GUIDE to the ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES of LOCAL AUTHORITIES for the inclusion of ROMA MIGRANTS

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Introduction

Recently, the attention given to Roma migrants in Europe has intensified, both in the media and in the policy-making departments at the European level. One of the catalysts for this spark in attention was the lifting of limitations on Romania and Bulgaria’s membership of the European Union on January 1st 2014.

A large number of Roma are from Romania and Bulgaria (an estimated min. of 1,800,000 in Romania and 700,000 in Bulgaria¹) and some European Member States have expressed concerns about a rise in Roma migration from the two countries. The focus of the following is therefore the migration of Roma from one Member State to another, and the suggestions made may therefore not be applicable for third country Roma migrants.

Authorities in many European Member States have expressed that the Roma are particularly difficult to integrate after having migrated to different Member States. The reason for this is that Roma migrants especially are economically and socially disadvantaged compared to other European migrants, and are therefore marginalized and stigmatized in most European countries. The negative image of Roma leads to their acute disadvantage in terms of receiving the rights and opportunities that should be given to all European migrants.

Policy-making at the European level promoting the integration of Roma in Europe is an important aspect of addressing some of the issues the Roma face. However, the social integration of Roma migrants into a host society always has a very strong local dimension. For this reason, national and European policies aimed at encouraging social integration and equal opportunities for the resident population, Roma and non-Roma, must consider the local and often urban context.

First, some remarks about the concept of integration and the current importance of this issue. The paper on The situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities² states that the concept of integration is understood as the process of inclusion of Roma migrants in the core institutions and social structures of the receiving society. For the Roma migrants, integration means a process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights, accessing position and status, building personal relations with members of the receiving society and growing to identify with it. For the receiving society, integration means opening up institutions, giving migrants equal opportunities and publicly welcoming their integration into society.

This paper differentiates between the dimensions of structural integration, cultural integration, interactive integration and identity integration. This is the base for developing a framework for identifying integration needs and policies in an urban context. Needs and policies should relate to the framing of the migration situation; general and specific policies of integration have to view the Roma migrants as actors and not simply as objects of measures by others. Although by no means all Roma are in a precarious situation, certain groups face difficulties that have the potential to threaten urban and societal cohesion.

¹ “Roma in Europe” by Jean-Pierre Liégeois, Council of Europe Publishing, 2007
² https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1858595
Defining ‘integration’*

Integration as a concept may be defined as the stability of relations between parts within a system-like whole, the borders of which clearly separate it from its environment; in such a state, the system is said to be integrated.

Three other meanings refer to processes of integration and the resulting degree of interconnectedness or quality of relations within the whole: a) the process of relating single elements to one another and, out of these, forming a new structure, b) adding single elements or partial structures to an existing structure to form an interconnected whole, and c) maintaining or improving relations within a system or structure.

These definitions are applicable to any area of study; they can, of course, be made more concrete by specifying the elements, the resulting structures and their particular properties. Integration in a sociological context refers to stable, cooperative relations within a clearly defined social system.

Integration can also be viewed as a process – that of strengthening relationships within a social system, and of introducing new actors and groups into the system and its institutions, as happens following migration.

Interactive integration

Interactive integration means the acceptance and inclusion of migrants in the primary relationships and social connections of the host society. Indicators of interactive integration include social networks, friendships, partnerships, marriages and membership in voluntary organizations. Certain core elements of cultural integration, particularly communicative competencies, are preconditions for interactive integration.

In the first phase of the integration process, interactive integration into the social systems of the ethnic colony is helpful to migrants, through the support and solidarity of relatives and co-ethnics, and through their sharing of information and experiences. In time, however, such support may hinder the migrant in creating links with the host society and in acquiring the cultural and social capital necessary for competing in the core institutions of the host country.

Identity integration

It is not possible to participate in a host society’s core institutions without having first acquired the cultural competencies to determine how these institutions function. It is, however, possible to participate without identifying with the goals of these institutions and without having developed a feeling of belonging to the host society. This feeling of belonging may develop later in the integration process as a result of participation and acceptance. Inclusion in a new society on the subjective level – identificational integration – is indicated by feelings of belonging to and identification with groups, particularly ethnic, regional, local and/or national.

* All definitions of "integration" are from: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/22/en/1/ef0622en.pdf
Rejection and marginalisation

What is commonly referred to as a “Roma problem” is a misnomer provoked by a series of factors – stereotyped images, differences in culture and behaviour, inherent diffidence and distrust – which prevail in one particular community’s relations with another.

The problem mainly arises because the local population views the Roma community in its midst as foreign, even if this community is a long-time native of the country they live in, or EU citizens exercising their right to move within the EU. In other words, we are dealing with an issue where non-Roma Europeans are rejecting and marginalizing other Europeans, who happen to be Roma.

This rejection unavoidably happens at the local or regional level. Inter-community conflicts rarely extend beyond a limited territory; it is therefore incumbent on the locality facing such conflicts to seek solutions for peaceful cohabitation.

It is not unusual that local or regional authorities take measures to improve the living conditions of the Roma in their town or region. Such measures, however, are often sporadic, short-term and uncoordinated. Integrating the Roma population in a particular area involves improvements in a wide number of sectors – health, education, employment, and housing – and is dependent on the full commitment of the authorities, as well as a change in the mentalities and perceptions of the non-Roma majority. It is a long-term process that requires a well-planned, holistic strategy.

Nevertheless, municipal policy is embedded within a specific national background. The immigration history of a country as well as the nation’s philosophy and its concept of integration have an influence on the local policy: the national framework defines to a certain degree what municipalities can do with regard to the integration of immigrants.

The strategy

When studying the integration of Roma migrants into existing systems and institutions, the question arises: which institution is crucial to the integration of migrants? Roma migrants will not always be received with open arms in the institutions and systems to which they aspire. They will encounter barriers to integration, which this paper will conceptualise as prejudice and discrimination, or as limitations of the institutions to accommodate migrants. For such barriers to be overcome, the host society and migrants must engage in a mutual process of integration. Therefore the local or regional authorities should develop a strategy, tailored for the locality, which follows and fits into the national strategy as recommended by the European Commission and the Council recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states.

Aim of the strategy

The ability of local authorities and institutions to develop an integration strategy depends, first of all, on the general degree of political, legal and financial autonomy they enjoy within national constitutional structures. Some countries have a strong tradition of municipal autonomy; other states are more centralised. However when these conditions are met the strategy should aim at ensuring the well-being of the Roma community on a par with the other citizens of the locality and the peaceful and harmonious cohabitation of the Roma with the majority population.

4 COM(2011) 173
5 COM/2013/0460
General principles

In order to obtain a success in integration of Roma migrants the strategy should be feasible, realistic and credible. In addition, care should be taken that the strategy does not produce a counter-productive outcome by provoking negative reactions amongst the non-Roma public. To avoid such reactions, measures, wherever possible, should be mainstreamed for all vulnerable groups, and not only specifically target Roma migrants.

Time-limits should be set for the implementation of measures proposed and the authorities responsible for implementation should be clearly identified prior to drafting of the strategy.

Furthermore the strategy should take into account the costs and benefits not only in the short term but particularly in the long term, and thus a proper financial plan should be developed to make sure that there are financial resources for any single action outlined in the strategy. The marginalization and exclusion of the Roma community will in the long term prove costly to society in terms of an uneducated, unemployed and socially frustrated population. Funds used for improving the standard of living of the Roma are an investment in the future of both the Roma and non-Roma population.

The authorities, however, must avoid raising expectations that cannot be realised. It is better to develop a modest strategy that can be implemented than an ambitious one that cannot.

The authorities should obtain basic data about the situation of the Roma for planning their strategy. Their effort in collecting data must, however, be proportionate, so that urgent measures are not postponed or delayed on the pretext that data is still being collected.

The authorities should involve the Roma community when developing and implementing the strategy in general and in the specific measures and projects proposed. Including the Roma in this process will ensure that the strategy maintains the interests of Roma, creates mutual trust and confidence and makes them feel responsible. The Roma community should not be rendered dependent through paternalism.

To illustrate some of the measures that could make up a strategy to integrate Roma migrants, examples of the Manchester City Council Roma Strategy 2011-2014 are highlighted in the following.

Indispensable measures

Whatever the legal situation of the Roma concerned is, the local authorities must ensure:

- that all Roma children receive normal schooling; and
- that all Roma men, women and children have full access to the health services available for other citizens.
EDUCATION

In a knowledge-based society, children from Roma backgrounds remain in a weak competitive position. Lack of human capital is the main explanation for this. Increasingly, the low-skilled jobs that their parents held (or hold) are disappearing or will disappear as general qualification demands rise. Since parents mostly lack the social and cultural capital to facilitate their children’s educational success, support has to come from outside the family to improve the children’s prospects.

Education is compulsory in practically all member states. This is a law that applies to all citizens and should apply to the Roma community too, meaning Roma parents should not only be encouraged but compelled to regularly send their children, both boys and girls, to school.

MEASURES ARE NEEDED FOR ENSURING REGULAR ATTENDANCE:

The most important and perhaps most obvious measure needed to ensure the education of Roma migrant children is an adequate amount of school places. According to the Manchester City Council document Roma Strategy 2011-2014 from 2013 the main reason Roma children did not attend school regularly was the lack of available places in the local schools for them. Once the local schools in Manchester corrected this matter and started to focus specifically on the issue of Roma children’s school attendance, it was even acknowledged that the attendance rates of Roma children were higher than those of the non-Roma children. This shows that an active effort by local authorities and institutions to enrol Roma children in school can dramatically improve their education practices and provisions.

Other more specific and elaborate measures should also be taken to ensure the education of Roma children: Municipalities can intervene in pre-school preparation for formal schooling; they can also support measures for Roma migrant children already in school. For example, language problems are a major stumbling block for many migrant children when entering school. Learning the local language is of extreme importance to all immigrant children, but especially Roma, since the language handicap is often mistaken for, or is used as active justification for knowingly and incorrectly classifying them as having a mental disability, leading to their wrongful placement in special schools. Pre-school language training is therefore of prime importance, and should be offered to Roma children. Support for improved school performance can be provided through different forms of mentoring. For instance, mentoring for individuals and small groups can often be carried out after school hours, and in many countries, this is a normal form of social work with children from disadvantaged families (including immigrant children), either by private individuals, welfare organisations, NGOs or publicly employed social workers. The local authorities should ensure that Roma children are also given such provisions.

Furthermore, school mediators, preferably Roma, should be appointed to encourage parents to send their children to school and maintain contact between the Roma parents and the school. In general, the teachers and mediators at the local school should make an effort to be sensitive and show awareness of cultural diversity in the classroom and the different implications this may have. Ideally, they should embrace these differences and try to promote the many benefits a school may get from having a diverse group of students.

Successful schooling is heavily dependent on living conditions. Roma children brought up in a shanty town without water, electricity or drainage are shunned by the non-Roma children, who see them as dirty and as possible carriers of infectious diseases. The location of the shanty town is an added obstacle if there is no transport to the school.
General principles

Ensuring sufficient school places for the enrolment of Roma pupils, pre-school preparation for Roma children, as well as language training and mentoring for Roma children within school and mediators providing a link between schools and the community are therefore the key measures that local authorities should seek to implement to broaden and improve schooling for Roma children. One factor that also plays an important role in successful schooling are the living conditions of Roma children and their families, and dealing with this must be considered by authorities as another key measure for improving education for Roma migrant children.

HOUSING

The living conditions of the Roma in the countries they move to is at best basic and at worst appalling, and this affects all other aspects of life. We have seen its impact on education, but there are worse consequences with regards to the health of the population, and put simply inadequate housing impacts all aspects of the inclusion of Roma migrants in a negative way. Therefore, providing decent housing must be targeted as a priority in the strategy.

The Roma communities in general tend to be concentrated, by necessity, in areas with poorer housing, environmental problems and poor public and private services. Many migrating Roma arrive without any economic resources and are therefore often forced to settle in shanty towns made up of makeshift huts. All essential services – water, electricity, drainage - are absent and the settlement is a nuisance to the neighbouring areas. No social integration is possible under such conditions.

Any strategy should focus on moving Roma living in shanty towns to alternative accommodation where their basic utility needs are met. Under no circumstances however should Roma be evicted without this alternative being available for them. When this happens they are forced to move to another area to build up another shanty town, and thus evictions only perpetuate the problem. Authorities should keep in mind that the majority of Roma are sedentary and do not own caravans for moving around.

The integration policies and measures concerning housing are essential in order to prevent social segregation between the local Roma and non-Roma community; this is an area in which municipalities can play a legitimate and effective role. Ideally, initiatives taken, such as distributive social housing, should not just be taken on behalf of the Roma community, but act as a general measure that benefits the entire local community. This way the Roma are not stigmatized as a local community that receives benefits that others don’t.

HEALTH

Two aspects must be considered when tackling health problems in the Roma migrant community, namely adequate housing and access to health services.

Inadequate housing has a strong correlation with health issues, within the Roma community as well as others, and should therefore be addressed by the local authorities and institutions in the manner addressed above, by ensuring alternatives to shanty towns are available and crucially have utilities such as water, electricity and drainage in place.

Health services should be accessible to all Roma residents, whatever their legal situation, not only for humanitarian reasons. The refusal of access to health services, particularly vaccination, is likely to lead to the spread of infectious diseases (e.g. tuberculosis, skin diseases) to the rest of the population, and women and children need to receive special attention in this respect.
Accessibility is dependent not only on the commitment of the authorities but also on the knowledge and willingness of the Roma themselves. The Roma community needs to be informed of the services available. The best way to achieve this is the appointment of Roma health mediators who not only transmit information to the community but also assist in putting Roma patients in contact with medical staff. Health mediators should also provide information on basic hygienic conditions to avoid making a bad situation worse. Both the authorities and health staff should be sensitive to the Roma culture regarding health matters. Roma women tend to be secretive about their ailments and the Roma in general tend to see hospitalization as the last step before death, and dealing with this perception and enabling communication between the community and health professionals is another way in which health mediators are important.

Family planning is an element of healthcare that has some negative connotations. The Roma tend to be diffident of measures that they see as an attempt to reduce their population. Forced and uninformed sterilization of Roma women has been practiced widely in both Western and Central and Eastern Europe, so the historical precedent is a negative one. As a consequence, this should be introduced with caution.

**EMPLOYMENT**

For the Roma unemployment is a core obstacle to their integration. Without employment members of the community cannot rent lodgings and are therefore compelled to live in shanty settlements, with the resulting negative effects on education and health. It is a vicious circle that can only be broken by providing work.

Measures for providing work are highly dependent on the situation of the local communities where the Roma are living. There are however several actions that are feasible in the present economic crisis and are encouraged as a fundamental part of an economic and social strategy:

- providing information on how to access to employment services;
- getting the support of employers to encourage recruitment within the local authority’s workforce;
- encouraging self-employment and small business development, particularly in traditional crafts.

The municipality can also provide means of **training and requalification** for Roma immigrants as well as for the local population. This particularly applies to assisting young people from the communities who are in the process of transferring from the school system into the labour market. The assistance given to them may take the form of supporting apprenticeships, providing additional vocational training and counselling their parents about applicable employment and training opportunities. Municipalities can also cooperate with local chambers of commerce, migrant organizations and other NGOs to persuade local employers to provide job opportunities for young people with migrant backgrounds.

Any attempts by local authorities to establish favourable conditions for new business investment and improving labour market opportunities for both locals and migrants aids the situation for Roma integration, provided there is no discrimination or segregation in the process. Furthermore, municipalities can organise programmes to support the foundation and running of ethnic small businesses. Many Roma are skilled at various traditional crafts, and the authorities could **encourage social entrepreneurship** that such craftsmanship could lead to, when combined with the right training and provisions. Such support could include counselling for start-up initiatives in legal affairs, tax issues and financial and organizational matters as well as assisting with access to enterprise support programmes.

The municipalities could negotiate with local chambers of commerce and local employer associations in integrating the small business into the general entrepreneurial community, as well as into consumers’ awareness.
EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Fundamentally, no action or project will succeed in achieving Roma integration unless there is commitment on the part of the authorities to work with the Roma and the willing participation of the Roma themselves.

Possible measures that could be undertaken are the following:

- Developing informal and simplified structures for giving a voice to the Roma community. Avoid bureaucratization and, where possible, use existing structures for minorities;
- Ensuring that there is consultation of these structures as representatives of the community, as well as of health and education mediators who have a good knowledge of the situation, when building up the strategy and preparing projects.

Local and regional policies dealing with intergroup or intercultural relations must aim at minimising conflict and establishing peaceful relations between Roma migrant communities and the local population. Improving intercultural relations cannot be identified as belonging to any one area of political action. Policies dealing with intercultural relations cover a wide range of both actions and actors. When such policies are successful they create a climate of trust and goodwill between migrant communities, the native population, different ethnic groups and religions.

Such a climate also contributes to a subjective feeling of security, and to greater security as measured by a lower crime rate. Furthermore, a more peaceful social climate can contribute positively to the local public discourse surrounding the issue of migrants and their position in society. The local authorities and institutions must take an active role in this process, by for example:

- Initiating contact between community groups by organising meetings of Roma parents of schoolchildren with non-Roma parents, Roma and non-Roma women and Roma and non-Roma children;
- Organise events (school outings, town festivals) bringing the two communities together;
- Encourage participation of the Roma in local life and in local politics.

The local authorities should not oversee any opportunity in combating stereotypes and prejudices. One possible action is to support interethnic and interreligious dialogue; another is to create events aiming at initiating a dialogue between the local population and the Roma migrants. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies have a major role to play in this process; as part of it, the local authorities and institutions could establish joint programmes with churches and religious representatives to support mutual awareness and acceptance. Such activities could indirectly contribute to diminishing conflicts. Prejudice tends to be persistent, and the eradication of it takes time. It is important, therefore, to be aware of its existence and to introduce both formal and informal mechanisms of social control that prevent prejudice from turning into active discrimination. The local authorities should naturally condemn without hesitation racist statements in the press or by politicians.

In addition to the above mentioned, the local authorities could join or set up a network of other municipalities which have a Roma community in their midst with a view to share experiences and good practices.

Conclusions

The situations described above, and the possible actions that could be undertaken to facilitate positive changes clearly show the importance of local authorities and the essential role they can have in promoting the successful integration of Roma immigrants in various countries. This strategy document provides a guideline to local and regional authorities, about how best to achieve this aim and the measures that are most necessary in terms of education, housing, health, employment and empowerment and participation.

At the European policy level, major steps towards establishing a European framework for integration of Roma migrants are underway. However, these activities mainly involve actors from the national member state level, such as national institutions and national contact points. They should be complemented by a ‘bottom-up’ involvement of relevant actors from the local and regional level. If focused on the concrete implementation of integration policies and the effectiveness of its measures, this initiative could provide data for policy-making on the European level, and could effectively support the consensus building process in a European framework for inclusion policies. This is where the MIGROM project can contribute with its findings and expertise that could result in establishing a European framework for successful integration of Roma migrants.