

**Identifying Evidence-Based Methods to Effectively Combat Discrimination of the Roma in the
Changing Political Climate of Europe (PoIRom)**

**Workpackage 4 - *Evaluation of Anti-discrimination Interventions Targeting the Links between
Political Discourse, Antigypsyism and Collective Action***

Focus Group Memo

Prepared by Ashley O'Connor and Anca Minescu.

<https://polrom.eu/>

PoIROM — REC-AG-2017 / REC- RDIS-DISC-AG-2017



Introduction.

Aims of Focus Groups.

The main aim of the research presented in this report was to identify and evaluate prejudice and discrimination intervention methods in Ireland. The focus groups were conducted to assess whether and how interventions have the potential to improve intergroup relations and encourage societal change. Overall, we aimed to formulate a systematic overview linking social psychological theory with grass-roots practices in interventions to prevent prejudice and discrimination.

Research Strategy

Guided by the theoretical models from the PoIRom project and the classification of interventions in the 3 clusters we identified which organizations to invite to the focus groups and designed focus group questions. These questions were to be used to guide the focus groups and gather information to better understand how the interventions worked, how they were run, and evaluated by the organizers and participants.

Below are the summaries from the focus groups in Ireland, Hungary, Slovak and Romania.

Focus groups summary – Ireland.

Summary prepared by: Ashley O'Connor and Anca Minescu.

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Focus group design, recruitment and procedure

a) Method of selecting focus group participants.

Based on the content analysis and the categorisation process of the interventions, it was evident that in Ireland, the interventions in Categories 1 and 2 were the most common. Therefore, the focus group participants were selected accordingly, to investigate the specific examples of the most representative interventions. An email with information about the project and the focus groups was drafted and then sent to the relevant people involved in 5 different projects.

b) Describe the focus group participants.

We decided on the composition of focus groups as follows: include the organiser of the intervention/event, specifically a person who ran it or was directly involved in the delivery in some way, and two service user/participants; if both members of the settled and Traveller communities were involved then it should be a minimum of one from each group. Two researchers were to participate to support the discussion as well as observe and facilitate the subsequent data coding.

c) Conducting the focus group discussions

We originally planned to conduct the focus groups in person, in the Social Identity Lab in the Department of Psychology at the University of Limerick. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, all in person focus groups were rescheduled to be conducted (and recorded) online via Microsoft Teams. The procedure was clearly explained to the participants before the online meetings began. Two researchers facilitated all focus groups.

From the 5 projects we invited, only 3 participated in the focus groups. The organizations of the three focus groups had funding by large scale EU or/and government funding scheme, yet ran their activities at grassroots community levels. The organizations operated under substantially different remits, and each organization typically runs a wide range of interventions, that we classified under the first 2

clusters/categories: Category 1-Educational Interventions (General Diversity Training) and Category 2- Interactive, Experiential and Intergroup Interventions

Focus group composition.

No	Focus group/ Interview	Participants	NGO concerned	Participants count
1	Focus group	NGO members, interventions organisers.	West Limerick Resources	2
2	Focus group	NGO members from different projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Intercultural Communities (BIC) Project (2) • Roma Advocay worker (1) • Primary Health Care and Community Development Team Member (1) • Primary Health Care Team Men’s Development and Health Worker (1) 	Donegal Traveller Project	5
3	Interviews	Members and intervention participants from the community of Abbeyfeale in Limerick, Ireland.	West Limerick Resources.	????????

The first focus group involved participants from West Limerick Resources, which is a community development organisation supporting positive change in the lives of people and groups in the country of Limerick. The organization works with many different groups of people, but we spoke to two members of the organization who work directly with members of the Traveller community. This focus group contained two project managers, two researches, but unfortunately no participants or members of the Traveller community could attend due the COVID -19 crisis. The focus group discussion lasted 2 hours.

The second focus group was with the Donegal Traveller Project, which is an independent, locally based community development organisation working for and with the Traveller Community and other minority groups, in Donegal. For over 20 years, the organization has supported Travellers to articulate their identity, to organise collectively and to work towards the realisation of their rights (refer website). This focus group contained six people, who are involved in the design and delivery of the many different interventions, most interesting to us was the Building Intercultural

Communities (BIC) Project. However, the focus group ended up yielding many more insights about a wider range of interventions and how to decrease Antigypsyism and increase solidarity with other minority groups living in Donegal. The focus group consisted of one member of the Traveller community, who worked for the project and was an activist, an American migrant, an African migrant, who both lived and worked in Ireland for over 20 years, as well as 2 other Irish colleagues working on Traveller health and Roma inclusion. Two researchers also participated. The focus group discussion lasted 2.5 hours.

The third focus group was with two researchers from the University of Limerick, based on a recent project involving Traveller-settled interactions in a town in the West of Ireland. Given the difficulties in recruiting more organizations for the focus groups, and including the voice of the Travellers and Settled people as participants in interventions, we decided to obtain insights from these researchers. The researchers had interviewed community residents of Traveller ethnicity and also Irish Settled people. The researchers shared their insights into the experiences of those interviewed, people who had previously participated in interventions or programs around personal development, inclusion, community and area development in their town.

Conclusions & Discussion

Overview of Themes and Subthemes from the Focus Group Discussions

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<p>THEME 1: IDENTITY AND POLARIZATION</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Group Identities 2. Polarization within the Traveller community/ Divisions within the Traveller community 3. Cultural awareness and stereotypes 4. Gender Issues

<p>THEME 2: LACK OF COHESION IN APPROACHING ANTI-TRAVELLER RACISM AND TRAVELLER SOCIAL INCLUSION</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trust, hopelessness and relationships 2. Funding: Sustainability and tokenism 3. Engagement Issues
<p>THEME 3: CREATING POLITICAL SOLIDARITY WITH THE TRAVELLER AND OTHER MINORITY GROUPS</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. REPRESENTATION 2. SOLIDARITY and Systemic Change 3. INTERCULTURAL TRAINING

The main conclusions based on the analysis of the Classification Table of all interventions included in our dataset and the focus group discussions are overall encouraging, yet leaving room for considerable improvement. Overall, we can see a wide range of activities aimed to tackle antigypsism and discrimination in Ireland, some with a very specific target involving a Traveller focus, some still too general or superficial in scope and reach. There are positive movements towards a more systemic approach that would decrease prejudice and discrimination in general and in particular towards Travellers. There are, however, particular sector and cultural specific barriers that paint a dismantled picture of Traveller-Settled relationships.

We summarize the main “take-home” messages of this workpackage on interventions in Ireland below:

- The interventions in our database focusing on anti-Traveller prejudice and fighting against Traveller discrimination, were predominantly classified as **Educational Interventions and General Diversity Training** (Category 1). The focus group discussions raised particular concerns with these kind of interventions: they are too general (not Traveller-focused),

they are not compulsory for people working with communities and in the public sector, they are often superficial in their impact unless their delivery includes self-reflection and challenges of one's world-view.

- The interventions categorised as **Interactive, Experiential and Intergroup Interventions** (category 2) were perceived by the participants in the focus group discussions as the ones with the greatest potential to decrease prejudice, increase social inclusion and trust between communities. However, the fundamental issue with these interventions lies in their typical short-term and localized reach, largely due to funding and political agendas, illustrating a piecemeal approach to social inclusion. Their implementation also depends on very personal individualised relationships of trust (built over time after overcoming serious barriers dividing the Travellers from the rest of the society). Instead, interventions should rely on wider institutional commitments and long-term engagement between the Traveller community and local organizations or government/authorities.
- **Public Showcasing Interventions** (Category 3) were seen as important for raising cultural awareness and a sense of positive identity and pride among the minority groups more generally, and Traveller communities in particular. The most impactful showcasing events however, are the ones which were built via interpersonal and intergroup contact activities, which brought the Traveller community in touch with non-Traveller people (both Irish and of other nationalities). In other words, when they are a “result of community work”, these showcasing interventions are seen as a positive development in dismantling negative stereotypes about Travellers and promoting positive intergroup relationships. In general, without the background of collaboration and long-term engagement of communities, these interventions still have very positive effects in building pride and cultural awareness for the Traveller communities.
- **Political Solidarity and Representation** was one of the main take home points from the first two focus groups particularly the one with the Donegal Traveller Project. The DTP was set up in collaboration between the Traveller and the settled community in Donegal, and this was seen as a strength. Furthermore, the focus on building solidarity with other minority groups was aimed at amplifying the voices of all disenfranchised groups that are

often unheard when in isolation from each other. The work of West Limerick Resources is also based on including Traveller people in the design, organisation and running of particular interventions. The collaboration and representation from the Traveller community are seen as crucial to the success of local interventions.

- **Sustainability and Long-Term Changes in Intergroup Relations:** If interventions are to be successful in tackling prejudice and discrimination, the short-term nature of the interventions and community work sector is seen as a serious obstacle to systemic change and impact. While a targeted approach for specific communities exists, an institutional level approach to addressing inequality and inclusion in a cohesive and comprehensive manner is missing. The community work sector has changed in recent years with more of a focus on “service provision” as opposed to a holistic, community development approach. This current approach offers little in the way of longer-term engagement and has a piecemeal approach with short term funding projects and high staff turnover. This results in fatigue, lack of trust and engagement within communities. It was the suggestions of the focus group participants that long-term approaches with human rights and community development as key principles would be the best approach to systemic change in social inclusion and prejudice reduction.
- ***Intercultural training and cultural awareness and competencies.*** All participants recognized the crucial role of recognizing, respecting and reconciling cultural differences when working with Travellers in Ireland. The historical divide between the Travellers and the rest of the society harbours ignorance and stereotypes that prevent positive intergroup contacts. In order to decrease prejudice and engage with the Traveller communities, organizations at all levels should invest in the intercultural competence training of their staff, and have an institutional long-term commitment to engaging with the Travellers. The current trainings and lack of implementation across the board are presented as major barriers: the content and delivery of these trainings are lacking, and people who should attend them (e.g., the funders, the coordinators of organizations, as well as the grass-roots community workers) often do not. There is a recognition that when done well, the

intercultural competence trainings are transformative and significantly improve inter-group attitudes and relationships. Without familiarity and knowledge of one's own and Traveller's cultural habits and norms, the success of any intervention is unlikely.

Recommendations

The results of the classification of interventions and focus group discussions were fruitful in leading to a list of recommendations and the creation of best practice examples, in the form of a toolkit (which will be available on the PoIRom website <https://polrom.eu/>).

For Funding Agencies and National/Local Authorities

1. A human rights approach should direct investment in interventions aimed to decrease prejudice and discrimination against Travellers. This means that the normative context of the country and localities should be positively encouraging of inter-group/inter-communities collaborations. Hate speech and hate crime legislation should be introduced in Ireland, to signal the importance of respecting others irrespective of their background. In the presence of very pervasive, entrenched and negative stereotypes about Travellers in Ireland, a normative change is needed to accompany any intervention aimed to decrease prejudice and discrimination.
2. A community-development approach should be prioritised as opposed to a service-provision, project based approach to antigypsism work, promoting tolerance and decreasing anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination. The lack of long term funding erodes the sustainability of any successful impact of interventions, because it involves high turn-over of staff and communicates a "tick-box exercise" approach. Community-development long

term investment in interventions would signal a sustained interest in social inclusion, capacity building and positive inter-group/inter-communities contacts.

3. Given the general normative context which typically portrays the Traveller community in a negative light, it is absolutely essential that comprehensive intercultural awareness and competence training is required of all employees involved with anti-Traveller prejudice/discrimination interventions or social inclusion projects more generally (including those working in the funding bodies). Building trust across the divide between the Traveller and the settled communities or local organizations is crucial for the implementation and success of any intervention. This will be enhanced if people are taught to question their own prejudices and biases, to understand the wider history of intergroup relationships and structural nature of institutionalised and everyday racism, and to recognize, respect and reconcile cultural differences.

For Community Level Organizations

1. The inclusion and representation of Travellers in the organisations, at design and implementation stage of Traveller-targeted interventions are highly recommended. This will help building bridges with the Traveller community, but essentially will focus the work on issues that are relevant and culturally appropriate from the Traveller perspective.
2. Fostering solidarity between different minority groups, and highlighting the political potential of a unified voice for community grievances was highlighted as a way of engaging

in divided communities. When funding is scarce, when relationships take time to develop and the effects of any particular intervention are short-lived and difficult to monitor, the focus on longer-term community involvement and solidarity can lay the foundations for sustainable engagement with interventions (and the organizations running these).

3. Intercultural competence and awareness training should be delivered on an ongoing basis to community workers as well as the larger society. These trainings could be seen as a way of consolidating trust between communities, and between communities and organizations, as well as ensuring a constant exchange of experiences and expertise that many community workers develop in one to one relationships. The trainings should be targeted at the specific minorities in the locality, and involve intercultural trainers with various backgrounds and experiences.

For Individuals Engaging in Interventions aimed to decrease anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination

1. Building bridges and trust between communities and challenging negative stereotypes are essential for developing working relationships in the implementation of interventions. This takes time, it is often personal, but it could and should be sustained by wider community and organizational supports and commitment. Being mindful of the local history and recent relationships between groups, organizations and communities will help position oneself in these relationships (i.e., how much does one need to “prove” him/herself before it is taken seriously by the other group depends on previous experiences with representatives of those groups).

2. Becoming interculturally competent and increasing one’s awareness of cultural differences, the norms, values and complex identities of the Traveller community in Ireland is crucial. Thus training and collaborating with Travellers are essential ingredients in successful interventions. Being self-reflective of one’s own biases and socialized knowledge is a great asset in working across cultural divides.

Fostering solidarity within and between groups is a way of amplifying one’s political voice, and gaining attention from the local and national governments/organizations. Solidarity can be built between different minority groups, but also, crucially between those who participate in any given intervention across ethnic divides, or organizer/participant differences. Getting to know and be involved with another group’s plight cultivates empathy, decreases prejudices and builds political efficacy.

Focus groups summary – WP4 Hungary

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Focus groups composition

Guided by the analysis of an intervention database, two focus group discussions were organised and conducted to evaluate. They were composed as follows:

No	Focus group/ Interview	Participants	NGO concerned	Participants count
1	Focus group	NGO members, group leaders	UCCU Roma Informal Education (NGO)	8
2	Focus group	NGO members from different projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young volunteers who work with children (2), • a part-time project coordinator (1) • a volunteer mentor who work with adults (1) • a coordinator from Bag (1) (the only Roma person in the discussion) 	Bagázs (NGO)	5

As the scope and activity of the two NGO's are different, we summarize the focus group discussions separately, but also provide a brief comparison.

Focus group design, recruitment and procedure

1. UCCU Roma Informal Education NGO

Activity, recruitment and methods

The members of the NGO are mainly Roma intellectuals who conduct prejudice reduction intervention programmes for elementary and high school students in the first place. Additionally, they conduct guided walking tours in Budapest and Pécs where they educate participants about parts of the city mainly inhabited by Roma people. They try to decrease prejudice by introducing real stories of Roma people living and working there.

In their school programme, typically two Roma group leaders spends 1.5 hours with a school class and educate students by informal, interactive teaching methods about the Roma. The method was borrowed from an existing intervention programme that dealt with Jewish identity and ways to decrease Anti-semitism. They recognized the need in those interventions to deal with prejudice toward the Roma as well.

All participants reported that they got in touch with the NGO because they looked for a community of Roma people, because they rarely had the chance to meet fellow Roma people during their childhood and youth, and they mainly got in contact with other Roma people during their years at the university. One also reported the need to deal with her own Roma identity and how others related to her as a Roma person. Many joined because their friends, relatives were involved.

What works?

They educate students by sharing their own stories as Roma people. They emphasized that it is really important to encourage students to speak without taboos and dare to talk about their prejudice, so they can respond to that with their own stories. The main method is story-telling: they share their personal stories and opinions as Roma people. They do not have a „script“ but

they always tailor their message to the group's questions. They do not have unrealistic expectations that students suddenly come to like the Roma, but to give a chance for them to get to know Roma people better, and motivate them to ask questions and start debating among themselves.

They believe that personal positive contact and credible personal stories make a difference. They try to demonstrate that Roma people are diverse, and that generalization is not ok.

Difficulties

They have to handle a lot of anger and frustration among participants but they look at it as a normal thing (coming from bad experiences and generalization).

It is more difficult to have an impact when the political discourse is more negative (there are waves when politicians try to make advantage of raising anti-Roma sentiment). It is a natural thing to them that they have to go against the flow (as prejudice expression is wide-spread).

It is more difficult when the programs are obligatory in schools (so there is bigger resistance). City walks are easier as they are voluntary.

It is also an obstacle that people are not aware of their own prejudices (e.g. teachers do not reflect on their prejudice, it is a taboo).

Roma identity

They educate about the Roma, try to change the biased beliefs about the Roma. They talk about national and religious identities and educate people about the problems of positive stereotypes (e.g. Roma are good musicians).

Solidarity, collective action

It is not their primary goal to raise solidarity and action. They try to reach as many people as they can, if they start to think about the topic and start to raise questions, then they reached their goal.

Gender

Participants are usually interested in gender relations among the Roma, but it is a complex issue and they typically do not have time to address these issues within their trainings. They only deal with it, if participants bring it up. Still, they feel the need to put more emphasis on this topic, they plan to introduce the neglected topic of Roma women in the city walks project.

2. Bagázs NGO

Activity, recruitment and methods

Bagázs has a number of projects taking place in two disadvantaged settlements: Bag and Dány. They facilitate Roma integration by giving assistance and improving learning skills of Roma children and by mentoring Roma adults. It is also their goal to raise awareness among majority members to be more inclusive. Their goal is to narrow the gap between minority and majority, and help community building within the villages. For example, they initiated a sewing group for Roma women, so they can earn money and be together in a productive way.

Mostly those people are recruited from the villages who were already open and sensitive toward this topic. Usually, they hear about the programme from fellow students or people with positive experiences.

What works?

They believe that they should always tailor their projects to the individual needs of the village inhabitants. They also change their projects based on the actual needs. They give practical assistance but also personal social support. They experience inclusion by the village inhabitants, so they believe in mutuality between majority and minority participants. They think that they give good examples (that people even manage to get out from the village), and this can shape people's attitudes, but prejudice reduction is only indirectly addressed, for example, when recruiting volunteers in high-schools to work in their programmes.

Difficulties

It is hard to motivate people to leave their everyday activities to take time in the program.

Volunteers sometimes have unrealistic expectations about making a change in a short time, so they need patience.

Volunteers also have prejudices (for example, they tend to underestimate the village inhabitant's skills and behave in a patronizing way), but it is not considered to be an issue, as the NGO believes that volunteers who join them are very open minded, and therefore prejudice reduction is not part of their training.

Roma identity

They do not raise the topic of Roma identity intentionally, only if it is raised by Roma participants. They react spontaneously and try to facilitate a positive Roma identity, but the NGO does not have a policy around the issue of discussing Roma identity or the experience of discrimination. According to the Roma participant of the focus group, Roma people are not comfortable raising the topic of racism with the volunteers.

Solidarity, collective action

For volunteers, it is important to speak up against racism, but they find it challenging. They hope that they can decrease prejudice by sharing their good experiences. It is also important for the NGO to be visible and to raise awareness among the majority, and especially their target group of high school volunteers.

Gender

It is a sensitive topic, because gender stereotypes are present among village inhabitants, but the volunteers provide counter-stereotypical gender role models. They used to conduct separate groups for boys and girls among teenagers, but they changed this recently and had positive experiences. They rely on same-sex mentors in the mentor programme for adults.

Summary and comparison

The two NGOs have very different activities and focus, but nonetheless, they can be compared among some dimensions. UCCU works with Roma activists/volunteers that aims to reduce prejudice among members of the majority in short-term training programs. In contrast, Bagázs

works mostly with non-Roma volunteers and their target group is highly disadvantaged people, most of whom are Roma. Their engagement with the target group is long term.

In UCCU, they believe in open communication and the well tested methodology of informal education. They encourage participants to express their negative emotions and prejudice, and they respond to them with their personal stories. In Bagázs, the topic of prejudice appears only indirectly, and the focus is more on practical problem-solving, assistance, inclusion and social support. A common element is that they both believe that a strict script cannot be followed in the programmes, they need to be tailored to the needs of the participants.

A clear difference is that Roma identity is at the core of UCCU's intervention, and members use their own Roma identity and personal stories to educate majority participants. In contrast, Bagázs with mostly non-Roma volunteers do not address Roma identity as an issue (most often, they do not even refer to their target group as Roma, but as „villagers“).

Solidarity and collective action is not among the goals of either NGO's, they both set their goals on other levels, like attitude change in both case (explicit in UCCU, and more implicit in Bagázs), and as step-by step changes in the lives of individuals in case of Bagázs.

Both NGO's reflected on gender as a relevant topic which they have not addressed directly so far, but they think of the ways they could in the future.

Focus groups (and interview) summary – WP4 Slovakia

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Focus group composition design and procedure.

Thanks to the analysis of interventions conducted in 2018 we have identified key actors among organizations carrying out the interventions, who were the most active within the Roma inclusion decade + (years 2005 – 2018). Subsequently we have selected two prominent non-profit organisations and conducted 2 case studies using interviews/focus groups to cover different

actors for both organisations - NGO representatives, intervention participants, and donors. Thanks to the participation of donors from diverse grant schemes in the focus group we have been able to grasp the situation beyond these two case studies.

The first case is Milan Šimečka Foundation, one of the oldest NGOs in Slovakia (established in 1991). They focus on human rights education, capacity building of democratic institutions and minority issues. Currently their work includes diversity education, Roma issues and Holocaust research and education. In the projects they use principles of interactive learning and elements of peer and drama education.

The second case is Eduma – an NGO founded in 2015 and led by a Roma social pedagogist who has worked with young people (in particular with ethnic minorities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds) since 2007. The aim of Eduma is to strengthen different social environments in their ability to successfully include minorities via education. Their main methods include storytelling, emotional and experience learning.

No	Interview / Focus Group	Type of participants	NGO concerned	Participants count
1	Interview	NGO representative	1 Eduma	1
2	Interview	NGO representative	1 Eduma	1
3	Interview	Intervention participant	1 Eduma	1
4	Focus group	NGO representatives	2 Šimečka foundation	4
5	Interview	Intervention participant	2 Šimečka foundation	1
6	Interview	Intervention participant	2 Šimečka foundation	1
7	Focus group	Donors - representatives from: 1 Ministry of Education, 1 Ministry of Culture; 1 corporate donor, 2 NGO donors	(all)	5
				14



Conclusions & Discussion

Interventions best practice from the perspective of participants

There is a wide agreement among participants that emotion and experience based interventions have the biggest impact on participants. All participants consider training in empathy, in critical thinking, self-growth, self-reflection as useful in strengthening tolerance and sensitization towards diversity (including the Roma, migrants, LGBT or other minorities). The participants pointed out several limits and lessons learned and formulated numerous tips on how to transform the short-lasting „wow“ effect of activities into the coveted enduring change in majority attitudes towards the Roma.

Ψ No law can make you a more empathic person. In this case, the law is useless. (...) You simply need to encounter a person face-to-face. And, suddenly, you uncover that behind “a minority” there is a name, a face, a story, images from their life and that changes you. (Eduma NGO representative)

Recommendations are:

- A) to combine activities targeting affective route (empathy/emotion/experience) with either presenting the facts about a given minority, OR making a reflection afterwards (e.g. discussion, essay writing, own project, action planning etc.)

Ψ It gives them a chance to empathise...empathise and to reflect. I find it very important. If we theoretically talked about one topic or another thing they may have heard or read somewhere in a textbook, it wouldn't have the same effect on them. They wouldn't get the chance to really think about what I am trying to communicate. (Šimečka foundation participant)

- B) stories used in interventions need to present elements easy to identify with for the participants - e.g. local, concrete, accessible, tailored to a specific age group in question, sharing same problems, same fears

Ψ That's why we work with the story of Landry and Matej (Stories that Move) most often because they are Slovaks. (..) As soon as they (the participants) watched other stories from foreign countries they were not able to embrace it. They felt the discrimination takes place somewhere else, not here. (Šimečka foundation representative)

- C)** to combine an individual story, individual experience with more general rules and broader context, with presenting facts about lives of members of a minority (after initial decategorisation, recategorize the individual stories back to the whole outgroup)

Ψ We still work with those testimonies that we have archived here. And these activities depend on them. Because they never said they suffered discrimination, they talked about reality. (Šimečka Foundation representative)

- D)** prepare the intergroup contact setting for members of different groups (majority and minority) to establish common ingroup identity and to blur intergroup boundaries.

Ψ Sometimes it happens that both groups find themselves in a completely exceptional/uncommon situation and the edges are smoothed a bit. (...) I would never be able to persuade a teacher to taste a cake brought by Roma mothers to parents' meetings inside a classroom. But we organised the same (event) outside. Suddenly a white kid takes their mother by hand and pulls her towards a table full of cakes. Now nobody knows who made the cakes, and it was OK. (Donors focus group, Ministry of Education representative)

- E)** it is not enough to conduct one-time activities, a repeated, systematic and long term engagement with the topic is needed (e.g. one-year period)

Ψ Almost all our projects are based on long term cooperation with a small group of people. We work with 20 teachers for 10 months. We don't want to just visit the school once, teach something and just leave afterwards (for good). (Šimečka foundation representative)

Ψ "Perceptive school" project ran for one year and sometimes it's not enough. Because sometimes we do a lot of activities (in school) and some of them require repeating. It takes time for my colleagues to get used to all activities involved. So the time factor is something, you know. (Participant of Eduma NGO project)

F) in order to change attitudes in a given school/community, all members should be engaged in the intervention, not only (self-selected) individuals (e.g. not only two or three teachers, but all employees of the school, including supporting staff should be engaged)

ψ We gradually realised that what started to work for us was that once we went to a school, it (workshop) should be for all the teachers, and especially when it came to topics about Roma children, all teachers had to get the director's time off (to participate). (...) This way I found out how big the impact was. That it is not about an isolated positive island, but the accumulated mass, when one of the group started to negate something, others would correct them. (Eduma NGO representative)

ψ The problem usually is, that there is one active teacher, but others are not. So I would like to stress here that it is important to change the entire environment, that means all full-day activities and then they need to educate themselves and put it into practice for several years afterwards. (Eduma NGO representative)

Barriers and struggles in conducting effective prejudice reduction

In their efforts to ensure sustainability of interventions, the organisers encounter at least two types of problems - internal (concerning organisers) and external (societal norms).

The NGOs (most common organisers of interventions in Slovakia) struggle due to: financial instability, high employee fluctuation, low capacities for PR, young staff, lack of professionals.

Although many interventions can possibly bring significant changes in participants/participant groups, the difficulties arise when confronted with broader community and societal norms - e.g. successful interventions within the school environment, but people outside school disapprove (parents, villagers, priests...), OR when Roma children leave inclusion-friendly schools and afterwards are “hit” by rejection from society.

ψ The parents, like ... we had sort of huge problems with them in the beginning. In terms that, how to put it, not all of them were willing to allow their children to take part in various activities. (Eduma NGO participant)

Identity, Engagement and Empowerment of Roma people in interventions

We have identified a tendency to include multiple different groups of majority population, or even solely members of majority in activities targeting prejudice against Roma. (This we interpret as a sign of good practice as opposed to an older one addressing segregation and antigypsyism by working almost exclusively within Roma communities and not including members of majority). Another tendency is to create opportunities for Roma to actively engage in interventions, to emancipate and empower themselves. Then it is about finding the right way to involve members of the minority.

Numerous cultural events supported by the Ministry of Culture grant scheme display Roma (solely) as musicians, dancers, this may further strengthen the essentializing stereotypical perception of Roma minority as musicians, artists and artisans. Although the festivals are part of popular culture, they can backfire in terms of perceiving Roma identity. The recommendation is to avoid positioning Roma people in the role of subjects at display, but to ensure they are a valuable and active part of interventions or even support them in becoming leaders that initiate change. The NGOs and donors recognize it is crucial to create opportunities for the Roma to actively engage in interventions, to emancipate and empower themselves.

Ψ It's important to engage Roma because a lot of them think less of themselves compared to white people (...) (Donors focus group, Ministry of Culture representative)

Ψ We know that we are not able to achieve anything solely with top-down approach, we need to educate young people that can later work within their own communities. (Eduma NGO representative, talking about Academy of young leaders)

Ψ (A Festival) is not successful in changing societal attitudes, which was our primary goal, but it can turn into a tool for minority empowerment, engagement. After 15 years this goal has actually become dominant, it provides them with greater visibility in the public domain. (Šimečka foundation representative, talking about festival Fjúžn/Fusion dedicated to foreigners in the country)

There is also a change in conceptualisation of interventions' target group - a shift of focus from multiculturalism and multicultural education to sensitization towards diversity in general.

Ψ "The example of multicultural education and the transition to intercultural education is a perfect example of change in the foundation's thinking," (Šimečka foundation focus group)

ψ “We have reached the point of some kind of respect for diversity, but I admit these kinds of activities are a bit of a challenge. (we’re asking ourselves) How to educate towards diversity using a book about specific minorities? It’s not simple to cultivate the understanding of general uniqueness in people. (Šimečka foundation focus group)

Evaluation of interventions, Donors and their role

Different grant schemes support and require evaluation of interventions’ effect to a various extent. Some schemes require to follow and report indicators of change very strictly, others monitor basic information about people engaged, their feedback etc., some schemes do not require anything but a simple final report. Donors representatives expressed the need to evaluate the effect of interventions more thoroughly, although this approach is accompanied by a lot of challenges.

ψ What we think is a problem when trying to measure the effect - it is not enough to count the number of people engaged in the project. We have decided to make some changes in the following decade to find out whether it (supported projects) actually changes attitudes. We will let an organisation decide, we support them to do their homework, and to define the ways how they want to measure the change. (Donors focus group, NGO representative)

Four out of five donor representatives mentioned interventions where the effect was measured using different tools - a questionnaire before and after intervention, or using a “control” group, or monitoring participants’ attitudes/feedback for a longer period of time. Unfortunately, according to our data from analysing interventions of 2018, these are outliers. Common practice of “evaluation” is participant counts, feedback, simple report etc.

NGO representatives did not express the grant schemes would be too restrictive in terms of what they feel is a meaningful activity. They perceive there is little the donor schemes demand from them in terms of evaluation of the actual effect. The problem they encounter is their financial dependency on grant schemes and the uncertainty of the organisation regime of existence, which has implications on the sustainability of projects and subsequently the sustainability of interventions.

Collective action - possible implications

Empowered Roma people who were involved in interventions may later take action in their communities, or become leaders to voice their own opinions, to defend the rights of the minority and to stand up for themselves (careful about the conditions of engagement of Roma people – to really empower versus to display them).

People and organisation who experienced interventions, or rather successful and inspirational projects can later influence their communities in more minority-inclusive, minority-sensitive, minority-accepting way (e.g. a school set a different way of behaving to each other, a school that has become a benchmark of inclusive approach in the region, it later engaged in ongoing projects and influenced the community via communication with parents, villagers etc.).

Ψ One of our graduates [who previously participated in an Eduma intervention in the school] later became an external team-member of the NGO Eduma. She helps for example in a project where, if I may use the term, the white couples adopt Roma children. She herself is of Roma origin and she helps the parents to understand their Roma child better, what Roma children are like. And she also led a workshop about different skin colour at our school... (Eduma NGO participant)

Conclusions

According to interview and focus group participants using in/direct contact and affective route proves to be attractive and efficient during activities. Secondly they stressed the importance of working with different environments/groups in order to develop their ability for an inclusive approach. To strengthen the intervention effect and to maintain its sustainability we recommend – working with different environments; engaging all members of a defined group (e.g. teacher staff); repeated, systematic and long term engagement of participants; using stories, examples easy to relate to; combining affective route with other methods (including cognitive route); preparing the intergroup contact setting to achieve common ingroup identity (decategorization); recategorize the individual stories back to the whole outgroup; engage Roma in an empowering role; financially, systematically and expert-wise support organisers in measuring intervention effects. Identified barriers included personal and financial instability of NGOs and overall normative and institutional context.

Focus groups summary – Romania

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Focus group composition design and procedure.

- **Focus group methodology**

Participants were recruited through email and telephone invitations addressed to the head of the NGOs. Upon acceptance, they were asked to provide the contact details of a couple of persons in their NGO that were directly involved in the implementation of the interventions. These persons were then contacted directly and invited to take part in one or two focus-groups, and were also asked to invite participants that directly took part in at least one intervention.

We received positive responses from four representatives of the NGO: two representatives of the NGO “Cu alte cuvinte” (In other words), one of which was formerly a member of the RomaniCriss NGO for seven years, two representative of the ProRoma NGO and one representative of the Center for Legal Resources NGO.

We selected only representatives of the NGO that were either responsible for the implementation of the intervention or were at least directly involved in it.

- The first focus group was composed of 5 participants, all women, aged 26 to 39 ($M= 35.2$). Two participants were representatives of the “Cu alte cuvinte” NGO, one was a representative of the ProRoma NGO and the last two participants took part in at least one discrimination fighting intervention. One participant took part at a conference that aimed to raise awareness related to discrimination by presenting real-life experiences of Roma that were confronted with discrimination. The other participant took part at an interactive theatre-based intervention where they staged a 3 minutes play about Roma discrimination and its effects.

- The second focus group was a follow up of the first one and was composed of the same two participants that took part in the first one to which a representative of the ProRoma NGO (woman, aged 41) and a participant that took part in an intervention were added (men, aged 41). The participant took part at the same conference as the participants from the first focus-group.
- The focus groups were conducted online through the ZOOM platform because of the Co-vid19 national urgency state that was in effect at the time, which forbade face-to face meetings. The duration of the focus groups was 65 minutes respectively 40 minutes.

Conclusions & Discussion

Overview of the focus groups

The focus groups revealed interesting results related to a couple of interventions carried out by the Cu Alte Cuvite (In Other Words) NGO: *All they know about us* and *The new story tellers*. These interventions are quite unique in Romania because they centre on creating story books inspired by the every-day life stories of Romani children, where the main characters are Roma ethnics. Racism has many forms and manifests itself at various levels, and one of them is exclusion, in this case exclusion of the Romani characters from the literature. As explained by one of our focus-group participants, these books aim to *“introduce some Romani characters in the Romanian literature with a double scope: to ensure that Romani characters are present in the children literature and [...] are portrayed positively, [...] so that the Romani children can find themselves in the books that they read”*. The response of our participants to this initiative was very positive, underlying that *“the use of educative books is one of the best initiatives and one that has the best chance to get the point across”*. They also underline that, even if these books are addressed to children, they have a great chance to change the negative stereotypes that adults have towards

Romani in general and make them be more opened and tolerant. Also, authors (e.g. Klein, 2002) that have researched racism in the children literature underline the fact that it can be both intended and unintended and both types have great bearing in shaping the opinion people have about minorities, their attitudes and the behaviours that they consider appropriate. Moreover, the same author suggests that appropriate books can represent important tools in determining a change. Also, the idea that children books can represent a starting point for positive interactions with adults that ultimately lead to positive change is supported by studies that show the fact that family can have a great impact in diminishing racisms (Laszloffy and Hardy 2000).

Also, the implementers of the intervention noted that the workshop themselves gave satisfaction to the children involved and determined a large area of positive emotions. Even though the impact of the intervention has not been assessed yet, the books were well received by the teachers, and they seemed to have an *“empowering effect on the Romani children”* and create a bridge between Roma and non-Roma children.

The difficulty of evaluation the impact of these interventions resides from two aspects: the first one is that the funders usually do not have a budget for measuring the impact and the second one is that they need time to work. However, based on previous studies that have shown that civic education can promote tolerance, respect and can increase the awareness towards discrimination and prejudice (Barr et al., 2015) we can assume that their impact can only be positive, and in the end it is the *“Roma children’s right to find themselves in the books that they read”*.

Another type of intervention we have talked about is the intervention based on interaction between Roma and non-Roma participants. The main ideas that emerged are that it can be very effective under some conditions. Compared to other countries, such as the United States of America, Romanians are still very racist when it comes to the Roma minority (Rus and Sandu, 2020), and are even unaware of how racist they are, so a first step should be to raise awareness related to these aspects. An option to reach this effect could be to organize meeting where the Roma participants could interact directly with the no-Roma participants. However, drawing from studies that have showed these types of interactions are often negative (e.g. Bhabha et al., 2017)

it appears that a supervised approach would be the best fit. Another important premise for success, underlined by the members of the NGO, is to have a very clear structure of the intervention, in order to have interaction with a scope. Drawing from past experience, organizers state that, in general, both Romani and non-Romani are often reluctant to interact, and when they do, it is only superficial, but if there is a clear objective (other than the interaction itself, for example an essay contest) then there seems to be more premises for a change. The participants from our focus-group agree, one of them reporting that such an intervention managed to change her perspective and determined her to wish to share her experience with family or friends.

One of our participants also offered us a view on the sanitary mediation system, proposed and supported by the Romani Criss NGO. The mediators, almost exclusively women, had a positive impact on the health of the Roma communities, but the system didn't address the cause of the discrimination, but rather reduced its effects. As statistics show, they managed to help Roma ethnics have better access to medical care by bridging the gap between them and the healthcare professionals but were unable to change the attitudes of doctors, for example. *“Ideally and philosophically speaking the idea of health care mediators is not, in my opinion a fare one [...] we should be able to ensure equal access to the health care system no matter the ethnicity but in practice [...] the impact was positive for this transition period”*

As pointed out in the previous sections, and confirmed by our focus group participants, the discrimination of Roma ethnics is still very present in the Romanian institutions and in everyday life. One domain that does not make an exception is the education field. A recent study (Sime, Fassetta, McClung, & Council, 2017) shows that Romani mothers still feel that their children have limited access to education, are being discriminated in schools and kindergartens and treated unfair, despite positive policies. Maybe even more important, 40% of Rumanians agree that the Romani children are indeed treated worse, compared to the majority children, and these results are even more shocking as, in general the awareness towards discrimination in Romania is smaller compared to other European countries (Surdu, Vincze, & Wamsiedel, 2011). One participant shared that, for her, the most efficient intervention aimed at reducing discrimination in education was based on sharing the discrimination stories and, most importantly the success

stories of Romani that succeeded in life despite of being treated unfair: *“What impressed me the most was the way he persevered and continued studding even in such conditions”*.

Another interesting observation is related to the impact that the support of teachers and friends have in these adverse situations. One of the organizers referred to a study she was involved in, which pointed out that, when faced with severe discrimination the persons that overcome them and managed to finish their studies did so because they had some sort of support from colleagues, friends or teachers, not because they had a better financial situation or were more gifted than their colleagues (Bhabha et al, 2017). Our participants had a very positive response to this observation stating that, the simple fact of making them aware of the positive impact they can have, made them be more careful to their behaviours in these situations.

One of the main issues of many Romanian interventions is that they lack continuity. One of the focus-group participants, the former member of the Romani Criss NGO explained that, in that NGO there is often a different team on each project, because they work with people that are hired only for the duration of the intervention. The director of the Romani Criss NGO who, although was not part of the focus-group, was contacted separately to corroborate this information confirmed that, when the funds for a certain intervention run out and the intervention itself is completed the team is let go, and another one is hired when new funds for another intervention are acquired. This type of approach has obvious limitation, such as the fact that the team that implements the interventions is constantly inexperienced, or the fact that there is an inability to fallow the progress of a previous intervention, of measure its impact. This is why, in her opinion it is important to have at least a constant core team that runs interventions and a *“soft approach that aims to educate can have greater impact”* even if it is not immediate, and is on the long term. Also, there are numerous empirical studies which support the idea that a soft long term approach based on education has the best chances of having a real lasting impact (Rivas-Drake and Umaña-Taylor, 2019).

When talking about the ideal intervention that could have a lasting impact some ideas arose. First of all, raising awareness related to discriminatory practices is still crucial in the Romanian society, and example of positive cases needs to be presented more often. The success stories of Romani

ethnics that thrived even though they were discriminated, could have a positive impact, and presenting the results of the studies that show that these people succeeded because they were supported by class-mates, teachers and friends (Bhabha et al, 2017) could help the majority be aware of the important impact they can have.

The interventions based on educating the teachers had mixed results, according to the NGO representatives that participated in our focus-group, although these interventions had short term positive effects and were received with enthusiasm, in time, their effect seem to disappear and teachers go back to their “old ways”. A possible solution could be a long term approach that offers continuous support and guidance for teachers in implementing the positive practices taught in the intervention.

“Reparatory justice” is another concept that emerged as important in our focus group. An important step towards diminishing discrimination and increasing awareness is knowing the history of the Romani ethnics, recognizing all the adversities to which they have been subjected to over the years; only then, we can start to mend these effects and build a positive relation. Also, empirical studies that show the positive effects of teaching history and educating teachers as well as students, support the fact such an approach can indeed have positive results (Barr et al., 2015).

Discussion

In Romania, as in many other countries, the Roma ethnics are, unfortunately still discriminated and marginalized by the majority (Rus and Sandu, 2020). In an effort to reduce it, NGOs have designed and implemented numerous interventions that were briefly described in Table 1 and further analyzed through a couple of focus-groups.

As can be observed from the table, in Romania interventions based on education are among the most frequently employed. Our analysis shows that, although many have limited effects, under certain conditions they can be one of the most effective ways to fight discrimination. The main issue in Romania is that they lack continuity; for example interventions that focus on completing a training for teachers with no follow up have little chance of making a long term difference, however if teachers continue to receive support in implementing the changes, and their progress

is being supervised than chances of success increase significantly. Another way to ensure a long term effect is through a soft approach based on gentle exposure to positive examples, to relatable Roma characters presented in children's books or to subtitle discussions about the effects of prejudice. These interventions aim to reach one of the most important goals which emerged from our research: increasing the awareness related to Roma discrimination and to the effects that such negative behaviours have.

In line with this goal is also the idea of increasing the knowledge about the historical adversatives to which the Romani have been subjected to over the years, and such interventions have been proven efficient in promoting tolerance and empathy (Barr et al., 2015). Also, raising awareness related to the positive impact that supporting and encouraging behaviours can have on Roma ethnics when they are faced with discrimination can also promote responsibility and positive practices for the majority population.

The health mediator system, a particularity of the Romanian context has had positive effects in improving the health of the Roma ethnics, and the relation between them and the medical personnel, however, this should be regarded as a provisory solution because the goal should be to create equal access to medical service for all minorities. In other words, although it is efficient, it addresses more the effects of the discrimination rather than its true cause.

Interventions based solely on interaction, for example Roma music festivals, are almost absent In Romania, with a single exception – The fair of diversity. In most of the cases interaction was combined with other methods, for example in mixed education trainings or debate contests, which seems to lead to more positive effects.

The second most important issue in Romania, besides the lack of continuity of the interventions, is the lack of evaluation of their effects. However, this is not a problem only in the Romanian context, but is rather a general problem with these types of intervention (Paluck, and Green, 2009). The reason behind it is complex, including impediments such as the lack of funds for a proper evaluation or the lack a proper methodology to complete it. Further interventions should try to address this issue because knowing the effects of an intervention, allows organizers to see

what is really efficient and what is not, and they can't really improve their methods if they don't know for a fact what works.

Recommendations for Practice.

Many recommendations for successful interventions have already been presented in the previous sections of this report; however, we wish to stress a few points that seem to be the most important. Based on our research, it seems that a soft approach, aiming to have long term effects appears to be the best way to reduce discrimination and prejudice.

Raising awareness needs to be one of the most important goals of the interventions as it can trigger chain reactions that modify the behaviours of participants. This goal can be achieved through education, history teaching, class discussions and exposure to literature that includes positive Romani characters.

One of the most important recommendations would be continuity. No intervention can have lasting impact if it is implemented only in a short amount of time, the goal should be to offer continuous support to the participants that received a training, to monitor the activity of teachers, and support them in overcoming the challenges they face, and to also implement the intervention in multiple stages. If it is not possible, NGOs could create short term interventions that aim to have long term effect: for example donating books to schools which include Roma characters or promoting discussions about discrimination during the history classed. Both these examples have the potential to continue having positive effects even after the intervention has finished.

Another important recommendation for the NGOs could be to maintain at least a core team that runs the interventions, so that they are able to accumulate experience and improve their strategy. Also, as stated in the previous section, evaluating the impact of the intervention using a proper before and after methodology should be a goal of further interventions.