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Roma MATRIX: Good Practice Guide

6. Cross-community Mediation



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This good practice guide is about cross-community mediation: the different types of mediation that take place to promote community cohesion and offer specific service provision to marginalised Roma communities across Europe.

This is one of nine good practice guides which have been produced as part of a suite of materials that have come out of the Roma MATRIX project. Roma MATRIX is a project that aims to combat racism, intolerance and xenophobia towards Roma and to increase integration, through a programme of action across Europe. With 20 partners across 10 countries, it is one of the largest Roma inclusion projects in the European Union.

The good practice guides are intended as a resource for municipalities and civil society practitioners and field workers to refer to on a range of themes that discuss the barriers and challenges Roma face across Europe.

This guide explains the context, the complexities and the extent of the problems relating to cross-community mediation techniques. It identifies the key issues and the emerging practice that is being applied across Europe and it highlights specific case studies that draw on the good practice applied by the Roma MATRIX partners. The guide also sets out the key lessons and makes recommendations to improve policy and practices to support greater cross-community mediation practices.

The discrimination suffered by Roma across Europe is reaching crisis point. Evidence from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)^{1,7}, Amnesty International³, Medecins du Monde, the Greek Council for Refugees⁴, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)⁵ and others, shows that incidences of racially motivated attacks against Roma and other minorities are not just increasing in numbers but also in terms of severity e.g. organised political and/or para-military attacks. The need to bring communities together and to ensure that Roma are better connected to and included in the wider community where they live has never been more urgent.

As far-right political groups gain foothold across Member States², a sinister environment is growing where relations between diverse communities are strained at best and positively abusive at worst. Whilst many in each country's majority population would say that they do not support far-right parties, a recent survey in Slovakia shows that 75% of the population would support some of the ideas put forward by the far-right, such as enforcing a lower birth rate among Roma populations.¹ Such comments demonstrate the extent of misunderstanding between the majority and Roma communities.

Such extreme discrimination causes greater marginalisation of Roma communities and leads to greater barriers and more inaccessible service-provision for Roma families in health, education, employment and housing. Cross-community mediation can provide some of the tools required to deal with these challenges, often delivered through cultural events, facilitated workshops or other occasionally funded activities.

Cross-community mediation is an increasingly important tool across Europe to support all Roma inclusion efforts, but the term 'cross-community mediation' has different meanings depending on the country/locality. Broadly, these are:

1. **An action that seeks to bring two or more diverse communities together in a common purpose to increase mutual understanding and strengthen community cohesion.** The purpose is to create interventions that provide members of diverse communities with a safe space to get to know each other better and understand and accept each other's cultural norms.
2. **Specific one-to-one mediation to create accessible health and social care, education and employment and other services for the most marginalised Roma communities.** The purpose is to ensure that Roma people have 'supported' access to basic public services. This usually means employing people with a Roma background, from local Roma communities, or with a good knowledge of Roma issues, to act as mediators between the Roma and the public institutions.



Whichever form is being undertaken, mediation, in its different forms, has become a tried and tested, and often effective methodology in many localities. Recent extensive EU programmes such as ROMACT and ROMED2⁶ have all emphasised the practice of one-to-one mediation and will be outlined later in this guide. Many of these one-to-one mediation programmes are very successful in ensuring service provision and starting to break down barriers between Roma and non-Roma communities.

In many situations, mediation is the best way to ensure that Roma people know what they are entitled to in terms of services and it also confirms that the local municipality is trying to reach them. As well as providing a means to ensure healthcare and other services are available to Roma, it also helps to bridge gaps and de-mystify both communities to each other.

Children and young people participating in an Integration event



Policy into practice

There is not one piece of EU policy legislation that offers a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to cross-community mediation. However, EU policy does set the framework that takes into account the needs of minorities and recognises the fundamental rights of all citizens.

Specifically, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) up to 2020 was first adopted in April 2011. The NRIS provides Member States with the means to set national policies and interventions to tackle discrimination and racism against Roma, but there is no explicit guidance on how this might be achieved successfully. The NRIS are country specific and there is no cohesive cross-country link between them. Although they do provide the opportunity to include cross-country mediation to create a more inclusive environment for Roma communities, how this is interpreted and implemented varies widely from country to country.

The FRA's 2013 Annual report⁸ analyses the situation across the EU concerning discrimination, racism and related intolerance. It notes that despite NRIS being in place in Member States, little progress is being made towards Roma integration and that because of this, 'the Council of the European Union issued in December 2013 a *'Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures to Member States'*, which highlights the need for effective monitoring of the implementation of national integration strategies.'

The importance of getting the right focus

Much of the cross-community mediation that does happen across Europe is led by NGOs. Although community cohesion is the cornerstone of an integrated approach to Roma inclusion, local authorities often shy away from the challenges of this, preferring to focus resources on more specific, tangible and target-focused actions like education, employment and health. These may broadly be the right areas, but policies which exclusively target Roma and fail to adopt an integrated approach or to deal with institutionalised or extreme discrimination do not create an integrated, and ultimately successful, path to Roma inclusion.

In the UK for example, policies introduced in 2011 to foster community cohesion across a diverse range of minorities and the majority community have shown some success. Latterly, however, the emphasis in the UK is on targeted policy addressing the integration of migrant and other ethnic communities with the indigenous community. These policies undermine the idea of earlier community cohesion policies in some ways as there is an insistence that all migrants should have a high standard of English and be knowledgeable about British society and culture in order to live and work there. New policies refusing migrants any welfare payments until they have resided in the country for 18 months are also being discussed.⁹

The need for mutual understanding

More needs to be done to develop mutual understanding between both communities and to break down the barriers that exist on both sides. Not enough is being done to bring Roma and non-Roma communities together, particularly in terms of understanding each

other's cultural norms. Non-Roma communities across Europe still tend to blame Roma for the situation they are in - for their own poverty and lack of education and employment. These are the very myths and stereotypes that cross-community mediation programmes can help to break down.

At community level, the impact of a range of policies and growing attitudes against Roma/ethnic minorities/migrants further emphasises their marginalisation from the community in which they live. Marginalisation leads to severe discrimination - on one hand it compounds the belief that Roma people choose to live separately; on the other hand, marginalisation occurs because Roma feel unwelcome as part of the society where they live or have chosen to settle. Where racism is so severe that it triggers a vigilante culture from some in the wider community, the attacks - such as those seen in France¹⁰ on a young man accused of burglary - generate fear amongst Roma towards the wider population.

Some Roma communities still live very traditionally and may not allow 'outsiders' into the areas where they live. These, and others living in slum conditions on the outskirts of cities and towns, rurally in segregated villages or on the edges of rivers in shacks particularly benefit from mediation programmes. When extreme marginalisation exists, mediation services are highly relevant and having community-level acceptance is a positive and significant step.

Across Europe, various different practices are being applied to improve cross-community mediation and thus encourage Roma inclusion. These mediation efforts are supported and delivered by many organisations. This section of the guide provides insight into these practices.

ROMED/ROMACT

ROMED and ROMACT programmes have been set up to train Roma Mediators across Europe. After two years of implementation in 22 countries, and with over 1000 mediators trained, the ROMED Programme is moving on to another level. Its second phase, ROMED2, and a new Council of Europe and European Commission joint initiative – ROMACT - aim to support local partners in 40 municipalities across 10 countries.

The action of the two programmes is complementary - while the ROMED2 Programme focuses on the community and their participation in democratic governance through mediation, the ROMACT Programme works on building local level political commitment and the capacity of policy development. Work is therefore simultaneously being done on both Roma citizens' ability to participate and the authority's ability to respond.¹¹

Poland

In Poland, the position of Roma Teaching Assistants has been in place as part of a wider integration policy since 2005.¹² This programme was funded partly by the EU and partly by the government of Poland. Whilst the overall programme has come under criticism for not being entirely effective, the element relating to the training and employment of Roma Teaching Assistants does show some success.



Children and young people take part in a Tolerance event

Roma Teaching Assistants are all of Roma origin and are primarily used to mediate between families and schools with the purpose of getting more Roma children to go to and stay in school. One of the reasons for its success has been the active participation of the Local Authorities in Poland for a national programme of intervention.

However, there have been some issues, e.g. not all Roma communities are willing to choose someone to represent them in this way. Furthermore, when the Roma Teaching Assistants are in place, they are not offered permanent contracts and so do not receive job security. This means that there is a relatively high turnover in Assistants, making it hard to build consistent trust with the communities they serve.

Hungary

In Hungary, the organisation Partners-Hungary¹³ – established in Budapest in 1994 – specialises in managing conflict and building consensus between Roma and majority groups (as well as other focuses on gender programmes and civil society development).

Roma are Hungary's largest minority group and have been historically marginalised, resulting in high levels of poverty, unemployment and other low socio-economic indicators. Partners-Hungary works to resolve conflicts between Roma and non-Roma groups and promote integration. They do this through coordinating and facilitating public policy dialogues and providing small grants to improve Roma access to social services e.g. education and housing. They also establish inter-ethnic 'Conciliation Commissions' to mediate community disputes.

Partners-Hungary have implemented several projects for Roma communities both regionally and nationally, achieving high participation rates and successes.

Roma MATRIX practice

The Roma MATRIX partners' work is contributing to emerging practice. Across the project, partners are actively using mediation to bring together Roma and non-Roma communities. Through both dedicated/trained mediators and programme partners, Roma MATRIX activity is helping to dispel myths about Roma and improve mutual understanding and tackle conflict (see the following 'Good practice from Roma MATRIX' section).

Roma MATRIX partners have been working on specific projects which begin to tackle some of the issues in creating a more integrated society of Roma and non-Roma communities.

The Roma MATRIX partners are focusing on working with all communities in local neighbourhoods to improve integration and reduce discrimination.

The case studies below draw on the good practice applied by the Roma MATRIX partners and highlight how that good practice has had a positive impact.

Good practice includes using informal approaches to promote positive messages, tackle discrimination and encourage understanding amongst young people; the use of real life stories to encourage greater mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma; and mediation to resolve and/or avoid ongoing conflicts.

Football as a tool for community mediation, UK

Migration Yorkshire commissioned the Joshua Project¹⁴, a Bradford-based voluntary organisation working with socially excluded children and young people from a range of backgrounds, to run a cross-community mediation project in Bradford as part of the Roma MATRIX project. The Joshua Project observed exclusion and a lack of cohesion between Roma and non-Roma young people. Project staff often had to intervene to stop potential confrontations and racist verbal abuse from non-Roma towards Roma.

A large proportion of the Roma young people that the Joshua Project works with are boys. They observed through their community work that the one activity that brought different cultures together was football. At the youth clubs and on the streets, racism, cultural differences and misunderstandings seemed not to matter if the young people were playing football.

The organisation had an existing football team but it was not representative of the demographics of the young people attending their service; no Roma young people were involved. So, they disbanded the existing club and held an open training session as part of a community festival in a local park. Over 30 Roma young people attended, in addition to existing team members.

Dance performance at a cross-community Integration event



They moved the training to the local park from the pitches previously used. This opened the football club up as a free recreation resource for all young people. Both Roma and non-Roma now regularly attend. They also used the *Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC)* resources alongside training. SRTRC uses the football context to encourage young people to recognise the importance of cohesion and to see the value in celebrating difference - "the team would be no good if everyone was a goal keeper". The activity was supported by a football coach and three youth workers - the football coach provided the technical training whilst the youth workers have informally delivered the SRTRC programme.

The football team is now representative of the community's demographics, including white British, South East Asian and Roma young people. The Joshua Tree continues to use the same techniques to promote a more mixed community in the youth clubs, which were initially predominantly attended by Roma young people.

Beyond the team, Roma and non-Roma young people now meet outside football training to play football together. At the youth clubs there has also been a noticeable improvement in how the young people mix together.

This example shows how taking simple steps to create an opportunity for children and young people from Roma and non-Roma backgrounds to come together has developed an improved, mutual understanding between the two communities. It also shows the value of informal interventions when working with young people.

"...As one of the youth workers at the football sessions, it has been a pleasure to observe a segregated group of young people become included in a positive activity. It has also been brilliant to see this inclusion stretch beyond our Saturday morning football training sessions to after school kickabouts and games in the park at weekends. The experience has shown me that cohesion is more than just a buzz word and when it works well it is positive for all involved..."

(Rich, Youthworker)

"...Football on Saturdays has become so much better since they [Slovakian young people] have joined in. It's better with more people there. I didn't really ever hang out with Slovaks before, but I've started speaking to them in school now. The staff asked me to think about how I would feel if I left my home, travelled thousands of miles for a better life and then just got bullied when I got there because of where I come from. I don't think that bullying someone because of where they come from is fair..."

(Michael, 13)

"...Me and my friends like football and have liked being part of the Joshua Project football team on Saturdays. Since we've moved to Bradford I have been bullied quite a bit at school because I am Slovakian. I stopped going to school sometimes because of it but one of the people who bullied me was at the football and we made friends..."

(Roman, 13)

"...I have seen a real change in the young people who attend. The original team members had a racist attitude. I have seen this change over the few months since we ran an open training session as part of a festival in the local park. They've come to accept each other as equal team members. I think the fact that a number of the Slovakian young people are really good at football has helped."

(Dave, Football coach)

Social services mediation to improve living conditions and prevent conflict, Italy

Roma people began arriving in Bologna at the beginning of the 1990s, fleeing the Balkans conflict. Temporary settlements were arranged for them and they were subsequently given help with accessing public housing when they met requirements. Increasing numbers of Roma continued to arrive from Eastern Europe however, occupying the places in the camps that other Roma had vacated. Therefore, the settlements that were intended to be a temporary, emergency response to an extraordinary situation became permanent.

The regional authority in Emilia Romagna, Italy has worked with Neighbourhood Associations to support Roma to integrate into private housing following the closure of settlements in 2013. Special care was necessary because Roma people encountered open discrimination when looking for a house or flat to rent; landlords would refuse to accept them as tenants, e.g. because they thought their property would be damaged, rent wouldn't be paid, other people would illegally move in, and neighbours wouldn't accept

Roma in their buildings (this discrimination can be experienced by many migrants, but particularly Roma).

"Roma people suffer from multiple discrimination, especially when accessing private housing or the job market. Unlike Sinti, they're also foreigners and unlike other foreigners they're also gypsies. Negative attitudes add up and make it very hard for them to integrate".

(Social worker)

The local administration supported Roma with social workers who became the first interface with estate agents and landlords. They registered the lease contracts in the authority's own name, and collected the rent from the family, meaning that the landlords could be guaranteed that the rent would be paid. They also mediated relations between Roma and neighbours, organising and attending meetings to help encourage understanding and prevent conflict.

The social workers provided a constant interface between the landlord and the family, in order to facilitate communication and provide help with adhering to the contract. The administration also proposed an integration contract to the family - by signing it the family agreed that the provision of support was dependent on factors such as school attendance, vaccinations for the children and the correct management of the apartment.

The role and involvement of the social workers is planned for one year only and will decrease in scale and degree, so that the family can gradually become independent in their relations with the property and their neighbours.

"The political minority in the Council is always very active in questioning interventions in favour of migrants and Roma people, especially when there's public money involved. The fact that these interventions were not challenged politically is a proof that they were perceived as necessary and well planned".

(Social Service Manager)

Other Roma MATRIX practice

In the UK, Pakistani Advice and Community Association (PACA) has been involved in supporting local communities to integrate. Page Hall is a small area in Sheffield where there have been tensions between the local Pakistani communities and newly arriving Eastern European Roma. A residents' Cross Community Mediation Group was established and used to create cross-community projects. The group also provides a regular mechanism for updating and disseminating information to police and the local authority. A Facebook page - 'Page Hall Today' – was created to promote the positive aspects of life in Page Hall. This medium has brought the issue of dealing with community tensions to the fore for discussion. Community lunches were also organised, where communities got together to discuss local issues.

In Bradford, UK, as well as the football club intervention, the Joshua Project in Bradford ran several initiatives for young people through their Youth Centre. They used the informal youth club setting to encourage Roma to attend and had local non-Roma and Roma youths engaging with each other. The group that formed from this interaction decided to make a video of their lives 'Same but Different' and hold a

Community Party. The young people led on the activities, with support from the centre. The autobiographical use of stories to share common experiences and common interests, as well as differences, provided a narrative that could be shared in other contexts. They used music as a universal language to break down barriers. The screening of the video was attended by 113 young people and 19 adults (youth work team members and family). Using the 'Same but Different' theme the young people also elected to produce a photographic exhibition. The launch was attended by 127 people and the photographs have been made into a permanent mural in the Youth Centre.

In Rotherham, UK, the local Council Community Involvement officer led on a mediation project. In the area of Eastwood, local residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds met regularly to improve their local neighbourhood, bring people together and improve understanding. A steering group was formed and 'Eastwood Environmental Group' was established. It decided to launch a 'litter pick', as this was identified by residents as a key area for mediation. Another issue identified was the isolation of many Roma women in the Ferham area, who are not

A young child's drawing of social integration



confident or able to engage with cross-community activities. Coffee mornings were facilitated where Roma women could come together to socialise and discuss concerns and issues regarding everyday life in the UK. These activities and meetings have improved community relations, with over 50 local residents meeting to decide on activities. The group also decided to extend the project beyond litter picking and have set up a 'Streetpride Volunteer' project.

In Spain, Maranatha supported families and individuals in the neighbourhood of Malilla near Valencia, where many Roma migrants from Romania live. There had been conflict between neighbours and evictions of Roma had been taking place. Maranatha spoke to political leaders in the city and met with neighbourhood associations to establish a bridge of communication and understanding. Cross-community mediation took place including issues relating to expulsion of children from the local school, eviction of families from their homes and unnecessary fines imposed on Roma by police. The meetings between the Roma and non-Roma neighbourhood associations enabled some issues of conflict to be resolved and points of understanding to be reached. The mediation work helped to stop the deportation of families from the Malilla neighbourhood and encouraged better communication between police and communities. The president of the Association of Neighbours of Malilla is quoted as saying *"Thanks to the work of mediation that has been done, we are now calmer in the neighbourhood and have a better coexistence with Roma families."*

The Roma Women Association in Romania (RWAR) have created networks of Roma and non-Roma to support individual cases

where mediation is required, e.g relating to health, education and employment. They have provided mediation between Roma families and local authorities, helping to develop communication and ultimately enabling the Roma families to access services e.g. to register with doctors and become eligible for emergency aid.

In Hungary, the Roma Civic Association mobilised Youth Volunteers to run activities in High Schools. The activities and events aimed to bring Roma and non Roma together. For children this was done through study sessions and for adults with cultural events. Roma-Hungarian 'Share the Table' lunches were organised. These events were well attended and helped support cross-community communication. In schools, crime prevention sessions were held with the police for Roma and non-Roma, which received good feedback.



This section of the guide sets out the lessons that have emerged from the actions of the Roma MATRIX partners, and also from the improved understanding of the issues that has occurred because of the transnational and multi-country implementation that occurred during the delivery of Roma MATRIX actions.

Lesson 1 - The need for mutual understanding

Mutual understanding, co-existence and respect between Roma and non-Roma are essential for greater inclusion and integration of Roma with majority communities. Effective cross-community mediation measures are a very effective way of achieving this as they promote cohesion and help to challenge commonly held myths and misunderstandings.

Lesson 2 – Choose the right tone of intervention

For cross-community mediation programmes to be successful, they must be appropriately tailored to the particular groups they are trying to influence. Only by doing this will they ensure engagement and, ultimately, increased cohesion. For example, interventions to encourage cross-community understanding and cooperation amongst young people should take a suitably informal approach.

Lesson 3 – The importance of support from authorities

There are numerous examples to demonstrate how mediation can successfully support and improve integration, tackling conflict and improving access for Roma to public services. Successful cross-community mediation of all types is more likely when there is local authority and political commitment to a cohesive society model. Currently, many cross-community mediation actions are led by NGOs and can lack the necessary political support to stand up to extremists or engagement to influence change in public policy and service delivery.

Lesson 4 – The need for clear terms

Any mediation intervention that involves giving direct support (especially financial support) should have clear terms regarding the duration of support and requirements of the Roma - otherwise it is more likely to encourage dependence rather than fostering empowerment and autonomy.

Lesson 5 - The importance of conflict prevention

Proactive, preventative interventions to encourage mutual understanding and integration are crucial and just as important (if not more so) than mediation simply to resolve existing conflicts. Helping people to live together peacefully in a multi-cultural environment is the ultimate aim.

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Other Resources

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The research component of Roma MATRIX is investigating how the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) and other policies focused on Roma inclusion and integration are being implemented and delivered within the 10 Member States. This has a particular focus on approaches to tackling anti-Roma racism, as well as exploring the progress being made in Member States around the key areas of concern to the wider Roma MATRIX project. Elements include:

- Ten 'country reports', one for each participating member state in Roma MATRIX written by various authors, considering thematic areas central to Roma MATRIX.
- The interim Roma MATRIX research report presents an overview of key issues raised by the authors of the 10 separate Member State Country Reports.
- Brown, P., Dwyer, P., Martin, P. and Scullion, L. (2014) Roma MATRIX Interim Research Report. University of Salford and University of York, UK.
- The final Roma MATRIX research report documents the empirical work and findings, which has involved more than 130 key stakeholders across 10 Member States, available in March 2015.
- Brown, P., Dwyer, P., Martin, P., Scullion, L. and Turley, H. (2015 Forthcoming) Final Research Report. University of Salford and University of York, UK.

All Roma MATRIX research is available at www.romamatrix.eu/research

For further information on the case studies from Roma MATRIX included in this guide and additional case studies, please go to www.romamatrix.eu/casestudies

For further information on Roma MATRIX visit www.romamatrix.eu

- Good Practice Guide 1: Reporting and Care Centres
- Good Practice Guide 2: Networks in Law Enforcement
- Good Practice Guide 3: Working with Children Leaving Care
- Good Practice Guide 4: Integration of Roma and non-Roma Children and Parents in Education
- Good Practice Guide 5: Employment of Roma
- Good Practice Guide 6: Cross-community Mediation
- Good Practice Guide 7: Roma Women Community Health Mediators
- Good Practice Guide 8: Roma Mentoring in Public Authorities
- Good Practice Guide 9: Roma Anti-Racism Campaign and Positive Images

All of the guides will be available at:

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