



*Istruzione e cultura*



*Commissione Europea*



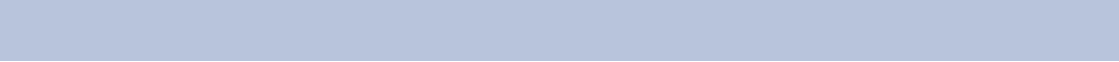
*Progetto STEP IN*

## **PROJECT STEP IN**

### Studying Training and Educational Paths for the Integration of young Roma

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“Roma: a possible integration”  
Pathways for the social and  
educational integration of young Roma



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## Foreword

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## FOREWORD

On the initiative of Caritas Ambrosiana as lead partner, 14 partners committed to the plight of young Roma's, have joined forces and committed themselves to design and implement an extra-curricular education package. Studying *Training and Educational Paths for the Integration of young Roma* otherwise known as STEP IN is the result of this commitment with the aim to increase school attendance and career prospects for young Roma kids between the ages of 13 to 18.

This publication presents the experience of all partners involved in STEP IN, reflecting synergies between different practices, contexts and methodologies from the 6 European countries where the partners were based.

The general basis of the project was formed by the *educational package*. The *educational package* was agreed between all project partners and guided each partner's implementation at local level. It was then evaluated and adjusted to meet the needs of the target group at different stages in the implementation of the project.

The definitions of the target groups and the descriptions of activities were different for each of the local projects. The main seven partners in STEP IN were: Caritas Ambrosiana, from Italy, Caritas Bucharest and Asociatia Aproapele from Romania, Bulgarisch-Deutsches Sozialwerk from Bulgaria, Secours Catholique from France, Diecezna Charita Nitra from Slovakia, Cordaid from The Netherlands and Caritas Europa based in Belgium.

All partners believed that education was one of the best ways to overcome isolation and the best-proven tool to integrate young Roma into the local community. Education should be seen as a tool to give the Roma access to the same chances as their peers, to develop mutual trust and to

encourage them to become active and responsible citizens. The STEP IN project set out to find and test new and innovative ways for integrating young Roma into the national education systems.

The aim of this publication is to provide useful and practical information for all those committed to improve the social and educational integration of young Roma in society. One of its main conclusions is that for any future projects of this kind, the right conditions for guaranteeing children's regular school attendance can be created, by setting up wide ranging, multi-dimensional programmes that involve the parents and include a wide range of official and unofficial local partners in the community.

*Claudia Biondi*  
*Project Manager*



# 1. Introduction

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

STEP IN is an acronym for *Studying Training and Educational Paths for the Integration of young Roma*. STEP IN was considered an appropriate name because it also means 'to enter', 'to intervene', i.e. to *step in(to)* society as citizens with full rights. On the initiative of Caritas Ambrosiana as lead partner, 14 other partners committed to the plight of young Roma's have joined forces to design and implement an extra-curricular education package with the aim to increase school attendance and career prospects for young Roma kids between the ages of 13 to 18. STEP IN was carried out by organisations of 7 European countries: Italy (Caritas Ambrosiana as lead partner in collaboration with social service providers and local associations), Romania (Caritas Bucharest and Asociatia Aproapele), Bulgaria (Bulgarisch-Deutsches Sozialwerk), France (Secours Catholique), Slovakia (Diecezna Charita Nitra), The Netherlands (Cordaid) and Belgium (Caritas Europa).

Now that the project is finished and all partners have evaluated their local implementation over the last two years, most partners have concluded that STEP IN has been a rewarding challenge. It has to be admitted that perhaps not all partners were fully aware from the start of how challenging working with young Roma could be. Supporting young Roma's in their schooling, providing them with perspectives for entering the labour market, encouraging them to participate actively in the local community, proved to be demanding tasks for all involved.

Although the target group was clearly defined as young Roma kids between the ages of 13 to 18, the approach chosen for this project dictated a much wider focus. Therefore, it was indispensable to equally inform and collaborate with parents, who were generally not formally educated and often unaware of the immense value schooling could have for their children.

Cultural differences had a great impact on the methodology of the project and often defied a successful outcome. One had to be aware that in dealing with the Roma, one was dealing with a cultural group that undergoes discrimination on a daily basis. As a result, Roma's tend to isolate themselves and are often suspicious of non-Roma people and of institutions. An example of a cultural challenge was the fact that many Roma people consider girls, aged 13-14, ready to get married and boys of that age ready to provide for a family.

Trying to fit these cultural customs and beliefs into a rigorous schooling system with strong bureaucratic requirements, has often led to failure in the past. However, experience has shown that education is one of the best ways to overcome isolation and the best-proven tool to integrate young Roma in the local community. Education should be seen and used as a tool to give the Roma access to the same chances as their peers, to develop mutual trust and to encourage them to become active and responsible citizens. In the light of the cultural challenges already described above, the project set out to find and test new and innovative ways for integrating young Roma into the national education systems.

In almost all European countries Roma children start school with considerable gaps in education in comparison to their peers. Their disadvantages get progressively worse, the older they get the more problems arise. Statistics learn that only 4 % of Roma youngsters finish secondary school, whereas less than 20 % finish compulsory education.

In Eastern European countries, young Roma are often relegated to so-called "special schools" (schools for children with mental and physical disabilities) and "ghetto schools" (schools attended only by Roma). In both cases, children receive a lower quality of education in comparison to their peers belonging to the majority ethnic group. Not only is integration evidently hindered by this practice, it also contributes to keeping Roma's illiterate or semi-literate.

Partners in this project were aware that family traditions and oral traditions play an important role in Roma communities. The family is seen as having a duty to pass on the richness of the culture to its youngsters. The traditions are kept alive by storytelling. The oral tradition in the medium through which knowledge and experience is passed on from one generation to the next. This oral tradition is a rich resource that Roma's carry with them and is too often undervalued by educators.

The racist attitude towards Roma people in schools, the labour market and community life, urged the partners in this project to design a project to improve education prospects and social integration for young Roma.

At first, the partners jointly produced an “educational package”, which served as a model for the planning of educational activities in this project. The concept of an educational package originated from the perceived need to find a common model that would form the basis for all partners in their planning and implementation of the project aims.

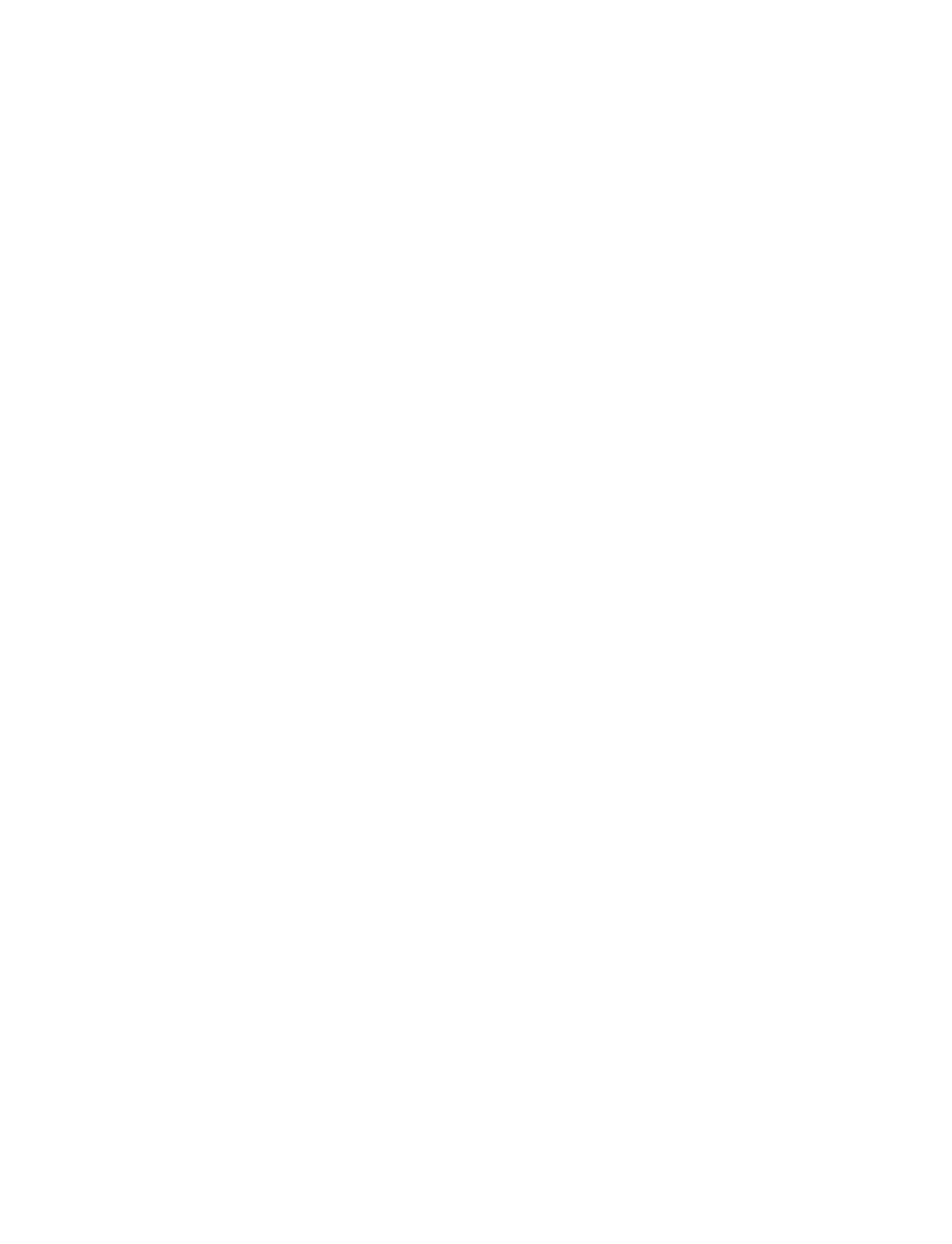
Although, the contexts in which Roma communities live in Europe strongly differ from one country to the next, all Roma communities are affected by similar problems in social integration. Almost everywhere Roma people are exposed to prejudice, hampering their integration. The situation is even worse for those Roma people who have recently migrated from Kosovo and Macedonia. In most cases these migrants are residing illegally in their new host countries and are unable to speak the language.

Flexibility was built into the educational package from the start, so that it could be modified according to the local context; to the local target group and to the resources available at local level. Thus, each partner was free to select the activities they deemed most suitable for the priority aims.

Overriding for all partners, however, was that the educational model contained three types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal activities.

Examples of such activities are: study support in school subjects, artistic and manual activities, sports, cultural activities, learning new approaches to work etc. The activities were always organised and performed in close cooperation with schools, local associations, voluntary organisations, parishes, public institutions, social services and commercial companies.

Finally, the educational package was tried and tested in the 6 different European countries represented by the project partners. The educational package was each time adapted to the circumstances and needs of the specific target groups in each of the countries.



## 2. The educational package

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## 2. THE EDUCATIONAL PACKAGE

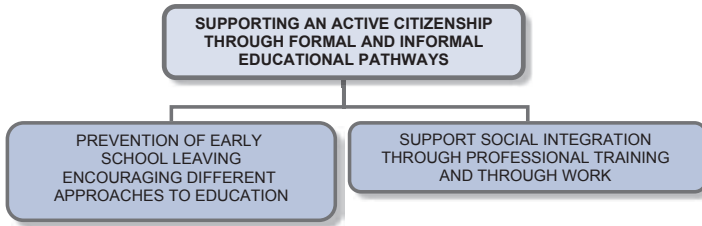
The educational package is the result of the experience of all partners of the STEP IN project, the final version of which is presented here. The following elements are essential:

- **acquaintance**
  - of the group (history, number of inhabitants, type of house...)
  - of the location where the target group lives
  - of the characteristics of the target group (age, education, family situation...)
- **needs analysis**
  - analysis of the needs of the group in general
  - identification of the needs of the target group
- **planning**
  - planning of the intervention area according to age, sex, and beneficiaries' characteristics and identified needs. Each intervention area must foresee activities aiming at educational, relational and didactic objectives.

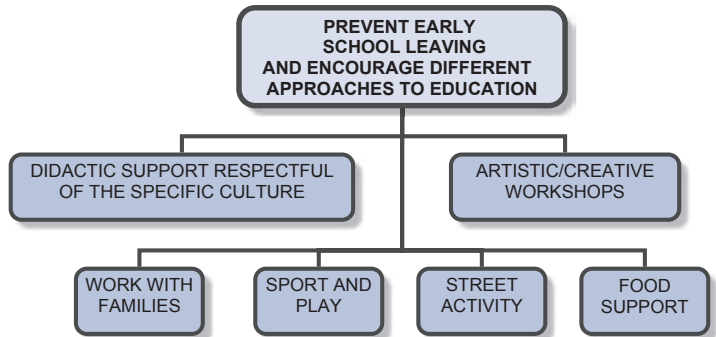
After a first phase of local implementation, the educational package was adapted, in order to meet new challenges that had arisen. An overall tool with an exhaustive range of objectives and activities was produced, allowing all partners to adapt the educational package to their own local context.

The general aim of the educational package was to support active citizenship through formal and informal educational pathways. This general aim was split into two more specific objectives:

1. to prevent early school leaving through encouraging different approaches to education
2. to support social integration through professional training and through work.



A series of activities and some implementation measures were outlined, together with a set of relational, educational and didactic sub-objectives.



### a. DIDACTIC SUPPORT RESPECTFUL OF SPECIFIC CULTURES

<b>What</b>	Learning themes that are related to different school rules and behavioural roles
<b>Where</b>	At school At home / In the office
<b>How</b>	In groups In small groups Individually Adopting different didactic methods, including new and experimental methods (materials and instruments: charts, texts...) Meeting parents Meeting teachers
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters between 13 and 16 Facilitators of the association Teachers Parents Roma / cultural mediator

#### Aims

- To learn a second language: from “Romany” to the national language (L2)
- To learn school rules
- To relate to the young “gaga”, to socialize
- To recognize and respect authorities and social roles

- To respect timetables
- To use and respect different spaces
- To motivate the young Roma to attend school and continue education / training
- To encourage an inter-cultural exchange
- To encourage and help the young Roma to achieve compulsory school leaving certificates.

## b. SPORT AND PLAY

<b>What</b>	Playtime and recreational activities
	Sport (e.g. football)
	Holidays
	Outings/excursions in the surroundings
<b>Where</b>	Parish youth club
	City facilities (e.g. swimming-pool).
	Locations where Roma's live
	Museums, theatre, cinema's, schools, organisation's building
<b>How</b>	In groups
	With children that are not Roma's
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters between 13 and 16
	Gage children
	Facilitators
	Other associations

### Aims

- To have fun/to relax/to join in
- To learn rules
- To learn to respect others
- To learn to respect and use different spaces
- To learn to collaborate and to cooperate
- To reduce discriminating attitudes
- To reduce or to manage conflicts
- To promote autonomy
- To gain enriching cultural experience
- To promote self-confidence and self-esteem

### c. ARTISTIC/CREATIVE LABORATORIES

<b>What</b>	Experimenting various artistic techniques
<b>Where</b>	Parish youth club
	At home
	In the head office of the association / other locations
<b>How</b>	In groups / individually
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters between 13 and 16
	Facilitators

#### Aims

- To promote the group's cohesion
- To develop the talents/abilities of every single person
- To involve young Roma into planning and management
- To promote participation
- To increase collaboration
- To increase creativity
- To learn new skills
- To valorise and use the elements / instruments of Roma culture

### d. STREET ACTIVITY

<b>What</b>	Walking on the streets and visiting the meeting points of the youngsters
<b>Where</b>	In the local area, in town (streets, pubs, yards, parks, meeting points)
<b>How</b>	Individually
	Groups of youngsters
<b>Who</b>	The team of the teacher and the Roma-Mediator
	The Roma-Mediator
	The youngsters of the target group
	Groups of other youngsters

#### Aims

- To follow/reach the young (especially: boys) of the target group

- To get to know the meeting points, the activities and the rules of street-life
- To recognise and to use the resources of street life
- To help the youngsters with the difficulties encountered in street life
- To give the possibility to youngsters to choose between street-life and participation in the activities of the project

### e. ACTIVITIES WITH FAMILIES

<b>What</b>	Regular visits to the homes of children during the implementation phase
	Selection of the target-group by visiting the families
	Meetings, info by the Roma-Mediator to the parents
	Party for the mothers on mothers´ day
	Evening for the Roma-family
	Meeting/Talking with the association SOS family
	Performance for the parents at the end of the implementation phase
<b>Where</b>	At home
	In the local area / in town
	At school
<b>How</b>	Individually
	In groups
	In (semi) public
<b>Who</b>	Roma-families in the local area
	The project-team and Roma-Mediator
	Staff of the school
	Other organisations

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#### Aims

- To get to know the families of the target-group
- To motivate the parents for the aims of the project and to get their approval for the participation of their daughters and sons
- Family-education
- To recognize and to use the resources of the families for the project

- To offer individual help for families in difficulty
- To follow/reach the girls of the target group
- To build up a network between families, school, project-team and other organisations
- To make positive memories for the youngsters and parents in the family
- To communicate the positive aspects as well as the difficulties of the Roma-families to the gage

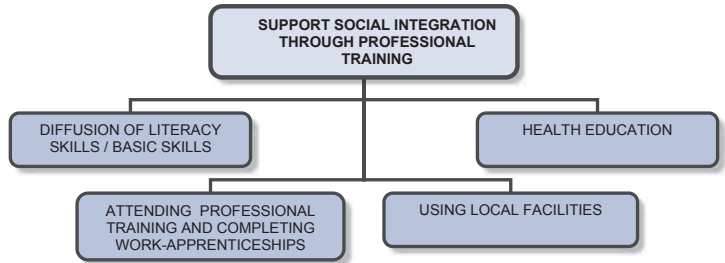
### f. FOOD SUPPORT

<b>What</b>	One meal per day, preferably lunch
<b>Where</b>	At school
	In the quarter
	In town
	Picnic outside of town
<b>How</b>	In the group
	In smaller groups
	Individually (if in need)
	Using the school canteen
	Delivering food from a kitchen or restaurant to the school
	Buying food at: grocery, supermarket, newsagent's
	The children and project-staff do the cooking themselves
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters between 13 and 15
	Staff of the school
	Project-staff
	Parents + volunteers
	Kitchen, restaurant, grocery, supermarket, newsagent's

#### Aims

- To satisfy a basic need for food by hungry youngsters
- To build up a sense of community by eating together at a table
- To learn cooking

- To get to know healthy food
- To learn to shop for food
- To learn to plan a meal and to work with a budget
- To motivate pupils to attend the activities of the project regularly
- To motivate parents to send the pupils to the activities of the project regularly



### a. DIFFUSION OF LITERACY SKILLS / BASIC SKILLS

What	Oral and written national language (L2)
	Knowledge of maths
	Knowledge of civics and specific legislation
	Guidance on getting to know and use community facilities
Where	Clean locations
	Their own homes
	Local area
How	In small groups
	Creating a personalized plan
	Building trustworthy relationships with the facilitators
	Choosing specific didactic methodologies
Who	Uneducated youngsters between 13 and 18
	Facilitators
	Educational bodies
	Parents
	Teachers

#### Aims

- To learn the national language (L2) orally and in writing
- To learn some preparatory elements for attending courses and to obtain a leaving certificate
- To break out of the isolation of the ethnic group, above all for girls
- To strengthen their self-esteem
- To promote cultural exchange
- To develop knowledge of the local area and its facilities

## b. ATTENDING PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND COM- PLETING WORK-APPRENTICESHIPS

<b>What</b>	Enrolment in an educational body
	Didactic and educational support arranged with an educational body
	Integration into the labour market (apprenticeship or work-scholarship)
<b>Where</b>	Public and private educational bodies
	Work places
<b>How</b>	Public and private educational bodies
	Monitoring the pathways
	Networking between facilitators / tutors / employers / youngsters
	Work-tutoring
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters
	Educational bodies
	Teachers
	Facilitators
	Parents
	Employers
	Work and study colleagues

### Aims

- To reduce the cultural gap between the young Roma and gage
- To achieve a more profound level of education
- To open possibilities for further education
- To obtain technical skills
- To dispose of a fair income
- To strengthen self-esteem
- Cultural exchange in a wider context
- To reduce reciprocal stereotypes
- To reduce discrimination
- To encourage responsibility and to create a deeper awareness
- To recognize workers' rights and duties (working hours, paid sick-leave, paid holidays)
- To build a relationship between employer and apprentice
- To validate already acquired skills

## C. USING TERRITORIAL SERVICES

<b>What</b>	Acquaintance with public and private services (citizen's advice bureaus, hospitals, police headquarters, treasury, health services, social services etc.)
<b>Where</b>	Local area and local town
<b>How</b>	Explanation and guided visits Initial mediation between facilitators and Roma users Check of the access and of the correct use of services
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters Services Operators Parents

### Aims

- To learn to move independently in the local area
- To use local facilities appropriately
- To break out of isolation
- To become aware of a citizen's rights and duties
- To increase a feeling of belonging to the community

## d. HEALTH EDUCATION

<b>What</b>	To be aware of the importance of health
<b>Where</b>	School
<b>How</b>	Groups
<b>Who</b>	Youngsters between 13 and 16 Facilitators Teachers Parents

### Aims

- To learn/to get used to the main requirements for hygiene
- To appreciate the role of hygiene for themselves and for their relations with others
- To know the main factors that influence one's health
- To prevent infection (food poisoning) and to avoid infectious diseases

### 3. Description of local implementation

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### 3. DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

#### STEP IN Bulgaria

The project took place in Varna, the local area is called Maksuda. The Roma community here lives in segregation. Many are poor.

##### **The Target group**

Two thirds of the children belonging to this Roma minority “Chorachané” are Bulgarian Muslims, who speak Turkish. One third speaks Romany. They are orthodox Christians.

The youngsters targeted in this project were in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> year in the Otez Paisii School, Varna. This school is attended for one hundred percent by children from the local Roma communities.

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Overall, 15 young people have been involved in the project. In the beginning the group changed several times because some children did not attend the project regularly and left. The children in the group were between 12 and 15 years old, with a strong majority of girls. As the group was rarely complete, the project was opened for children from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year who were present at school every day and who wanted to join the project’s activities. As the Bulgarian state offers extra-curricular classes after the official school time for younger children, they were already used to staying at school in the afternoon, whilst many older pupils had already given up staying in school after school hours. Together with these children, the group counted 20 pupils in total.

##### **The local project**

In Bulgaria the STEP IN project focused mainly on motivating and helping Roma-children with the educational contents of the Bulgarian curriculum. Furthermore, it focussed on social and cultural integration through extra-curricular activities. The project activities aimed to support children with the

following subjects: Bulgarian (language and literary), mathematics, chemistry, history, nature and physics and biology. The support was necessary as the young Roma involved in the project often had missed out on basics taught in first year, even though they had been registered at school during this time.

Complementary activities carried out within the project realms were:

- Learning “free” subjects like English (which is not taught at school for children of this age), computers, health education, religious traditions pupils’ rights and duties Roma culture
- Sports
- Creative work (workshops in writing, painting, singing and dancing)
- Excursions and cultural activities: going to the museum or to the theatre and reading famous Bulgarian literature together
- Professional orientation
- Getting to know public institutions in- and outside their segregated local area
- Meetings with parents about the importance of the activities of the project, the importance of education and discipline and discussions about what role the parents could play in the education of their children
- Food support (one warm meal per schoolday)

**Negative points / difficulties:**

The school is in the segregated local area and is only attended by Roma children. Gage and children who are not pupils of the school are not allowed to be present in the building on a daily basis. Therefore it was not possible to build up an intercultural group.

Another difficulty was the irregular attendance of the children at school and at the project.

To overcome this problem, employees of the project as well as teachers of the school made visits to the children's homes and helped parents to find ways of solving their problems. The parents had an open attitude towards them.

Studying, training and educational activities should not be started with a perspective shorter than 10 years. The development of trust and success in life cannot take place in two years. "Gaps" experienced in childhood cannot be repaired in two years. It is important to assure sustainability of these kinds of projects and activities.

The "Ethnocentricity" in the Bulgarian school-system, as well as the lack of intercultural training and understanding at school for other cultures, including the Bulgarian culture, formed a big setback of the project.

The contents of the schoolbooks, as well as the teaching methods and the schedules at school were not sufficiently adapted to the life-style of Roma children. Food in the school-canteen could only be given to those children whose parents could pay it. Books for elderly pupils had to be bought by the parents as well.

#### **Positive points / strengths:**

The school had a long experience in working with children of Roma origin. It was open to new projects and looked for different ways of leading the way for children to become equal citizens in civil society.

All pupils involved in the project finished their school year successfully. Their performance really improved thanks to the project; their marks ranging from very good to average. None of the children received bad marks.

An important success was also achieved with a group of pupils of the 8th year, the last class of compulsory education.

Some of them did not attend school regularly, others had little success and were sometimes absent. Thanks to the daily work of the project with them and their parents, the school was able to keep them involved till the end of the year, which meant they could finish their 8th year with success. An important incentive for keeping them at school was the free lunch provided, sports, excursions, computer- and English-courses and various cultural activities. The activities involved for job-orientation were also seen as helpful. Some pupils will go on to attend a vocational training course, such as hairdressing, others are thinking of going into secondary school.

Experience has shown that many of the project's extra-curricular elements helped in motivating children to attend school, especially the creative and outdoor learning activities. These activities motivated the children to behave better and to obtain better marks at school with the result that the teachers became more attentive to the pupils' difficulties and joys.

The fact that the team of the project was intercultural (Bulgarian, Bulgarian-Roma, German) was enriching. The Bulgarian-Roma mediator of the project, and the author of the book "the world and the gypsies", was born in the segregated local area himself and "stepped in" educational, social and cultural life of society. He is an example that "integration" – even if he does not like the word! – AND preserving the genuineness and authenticity of Roma-culture is possible, provided we give a chance to each child to choose his own way!

The networking with other institutions in the framework of the project meant having the possibility to find reliable allies, to strengthen the network for children in Varna and to apply together for new projects.

The foundations Liebenau and St. Franziskus Heiligenbronn will guarantee the continuation of the project till the

end of the school year 2007/2008, to enable the pupils of the 5th and 6th year to end up in the 8th year so as to be prepared to enter a secondary school. The older pupils will be supported and guided with their training, education and employment from now on.

## STEP IN Romania

The project took place in a village called Cojasca, 45 km from Bucharest. About 3500 people live there, the majority are Roma people. They have electricity (even if some of dispose of it illegally), heating (coal and wood) and water (wells/fountains). Not many people own a car. Many use horse and carts for different jobs and for getting around. Almost all people in Cojasca have seasonable jobs building little brick house furnaces.

### The target group

The two Romanian partners, Association Aproapele and Caritas Bucharest collaborated with the Foundation for People Development (FDP) for implementing the activities of the project at local level. The Foundation for People Development has been running a large Community Development Programme since 1998. The activities from the STEP IN Project formed part of this Programme in the village of Cojasca.

- Association Aproapele financed the activities with 54 young pupils attending the 8<sup>th</sup> year of compulsory education. The Target group was formed by Roma and Romanian children to avoid separation the two groups. For this reason the activities could not be targeted only to children that were officially declared Roma people (however, the majority of the target group are Roma people).
- Caritas Bucharest worked with a group of 30 girls aged between 14 and 16, who specialized in tailoring.

### The local project:

The activities with the two target groups were very similar. The aim of the project was to prevent early school leaving, to encourage further education and to help young Roma's to approach the world of work. The organizations Association Aproapele, Caritas Bucharest and FDP believed these children should be offered alternatives on how to get on in

the world. They decided they wanted to help them develop an inner motivation for wanting to get more out of life. For this reason they planned the following activities:

- Didactic support, to help youngsters to finish their school year successfully, perhaps even opening up possibilities to continue education in a secondary school.
- Job orientation and professional training: the project aims at showing the young pupils which job possibilities would be available once they have finished school. It is important that they are aware of the variety of jobs from which they could choose. They should not be bound to do the same job as their parents. The job orientation was offered to them after school hours consisting of individual counselling, group counselling, visits to different secondary schools and job places, meetings with different professional models.
- Health education, which consists of lessons of different specialists to meetings where they were talking to children about various themes: hygiene, nutrition, sexual diseases (some students are affected by AIDS), effects of cigarettes and alcohol on the human body.

**Negative points / difficulties:**

- Indifference of parents regarding their children's education. There was a necessity to work closely with the parents, because they are the first people who should advise/stimulate their children to aim at a better life through education.
- The short term nature of the activities: it is difficult enough to start these kind of activities, which is why it is important to keep them going as it is the only way to get results for the long term. There are not enough resources to motivate these children on a continuous basis.
- Delays: sometimes the activities were delayed, because of deficiencies in communication/collaboration.

Deadlines had been decided on and had been agreed by all partners of the project, but were not always met. This sometimes jeopardised our credibility with the local partners. It was felt that more time was needed for the reports and the evaluation, especially as these were construed with the involvement of the beneficiaries.

- Absence of collaboration from some of the teachers: the collaboration with teachers suffered from economic and cultural differences. The teachers commuted daily from places 40 km beyond Cojasca, sometimes they received expenses for their travel from the local authorities, sometimes they did not. The teachers felt a great cultural difference between them and the children felt that the lack of immediate results was frustrating. Children in their turn sometimes, felt earmarked for negative reasons and consequently their behaviour would disimprove.
- Association Aproapele did not succeed to get involved in sport activities as was foreseen.

#### **Positive points / strengths:**

- Sustainability: activities have been integrated in the school curriculum. The teachers have learned the methodology and will continue practising this after the end of the project.
- It was an advantage that FDP had had activities in Cojasca for a long time. They had experience in working with this target group, their representatives were trusted by the local authorities and by the didactic staff from the school and the kindergarten.
- Collaboration and support: working and collaborating closely with FDP (without FDP there would have been no possibility to realize the activities). Collaboration with the school (teachers, school director, children). Availability and agreement of the class teachers to conduct activities proposed in their classes.

- Difference and novelty of the project's activities compared to the existing school curriculum. The enthusiasm, availability, involvement, participation in our activities by children, teachers and the FDP team showed how necessary this project was for the target group.
- Permanent contact: maintaining permanent contact with children, teachers through the FDP team. The importance of direct work with the target group and spending time together in locations offered by FDP and the school. The good and close collaboration with FDP contributed to the achievement of the goals for the project.
- The presence of different NGO-s in the field: Association Aproapele could only finance part of the expenses for the activities accomplished. FDP supplemented the costs and in this way project aims could be achieved.
- The activities implemented in the local project helped the Roma youngsters to see other opportunities that could improve their educational level. During the activities, the group co-operated very well. There was a 100% attendance to the project's activities. The interest in learning and finding out information increased. The educational trip was an opportunity for the girls (doing tailoring) to start looking for a job after they will have graduated. In fact, two of the girls were promised a job in the factory they visited.

## STEP IN Slovakia

The project took place close to the city centre of Prievidza, an ex-mining town in the region of Upper Nitra. About 450 Roma families, live in this district totalling 1.500 people. The families live in blocks of flats and barracks originally built for mine workers.

### **Target group**

Young Roma and Roma families close to the city centre of Prievidza.

### **The local project**

The partners, Diecezna Charita Nitra, together with a voluntary Christian association in Partizanske and a local Roma self governing civic association organised leisure activities. The activities focussed especially on music, through which medium the children were encouraged to develop other abilities. Professional music teachers were employed to this purpose. The objective was to motivate young Roma's to lead a responsible life style.

Furthermore, a social worker was involved to give the young Roma's guidance in learning their "rights and duties" in society.

The aim of the project was to develop leisure activities in order to help along the personal development of young Roma people, to prevent early school leaving and to encourage school attendance by giving support for learning skills.

Meetings with families were also built into the project, in order to develop an ethical culture of behaviour between families and society. The families were supported in creating the right environment for personal growth of Roma youngsters.

For the sustainability of this kind of work it is necessary to support local Roma activists, which will lead to achieving political changes and acceptance of Roma people in society.

**Negative points / difficulties:**

The majority population have to learn not to put Roma into their own categories. The world of Roma thinking, their priorities and their culture is very different from that of the majority population. At the same time, the Roma culture has fallen apart. Family relations and moral values are not the way they used to be.

It was a big challenge to work with needy Roma people when non-perpetuity and impulsive behaviour jeopardised our long-term goals. Reacting emotionally to difficult situations ensuing from this attitude could mean the end of a relationship.

**Positive points / strengths:**

It is important not to isolate STEP IN's educational package from a wider social dimension.

This is a long-term process, which needs active participation of all involved, namely the Roma themselves, state bodies (till now too much dependent on willy-nilly political willingness), self governing neighbourhoods and churches through their pastoral work. The participation of all these partners is necessary to build networks of local and national NGOs that support Roma initiatives based on moral values.

The strength of the educational package was that it was dealing with education in a wider context, which especially for Roma people, is indispensable. The package worked well, because it contained elements of prevention, relation building between the Roma and the majority population and it allowed for introducing Christian values into daily life.

## STEP IN France

The local implementation of STEP IN in France was carried out in four different locations. In each location, the target group was specific, and the activities were tailored to their local situation.

The target was to similarly reach young French Roma and young Roma that were mainly from Kosovo. The families of the young French Roma are half-sedentary: they live in caravans in a designated field. They travel for 9 months a year and also often during the three months of the school holidays.

The context for the young Roma who came from Kosovo with their families is quite different. They have a foreigner status because their country is not a candidate to the European Union.

The four locations were the following:

### **1) Aix- en -Provence – Le Hameau de Martelly**

**Target group:** French Travelling people families, of Roma culture, living in a very poor area, living next to a North African community Total of beneficiaries: 5 young people between 13 and 18 years old.

**Activities:** The young Roma people were supported in their schoolwork. Their interest in writing had grown through reading tales, because some of these tales belonged to the traveller's tradition.

A group of young people was encouraged to form a gypsy music band, for some of them were playing guitar.

### **2) Aix –en- Provence – Le Plateau d'Arbois :**

**Target group:** a group of Roma from Kosovo, parking on a ground, far from the agglomeration and near the TGV (high speed train) station. They were not well accepted by the local

community.

Total of beneficiaries: 7 young people between 13 and 16 years old.

**Activities:** The work done with them was, on one hand, to teach them French as a foreign language, on the other hand, to help the families to find a school that would accept them, given that school attendance is only compulsory until the age of 16. Humanitarian help was also given, for these families lack everything.

### 3) La Rochelle – Muron

**Target group:** one family of travelling people, of the Manouche culture, resident in the village of Muron.

**Activities:** We supported a young French Roma of the «Manouche » culture, who wanted to take the BAFA (skills diploma to qualify for a Coordinator's Function). He had already attended school up till the fourth form. The help consisted, on the one hand of helping him prepare the theoretical tests, on the other hand, it consisted of providing him with an approved location for the practical tests. He will do his BAFA work placement in one of Secours Catholique's summer camps.

### 4) Crosne

**Target group:** Some families of travelling people settled on a piece of ground they own, but had been turned away, because the ground was liable to flooding. The group consisted of 6 young people between 10 and 18 years old.

**Activities:** School support was given to young Roma and Manouche children, who had already attended school. Their families lived on the piece of ground and only travelled from May to September. The town hall provided the premises. The youngsters rigorously visited this activity, because the school help was not free after school hours. Therefore, it was the only way for them to be supported in education that was free of charge.

**Negative points / difficulties:**

In Aix - Hameau de Martelly, the fourth form level had a young girl aged 18 years in it. She had been admitted to the project, but her personal project didn't correspond to the help we could provide for her in order to further her career.

The more serious situation was the one of the young Roma's from Kosovo, parking in Aix – Plateau d'Arbois, where the voluntary team hadn't managed to integrate them into a school. Therefore, the only contribution was the voluntary work carried out by this project.

The priority goal really was to see these youngsters attend school.

Otherwise, another site was planned in Frejus (Toulon's Delegation), a survival help had already been brought to a group of Romanian Roma, and a youth support project was being set up, when the population of Roma was expelled from the field. The inhabitants shared themselves out, which prevented us from implementing the project.

**Positive points / strengths:**

Secours Catholique, Caritas France, contacted the families in order to encourage the parents to send their children to school. But their attendance remained delicate, because the situation of some families is socially fragile. That was why making the children feel important by making them more aware of the wealth of their culture was very important. In this way four or five 15-year-old boys who played guitar formed a musical band. Secours Catholique, for its sixtieth anniversary in October 2006, is going to make them play in front of a huge audience, in Aix. A few young Roma girls know some of the traditional dances and will equally be invited to show them on the occasion of this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Despite everything the 18 years old young girl from Aix - Hameau de Martelly, reached the fourth form, thanks to the

support that she received by our volunteers.

In La Rochelle, Muron: the success of the young boy at the BAFA, which will allow him to work as a coordinator for young people's leisure activities. He still has to pass the second theoretical part of this diploma in November 2006, in order to obtain the real diploma.

In Paris, Secours Catholique (Caritas France), created a practical audio-visual user's guide for social services in the area for the STEP IN project, in order to improve the Roma's knowledge on the specific legislation applying to French Travelling people. Power Point editing, including pictures, cards written in simplified French, manouche jazz and gypsy flamingo music given for free by two musical bands, are all included in the audio-visual presentation.

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The audio-visual method consists of cards, with information on one side and pictures on the other, unfolding several legislation points related to the Travelling people's life:

- The commune they are depending on
- The ambulatory activity and circulation titles.
- The social institutions in the area in which they are resident.
- The rest sites.
- Scholarships for the Travelling children.
- The B.A.F.A. (Ability Diploma for a Coordinator's function)

## STEP IN Holland

The project took place in the municipality of Veldhoven, situated in the province of North Brabant, in the South of the Netherlands.

### Target group

The children belonged to the small Roma community in Veldhoven, which is a transient community made up of legal and illegal immigrants. Some of the Roma have been in Holland for 30 years (former migrant workers), and some have arrived more recently (asylum seekers from the Balkans). The latter group of Roma is finding difficulty in being accepted by both their own people who have been longer in the Netherlands and the local “native Dutch” population. Both groups of Roma in Veldhoven are also finding difficulty in being accepted by the ethnically related Sinti, who have been living in the same area for almost a century. The project in Veldhoven focuses on the entire Roma group.

The target group consisted of children aged between 12 – 18 years. They numbered about 35, about 1/3 were girls.

### The Local Project

We identified the following obstacles and solutions for sustainable improvement of the education of young Roma in the Veldhoven area:

1. Obstacle: Reluctance within the Roma group itself to accept education.

Solutions: Involve mothers with infants to create a cultural basis for the acceptance of education. Hence the integration of the age group 0 - 4 into the project.

Both children and mothers were motivated to accept education as a value.

2. Obstacle: The educational care according to the regular Dutch system is too fragmented (many schools and

organisations exist), and too rigid (fixed age categories, bureaucracy) to adequately cater for a group of Roma children, which is difficult to define (no documentation, moving around, real age not clear, etc.). Solutions: KPC groups were able to coordinate and integrate all activities of all organisations and actors involved (the mayor, the police, church, schools, adult education, etc.). The fieldworkers of the KPC group were “following” the children closely, literally throughout the whole process of education, as well as follow the educational location/ environment (from camp/caravan to adult education).

3. Obstacle: The usual difficulties when tackling Roma education problems, such as language, participation, the negative attitude of traditional Roma leaders towards education etc.

Solutions: A package of both curricular and extra curricular education, adapted to the specific needs of the schools and the students. Close contact with the families (camp/caravan) by the fieldworkers formed a crucial element in this package in order to:

- Improve their knowledge of the Dutch language (mothers and children).
- Provide from the outset a point of continuity of care and the creation of educational records that can be transferred to the local junior school at a later stage. (Education in the camp/at the caravan; and early participation in the kindergarten)
- Raise awareness of the importance of education in ROMA society as a whole, through the mothers’ enthusiastic involvement with the project.
- Motivate the parents into recognizing the aims of the project and to obtain their approval for their child’s participation.
- Get to know the families of the target group.
- Conduct family education (at the camp/caravan).
- Recognize and use the resources of the families

for the project (mother's role as basic educator and transmitter of culture at an early age).

- Change cultural values with regard to the need for education.
- Offer individual help concerning the difficulties of the families.
- Follow/reach the girls of the target group.
- Build up a network between families, school, the project team and others.
- Promote the active involvement of young Roma leaders activists, and young Roma role models In the last phase of the project (7 months).

#### **Negative points / difficulties:**

- Mobility of the group (sometimes families and children travel for several weeks to another location).
- Illegal status of some of the Roma families, which result in:
  - o A lack of reliable documentation (what is the actual age of the children? Who are the parents really?)
  - o Criminal activities (also by the children), which could interrupt the educational process (children sometimes disappear for some weeks)
- Although nominally/officially the entire community had committed itself to the project, in real life, discrimination is still a problem, especially for age 15+ when young people start to look for jobs.
- Participation of girls is low, especially at a later age.

#### **Positive points / strengths:**

This project seems to have succeeded through a real integrated approach (all institutions, societal levels and actors involved).

It also seems to have succeeded to change the traditional negative cultural attitude amongst Roma with regard to education. The most important element leading to this success seems to have been the involvement of mothers as cultural transmitters in the camp.

## STEP IN Italy

The project took place in Milan, in a camp where a group of about 200 hundred Roma people lived, who had migrated from Kosovo and Macedonia. They had lived in Italy since the nineties and they had settled in a designated camp in the suburbs of Milan (Northern Italy).

Caritas met the Roma groups in 1999, when they were evicted from the area where they had lived. From 1999 onwards, Caritas has been carrying out projects targeted for this group of people, with the aim to promote an active citizenship. In 2002, Caritas started a partnership with the Municipality of Milan for the coordination of the 'camp' where the groups live. Since then, Caritas also maintained contacts with school and other services active in the camp.

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### Target group

The project was directly targeting young Roma between 13 and 18 years old and involved 26 youngsters (11 boys and 15 girls). Moreover, 8 boys and girls born in 1993-94 (11 and 12 years old) also participated in the project.

Even though work with families had not been planned from the beginning, the project would not have been possible without a good relationship with the parents. We also worked with some other indirect beneficiaries, such as schools, parishes, voluntary organisations and the Municipality of Milan.

### The local project

The objectives of the project were to prevent early school leaving and supporting pathways for social integration.

During these two years, the project developed the following activities for the first objective of the project: support for school, sports and recreational activities and artistic and creative workshops. For the second objective it developed

activities around: teaching literacy skills, professional training coupled with completing work-apprenticeships and using services in the camp.

### **Positive points / strengths**

- The vocational training and the work apprenticeship (planned alongside the activities for supporting pathways for social integration) turned out to be a great opportunity for young Roma as they got in touch with the world of work and learned a job.
- The network of partners participating in the project (church, cooperatives and associations) helped young Roma to meet other boys and girls and socialize with them.
- The young Roma involved in the project, as well as the staff working with them, were quite satisfied with the results obtained and had enjoyed the activities carried out. They had appreciated the didactic input as well as the social relational aspects of the project. In particular the members of staff, reported an improvement of their relationship with young Roma as time went on.
- One of the aims of the project was to improve the quality of the relationship between the two groups living in the camp, those from Kosovo and those from Macedonia. In the past fights had broken out between them. At the end of the project this aim had partially been reached.
- Another aim regarded respect of roles and the learning of a collaborative behaviour. This aim was also partially reached, in particular through sports and recreational activities.

### **Negative points / difficulties:**

- Members of staff reported some difficulties linked to the behaviour of young Roma, due on the one hand to their age (adolescence is a “critical” period), and to cultural tension. These teenagers were sons and daugh-

ters of immigrants and form the so called “second generation”, meaning they do not completely belong to the culture of their parents, nor are they integrated into the Italian one.

- Sometimes difficulties were faced during the project relating to different perceptions of when adulthood begins in life. In Roma culture, people from about 12-14 years onwards are considered to be adults already and as such are expected to start their own family. Following on from this, it was sometimes hard to convince parents of what the sense was in attending school.

## 4. Evaluation of the educational package

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## 4. EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PACKAGE

The implementation of the educational package in local projects made it possible to test its suitability *“in loco”*. It was possible to test how it corresponded to the objectives and how it interacted with the specific characteristics of the target group. It showed its efficacy in some places and its limits in others. However, in the end it was possible to come up with quite some recommendations for better integration methods.

As has already been explained elsewhere, when working with Roma people, it is not possible to isolate your action and to target just one issue or one specific target group. The project’s approach, therefore, had to be comprehensive, and has included relations with parents and schools. In many cases a rich partnership ensued, given the inevitable cultural differences encountered. This is why the conclusions give *general* recommendations. Suggestions are given on how to improve the management of activities in order to promote the educational and social integration of Roma people.

This evaluation is the result of a joint work session held in Holland; it contains contributions from all partners. Although the implementation was relatively time-limited (12 to 18 months depending on the local projects), some very interesting comments and suggestions emerged. The debate on *strategies used to overcome difficulties* has been particularly fruitful.

## A. Activities and specific objectives

Aspects investigated:

- Were the activities and specific objectives exhaustive and comprehensive?
- Has the educational package been a useful tool for the planning of the local project activities?

As far as the school support activities, with the aim of avoiding early school leaving, the educational package included, as a secondary objective and as an indicator of success, the learning of L2, the language of the place where the Roma live (their mother tongue is Romany). The situation turned out to be very different from country to country. In Italy, for example, the target group was composed of Roma people who had recently arrived from Kosovo and Macedonia, while in Romania, Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic, they had been naturalized and in some cases had a good knowledge of the national language. In other cases, despite of their naturalization, they did not know the language of the country in which they lived very well. L2 learning, therefore, meant different things in different places: In the first case it had to take place as a preparatory phase before integration into school and social integration could take place; in the second case this phase had already been achieved.

Almost all local projects observed that all Roma groups could be characterized by a lack of, or low level of, basic education and knowledge. This gap had negative repercussions on their chances for integrating into schools and on their study performance. The majority of children finished the first stage of compulsory education, but obtaining a diploma for secondary school, a minimum requisite for entering the labour market, proved to be much harder. Most young Roma abandoned school prematurely, without any certificate or without having learnt any skills. The main aim of school support was to make up for these gaps in their education,

through regular meetings with teachers, convincing them of the use of personalised programmes.

Regarding the various specific objectives designed to avoid dropping out, *Social Werk*, the Bulgarian partner, reported better results in school performance, compared to discipline and behaviour (in terms of respecting the rules, punctuality etc.).

Study support in Romania and Bulgaria had also included supplying school materials such as pens, notebooks and textbooks. This kind of material support had been necessary considering the poverty, and in some cases, the extreme poverty, in which Roma groups often live. Bulgarisch-Deutsches Sozialwerk had included food support in the local project, a hot meal being an effective way of encouraging Roma children to attend school (and of persuading the family).

The artistic and recreational workshops yielded very positive results in terms of participation and involvement of the youngsters. Their merit was to stimulate creativity and to enable young Roma to apply theory to practice as they progressed. These creative workshops also helped the students to develop new skills and to discover their talents, especially where manual activities were concerned.

In the Italian local experimentation, non-formal education activities such as artistic and sports activities, formed an important bridge for approaching the young Roma. It offered them a chance to establish positive relationships, both between Roma groups in the camps, and with Gage (non Roma) children, through promoting cooperative and non-conflictive relationships.

In some cases, these workshops were the first contact made with the youngsters, and led to a wider participation, as well as their involvement in the literacy courses and the

vocational training. In particular, workshops turned out to be the ideal setting for planning and carrying out various kinds of activities, such as training courses on hygiene, nutrition and sex education. The youngsters themselves through questionnaires selected the subjects. Their involvement in choosing and planning the activities and the subjects has been an important element in encouraging their spontaneous participation.

Workshops were also a place where the youngsters could talk, express themselves and listen to each other. Many young Roma are very talented storytellers, and the appreciation of this oral dimension gave prestige to their oral traditions. Oral skills are not considered as conflicting with traditional education, but are seen as a resource that also reinforces their Roma identity.

The relationship between Roma and Gage was also considered as very important. The Romanian partners involved both groups in their activities, in order to prevent any form of segregation. Unfortunately, in some cases natural segregation is unavoidable. In Eastern countries, for example, there are villages, city-quarters and schools, consisting of only Roma people. In these cases, attempting integration and an intercultural approach is extremely difficult.

In conclusion, all informal educational activities (workshops, creative and manual activities, sports and play) have had a fundamental role in involving the youngsters in the activities connected with formal education. School subjects are often considered boring by the children. Moreover, mixing studying with manual activities, linked to Roma traditions, can reinforce the Roma identity and stimulate the youngsters' imagination and motivation with respect to future possibilities for employment.

## **B. Correspondence with the target group** (ethnic group, age, etc.)

Investigated aspects:

- Does the educational package correspond with the specific characteristics of the target group?
- Has the implementation of the educational package brought forward any recommendable changes for the purpose of a better integration?

As far as the age of the youngsters was concerned (13-18 years), some partners believe that it would have been better to start working with the Roma at an earlier age, probably when they are of school going age. Starting them at 13 often means having to deal with the effects of learning gaps that have been allowed to develop over a large number of years.

Regarding the creative workshops, it would have been interesting to include activities linked to the Roma's own traditional activities, especially in Romania and Bulgaria, where these traditions are still kept alive. This would also have been a way of taking the cultural context into account.

The Romanian partners were highly satisfied with the results of the creative workshops. The specific objective of promoting social cohesion, in particular, was considered to be very successful. It worked particularly well for them, because the youngsters involved in their project came from different villages; the activities proposed in the workshops proved to be an important means of bringing them together so they could get to know one another and for the first time have an opportunity to work together.

At the second trans-national meeting held in Saintes Maries de la Mer, some of the partners pointed out the importance of involving the families. They felt that activities around collaborating with the parents of the youngsters should be

included in the educational package. Working with the families was seen as an important element in convincing them of the importance of regular school attendance. Another point raised was that instead of limiting the activities to education taken in the narrow sense, they should include food support combined with teaching points on healthy nutrition. The educational package was sufficiently flexible to allow the inclusion of further improvements. The new activities proposed could be fit into a series of specific objectives.

Furthermore, concerning the inclusion of other activities in the local education package, the Romanian partners and Secours Catholique (Caritas France) observed the need for training for education professionals; even those that had already been working with the Roma. Training teachers in new methods of teaching Roma was therefore included in the education package. As a result, specific training courses were held in some cases. Secours Catholique now collaborates with the Ministry of Education on this matter.

### **C. Local partners**

Aspects investigated: The role and the importance of local partners

Some of the partners in STEP IN (in particular, the Romanians and the Italians) who have been working for a long time with the Roma as a target group have been operating with a close network of local partnerships over the years. For these partners, therefore, there was no difficulty in collaborating and interacting with other organisations. Other partners, however, such as Social Werk, had to create a network of local partners from scratch, in order to set up the local implementation of STEP IN. In this case too, the collaboration has proven to be fruitful and contributed to achieving the goals.

The positive role that partnership can play and the importance of collaboration with other partners in implementing projects of this kind, was recognised unanimously by all the project's partners. This partnership was especially important, given the multidimensional, often complex character of the problems encountered by the Roma. Local partners can be a very valuable resource when strategies need to be decided on at the outset of a project. Each partner involved can have a different way of looking at the question, but different points of view can materialise into new ways and innovative methods for helping the Roma.

The most important local partners to consider in this kind of a project were: branches of local government, schools, church organizations, and community service providers (general practitioners, family welfare associations etc.). Involving some of these was even considered to be fundamental, for the simple reason that the Roma had already accepted them as important actors themselves.

In contrast to this, Secours Catholique pointed out how some partners, whilst they were fundamental to the suc-

cess of a project for the Roma, are regarded with suspicion by them. This is the case for instance with local community and social services, who are often feared by the Roma. This makes it harder to involve them in the activities.

Concerning pedagogical tools, following the lack of methods available tailored to the cultural specificities of the Roma, Secours Catholique has produced an audio-visual method that allows the young Roma and their teachers to take the specificity of Roma life into consideration.



## 5. Conclusions... and a little advice!

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## 5. CONCLUSIONS ... AND A LITTLE ADVICE!

On the whole, the educational package has been evaluated as a success, some of its aspects, outlined here below, contributed to their success.

1. The combination of the following activities concerning formal education:
  - Long-term support for the school curriculum.
  - Planning this school support together with teachers.
  - Raising parents' awareness concerning their children's school attendance.
  - Recreational, sports and creative activities.

These activities led to:

- Getting in contact with some illiterate boys and girls, and their inclusion later on in literacy courses and training for jobs.
  - Being able to teach certain manual skills.
  - Being able to teach rules of behaviour (through rules of games and sports activities).
  - Being able to promote non-conflictive interaction.
  - The involvement of Gage (non Roma) boys and girls with the aim of promoting social inclusion and a deeper knowledge of one another.
2. The evaluation of the educational package has provoked much thought amongst the partners. Certain aspects of it were considered as indispensable for any future project of this kind:
    - The setting up of wide ranging, multi-dimensional projects that involve the parents as well, in order to stimulate awareness, and to create the right condi-

tions for guaranteeing the children's regular school attendance.

- Arranging residence permits for groups of foreigners. Conducting campaigns of awareness and lobbying of government representatives to provide adequate housing conditions.
- Promoting the involvement and an active participation of the Roma, not only by calling them in to take part in the project, but also in the design phase, so that they feel they are active stakeholders and central figures of their project.
- Creating possibilities to start the activity with smaller children, perhaps of school-going age, or even at the ages when infants can go to kindergarten, rather than the older STEP IN target group of 13-18 years. Experience in this project has shown that several important gaps in the children's basic education could not be compensated for at a later stage. The often close mother/child relationship at pre-school ages could be very significant for pre-school activities, where attempts should be made to involve the mothers in the education process from the start.
- Taking into consideration the importance of a local network. Local partners should also be involved in training and awareness activities, which are designed to improve knowledge of the Roma culture. The contents of this training should go beyond the existing local knowledge.
- Projects will be more successful, the more they involve:
  - organisations and bodies from the private social sector.

- organisations that work in different fields (education, health, recreation etc.).
- organisations whose authority is recognised by the Roma themselves.
- Recognising the need to provide material aids to promote regular school attendance, such as textbooks etc. In certain cases, food support could also improve the success rate of the project. Especially when this support is regarded as a form of health education and coupled with diffusing important messages about healthy nutrition.
- Paying greater attention to the importance of positive role models, i.e. showing the youngsters examples of adult Roma who have been successful in their career and/or in their personal life, responding to any child's tendency to imitate their elders.



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