Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme Annual Co-ordinators' meeting

Vila Verde, Portugal, 15 November 2024

Workshop: Reflecting on Inclusion of Roma and Travellers[1] in Intercultural Cities

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Summary

1. Introduction and Context

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme identifies the inclusion of Roma communities as a cornerstone for building genuinely diverse, fair, and cohesive urban environments. Cities across Europe recognise that promoting Roma inclusion is not just about adding policies — it is about transforming structures, combating stereotypes, and ensuring that all residents, including those who are Roma, feel valued and integrated into urban life. This workshop aimed to help cities reflect on their current efforts to include Roma communities and other marginalised groups, pinpoint gaps, and chart clear paths forward.

The sessions encouraged participants to envision their dream scenario for Roma inclusion: one where Roma individuals are not isolated or disadvantaged, but instead enjoy equal opportunities, housing security, access to quality services, and representation in decision-making. The ultimate goal was to understand what stops cities from achieving this vision and identify who can help them overcome these barriers. The ICC team provided guidance, practical tools, and a list of key dates and resources that could serve as immediate first steps for cities to demonstrate their commitment to Roma inclusion.

2. Workshop Approach and Activities

The workshop combined plenary discussions and small-group dialogues. This multi-faceted approach gave participants firsthand insights into the living conditions, cultural assets, and current challenges of Roma communities. Cities were asked to reflect on their policies, cultural events, data collection methods, and their ability to provide equitable access to essential services.

Using the Cultural Audit Form (see annex 2), participants examined how well they understand Roma demographics, socioeconomic realities, and cultural heritage. The Form provides prompt questions across a range of areas for city representatives to consider how they integrate Roma and Traveller culture into their policies, but also how they respond to the needs of these communities. They explored existing city frameworks and strategies (or the lack thereof), assessed the impact of discrimination, and acknowledged the structural barriers that hinder true inclusion. Two or three cities stood out with exemplary frameworks — such as Strasbourg's Roma inclusion strategy and Norway's comprehensive approach — demonstrating that tangible progress is possible.

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[1] The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

3. Key Themes and Findings

(a) **Dreaming of Roma Inclusion**:

Participants unanimously desired a future where Roma communities are fully part of city life, enjoying the same rights and protections as everyone else. They imagined neighbourhoods without discrimination or isolation, where Roma cultural heritage is celebrated, and Roma voices shape public policies. Key elements of an ideal situation for Roma inclusion would include:

- That they participate in all aspects of life of the city
- Equal access to knowledge/rights/housing
- Roma should have access to all these rights
- Reflecting the challenges faced by communities facing different situations, for example - some are migrant/refugee communities and some locals
- Eliminating homelessness
- Inclusion in urban area rather than marginalisation
- Mutual trust with local authorities
- Good safe locations of communities with an itinerant way of life, with good quality amenities
- Flexible education pathways
- Prevention of exploitation of vulnerable people
- Equal treatment with others - same as inclusion for other minority but taking into account specific needs
- Opportunities for adult/continuing education.

(b) **Identifying Obstacles**:

The path to this ideal scenario is blocked by several long-standing issues. Many cities admitted to having limited knowledge of Roma history, language, and cultural nuances. This knowledge gap hampers empathy and well-informed policymaking. Persistent discrimination, harmful stereotypes, and institutional biases further compound these challenges. Moreover, physical segregation — from camps on the outskirts to settlements lacking water, electricity, or sanitation — reinforces inequalities and mistrust. Without comprehensive demographic and socioeconomic data, cities struggle to design targeted measures or gauge their progress. Some key obstacles identified by cities in the workshop included:

- Discrimination against Roma
- Lack of participation of Roma individuals in political processes (whether formal or informal)
- Institutional violence
- Lack of knowledge of the Roma community - whether communities are in fact still nomadic and a lack of knowledge within cities about nomadic or semi-nomadic communities.
- Discriminatory and hateful narratives
- Difficulties for associations in co-operating and working together

- Mutual distrust
- Level of reluctance on the part of some Roma to be integrated/included
- Difficulty to engage/gain trust with communities
- Lack of formal communication
- Stigma and suspicion
- Lack of social understanding
- Inflexible systems requiring fixed abodes to access services
- Granting equal treatment and considering the specific needs of Roma communities, ensuring their voices shape decisions that affect them.

(c) **Who Can Help? How can Roma Inclusion be achieved?**

Participants recognised that Roma inclusion requires partnerships. Beyond municipal authorities, help can come from Roma community leaders, cultural mediators, NGOs, national governments, and international networks like Intercultural Cities. The ICC team emphasised that existing programs, policies, and strategies could be leveraged to promote Roma inclusion, provided there is genuine commitment and follow-up. Key tools, methods and partners were identified by cities:

- Inclusion in policy making and political life through
- Positive discrimination
- Private donors, NGOs, and community leaders who could promote projects for inclusion of Roma people
- Access to community and talking to community leaders to understand needs better
- Action of local government to build houses and provide access to basic services
- Communication between communities and cities – openness to listen to one another
- Both cities and communities should be more open to communicate
- Roma representatives
- Institutions working together across institutions of health to have cross-departmental collaboration, especially health, education, housing, to ensure that all policies are cohesive and mutually reinforcing.

(d) **Immediate First Steps: Recognising Roma and Accessing Resources**:

The ICC team highlighted the importance of symbolic and practical gestures, starting with recognising key dates (8 April, 2 August, 5 November) related to Roma rights, history and culture respectively. Observing these dates helps raise awareness, counter prejudice, and show that Roma stories and experiences are acknowledged and honoured at the city level. To guide cities further, a curated list of Council of Europe (CoE) resources is attached to this report, encompassing factsheets, recommendations, thematic reports, and best practices. These resources serve as a roadmap for cities to deepen their understanding, refine their policies, and strengthen their intercultural capacities.

4. Key Themes from the Workshop

In the final activity, cities took part in a shortened version of a cultural audit (the full version of which is to follow, see appendix for the questions asked) asking cities to look at current action they take with regard to the inclusion of Roma and Traveller communities in their cities. Cities were then asked to identify the strengths, the gaps, and the story of change for their city – how those gaps can be transformed and Roma inclusion meaningfully ensured.

The exercise only allowed for a brief discussion of some of the key issues facing cities in this regard. Some strengths were noted – including:

- Existing activities on International Roma Day and Roma heritage month;
- Intercultural working groups allowing for discussion and interaction with communities and their leaders;
- representation of Roma on some city councils;
- strong national strategies and frameworks;
- strong local Roma NGOs.

Cities also candidly identified gaps in their work, which provide a framework for the ICC Programme to work on in the future, taking advantage of the Council of Europe's leading role in this field:

(a) **Knowledge Gaps and Cultural Understanding**:

Many cities confessed a limited understanding of Roma heritage and historical context. Without these insights, it is challenging to design policies that acknowledge Roma cultural richness and address the root causes of exclusion.

(b) **Commitment to Ending Discrimination**:

Participants aspired to zero tolerance for discrimination—whether systemic or subtle—and recognised that anti-bias training, awareness campaigns, and better data collection would be indispensable for making their commitments credible and impactful.

(c) **Housing and Infrastructure Challenges**:

Roma communities often live in isolated, under-serviced areas. Improving housing options, ensuring reliable access to water, electricity, and sanitation, and integrating Roma neighbourhoods into the urban fabric are crucial steps toward equality and dignity.

(d) **Data and Accessibility**:

Insufficient demographic and socioeconomic data hamper evidence-based policymaking. Cities agreed that understanding Roma community profiles is essential to improving service delivery, educational opportunities, healthcare access, and employment pathways.

(e) **Representation and Engagement**:

Increasing Roma visibility in public life — from heritage celebrations and advisory boards to city councils and national strategies — helps counter stereotypes and reinforces the message that Roma have a stake in shaping urban future.

5. Conclusions

Drawing Inspiration from Existing Frameworks and CoE Resources

Cities like Strasbourg and Bergen highlighted their strategic and structured approaches, showing that progress is possible when policies are culturally sensitive, data-driven, and grounded in partnership with Roma communities. The ICC team and CoE resources offer guidance to all cities aiming to replicate these successes.

Important reference materials include factsheets on Roma history, culture, and language; Council of Europe recommendations on equality, youth participation, and educational inclusion; and EU/CoE joint programmes like ROMED and ROMACT which demonstrate effective mediation, community participation, and integrated local governance.

Additionally, the ICC team encouraged cities to recognize important dates related to Roma history and culture. Marking these occasions publicly can raise awareness, counter prejudiced narratives, and signal genuine city-level commitment to Roma inclusion.

This workshop highlighted both the challenges and the opportunities in promoting Roma inclusion within an intercultural framework. While participants recognised significant barriers — discrimination, lack of data, and inadequate infrastructure — they also expressed determination to embrace constructive solutions. By tapping into CoE resources, celebrating key Roma dates, completing the Cultural Audit, and taking inspiration from successful examples, cities can transition from aspiration to action. The Intercultural Cities programme will continue to support these endeavours, helping translate intercultural values into tangible improvements for Roma communities across Europe.

6. Proposed next steps

Following on from the workshop, it is suggested that ICC member cities and the ICC programme proceeds in the following way:

- Cities complete the Cultural Audit Form in full: This exercise will reveal strengths, gaps, and target areas for growth, enabling tailored strategies that align with Roma needs and intercultural values.
- Drawing on the audit's findings, the intercultural approach and existing CoE materials (notably from the Roma and Travellers Division), practical guidelines to improve policymaking, infrastructure, communication, and community engagement could be developed. This would explore how the intercultural approach would be relevant for strengthening the inclusion of Roma and Travellers across Council of Europe member states.
- Cities interested in continuing to work on this subject should continue to exchange horizontally, through the ICC Programme, on good practices, shared challenges and strategies for overcoming them.
- Strengthen Communication and Collaboration: Encouraging open dialogue and trust-building with Roma communities, involving community leaders, and fostering cooperation across institutional departments.

ANNEX 1: Council of Europe Resources on Roma and Travellers

Cities were encouraged to explore a comprehensive set of CoE resources to inform their efforts.

List of CoE resources on Roma and Travellers

Factsheets:

- Roma History – Factsheet

- Romani Culture – Factsheet

- Romani Language – Factsheet

Recommendations:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation

- Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) CM(2019)161

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on mediation as an effective tool for promoting respect for human rights and social inclusion of Roma

- Further Recommendations and texts

Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues

- Feasibility study on desegregation and inclusion policies and practices in the field of education for Roma and Traveller children (2024)

Texts by the Parliamentary Assembly:

- Promoting the inclusion of Roma and Travellers

- The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe

Texts adopted by ECRI:

- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°13 on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma

- ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°3 on combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies

- Country specific reports

Texts adopted by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities:

- Thematic Commentary on Education; on participation;

- Country specific opinions (Link to country reports)

ROMED:

- ROMED1 - Mediation for Roma: Training of mediators to reduce the gap between Roma communities and public institutions (incl. promoting effective intercultural mediation)

- ROMED2 - Democratic governance and community participation through mediation: Enhancing the participation of Roma in local decision making

- Case study on the implementation of ROMED2 in Kakani, Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Case study on the ROMED2 implementation in Torres Vedras, Portugal.

- Further ROMED resources and case studies

ROMACT:

- Joint Programme by the Council of Europe and the European Commission: "Building up political will and understanding of Roma Inclusion at local and regional level". The Programme helps local authorities to improve the lives of all citizens by a 4 steps-methodology.

- ROMACT Handbook

- Analysis of the draft Integrated Territorial Strategies for the Development of Level 2 Planning Regions in Bulgaria to find out their relevance to the needs of the local Roma communities

- Further ROMACT resources and reports

ANNEX 2: CULTURAL AUDIT FORM

Cultural Audit Form: Reflecting on Roma Inclusion

This cultural audit is designed to help cities reflect on their efforts to include Roma communities and other marginalized groups. It identifies strengths, gaps, and areas for meaningful change, with a focus on reducing discrimination, improving access to services, and fostering equity.

City Name:
Contact Person:
Role:
Date:

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1. Does your city currently have a strategy or framework to support the inclusion of Roma communities?
(e.g., If yes, how is it being implemented? If no, are there plans or interest in developing one?)

2. How well does your city understand the demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural profile of its Roma population?
(e.g., availability of data, participatory profiling, community engagement)

3. What steps has your city taken to address and reduce antigypsyism and other forms of discrimination?
(e.g., awareness campaigns, anti-bias training, public policies, enforcement mechanisms)

4. How does your city ensure that public services (e.g., health, education, housing, employment) are accessible and meet the needs of Roma communities?
(e.g., mobile services, culturally adapted programs, targeted outreach)

5. What actions have been taken to address inequalities in health, education, and service access for Roma communities?
(e.g., tailored programs, resources to address barriers such as language or mistrust)

6. How effectively does your city engage Roma representatives and organizations in decision-making processes and program development?
(e.g., advisory boards, participatory governance, leadership opportunities)

7. What programs or initiatives celebrate and raise awareness of Roma culture and history among the broader population?
(e.g., educational campaigns, school curriculums, public storytelling, cultural events)

8. How does your city support intercommunity dialogue and cooperation to reduce tensions between Roma and non-Roma communities?
(e.g., intercultural forums, shared projects, community dialogue spaces)

9. What has your city done to meet Roma people where their needs are most pressing?
(e.g., outreach services, localized support, addressing systemic barriers such as housing insecurity)

10. How does your city measure progress and evaluate the impact of inclusion initiatives for Roma communities?
(e.g., community feedback, data analysis, case studies, reporting mechanisms)

Reflective Section

- **Strengths**: What practices or initiatives are currently working well in fostering Roma inclusion?
- **Gaps**: Where do you see the most significant opportunities for improvement?
- **Story of Change**: Imagine a future where these gaps are addressed—what does Roma inclusion look like in your city?