

# Roma Youth Participation in Action

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*Roma youth participation: good practices,  
from the local to the European level*

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## **Roma Youth Participation in Action**

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# 1. Introduction

This publication is predominantly the result of the enthusiasm, dedication and purposeful work of the young people from the projects and organisations represented here. This includes professional workers, volunteers and young Roma and non-Roma participants.

The aim of this publication is to provide examples of Roma youth participation that exist and thrive in different projects and organisations across Europe; in doing so, the publication will challenge existing and widespread prejudice related to Roma youth participation. These examples can be an inspiration to any project or organisation which seeks to consciously and critically promote participatory practice, particularly the organisations run by young Roma and for the benefit of Roma communities. It shows that Roma youth participation works and brings results, but at the same time the conditions for it to develop are often fragile, as the realities of structural discrimination or social exclusion are major obstacles. The publication also serves as a tool for youth policy makers. It is a message that states that Roma youth participation is real, it is happening and it needs further support in a climate where the human rights of Roma communities are often violated. These success stories can act as a catalyst for youth policy makers to create the space and support for new initiatives; in turn, these initiatives can develop further policies to support Roma young people's creativity and willingness to take an active stand in order to promote their identity as young people, as Roma and as citizens.

The importance of efforts to develop Roma youth participation are a result of the failure to motivate and encourage the participation of young Roma. Today, with the rise of political extremism, coupled with economic migration in the wake of austerity, the emphasis on Roma youth participation has become more relevant and perhaps more urgent than at any other time. The examples of good practice included in this publication are part of a process in the effort to develop real participation of Roma young people in communities and societies in all parts of Europe.

The stories of participation included here were collected and compiled by three researchers. The projects and organisations included in this publication were identified through their ability to clearly demonstrate real participatory practice with young Roma. Each participating organisation involved was consulted at every stage of the research and during the editing process.

The development of the publication is also based on:

- The Roma Youth Action Plan of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and its approaches to Roma youth participation and inclusion
- The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
- Recommendation 354 (2014) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe "Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels"
- The *Have Your Say!* manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, developed by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

The publication is divided into several chapters:

- Introduction – this provides an overview of the entire project around this publication, the process and the product
- Roma Youth Action Plan – this is a commentary on the Council of Europe Youth Department and the Roma Youth Action Plan
- Participation and Roma young people – this introduces the concept of participation and the relevance of Roma youth participation in particular
- Participation and this Publication – An explanation about the context of participation in the stories and examples
- Stories and Examples – This is a collection of 15 good practice examples of Roma youth

participation. Each of these examples is divided into 6 parts:

1. Overview
  2. The Organisation
  3. The Issue – specific to that community or group
  4. The Project – what the project did or does
  5. Participation – highlighting the practice of participation
  6. Outcomes – direct results of the participatory work
- Conclusion – A summary of the publication

This publication offers to anyone interested the chance to learn about how Roma young people participate and take an active role in their communities, with examples of how this is done. The publication presents these stories of participation and points out specific aspects of participation. We have included the contact details of the organisations involved, and invite the reader to contact them for further information.

A word about the style of the publication: this is a publication about young people, and, in the spirit of participation and access, we wanted to create a publication that also speaks to young people and inspires them. We have strived to keep its style and approach youth-friendly.

### A Note on Terminology

The term 'Roma' is used throughout this publication to refer to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom). It should be understood to cover the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including people who identify themselves as Gypsies.

The term 'Rom' is also used to refer to a person of Roma origin.

Both 'Roma' and 'Romani' are used as adjectives: a 'Roma(ni) woman', 'Roma(ni) communities'.

## 2. How and why this publication came about

A large amount of research was conducted in the search for the examples used in this publication. The project team, formed by both researchers and with the input of the Roma youth organisations involved in the Roma Youth Action Plan and of the ROMED programme of the Council of Europe, began by asking themselves what the most common approaches and practices of Roma youth participation and the combatting of discrimination were. Some of the criteria related to creating a geographical balance in order to highlight that Roma youth participation is not restricted to one country or region. Another criterion was to ensure a representation of European, national and local organisations; this shows that Roma youth participation is happening at different levels and has an influence not just on a local settlement or community in some cases, but on national youth and or Roma policy in other cases. Different approaches of participation were also taken into account alongside different target groups within the young Roma populations: rural, inner city, LGBT, economically challenged young people and so on.

With these criteria in mind, the team proceeded to identify a number of projects or initiatives aimed at empowering Roma young people through participation. Initially, a list of 45 projects was defined, and a first filtering of the projects began.

The project team collected and reviewed all available information provided by the project and any partners. They set the following questions against those examples and information:

- Can the identified project or initiative be considered good, inspiring and relevant?
- Is the project or initiative of Roma youth participation producing a significant impact at the level of policy and/or public opinion in the community? If so, how?
- Does the project or initiative of Roma youth participation have any potential of replicability and, if so, on what conditions? What is the role of the young Roma in the project?

Once this phase had been completed, the team organised interviews with representatives of the projects / initiatives, with the beneficiaries and with people from the wider community affected by the project or initiative. This was to create a deeper understanding of the work taking place, the approaches used, and effectiveness of the participation of the Roma young people.

From the interview material, the researchers created the first drafts of the text for the publication; the text was then sent back to each project organiser for comments, correction and/or approval.

### About the authors

This project involved the following authors and contributors:

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Alexandra is a trainer, facilitator and a consultant who has extensive experience working on diversity, inclusion, participation, human rights, youth work and organisational management issues. She is continuously working in Roma neighbourhoods on community empowerment and mediation. Alexandra has managed a local youth NGO and has been the president of the Forum of European Roma Young People, established as the first European Roma youth network. She has been involved in major policy-making processes for Roma and Roma youth issues from local to European level.

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Miguel is an experienced evaluator, trainer, Lecturer and e-Learning-Moderator working at European level for European Institutions and NGOs and in Germany for the Universities of Hannover and of Osnabrück in the following fields: social inclusion, participation, training of trainers, human rights, voluntary service, global education, intercultural dialogue, conflict transformation and peace education.

Brian Belton (United Kingdom)

Brian is an academic and global consultant on youth work and related disciplines. As an educator and trainer he was able in the past 20 years to produce a numerous books and articles on issues related to youth work. Brian is also acknowledged academic on topics of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma identity, rights and politics.

Nicholas Paddison (United Kingdom / Montenegro)

Nik is a freelance trainer in the European youth field. He is also a writer, consultant, copy editor, and, for conferences and large youth events, works as a speaker, facilitator and rapporteur. Nik has a background as a youth worker from the UK. Over the last 15 years he has worked as a trainer of youth workers, leaders, volunteers and activists in the European youth field. He has been a part of youth work and non-formal education / learning recognition, working with local and international organisations across Europe.

The secretariat of the ROMED programme of the Council of Europe supported the project and contributed with identifying the practices described here.

From the secretariat of the Youth Department, Denis Durmish contributed to the project management and the contacts with youth organisations. Mara Georgescu managed the entire project and supported the final editing process. Rui Gomes provided useful insights into the final editing of the project.



### 3. The Council of Europe and Roma Youth

The work of the Council of Europe is based on the values of respect for and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. At different levels, through a variety of tools (legal, political or educational), the Council of Europe supports the creation in Europe of societies based on a culture of peace and human rights.

The work of the Council of Europe regarding the situation of the Roma started when the Parliamentary Assembly adopted its Recommendation 563 (1969) on the "Situation of Gypsies and other travellers in Europe". A series of recommendations, meetings and seminars followed, with a clear focus on education and non-discrimination. Later, the themes tackled were extended to equality of opportunities, Roma women, training and education, the fight against racism and xenophobia, and youth.

In October 2010, the Council of Europe High Level Meeting on Roma resulted in the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma (CM(2010)133 final), which has become a guiding document for all the activities that the Council of Europe undertakes regarding Roma people. It is based on the following priorities:

- Non-discrimination, citizenship, women and children's rights
- Social inclusion, including education, housing and healthcare
- Empowerment and better access to justice.

The European Court of Human Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights have also been important instruments of the Council of Europe to make governments respect their commitments to the human rights of the Roma. Several cases relate to discrimination, school segregation, forced evictions, attacks on Roma villages and destruction of property, racially-biased police investigations, and forced sterilisation of Roma women, to name a few. The Court has recognised that the Roma are "a specific type of disadvantaged and vulnerable minority" who "require special protection" (the case of *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic*). Several articles of the European Convention of Human Rights are particularly relevant to situations of discrimination faced by the Roma population, namely article 14, which prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the Convention, and Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention, which extends the scope of protection to any right set forth by law, and, in so doing, introduces a general prohibition of discrimination.

#### Working With and For Roma Youth and the Roma Youth Action Plan

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has associated young Roma with its policy and activities since 1995, when a groundbreaking training course for Roma youth leaders was held at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

During the last 20 years, the Council of Europe has also:

- supported the development of Roma youth networks, through study sessions with Roma European youth networks covering human rights education, youth mobilisation, the management of Roma youth organisations, and intercultural dialogue
- organised activities where the concerns of Roma young people were particularly relevant, such as young migrants, young women, violence in everyday life or gender equality
- carried out training courses for youth leaders and youth workers, such as the series of long-term training courses on Participation and Citizenship of minority youth, and the Enter! project on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (2010-2012)
- supported local pilot projects by the European Youth Foundation.

In 2011, the Council of Europe organised a Roma Youth Conference which brought together some 60 Roma youth activists, members of youth organisations and international institutions to discuss a co-ordinated approach to tackling Roma youth issues. The participants in the Conference developed guidelines for what

the Council of Europe and other partners should take up as themes for their future projects and actions in the following five years, in the areas of youth work and youth policies; a Roma Youth Action Plan was developed based on the Conference input. The Roma Youth Action Plan became a response by the Council of Europe to challenges faced by Roma young people in Europe, particularly in relation to their empowerment, participation in policy decision-making processes and structures at European level, and multiple realities of discrimination.

The Action Plan includes activities of the Youth Department and of other sectors of the Council of Europe, along with activities proposed by other partners, first and foremost, youth organisations: Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP), ternYpe – International Roma Youth Network, and the European Youth Forum.

The Roma Youth Action Plan is articulated around six themes, as follows:

- Strengthening Roma youth identity
- Addressing multiple discrimination and recognising multiple identities
- Building a stronger Roma youth movement
- Increasing the capacity of Roma youth organisations to participate in policy making
- Human rights and human rights education
- Combating discrimination and antigypsyism.

The Plan is implemented through a variety of activities, from capacity-building activities for Roma youth organisations, to seminars and conferences, policy debates, production of educational tools, summer schools and training courses. Non-formal education methodologies are applied in the activities of the Plan.

As far as youth participation is concerned, the Roma Youth Action Plan makes a very strong statement: in order to tackle the wishes, needs and aspirations of Roma young people, their voice needs to be listened to, and they need to be involved in all the steps of the process. This is why this publication also came about. The Roma Youth Action Plan strives to demonstrate that, given the right, means, space, opportunity and support, Roma young people take an active role in changing their environment, in developing actions for a better life, in affirming Roma identity and in fighting for human rights. This publication is part of the Roma Youth Action Plan and aims to exemplify this approach to Roma youth participation. It is also part of the youth policy of the Council of Europe, as defined in Agenda 2020.

For more information, see: [www.coe.int/youth/roma](http://www.coe.int/youth/roma)

## 4. Participation

Participation is one of the rights recognised by many human rights treaties. This means that people have a right to participate in government and free elections, to participate in the cultural life of the community, to peaceful assembly and association, and the right to join trade unions. For example, the UN Convention on Rights of the Child states that children (all human beings under 18) have the right to have their voice heard when adults are making decisions that affect them, and their views should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. They have the right to express themselves freely and to receive and share information. The Convention recognises the potential of children to influence decision making relevant to them, to share views and, thus, to participate as citizens and actors of change. Participation is a right on its own, but, in addition, it also makes other rights possible. If people are involved, for example, in consultations in order to improve health care services, then their participation supports the realisation of their right to health.

The Preamble to the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (21 May 2003) states:

The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

A great deal has been written and talked about regarding participatory methodologies and their scope for initiating social change and developing participation, especially amongst the most disadvantaged, at grassroots level. In reality there has been little sustained effort or a full understanding of what this actually means. As a result, too often the status-quo is maintained and the active participation and involvement of those most disadvantaged remains limited. This publication showcases the work of projects and organisations that are integrating participatory methods into their practice and thus prove that it can be done.

Youth participation is the active engagement of young people in their own context and beyond. It includes young people being included and involved in decision making at all levels. Youth participation invites young people to take on responsibilities, face challenges and to become active in terms of realising their own wants and needs, to take responsibility for and deal with the consequences of their decisions and actions – developing judgement, communication and collaborative capacities. Youth participation encompasses the recognition and fostering of the strengths, interests, and capabilities of young people.

Participation is also about the planning processes and decision making that both impacts on and includes others – both adults and other young people. An inclusive approach reflects the diversity of the population not only in age but in background as well.

The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life stresses that to

participate means having influence on and responsibility for decisions and actions that affect the lives of young people or are simply important to them. In practice, therefore, this could mean voting in local elections as well as setting up a youth organisation or an Internet forum to exchange information about hobbies and interests or other creative ways of spending free time. The charter's definition of participation also shows a shift in the approach to young people and youth involvement. Young people are not treated as victims or as a vulnerable group

that needs protection and help (the so-called "problem-based approach"). They are not treated as objects of adults' intervention, with the adults assuming that they know what is best for young people. Young people are now seen as active players in organisations or in community life; they are seen as partners with lots of potential, talents and strengths. They should have the opportunity to express their needs and to find ways of satisfying them. (Compass, 2012)

More than a decade ago the Commonwealth Youth Programme and UNICEF proclaimed the following:

As there are many types of developmental processes, cultures and unique individuals in the world, participation is not any one phenomenon. There are various definitions of participation. A basic concept of participation, however, is that people are free to involve themselves in social and developmental processes and that self-involvement is active, voluntary and informed.

*UNICEF / Commonwealth Youth Programme Participation Toolkits (2006) Book One*

Youth participation creates a platform for young people to increase their involvement in contemporary society. It is a means to amplify their individual and collective voice.<sup>1</sup>

In the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, youth participation has a key role. The Council of Europe has a co-management system in its youth sector, where representatives of youth organisations and governmental representatives work together to define the priorities for the youth sector.

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<sup>1</sup> See Forbrig, Joerg (ed.) (2005) *Revisiting Youth Political Participation*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe

## 5. Participation and Roma Young People

The Roma youth participation examples included in this publication must be contextualised within the current European social and political context, in which Roma human rights are still violated and social exclusion and hate speech affecting Roma communities are widespread. These examples must also be contextualised within the efforts to support the participation of young Roma and their potential to be a protagonist in what concerns the improvement of the living conditions of Roma communities, and making the voice of Roma communities heard. While in many communities across Europe, Roma young people face tremendous pressures and must “become” adults because their perspectives to enjoy their “right to be young” are slim, at the same time there are more and more examples that young Roma are aware of their potential and role as partners in the dialogue about anything that concerns them and their communities. This publication aims to highlight both the challenges that young Roma face, as well as their efforts to actively shape their present and their future.

In 2011, when the Council of Europe organised its first Roma Youth Conference in order to develop its Roma Youth Action Plan, Roma young people and Roma youth organisations pointed out the main concerns, issues and challenges that affect young Roma today. We quote here the input of the 60 participants in this conference, in order to provide an overview of the situation of young Roma today.

### External Challenges

*Roma youth face a number of external challenges, including:*

- *limited access to political participation and absence from relevant decision-making bodies and processes*
- *limited or no participation in mainstream youth events and initiatives*
- *a lack of political will for mainstream youth programmes that are more inclusive of Roma youth*
- *an absence of Roma youth issues from related mainstream legislation and policies at national and international level*
- *a lack of solid (or any) funding for youth activities – where they exist they often exclude Roma youth organisations due to their weakness and specificities*
- *an absence of effective positive measures towards equality of opportunities*
- *a lack of disaggregated data and statistics, rendering Roma youth doubly invisible*
- *a preponderance of pilot project-based activities for Roma youth which lack strategic focus to link to sustainable policies*
- *high levels of discrimination, which have a deep impact on self-esteem and self-confidence and lead to further stigmatisation and exclusion of Roma youth and their families*
- *a lack of access to essential goods and services, as well as the same opportunities as other young people*
- *the reality of growing up in segregated neighbourhoods and schools, which prevents Roma youth from being part of mainstream society*
- *multiple forms of discrimination (including intra-community discrimination) of particularly vulnerable groups such as women, LGBT youth, HIV-positive individuals, migrants and undocumented young people*
- *a generally negative portrayal of Roma in mainstream media, which reinforces prejudices, stereotypes and racialised attitudes*
- *a lack of information in the media, in school textbooks or other sources of educational information concerning Roma culture and the lives of young Roma*
- *significant barriers to accessing quality education, often even to education at all*
- *the widespread practice of placing disproportionate numbers of Roma children and young people in special schools for mentally disabled people*
- *low levels of education and training among Roma youth, leading to their being uncompetitive in the labour market*
- *low levels of access to high school, and even lower levels to university-level education*

- *the high levels of poverty which Roma children and young people experience as they grow up*
- *a lack of birth certificates, identity documents and citizenship status, meaning that Roma are often invisible to the administration and are denied the possibility of exerting their rights.*

### *Internal Challenges*

*Internal challenges include:*

- *weak Roma youth organisations and a lack of Roma youth structures*
- *poor co-ordination and communication among existing structures (e.g. Roma and non-Roma youth; Roma youth and general Roma movements, organisations and authorities responsible for them)*
- *a lack of information and education about human rights and citizenship rights*
- *low levels of mobilisation, making Roma youth movements invisible*
- *low levels of Roma youth voluntarism and participation in mainstream youth organisations and projects*
- *a limited capacity to manage and apply for project funding*
- *self-loathing and self-segregation as a result of discrimination and exclusion, leading young Roma to hide their ethnic and cultural identity*
- *early and arranged marriages, which pose barriers for young people, and young women in particular, to continuing education or pursuing a professional career*
- *disproportionate placement of Roma children and youngsters in care institutions, where many of them lose their ethnic identity*
- *domestic violence affecting young girls and women*
- *difficult relations between Roma youth and elder Roma leaders*
- *tensions between different Roma groups and communities which limit co-operation between youth organisations*
- *a lack of youth role models in Roma communities.*

(Source: 'The Right to be young', Roma Youth Conference report, Council of Europe, 2012)

## 6. Participation and this Publication

As described in the introduction, each of the stories and examples of good practice is divided into six sections.

- Overview
- The Issue – specific to that community or group
- The Organisation
- The Project – what the project did or does
- Participation – highlighting the practice of participation
- Outcomes – direct results of the participatory work

Most of the sections are self-explanatory, however the section on 'Participation' will need further explanation. In order to highlight participation and how it was taking place, the authors referred to a model of participation from the *Have Your Say!* manual.

[The Charter] proposes an approach that can be used in all areas of young people's involvement at local level, such as when running participatory projects for youth, building youth-adult partnerships or setting up youth organisations and groups, etc.

The charter's approach to participation is the so called "RMSOS" approach and is based on the five keywords mentioned in the document's preamble: Right, Means, Space, Opportunity and Support.

It is based on the principle that meaningful youth participation can only take place when the right conditions have been created and all the actors involved in participatory work have been given the responsibility to ensure that these conditions are present.

The five keywords, Right, Means, Space, Opportunity and Support, represent the main factors having an influence on youth involvement at local level.

(*Have Your Say!* manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Chapter 3)

Within the context of this publication, two other elements were added to the model, 'Identity' and 'Human Rights and antigypsyism'. Below is an explanation about each of the elements summarised from the original text in the *Have Your Say!* manual<sup>2</sup>:

### Rights

Basically, young people have the right to participate in society; it should not be dependent on local or regional authorities providing the right. It is a fundamental right. This area of participation can be seen when young people are in a position to actively promote their rights, where they have influence on local decision-making processes through consultations or voting. This is also being fulfilled when activities, projects and organisations are promoting youth rights. Please note, however, that this does not mean the promotion of the need for rights but a promotion of the rights being practised. Rights cover every aspect of life, not only civil or political rights, but also social, economic or cultural ones.

### Means

Young people have the means to participate. As in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, if basic needs such as food or shelter are not being met, then participation is not a high priority as there is a focus on obtaining missing resources. It is necessary to ensure basic needs are being met for individuals and communities,

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<sup>2</sup> [www.coe.int/t/dq4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Have\\_your\\_say\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Have_your_say_en.pdf) pp38-43

then the feeling of isolation and being left out of society can be dealt with and participation can be enacted. Basic needs include sufficient social security, education, housing, health care, transportation, know-how and access to technology.

## Space

Young people need the space to participate. This refers not only to physical space for meeting and running activities but also the space in time for the organising of their own activities. Another aspect of space can be seen in terms of the Internet: this is being used more and more as a space for exchanging views or even setting up projects with others. There is another aspect of space, and that is young people being provided with opportunities to participate within the institutional frameworks; specifically, this can relate to policy making. Added to this, society needs to have space available for young people's views, recommendations and conclusions to be heard, acknowledged and to have a real impact on decisions.

## Opportunity

The opportunity to participate is an option for young people. In order to participate there has to be an opportunity to do so: young people also need access to information on how to get involved, what opportunities are available and where. With opportunity in place, young people can make informed decisions about their involvement and participation. Opportunity is also about structures and institutions providing opportunities for participation; however, opportunity here means more than just an opening, it means that decision-making processes and systems need to be youth-friendly, understandable and organised in such a way that young people feel empowered and not overwhelmed. This also means providing sufficient time for the young people to participate at their own pace.

## Support

Young people need support available in order to participate. Support needs to be available in many forms, all of which need to be accessible to young people. These should include the following: financial, moral, institutional, personal, and organisational, all of which need to be available at a local community level. Local authorities should provide adequate financial support to cover at least expenses and structural costs. Moral support and advice needs to be on hand to support the young people in decision making; this can be provided by a person referred to in the revised charter as a guarantor, youth worker or other professional. Institution or community support needs to be in place to recognise the importance and contribution of youth participation.

## Identity

It became clear from several of the stories that Roma youth participation was related to identity. Participation in society supports the formation and reinforcing of identity amongst Roma young people and it also strengthens their social identity and affirms positively their identity as Roma. In several cases the self-esteem of young Roma was reinforced: the way young Roma perceived themselves moved from a feeling of having a lack of social worth and/or fear of showing cultural affiliation, to a stronger sense of worth and pride. Strength of understanding of identity reinforces the need for participation. At the same time, participation of Roma young people in the project or action supports the formation and reinforcement of their identity.

This element of participation should not be seen in isolation from the other dimensions: it is an integral part of participation in general. However, since this element was very visible and, from the interviewees' point of view, crucial to explaining the "why" and "what for" of participation, we have chosen to see it as a separate dimension.

## Human rights

Young people acting for human rights and against antigypsyism was a consistent theme in all the stories, and was an important factor in the participation of young people. Roma youth participation is in some cases a reaction to the very widespread antigypsyism affecting Roma communities. Roma young people



are taking action because they want to combat antigypsyism and make a stand for their rights. The participation of Roma young people empowers them to act for the human rights of all Roma which empowers more young people to participate. Human rights and human rights education form a foundation for participation.

The participation of young Roma cannot be seen to be isolated from the conditions that their communities face. Where Roma people live in conditions of discrimination, exclusion, segregation and violence, in order to participate, young Roma are challenging these conditions and finding alternative solutions for their lives.

This element is not isolated from the others. However, given its key importance among the values that Roma youth participation promotes, it was decided to consider it as a highlighted dimension of Roma youth participation.

## 7. Main Trends and Ideas in Participation

When looking through all these projects there are a number of trends that appear. This chapter will briefly explore these different trends connecting different aspects to different projects.

### Youth Work

As obvious as it sounds, all the examples are working directly with young people and are good examples of participative youth work practice. Most of the projects and organisations have taken the approach of working with a small number of young people in order to ensure effectiveness and sustainability; for example, Kamira involved 22 young people, Roma Integration House 8, and Integro 20.

### Peer Education

Peer education is a practice that several of the projects and organisations are using, including Sumnal and LGBT Pavee.

### Participation in Youth Work

The biggest single approach that creates impact and supports participation of Roma young people in society is the participation of Roma young people in the organisation or project. Kamira promotes and encourages the young people it works with to be involved in its decision-making bodies. The Roma Support Group ensure that all their activities are developed with the young people and are guided by the wants, needs and perspectives of the Roma young people. It is the young people who choose, suggest and initiate the projects through their interaction, collaboration and co-operation. The young people are also encouraged to be a part of the management structure and/or to take a part in the organisation's decision-making processes. Konexe works to make sure the voices of the Roma young people are heard in the organisation as they see this as a step towards the Roma young people having a voice in the wider community. ternYpe is young person led and it is the Roma young people who make the decisions, not just internally for the network but also when organising events they are responsible for all the organising aspects and the lobbying of authorities to support the respective project. LGBT Pavee's policy and direction is guided by its membership – the Roma and traveller young people. Cooperativa Mandacaru and Fundação António Silva Leal has the Roma young people as decision makers and encourages them to have their own voice.

### Developing Independence and Autonomy

The work of Roma Integration House enables the Roma young women to show that they are capable of organising activities outside of the domestic environment. Sumnal works to ensure the young Roma know their rights and how to gain access to rights: this supports the young people in being able to access social resources and support. This in turn fosters the integration of the Roma young people into mainstream society.

### Partnership and Networking

Partnership and networking is another factor here, although some of the organisations are networks in their own right, for example ternYpe. However the building of partnerships is still a key factor, with other Roma youth organisations, with local authorities, institutions and services, and even international institutions such as the European Union and/or the Council of Europe youth departments. The creation and development of partnerships and networks raises the profile of the work of the project or organisation, of the Roma young people and what they are achieving, and therefore opens doors for participation.

### Identity

An interesting trend in many of the examples is the promotion and support for Roma young people to embrace their identity and plural cultural affiliations. This happens in a variety of cases and ways. Amaro Foro works on Roma young people's self-confidence and supports them in taking initiative. Gypsy Eye and Integro Association work hard to promote a positive image of Roma young people. Cooperativa

Mandacaru and Fundação António Silva Leal work to provide Roma young people with the opportunity to cultivate and preserve their identity through theatre. Roma Integration House combines entrepreneurial activities by exploring elements of the Roma culture in order to support the young people to understand their identity better.

## Youth Policy

Having a focus on youth policy is another key factor in the work of many of the organisations and projects. Interacting with, influencing, and co-working with politicians and/or institutions on Roma youth issues is a hugely important part of Roma youth participation.

Sumnal works with a wide range of partnerships, creating consultations and co-operative relationships with a variety of institutions and organisations at both local and national levels. These include the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Centre for Social Work, the Ministry of Education and the Employment Agency. Through these contacts and partnerships, the organisation can influence the creation and development of youth policy in general, and Roma youth policy in particular.

RROMA is working to connect the groups of young people with the local municipalities and so begin a process of engagement in local policy making, and, from that, the development of local Roma Youth Action Plans. They are also working to facilitate Roma young people's participation in youth policy making at the national level in co-operation with the National Youth Council. Amaro Foro has an ongoing developing relationship with the Berlin Senat (Berlin government) with whom they are working on the developments of youth policy and Roma policy. The young people are taking responsibility for pushing the implementation of the policies and promoting the role of young people in society.

Konexe is contributing at the European level to the drafting of measures and strategies against the growth of hatred and racism. At the local level, the anti-Roma attacks have been brought onto the political agenda by the young people. Roma Integration House is working on giving women a voice within the Lithuanian society and the Roma community, with the young people presenting Roma issues to governmental institutions.

## Internet

The Internet is a huge resource for many of the organisations. For some it is a tool for networking and keeping in contact with members and for others it is platform and the basis of their work. Gypsy Eye and Roma Integration House make use of the Internet and both have websites and make use of social media. ternYpe, LGBT Pavee and RomaReact each host an interactive online platform to promote web-based youth participation and activism through the use of social media and online activities. For some it is an opportunity to identify with a specific group, to express views and to host online events. There are also chat rooms for discussions on different issues or general online interaction. Another use is to raise the profile of an issue and to use the platform and/or social media to tackle the issue.

## Sustainability

Too often the aim of the project is achieve an end product; however the projects and organisations involved see the need for sustainability; participation is limited if there is no sustainability. Examples of sustainability include the following: the young activists from Gypsy Eye remaining active; RROMA promoting the establishment of independent Roma youth groups; most of the women involved at KAMIRA were more active within their organisations and public life as a direct result of the project. Konexe ensures that participants spend time with the threatened group or community in providing psychological and social support to the affected Roma people. Once a group in a threatened community is organised, Konexe works with them to become self-organised and autonomous.

The majority of Movit's work is based on the promoting and encouraging Roma young people to take part in international activities and at the same time to engage Roma youth organisations in international programmes.

In Sumnal, young Roma who were active participants are now volunteers in the project: they are now providing support activities, guidance and advice, and helping to organise educational activities; in turn the young people involved in the network are mentoring local groups and supporting capacity-building for youth workers.

## Training

Training the Roma young people was an important aspect. KAMIRA, Gypsy Eye and others trained the young people in competences for organising events and campaigns, or for learning about how to tackle discrimination and hate speech. Konexe delivered training on non-violent action. Integro Association not only trained the Roma young people but also continued with coaching possibilities. KAMIRA also focussed on training courses on participation itself, and engaged with the Youth in Action Programme (now Erasmus+).

## Roma Culture

Many of the projects and organisations take into account the cultural and traditional values of the Roma communities. This is seen as a vital part of the work: to work successfully with the Roma young people it is important to work with and create understanding with the whole community. Roma Support Group work a lot with the Roma family structure because of Roma traditions. KAMIRA promotes intergenerational dialogue between Roma women, and increasing the participation of young Roma women, which is seen as a key element in initiating changes for and within the Roma population. Cooperativa Mandacaru and Fundação António Silva Leal as part of their work explore the social context of being a young Roma in the Roma community and culture and being a young Roma in the wider society. LGBT Pavee explore the multiple aspects of being Roma, including sexuality, gender, age, disability, and so on. Roma Integration House show Roma culture as an inspirational resource and provided an example of the potential for the initiative of young Roma women from both poor and marginalised neighbourhoods. RomaReact and Sumnal work to heighten the visibility of young Roma and Roma youth issues, and create a growing public awareness about young Roma in Europe.

## Promotion and Visibility

Good youth work impacts on the young people who then attract other young people to take part. This can be seen in the work of RomaReact where their face-to-face activities motivate other young Roma to become active and to participate. The information and testimonies from the field are shared with decision makers, the wider media and the general public at the local and European levels. LGBT Pavee exchange flyers, leaflets and information booklets with other mainstream organisations. The more publicity and visibility of the work of the Roma young people, the greater the chances for breaking stereotypes and discrimination and the greater the chance for the Roma young people to be able to break down the barriers to participation.

## Advocacy

Konexe, Roma Support Group, KAMIRA and RomaReact all have an aspect of advocacy in their work, either for participation directly or for raising issues related to the Roma young people – especially in cases of discrimination and violence.

## 8. The Stories and Examples

Each story is prefaced with a list of the key elements of the participation model that are exemplary in that example. These are then briefly explained in the overview and can be traced through the Participation section of each story – although they are not necessarily specifically highlighted in the main text. In reality, every aspect of the Model should be present (according to the Model) for participation to be happening. Indeed, in many of the stories it can be seen that all the aspects are clearly there. However we have endeavoured to highlight the most important ones in each case.

## 8.1 Social and Political Roma Youth Participation – Amaro Foro, Germany

[www.amaroforo.de/kinderprogramm](http://www.amaroforo.de/kinderprogramm)

*Keywords for participation: Right / Space / Opportunity / Support*

This example of Roma Youth Participation shows groups of young Roma in Germany working on both the social and political level, making their voice heard and ensuring the voices of other young Roma are also heard. It highlights the importance of a combined social and political response to the position of young Roma. The key elements related to participation are the young people claiming the right to participate and engaging with the city government to acknowledge their right. They also have the space to participate, through a building run by the organisation and through a contact point contributed by the city government. There is opportunity at many levels, not least the involvement of young people in advising and making recommendations at a political level. Although limited, there is also support, from the organisation and from the city.

### Migration and Media Hostility

Over 12,000 Roma from the states that made up the former Yugoslavia now reside in Germany. They are made up of war refugees from the early 1990s, and there are also those who migrated following the abolition of visa restrictions from Serbia and Montenegro in 2009, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2010. The legal status of many of these people continues to be unclear and, as such, they are obliged to live with the risk of deportation to their countries of origin.

There are an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Roma from Romania and Bulgaria currently living in Germany. Their presence, especially in cities such as Berlin, Duisburg and Dortmund, has been met by hostile media coverage.

Sections of the popular media in Germany promote a negative stereotype of migrant Roma as well as Sinti<sup>3</sup> and Roma with German minority status. This characterisation portrays Roma as a problem group, typically abusing the social security system. They are associated with poverty, widespread illiteracy and involvement in criminal activities. The attitudes and practices of German local and federal institutions towards Roma migrants have had a tendency to reproduce negative representations of Roma. The effect of this institutional exclusion of Roma only increases the everyday prejudice and discrimination they experience.

### Restricted Access to Education and Employment

Many young Roma face difficulties in getting a good level of education and in some cases any education at all. There are often no clear criteria for when or if young Roma are able to attend regular classes at school, which directly impacts on their integration into the school system. Schools are not obliged to accept Roma young people over the age of 16.

Roma young people under 16 years of age, arriving from Bulgaria or Romania, are placed in separated classes at school. This is done so that they can learn German and/or improve their German language skills. Not all schools have welcome or induction classes, leaving many young Roma confused or excluded. In some cases, schools refuse to enrol young people from families with no fixed address. In other cases the young Roma are placed with unqualified teachers; these are often interpreters with Bulgarian or Romanian background.

When the education system rejects them, it is much more difficult to engage the young people in any kind

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<sup>3</sup> The Sinti (also Sinta or Sinte; masc. sing. Sinto fem. sing. Sintisa) are a Romani people of Central Europe. Traditionally itinerant, today only a small percentage of the group remains unsettled. In earlier times, they frequently lived on the outskirts of communities. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinti>

of organised learning. One of the consequences of the lack of schooling is that many young Roma don't learn German, which impacts on their chances of gaining employment. There is the option to pay to learn German, but few young Roma or their families have the financial resources to meet the necessary costs. There are some projects supporting the teaching of German to young Roma, which is usually combined with some employment skills, but the travel costs are usually not covered and, again, the finances are a barrier for Roma young people. The feeling of rejection or disenchantment with the school system by young Roma is commonly felt. This situation means that many young Roma often have no other resort but to seek work relatively early in life.

## Amaro Foro – Germany

Amaro Foro was established in 2011 in Berlin. The goal was to contribute to a more tolerant society, with a particular emphasis on promoting respect, mutual understanding, and inclusion via the voice of young Roma. As an organisation they work hard to ensure that Roma young people are at the forefront of their work, and that young people and children are not just the beneficiaries of the work but also the instigators of the work. There is local level support work, a 'contact' point, and there is also the politically-orientated work.

## Social Support and Roma Youth Participation

### The Youth Group

The response from Amaro Foro to many of the issues that the Roma community is facing has been to develop several youth-led initiatives. They developed a youth club which provides a space for young people to meet and interact. This is a key example of Roma youth participation. The young people work together in the club to come up with and implement their own ideas; they then develop programmes and activities accordingly for which they are responsible and accountable, taking the right to participate in their own hands. Many of the activities are quite general, for example, workshops on Roma history, identity, and Roma in the Second World War. However, there are also workshops directly related to the situation of the young Roma living in or around Berlin. For example, they have conducted workshops and seminars on antigypsyism and on Educational Opportunities for Young People to Promote Political and Social Inclusion.

Once a year the young people involved in the youth club organise an international youth exchange. This involves 50 participants (Roma and non-Roma) from different countries working together to develop equality and inclusion strategies through music and theatre. These activities are guided by the general themes, values and principles that underpin Amaro Foro's work.

### Roma Contact Point

The young people of Amaro Foro run a social contact point for Roma of all ages. This is the largest social contact point for Roma in Berlin, and the space is funded by the city government. It provides advice on employment, education, health, housing and social security issues. The facility supports Roma in their dealings with the authorities and helps them with access to various social resources. This work is a key demonstration of Roma Youth Participation, young Roma working and volunteering their time and energy for the benefit of the wider Roma community as well as for other young Roma, in other words, young Roma providing opportunity and support to other young Roma.

### Community Building

Amaro Foro operates its own space, a community building. It has become a focal point for a network of individuals and organisations who are working on Roma issues. The network includes a group of young Roma women who meet twice a month to discuss issues and rights related to such matters as health and education. This particular project is also focused on the ongoing development of a network of Roma NGOs and activists.

The results of all this work are that young Roma are provided with the opportunity and means to become active in society. Through the mobilisation of young Roma they encourage and develop active youth

participation. They strengthen self-initiative, promote constructive networking, and promote a positive image of young Roma. Through active youth participation, creative interaction and the taking of responsibility, Roma young people develop their capacity as active citizens.

## Participation in Action

One of the main achievements of Amaro Foro has been the development of an effective and organised relationship with (and within) Berlin's government system. This advocacy work is an excellent example of Roma youth participation, and it is led by the Roma young people of Amaro Foro. They provide the government with information on developments relating to Roma in Berlin. They also formulate recommendations on policy measures relating to Roma.

As a result of this advocacy by the young people, Berlin has developed an action plan for the inclusion of foreign Roma. It comprises a set of measures focusing on education, health, housing, youth, community building and integration. The action plan includes the aim to eradicate antigypsyism. The action plan utilises Amaro Foro's contact point for Roma immigrants from other countries.

The active youth participation of young Roma at this political level provides them with the means to make rational and considered (and so potentially effective) responses to the sources of prejudice; this in turn guides the work of the organisation as a whole, whether it be the youth club, contact point or work in the community building.

Despite the close co-operation with the authorities and institutions, Amaro Foro has kept its autonomy and non-governmental nature. The organisation constructively criticises some aspects of the Roma action plan initiated by the Berlin government.

## Outcomes

The work of Amaro Foro creates a combination of social and political youth participation and learning. Active Roma youth participation encourages other young Roma to take an active role in establishing and celebrating their own identity. This sense of confidence in their identity is also enhanced by the amount of positive media impact Amaro Foro makes. The organisation as a whole works hard to counter the negative stereotypes usually portrayed by the media. The overall positive impact, in terms of the self-esteem, on young Roma supports these same young people in gaining equal and fair access to social resources.

In the field of youth policy and Roma youth participation Amaro Foro is showing itself to be not only an implementer of public social services, but also a promoter of the role of young people in society. Amaro Foro as an organisation is also keen to co-operate and develop networks with other organisations, both Roma and non-Roma. Through combining resources, stronger strategies for inclusion are developed and greater steps are taken towards building a more equal, fair and just social environment.



## 8.2 Messengers Against Discrimination – Gypsy Eye, Romania

<http://Gipsyeye.com>

*Keywords for participation: Opportunity / Support / Identity*

This example of participation is mainly based on the opportunity and support for young people in a community to participate actively in the lives of their communities. The support was in the form of the training of 55 young people – both Roma and non-Roma – to become messengers against discrimination in the many communities they came from. The participation of Roma and non-Roma working together to explore and understand Roma culture and traditions was a huge strength for the continued participation of many young Roma, both during and after the project, and supported the positive affirmation of their identity and of their rights.

### Poverty and Isolation

Iași county is an under-developed region of north-eastern Romania. In the region, most of the Roma live in cities such as Iași, Pașcani and Targu Frumos. In the example of Iași, 5% of the Romanian Roma population live there. The Roma make up more than 10% of Iași's population. There are also several villages where the Roma population has the same number or even more than the Romanian population: Grajduri, Ciurea, Miroslovești, Lungani, Pietris, Crucea, Sirețel, and Cosmesti.

In all of these villages, towns and cities, many Roma are subjected to extreme social exclusion. There are high levels of unemployment and major educational challenges.

### Gypsy Eye – Romania

Gypsy Eye is a volunteer-led, grassroots association. It promotes social inclusion of young Roma in the Iași region in North East of Romania. The organisation was founded by a group of Roma university students.

The organisation started working with only Roma. However they realised that there were many non-Roma who have no interaction with Roma people, who have never even spoken with a Roma person and have no Roma friends. At the same time many Roma were closed in their settlements, never went out from these areas and had little or no interaction with non-Roma. From this reflection they designed the project to be open for Roma and non-Roma and for it to be a place where young people can start interacting, highlighting the fact that the Roma and non-Roma have many commonalities and can fight discrimination together.

In 2012 Gypsy Eye gained accreditation from the Romanian National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme (now Erasmus+) to train and host EVS volunteers. Gypsy Eye has organised five youth exchanges and co-organised 15 youth meetings in Romania and across Europe. More than 100 volunteers and 20 teachers have been trained to work with Roma children. They also established a volunteer club in the town of Cosmesti where four young people were supported in establishing the local youth association and writing projects.

### Messengers Against Discrimination

Gypsy Eye implemented the project Messengers Against Discrimination. The project started in December 2009, and during the first year they gained wide media attention and generated political support at local level. It was something new and innovative for the region and many young Roma were keen to participate.

Messengers Against Discrimination brought together Roma, Romanian and Lippovan (Russian) young people. The idea of the project was to create a group of informed young activists who could organise events against discrimination. Since 2009, 55 young people have been trained and become involved as 'messengers'.

The aims of the Messengers Against Discrimination project were to prepare a multi-ethnic pool of young people to literally take on the role of 'messengers against discrimination'. Through training, they would gain the competences to organise workshops, campaigns and other activities and projects challenging discrimination.

The project was open to all disadvantaged young people, especially young Roma. They wanted to encourage mutual co-operation and foster mutual understanding between young people coming from different backgrounds. They wanted the young people to discover Roma cultural traditions and so promote a new positive image of Roma. The project was set up to develop and raise public awareness for the inclusion of minorities and find ways to combat discrimination. It would then work to promote understanding of the sources and effects of racism against Roma and other minorities.

This was achieved by working with and training groups of young people who became the messengers of understanding and promoters of social change. They themselves, as a mixed ethnic group, became symbols of the need for the involvement and contribution of all members of the community.

### Participation in Action

The idea for Messengers Against Hate came from young people who were already actively participating through the Gypsy Eye youth organisation. They selected a core group of Roma and non-Roma young people from the schools who would be supported to participate in the role of leaders of the project – the Messengers. The co-operation of young people across and despite ethnic and cultural boundaries was a strength of the project.

In order for the participation of the young people to be fully effective, the organisation needed to take into account the cultural and traditional values of the Roma communities and other communities. The project and the involvement of the young people was discussed with the Roma parents and elders. This was to reassure them about the involvement of their children, and how the importance of their participation was a necessary part of successful Roma youth participation.

Once the Messengers had been prepared and trained, they organised meetings with other relevant groups and introduced the idea of the project to attract potential participants for the activities and events they would organise. The young people showed themselves to be capable, not only as entertainers in the fun elements of the work, but also as educators and managers.

The Messengers organised five cultural events representing Romanian, Roma and Lippovan culture. These included dance performances, a living library, various exhibitions, food-based events, displaying of traditional costumes, and debates. They participated in the most important cultural events of Iași county, such as the Traditional Roma Ball and FestudIS – the biggest student festival in Romania – where they won the best creativity prize for the parade of the Messengers.

The final event was the 'Messengers Ball', which attracted around 600 people, including high-level representatives from local politics, authorities and media.

The role of the Messengers at the events was to speak about their everyday experiences. The Messengers were also responsible for the extensive media coverage that was generated throughout the life of the project, which included an online social media presence. This very much supported and projected a positive image of Roma young people.

Many young Roma face problems in terms of expressing, developing and strengthening their identity within the environments of prejudice and discrimination that they grow up in. Having the Messengers work together as a multicultural group, Roma and non-Roma, against discrimination, proved to be effective in challenging negative images of and associations with Roma. On the one hand it maximised the delivery of messages against discrimination and on the other it supported the Roma young people in their

participation by strengthening their understanding of their own identity.

Through the work of the Messengers, other young people were provided with opportunities to broaden their knowledge and have their perceptions on ethnic minorities, intercultural dialogue and discrimination challenged. A positive image of Roma was promoted in the region.

## Outcomes

The project achieved a number of outcomes. A pool of 55 trained activists was created – from the training itself many concepts for workshops were developed. Ten cultural and awareness raising events were implemented. A project website (which achieved about 13,000 hits) was developed. More than 1,000 Roma and non-Roma participated in activities organised by the Messengers. Around 10,000 people visited the events organised.

After the project had finished, many of the young people involved remained active in associations at local level. Most of them continued their participation as volunteers with Gypsy Eye. Some were motivated to continue their education, taking up places at university while remaining involved with Roma issues and concerns in other cities.

Following the project, the Messengers set up a school-based club, organised charitable activities, created Gypsy Eye's Facebook page, founded a Gypsy Eye dance group, and participated in the 'Romania's Got Talent' show; some took part in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and became involved with the 'Heart to Heart Club', another Gypsy Eye initiative.

## 8.3 Entrepreneurship of Roma Women – Roma Integration House, Lithuania

[www.facebook.com/RomaIntegrationHouse/timeline](http://www.facebook.com/RomaIntegrationHouse/timeline)

*Keywords for participation: Opportunity / Space / Support*

In this example the opportunity to participate is the single biggest factor. Roma young women facing oppression from within their own community and by the wider community took the opportunity to participate in a project that affirmed them as individuals and allowed them to develop skills. The organisation provided the space and support for this participation to happen.

### The Situation of Young Roma Women

Based on the latest census information there are about 3,000 Roma in Lithuania, which is approximately 0.01% of the total population. The situation of young Roma and young Roma women in particular, is clearly challenging. This is made worse by the young people having little in the way of prospects or vision for their own improvement. The Roma NGOs in general are fragile and/or fragmented and many are comparatively new and inexperienced. Social and public institutions are unable to address the needs of Roma in any real way. Roma have little participation in decision-making processes at local or national levels, although the Ministry of Culture is currently working on the development of an integration strategy, but this will take time to develop and have impact.

In Lithuania the majority of the Roma families remain largely unaware of the benefits of education for young women – around 52% of Roma in Lithuania have no primary education. Early marriage, at the age of 14 or 15, is common. Most Roma women receive social welfare / child support, but this is often not sufficient to provide for their children and older relatives. Roma women find it hard to gain employment. Prejudice and discrimination, even towards educated Roma women, is common. The tendency for Roma women to adopt traditional dresses, and their sometimes poor command of the Lithuanian language, make them an easy target for discrimination. At the same time within Roma groups there is often strong disapproval of women taking employment outside the home. Consequently many Roma women in Lithuania live in poverty.

Some Roma women engage in fortune-telling while others are obliged to take a role in drug-dealing. Both activities are criminal offences, and many Roma women find themselves having to cope with prison sentences; re-offending is common. Some take responsibility for their husbands when the latter are accused of selling drugs, being under the impression that the prison regime is more lenient on women. As a result, there are many children spending periods in the care of other family members, special institutions, or lone fathers.

### Roma Integration House – Lithuania

Roma Integration House (RIH) was established in February 2012. To date the organisation has 10 members and aims to represent the Roma, especially Roma women, all over Lithuania. Roma Integration House seeks to empower Roma women by giving them a voice within Lithuanian society and the Roma community. In particular, the organisation seeks to address the challenges experienced by Roma women in education, child care, the domestic environment and unemployment. They also represent Roma issues to governmental institutions.

Roma Integration House was a partner with Vilnius University, Faculty of Applied Sciences, in organising the international week, Pedagogues against Discrimination in April 2012. Also in 2012, they were invited by the European Commission Office in Lithuania to the round-table discussion, Roma in the European Union and in Lithuania. They are active in Roma rights advocacy and, together with other NGOs, submitted the Resolution on the National Roma Integration Plan for the Ministry of Culture. In 2014 they were invited to discuss the proposals for the governmental strategy of Roma integration.

## Entrepreneurship of Roma Women

The Entrepreneurship of Roma Women project was implemented by Roma Integration House over a period of eight months between 2013 and 2014. It was supported by the US Embassy in Vilnius and received additional support from the Ministry of Culture. The co-ordinator of Entrepreneurship of Roma Women, Bozena Michaj, is the Director of RIH; she was inspired to initiate the project by a similar one she had participated in, implemented by the Roma Community Centre in Vilnius.

The eight young women in the Entrepreneurship of Roma Women project were all unemployed, although some were occasionally engaged in artistic performances in concerts and cultural events. This project was their first opportunity to work towards receiving a qualification. Activities included workshops on design, embroidery and sewing skills, a training course in English, developing a website, and producing two exhibitions with the pictures and costumes they created. The young women produced 10 original handcrafted framed pictures of embroidery, and five original, traditional Roma costumes.

The project combined entrepreneurial activities and skills by exploring elements of the Roma culture. This proved to be innovative, enriching and motivating for everyone concerned. The project showed the young women that they are able to organise activities on a business and management level. Through the exhibitions they also contributed to the enhancement of the image of the Roma women in Vilnius.

## Participation in Action

Although the project was realised by Roma Integration House, it was the young women themselves who ran it. Roma Integration House provided the opportunity, space and support for participation in the project. It was the young women themselves who then turned this into participation in society.

As part of increasing the entrepreneurial skills of the young Roma women, the project provided them with opportunities to increase their practical skills, relationship building and independence. The young women were expected to guide the process, manage the project, promote the results, and to bring it all to the community – thereby creating a space of participation in the community for themselves. They developed, co-ordinated, implemented and developed all aspects of their participation. They achieved this through learning practical skills in administration, website development, the staging of exhibitions, and public relations activities. All of this led to the development of confidence in themselves and others.

### **Participation in the Roma Community**

The project provided the young Roma women with an opportunity to demonstrate the potential of young Roma women to promote social change for themselves and their families in a challenging social context. Through their entrepreneurship the young women challenged the majority perceptions of the role of Roma women. They showed themselves capable of organising activities outside of the domestic environment.

### **Participation in the Wider Society**

The project enabled them as Roma young women to make themselves visible to the wider community in a non-stereotypical role. Their participation and commitment represented an example of how young Roma women can challenge negative cultural images and become engaged in the community. They showed Roma culture to be an inspirational resource and provided an example of the potential for initiative of young Roma women from both poor and marginalised neighbourhoods.

## Outcomes

The young Roma women developed a website that was the main instrument in promoting the work of the participants. It functioned as an online shop, inviting visitors to the site to browse, rent and buy costumes and other items handmade by the Roma women. It also featured the means for clients to submit a customised order. Revenue from the website was reinvested into new equipment and materials or compensation to the women for their working hours.

This project provided qualifications and social competences to the young Roma women. It created a means for them to achieve, and to support themselves and their families financially. It provided them with the possibility of starting their own business. After the conclusion of the project, all the women continued working individually. Roma Integration House is looking for opportunities to start another similar project to continue this work of establishing stable employment for young Roma women.

### **Linking economic opportunity and participation in society**

One important lesson learnt from the project concerns the link between economic opportunities, or the opportunity to be an economic agent, and the possibility to have access to social opportunities and participation. Through their active involvement in this economic project, Roma women also contributed to the change of their image in society. They challenged gender roles and they contributed to the improvement of the economic conditions of their families. This example highlights that improving economic conditions is a key step in moving towards participation. At the same time, the process of improving economic conditions must go hand in hand with the participation of those concerned.

## 8.4 Roma Young People Participating to Combat Hate Speech and Antigypsyism – Integro Association, Bulgaria

<http://integrobg.org>

*Keywords for participation: Support / Opportunity / Identity*

The following example is about a group of 20 young Roma who took on the role of monitoring hate speech in universities and in the media in Bulgaria. This example clearly shows how participation includes an important element of support (training, in this case) and also an important element of opportunity. Furthermore, this example is very important when it comes to the situation of Roma rights, as youth participation in this case was a means of combating antigypsyism. Finally, this example is also linked with the reaffirming of Roma identity. Many young people were no longer comfortable in saying they were Roma; this project gave them the self-confidence to do so.

### Hate Speech and Antigypsyism

Across Europe, the levels of hate speech directed toward Roma is a worrying and frightening trend that has gained momentum in recent years; it is being particularly felt by young Roma in Bulgaria. A lot of prejudice and discrimination is expressed through media and politics. Particularly alarming is the anti-Roma populist and nationalist political speech-making which is quickly spread through media publications, television and radio.

Integro conducted a study amongst young Roma and found that students, especially those who are successful, are ashamed to declare their Roma identity. They found that many educated young Roma prefer to be anonymous in terms of their ethnicity. For many young people, this situation is intensified because they lack positive role models in the Roma community with whom they can identify and be proud of.

The knock-on effect of this publicly supported discrimination is that many young Roma see every rejection as a form of prejudice or discrimination, while more generally young Roma are constantly exposed to such discrimination and antigypsyism, and are becoming more sensitive to it. In both scenarios the young people themselves either start to create barriers to the rest of the community and/or distance themselves from their cultural and ethnic identity.

### Integro Association – Bulgaria

Integro Association (Integro) was established in October 2002. The organisation's mission is to promote respect and equality for Roma. Their activities are based on developing active citizenship in Roma communities and ensuring adequate representation of Roma people at all levels of decision making. They have considerable experience in addressing anti-Roma attitudes, issues of social exclusion, and human rights violations. They actively work on creating conditions for dialogue and co-operation with local authorities and national institutions in Bulgaria. This includes empowerment of individuals and groups both for leadership and for grassroots mobilisation. Part of the work of Integro has a focus specifically on young Roma.

### Curbing Antigypsyism from Local to European Levels

Integro developed a project entitled Curbing Antigypsyism from Local to European Levels. The project operated from 2013 to 2015 and was funded by the Open Society Foundation. In general, the project aimed at combating antigypsyism in Bulgaria. More specifically it encouraged a response and reaction to hate speech, particularly televised hate speech and hate speech too often found in universities. The project aimed at developing competences among the Roma community and especially among the young people.

Because of the specific effects these levels of hate speech were having on young people, Integro wanted to directly include young Roma in the project. A number of Roma students were formed into a group, the

'Young Roma Professionals' (YRPs). They were trained, coached and supported to react to the widespread antigypsyism found in the media and in their universities. This is an example of youth participation as they moved from getting the space and support to participate to actually using their competences for reaffirming Roma identity and fighting for Roma rights. Young people were very involved in the project and they had to monitor hate speech in the universities and the media.

## Participation in Action

Firstly, 20 young Roma were selected through an application process to be the young Roma professionals. Young people were trained and they were offered a six-month internship where they received coaching and training. The training of the YRPs included other Roma activists in order for the YRPs to get to know and understand that their work was part of a bigger picture and that they are not alone. They became engaged in training activities on presentation and communications skills, so that they could be ready to communicate with the media. They also improved their skills in verbal communication in order to be able to enter into dialogue and discussions with peers, policy makers and institutions on issues of discrimination against Roma. Other training courses included training on media monitoring, and monitoring in the universities, and training in anti-discriminatory practice.

The young people then began to monitor hate speech and antigypsyism in the universities and the media.

This example underlines the importance of training for young people to be able to participate fully, especially when it comes to complex issues, such as hate speech. Furthermore, in this example, the connection with other Roma activism processes was also important in order for the Roma young people to feel part of a bigger movement for Roma rights.

## Universities

The YRPs were responsible for making contact with the Rectors of the different universities, informing them of the lectures that were monitored and the findings of the monitoring. Where possible and appropriate, they would arrange meetings in order to deepen discussions on the issues and to push for action to be taken. Where discrimination and antigypsyism were identified, they were responsible for informing the Commission for Protection Against Discrimination.

The YRPs also created public debates in the different universities on discrimination and antigypsyism. They invited various personalities, politicians and university staff to the debates, as well as fellow students. Open letters on the issues faced by young Roma in the universities were sent to the Ministry of Education, Parliament, and various foreign embassies. They went through teaching materials in order to identify hate speech, discriminatory attitudes and antigypsyism sentiment, and to report it. The YRPs organised street actions and protests with the student bodies to highlight the issues.

## Media

The YRPs were responsible for monitoring television broadcasts and electronic media in general. They developed competences for analysing different broadcasts, to be able to identify not just the overt hate speech but also to identify the latent antigypsyism underlying many of the broadcasts they monitored. Where discrimination was identified, they would prepare reports for the Commission for Protection Against Discrimination (CPAD), the Council for Electronic Media (CEM), the State Prosecutor, the Ministry of Interior and the Sofia Police Directorate. The YRPs attended a number of open meetings with both CPAD and CEM in order to present their findings and push for action to be taken. The YRPs also participated in a number of TV and radio broadcasts addressing the issues of discrimination and antigypsyism towards young Roma.

The work of the YRPs continues. Their participation moved from being embedded in a specific Integro project into a practice of activism. Their aim is to maintain and generate immediate reactions by Roma organisations and the Roma coalition to any abuses and elements of antigypsyism.



## Outcomes

Young Roma involved in the project, either directly as a YRP or those who came into contact with the project, have become more aware of hate speech, especially the more subtle approaches of discrimination and antigypsyism. Many of the young Roma have become empowered to respond to and address hate speech and discrimination in the media and at the universities, using institutional mechanisms to do this. The participation of the 20 young people became an example for others. The work of the 20 YRPs in the project also led to further participation at the local level. In the municipalities of Kotel, Viatovo, Isperih and Zavet, the YRPs engaged in dialogue with the local authorities and presented, to the respective mayors, proposals for activities and policies to be developed that would address various issues affecting Roma youth. In two of the municipalities the proposals were accepted by the mayors.

Importantly many young Roma, through their exposure to this project and the work of the YRPs, have come to understand and recognise the discrimination they face much better and, as a result, support themselves in the reflection of their own identity. Participation has led in this case to two extremely important outcomes: the reinforcement of Roma young people's identity and the reinforcement of their competences to combat human rights violations.

## 8.5 Youth Activism in Emergency Situations – Konexe, Czech Republic

[www.facebook.com/konexeinenglish](http://www.facebook.com/konexeinenglish)

*Keywords for participation: Right / Opportunity / Support*

This is an example where the right to participate is encouraged through Roma young people being involved in non-violent direct action against racist actions. It also encourages and supports the young people to stay engaged in their own communities, which have been affected by hate and discrimination, in longer-term development. This approach to Roma youth participation is a unique form of support in that it encourages the young people to form their own autonomous and self-determining local groups. The groups of young people receive ongoing support from the umbrella body. The effect of the development of young Roma to be able to react to racist actions is that the opportunity to participate remains open and becomes a part of the life of their communities.

### Discrimination and Violence

The majority of Roma in the Czech Republic are socially and economically disadvantaged. Many face long-term unemployment and even when jobs are available to them they face discrimination both personally and in the employment system. The general living conditions of the majority of the Roma population are poor and Roma groups are some of the most socially disadvantaged in Czech society.

Roma are also faced with prejudice in the spheres of education, housing and the legal system. Often Roma can find themselves excluded from public and private services. In general, the Roma population are subjected on a daily basis to prejudice and discrimination, both overt and latent. The protection of rights and of physical people through the law is minimal or non-existent.

In the last few years there has been a rise in the number of right-wing movements and organisations, there have been increasing amounts of antigypsyism sentiment voiced in the media, and there have been numerous marches and attacks focused against Roma individuals, communities and groups.

### Konexe – Czech Republic

Konexe was founded in 2012. It brought together Roma groups from across the Czech Republic, with the aim of providing assistance to one another and other Roma in similar contexts, particularly in times of crisis. One of the key aspects of Konexe is that as an organisation they reject social integrationist policies that target Roma groups. They believe that such policies objectify Roma people. Konexe works on promoting Roma groups as actors and partners in society *and they have adopted an inclusive partnership approach in relation to Roma issues.*

Konexe as an organisation is still growing. At the beginning of 2015 there were approximately 81 declared members, of whom 25 are regularly active. Around 75 members are Roma, most living in situations of social exclusion. Some of the members are non-Roma. A large part of the work of Konexe is concentrated on Roma young people; therefore most of the Konexe activists are young Roma and non-Roma.

### To React and to Inform

The key work of Konexe is active and immediate response to threats and unjust situations that affect Roma communities. In 2013, for example, Konexe activists travelled all over the Czech Republic supporting Roma groups and communities who were identified as targets of racially motivated demonstrations. Konexe also developed 'Blokujeme!' ('Let's Block the Marches!'), which functions as a platform for supporting antiracist activities in the Czech Republic. Working alongside Roma and non-Roma citizens and organisations, Konexe represents an example of civic courage, based on the defence of human rights.

Konexe does not just go to a situation and then leave; they spend time with the threatened group or community providing psychological and social support to the affected Roma people. In 2013 specifically they had a multidisciplinary team, including psychologists, sociologists and social workers, who would intervene wherever necessary throughout the summer period, which saw almost weekly racist actions that year.

Konexe also supports the communities with advice and assistance in organising and preparing for future demonstrations. This work includes providing training on non-violent action and how to safely and peacefully deal with potentially violent situations. They also support the organisation and implementation of counter demonstrations.

Beyond emergency interventions, the activists develop long-term activities such as Roma Holocaust remembrance, advocacy for the victims of discrimination, support for the victims of forced evictions and the development of advocacy methods. In the future, the organisation intends to build a professional emergency support team.

Another role that Konexe has adopted is to inform international organisations about the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic. It contributes at the European level to the drafting of measures and strategies against the growth of hatred and racism. Konexe has also become actively involved with international networks and activities. They are an active member of EGAM (European Grassroots Antiracist Movement), have taken part in supporting migrant demonstrations against the rise of Golden Dawn in Athens, and were involved in a "night of protest" in Budapest, Hungary.

## Participation in Action

Konexe has no state funding and as such is financially reliant on NGOs and international donors. However the organisation is promoting innovative approaches with a particular emphasis on youth participation and self-organisation.

Most of the young people Konexe works with are teenagers living in ghetto conditions and extreme poverty; violence and discrimination are daily challenges faced by these young people. The primary step to participation of young Roma is that Konexe makes itself and its work visible and open; as a result, many young people are attracted to it and come to see what is happening. Young Roma are also a part of the teams of people who go to the different settlements; this also attracts other young people.

Another key factor in Roma youth participation, and one that Konexe promotes and is insistent on, is that as an organisation they listen to the young Roma and respond to them as equals; this, more than anything, creates not just a sense of participation but allows the young Roma to actually live that participation. As the young people influence Konexe, they also see that they can have an influence and say in their communities.

Konexe's approach of responding with commitment to threatening and unjust situations provides a useful model of radical youth work. Through their participation, the young people are motivated to challenge discrimination, the violation of human rights, and violence against Roma.

## Outcomes

Once a group in a threatened community is organised, Konexe works with them to become self-organised and autonomous. They are encouraged to further promote the participation of young people in their own and wider social contexts and so offer young Roma the opportunity of social integration. The groups, often consisting largely of young people, are also encouraged to be self-determining with regard to their own needs. Konexe provides tools and educational activities for Roma people and groups to deal with the challenges of employment, education and security. The young people consistently show that through self-organisation and participation they are able to engage usefully and appropriately with issues relating to their access to rights and justice for all.

The results of direct action and longer-term lobbying by both the autonomous groups and Konexe itself have seen the inclusion of the anti-Roma attacks brought onto the political agenda and a political mobilisation of citizens in local elections.

### **De La Negra**

A specific example of the work of Konexe that resulted in an innovative and powerful expression of youth participation is De La Negra from Krupka. This is a politically engaged rap group, the oldest members of which are also members of Konexe. In 2013, De La Negra performed during the anti-Roma marches in neighbourhoods targeted by the demonstrations. They rapped about the dangerous situations in a number of towns. During that year, De La Negra went on to perform a tour of concerts all over the Czech Republic. In the summer of 2013, De La Negra also visited Roma settlements in Slovakia, where they supported a project against segregation walls. There was a De La Negra tour of Germany early in 2014. De La Negra also performed in Strasbourg in June of that year, and in Vienna in November.

## 8.6 Roma Inclusion Strategy – Institute MOVIT, Slovenian National Agency for Erasmus+ Programme

[www.movit.si/erasmus-mladi-v-akciji/pomembni-poudarki/socialno-vkljucevanje/roma-inclusion](http://www.movit.si/erasmus-mladi-v-akciji/pomembni-poudarki/socialno-vkljucevanje/roma-inclusion)

*Keywords for participation: Right / Opportunity / Support*

This example shows an alternative and yet equally valuable approach to Roma youth participation. This example is about a national-level agency promoting the right to Roma youth participation in its own international programme by working with Roma organisations and organisations that work with Roma. Through a series of actions and activities since 2011, Movit (Institute for the Development of Youth Mobility) has been providing opportunity and support for locally based organisations to understand and learn how to include Roma young people in internationally funded projects.

### Lack of Young Roma Taking Part in International Activities

In the history of the European Commission's various programmes for youth, the inclusion of Roma young people has not been high. Through lack of information and lack of access to information, many young Roma have never heard of the various programmes and the possibilities they offer, many not even knowing of their right to participate. In settlements where fulfilling basic needs takes priority and the young people feel isolated and left out, Roma young people often do not have the means to participate. Over the years, many Roma young people have not known of the space that is there for them to participate. There is a general lack of understanding of the opportunities open to them and thereby the support they and their organisations could receive.

### Movit – Slovenia

Movit has been performing the tasks of the National Agency for Slovenia of the EU programmes in the field of youth since May 1999; most recently this is the Erasmus+ Youth in Action programme<sup>4</sup>. In this role, Movit manages the EU budget for youth funds and enables support for different forms of mobility activities in youth work in Slovenia and more broadly in the European youth field. It also runs activities supporting the general development of youth work and non-formal education, with special emphasis on activities contributing to the strengthening of European co-operation in the field of youth.

### Roma Inclusion Strategy

Movit was concerned about the situation regarding the lack of participation of young Roma in the EU youth programmes and decided to react to this situation. In 2011 Movit prepared a strategy to include more Roma organisations into the then EU Youth in Action Programme and in this way encourage the participation of young Roma in society and enrich the work of Roma organisations. A strategy was devised and put into action spanning the period from 2012 to 2015 so far. The strategy has included a questionnaire, training courses and partnership-building activities.

#### Questionnaire

As a first phase, a questionnaire was circulated amongst Roma organisations, with the main goal of finding out who would be interested in participating, and what kind of support would be needed. Results revealed several strong organisations and many interested individuals. The main barriers to participation were highlighted as language and a lack of funding.

#### U Terne Andi Akcija (Youth in Action)

In 2012 Movit, organised a national information seminar U Terne Andi Akcija for Roma organisations, and/or organisations working with Roma, in Dobrna, Slovenia. The aim was to inform organisations about the existence of the Youth in Action Programme and opportunities that the programme is offering, and to

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<sup>4</sup> Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020 (2007-2013; 'Youth in Action Programme' and 2000-2006 'Youth Programme') [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm)

gather more understanding on the needs and type of support they would need in order to get involved in the Programme. Participants developed several interesting project ideas, and Movit offered further support in the following months (mostly in the form of individual counselling) to help with their realisation. Several youth initiatives were submitted and granted as a result of these efforts, and collaboration between different organisations started to take place.

### **Inclusion of Young Roma into the Youth in Action Programme**

As the next step, Movit organised an international training course, the Inclusion of Young Roma into the Youth in Action Programme, to highlight and open the discussion on the issue of the lack of representation and involvement of Roma young people in the Youth in Action Programme. The activity provided space for the group to discuss the motivation for Roma organisations to carry out international projects, and to prepare their participants to face the intercultural elements and specific challenges related to international projects for Roma youth and Roma youth organisations.

Twenty-six participants developed project ideas during the course, and individuals also made collaborations between participating organisations.

### **Study Visit**

The next step in the strategy was to organise a study visit to Roma organisations, and organisations working with Roma youth, to promote their good practices. The visits took place in towns and cities across Slovenia. The aim was to present Slovenian good practices of Roma inclusion at the local level and to bring more potential project partners to Slovenian Roma organisations for possible future co-operation.

Participants learned from the different organisations and were able to explore the opportunities and challenges these young people are facing in their local, national and international contexts. The study visit showcased Roma youth participation at the local and national levels, with field visits to a number of projects and organisations across Slovenia. Participants had an opportunity to reflect on their own realities, network with potential project partners and focus on the importance of organisations working as mediators, in different contexts, between Roma and non-Roma. They looked at Youth in Action Programme related opportunities, and focused on what to bring home, and ways of multiplying what they had learnt.

### **Cross-Border Roma Co-operation**

The next activity was in Murska Sobota, and focused on Roma organisations from neighbouring countries. The training course Cross-Border Roma Co-operation brought together 15 participants from Slovenia, Hungary and three West Balkan countries. The aim was to offer an opportunity for Roma (youth) organisations to meet potential partners from other countries in order to become more involved in the Erasmus+ programme and to share good practices. Participants worked on creating partnerships, developing project ideas and starting to collaborate.

## **Participation Outcome**

Since the start of the strategy for including Roma young people into the then Youth in Action and now Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme, there have been many results. Many participating NGOs who did not have a specific focus on Roma young people are now directing a part of their work towards Roma as a specific target group.

One Roma young woman who participated in Movit's first two activities carried out a youth initiative in which she organised and opened a museum of Roma culture. She also got a job in a kindergarten. This museum was later one of the locations visited during the study visit in 2013.

Another participant from the first activity carried out two youth initiatives, as a result of which the participation and engagement of local Roma young people increased. She herself managed to become self-employed and now owns a shop selling clothes based on Roma culture. Her organisation also became

a partner in an international project, funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

In the Inclusion of Young Roma into the Youth in Action Programme not all the organisations were Roma organisations or even worked with Roma young people. As a result of the long-term strategy, one organisation from France decided to start working more directly with Roma young people. They also signed up to take part in at least one future action in the Youth in Action Programme in partnership with Roma organisations. An organisation from Germany decided to direct some of their work specifically to work with Roma young people and also to engage in a future Youth in Action Programme activity. An organisation from Serbia, working with children on the street but with no experience in working with Roma young people, started developing its work and raising their own awareness of the needs of the Roma young people they would come into contact with. Another organisation submitted an EVS accreditation form, and many others developed international and cross-border projects.

It is clear that the work of Movit, with this strategic approach and continued support, has led many individuals to become proactive. Looking at the above examples, it can be seen that through providing the opportunity to participate in Youth in Action activities, Roma young people have an opportunity to come up with and develop their own ideas. Through the continued support of Movit, these ideas can grow and become a reality, the examples above of the youth initiatives being two cases explicitly showing this. Both of these cases also show that the participation in the opportunities of the youth programme translate into a greater sense of identity, self-confidence and ultimately participation in both the Roma community and wider society.

## 8.7 Reconciling Community, Culture and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – LGBT Pavee, Ireland

<http://lgbtpavee.yolasite.com/our-forum.php>

*Keywords for participation: Right / Means / Support*

This is a strong example of the right to participation being supported and promoted, especially in the context of being a minority within a minority. The work also highlights the importance of the means needed for participation, as for many of the young people their basic needs of safety and security are not being met by society. In addition, this example shows how an organisation, through the provision of safety and security, can support individuals in growing in self-esteem and self-confidence and so begin to participate in ways that were not possible before. This is based on the organisation being a peer support base for young people through counselling, guidance, mentoring and online “being there”.

### Irish Traveller Context

Irish Travellers, also known as ‘Pavee’, are a formally itinerant ethnic group, many of whom maintain cultural traditions associated with Pavee and other groups. Modern conditions have placed severe limitations on the extent to which Irish Travellers can still be said to be nomadic.

The historical origin of Irish Travellers as an ethnic group has been a subject of academic and popular debate and is contested. It is sometimes claimed that this group are of Roma extraction, although this theory is disputed, and theories of pre-Celtic and straightforward social/economic origins exist. Although predominantly English-speaking, a number of Irish Traveller individuals and groups also speak and/or understand Shelta. It has been claimed that about 10% of the Shelta language is derived from Roma languages.

According to LGBT Pavee, there are around 48,000 Pavee Travellers and 10,000 Roma in Ireland. However, An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh (Central Statistics Office – October 2012)<sup>5</sup> state the following: “The total number of Irish Travellers enumerated in April 2011 was 29,573 accounting for just over half of one per cent (0.6%) of the total population.” However, Ireland’s National Traveller / Roma Integration Strategy 2013 states: “There are no official statistics on the number of Roma in Ireland. Different figures have been mentioned, for example 3,000, which would be approximately 0.07% of the population. This figure has been cited by the Roma support group.”<sup>6</sup>

### LGBT Irish Travellers / Roma

Apart from facing discrimination as Traveller or Roma, as in many other social contexts, homophobia and transphobia exist within Irish Traveller groups. Many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals and Transgender (LGBT) Irish Travellers / Roma experience social exclusion on personal, familial and community levels. At the same time they are also facing discrimination from the wider LGBT population because of their origins.

Many traditions have evolved from and out of rural culture and the necessities of a nomadic existence. Many others have been established over time as defensive reactions to discrimination and prejudice, including a particular emphasis on gender roles, attitudes to family, procreation, and conservative religious values. This situation can leave LGBT Travellers / Roma with a sense of alienation or disaffection from their social and group context. Potentially these circumstances can lead to an ambivalent or conflicted relationship in terms of identifying as Traveller / Roma.

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<sup>5</sup> See

[www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile.7.Education.Ethnicity.and.Irish.Traveller.entire.doc.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile.7.Education.Ethnicity.and.Irish.Traveller.entire.doc.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)



LGBT Irish Travellers / Roma often struggle to find ways to successfully negotiate their ethnic and sexual identities, while often within LGBT movements there is little awareness of the specific concerns of Irish Travellers / Roma.

## LGBT Pavee – Republic of Ireland

Following a series of suicides within the LGBT Irish Traveller and Roma community in 2009, LGBT Pavee was founded as a support group for LGBT indigenous Irish Travellers. The word 'pavee' comes from the Traveller language Shelta, and means 'Traveller'. Shelta is also known as 'The Cant' or 'Gammon'. It is unclear how many people identify as LGBT within the Irish Travelling community; this makes it difficult to estimate the scope of the impact of this project.

LGBT Pavee works to unite those of any age and gender who identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender, especially within the Travelling and Roma population. Although Pavee is open to all ages, the main focus of their work is with young people under the age of 27. Their ultimate aim is to work with LGBT Irish Travellers in order to create an environment where the young people can participate in their own social contexts and in society as a whole. The work of LGBT Pavee is done by young workers and volunteers. There is a core group who work as LGBT Pavee but there are many others who work in and with various support groups and run workshops which are promoted and supported by LGBT Pavee. There is also the 'LGBT Pavee Online Forum' which acts itself as a support mechanism for young people. LGBT Pavee provides information about local support groups and advises on sexual health. In the past, the group has helped members arrange health clinic check-ups and constantly updates its resources relating to sexual health and safety for members' use. The organisation also reports homophobic bullying or behaviour.

## Information and Support

LGBT Pavee provides support and a safe space; they work to ensure that available information is up-to-date on all LGBT issues and that they cover as diverse a point of view as possible. This is facilitated by the gathering and exchange of flyers, leaflets and information booklets from other mainstream organisations. They run an online platform on which Roma and Traveller identifying as LGBT can express their views publicly, either through the medium of the group, or by hosting and organising events and workshops. There is also the possibility for users to enter facilitated discussions in a forum on issues affecting those identifying as LGBT.

## Participation in Action

The organisation is committed to developing and maintaining an environment of safety, fairness, freedom of expression and the participation of young people. The right to participate is a key concept of the organisation, with policy and direction being guided by the young members themselves. Ideas are brought up in group discussions, explored, and in the following group meetings they are voted on. This is the basis for peer-led activism.

LGBT Pavee provide a space for participation through promoting dialogue and interaction based on peer support. Those participating support each other by exchanging experiences, providing guidance and expressing diverse points of view on issues such as sexual health, helping parents with LGTB children, coming out, falling in love, bullying, cultural conflicts, and depression. The primary way this space is provided is through the 'LGBT Pavee Online Forum'. As is typical of most online chat-room environments, discussions are formed spontaneously. Subjects change according to the needs of their participants. This translates into a flexible response that adjusts and evolves in line with the wishes and needs of those engaging. At the time of writing, more than 200 topics are being discussed and promoted. The online platform also includes meetings, advocacy action, educational programmes, advice and support for local support groups, as well as information relating to plays, magazines and general LGBT issues.

This also links to the concept of a means to participate; here the young people's basic needs – in this case, security, safety, sense of belonging and so on – are being met, therefore enabling them to focus on

participation in a broader sense. This approach can facilitate participants in finding ways of reconciling external pressures. Interactions can potentially be developed, creating a range of opportunities for participation in the attending and/or organising of educational workshops nationwide. Eight workshops were planned for 2015. Previous examples included workshops with Traveller youth groups and the organising of LGBT Pride side events.

The project also promotes participation through working on multiple aspects of being Roma, including sexuality, gender, age, disability, and so on. It works against the exclusion of all individuals and groups both within the Roma context and wider society. Working on multi-layered discrimination is a relatively rare approach in terms of Roma; LGBT Pavee is creating pioneering work in this respect.

## 8.8 Play – Cultures on the move! – Cooperativa Mandacaru and Fundação António Silva Leal, Portugal

*Keywords for participation: Space / Opportunity / Support / Identity*

This example shows that if there is a combination of opportunities, support and space, Roma young people can work towards participation semi-independently. The project has been a means for a group of young Roma to understand how they can play an active role in society. It has seen them addressing their individual and collective concerns. The project has also been an important step in celebrating their own identity, another part of the participation picture of this example. One of the most important aspects of participation that this example provides is through the sense of solidarity the Roma and non-Roma young people were able to promote.

### Isolated Community

The social housing district of Horta da Areia is situated in the city of Faro, Portugal. Faro is the capital of the Algarve, the southern region of Portugal. The city has a population of approximately 60,000. The economy of the area is predominately related to tourism.

There are around 230 people living in Horta da Areia, which is situated in the industrial area of Bom João. Horta da Areia is bordered by the Commercial Wharf Road and a nature reserve, Ria Formosa. As such, this housing district is geographically separated from the main residential areas of Faro. Approximately half of the district's population are Portuguese Roma.

As with other social housing districts, there are problems relating to housing, environment, education and employment. Young people particularly have difficulties in terms of accessing education and employment.

The social participation of some groups of young women living in this area is restricted by cultural expectations. This includes the taking on of roles related to domestic labour in the home, sibling child care and supporting elderly family members. There is also, in some instances, a social expectation that young women will marry and have children at a young age.

### Cooperativa Mandacaru and Fundação António Silva Leal – Portugal

In 1996 an integrated community development project was initiated with the aim of addressing some of the challenges of life in Horta da Areia. One of the outcomes of this project was the creation of the Community Centre. Mandacaru, a social and cultural co-operative, is based in the centre and the Foundation António Silva Leal, and has been running Theatre of the Oppressed workshops in the centre since 2010.

### Play – Cultures on the Move

Initially, two mixed-gender groups were created, made up of both Roma and non-Roma. Through the exploring of subjects and issues, they prepared public performances using Theatre of the Oppressed. Eventually a core group emerged, taking the title 'Magic Twelve'. This group is made up of 12 young people, aged between 13 and 18. The majority of this group come from Roma backgrounds, although some are non-Roma. The group is keen to become autonomous and self-sustaining. It is with this in mind that the young people plan to create their own organisation.

The organisers realised that the project needed to tackle participation on two fronts: firstly, within the social context of being a young Roma in the Roma community and culture (inside), and secondly, being a young Roma in the wider society (outside).

Concerning "inside", the young people explored the cultural limitations and the restrictions of tradition. They grew in understanding of the potential oppression of customs and habits, and explored ways of being

able to participate in their communities despite these restrictions.

The “outside” approach consisted mostly of the public performances. This is where they could promote a positive understanding of Roma identity, where they could question stereotypes, challenge prejudices, and raise awareness of the consequences of discrimination for Roma young people. They were able to make these issues relate directly to specific manifestations of prejudice and inequality that impact on Horta de Areia and on them as young people from that community.

### **Theatre of the Oppressed**

Variations of the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology have been used for many years around the world as a means of personal and group exploration, and the discovery and expression of social positions and intentions. The process comprises dramaturgical techniques and approaches whereby actors and audience become involved in developing and elaborating a performance. This, together with other activities, related to human rights education, has been used in order to offer participants a means to analyse, shape, express and transform perspectives. Ultimately, the concept of the theatre is to formulate action focused on advancing equality, fairness and justice for all, providing a potential spark to ignite social and political change.

Through the public performances the young people showed how young Roma, working with their non-Roma peers, contribute to the recognition and celebration of the Roma identity. It offered the potential for intercultural learning among the young people. Working together, the young people were able to question and undermine stereotypes, while at the same time develop skills related to communication and co-operation. The events also offered audiences a chance to raise their consciousness of the shared reality of Roma and non-Roma with regards to discrimination against young people. Together with the audience, there was also an opportunity to participate in looking for ways to address and alleviate this discrimination.

### **Participation in Action**

It was important that the participation of the young people started right from the beginning in this project. When the idea of creating the project was initially put to the young people, it was agreed that they could attend when they wanted and manage the organisation of the project. The young people chose what they wanted to present through the theatre methodology, when they wanted to practise and when they would perform. They controlled the process.

The community centre offered the space for participation, both through the proposal of the project idea and with the physical space to meet and work. The young people had access to the building and it was a building they were encouraged to see as theirs – along with the rest of the community of Horta da Areia.

Overall the project provided the young people with the opportunity and means to discuss, formulate and analyse issues that were relevant to them. These included discrimination at school, poverty, health, and sexuality questions. This was the seed of “political” participation; it was the means of motivating the young people to raise their voice and push for change.

A key factor in the project was that it was mostly the young Roma women who led the process. They became role models for other young women in the community. Through the activities, the young women became more aware of their situation and at the same time this served as a consciousness-raising opportunity for the young men. The young women were able to exert influence and take authority for the development of the project. It was their responsibility to engage with the audiences in order to realise and grasp the nature of oppression and its relationship to identity. The Roma young women’s participation pushed the boundaries of the traditional roles often associated with young Roma women, pushing back against the “inside” forms of oppression.

The young people acted as advocates for their own and others' rights. At the same time they invited other

members of society to become part of this process. This active participation through theatre provided Roma young people with the opportunity to cultivate and preserve their identity, and to celebrate and question life-style choices and traditions. It is the young people themselves who have provided new opportunities, accessing space, tools, and resources to make their own decisions.

## Outcomes

The project raised the consciousness of both the Roma and non-Roma young people about their own experiences of discrimination and prejudice. It provided opportunities for the young people to make more sense of their social and political context. It showed the young people involved that change is possible and that young people (Roma and non-Roma) have their own voice: they are responsible and can decide for themselves about how to live their lives.

The outcome is that the project is continuing because the young people make it continue.

## 8.9 Tackling Marginalisation and Xenophobia – Roma Support Group, UK

<http://romasupportgroup.org.uk>

*Keywords for participation: Space / Opportunity / Support*

The entire structure of this organisation is based on the creation of a space for participation. Young people have the space to participate not only in the running of projects but also in the running of the whole organisation, from being a part of the management team to being a part of a group that advises and proposes policy and strategy. The above also covers the aspect of opportunity: in this example opportunity is not something static; it is continuous and fluid. Perhaps most important here is that with so much space and opportunity for participation, the level of support for participation is key.

### Marginalisation and Xenophobia

Roma in the UK are a socially, culturally and ethnically rich, diverse and heterogeneous grouping, often from indistinct varied origins. However, most people in Britain understand Roma to be a homogenous, racially distinct people, probably coming from Bulgaria or Romania. Many find the presence of Roma disturbing because as a group they are effectively mysterious. However, association with poverty, benefit fraud, child trafficking<sup>7</sup> and general crime<sup>8</sup> has intensified such sentiments, giving rise to forms of discrimination, prejudice, social injustice and inequality.

As a result, many Roma communities and families place little faith in the institutions and organisations they perceive to be part of the social subjugation. Roma look for security within the familial framework.

### Roma Support Group – UK

Roma Support Group (RSG) is a Roma led organisation. Its service provision, in relation to Roma youth, is informed and guided by the wants, needs and perspectives of Roma young people. The organisation also works with non-Roma young people to enhance the position and perception of Roma in society. Staff and volunteers, who are mostly drawn from the Roma community, run the organisation, alongside a small management committee of whom over half are Roma – including the chairperson, Roza Kotowicz.

The RSG has, since the mid-1990s, made ongoing progress in developing an effective Roma self-help organisation, which understands Roma as an enriching element of British society. Advice and advocacy projects have helped many young Roma overcome barriers of poverty and homelessness, increasingly focusing on their employment and employability skills. RSG promotes many Roma and non-Roma activities for young people where there are strong elements of community cohesion and anti-discriminatory practice.

Approximately 30% of those involved directly with RSG services are young people. With young Roma being central to the work of RSG, they have devoted much energy and thought to the ways of enhancing the public understanding of Roma culture. They have done this by drawing from a rich heritage of Roma arts, particularly through music events and concerts.

The main areas of the work of RSG are Roma support and engagement, advocacy, culture and arts development, campaigning, community support, sports, and work with the elderly. Each intervention represents impact, not only on the individual but on their families and communities as well. All this work is supported by dozens of Roma volunteer workers.

RSG work a lot with the Roma family structure, and respect and value the Roma traditions. Through the

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<sup>7</sup> [www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/may/17/trafficking-gang-masterminding-benefits-fraud](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/may/17/trafficking-gang-masterminding-benefits-fraud)

<sup>8</sup> [www.express.co.uk/news/uk/380512/How-Romanian-criminals-terrorise-our-streets](http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/380512/How-Romanian-criminals-terrorise-our-streets)

family, they get to work with the whole community but especially with the young people. Approaches to young Roma independently of their family is almost always unsuccessful and is likely to constitute a general threat to the family and wider social network of Roma families.

## Projects

RSG provides the opportunity for young Roma to express themselves and their opinions through a number of different initiatives. Areas of work that are focussed on young people include the Young Roma Advocacy Project, the Education Support Project, Roma Youth Music Project, the Media Project for Roma Children and Young People, and the Roma United football team. They also work extensively on enhancing the experience and attendance of young Roma in schools. Below, two of the projects are explored.

### **Roma Youth Music**

The Roma Youth Music project provided opportunities for young Roma to express and develop their musical talent. Through the project, the young people gave nine live performances and produced a CD 'Roma Youth Music', which was aimed at enhancing an understanding of Roma culture by celebrating and sharing the musical heritage of Roma. In total they performed to more than 950 people. Three quarters of young people involved wanted to pursue a music career in the future.

### **Media Project**

The RSG Media Project for Roma Children and Young People was aimed at Roma young people from East London. They produced a short documentary in collaboration with a community media company. The project provided an opportunity for Roma young people to take part in all stages of film production from planning, script writing, researching, acting, narrating, music production, and film editing. The film *Be Roma or Die Tryin<sup>9</sup>* portrays a journey across London exploring the heritage of the young Roma. It examines British attitudes to Roma, while celebrating the new life that the Roma refugee children and young people are making for themselves in the UK.

The launch of the film took place in the Genesis Cinema in East London. It was also screened during the 1st International Roma Film Festival in London. Both shows were followed by a panel discussions involving the public and the makers of the film. This created an opportunity for the young Roma to talk about their lives and the issues that they face as Roma refugees in multicultural and multiracial London.

## Participation in Action

### **Participation in Management**

All the activities of RSG are developed with and alongside the young Roma. The young people are encouraged to become part of the management structures of RSG. This collaborative approach means the Roma young people become familiar with the management and leadership structures and are able to take on roles and responsibilities in both the management and leadership of the organisation and of its projects.

Part of the strategy for participation within RSG includes a peer and group advocacy forum. This is a space for discussion and dialogue. It provides an opportunity for the young Roma to express their needs and give direction to the organisation's current and future work. This creates a means for them to influence policies which impact on themselves, their peers and the families. The organisation aims to be energised by the participation, advocacy and activism of young Roma.

It is the Roma young people who choose, suggest and initiate the projects through their interaction, collaboration and co-operation. This process is not an end in itself but a means to continuous learning, advocacy and activism of the young people. This can include political and social consciousness as well as personal and group awareness, and exploration of identity, in terms of culture, religion, gender, sexuality and so on.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjQC8d5PABk>

## Outcomes

Approximately 500 Roma have improved employability skills through working with RSG. The majority of them are young people.

In 2014, 341 professionals attended 17 training sessions provided by Roma young people. One example is the 'Support and Engagement Programme'. Here the young Roma were involved with the delivery of the training on the subjects 'Introduction to Roma Culture' and 'History and Tradition'.



## 8.10 Youth Reacting and Participating Online – RomaReact

[www.romareact.org](http://www.romareact.org)

*Keywords for participation: Space / Opportunity*

This example is about young people sharing stories and perceptions of their life experiences through an interactive multimedia platform. The platform is a space and an opportunity for participation by acting as a reporting point for highlighting issues and a resource for promoting a positive image of Roma. This example shows how the act of sharing and having access to listen to / read other young people's stories acts as a catalyst for participation. It also projects a positive image of Roma and offers tools for cultural exchange, equality of opportunity and fun. The young people who engage in the project experience self-determination over their own lives as well as finding ways and opportunities to participate in their own communities.

*It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it, that matters.*

Epictetus (AD 55 – 135), Greek sage and stoic philosopher

### RomaReact – International

The RomaReact online platform, in association with the European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO), was launched in 2012. The project's goal is to contribute to and reinforce that Roma, while often experiencing marginalisation, are an integral part of society. Since 2012, RomaReact has promoted youth participation by engaging both Roma and non-Roma young people online by creating a space for social interaction that is relevant and attractive to young people.

### Antigypsyism

RomaReact tackles the issues that young Roma face through their life experience. Another unique aspect is that the project is not based in one country, but rather is European-wide. Antigypsyism in all its forms is followed and monitored by the platform.

From time to time a specific issue is raised on the platform, for example in 2014 it was the issue of walls that segregate and separate Roma from the rest of the community. In Slovakia alone, 14 walls exist to separate Roma from non-Roma. In Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, France and other European countries, local governments build walls to hide Roma. This practice is often motivated by [a moral panics](#) relating to the protection and safety of children. The outcome is a form of apartheid where Roma are segregated in schools, and confined to ghettos. The situation is not helped by disproportionate and extensive unemployment among Roma.

### The RomaReact Platform

The RomaReact online platform functions as a broad-based network. It promotes a notion of "civic journalism" and, as such, regards its mostly young users as social reactors. RomaReact is a means for advocating Roma youth participation. The primary way this is achieved is through the Roma young people reporting, directly online, different aspects or issues from their localities. The primary function of the platform is to map, through the reports and testimonies of the young people, the perspectives, views and something of the collective experience of Roma in Europe. It generates data about the self-perception of Roma by collecting information from the local / grassroots sources. This data can potentially be helpful, for instance, in the assessment of the impact of Roma inclusion policies, and provide an indication about the levels of antigypsyism taking place at any one time.

Another aim of the platform is to create a growing public awareness about Roma in Europe, by providing and making public information from the Roma young people about their lives. The information and testimonies from the field are shared with decision makers, the wider media and the general public at the local and European levels. This is seen as a means to challenge stereotypes and contribute to a change in

the negative image of Roma.

The RomaReact platform also contains a mixture of innovative and inviting activities, coupling social media with outreach activities and events at local, national and international levels. The platform has hosted a number of campaigns that have combined the use of social media with offline activities. Two such examples are Our Space, Our Place, Our Case in 2012, and Wall Free Europe in 2014.

### **Our Space, Our Place, Our Case – Roma Women Empowerment Campaign**

This was launched in May 2012. The activities of the campaign have focused on capacity building and the training of Roma women (groups), generating and ensuring the visibility of actions and awareness raising both within and outside the Roma community on women's rights.

### **Wall Free Europe**

The Wall Free Europe campaign was launched in 2014 on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. The campaign highlighted that walls of segregation continue to exist, separating Roma from their non-Roma neighbours. It brought attention to and demanded the removal of both physical and psychological walls.

This campaign started with a contest for young people. They were asked to respond to the physical and psychological walls that segregate Roma from non-Roma and how these undermine the notion of equal citizenship. The resulting presentations included photographs, paintings, drawings, comic strips and videos, as well as written stories.

The winning entries were placed on the RomaReact Facebook page promoting youth participation. Two winners were invited to Brussels to participate in the ERGO network activities on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Winners from Romania and Albania presented their work and shared their message at the Wall Free Europe hearing at the European Parliament. Their work was also part of the exhibition that pointed out and highlighted the walls across Europe.

These initiatives demonstrate how the online environment has the potential to facilitate creative forms of expression, such as videos or pictures, that are both informative and awareness-raising. Young people are often very familiar with this environment. The online interaction can help to reinforce the sense of belonging and can create transnational links among Roma and non-Roma young people.

## **Participation in Action**

In the project RomaReact, the participation of young people is happening at several levels. Young people can send in directly reports of issues, antigypsyism, events, and feel-good stories. Having the ability to report instances of antigypsyism is a form of empowerment in itself. However, it is stronger than just reporting. Young people, particularly those with access to the technology and who have an awareness of the problems and concerns of their local situation / context, can organise themselves online to find ways of tackling the raised issue or supporting the affected community. In the context of this project, young Roma who have access to the Internet can make use of an opportunity for participation, and so improve the image and situation of themselves, their families and neighbourhoods.

Another aspect of participation is that the online participation and activism, and face-to-face activities can motivate other young Roma to become active and to participate. The learning that these activities facilitates encourages young Roma to inform others, building skills and motivating each other to take responsibility, by becoming part of a shared voice.

In 2013, through RomaReact, ERGO conducted a training course for eight young Roma. The training consisted of the subjects of digital democracy, Internet skills, media outreach, organising, and advocacy work. The concept was to encourage the young people to become civic journalists / reactors. Informed by the stories they collectively generate, they would influence their peers to engage in their own individual

contexts in positive offline and online actions.

## Outcomes

The response to and participation of young Roma to RomaReact has seen a continuously increasing number of users and visitors, both on the website and the organisation's Facebook page. As a result of the popularity of the concept, RomaReact wants to develop local editions of the website in Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, so that more people can share their experiences and perspectives.

The overall outcome of the Roma React platform and of the campaigns that it hosts is that Roma youth participation works (with its learning and advocacy dimension), and it needs greater promotion and development. All around Europe there are Roma young people who have access to the Internet and who can be engaged in online platforms such as RomaReact. However, it should also be borne in mind that there are many young Roma who do not have access to the Internet.

## 8.11 Participation in Local and National Policy – RROMA, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

<http://rromassn.org>

*Keywords for participation: Right / Space / Opportunity / Support*

This is an example of Roma youth organisations taking and claiming the right and space for participation, this is, not about waiting for someone else: this is grassroots activism and initiative. Through forging a space for participation with the National Youth Council in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the initiative provides opportunity for many individuals and organisations to participate in dialogue and the development of local and national youth policy. The initiative and the National Youth Council also provide support to those who get involved, offering a framework for participation at the political level in different municipalities across the country.

### Social Exclusion

According to the National Strategy for Roma in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Roma are considered to be the most vulnerable ethnic community in the country. Levels of poverty among Roma are far higher relative to other groups, as a consequence of a range of historical and social factors. Roma face continuous social exclusion.

The repercussions of the above have impacted on the educational attainment of Roma and their access to public services, housing and health care. Unemployment among Roma is the highest of any group in the country. Roma make up 2.6% of the total population, but over 70% of this group who are of working age are without work.

The majority of the Roma population is young and shares all the problems of the wider Roma population, but they also face other difficulties associated with their age. At the same time, young Roma lack appropriate representation to enable them to address these challenges at relevant levels, with the relevant institutions.

Roma youth are often not recognised as a specific target group and therefore the impact in terms of policy making is relatively negligible and restricted to local levels.

### RROMA – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Регионална Ромска Образовна Младинска Асоцијација – Regional Roma Educational Youth Association (RROMA), has a membership of around 250. Annually it directly involves approximately 150 young people in activities, while indirectly the organisation reaches between 1,000 and 3,000 young Roma in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

### The RROMA Initiative in Youth Policy

#### Local Policy Development

RROMA works to encourage Roma youth participation at local and national levels. It promotes the establishment of independent Roma youth groups; because these groups are local they are better able to define the needs of local young Roma. RROMA works to connect these groups with the local municipality and so begin a process of engagement in local policy making. The idea is that the Roma youth groups, in co-operation with the local authorities, should establish local Roma Youth Action Plans (RYAP). These RYAPs are then presented to the municipal council for adoption. If they are adopted, it is expected that appropriate funding would be made available and that they would be fully implemented by the municipality in co-operation with the Roma youth group.

So far RROMA has signed 12 memorandums for co-operation, establishing RYAPs in 12 municipalities. RROMA is also promoting Roma youth participation in the National Youth Council (NYC) through the

establishment of a Roma Youth Council (RYC). The aim of this initiative is to facilitate Roma participation in youth-policy making at a national level. It is hoped that this will aid in the mainstreaming of Roma youth issues nationally, and promote access for Roma youth to existing youth programmes.

### **National Youth Council**

RROMA is working on the development of Roma youth participation with the National Youth Council. This is a voluntary initiative involving a number of Roma organisations. The organisations involved want to establish a Roma Youth Council. The establishment of a Roma Youth Council and its participation in the National Youth Council are part of a strategy to create a structure of participation in mainstream youth-policy making. At the same time it is seen as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships and networking between Roma youth organisations, groups working with young Roma and youth branches of Roma political parties.

The above initiative represents a first in the European context; it provides a representative platform for Roma Youth organisations, and other groups working on Roma youth issues, to work in partnership to improve the situation of Roma youth at the national level. The intention is to mainstream Roma youth issues in youth policies. The National Youth Council is planning to address the lack of adequate youth policies addressing Roma youth concerns, including unemployment, school segregation and the need to support intercultural dialogue between young people.

### **Participation in Action**

The whole concept being developed by RROMA has its foundations in the young people at local level. Without the direct and ongoing participation and commitment of these young people the rest of the initiative fails. The participation of the Roma young people in local youth action groups means that they identify their needs. The identified needs, through dialogue, become the "Roma youth issues". These in turn become the basis for inclusion strategies, which, through co-operation with the local authorities, form the basis of Roma Youth Action Plans (RYAP). The RYAPs can then be developed into local policy proposals. The local youth action groups operate as a platform through which the young people can be engaged throughout the whole process. Ultimately it is the young people who participate in a dialogue with their local authorities. The initiative and the processes involved also lay the ground for young Roma to take responsibility and deal with the consequences of their actions and judgements.

The initiative promotes active citizenship and enables the Roma young people to gain participation competences. These include the ability to identify issues in local contexts, the development of planning skills, enhanced capacities in communication skills, the development of competence in advocacy, and the ability to monitor and evaluate the implementation of local policies.

Achieving the inclusion of Roma youth issues in local policy agendas is already a big step towards participation for the general population of Roma young people. The fact that it is achieved by the young people themselves in co-operation with local authorities is a huge step in participation for Roma young people. The mainstreaming of Roma youth issues into youth policies represents an important move for young Roma. This is also progressive in terms of gaining social recognition for the young people involved.

### **12 Municipalities**

Work continues in 12 municipalities; in each they are establishing local youth action groups composed of young Roma and representatives from the local authorities. Representatives from the local authorities are responsible for improving the co-operation and communication with the young Roma and for providing insights into what the municipality can support.

The local youth action groups are identifying Roma youth issues and concerns at the local level. Their role is to promote inclusivity, avoid segregation of Roma young people, and demonstrate that young Roma experience difficulties because of social discrimination and prejudice. The groups will address the challenges young people face and work with the young Roma to develop views on and responses to these

issues. This will act to promote Roma young people as leaders and agents of change.

There are challenges in terms of maintaining the motivation of all partners involved and ensuring that equal contributions to the process are forthcoming. This is made more complex because the priorities and resources of each local youth action group are unique. The initiative has been, and will continue to be, a challenge.

Local youth participation, in the development and establishment of Roma Youth Action Plans at the local level, helps to ensure the participation of Roma young people at the national level.

## Outcomes

Though not a direct outcome of the work of RROMA, the initiatives have been a factor in the development of two significant youth policies that are about to be implemented:

- The government will initiate public debate about the position and rights of Roma youth, while adopting legislation to recognise youth work
- The National Agency for Youth and Sport will develop a National Youth Strategy with a Roma youth dimension.

## 8.12 Roma Youth Information Club – Sumnal, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

<http://sumnal.mk/>

[www.facebook.com/pages/Roma-Youth-Information-CLUB-Topaana/150433464999607](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Roma-Youth-Information-CLUB-Topaana/150433464999607)

*Keywords for participation: Opportunity / Support / Human Rights*

The main aspect of this example is support for participation in the form of training provided to a small number of young people. Through the creation of the project the opportunity was there for young Roma to participate. Coming to know about their rights and working with other young people to access their rights was another key factor in participation.

### Social Exclusion

There are several Roma settlements in Skopje: Shuto Orizari is one of the biggest in South East Europe with a population of about 25,000 people. Topaana has a population of around 5,000 and there are concentrated Roma populations in Gorche Petrov, Zlokukjani and Singelik.

Roma in these settlements face the challenges of poverty and unemployment that are, at least in part, the symptoms of discrimination and prejudice. Roma experience difficulties accessing their rights, while many remain unaware of them.

Many young Roma experience low educational achievement and/or no qualifications, mostly due to a low level of engagement with the education system. They face isolation, rarely venturing outside of their traditional neighbourhoods. Many young Roma have limited aspirations partly because of social and political passivity; as a consequence they have relatively little information about the opportunities for personal and social development. There is a lack of positive role models. Many lack social competences. There are also early marriages that affect many of the young people.

This situation is aggravated by inadequate access to and/or knowledge of health services, their rights, and public or social resources.

In order to support their families financially, many young Roma engage in the same type of work as the rest of their immediate family: working at the clothes market, collecting recycling materials, and so on.

### Sumnal – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Sumnal was established in 2004 and is based in Topaana, Skopje. Their work with young Roma people is one of their priorities. Sumnal's work is in the fields of education, advocacy, generating access to health education and services, prevention of domestic violence, and promoting children's rights. The organisation is one of the founding members of the National Youth Council.

### Roma Youth Information Club

The Roma Youth Information Club (RYIC) was a project implemented by the Association for Roma Community Development SUMNAL. It was conducted between 2010 and 2011 in Skopje. It was initiated and co-ordinated by Elez Bislim, who was took part in the first edition of *ENTER! Long-Term Training Course of the Council of Europe*<sup>10</sup>.

The RYIC targeted Roma young people aged between 13 and 18. Its aim was to improve the competences of young Roma to gain access to rights and to develop their capacity to access social resources.

This was achieved through providing advice and information, counselling, peer education, guidance about

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<sup>10</sup> <http://enter.coe.int>

employment and health services, and opportunities for personal and social development. The project also provided access to leisure-time activities. There were practical workshops addressing the needs of the local young Roma. These included continuing education, finding employment, and accessing social / human rights. Experts from the institutions were involved in the delivery of workshops, while others provided consultations relating to their personal and organisational experience.

The project as a whole established links between Sumnal and the local employment services and social services. It was also able to establish a wide range of partnerships, consultations and co-operative relationships with a variety of institutions and organisations at both local and national levels. These included: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Centre for Social Work, the Ministry of Education and the Employment Agency.

Around 300 Roma young people took part in the project. Evidence of the increased competences of this group was established by many of them achieving better access to services and social rights. They were also engaged in learning about their rights, and the work and responsibilities of the state institutions. In the summer of 2013 a camp was organised for young Roma, focusing on human rights education.

Based on the experience and the outcomes from the original RYIC, Sumnal lobbied the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for support, and, as a result, premises for a Roma Youth Information Club were opened in the Topaana settlement. The Club provides information about public services and available social and economic opportunities that are intended to foster the integration of Roma into mainstream society. Information on the implementation of the activities related to the National Strategy for Roma and Decade of Roma Action Plans is also available.

## Participation in Action

Roma young people from four different settlements of Skopje participated in the project. Roma youth participation in this project was a priority because it was based on peer education. The core group of young people involved would be the ones to inform their peers and raise awareness within their neighbourhoods about rights and access to services. The project would work with up to 100 other young Roma, between the ages of 13 and 18, in a series of workshops.

Six Roma young people were initially supported in their participation by being trained. They were trained to be the co-ordinators and implementers of the project. They worked alongside representatives from the organisation Sumnal. They participated in meetings with social service organisations and with the institutions collaborating with the project. This created opportunities for the core team of young Roma to learn more about these institutions and organisations, as well as the aims and scope of the work they were taking on. Co-operation with the authorities was crucial in facilitating effective access to social rights and public services for Roma young people. This was an important factor in enabling the means to participation for themselves and for other young Roma in the community. They learned how to complete application forms in order to assist their peers or other Roma from the settlements; this included applications for scholarships, forms to access social services, and so on.

The team of young Roma designed and implemented six workshops on different social rights, including education, employment, access to health, and social issues. They were also responsible for the selection of the experts to be invited to speak at the workshops. Roma young people working as peer educators were effective in motivating others to participate. It was also noted that these young Roma became positive role models for their peers.

The main thrust of the project was the dissemination of rights information and details of how to access a variety of public services. The dissemination of information was a key step in participation, not just for the young people but also for the whole Roma community. This action opened doors for Roma people to play a more active role in their own localities. The Roma young people who were central to this process demonstrated their capacities and potential to play an active role in the integration process.



Consciousness of equality of rights and access to rights and leisure services has been and continues to be enhanced. Knowledge of leisure-time activities in the wider society can draw young Roma to look beyond their traditional settlements and so enhance their social inclusion and competences.

Another aspect of the participation of the young people was that it heightened the visibility of young Roma and Roma youth issues. The project was able to engage with Roma Youth Day, which raised the levels of general awareness of the situation of Roma and their culture. The process also managed to increase visibility of Roma youth issues among the larger Roma community.

The RYIC continues to provide activities. Some of the young Roma who were active participants are now volunteers in the project, a clear demonstration of its sustainability. They are now providing support activities, guidance and advice, and helping to organise educational activities.

## Outcomes

The outcomes of the project are numerous: six trained young Roma as peer educators; the successful running of six workshops by the young people; the young Roma population from the various settlements taking part in leisure-time activities outside of the settlements; a decrease in the level of unemployment among the young Roma; ongoing provision of information and counselling for young Roma and other Roma on accessing services. In addition, fifty people received scholarships from the Roma Education Fund and the Ministry of Education; 10 families were consulted about receiving documentation and social welfare support; 15 people received vocational training and support with finding work; 23 people enrolled on a job application writing course; 10 young people between 13 and 19 received immunisations; approximately 300 people increased their competences through this project.

## 8.13 Dikh he na bister (Look and don't forget), Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative – ternYpe

<http://2august.eu>

[www.ternype.eu](http://www.ternype.eu)

*Keywords for participation: Right / Opportunity / Support / Human Rights / Identity*

This example highlights participation through a specific youth event as well as exploring participation through a network. The network is an example of how the right to participation can be promoted and put into practice – from international networking onto the local level. The network also provides the space for participation in the development of an online platform. The highlighted youth event is an example of young people being given the opportunity to participate, both as participants of the event and as organisers. The event also gives a strong focus to the importance of support, with the young people entering a learning experience and being motivated to turn this into participation back home. Lastly, the nature of the subject links participation to both human rights education and to the recognition of Roma identity.

### ternYpe – International

ternYpe (International Roma Youth Network) is an International Roma Youth Network founded in 2010 that unites Roma youth organisations from Albania, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. The organisation’s mission is to create space for young people to become active citizens through mobilisation, self-organisation and participation, promoting mutual respect and co-operation between the Roma and non-Roma young people. The work is based on grassroots groups made up of Roma and non-Roma, but strengthening / maintaining Roma leadership at all levels.

The organisation’s vision is based on “education for remembrance” in order to develop solidarity among Roma and non-Roma youth. This is done through analysis and interpretation of the past as a means to critically evaluate and act in contemporary societies. Recognition of the Roma Genocide, for ternYpe, is an important step in the restoration of dignity and justice for Roma, and human rights in Europe.

ternYpe’s action plan includes the coaching / mentoring of local groups and capacity building for youth workers. Another part of the plan is the ongoing building of partnerships; these include the European Youth Forum, the Council of Europe, the European Union of Jewish Students, and Youth of European Nationalities. As such, the organisation has looked to move out of the project-orientated field and away from being a Roma-focused service-provision organisation, to becoming a network and voice of young people in the youth field. ternYpe has participated in a number of major European youth events, making ternYpe and Roma youth issues visible.

### Lack of Recognition

The foundation of the moral dimension of the work of ternYpe is the lack of recognition of the Roma Genocide (sometimes referred to as ‘Porrajmos’ or ‘Samudaripen’). The organisation seeks to demonstrate that the failure to acknowledge fully this historical tragedy has an impact on current society, declaring: “We need to shed light on the forgotten Roma Genocide, its more than 500,000 victims, on social exclusion, on antigypsyism, and on hate speech against Roma today, which is a consequence of predominant, widespread ignorance and lack of recognition of the Roma Genocide.”

The organisation believes there is a need to acknowledge and address the stereotyping of Roma and growing antigypsyism as mechanisms of exclusion, hate speech and hate crime. ternYpe also works to counter widespread denials of the Roma Genocide across contemporary Europe.

## Dikh he na Bister – International Youth Event

Seventy years after the Nazi Genocide of Roma, with very few living witnesses to provide testimonies of the past horrors, ternYpe worked with young Roma to ask:

- What is the role of Roma youth with regard to the memories and lessons for the future?
- Why is remembrance relevant for young Roma identity and sense of self-dignity?

With 2014 being the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust, ternYpe organised a youth event that offered a unique learning opportunity for participants. Young people organised over 40 workshops and lectures that were facilitated by experts and activists in the field of the Roma Genocide, Holocaust, human rights education and youth activism. The workshops all took place at the Pedagogical University of Kraków. Aside from the workshops, the programme included meetings with survivors (or witnesses), remembrance ceremonies, and the exploration of current issues relating to antigypsyism and extremism. Organisers wanted to create a bridge between the historic experience of the Roma Genocide and present concerns relating to far-right / neo-Nazi movements and tendencies in societies across Europe.

The main act of remembrance was a commemoration at Auschwitz, which was attended by more than 1,000 people. ternYpe invited a range of institutions and organisations: amongst others, representatives attended from the European Commission, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the United Nations. Media coverage encompassed 15 to 20 countries, and press releases were disseminated internationally in an effort to reach and inform governmental institutions worldwide.

## Participation in Action

The participation of young people in the youth event Dikh he na Bister was a long five-year process. Participation here was not just about bringing a group of young people to the event in 2014, but about being involved through many difficulties and frustrations. The young people were leading the decision making, the organising, the responsibilities, and the lobbying of authorities. The process required the young people to engage in advocacy and partnership building with local authorities and international institutions – such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. The process attracted literally hundreds of young people, either to become involved in the organising or wanting to attend the event.

Starting in 2010 and occurring annually, ternYpe organised youth seminars in Kraków on 2 August – the Memorial Day for the Roma Holocaust. Although primarily aimed at young people, the events were intergenerational and were for Roma and non-Roma. The original concept was to facilitate the role of young people in the process of constructing tolerant and inclusive societies, working with them to understand the history of Roma persecution better, its causes and consequences. ternYpe wanted the youth remembrance approach to promote human rights education. The facts and consequences of the Roma Genocide are highlighted through youth-led local and national awareness-raising events, including acts of commemoration.

Young people and their organisations began organising follow-up events and youth exchanges as a direct result of the seminars. In 2012, ternYpe concluded that, with interest growing in what they were doing, they wanted to explore further the relationship between the forgotten or ignored history and the current rise in antigypsyism.

In March 2013 they invited 50 organisations from 20 countries to Germany to discuss common interests related to the topics of recognition of the Roma Holocaust and the date of 2 August. In September of that year, ternYpe organised a study session through the European Youth Centre in Budapest to explore in more details the issues and the options for further developments and actions. A series of meetings followed in 2013 and 2014 in various countries with numerous young people, organisations and institutions.

The participatory organising concept was to open spaces for young people to take responsibility on many levels, from building a social media team, to co-ordinating and preparing workshops. It became an

example of youth participation and co-operation between different young people and youth organisations from different countries across Europe. Almost all the young people involved did so on a voluntary basis. It was not a smooth process and many mistakes were made, but it was young people-led, and the mistakes and problems were resolved by the young people. Young people got engaged in different groups, often at an informal level, many of which were not always structured or continuous. At times the process lacked professional co-ordination and resulted in many breaks and interruptions.

Over 1,000 young Roma and non-Roma from over 25 countries and more than 70 organisations took part in the event. Each young person and partner organisation managed their own finances; they developed their own local activities, and funded their international travel costs to Poland for the event. Many organised media to travel with them so that their experience and their achievements would be brought to public attention in their own country. For example, the group from Barcelona held several high-profile events and exhibitions. Through their work, lobbying and generated publicity, the local government made a resolution to officially recognise 2 August.

Participation in this event gave young people from different backgrounds chances to be able to share experiences and perspectives, so learning from each other. Roma youth participating and engaging in this event showed themselves to be active citizens and the agents of change. It was an opportunity for both social and professional networking activities. Besides the educational dimension, the networking of Roma youth resulted in the mobilisation of youth groups, and the starting of new initiatives at a local level.

## Outcomes

### **2august.eu**

An interactive online platform <http://2august.eu> is being developed to promote web-based youth participation and activism through the use of social media and online activities such as the 'Thunderclap action to remember the Roma Genocide', the Twitter account 'For a Better World' and 'pickabadge' for profile photos. This online platform will be linked to the No Hate Speech Movement campaign of the Council of Europe.

## 9. Conclusion

The creation of this publication has sought to analyse, define and understand Roma youth participation in action. The process of research, writing and consultation has created an opportunity for the better understanding of forms, approaches, and practices of Roma youth participation. It serves as an invitation to others to use these good examples as starting points or inspiration. It also supports the further development of strategies and programmes for Roma youth participation, especially at the local and regional levels.

It is clear from these examples of good practice that a response to Roma youth participation is possible and can be successful. However, it is necessary to understand that the projects and organisations' approach is based on the understanding that the "problem" does not come from the Roma young people but is a symptom of the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination faced by Roma people in general and Roma young people specifically.

Sustainability is always an issue and projects come and go with time. Many of the organisations here face continual problems with funding – as with any youth organisation. There is a need to become broader in thinking, whereby funding can come from and not rely solely on traditional funders or the big well known European funders. Sustainability is also affected by an organisation's ability to adapt, the lives of young people are ever-changing, and young Roma are no different in this respect: organisations need to keep adapting to the needs of the young people they work with. Strength comes in numbers: this publication offers a secondary aim of connecting organisations, and networking is hugely important for survival. Whether it be seeing that others also experience similar issues and problems, whether it is about inspiring each other with new ideas and creativity, or whether it is simply knowing that you are not alone – this publication can serve as a means to linking individuals and organisations, whether you are in the publication or not.

These combined examples show a need for further developments in youth policy at local levels but also at a European level. In order to be effective, youth policy needs to step out from the pages it is written on and become action on behalf of and with and by the young people it is targeted at. Added to this, vulnerable groups, including young Roma, need to be specified in such policies in order that their circumstances and needs are taken into account. Again, strength in numbers: organisations can learn from one another and add support for one another in the developments of strategies and policies, at both local and national levels. This is vital for the continuation of the work being done by, with and for young Roma.

This collection of examples is evidence that young Roma are willing and able to contribute to local, regional, national and European-wide developments for enhancing their own participation.

The examples reveal that Roma young people are reshaping, redefining and developing their cultural response to the world. Young Roma, through their participation, exhibit courage and optimism; this is something that can influence their immediate families and wider Roma community in a positive way. This is a creative process on the part of the young people, as they move beyond being consumers to becoming activists.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the work of the projects and organisations included in this publication is that they work with young people in order for the young people to empower themselves. Through creating their own place within the world they refuse the option of isolation and segregation.

Another aspect worth highlighting is that Roma young people have much in common with other marginalised groups and communities. Recognition of this can help build contemporary models of better political, professional and social practice.

In the light of growing political extremism across Europe, such co-operation, via the promotion of

understanding and cultural / ethnic interaction and co-working, has the potential to alleviate and counter exclusion, prejudice, exploitation and oppression.