

Roma Source

Sharing of Understanding Rights and Citizenship in Europe

The Limits of Inclusion?

Exploring the views of Roma and non Roma in six
European Union Member States

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Background to the study

This research forms part of the Roma SOURCE (Sharing of Understanding Rights and Citizenship in Europe) project. Roma SOURCE involved eight organisations from six European Union Member States (i.e. Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom). The research aimed to consider the extent to which Roma and majority communities in the six identified Member States lead integrated lives by conducting empirical research with Roma and non Roma populations.

This summary is based on analysis of data generated in 24 focus groups with members of Roma and non Roma communities in the six EU Member States listed above. The focus groups were convened in 2012. A total of 180 respondents (92 men, 88 women), took part in the focus groups, with representatives from 14 nationalities.

For more information about the work of the research team and partners and to access the full report please see www.romasource.eu

Key findings

Unemployment

Entrenched prejudice, discrimination and a lack of education - both academic and vocational - condemns many Roma to long term unemployment. Our data reiterates the findings of many previous studies and provides strong evidence that Roma face significant barriers when attempting to access labour market opportunities.

'Where Roma feature within the labour market their position is characterised by precarious, unstable, low paid and low skilled work.'

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Paid work

Where Roma feature within the labour market their position is characterised by precarious, unstable, low paid and low skilled work. This research suggests that there is sometimes a tendency, by employers or key gatekeepers, to suppress opportunities which might allow people to progress. This situation can be self-perpetuating as Roma can become increasingly associated with particular sectors and areas of work, which can lower their aspirations and expectations. From the perspective of non Roma communities, Roma are often viewed as engaged in a spectrum of activities, ranging from market trading through to criminal activities.

Community relations

Relationships between Roma and non Roma are characterised by a diverse range of everyday encounters. These encompass civil, routine associations between neighbours from different communities at one end of the spectrum, alongside a sometimes begrudging toleration of others as the norm, through to violent racist incidents at the other extreme. Although there were reports of voluntaristic, positive relations between Roma and non Roma founded on trust and reciprocity within local neighbourhoods, in many instances Roma and non Roma continue to lead separate, parallel lives.

Social welfare

A strong perception exists among non Roma respondents that Roma receive preferential treatment to collectively provided public welfare services. Linked to this, many non Roma also believe that Roma rarely contribute to such welfare services but are happy to manipulate the services on offer for their own financial benefit. Such views help to foster a deep seated resentment from certain members of the non Roma population. On the other hand, Roma, consistently highlight poverty as impacting negatively on their ability to effectively engage with health, housing and educational services.

Social exclusion

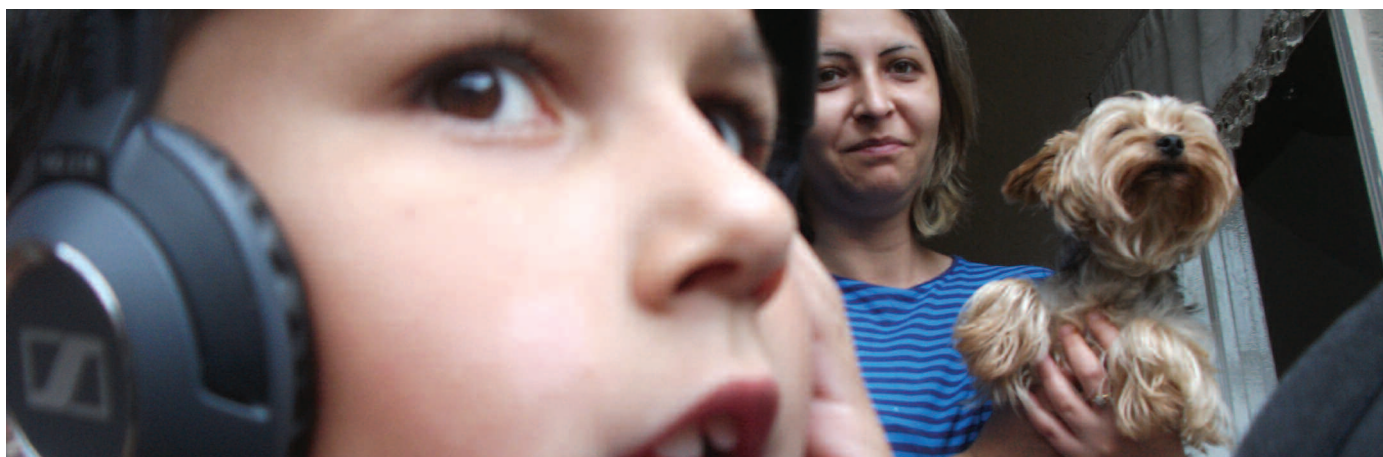
The focus group discussions shows a clear dichotomy between the narratives used by Roma and non Roma respondents to explain the continuing social exclusion faced by many Roma communities. Roma primarily emphasise structural factors such as poverty, discrimination and racism and describe the negative impact that these issues have on their daily lives. On the other hand non Roma respondents regularly view the poverty and social exclusion of Roma as being rooted in the dysfunctional behaviour or culture of Roma themselves. These contrasting views permeated discussions across all the thematic areas identified in this research.

Recommendations

Recommendations are targeted at the macro level of policy making and the micro level of community based settings:

At the level of **policy makers**, there is a need to:

- Prioritise anti poverty initiatives, given the negative ongoing impact of poverty which reverberates throughout the lives of Roma.
- Directly confront the entrenched anti Roma sentiments that pervade large sections of non Roma populations across Europe.
- Ensure principles of equality are embedded within all service areas and examine the potential impact new policies may have on Roma populations.
- Pursue targeted policies to enhance the entry of Roma into paid work. This requires that opportunities are made available for Roma within more highly skilled, better paid sectors of the labour market.
- Ensure Roma are facilitated to engage with education at all levels. This requires specific policies for Roma, to encourage engagement. Additionally schools need to ensure that experiences of education are positive, equal and fuel aspirations.
- Develop strategies to ensure that the views and concerns of non Roma and Roma communities inform policy and practice.



For those working in **community based settings**, there is a need to:

- Ensure each local authority/municipality identifies a lead officer to co-ordinate and mainstream key issues pertaining to Roma inclusion.
- Develop initiatives that encourage mixing between Roma and non Roma. Initiatives based on skills, health, faith, food etc. can offer opportunities to build meaningful relationships within mutually supportive environments.
- Invest in leadership through the development of Roma 'community champions' to help bridge the existing gaps between Roma and key service providers.
- Ensure the delivery of local policies is subject to equality impact assessments to examine their effects on Roma.
- Address the poor housing conditions which blight the lives of many Roma.
- Prioritise approaches that support co-developed solutions which allow for greater residential inclusion whilst avoiding forced relocation and social engineering.
- Engage in robust efforts to dispel the persistent myths and commonly held beliefs about Roma.
- Ensure that organisations develop their existing consultation and engagement strategies and tailor these, in an appropriate manner, to include Roma communities.

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The research was undertaken by Philip Brown, Peter Dwyer and Lisa Scullion at the University of Salford as part of the Roma SOURCE project. For further information about this study contact:

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