

3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR

Stepping up Institutional Capacity for Roma Inclusion in the Danube Region

Workshop summary			
Date	27.06.2014		
From:	11:15	Until:	12:05
Place:	Vienna City Hall, Room 4		
Facilitation	Ivana Lazic, INTERACT Point Vienna		
Panel - Speakers	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sever Avram, Coordinator of the Platform of Local Communities along the Danube River in Romania, Eurolink <p><u>Roma Inclusion in the Danube Region: challenges and opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ilona Negro, DG Justice, Non-discrimination policies and Roma coordination unit • Daniel Vasile, President of National Agency for the Roma – Government of Romania <p><u>Discussion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jörg Mirtl, Priority Area 10 • Susanne Pfanner, Austrian National Contact Point for the Roma Strategy, Austrian Federal Chancellery • Iolanda Mihalache, President of PartNET Association 		
Number of Participants	50		

1. Focus of the Session

Identification of synergies between the Danube and the Roma strategies, with a focus on structural prerequisites for Roma inclusion in the Danube Region, e.g. the cooperation between public institutions and civil society organisations.

The majority of the Roma in Europe live in the Danube Region. The workshop provided a focussed approach and draw the attention mainly to the following dimensions of Roma inclusion:

- 1) Links between Roma strategies and Structural Funds
- 2) The role of local authorities and cities in relation to Roma inclusion
- 3) Transnational exchange of experience in the Danube macro-region

2. Main Messages of the Speakers

Sever Avram, Coordinator of the Platform of Local Communities along the Danube River in Romania

Beyond of any mental or cultural stereotypes, the question of social inclusion of Roma minorities is a historical one, very old and of a high complexity. The solution for this problem needs to come from a communitarian, non-hypocritical perspective. It is important to mobilise existing resources and to redesign the process as EU Public Policies at various levels (education, human resources, social assistance, partnerships with NGOs and international institutions, stimulation of the economy, etc.)

From a demographic perspective and in times of food crises, it is obvious that we cannot let things get out of control. Political movements, also in the EU, like ultra-populist forces gaining more and more power, show us the need for change. The social gaps are deepening and social inclusion of Roma needs to be pushed forward. It is not only a matter of Roma elites or specialised NGOs; it is a problem of various majorities and minorities.

It is also important to recognise that there exist extremely deep discrepancies in terms of interests, views or incomes, even between certain Roma groups or elites.

Neither Europe nor our macro-region needs new barriers. We strongly believe that the EUSDR could radically change the necessary integrative approach and achieve a required homogeneity of the perspective, towards a common solution for all involved parties. A long process of re-learning, mutual tolerance, inter-consultation and social mediation should be triggered, in accordance with a well-established EU framework strategic plan.

Ilona Negro, DG Justice, Non-discrimination policies and Roma coordination unit

The DG Justice of the European Commission is responsible for the Roma policy and addresses various topics in order to tackle specific problems such as anti-discrimination, social welfare, housing, income, etc.

Until 2011 the situation of the Roma was not one of the EU's priorities. In 2011, the EU Framework on Roma Integration Strategies, endorsed by the European Council, was established. The four main topics of this framework are:

1. access to education
2. employment
3. housing
4. healthcare

The Roma Integration Strategy is coordinated by the European Union, but leaves space for national interpretations by the Member States. The implementation is based on three pillars: 1. Legal base, 2. Policy coordination, 3. Funding.

Since 2011 reports on the implementation of the Roma Integration Strategy have been published. The main topics in 2012 were National Contact Points in the Member States, contact to local governments, the local civil society and use of funding by Member States. In **2013** an overview of the 4 areas of the Strategy was provided. Many projects on Roma inclusion have already started, the wheels are in motion.

Subsequently, EU recommendations were adopted and are now a legal commitment of all Member States. These implications are also compulsory for all future EU Member States.

Conclusions on funding:

- Lack of capacities on local and regional level (including civil society)
- Complexity and delays in the EU (problematic for new projects)
- Not all stakeholders included → target groups not always reached

Important topics for the future:

- Inclusion and Poverty are priorities of the European Social Fund (ESF)
- Connection of general and specific policy
- Focus on more funding
- Best practice transfer, capacity building

Daniel Vasile, President of National Agency for the Roma – Government of Romania

From 2009 – 2012, the National Agency for the Roma implemented 6 ESF project as Lead Partner and 4 as Project Partner, with following key-figures:

- Total value of the 6 ESF strategic projects: over EUR 22.2 million, out of which over EUR

18.6 million were financed from the European Union.

- Area covered: 541 communities all over the country
- Number of beneficiaries: over 37,000 people involved, out of which 25,000 Roma
- Topics addressed: lifelong learning, labour market and preventing early school leaving.
- Cooperation: For project implementation a close cooperation between public institutions, local Roma NGOs and international organisations is very important.

Important topics for the future:

- More improvements in the field of inclusion and attention to the Roma situation (officially there are 600.000 Roma in Romania, according to the World Bank, there are 1,5 Mio.)
- Raise of Roma students graduating from universities
- More educational and health mediators
- Building up a Roma platform consisting of public institutions and NGOs
- To implement the EU Roma Strategy, the Roma voice needs to be heard in the EUSDR

Jörg Mirtl, Priority Area 10: Institutional Capacity and Cooperation

Priority Area 10 is among others responsible for the Civil Society issues and better spending of EU funds Roma Integration is and should be a horizontal matter also in the EUSDR and civil society involvement is crucial in this.

- In addition to national programmes, transnational programmes also provide support for Roma Integration, e.g. the upcoming “Danube Transnational” programme or the URBACT III programme which is dedicated to cities.
- A high-level meeting for Roma Integration in relation to better spending of EU funds in this context will take place in October, which is jointly organised by the Austrian Federal Chancellery, the City Of Vienna (PA10) and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (PA9)
- PAC 10 also supports transnational projects via TAF-DRP (Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects) and START – Danube Region Project Fund (especially for small organisations, NGOs and local governments).

Susanne Pfanner, Austrian National Contact Point for the Roma Strategy

The Roma Community in Austria consists of two different types:

1. Community of indigenous Roma which are an official minority in Austria
2. Community of Roma who immigrated mainly from former Yugoslavia 40-45 years ago

At the moment there is 20 years of expertise in integrating the first group. Cooperation with the local civil society is close and since the minority was officially recognised, there is a dialogue between NGOs and national institutions (this dialogue is also legally required, which is a key to its success).

Iolanda Mihalache, President of PartNET Association

The mission of the PartNET Association - Partnership for Sustainable Development is to contribute to a sustainable economic, social and cultural development at local, regional, national and international level, in rural and urban environment.

With 10-12 million members, the Roma population is Europe's largest minority. Communities vary in terms of culture and religion, legal status, language, settlement models, and periods of migration. In many countries Roma show high levels of social exclusion from employment, education, health and social services; high rates of illiteracy; poor school attendance. Many Roma people live in segregated, isolated districts where overcrowding and a lack of basic facilities contribute to poor health. Due to lacking skills, education and entrepreneurship, Roma and poor people have only limited access to the formal labour market and to formal economic activities which results in poor quality of life. Best solutions for this problem are cross-border projects on Roma Inclusion. High emphasis should be put on civil society, education and training and inclusion of ethnic minorities from regions and municipalities in order to raise their interest for a change of the conditions.

The long-term goal is to foster economic development for the poor people and Roma community by using successful best practices, experiences and skills from other EU Member States.