



SDC strategic learning brief

Learning from SDC's Roma Inclusion work for future programming

Summary

While SDC programming for Roma Inclusion has demonstrated concrete and encouraging results from some initiatives, effectiveness has been uneven. This is for two key reasons. First, the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization faced by Roma communities (deep social, economic and spatial exclusion, discrimination from the majority society, and lack of political will by the authorities) present complex challenges for development interventions. Second, the implementation of Roma inclusion programming often lacks sufficient grounding in development good practices such as participatory approaches (empowerment) and systemic approaches, which can support Roma empowerment but also build the capacity of government officials to respond to the needs of all marginalised groups, and provide more sustainable outcomes.

We therefore propose **both to consistently mainstream social inclusion** (including of marginalized Roma) in all relevant Swiss programs, **and to address the situation of Roma through special programmes that directly promote Roma inclusion**. These two approaches can work together in a systematic and systemic approach to addressing the multiple exclusions and discrimination faced by Roma, especially Romani women.

This note provides detailed recommendations on i) combining specific interventions with policy mainstreaming; ii) adopting a systemic approach; and iii) working with an empowerment approach. These recommendations are based on findings from our collective thinking (Roma seminars) and reflective practices (learning trajectories). They should be complemented, validated and/or adapted by the final evaluations of the Swiss programs in Bulgaria and Romania. The purpose of this note is to provide strategic guidance for SDC programming before starting bilateral negotiations.

Background to Roma Inclusion

Deep and entrenched inequalities between Roma and majority population persist across the Western Balkans and Central Eastern Europe. The population pyramids comparison between Roma and non-Roma neighbours (World Bank Romania 2014:6) highlight the inequalities and levels of poverty experienced by the Roma population in terms of access to services and human development. This is despite a decade of prioritizing Roma Inclusion in Europe, which suggests that a shift in approach is required (UNHCHR 2014).

This measurable evidence supports the key arguments made by the Council of Europe and the Strasbourg Declaration, for a multi-dimensional approach which recognises the importance of tackling discrimination at all levels ([EU Framework 2020](#))¹. The core values of the European Union include

¹ The Common Basic Principles were first presented at the European Platform for Roma inclusion in Prague in April 2009. On 8 June 2009, the Council of Ministers in charge of Social Affairs annexed the Principles to their conclusions and invited Member States and the Commission to take them into account.

human rights and dignity, non-discrimination and equality of opportunity as well as economic development (CoE Principle No 1). The World Bank report also reinforces the argument that Roma inclusion is in the interest of the majority society in terms of cohesion, economic activity and improvements in service provision for all.

SDC supported a process of sharing experience and co-generating knowledge among program officers in Western Balkan and New Member States about what works in Roma Inclusion programming between 2012 and 2018. This learning process among peers comprised four seminars, each held in a different country in the region, and three action learning groups which met virtually to discuss more specific aspects of Roma Inclusion. The learning gathered at these seminars and through the work of these learning groups, informs the following three groups of recommendations.

1. Ensure that specific programs to address Roma inclusion are combined with a mainstreaming² approach

SDC should plan for **both** specific programs promoting the inclusion of Roma (and marginalized groups) **and** consistent mainstreaming of social inclusion (including Roma) across its programs with new member states.

Evidence from the literature on multiple and deeply rooted inequalities (poverty and inequality traps) shows that these are interlinked and are exacerbated by discrimination (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO (2016)). Therefore, where discrimination exacerbates other forms of marginalization, it should be explicitly addressed through special programming dedicated to Roma Inclusion; otherwise, there is a high risk of increasing inequalities. Other issues that can be addressed by special programming include segregation, catch up in education, and the challenges of working with large municipalities which lack the political will and small municipalities which lack the resources (and political will) to take actions to improve the situation of Roma communities. However, mainstreaming is also important and necessary to ensure the inclusion of all marginalized populations and reduce pressure from the majority population not to invest in Roma issues.

Discrimination

Discrimination against Roma is driven by a collective fear that is created by segregation between communities and sustained by distrust. It is known as antigypsyism or 'Romaphobia'. Romaphobia is a useful term because it communicates the essence of this discrimination, which is about the lack of understanding of the realities of Roma life, and the fear of Roma that comes from this. Romaphobia is present in all institutions and policies of societies where it operates.

Specific recommendations:

1. **Mainstream social inclusion across SDC programming** by improving staff capacities and awareness:
 - Ensure that staff have the skills and data to identify target groups, analyse their exclusion,

Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/108377.pdf

² By mainstreaming social inclusion in development programs we mean: 1) explicitly identify the excluded groups as target groups and analyze their exclusion patterns; 2) ensure they benefit from the program (by adapting its design or special measures); 3) regularly check progress through disaggregated monitoring; and 4) steer and adapt program design if change is not as expected.

and monitor their progress, especially through participatory approaches such as beneficiary assessment

- Ensure workforce diversity and hire staff from the targeted communities;
 - Promote the use of socially inclusive procurement³ (provided it conforms to the legislation) e.g. for project spending in infrastructure
2. **Support the universality of public services and address discrimination**
- Avoid division of 'Roma' and non-Roma services; good quality public services should be available to all. However, there is a balance to find: too much targeting can drive further stigmatization (because it is perceived as unfair or the success of Roma devalued as not seen as merit-based), universality can become an argument for no more affirmative action, no 'special' programmes, jobs or interventions. Without a special focus, Roma issues will always be secondary, or marginalized because they are a minority, but also because of institutionalized discrimination.
 - Roma inclusion requires working with majority populations as well as Roma, fighting prejudices, raising awareness and promoting social situations where Roma and non-Roma collaborate such as desegregated schools, and in the workplace.
 - Include discrimination awareness in all (Roma) inclusion programming, and that SDC develop indicators to measure progress in reducing discrimination
 - Identify and address racial discrimination discourse in all our work by providing training for SDC and partner staff (local authorities and civil society service providers) working with Roma communities. Inter alia, promoting the understanding that Roma often have to engage in difficult trade-offs to stay ahead of the oppression they experience.
3. **Recognise and continue with special programs** that have demonstrated that they are effective in addressing inequalities, for example:
- support for catch-up classes, education mediators, health mediators and health literacy programs, access to housing, access to the employment market. These special initiatives should not be one-off, but integrated into a strategic approach (see Section 2). The final evaluation of the Swiss funded Roma inclusion Funds in Romania and Bulgaria will indicate which sectors / specific interventions or combination are most likely to have impact.
 - 'Explicit but not exclusive targeting' (CoE principle no.3): our learning confirms that we need to focus on special programs with Roma people, but not to the exclusion of other people who share similar socio-economic circumstances.

2. Adopt a systemic approach to Roma Inclusion: supporting the government to fulfill its duties and strengthening CSOs to defend and realize (Roma) citizens' rights through service provision and advocacy⁴

A strategic and systemic approach to Roma Inclusion means **both** working with government (at national level with ministries, at local level with municipalities) to push for systemic change, **and** promoting meaningful participation of Roma at local government and community levels through

³ According to DIRECTIVE 2014/24/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 February 2014 on public procurement, the contracting authority may take into account some specific aspects during public procurement. Social inclusion and employability are specifically mentioned in the Directive.

⁴ This part is likely be substantially reworked based on results from the Roma inclusion Seminar 2018 and the analysis of the experience in Bulgaria.

working with NGOs and CSOs. This can be achieved by addressing discrimination and institutional barriers across the system.

At municipal level, municipalities often lack a strategic vision and commitment to Roma inclusion, and are likely to make decisions to maximize votes and funding. Donor priorities are not always grounded in community priorities and needs, and there is competition rather than coordination between actors in the field with municipalities 'shopping around' to find the best offer, rather than working strategically. Roma mediators and Roma local experts are often not able to be effective because of institutional discrimination and because they are not embedded and accountable to Roma communities. Employment initiatives fail because local firms do not employ Roma due to negative social stereotypes and perceptions.

Specific recommendations at municipal level:

1. In SDC programs with municipal institutions and service providers e.g. in education and employment, include a component on discrimination awareness training for teachers, employers etc.
2. Seek out and work with champions within local government. Tackle the lack of commitment to mainstreaming, and provide capacity building.
3. Embed economic inclusion initiatives in broader empowerment strategies which address discrimination amongst employers, and also build the capacity and confidence of Roma to secure employment or to operate as entrepreneurs.

At multiple levels:

4. Develop a systemic approach based on a sound contextual understanding of the drivers and barriers of laws, policies, practices and attitudes to Roma inclusion; identify where change needs to happen, and where national or local government, civil society organisations and other actors (e.g. other donors) can play a role.
5. Identify where skills and capacities need to be developed in the system, in order for sectoral initiatives for Roma inclusion to be sustainable, and to create a conducive environment for Roma empowerment.
6. Work at cross-national, national, local, and community levels to increase awareness, identify advocates and champions and reduce discrimination across the system. SDC has a strong track record in facilitating policy dialogue which can contribute to national and cross-national learning and awareness.

3. Adopt an empowerment⁵ approach which builds individual and collective capacities for sustainable community development⁶

(i) Emphasise Roma women's empowerment

We understand Roma empowerment as taking place through long-term individual and group processes which build confidence and capacities and link into community development; and also through working at the institutional level to support Roma to become leaders beyond the community. This also

⁵ We understand empowerment as the process of building capacities to address inequalities. It needs to take place at the personal and group level, and also at the institutional level. The models we found helpful are: 'Gender Equality & Institutional Change' (Just Associates), and the 'Capacity Development Butterfly' (SDC).

⁶ We understand community development as a broad framework, which includes empowerment and active citizenship. Community development happens through community empowerment, when the Roma community is able to dialogue with different stakeholders: other communities, local authorities, decision makers at local and national level, NGOs and funders, and when the Roma interlocutors in these dialogues are accountable to the wider Roma community.

means working with institutions to provide training and capacity building so that they are more receptive to emerging Roma leaders, and more responsive to the issues and priorities they articulate.

Women's empowerment needs specific attention, and is an essential component of sustainable Roma inclusion and community development. Gender equality as a transversal theme is not included in SDC's work with new member states. This results in lost opportunities and risks inadvertently strengthening exclusion patterns. Roma inclusion programs currently engage more women than men, but they are engaged in instrumental ways which do not promote their empowerment (or may only do so accidentally). For example, women are disproportionately represented in community initiative groups, but tend to be exploited as "good volunteers" and their stereotyped role as mothers and care-givers is perpetuated rather than explicitly supporting their development as leaders and decision makers. An empowerment approach means engaging with Roma women in ways which develop their skills and confidence to take on leadership and advocacy roles. Women's empowerment is necessary to achieve gender equality, and the findings presented here were endorsed by the SDC Gender Focal Point.

BOX: Roma women's empowerment

- **Roma women's empowerment is strategic for Roma inclusion.** It requires moving away from an approach to working with women as service providers, to supporting processes for women's empowerment.
- **Women's empowerment is a process** which needs to start by supporting women to grow their confidence and skills as individuals, and this is where most investment should be focused.
- **Supporting Roma women's empowerment requires awareness of discrimination:** avoid the risk of double exploitation through sexism from their families and through putting the burden of development projects on their shoulders. This means working with men, with decision makers, with non-Roma, with a focus on antigypsyism and women's oppression at the same time.

Strategic approaches to women's empowerment can have various entry points, and we need to be aware of how they can be linked, to maximise effectiveness and avoid instrumentalising or doing harm. Programs may start with economic empowerment or education, but need to be integrated and long term, to include community organising, tackling discrimination and with women's leadership as an outcome.

Specific recommendations

1. Link interventions to promote women's empowerment into a systemic and coordinated approach to Roma inclusion (See **Recommendation 2** above), working at national/institutional as well as local. This can include:
 - Support for Roma women's activism: create the enabling conditions for women to move into leadership roles in the community; support safe spaces for Roma women to meet and organise; be prepared to fund women's empowerment activities that do not have a direct link to development outcomes but which are strategic; support women's activism alongside projects that provide services.
 - Ensuring that women's empowerment is an explicit component of programmes for sustainable community development, to ensure that empowerment is a strategic goal rather than accidental.
2. Ensure that gender equality is a transversal theme with a strong focus on women's empowerment.
 - Build the capacity for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in all SDC programs for Roma Inclusion. This can be achieved through building capacity of all staff and executing agencies to understand, implement and monitor women's empowerment.

(ii) Embed special initiatives for Roma Inclusion into a broader community development approach

Special initiatives for Roma Inclusion (e.g. Roma experts, Roma mediators, local initiative groups) can lack legitimacy and grassroots support within the communities they seek to represent. This undermines their sustainability, and makes them vulnerable to be side-lined by local authority officers, or co-opted by politicians. Such special initiatives therefore need to be integrated into broader community development processes so that discrete interventions can enhance each other; for example, a Roma mediator post needs to be linked to support for grassroots community organising, as well as capacity building within the local authorities. This more systemic approach is more likely to lead to sustainable progress towards Roma inclusion.

Specific recommendations

1. Support grassroots processes that work with Roma communities to engage Roma as active agents of change and seek to develop their active citizenship
 - Prioritise building the voice and self-organisation of marginalised communities: self-organization is a critical precondition for the participation of excluded groups in the construction of a new inclusive social contract between them and their governments.
 - Link these empowerment initiatives into longer-term community development programming, which connects with Roma experts, mediators etc, to ensure that these roles are supported by and accountable to Roma communities.
2. Ensure that interventions are people-centered and cross-sector, so that progress in one sector can generate empowerment, capacities and positive synergies that reinforce progress in other sectors.
 - Identify sectoral 'entry points' (e.g. inclusive education, employment initiatives) and link these to each other
 - Build stronger synergies between initiatives for education, employment and active citizenship
3. Involve Roma as active partners in the next Roma inclusion programming, as part of the process of empowerment of Roma.
 - Provide training for LIGs and Roma NGOs in facilitation, community-based research, community development;
 - Include Roma NGOs as partners of consortia which can access SDC funds, to be included as executing agencies;
 - Support networking and peer-support/ training activities across Roma organisations;
 - Make use of networks of community development associations and community organisers (e.g. CEECN).
4. Develop and encourage participatory and adaptive approaches to project development, monitoring and evaluation (See Council of Europe Principle No.11 'active participation of the Roma').
 - Use Beneficiary Assessment as a key component of the project cycle, to enable Roma to set and monitor their own indicators of meaningful change.
 - Develop capacities for gender and ethnicity⁷ sensitive data collection, to monitor progress and understand and explain the links between racial, gender-based and economic marginalisation.

⁷ As far as politically / legally acceptable, otherwise use proxy like geographical origin in case of marginalized and segregated settlements

Further reading

Alliance against Antigypsyism, *A reference paper on antigypsyism* <http://antigypsyism.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Antigypsyism-reference-paper-16.06.2017.pdf>

Baumgartner, Gerhard: presentation to Centre for Holocaust Education, UCL
<http://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/subject-knowledge/history-roma-genocide/>

Council of Europe 'Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion'
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/108377.pdf

Gender at Work (nd) [Gender equality and institutional change](#). Just Associates. See also
<http://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

Howard, J. and Vajda, V. (2016) Inclusion as an Agenda for Transformative and Sustainable Change: Addressing Invisible Power through Reflective Practice. *IDS Bulletin*, 47: 5.

ISSC, IDS and UNESCO (2016) *World Social Science Report 2016*, Paris: ISSC, IDS and UNESCO.

Love, B (2000) Developing a liberatory consciousness. *Readings for diversity and social justice* 2.470-474. https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/intercultural/assets/dev_liberatory_conscious_001.pdf

McGarry, A. (2016) *Romaphobia* <https://www.zedbooks.net/shop/book/romaphobia/>

Rezmuves, S, Skenderi, I and Vajda, V (2017) 'The best Roma in the village is the Roma who works as a servant', <https://www.opendemocracy.net/author/szilvia-r-zm-ves>

Roma Rights Journal, 2/2015, Nothing about us without us? Roma Participation in Knowledge Production. <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf>

The Capacity Development Butterfly: Understanding and operationalizing empowerment
https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Poverty-Wellbeing/Documents/media_-_current_poverty_issues_-_understanding_and_operationalising_empowerment.pdf

World Bank (2014) *Diagnostics and Policy Advice for Supporting Roma Inclusion in Romania*.

Credits & acknowledgements

Special thanks for their commitment and contributions to the participants of SDC's learning trajectories between 2015-2018: i) on Discrimination (Daniela Dimitrova, Dalma Janosi, Isak Skenderi), Roma Women's Empowerment (Lili Gouneva, Cerasela Banica, Cristi Mihalache, Murisa Halilovic, Jean Michel Jordan, Laurent Ruedin), and Active Citizenship and Community Development (Cerasela Banica, Szilvia Rezmuvez, Dominique Be, Albert Memeti, Lajos Szabo, Laurent Ruedin) [with their permission] supported by Jo Howard and Violeta Vajda of the Institute of Development Studies (UK). Thanks also to the participants of the SDC Roma Inclusion seminars in Belgrade (2012), Bucharest (2015), Tirana (2016) and Plovdiv (2018).