

## EQUAL AND THE ROMA, GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

### 1. THE PROBLEM

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Roma<sup>1</sup> people form the largest, ethnic minority group in the enlarged EU. Europe's Roma population is estimated at 7 to 9 million people and Romania is the country with the highest absolute number of Roma ranging between 1 and 2 million. Nearly 80 percent of the total Roma population lives in European Union candidate countries and new Member States. However in many Member States, the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities have to face the greatest degrees of exclusion and the highest levels of discrimination.

Most Roma live in, or have experienced a situation, of poverty. Poverty rates for Roma range between four and ten times that of non-Roma in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania — nearly 40 percent of Roma in Romania and Bulgaria live on less than 1.65 euro per day. It is not uncommon to find reports of unemployment rates of up to 100 percent in Roma settlements across the EU 25 - due to the low skill levels of Roma people and also the discrimination in the local labour markets.

It is also important to note that Roma poverty is multifaceted: Roma are often deprived of the resources necessary for adequate living conditions and, in addition, they also lack access to education, the labour markets, social and health services, and channels for participation in society.

### 2. POLICY RELEVANCE

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At the end of 2004, the Commission published a report on ["The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged EU"](#). In effect, the report considered the existing situation of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities across Europe and in its very first paragraph, it talks about "a failure of existing policies within both the EU-15 (the "old" Member States) and the new Member States to address adequately discrimination against these communities and to promote their social inclusion."

The Commission's *Green Paper - [Equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged European Union](#)* published earlier in 2004, had stressed that: "Enlargement should be used as an incentive for all Member States to step up their efforts to address the challenges faced by minorities. This relates in particular to the Roma, who will collectively form the largest ethnic minority group in the enlarged EU and who continue to face situations of exclusion and discrimination in a number of old and new Member States."

In the light of this evidence from the Commission's own studies and documentation, Odile Quintin, Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities went on record, in November 2004, as saying *"The European Commission is now preparing the EU's new Social Policy Agenda which will set out our policy priorities for the next five years. The situation of Roma will of course be a strong element within this"*.

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<sup>1</sup> For convenience, the term "Roma" or "Romani" is sometimes used in this text as shorthand for different groups and individuals. In no way does this seek to undermine the rich diversity and cultures of Roma, Gypsies, Travellers and other groups perceived as "Gypsies".

There has been at least one other major demonstration of concern about the plight of the Roma. The next ten years have been nominated as the [Decade of Roma Inclusion](#). This initiative grew out of the conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future,” hosted by the government of Hungary in June 2003. The conference was organised by the Open Society Institute, the World Bank, and the European Commission. As a contribution to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the [Roma Education Fund](#) will provide finance to be used to raise the educational status and performance of the Roma.

### **3. NEW SOLUTIONS: EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE FROM EQUAL**

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To date, a total of 15 DPs have been identified that were working with Roma, Gypsies or Travellers in the first round of EQUAL. These DPs are from the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Hungary and Italy. Their good practices have been recorded in the case studies that they have submitted or in reports of visits to three of these projects.

However, many more DPs that have been selected for the second round of EQUAL will be addressing issues related to Roma and thus, this Policy Brief represents a Position Paper rather than a final analysis of what EQUAL has done, or could do, on behalf of Roma. It outlines some priorities for the social and vocational integration of Roma people to which EQUAL has already made a contribution but may have an even more telling contribution to make. Thematic work on the issue of Roma will continue during the second round of projects and it will be geared to identifying and analysing these new EQUAL projects so as to ensure that there is a critical mass of good practice to support the initial propositions made in this Policy Brief.

An EQUAL Policy Forum will also be established before the end of 2005 that will bring together EQUAL advocates, potential user bodies, decision-makers and stakeholders to validate the good practices that have been identified and to determine how best these EQUAL lessons could impact on policies and practices for the integration of Roma, at European and national level.

Below are six areas mentioned in the “Situation of Roma in the Enlarged EU” to which EQUAL may have the potential to contribute and the quotes at the beginning of each of the sub-sections have been taken directly from this report.

#### **3.1. AWARENESS RAISING**

*“EU instruments should be used to raise awareness of the situation of Roma in society and to build a pan-European pro-Roma coalition. At the EU’s disposal are the anti-discrimination and social inclusion action programmes.”*

However, in addition to these programmes, there is the EQUAL Community Initiative and many of its DPs have played an active role in awareness raising. A number have run major anti-discrimination campaigns involving television, radio slots, posters and articles in the local press. Some DPs have targeted the staff of other organisations and awareness raising has been combined with training to help these members of staff to better understand and deal with Roma clients (see 3.4 below). In other instances, the approach has been to make agencies and institutions more aware of the existence of Roma organisations and of their potential role in the local community and its political life (see 3.5 below).

Then within EQUAL, Roma people and Roma organisations have also been trained to carry out their own media and PR activities. In one example, a modular course is being used to prepare a group of Roma including both young people and adults, for work as intercultural media designers. The course provides basic skills in IT, video and audio for the design of print and digital media. It aims to enable and motivate the participants to play an active role in presenting practical problems and issues that are faced by Roma people in their local environment in Germany. A Roma NGO, this time in Greece, was helped by a media-based DP to understand the strategic use of mass media as a resource for advancing its social and public policy initiatives. Staff also learned how to produce media material such as newsletters, radio or television programmes, documentaries, and advertising spots to complement access to the mass media and make up for the limitations in the news coverage of Roma issues.

### 3.2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*“Educational achievement among Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities is currently very low across the EU-25.”*

EQUAL has been attempting to redress this situation by working with adults and also by working with children of school age. Many of these DPs stress the necessity of understanding the identity, culture and mind set of the target group if progress is to be achieved. The training offered by one DP was designed to take account of the manual or communication capacities of the people, of their wishes to work in the open air where they can move around and, of course, of the employment opportunities in the locality. With this in mind, a pre-training course was offered to 112 gypsies of whom 21 were woman. Of these, 64 went on a vocational training course and after the training, 28 found stable jobs while the others are working on a seasonal basis.

In general within EQUAL, new more adapted forms of training have been offered to Roma people. Many of these are operated on a basis of short modules because having “the end in sight” reinforces the motivation of the participants. A number of projects report success in applying the personal pathways approach but often with novel add-ons. Two projects provide training grants but these are calculated in proportion to achievement and attendance, and this has greatly improved performance. Another DP introduced a computer-assisted literacy and numeracy course and while the teacher found it very taxing, the individualised support offered was both effective and also very much welcomed by the students. Distance learning was also used in one project so that students could both work in an enterprise and then study, as they wished, to complete a second and final year of apprenticeship training in clothing, floristry or mechanics. One DP has even gone as far as to set up the first, nationwide professional training network for Roma and Sinte.

Many of the same principles also apply to school-based education. It is obviously very important to make the education as attractive as possible because there are many other factors which inhibit attendance such as the lack of tradition of going to school and the early ages at which girls and boys get married. In EQUAL, new roles have been introduced to support these educational developments. There have been positive experiences of the use of “school mediators” who are recruited from the Roma community and provide a link between schools and Roma families that is built on mutual trust. School mediators encourage parents to send their children to school and offer advice on questions and problems that may arise. Working closely together with teachers and social workers, they accompany Roma children on their way to school, help them to engage in the life of the school and participate in school conferences and parents meetings. One DP has developed and tested, in cooperation with the educational authority, a modular curriculum for the training of intercultural school mediators that can now be used as a basis for certification and formal recognition of this new role. Another DP, in Spain, has organised school-leaver classes and the local regulations had to be changed to make the curriculum more flexible. In each instance, a teacher and a “monitor” worked with a group of 15 pupils with the teacher covering the compulsory subjects and the monitor being responsible for practical activities and excursions and visits. Breakfast was offered to help ensure attendance and by the end of the four month experiment, there had been a 70% reduction in absenteeism and the majority of pupils had “passed” the course.

### 3.3. EMPLOYMENT

*“Unemployment rates among these groups continue to be as high as 80% in some new Member States.”*

While EQUAL has trained and assisted Roma people to find permanent jobs in the normal labour market, it has also been involved in setting up social enterprises and in helping people to become self-employed or to work from home. Often, the training aims to enhance some of the interests or traditional, but unrecognised, skills of Roma such as, dress making, flower-selling, forestry or various agricultural pursuits and this subject-specific training is then backed up by additional training in the required administrative and financial procedures. Some DPs have produced a variety of support materials to assist this move to “independence” such as a briefcase for the self-employed that:

- Ensures that people know about their various obligations when self-employed;

- Provides a system for the filing of all the necessary documents like tax declarations, invoices and bills;
- Gives more information about how they can become more professional and can develop in their chosen field of activity.

In other situations, DPs have gone further and have either established a system of “micro-credits” for “would-be” entrepreneurs or have given equipment originally used for training to individuals or teams that seem to have a chance of making a living on the normal labour market. The emphasis on self-employment and setting up small cooperatives or firms reflects the working culture and practices of the Roma and on occasions, the result of EQUAL can be the transfer of an activity from the informal into the mainstream economy. In one DP, it was possible to negotiate with the local authorities so that an agreement was signed on a “social license for selling flowers” that legalised the situation of Roma women who sold flowers in the street.

### **3.4. PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

*“Severe problems in accessing social services” and “many Romani women face double discrimination and correspondingly low levels of access to health, education and other services.”*

Almost half of the EQUAL DPs that are working with Roma have recruited people from that community to act as “go-betweens.” A variety of different terms are used such as mediators or intercultural agents but these individuals are essentially the channels through which the DP communicates with the wider Roma community. These new roles have proved to be effective in ensuring that Roma people get to know about and can use a variety of different local agencies including healthcare and social services.

In addition, DPs have been working with the staff of other organisations in two different ways. One is to coordinate the activities of the variety of services that are, or should be, working with Roma, Travellers or Gypsies. In this way, these DPs can improve access to the services and at the same time ensure that Roma, Travellers or Gypsies are seen by these services to be legitimate clients. The second type of action is to raise awareness or even train the staff of other agencies or institutions. For example, one DP ran a course for Labour Offices’ employees, focusing on the integration of Roma and other minorities into the labour market and trained staff of children’s homes and reform schools (about 70% of pupils are of Roma origin) in social and intercultural education. Other DPs have been helping a range of people like teachers, trainers, social workers and employment officers to better understand the situation and specific living conditions of Roma people and thus, to offer more open and flexible services.

Despite all of these activities, EQUAL DPs have had little or no success in the area of housing. There is same story throughout Europe – most politicians and officials will not take the responsibility for housing a Romani family in the town or district that they work for or represent.

### **3.5. CAPACITY BUILDING**

*“One condition for the increased involvement of Roma in both policy and projects is the capacity of local groups and organisations to participate actively. There is an urgent need to empower Romani organisations and representatives, both politically and practically, in this field.”*

As indicated above, DPs are helping Roma people in their own efforts to find training, permanent jobs or other forms of employment or to access appropriate services. This emphasise on a “community development” type of approach recognises the bitter experience of a range of different projects that has shown that Roma people are rightly, very suspicious of any solutions that might turn out to be “window-dressing”. As one DP states, “In our opinion, only those employment projects and activities can be efficient, which were elaborated with the full involvement of the local Roma population.”

Thus, several EQUAL DPs have been active in strengthened the role of Roma organisations within their local towns and communities by providing them with training and advice or simply improving the office facilities or equipment that is available. One DP created a dedicated support structure through which people with specialised skills passed them on to the Roma NGOs so that their representation might be more effective. At the same time, the support structure acted as an

advocate and briefed other agencies and institutions on the potential contribution that these Roma NGOs could make to local decision-making. Other DPs have provided more formal training so that people can perform more effectively on behalf of the Roma organisation for which they work. For example, training was provided in one project for these organisations' leaders and activists, who had already been undertaking roles in the life of the local community, and who then became able to give effective professional assistance in the implementation of employment initiatives. Another DP trained people to become planners and organisers of Roma activities and programmes.

### **3.6. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*"In a number of areas, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, Romani issues are particularly pressing in areas targeted for regional development. Northeast Hungary, central and eastern Slovakia and southern Poland are all areas in which, on the one hand, poverty is widespread and infrastructure is poor, and, on the other hand, Romani populations are particularly large."*

In Hungary, at least two of the EQUAL DPs have adopted a regional approach in their work and have ensured that their training and employment activities are closely related to the needs of the labour market. One DP carried out a market analysis with a questionnaire being applied to local authorities, employment centres and educational authorities. This resulted in a structured and thematic view of the local labour market, the most important community needs, the opportunities offered by the main employers and the training and employment programmes that were being provided in the region. Thus, the vocational training that was developed by this project was targeted at sectors or trades revealed by the survey and took account of short and long term plans for economic development, which included the building of cold-storage units and the planned construction of a highway towards Slovakia. Another DP started from the basis of the strategic and operational programmes that had recently been established by the Regional Development Council. A model regional network model was created that integrated both a geographical and sectoral approach focusing on the development of the regional food industry. Through this network, vocational training was offered to 76 people in the processing of poultry, dairy farming or vegetable growing.

## **4. POLICY MESSAGES**

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Though comprehensive and reliable statistical data is not yet available at EU level, there is ample evidence that the Roma and Sinti communities are strongly exposed to different forms of open or latent discrimination throughout the European Union – possibly more than any other ethnic minority. Much less evidence exists of models of good practice that can be used more widely to successfully support their integration. Every effort should therefore be made to identify and validate relevant good practice from EQUAL, and present it in a way that can effectively inform decision makers in the design and implementation of new integration policies.

Possibilities should be explored and action taken, at EU level, to articulate the work of EQUAL related to Roma with relevant activities launched under the auspices of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The European Commission should encourage all Member States to address Roma, Gypsies and/or Travellers as a target group for the purposes of their National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and Employment and any other relevant policy frameworks.

The European Commission and the Member States should make a particular effort to use and develop the arrangements that exist for monitoring the practical implementation of the Race Equality Directive and the Framework Employment Directive, in order to identify and follow up any instances of evident discrimination against Roma and Sinti people. This process should be supported by regular structured exchange of experience and reporting.