over the hearts and minds of **kindergarten and elementary school teachers** is essential if Roma children are to have a positive and welcoming experience in school which is aware of their background and adapted to enable them to play a full part. To achieve this the mediators need to build relationships with teachers and have their acceptance as part of the school environment.

Potential for scalability

As for parenting support above. No other particular issues in relation to early years except the need for curriculum development and specialised training in experiential approaches and cultural background for mainstream kindergarten and nursery staff.

Sustainability

Provision for very young children needs to **include their mothers** for cultural reasons. Mainstream kindergarten/nursery provision may not therefore be appropriate in all cases. Exclusive provision is difficult to sustain financially but more feasible if it is based alongside other activities in a focal point for the community such as RRCANI premises in Belfast.

Ongoing support to parents and teachers to sustain good relationships with schools should gradually become part of mainstream school provision, but this may take time to evolve.

3. INFLUENCING PUBLIC AWARENESS ON ROMA INCLUSION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Type of activities

Working with professionals, service providers and local authorities to raise awareness of the Roma context, needs and the barriers to access and inclusion of Roma communities was a key activity in Rome and Belfast and incidental - but important - in Ghent. Apart from regular meetings, there were also conferences, events, regular discussion groups and informal sharing information and knowledge among professionals. Dealing with individual cases facilitated by the mediators was also an important source of new information for professionals. **Supporting and facilitating members of the Roma community to speak up** for their needs and concerns and to meet decision makers was another key strand of awareness raising (see section 3 below).

Successful approaches

Broad **networks of service providers and local authorities** have worked successfully in Italy and Belfast to promote change, but progress in Italy was hampered by a very unstable political environment and a corruption scandal. Despite this there were significant advocacy successes and individual **Roma activists** worked alongside other stakeholders to influence policy and decision makers.

The Roma Working Group in Belfast brings together professionals working with the Roma communities in Belfast as well as community representatives who now facilitate the Group together with a partner organisation. The Group is very well attended by representatives of community and statutory organisations delivering services to the Roma communities (both at grass-roots and strategic levels) in the areas of health, education, employment, welfare and wellbeing, community development, housing and community safety. The work with the Roma community has been better coordinated as a result and proactive, with gaps or issues identified and solved in advance.

Some Roma related resources, for example '**Guesses at inclusion**' a collection of insights on working with the Romanian Roma community in Belfast, aimed at local service providers have been successful. The tool was very well received and is widely used. This work could usefully be more widely disseminated and replicated beyond Northern Ireland.

Roma communities have shown themselves willing to take part in events and actions to draw attention to their community and to **dispel myths and ignorance** about their culture and have benefited from the experience, whether as human 'books' in the **Living Library** in Rome, or as **activists for change** or facilitators at Roma events and special days or on Roma community stands at other wider events.

In terms of influence on wider public awareness and myths and prejudice against the Roma community among majority populations, there is no concrete evidence available in these studies on changes to public opinion as a result of the wide range of activities carried out in Rome and Belfast. In Rome **pro-active and sustained contacts with government stakeholders** at all levels has, despite turbulence in the political scene, resulted in a momentum of opinion among policy makers at least, towards the elimination of the segregated encampments and resettlement of Roma into majority areas. However, there is still a long road to travel to make this a reality and wider public support will be required to gain acceptance for it. Influencing on the scale required is beyond the scope and ambition of the projects under review in this synthesis, but each of the three projects has demonstrated very effective ways to positively influence small numbers of stakeholders in the majority community (whether professionals, service providers, teachers or others) that inclusion of the Roma is possible and beneficial. Among these groups, it has dispelled some pernicious myths (e. g. that Roma parents do not care about children's education, that the children are unteachable, etc.)

Main obstacles

Lack of resources, both financial and human are the main constraints to these activities. The political context is also significant.

More financial resources would have enabled more documentation and communication of Roma lives and stories and culture, more live interactions and more events and publications drawing on research and first hand materials, as well as publications of ideas for Roma and majority populations on how to interact more easily with each other.

Such materials have the potential to reach large audiences such as the launched video campaign called "Roma, citizens of tomorrow's Italy" launched in 2012 by Associazione 21 luglio onlus covering 6 stories of Roma living in "ordinary" houses and leading "ordinary" lives. The campaign had 15,000 views on You-

Tube and successfully presented to the public a counter-narrative about Roma dismantling prejudices and stereotypes.

The lack of human resources is two-fold:

- the shortage of time and availability of professional service providers and others to spend visiting Roma communities, to become better informed about them and to develop flexible service provision and policies which better meet their needs; and
- low numbers of Roma individuals who have experience and skills needed to contribute to public awareness raising campaigns and influencing and who can link with and mobilise their community.

The other obstacle to influencing public awareness and opinion is the **political context**. In Rome the corruption scandal put a negative light on the Roma presence in Rome and changes in government and key post-holders held back progress in achieving policy change. In Belfast, Brexit is likely to have an effect on access to future funding and to distract attention from equality and inclusion issues.

Main lessons learned

The **evolution of political frameworks and strategies** relating to Roma inclusion is a very slow process (only now reaching a pivotal point in Rome and Belfast after many years work). Although the policy environment is somewhat more advanced in Ghent, with an already operational framework for integration of migrants into the life of the City, Roma still suffer multiple disadvantage and the education system reproduces social inequalities rather than addressing them. The path ahead is a long one and multi-annual commitments will be needed to create a public environment where the Roma are better understood and accepted and they themselves feel more at ease and included. The current European background of populist politics, resistance to immigration and intercultural tensions is not a helpful one in this context.

Scalability

As mentioned above under obstacles, more impact could be achieved on public awareness and knowledge through **greater financial resources** for the kind of activities piloted in Rome and Belfast but there would also need to be investment in capacity building of more Roma activists/actors to support these.

Type of activities

4. CAPACITY BUILDING AND EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA ACTORS

The projects successfully developed a wide range of approaches to capacity building and roles for **Roma actors** including project volunteers and staff (coordinators, qualified social workers, childcare workers, social facilitators, cultural mediator, driver, etc.), campaigners and activists in the public space, interns, trainees and exchange students, consultees in policy processes, cultural mediators for example, in the Living Library and sharing experiences in videos and publications. In Belfast, as well as empowering individuals, the project aimed to increase **Roma leadership and ownership** by working closely with the Roma community organisation RRCANI modelling good practices in terms of requirements for playgroups (i.e. health and safety, children ratio, staff, resources), organising and facilitating cultural events, working in partnership with other organisations. This investment helped to enable RRCANI to become a focus for the continuation and sustainability of service provision and community activities after RCDP ended.

Main outcomes

All the projects provided training and capacity building for project staff and volunteers. In Belfast, the women's employability initiative resulted in a **number of women gaining paid employment and gaining skills in English** language enabling them to interact more with the wider community. Both initiatives developed and used approaches to training for people with low or no literacy with positive results and satisfied participants. In addition some of the project roles were taken over by other organisations at the end of the project enabling Roma employment to continue. The **empowerment of Roma volunteers** in Rome has had a strong impact on their peer group who were impressed with the roles they took on and the contribution they were able to make to their community. Such inspiring role models could be an important strategy for future interventions.

Most relevant partnerships

In general, much of the successful empowerment of Roma actors occurred within and through the projects themselves. However external partners were also relevant. The Roma actors proved effective at working in partnership with **external organisations and agencies** but needed support and capacity building to develop the necessary skills and confidence. When they had access to **external training opportunities** (as for example in Ghent where

all 4 BIEMs gained a professional social work qualification) they were able to benefit from these. **Thirty five young Roma actors in Rome benefited from internships and placements** in partner organisations as well as exchanges and took part in advocacy and campaigning activities.

Main lessons learned

In Belfast, women were keen to take up employment opportunities but lack of childcare was an issue. The quest for **economic empowerment** needed to embrace the whole family situation. Many Roma are illiterate and have little knowledge of the majority language in their country of residence. They are not even exposed to the language and culture on a regular basis because of the isolation of their communities. Programmes to build their capacities and skills need to acknowledge their starting point, work in language/s they are familiar with, value the knowledge and skills they already possess and build on those, and use approaches which do not depend on functional literacy or a formal classroom style.

Scalability

The activities and programmes benefitting individuals could definitely be scaled up if fundi-ng was available. The numbers of Roma staff and volunteers in these three projects were small but very influential. The **employability programme** in Belfast showed potential for economic integration of Roma women. And finally the investment by RCDP in working with RRCANI has already produced benefits in terms of sustainability of project activities and roles – this is a model which could be used elsewhere with Roma-led community organisations.

Reflecting upon the experience collected from the three case studies as well as upon the issues discussed in working groups at the round table meeting in Brussels in September 2016, partners recommend the following action:

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROMA EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION

Political will and finances

What needs to be done? What can be done?

Evidence shows that **adequate political support** can serve as catalyst for Roma inclusion. Lack of it, on the other hand, is a barrier preventing systemic measures. On number of occasions, including the 9th European platform for Roma inclusion², importance of political will has been emphasized when fighting anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma.

Lack of political support can often be linked to perception of the problems as too big and therefore it is crucial to **pilot initiatives** and demonstrate impact of effective and efficient implementation. Similarly, financial demands may have negative impacts on decisions of political leadership and it is crucial that **non-governmental organisations offer** help with expertise or foundations provide assistance with sharing of costs. Role of small-scale community-based projects should not be underestimated.

As an innovative component, **stakeholders should consider using social impact bonds** as public-private partnerships driving resources toward effective social programs that measurably improve lives. In recent six years, they have been used to finance social innovations in 15 countries, including United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Portugal, India, Switzerland, Austria, Israel, Finland, Sweden, in 60 projects altogether.³

2 “European platform for Roma inclusion – Summary and conclusions” *European Commission, DG Justice*, Retrieved from: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/roma-platform-2015/platformconclusions_en.htm>

3 Dear, A., Helbitz, A., Khare, R., Lotan, R., Newman, J., Crosby Sims, G., Zaroulis, A. (2016). Social Impact Bonds. The Early Years. *Social Finance*. July 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SIBs-Early-Years_Social-Finance_2016_Final3.pdf>

As another reason for inaction, stakeholders often refer to the fact that periods required for real impact in communities are typically longer than the election period. This may be another reason – even if not explicit – why political leadership is reluctant to take adopt the recommended policies. In order to address to issue, we need to **accompany long-term measures with short-term milestones**.

In terms of financing, it is crucial that **financial resources from various operational programs are combined**, avoiding too much of dependency on funds allocated specifically for Roma. Use of funds needs to be coordinated both horizontally as well as vertically. It is also encouraged to **target Roma through mainstream tools**, such as anti-poverty measures, fiscal policies, VAT rules, etc. As a wider policy, experts call for **progressive universalism to be introduced in inclusion policies**.

Often voiced criticism on the 2011 EU Framework for Roma Integration Strategies and the submitted national Roma integration strategies is that while they include solid inclusive measures, they lack implementation. As this may be linked to lack of funds, it needs to be stressed that strategies need to come with funding. At the same time, the use of funds needs to be closely monitored and evaluated to avoid financing segregation with integration funds.

While in most cases lack of political will is linked to lack of know-how in Roma inclusion policies, we have to also acknowledge discrimination against Roma. In such cases EU institutions have to be strict in action against Member States, e.g. in using research data for infringement procedures.

There is also an agreement that European Union needs to push early childhood education and care higher in the agenda. For example, the Europe 2020 targets include reduction of school drop-out and tertiary education, but not early childhood.⁴

⁴ “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” (2011). *European Commission*. COM/2011/0173 final. Retrieved from: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173>> “Europe 2020 targets” *European Commission*. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index_en.htm>

Mediators as key actors for inclusion

What are the pros and cons?

Experts confirm what has been indicated in case studies, as well as other projects – mediators play number of crucial roles at the local level, including that they act as **carriers of inclusion policies at community level**.

To gain from capacities of mediators, it is important that they are able to maintain their mediation role – i.e. **in Romani communities they should preferably be Roma** and they should also have some additional qualifications: at minimum **intercultural mediation skills, knowledge of languages of mediated communities, personal attitudes**. Support to Roma leadership should be provided to involve Roma as workforce, as actors of change, including women and young people. Continuous support and professional development should be provided to help them obtain qualification, in case they did not have it.

Mediation needs to be understood through the **holistic approach perspective**, i.e. it is not about education only, but also care (in case of ECEC), and should reflect broader contexts of living conditions, etc. As part of educational policies, **schools and other facilities should be obliged to provide services of mediators** to support inclusion.

To guarantee the quality of work, **mediators' job description needs to be strictly defined**. It should involve awareness raising and bridging between communities. Mediators must not work only with Roma, as is often the case. In addition, **mediators' job should be adequately paid and all additional support as requested should be provided to them, alongside opportunities for their professional development**.

As a natural part of the job, mediators may often get into conflicting situations between two (or more) groups, communities and/or institutions. In an effort to **secure impartiality of mediators their profession should be specified by law or other local regulations and budgeted for from public finances**. There needs to be clear agreement between schools and municipalities in terms of mediators' responsibilities.

Strengths based approaches

Family support as key entry point for inclusion

In order to address the issue of mothers' illiteracy leading to increased isolation and also the issue of early parenting, sometimes at the age of 15, it is recommended to **support education of mothers**.

Physical segregation is another factor contributing to isolation and enforcing the stigma. It is therefore important to **move parents out of camps, settlements or ghettos** – both physically and mentally. Awareness has to be built about the positive impacts of parents' productivity on their self-esteem.

To deconstruct stereotypes about Romani families and parents not seeing value in education, **anti-bias and anti-prejudice training needs to be included in professional development of practitioners**. At the same time, awareness has to be raised about differences between traditional culture and culture of poverty. It is also crucial to keep in mind that parents want their best for children.

Making use of and building parents' skills and abilities, **ECD approaches need to include family empowerment**. Similarly, early childhood inclusion should **incorporate community-based approaches** – using volunteers from the community, supporting parents' clubs and youth clubs, etc.

Empowerment of parents and community members should also **include formal education** through accredited programs, e.g. second-chance programs and literacy programs.

Comprehensive approaches

Breaking the barriers for inclusion

Comprehensive approach should include, at minimum, access to:

- Legal assistance,
- Health services,

- Education (parenting support, home-visiting, preschool and primary school),
- Welfare – social assistance, protection,
- Housing and security of tenure,
- Labour market through opportunities for career development, employment,
- Active participation through empowerment of children, families, communities,
- awareness raising and capacity building for addressing social inclusion processes.

It is important that comprehensive approach is **built on shared values and understanding, goals, shared planning and shared responsibilities**. It should combine mix of interventions by mix of stakeholders (through public-private partnerships, civil society, authorities at various levels, with involvement of local communities). Quality of interventions needs to be monitored and evaluated with ideal of family-centred early childhood policies. Comprehensive approach should be also built on progressive universalism and designed with long-term vision.



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