Europe includes us all

THE ROMA PILOT PROJECT

The Roma people are Europe’s largest ethnic minority, with an estimated population of 10 to 12 million. They face discrimination and are often denied access to education, employment, housing and health care. Through the Roma pilot project, the EU is trying to help them integrate into society.
Launched in 2008, the Roma pilot project will run until 2012. It is being managed by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO).

It comprises four projects which aim to:

- give Roma children better access to quality education and care in early childhood;
- help Roma people set up their own businesses, by providing advice and access to finance;
- combat discrimination against Roma people by raising public awareness;
- collect and assess data so that Roma inclusion policies can be based on hard evidence.

What exactly do these four projects involve?

1. **A good start in life**

   The ‘Good Start’ project, managed by the Roma Education Fund and its partners, aims to give young Roma a better start in life. Small-scale projects in four European countries are providing preschool education and care for disadvantaged Roma children. ‘Good Start’ reaches out to a large number of children, preparing them well for life at school. The project is operating in 16 locations in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

2. **Setting up in business**

   The “Kiútprogram” self-employment and microcredit programme, managed by the Polgár Foundation for Equal Opportunities, aims to help Roma people – women and men alike – to get out of the ‘black economy’ and start up their own business. It lends them the start-up money and advises them on administrative, financial and business matters. Successfully running their own business frees people from the debt trap and enables them to become contributing members of society. The programme encourages its clients to play an active part in local public affairs and to be role models for other Roma people. It operates primarily in Hungary, but is also sharing the lessons learnt with stakeholders in Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
3. Raising awareness, fighting discrimination

The ‘REACT’ project, managed by the ERGO network, raises public awareness about racism and anti-gypsy attitudes. Through a high-profile Europe-wide campaign it seeks to challenge people’s negative views and prejudices. Its ultimate goal is to persuade public authorities (local, regional and national) to adopt better policies for fighting discrimination against Roma people.

The project started by launching nationwide anti-racism campaigns in Italy and Romania using the mass media, sporting events and cinemas. Spokespersons included celebrities (both Roma and non-Roma), and this helped to ensure Europe-wide media coverage. The current focus of the project is on local and regional campaigns in Romania, Italy, Bulgaria and Albania. The aim here is to encourage exchanges and mutual understanding, with the active involvement of grassroots Roma groups.

4. Basing policies on hard evidence

The lack of data and, consequently, the inadequacy of evaluation and monitoring tools, have been a major obstacle in designing and implementing policies explicitly targeting the marginalised Roma. Decision-makers need reliable facts and figures on which to monitor and assess projects, for example, to improve early childhood education or to provide business micro-microfinance.

Through the Roma inclusion pilot project, the European Commission, together with the United Nations Development Programme and World Bank, set up a pilot project aiming to develop data collection and evaluation tools for projects under “A Good Start”, targeting pre-school education and the “Kiutprogram”, to support self-employment through microfinance. The first phase of this pilot was completed in March 2011.

A second phase of the pilot is now in progress and will also include a household survey on marginalised Roma communities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The survey is being carried out by the European Commission, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank in collaboration with the Fundamental Rights Agency. Roma will be asked about their socio-economic situation and the ways in which they feel affected by discrimination. It is the first time that such a survey is being carried out in the European Union and the Fundamental Rights Agency intends to expand it to all member states, in order to provide updated information to assist evidence-based policy development for marginalised communities, and National Roma Integration Strategies appraisal and monitoring.

On 30 November 2010, as part of the Roma pilot project, the European Commission held a conference for academics, practitioners, government officials, international organisations, NGOs and representatives from Roma associations. They discussed the importance of developing robust monitoring and evaluating mechanisms for Roma inclusion policies at EU and member states level, as also reflected in the Communication “EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020”.

LOVE FOOTBALL NO RACISM NO VIOLENCE
What is the EU’s contribution?

The total budget for all components of the Roma pilot project is €5 million. This money was assigned by the European Parliament to the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Regional Policy.

More generally, the primary objective of European Regional Policy is to reduce the economic and social differences or “disparities” between different regions of Europe. One of the ways of reaching this objective is to support equal opportunities. This can involve improving the opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as large and single-parent families, people with special needs or disabilities, or those from disadvantaged ethnic minorities, including Europe’s Roma communities.

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