

# EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In response to the invitation by the Commissioner for Human Rights

## Example from Slovenia

### “Successful integration of Roma children into education”

#### 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

##### *Summary*

The project concerns the integration of Roma children into the education and training system of Slovenia and the elimination of segregation and discrimination. The Roma Union's project strives to enhance the efficiency of the on-going integration process through educating and training Roma teacher assistants, school teachers and staff as well as educating and encouraging Roma parents to assume responsibility.

The project is financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Ministry of Education and Sport of Slovenia and amounts to € 1,593,100. It started on 30 May 2008 and will finish on 31 August 2011.

##### *Objectives*

The goal of the project is to prepare Roma children for successful inclusion into elementary school and to build up the outcomes of Roma children. The aim is to communicate good practices and experience realised in Slovenia to areas with poor or no experience at all.

Target groups are:

- Preschool and elementary school Roma children
- Roma parents
- Teachers and professional staff
- Roma teacher assistants.

The project aims at the realisation of objectives stated in the Strategy of Education and Training of Roma Children in the Republic of Slovenia so as:

- To ensure education and training that enable Roma children to achieve goals and standards defined in the National Curriculum for Preschool Institutions and in the elementary school syllabi
- To exercise the right to maintain and respect Roma language and culture in the education and training system
- To promote inclusion in society through education and training enabling Roma children to assume the functional requisites of society, while respecting their differences and identity
- To promote inclusion in society through a curriculum which ensures the principles and moral values of equality within the scope of social equity.

The project aims at resolving issues in the following areas:

- Early integration into the education and training system: increase in enrolment of Roma children in preschool institutions at least two years before starting elementary school
- Introducing Roma teacher assistants: elimination or mitigation of ignorance of the Slovene language and unsuccessful integration of Roma children; Roma teacher assistants will help children to overcome emotional and linguistic barriers and act as a bridge between a preschool institution or elementary school and Roma community
- Adjustment in the contents of educational programmes: the introduction of Roma language in elementary school on an optional basis, teaching Roma children the Slovene language, and identification of objectives (e.g multiculturalism) or standards of knowledge through the topics of Roma culture, history, and identity
- Continuous professional development and supplementary training for educators
- Providing special organisational and material conditions: at least preserving the advantageous standards and criteria for the financial aid already established
- No segregation policy; as a rule, homogeneous Roma class-units shall not be formed
- Introducing various forms of learning assistance
- Establishing trust in school and eliminating prejudice
- Following the principle that, as an ethnic group, Roma children are not special needs children
- Promoting adult education: the reference level for objectives in the area of education of Roma adults are basic points set out in the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia until 2010.

#### *Activities*

The Roma Union of Slovenia is tasked with the implementation of the project. It was the aim of the Ministry of Education and Sport in choosing this project to promote training of Roma by themselves, to acknowledge their potential to manage the project on their own, and, moreover, it is a shared goal to qualify Roma to make use of EU funds.

The Roma teacher assistants are Roma who set an example and communicate the importance of education in so far as to make Roma aware of the opportunities and their own capabilities to achieve learning objectives and develop skills, and challenge themselves for more demanding professions.

Among the project activities, the Roma Union of Slovenia has provided education and training for Roma teacher assistants. Assistants have taken part in project teams in preschool institutions and elementary schools, together with Roma parents and teachers. The project teams evaluate the work of assistants and teachers or educators, highlight the outstanding issues, and try to find solutions to problems. The project teams identify and meet the needs of Roma children. Roma assistants contribute to the preparation of the teacher's manual and they guide teachers and children to broaden their knowledge of Roma culture, history, language, and identity.

Through the project the Roma Union of Slovenia encourages Roma parents to participate in extracurricular activities of Roma children and various workshops organised for parents exclusively or parents and children together.

For teachers and professional school staff the Union organises supplementary training programmes, primarily to familiarise educators with Roma culture, language, history, and identity.

The Union has prepared a manual for teachers and Roma teacher assistants in co-operation with the National Education Institute and the public institution of adult education *Ljudska Univerza Murska Sobota*. The manual will contribute to more efficient interaction with Roma children and parents.

The experts on Romology will draw up a textbook on Roma culture on the basis of existing materials.

In preschool institutions, the Roma teacher assistants help the preschool teacher, preschool teacher assistant, elementary school teacher, and teacher in after-school care to implement the programme, encourage parents to participate in extracurricular activities, and help to do away with the fear of the institution among Roma parents and children.

Roma teacher assistants help Roma children with the Slovene language; they are involved in planning and analysing work processes. Roma assistants take part in all activities implemented within the class-unit.

It was the obligation of elementary schools and preschool institutions to draw up a plan of activities for the purpose of effective and successful integration of Roma children into preschool institutions and elementary schools (cooperation with Roma parents, learning about Roma culture, history, and identity, and eliminating stereotypes and prejudice) before the end of 2008.

#### *Stakeholders and partners*

The Roma Union of Slovenia, the principal holder of the project, has fourteen years of experience in organising efficient forms of education for Roma and non-Roma persons (in history, language, culture, and ethnology) as well as annual Roma meetings (*romski tabori*) on education, media, and political participation of Roma. The Union has organised round tables on education of Roma and carried out research on the education of Roma children in preschool institutions and elementary schools.

Other stakeholders in the project include 39 elementary schools and 20 preschool institutions which signed partnership statements with the Roma Union of Slovenia. By signing partnership statements preschool institutions and elementary schools committed themselves in taking an active part in the project until its completion. All Roma children from schools that signed a partnership statement are included in the project.

In the scope of the project, a project team has been set up in all partnership preschool institutions and elementary schools. A partnership team consists of teachers or professional staff and a Roma teacher assistant, and it is the Union's intention to include Roma parents in order to improve cooperation among parents, children and the school.

## 2. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AT STAKE

In the first place, the project aims to ensure the effective enjoyment of the right to education by Roma children. This should take place in a mainstream setting avoiding any segregation of Roma children from other children. Therefore the project also addresses the discrimination of Roma and aims at their full inclusion into society. This facilitates the enjoyment of other human rights by Roma and promotes non-discrimination and effective equality in society.

In addition, the project promotes respect for and eliminates prejudice towards Roma and Roma culture, language and identities. Therefore the project also contributes to protecting Roma as a national minority.

## 3. IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The project has to fulfil the indicators set out in the project application (number of Roma children included in the project, number of teachers, number of Roma assistants, number of preschool institutions and elementary schools involved in the project, number of educational workshops for Roma parents, etc.). Targets reached by the end of 2010 include the following:

- No of children and pupils: 1219
- No of Roma assistants: 31
- No of educational institutions: 31.

The final targets for 2011 are the following:

- No of children and pupils: 1219
- No of Roma assistants: 31
- No of educational institutions: 31.

The project has been systematically evaluated by regular reports to the ministry, monthly meetings of project teams and peer evaluation. Two conferences have already been held regarding the success and effectiveness of the project. Evaluations have been made by educational institutions, Roma assistants, the partners of the project and the Roma Union. The Roma Union has reported the following: higher attendance of Roma children in educational institutions; the cooperation between Roma parents and educational institutions has improved; parents are more aware of the importance of learning and education; Roma assistants successfully cooperate with teachers of Roma children and with Roma parents; Roma children and parents have less fear of educational institutions. Two books have been published: *History of Roma Literature*; and *Romani Verbs: their Origin and Meaning*. Two other books will be published before the end of the project.

The final report will include the evaluation of all the project aims. Final evaluation will be carried out in 2011. The project was nominated for 2010 RegioStars awards of the European Commission and received a special mention from the jury.

The project of successful integration of Roma children into education will continue after 2011 (2nd cycle of ESF call for tenders will probably be announced in 2011). The following factors for ensuring the sustainability of the project have been identified:

- Access to knowledge and learning to work with Roma children
- Real integration of Roma children into preschool institutions and elementary schools
- Education of Roma by Roma themselves
- Inclusion of parents for a better education of Roma children
- Qualification of Roma to acquire and use EU funds
- Publication of expert literature
- Publication of a textbook on Roma culture.

The observation has been made that even more effort should be put and more activities carried out in order to improve cooperation between schools and Roma parents. One of the findings of the current evaluations is that this approach should be taken in pre-school education of Roma children. As a result, a new project started in 2010, financed by ESF and Ministry of Education and Sport of Slovenia, is focused on measures to improve the situation in pre-school Roma education.

In July 2010 the ESF call for tender "Increasing the Social and Cultural Capital in Areas Populated by Members of the Roma Community" was concluded, where a special emphasis is placed on the development and implementation of various models and concepts of preschool education of Roma children and the education of Roma with an emphasis on literacy as well as cooperation between Roma parents and children as well as non-Roma population. The project is carried out by the Institute for Ethnic Studies. The activities have begun recently and will include:

- Analysis of demographic spatial features of Roma settlements in Slovenia
- Promotion of the importance of knowledge and education and awareness-raising of the Roma population
- Motivating children and parents to attend educational institutions regularly
- Establishment of day centres where the following activities will be carried out: social activities and workshops for preschool and school children and their parents; homework and study help; workshops for parents in social topics of interest
- Practical multi-lingual activities for the whole family; extra-curricular activities for all
- Education and training of teachers and other professional staff with an emphasis on problem-oriented practical activities to promote the staff's motivation
- Encouraging those members of the Roma community who possess a degree to serve as role models and help motivate Roma children to learn and develop their potential.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS FOR INSPIRING SIMILAR PROJECTS ELSEWHERE**

Roma assistants represent a bridge between the Roma community and the educational institution. They offer help to children in preschool institutions and in primary schools in understanding the Slovenian language, in achieving standards of knowledge, in fighting against prejudice. They also cooperate with the parents of Roma children. Roma assistants themselves receive education and training in the Roma language, history and culture.

The project is innovative in that it strives to establish and pursue active involvement of Roma parents within the compulsory system of education. Parents are key figures in urging children to education and training and with the introduction of Roma teacher assistants the Roma Union of Slovenia seeks to reinforce the awareness of Roma parents and children of the importance of education while respecting their cultural identity.

It is our belief that it is of utmost importance that Roma themselves carry out this kind of project and that they are empowered to direct and influence their own education as they know the language, culture and problems of Roma families. The same approach should be applicable elsewhere.

#### **5. CONTACT**

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