Discrimination Learning Trajectory (Romaphobia or racism against Roma people)

We have synthesised our discussions and learning under three themes:
1. why understanding discrimination and in particular, Romaphobia and Roma emancipation, is necessary for Roma Inclusion;
2. what are the current barriers to addressing discrimination; and why some solutions are not effective;
3. what could realistically be done with SDC support.

Definition

We understand **Romaphobia** as a phenomenon present in all societies**,** independent of the presence or actions of Roma people; as historically constituted and functioning at all levels of society (individual, group, national, global). It is understood as a structural oppression, that is embedded in the structures of society and is based on economic exploitation of Roma for centuries; and relies on separation between Roma and non-Roma. Romaphobia is present in all institutions and policies of societies where it operates, and also in the minds of all people whether they have or have never met a Roma person.

Conversely, we understand **Roma emancipation** as the liberation of Roma from subordination, oppression, bias/prejudice and discrimination. Emancipation is the positive **action taken to end Romaphobia**, and it involves both Roma and non-Roma people.

Both concepts are equally important for Roma Inclusion work, as both coexist and create their own realities. In particular, we recommend that all Roma Inclusion work make efforts to end Romapobia and to promote Roma emancipation.

1. Why understanding Romaphobia is necessary for Roma Inclusion;

Roma Inclusion programs cannot ignore the objective phenomenon of Romaphobia, since to do so would mean ignoring an aspect of historically constructed reality and inevitably leads to incorrect or ineffective policies. The following aspects of Romaphobia are particularly important.

- **Romaphobia is independent of the presence or actions of Roma people, indeed it suggests an irrational fear of Roma**

'Phobia' suggests 'fear of the other', someone seen as different. There is a lot of discussion about the politics of fear. There is a collective fear that is created by segregation between communities sustained by distrust. Romaphobia does not speak to historical moments, it speaks to the current situation (McGarry). The essence of this discrimination is about the lack of understanding of the realities of Roma life, and the fear of Roma that comes from this.

- **Romaphobia or anti-Roma discrimination is present in all societies**

Romani activist: So I concluded that [anti-Roma] discrimination is universal. I just visited Finland and met Finnish Roma – who are a very small community. Finns are very proud of

their high level of tolerance. [but even in Finland], not many businesses are ready to employ Roma because they are scared they will steal – but there are no real cases when that happened. So even in Finland with its democratic values where Roma have lived so long, they are still treated differently. So would it be possible to change situation in Kosovo, where the situation is more severe?

- **Romaphobia is historically constituted**

Discrimination against Roma has arisen as a historical process that started in the Middle Ages and continues to this day. It had particularly extreme manifestations such as the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian territories, the exclusion of Roma from Western Europe or the Romani Genocide in the Second World War. The origin of the oppression, as with white racism, seems to be economic.

Roma activist, Kosovo: 'It is typically expected of a Rom to work on the local Serb farm or household all day for no money at all. Instead he/she would depend on the mercy of the farmer or Serb family – how much to give them at the end of the day was up to the farmer. I started to realize that the Serbs were treating the Roma with no dignity, considering them to be people of second rate, not worthy of time or attention. Even now in my small village the best Roma in the village is one guy who still works for these Serbs for morning to evening for whatever they give him. The Serbs consider him 'the best Roma in the village' the rest who don't want to work for the Serbs are 'bad Roma', they are seen as rebellious/traitors. You are not regarded as a good person if you don't work as a servant. '

- **Romaphobia functions at all levels – individual, group, structural**

Roma activist, Hungary: 'The way the police deals with Roma people living in Roma settlements is very different from how they deal with non-Roma. Hungarian Liberties Forum knows these cases very well. There was a case that happened with a Roma man who was beaten in a pub by non-Roma people. Later on the way home from the pub on his bicycle he fell down and he died. Everyone knew he died because he was beaten and that he was beaten because of being Roma. When police was asked to do something they took no action, simply did not investigate, saying 'he was a Roma, he was an alcoholic, it was a pub brawl'. The relatives went to county police who said the case had to be investigated. The local police investigated but were very rude to the family of the victim, they closed the door in front of them, they spoke about Roma very rudely.

2. What are the current barriers to addressing discrimination in Roma Inclusion work; why some solutions are not effective

Romaphobia, as a structural phenomenon, is present in the actions of all development practitioners, in state and development policies; including in SDC programs and policies. This leads to some solutions proposed for Roma Inclusion work not being effective, unless they also address the structural discrimination against Roma and actively promote Roma emancipation.

Some examples of how Romaphobia undermines programs and policies, drawn from all three learning trajectories:
- Roma activist, Kosovo: 'They [development organisations] don't actually do the screening of [non-Roma] individuals who work there to find out whether they

actually believe in change, they just give the organization the project to run without making sure that staff who work there believe in Roma inclusion. This is why change does not come. Very often you have these projects run by completely wrong people. You need to screen staff, you need to ask openly when you recruit them – 'what do you think of these [Roma] people'.

- Any meaningful work with Roma communities needs to engage with the institutional racism that means Roma local experts are not given any powers. This calls for a better understanding of the power relations: why do some actors within the local authority block the local expert from having any real power to help to resolve issues in Roma communities?
- Programs focused on vocational training, mediating between people and market, found it was more difficult to work with Roma because of discrimination in the labour market. Projects artificially employed Roma for a month, paid the employer to employ Roma, and very soon they kicked out the Roma, or they left because salary was minimal without investment in further training. Less than 10% remained in employment. The problem is the design but the result is that Roma are scapegoated as not wanting to work. But what you need to ask are those the jobs that Roma really want?
- Some government programs (eg public work programs in Hungary that force unemployed people to work for sub-minimum wage in exchange for benefits); some policies and practices of state enforcement by police; and segregated education are inherently discriminatory and replicate and perpetuate old structures that arose because of and in support of Romaphobia. Without an awareness of structural discrimination, development programs such as those promoted by SDC, can inadvertently perpetuate structural discrimination.

3. Recommendations for SDC programs to address Romaphobia and promote Roma emancipation

Because Romaphobia operates at different levels, solutions must also come at all the following levels:

Individual level:
- Anyone working with Roma must learn about the history and background of Romaphobia in our societies.
- In particular, SDC can support its staff and partners to process the historical lore and prejudices that we have all been handed down, and which perpetuate Romaphobia. For example, in Romania, every year a coordination meeting is held with the executing agencies of the projects supported by SDC. Romaphobia could be a dedicated theme for one of these meetings. This could be followed up with the learning trajectory method where staff and partners engage through online meetings to further their learning on the subject.
- Listening to Roma colleagues and activists and reflecting about one's own stereotypes and prejudices and is an excellent way of informing SDC staff about the realities of discrimination.

Programmatic (internal SDC) level:

- All Roma Inclusion interventions need to come to grips with Romaphobia. When designing new programs, SDC could introduce an element of addressing discrimination in the program design. For example, M&E could ask direct questions about Romaphobia to gather data on this subject that could inform programming; SDC partners could be required to prove that their interventions avoid perpetuating discriminatory structures such as segregation; and actively promote Roma emancipation.

- It would be great to have a policy brief on Roma emancipation written directly for SDC to formulate concrete SDC policy making on Roma Inclusion issues in Europe; addressing Romaphobia and promoting Roma emancipation.

- Use participatory methods to engage with Roma people in identifying indicators of change. SDC should organise better for learning through direct contact with Roma, for example through more field visits to find out directly how SDC's programs work in the context of Roma discrimination.

- SDC could develop closer links through potential study visits to politically active and effective grassroots Roma-led organisations.

- Retain Roma activists' expertise in some formal way in SDC's programs. This could be done by actively encouraging recruitment of Roma staff and/or by setting up a formal advisory body of Roma activists who work in SDC partner organisations.

- SDC could organise a Roma Inclusion seminar with a specific focus on discrimination, because this topic is one that needs deeper reflection time. Specialists in Romaphobia could be invited to facilitate such a seminar. The learning trajectories have built the groundwork to make such a dedicated seminar possible.

Structural level (working with partners and sate structures):

- Romaphobia needs to be addressed at the structural level, structures need to change. 'We should NOT change the Roma, but rather the institutions' (Iulius Rostas)

- To do this, SDC could learn from other partners and donors how develop programs that focus on Roma emancipation. For example ROMED/ROMACT have tried and tested methods for initiating dialogue between Roma communities and Local Authorities in order to create local joint action plans based on issues that directly improve conditions for Roma communities; NDI has developed programs to set up and sustain effective local Roma action groups; IDS has a wealth of experience in supporting participatory action research, including with Roma communities.

- The proper implementation of any such programs requires real commitment from decision makers at local, national and international level. SDC could act in policy making at high level through diplomatic dialogue between countries, with the help of Swiss and other Ambassadors.

- SDC could also build partnership at local level with Mayors and promote these agreements with other countries at national level.

- Address discrimination across all SDC projects, in civil society, in health fund, and if there will be future funds discrimination should be monitored in the programs. The best way to monitor this is to ask community members directly about their experiences of discrimination; using participatory monitoring and evaluation.

- 'Systemic change means working on change at national as well as local levels: you need to work with the ministries. We have explored a lot about what is inside the Roma community, now we need to go outside, and understand how to work with ministries and councils on how they want to initiate this systemic change, to change the mentality, to have public awareness about discrimination. This means addressing discrimination systemically, in laws, in policies and in social practices. ' [Women's empowerment LT]

Useful links and resources
- The Great Shame https://vimeo.com/225881913 - a play about Roma Slavery in Romania by Alina Serban
- Romaphobia by Aidan McGarrry https://www.zedbooks.net/shop/book/romaphobia/
- Gerhard Baumgartner presentation to Centre for Holocaust Education, UCL, http://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/subject-knowledge/history-roma-genocide/
- Alliance against Antigypsyism, *A reference paper on antigypsyism* http://antigypsyism.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Antigypsyism-reference-paper-16.06.2017.pdf
- 'The best Roma in the village is the Roma who works as a servant', by SZILVIA RÉZMÜVES, ISAK SKENDERI, and VIOLETA VAJDA, Open Democracy, 7 April 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/szilvia-r-zm-ves-isak-skenderi-violeta-vajda/best-roma-in-village-is-roma-who-wor