

Summary of SDC Learning Trajectory: Discrimination

The goal of this learning trajectory was to deepen our understanding of discrimination against Roma and to discuss what SDC could do to address this discrimination. In the first meeting, we agreed on some learning objectives:

- Learn what individuals can do about discrimination;
- Test our ideas out in practice and bring examples of good practice to the meetings;
- Deepen relationships with Roma people involved in SDC partner organisations

Note: the members of this group are from Bulgaria and Romania. The views expressed reflect their perspectives.

1. Process (what did we do?)

We met 7 times between July 2015 and May 2016, although Dalma was not able to join us for the last one. We identified some sub-themes to discuss, and on one occasion invited Roma academic Iulius Rostas (Corvinus University) to talk to us about anti-gypsyism. Daniela and Dalma were able to reflect on field visits, and also on SDC programming and policy. We shared articles and documents, which we discussed. Especially useful were those giving a historical perspective on discrimination against Roma and also outlining how discrimination can be addressed in practice ('Towards a liberatory consciousness' by Barbara Love).

2. Substantive (what did we learn?)

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. Because of a lack of attention to this form of discrimination, it is often hidden and unacknowledged. Also important is intersectionality (someone can be Roma and a woman for example, and thus doubly discriminated against).

Iulius Rostas talked to us about anti-gypsyism – a special form of racism towards Roma people. Its core is a belief in the deviance of the Roma and can be analysed in different ways.

1st level of analysis

Key unaware assumptions:

- Orientalism of Roma – They are not part of the nation, EU etc.
- Nomadism of Roma - “They have it in their blood” statements
- Lack of identity of Roma – They are different but they do not have a clear identity.
- Backwardness of Roma – “They are not civilised”, they are considered too different to integrate.

2nd level of analysis – individual

What do people imagine when they hear “Roma”?

It depends on the country but usually it comes from our childhood and it is connected to the perception of something “dangerous”.

3rd level of analysis - Everyday experience with Roma

A single small incident of a bad experience with Roma, if unchallenged and unprocessed, can lead to racism.

4th level of analysis - Attitude, beliefs and values

We often have different standards for Roma and non-Roma. Eg equality in rights – we believe that Roma have equal rights but in practice we would rather keep them away and separate from the majority population.

5th level of analysis - Anti-gypsyism in institutions

Institutions create inequality between Roma and the others. Anti-gypsyism is embedded in institutions, thus it needs to be eradicated from there first. ‘We should not change the Roma, but rather the institutions’

Anti-gypsyism is about power, as evidenced by the impunity of perpetrators when using racial attacks and slurs. It lives in institutions, for example:

Education - teaches nothing or is biased about Roma

Police – set up to control the population, especially Roma, from disrupting society

Army – also produces a certain behaviour that is in line with national ideas of who is a citizen.

How to influence anti-gypsyism in practice?

Process is more important than outcome - policy is about embracing a process of social change.

Participation is key:

- gives people space to negotiate policies and ownership
- offers opportunities, responsibility and accountability
- give people the capability to engage in negotiations

Sometimes, certain approaches to integration can be exclusionary, the terms of integration can exclude people (Nicholas de Genova, Kings College University, London).

Education and health: Often educational institutions reinforce discrimination through assumptions that once a service is in place, it will lead to good outcomes for all groups using it. However, the soft skills of staff working in these institutions can counter or reinforce discrimination, often resulting in a deepening of the divide between Roma and non-Roma.

SDC programming and discrimination: There is little understanding in SDC programs how the work of executing agencies impacts on the experience of discrimination of Roma individuals and communities. Anecdotally, members of the group talked about how some institutional partners (eg municipalities or schools) can discriminate through not knowing how to address discrimination – through

inaction rather than actively – and this could be addressed through making discrimination an explicit topic with these partners.

3. Methodological (how did we learn, how did we find the process?)

The Learning Trajectory method was felt to be a good way to express our perceptions and explore these and their meanings and to get feedback from others, in a safe space. The opportunity for reflexivity was valued, to explore the assumptions we are each making about Roma. We discussed in more detail what we are doing in terms of Roma inclusion, we all shared experience with instances of discrimination and what we saw as possible solutions. We understood much better where discrimination comes from and some theoretical models of how to address it (through allyship, ie the deliberate attempt to raise our awareness of discrimination, analyse it and take action to combat it). We tried to come up with a new vision of development for example in terms of high quality education for all children, including Roma.

It was helpful to have a recording of each meeting, which we could refer back to and see what was discussed. It was considered very useful to reflect on fieldwork visits and recount how we saw discrimination affecting Roma, including feedback from Roma community members.

Relying on skype was difficult, because not everyone could use skype in the office and had to work from home or from a coffee shop. Still, it provided a valuable resource for our meetings.

When we evaluated the process, participants expressed:

- It would be important to find ways of monitoring discrimination in SDC programs especially at the field level.
- We saw particular instances of discrimination in the programs focused on education and health. We concluded that SDC needs to know what is happening in those schools and health centres that it supports, needs to ask questions about whether Roma children or patients are still discriminated against even when they have access to education and health services, and if there is such discrimination then SDC should work to address this. (eg if you compare the knowledge of Roma children and non-Roma children of similar ages, it is clear that the quality of education in segregated schools is worse. This means that quality of teaching in segregated schools needs to be improved through teacher training, awareness raising, etc)
- The overall quality of education and healthcare should be improved in Romania and Bulgaria, as the current quality of these services results in demotivated staff, small amount of creativity, and students and patients who are not served well enough by the system. The worst aspect is the lack of a service tailored to individuals, be they Roma or non-Roma. SDC should be advocating for educational and health care reforms that result in eg child centred education.
- We found that often the institutions that SDC works with (eg municipalities) because of hidden discrimination against Roma and lack of experience of work with minorities might find it a challenge to be involved in Roma inclusion programs. However, the power of example works well, eg

when more enthusiastic municipalities, which have achieved good results with Roma inclusion can communicate this, other municipalities can make substantive changes to the lives of Roma people with SDC support. In future, SDC should invest more in municipalities learning from each other. Trainings for municipalities should include the topic of discrimination and awareness-raising for civil servants. Bulgaria has allocated separate funding for this kind of seminars and will report back on how it went.

- We were able to discuss issues on which we had different views and identified in different ways

4. Next steps

- i. As horizontal issue, discrimination should be present in all our projects, in civil society, in health fund, and if there will be future funds discrimination should be monitored in the programs. We feel the best way to monitor this is to ask community members directly about their experiences of discrimination.
- ii. SDC should put more effort into monitoring whether education is good for all children, make efforts in that direction, concentrate on the soft skills of staff – We need methods, resources for monitoring this effort and corrective measures if things are not going well.
- iii. It's important to have more field visits to find out directly how SDC's programs work in the general of context of Roma discrimination. It would be difficult to judge this without direct contact with communities. Ambassadors could help with this effort by making visits to the field with SDC staff and raising awareness about Roma discrimination or using their convening power to educate SDC institutional partners.
- iv. To use participatory methods to engage with Roma people in identifying indicators of change. SDC should organise better for learning through direct contact with Roma. This is needed to ensure the quality of our work, and is important!
- v. To organise a Roma Inclusion seminar with a specific focus on discrimination, because this topic is one that needs deeper reflection time. Roma specialists in anti-gypsyism (Iulius Rostas, Corvinus University) could be invited to facilitate such a seminar.
- vi. Every year a coordination meeting is held with the executing agencies of the projects in Romania with certain topics of discussion. The learning trajectory method would be very useful for them – with follow up online meetings, plus discrimination could be a theme for these meetings.
- vii. Discrimination is one theme that could be picked up in future good practice exchanges. Has there been anything in the good practice learning trajectory that we can use? Have other groups noticed any discrimination in their learning and reflections?