



**TRAVELLERS AND ROMAS
IN WALLONIA
MEDIATION CENTER**

Belgian Presidency of the European Union

*Who cares?
Child Poverty and Child Well-Being*



(Boris Kocis: Roma of Serbia)

Recommendations

in partnership with Vlaams Minderheden Centrum and “Le Foyer”

Which population

By Roma population, european and national institutions mean usually two main categories:

- Travellers communities, mainly from Western Europe (France, Germany, UK, Ireland, Holland,...) whose needs are articulated around the mobile habitat/housing.
- Roma communities living or migrating from Central and Eastern Europe.

I. RESOURCES: incomes and allowances

The incomes of the parents determine on the whole the situation of the children. The children themselves hardly have the means of changing the circumstances in which they live¹. The majority of measures are thus centered on the families including the children themselves as well as their parents.

The Travellers have economic activities with an independent status which requires and which allows the mobile way of life. The practical and administrative barriers to the life in mobile habitat have as consequences:

- the increasing **impoverishment** of the Travellers families;
- **a break in the transmission to the children** of the professional competences and knowledge necessary to these economic activities;
- difficulties, and sometimes the impossibility, to have access to the **social rights** (family benefits,...).

Living Roma or migrants coming from the Central and Eastern Europe find barriers related to stigmatization, the linguistic difference, the lack of information, particularly about the ways to find an employment or to have access to the allowances.

These barriers increase the already important complexity of the administrative procedures making those insurmountable and leading to the inefficiency of certain projects relating to the Roma population.

Recommendations:

- Adapt and simplify the procedures to accede to the independent status.
- Take measures to guarantee the right to the mobile habitat (housing).
- Break the circle of the “administrative precarity” of Roma.
- Support mediation services for an effective access of Roma to the job market and the allowances (family in particular) by:
 - the information and orientation of the families;

¹ *Études des politiques nationales : La lutte contre la pauvreté infantile et la promotion de l'inclusion sociale. Ann Morissens, Ides Nicaise, Gijis Ory ; HIVA KU .Leuven ; mai 2007 ; www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net*

- improvement of the communication with the services specialized in professional training, job coaching,...

II. ACCESS TO THE SERVICES

1. Early childhood

The attendance to the pre-schools level is an important part of the integration process of the children into the school system.

Recommendations:

For the *Travellers*, a special attention will be given to early childhood within the framework of mobile animation projects.

The Member States must invest in projects or services of mediation which will give a support to the parents and pre-school classes.

2. Education

The lack of official recognition of the mobile habitat probably explains the **absence of projects of mobile education** which is however essential to the academic success of Traveller's children.

The access of the children to primary necessity equipment (access to water,...) is largely insufficient to allow the education in dignity.

The particular stigmatization of the Travellers children, in particularly at school is regularly reported by the parents. According to them, the children find themselves at the bottom of the class without really taking part in class activities. In addition it isn't rare to hear from certain teachers "I deal only with the children who come regularly to the school" excluding the Traveller's children.

For a better integration of *Roma*, **education is essential**. Otherwise, the risk would be a new generation of Roma without school instruction and with a very low level of literacy. In our modern society, it means having less opportunity to find an employment and to remain in a poverty dynamic. Education is also recognized at the international level as the most effective tool to improve the social situation of the Roma children and to break in a long term perspective the vicious circle of impoverishment and marginalisation.

In addition, a considerable number of **barriers** exist and **prevent Roma from ensuring continuity and academic success**.

- Discrimination and stigmatization;
- Incapacity to cover school fees (school clothing, food, voyages,...);
- The schools are also powerless vis-a-vis the *administrative absenteeism* of the European children whose parents are administratively in the obligation to leave the country after three months of residence.

Stigmatization as well as the **absence of adapted projects** push the educational world to take inadequate measures:

- systematic orientation of the children Roma/du *Voyage* towards a special schools for disabled children whereas they present no deficiency neither mental, nor physical;
- « redoubling » in pre-school.

Recommendations

- Support **mobile school** projects for the *Travellers children*;
- Recognize the mobile habitat/**housing**;
- Support **mediation services** to give the Roma children effective access to education through:
 - guidance and information of the parents on education rules and institutions (compulsory education, the role of the educational and extra-curricular structures, ...);
 - improvement of the communication with the teachers, the psychopedagogic advisers,...
 - the decreasing of the school absenteeism,
 - the implication of the parents in the education process;
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- Allow the services to fight against school absenteeism by helping homeless Roma children.
- **Invest in an adapted pedagogy:**
 - The schools must be supported to invest in education and teaching models adapted to immigrants, in particular for the young people who have problems in their school course.
 - It is necessary to allow experimental projects of pedagogy adapted to mobile teaching for the Travellers.
- **To eliminate financial barriers**

For many Roma parent, education costs are unaffordable. Especially for those which do not have a legal residence (with no access to subsidies of studies or family allowances.

Specific measures are thus necessary to reduce financial barriers. An additional and individualized **financial support** should **guarantee the right to education for every child**, independently of his legal status or that of the parents.

3. Health care

Regular expulsions of *Traveller families* have important consequences on children's health and still little investigated. Among these:

- psychological traumatism, fear and major insecurity feeling;
- discontinuity in the medical monitoring of children requiring a treatment even long a hospitalization.

The link between poverty and health conditions is already well known. Thus, a big number of families living in precarity frequently have one or two of their members with serious health problems as a disability or diseases such as the diabetes, obesity, asthma and respiratory infections.

In addition to poverty, we can point the costs of the health care, bad housing conditions (moisture, cool water, exiguous housing, lack of isolation,) and an insufficient food.

Recommendations

- In case of problematic stay in caravan, application of the legal eviction procedures and **practices** (mediation, justice decision, notification, respect of the children rights,...).
- Tackle the question of the unsanitary housings.
- Eliminate the financial barriers to health: access to the dental care, food for babies, the drugs....
- Inform on the health-care system in its preventive as well as curative dimensions.

4. Environment and housing

We can make a certain number of reports and proposals related to the environment and housing conditions of Roma/Travellers children:

- Relegation of the *Travellers* families in zones unsuited to the habitat, near the highways, industrial parks, on contaminated/polluted grounds, intoxication with heavy metals,...
- ...

These questions are not specific to infantile poverty but raise questions of housing and of homelessness, we will develop them in the document concerning with the Conference of Consensus about homelessness on December 9th and 10th.

5. Child welfare and social services

Over-representation of the Roma children in the institutions of assistance and protection of Youth as well as in the “placement” measures of taken by these institutions tend to be confirmed by the some reports² as well as by our daily practice.

This can be explained by:

- the extreme stigmatization of Roma;
- the image of “incompetent parents”;
- the idea that because they are Roma, the parents would have some habits which endanger the children;
- a bad communication between the parents and the services;
- ...

²Voir document préliminaire à la conférence de la Présidence de l’U.E. « la pauvreté et le bien-être des enfants ». p. 28

Child Poverty and Child Well-Being: recommendations about Roma and the Travellers children

In addition, the relation between the regular services and Roma are sometimes difficult. It also appears that the services offered are not integrated and too fragmented. It needs an important work of support of Roma with the different actors.

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness and officially recognize the particularly serious stigmatization of Roma and Travellers are victims;
- Support **mediation services** with the objectives of:
 - orientation and information of the parents about the various social, assistance and child care services,...
 - improvement of the communication with the educative and social workers of these services.