

Belgian national Roma platform

Roma Youth Participation training seminar

22 May 2018

Program report

Background:

In order to create instruments for more cooperation and coordination on Roma issues, the Belgian authorities competent for Roma integration have set-up (2016) a national consultation process through the construction of a [national Roma platform](#) managed by the [Belgian national Roma contact point](#).

The evaluation of the pilot year of the Belgian national Roma platform shows that more effort is needed in order to more involve Roma youth in the dialogue process. Moreover, the need for training (f.eg. capacity building, active participation, advocacy, etc.) was identified.

As a follow-up event the Belgian national Roma platform in co-operation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe organized this full day training seminar aiming at facilitating further collaboration within the sector. The training module was focused on the opportunities of active participation, but also on the challenges that Roma youth faces in this context.

The general aim of the training seminar was to raise awareness, create networking and learning opportunities for young people and relevant stakeholders that will further work to support the participation and inclusion of Roma youth in the Belgian context at all levels. The specific objectives of the seminar were:

- To deepen the understanding of participants about youth participation and its different forms and manifestations in the Belgian context;
- To support mutual learning and networking among participants and relevant Roma and youth stakeholders;
- To identify challenges and opportunities that will promote and reinforce the participation of young Roma people including with the national Roma platform.

The training seminar was open to Roma and non Roma youth, youth organizations, social workers, representatives local & regional authorities, and all those interested in learning and promoting Roma youth participation.

The Belgian national Roma platform has partnered with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe to develop and support the implementation of the training seminar. The role of the Youth Department for this activity is to provide educational support and expertise through developing the concept of the training, offering its trainers' pool expertise and supervising the content development of the activity as to meet the standards and principles of non-formal

education and youth participation as promoted by the Council of Europe. The cooperation is within the framework of the Roma Youth Action Plan project of the Youth Department.

Program

The program started by a warm welcome by Ms. Isabelle Martijn from PSS Social Integration, and by the introduction of the other team members:

- Mr. Denis Durmish, Project Officer of the Roma Youth Action Plan in the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, and
- Zora Csalagovits, facilitator, member of the Youth Department's pool of trainers of the Council of Europe.

Also Nathalie Van Ceulebroeck, expert (AP Artesis Plantijn Hogeschool Antwerpen) was welcomed. Nathalie today presents the key elements of the study 'TOMORROW WILL BE A BETTER DAY...Participation of Roma young people in the neighbourhood and youth policy in Flanders (2014). Nathalie was one of the authors of this study.

A structured round about background and expectations towards the meeting was called in order to establish the common ground for the day of work. The most strongly and frequently expressed needs were concerning learning from each-other and networking: to be able to connect as a network of professionals working on Roma youth participation, to learn about the realities of each other's work and to share experiences from the field.

An introduction to the mission and activities of the Belgian National Roma Platform by Isabelle Martijn was followed by an input on the work of the Council of Europe with Roma Youth Participation.

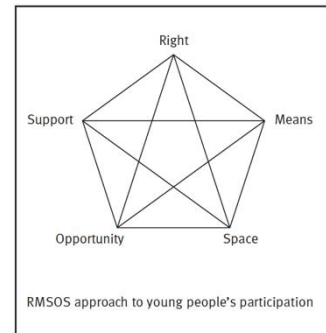
Following the presentation one of the outputs of the Rome Youth Action Plan project was presented: a report produced during 2014 outlining the results of an exploratory research. In the research information was collected and a limited analysis is presented of the existing participation opportunities for Roma children and young people in neighborhood and policy in Flanders. On the basis of the research policy recommendations were developed and incorporated into the report document. The report was produced under the Roma Youth Action Plan project of the Council of Europe with the support of the Flemish Government.

"Tomorrow will be a better day..." research report on the participation of Roma young people in the neighbourhood and youth policy in Flanders: <https://rm.coe.int/168046d025>

In the interactive part of the session, going to a practical level, a basic input on what is youth participation was provided by the facilitator, based on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young people in Local and Regional life.

Working and discussion groups were invited to discuss the following topic: Assessment of the National/Local/Communities' practices using the RMSOS model of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young people in Local and Regional life with a focus on Roma Youth Participation. This group work allowed the participants to get to know each-others' approach and their area of work more precisely by sharing their opinions on what factors are there in their local context and what is missing regarding the five elements of the proposed model:

- Rights
- Means
- Space
- Opportunities
- Support



The most important conclusions of the discussions were presented to the group:

1. Religious identity versus (a diverse) ethnic / cultural identity:
 - i. Religious identity: strategy to connect with society; in absence of (historical) knowledge about other layers of identity
 - ii. Ethnic / cultural identity: need for role models (create trust) and good practices; need for recognition of diversity of Roma communities with common basic identity; more support for Roma self-organization
2. Importance of positive awareness raising: collecting, sharing and disseminating knowledge/information
3. European financing mechanisms are administratively too heavy
4. Set up low threshold activities; connect with youngsters via social media, websites, personal contacts ...
5. Inform, stimulate and raise awareness about the importance of education; give f.e.g. attention to dual learning
6. Involve the parents; discuss traditional role patterns.
7. Work with bridge figures, intercultural mediators
8. Create accessible spaces where young people can get together, where there is active participation...
9. Invest in communication. The existing offer is often unknown.

Another learning opportunity of the seminar was concerning good practices from wider Europe; the participants worked on the selected examples by identifying success factors that enhance Roma Youth Participation. The practices described were adapted from the Study Roma Youth Participation in Action of the Council of Europe and allowed the group to reflect upon the diversity of possible approaches in practices and at the same time to share about their own mission as actors and advocates for Roma youth participation in their society.

Source: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/roma-youth-participation-in-action>

Recommendations from the participants

In the end of the training seminar, it was planned that participants create recommendations on promoting and supporting active participation of young Roma people by various stakeholders and at all levels relevant for Belgium. In order to identify and formulate recommendations to policy makers, the following questions were brought to discussion in the group as starting points:

- *What are/ is your knowledge about the needs of young Roma in your context?*
- *What are the obstacles to the participation of Roma young people in your reality?*
- *How would you promote the participation of Roma youth in your local context?*

The following recommendations were formulated :

1. Organize regular meetings between Roma communities / representatives and (local) authorities.
2. Prioritize school enrollment by making it possible several times a year; support the parents in this process; strengthen intercultural competences of the teachers.
3. Importance of working with positive role models / famous people from Roma origin (here, media has an important role).
4. Participation should lead to concrete result. Too often only a false hope is created.
5. Organize trainings for professionals working with Roma (culture, history, challenges...), including people working in administration to prevent/tackle discrimination of Roma youth in the enrollment processes.
6. Create more meeting places specifically for Roma youth, or make the existing ones more accessible for Roma youth by outreach activities, work more with contact persons (trust).
7. Need for empowerment; youngsters don't always know their own background, culture... Create programs to work with identity of Roma youth.

Educational resources and materials

“Have your say!” Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life: <https://rm.coe.int/16807023e0>

Website of the Roma Youth Action Plan – Council of Europe:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/>

Publication including the good practice examples, Roma Youth Participation in Action:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/roma-youth-participation-in-action>

Mirrors - manual on combating antigypsyism through human rights education:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/mirrors>

Right to Remember – handbook for education with young people on the Roma Genocide:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/right-to-remember>
Barabaripen – study on examples of multiple discrimination of young Roma: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/barabaripen>

Taking it seriously- guide to the recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on the access of young people from disadvantage neighborhoods to social rights:
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806accfa>

Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass>

European Youth Foundation <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation>

Conclusions and next steps

Isabelle Martijn (PPS Social Integration) thanks the participants for the interesting and necessary discussion. This training seminar was one of the steps in a broader awareness process around active participation of young Roma. The identified challenges put the finger on the wound. The Belgian national Roma platform will explore the next steps in this dialogue process to eventually translate these challenges into concrete recommendations.

Denis Durmish from the Youth Department of the Council of Europe welcomed and appreciated the positive cooperation with PPS Social Integration as it was a direct attempt to raise awareness and develop capacities of relevant stakeholders on issues that are relevant for young Roma people in the Belgium context. The Council of Europe within the framework of the Roma Youth Action Plan project will continue to support mainstreaming of Roma youth issues, support the capacities and participation of young Roma and organization at the European, national and local levels.



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