



Mutual Action Targeting Racism
Intolerance and Xenophobia

Roma MATRIX News

September 2013
FIRST EDITION

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Welcome to Roma MATRIX

By David Brown

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We launched the Roma MATRIX project in Leeds in April this year with an ambitious programme to target anti-Roma racism, intolerance and xenophobia.

Roma MATRIX is one of the largest ever EU Roma inclusion projects. It is a partnership of 19 organisations from different sectors, in 10 EU member states, which between them, contain 85% of the EU's Roma populations. Our project will run for two years from April 2013 till March 2015. It is co-funded by the European Union's Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme.

We have already started work on our 13 key activities and we have our first conference in Athens on 27 November 2013, please contact us for details.

In future editions of this newsletter we will be sharing details some of the exciting work being carried out across the EU.

Understanding anti-Roma racism

By Dr Philip Brown, University of Salford

The research in Roma MATRIX is being led by the University of Salford.

They will be seeking to understand and analyse racism through a major research programme looking at, amongst other things, how the national strategies for Roma integration are being implemented within the 10 partner countries. Their specific focus of the research is on several key elements which include reporting and redress mechanisms, children leaving care, employment and cross-community mediation. The research will be carried out with local researchers in each country.

Dr Philip Brown of the University of Salford said "The strategies for Roma integration form the major backdrop for how EU Member States are expected to address the integration of Roma. However this tells us only part of the story. Our research hopes to unpick what is being done in several crucial aspects as well as examining how actions are being achieved. The focus of the research will be the officials, workers and activists leading and involved in these activities in each of the 10 Member States of concern to the broader Roma MATRIX project."



Project partners discuss the work ahead.



With financial support from
the Fundamental Rights
and Citizenship Programme
of the European Union

Redress, reporting and support

By John Donegan

“...Roma people have always been afraid of retaliation if they dare to protest against discrimination ...”

A major stream of Roma MATRIX involves improving redress, reporting and support for Roma people experiencing racism, discrimination and hate crime.

Partners are working on a variety of initiatives to provide support to individual Roma suffering from racism and discrimination, and to resolve and provide adequate redress for individual cases

There is also work across the partnership to improve the understanding of Roma communities about their rights, redress mechanisms and reporting. Some partners are developing specialist reporting and care centres for this purpose.

Other partners are working with public authorities, particularly in the areas of law enforcement and the judiciary, to improve the way they engage with Roma people experiencing discrimination and hate.

All partners are working collectively with different organisations to reduce racism, discrimination and xenophobia and raise the profile of the issue.

The first of a series of partner meetings to address this stream of work was held in Valencia in June 2013. Jose Luis Gil Hidalgo from the Maranatha Federation of Gypsy Associations, who hosted the meeting says “Partners were able to share their experience of the reality of anti-Roma racism in their countries as well as their plans to improve practice through the Roma MATRIX project.

“For us, the meeting was a great opportunity to share and discuss how best to work with Roma. This will help us all increase the confidence of Roma experiencing racism to come to our centres to report it.

“Roma people have always been afraid of retaliation if they dare to protest against discrimination. The Valencia meeting has allowed us to discuss and consider these issues, but also allowed us to develop guidelines for action to provide appropriate solutions for each case.

“Finally, I think it is clear how important it is to have engagement and collaboration at a political level and networking that enables joint work with different organisations.

“We are very happy to have had the opportunity to host this meeting in Valencia, and that together, we will be able to make the life of Roma people a little better.”



Project partners are given a tour of Valencia's community of Romanian Roma.

Roma MATRIX project partners

Project Lead: Migration Yorkshire, based in Leeds City Council, UK. **Bulgaria:** Association National Network of Health Mediators, Association of Young Psychologists in Bulgaria, Regional Administration of Varna. **Czech Republic:** IQ Roma Service Civic Association. **Greece:** Action Synergy SA. **Hungary:** Former State Fostered Children's Association, Roma Civic Association, Wheel of Future Public Utility Foundation.

Combating racism through inclusion

By John Donegan

Work by Roma MATRIX to combat racism through inclusion is a varied and diverse stream of work, bringing together activities such as preparing Roma children for leaving care and improving the integration of children and young people and reduce discrimination.

There is also work with Roma people and employers to increase the employment and employability of Roma and many partners are working in local communities to reduce discrimination through cross-community mediation and build bridges between Roma and non-Roma.

This is supported by initiatives to provide mentoring for Roma individuals within public authorities, to support their personal development and improve interaction, understanding, access and engagement between public authorities and Roma.

“One thing we have been particularly keen to address in this strand of work is the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women” says Dave Brown, Roma MATRIX project leader. “That is why we will be implementing numerous initiatives to train and support Roma women to work as health mediators within their own communities. We believe that this will empower them to identify and address many of the concerns affecting them, which could otherwise be overlooked”.

A meeting of all the partners involved in this workstream was held in Tiszadob, Hungary in July. Sándor Juhász from the Former State Fostered Children's Association, which hosted the meeting said “The meeting gave partners working on the same issues an opportunity to plan our future activities together, to discuss our workplans, and how we want to achieve common goals in our countries.

“Though we come from different countries, the issues facing Roma people and the issues of children in child care are similar, though the methods of the work with the target groups can be different. The partners have different backgrounds, with different experiences, and we have to use it as an advantage and learn from each other, so that we can make our work more effective.

“During the meeting we were able to give each other good ideas, and share what has worked for partners previously and what didn't work, so we won't waste time. It was interesting to compare the different ways partners are approaching and dealing with similar issues, and I think these meetings will be important for the future work of the project.”



Project partners in Hungary discuss ways of combatting anti-Roma racism.

“...Though we come from different countries, the issues facing Roma people and the issues of children in child care are similar ...”

Roma MATRIX Project Partners

Italy: Bologna Municipality, Emilia Romagna Region. **Poland:** Roma Cultural and Community Association. **Romania:** Roma Women Association in Romania. **Slovakia:** Society of Friends of Children from Children's Homes Smile as a Gift. **Spain:** Maranatha Federation of Gypsy Associations. **United Kingdom:** Glasgow City Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Social Marketing Gateway Ltd, University of Salford

Roma – what is a positive image?

By Andy McArthur, *The Social Marketing Gateway*

What is a positive (and what is a negative) image of the Roma community? This question was the focus of a workshop with partners at the first Workstream 4 meeting in Varna, Bulgaria in September 2013. Before the meetings we anticipated that the answer may not be as simple as it seems and we were unsure about how easy it would be to establish a consensus across the partners. In reality, partners were able to find broad (but not unqualified) agreement about negative and positive images of Roma.

Partners were quick to agree on ‘what represents a negative image of Roma’. Squalid housing; Roma poorly served by public services; lazy unemployed adults; shoeless young people begging; or images of criminality, are all too familiar. Such pictures reinforce stereotypes of Roma as a social burden or dangerous and unwelcome outsiders, even though the root problems facing many Roma are ones of poverty and social exclusion.

While negative images that take viewers out of their comfort zone have been used in many public campaigns in the past, partners almost unreservedly supported the need to use only positive Roma images to challenge entrenched public perceptions.

They particularly called for ‘positively shocking’ or ‘positively surprising’ images that would confront target audiences and challenge their established stereotypes of Roma.

Partners wanted to use examples of Roma who were: successful and holding down normal, responsible jobs; children doing well in education and representing optimistic future

citizens; and images of Roma men and women mixing positively with non-Roma. And this called for good quality photography that told a compelling story and that places Roma in the mainstream as opposed to the margins of society.



Positive images or reinforcing cultural stereotypes?

Notably missing from this were the more ‘classic’ images of Roma celebrating their rich culture of music and dance. Partners agreed that such images play well with Roma themselves as they are passionate and proud of their culture. The question was raised: ‘might not the Roma prefer to be shown in this way?’

Partners agreed that such images are positive, but could also reinforce some public stereotypes and dilute the impact of the ‘positively surprising’ public media campaign work. Also, for Roma MATRIX, the target audience is not Roma themselves. We have to find an approach and a set of campaigning tactics that will have the desired impact on non-Roma audiences whose perception of Roma is negative and/or stereotypical.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Migration Yorkshire and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.