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Roma MATRIX: Good Practice Guide

5. Employment of Roma





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This good practice guide is about employment programmes that work with Roma to help them to access employment opportunities.

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 challenges related to creating successful employment programmes that Roma can access and benefit from. 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 that support greater access to employment opportunities for Roma people.

Background and Context 🧎

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In all of the countries participating in the Roma MATRIX project, where research has been gathered, there is a disparity between the unemployment rates of Roma and non-Roma as well as in the types of work undertaken by Roma and non-Roma. Roma are more likely to be unemployed, and those in employment are more likely to be in less skilled, less profitable and less secure work than non-Roma. The individual Country Reports¹ collated for this project are referenced at the end of this guide and provide an overview of the situation in each of the 10 countries participating in Roma MATRIX.

Being able to access legal and sustainable employment is absolutely critical for Roma to make a better life for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, many years of being excluded from a full mainstream education, and sometimes a necessity to prioritise earning a basic family living to counteract extreme poverty over education, has prevented many Roma from developing the skills required to secure decent, long-term employment. This creates a vicious circle of poverty, lack of education/experience and living a hand-to-mouth existence, which has continued through generations with very little change.

The barriers to accessing regular, sustainable employment are many for Roma. Whether they come from the most marginalised communities in new Member States or are new migrants in old Member States, they still seem to face extraordinary discrimination and obstacles in the labour market.

When Roma feel pushed into making a living through the grey economy due to a lack of alternatives, they are seen by non-Roma as working outside of the law. When they move country to find a better life and look for employment in a new Member State, they are looked down upon as economic migrants and accused of 'stealing' others' jobs or being 'benefit thieves'.

Employment programmes can have a positive impact on this situation but to do so they must take an integrated approach. It is not enough to only offer Roma the lowest-skilled and lowest-paid jobs in, for example, a public works environment without some kind of skills development package in place that might create better, future opportunities.

Roma may need different support systems to non-Roma to be successful in getting a good job, as well as to retain their positions and to understand the employer culture they have been recruited into.

Employment programmes must build in actions to work with employers to help break down the stereotypes they hold towards Roma. Additional mentoring for both Roma and their employers at the beginning of new employment can be helpful to support employees to understand a new work environment that has previously been inaccessible for them, as well as assuring employers who are new to employing Roma.

Across Europe, the number and type of programmes centred around getting Roma into sustainable employment are not always the most appropriate for their needs. Many of the programmes focus on getting Roma into any job - usually low paid, often short-term, in the worst employment conditions and with poor prospects for developing

Background and Context

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skills for more suitable gainful work in the long term.² This is neither an integrated nor a long-term response.

For Roma women, the situation is often even worse. Living in a patriarchal family unit and often being expected to both marry and have children at a young age, their chances of completing an education are particularly low. Roma women have to be additionally empowered to put themselves forward for secondary or higher education, as well as to juggle working whilst also running the home and caring for children.

As ever, the problem is often seen as Roma's own. Employers and Local Authority workers at the front-line in job support services can be discriminatory against Roma³ and more work is needed to develop awareness and understanding around the issues that Roma face when they start the process of job-seeking outside of those areas that have become the norm.



A number of interrelated factors contribute to the many challenges faced by Roma people trying to secure stable employment. These range across institutional policy, the need for local authority support, the role of employers, and informal, uninformed entrepreneurship, and they align closely with the issues tackled by Roma MATRIX partners.

Institutional policy

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Key issues

There is provision at EU and national level for anti-discrimination measures in employment. The National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS)⁴ in every country also have provision for employment interventions but the approaches vary widely. Culturally, what one country considers to be an approach towards equality for all can vary widely to another country. Some approaches are based around a loose 'access for all' system where no specific measures are adopted for Roma. Targeted actions for Roma are still an essential component for ensuring their access to employment.⁵

In the most marginalised communities, there are still Roma without formal identity papers or without the necessary papers to work. While progress is being made in this area, in some countries e.g. Romania and Bulgaria it is still slow. The result is often that Roma cannot work legally nor claim benefits. This compounds their poverty and their need to find an income by any means – through begging, or working in the grey economy e.g. with unregistered street stalls, day-to-day labour with no contracts. This also makes them susceptible to gang masters and further abuse of their rights.⁶

The need for Local Authority support

At community level, NGOs are shouldering much of the responsibility to create, find resources and implement employment programmes. In some cases this is very successful but in others the lack of support from municipalities and an absence of political will and understanding leads to short-term projects that 'tick a box' but have very little real impact.

The role of Local Authorities is critical. Without their full partnership with local NGOs, political support to create an environment in which change can happen and the ability to lead by example through mentoring Roma and providing employment, anti-discrimination measures and funding/resources to local communities, there can be no genuine progress. Local Authorities should not only be partners but should be leading in this area – especially as having a fully skilled Roma workforce can only contribute positively to their own local economy, both in terms of employment rates and a reduced spend on benefits in some instances.

However, Local Authorities do not always feel equipped to provide this role. They may be part of the problem with engrained and institutional discrimination or bureaucracy that is too slow or fragmented to take advantage of European funding or other opportunities. They often need extensive capacity-building; time spent understanding the issues. One of the biggest issues is that they fail to work with Roma to find out what the real barriers are – making assumptions rather than listening to the genuine needs of their Roma community.

Public works programmes

There are many examples of public works programmes that offer targeted, positive action to employ Roma. For some Roma (as well as non-Roma) this is a solution of sorts but what is clear is that these programmes do not take into account the individual skills or talents of the Roma they employ. The programmes lack ambition or aspiration and compound stereotypes that Roma are only capable of low-skilled, low-paid employment.

Mentoring within the public sector has been very successful during the Roma MATRIX project and a separate guide discusses it in more depth. The principle that Local Authorities can lead the way by employing Roma on an internship basis or working with Roma to create Peer Operators or Mediators is not only successful for the Roma individuals involved but also shows the public sector to be leading the way. This is an example that private sector companies are likely to pay attention to and learn from.

Employers' rights and responsibilities

Many programmes set up to activate Roma inclusion in the labour market only target Roma and do not work with employers. The barriers to Roma being able to access employment cannot be broken down through training Roma alone. Working with employers is a very important step in placing Roma in employment, and also in finding ways to upskill Roma workers and develop their aspirations. Employers need support and mentoring to better understand Roma and the ways in which they have been excluded from the labour market. They also need help to understand the benefits of employing Roma. Employers are part of both the problem and the solution.

More also needs to be done to ensure that Roma are not being exploited because of their desperation to find any employment. This involves working with Roma to understand their rights better and also ensuring that employers are accountable to the law, whoever they employ. Using an NGO to act as a mediator between the two parties can be useful in these circumstances, but in some cases this will take time as the discrimination from employers can be so engrained.

Roma and entrepreneurship

Many Roma have already experienced some form of self-employment. This comes from having to find alternative ways to earn an income such as street trading, collecting scrap metal or selling the Big Issue. In many cases this is a necessity and not a sustainable form of employment, nor does it cover the bills. Some of these selfemployment situations are not legal or registered in any way and this can lead to further issues, such as an inability to grow a business, to borrow money through normal means or to rent suitable premises.

However, the skills required to be this resourceful are useful in successful entrepreneurship and yet there are few programmes supporting Roma to make the leap from the grey economy to running a legal and successful business. In fact, there are many obstacles for Roma in creating new business start-ups: a lack of formal identification papers, lack of knowledge in how to register a new business, lack of understanding in financial issues including tax legislation and a lack of self-esteem and confidence in being able to do something like this. These could all be addressed with cohesive support programmes to help Roma become self-employed.

Across Europe, various different practices are being applied to challenge and overcome the disadvantages Roma face when trying to access employment. This section of the guide provides insight into these practices.

Spain

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In Spain, the Acceder⁷ programme has become both a national and long-term programme; both of these factors are likely to have contributed to its success.

Since 2000, the Fundacion Secretariado Gitano has been running the Acceder programme across Spain. The aims of the programme are to support Roma and other vulnerable groups into sustainable employment through a mixture of intensive support in skills development and an exploration of the opportunities available in the labour market.

The programme is probably one of the most successful and mainstream programmes to help Roma into employment across Europe. Up to 2012, the Acceder programme has helped more than 47,700 people secure work. Two thirds of all beneficiaries have been Roma. Additionally, training is offered, as well as labour market research into suitable employment opportunities.

Due to its success, it is understandable that this programme has spread nationally and the political support to do this no doubt helps its success. Despite this, the disparity between Roma and non-Roma in gaining paid employment and in the types of work they each have access to remains extensive.⁸

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Czech Republic

One of the key issues in developing successful employment programmes for Roma is a lack of engagement with employers. Employers will be less likely to employ Roma if they have no incentives to do so, especially in localities where anti-Roma discrimination is rife.

In the Czech Republic, IQ Roma Servis (IQRS) created an employment programme aimed specifically at engaging with employers, whilst at the same time looking at new ways to break down some of the anti-Roma discrimination which is common in the country.

Through working with employers and creating an accreditation of 'Ethnic Friendly Employer', IQRS developed a brand and a media campaign as well as an award scheme for employers who employed Roma and other minorities. Those who did employ Roma were given the 'Ethnic Friendly Employer' badge following completion of a survey which assessed whether they were indeed 'ethnic friendly'. In the original programme, 19 employers were awarded the badge, and the scheme has continued to grow since its inception.

One of the reasons that this was a successful approach was because IQRS did not only make contact with the employers but also with the employers' associations and with employment institutions. Additionally, the media campaign worked not only to encourage employers to participate in the scheme, but also to raise awareness of the issues surrounding discrimination against ethnic minorities, particularly Roma.



A young Roma doctor checks a patient's blood pressure

Bulgaria

There is a common misconception that Roma are not aspirational in their career ambitions. Some are not – after all they have not had the opportunities that others might have to find an ambitious career path. However, even those who do have ambitions to become doctors, nurses, pharmacists, midwives etc, will usually find the cost of the courses and support needed to get through even the first stage of the learning process beyond their reach.

In 2009, the Roma Education Fund (REF) funded the Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation (EMHPF) to work intensively with Roma who wanted a career in healthcare. More than 120 young Roma attended preparatory courses from 2009 until 2013 and more than 60 became students of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, midwifery, nursing and other medical fields. Initially, the project was funded for one year but REF continued to provide funding for four years due to its success.

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The first cohort began to graduate in 2013 and all of those who have been supported through the scheme and graduated now have jobs such as pharmacy assistants, nurses and laboratory assistants. More will graduate in the coming years.

One of the extra advantages of this scheme is that there will be more Roma medical professionals who are able to provide services and work with other Roma, such as some of the most marginalised communities in Bulgaria. They will also become role models for future generations.

Jobs business Glasgow Agency (JBG)

In the last eight years Glasgow has seen an increase in the numbers of Roma families arriving in the city from Slovakia and Romania. While some have managed to find employment, many Roma adults are unemployed and unable to find work except in the informal labour market.

Glasgow City Council contracted JBG to undertake a programme to tackle the obstacles to employment that are faced by Roma arriving as new migrants to the city. This programme has been running since 2012 and was peer-reviewed by EUROCITIES Task Force on Roma Inclusion in June 2013. It has a budget of approximately £400,000 provided by Glasgow City Council and the European Structural Funds.

P5 Roma Employability Support Programme, JBG

This programme provides bespoke support to Roma to find work in areas such as developing a CV, job search and interview technique

support so that they may enter into suitable and sustainable training and employment opportunities. The aim of the programme is to connect Roma with known local employment opportunities which JBG has knowledge of.

Participating in the programme also offers opportunities to access other services such as the Youth Employment Service (YES), business start-up advice, bridging services, adult literacy and numeracy (ALN) and childcare support. Participation also fulfils the 'actively seeking work' requirement to access social benefits.

Between 2012 and 2014, the service reports that 531 have attended courses, 796 have received one-to-one employability support and 120 have, or are in the process of, achieving qualifications.

Roma MATRIX practice

The Roma MATRIX partners' work is also contributing to emerging practice. Across the project, partners are actively providing support to help Roma people access employment. Through employment programmes including measures such as training and mentoring for both potential employees and employers, Roma MATRIX activity is helping to improve employment prospects for Roma (see the following 'Good practice from Roma MATRIX' section).

Roma MATRIX partners have been working on specific projects to help Roma access employment opportunities.

The Roma MATRIX partners have been focusing on developing skills and employability amongst Roma, as well as entrepreneurship skills and their ability to work with employers and build positive relationships.

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 delivering intensive training, mentoring and support programmes from as early as possible to build Roma's skills and confidence. Building confidence and motivation are key aims. A focus on holistic and experiential learning is proving helpful, particularly with regard to young people. Ensuring that the support extends beyond when an individual secures employment is also important, as well as providing support to both employees and employers to build relationships.

Intensive but informal support has helped young Roma gain employment after leaving care in Slovakia

Securing employment can be particularly difficult for Roma children who have been brought up in care and are then are expected to begin independent adult lives, often with little support. In Slovakia, the number of young adults in need of help and counselling after being released from a children's home rises annually. They are often extremely vulnerable, lacking the life skills, education, motivation and social skills necessary for independent living. This, together with employers' negative attitudes towards Roma, can result in a lack of job prospects and a likelihood of long term unemployment.

Smile as a Gift launched an informal training programme called 'Progress' within 'halfway houses' where young people go temporarily to ease the transition from care. The 'Progress' training promotes independence. By working intensively with young Roma in the 'Progress' project they have created group and individual meetings where young Roma can take advantage of a safe environment to understand how to live in the world, how to budget, how to look for employment etc. They are encouraged to explore the idea of poverty – the causes, consequences, and potential ways that they may escape their difficulties.

Vili manages his own mobile phone and accessories shop



The 'Progress' model has 15 modules designed to help young Roma understand the world of work and ways to get themselves out of poverty. 20 young people have taken part in eight 6 hour small group sessions, followed by 21 hours of intensive individual support from a lecturer and social worker who works with each individual to develop his/her personality and employment prospects. The methods used include discussion, brainstorming, group work, case studies, roleplay, encouragement and reflection. This serves to improve the young people's skills, confidence, self-esteem, their ability to learn and adapt to new situations, overall developing their socio-psychological maturity.

The programme has helped participants to work towards important group and personal goals, improving their work prospects and related skills such as how to engage more effectively with people from different social and cultural backgrounds. Seven participants were able to find work during the training, as a direct result of the skills they acquired.

"...Our client got really motivated to further educate himself after he took up the job of a social worker and started to work with Roma community in a small town located in eastern Slovakia..."

(Project trainer)

Mentoring and support are helping Roma return to work after long-term unemployment, Hungary

The Roma Civic Association in Hungary provides a mentoring programme to help Roma find employment.

One recipient of their support had previously worked in supermarkets and a hospice but had been unemployed for several years, surviving on benefits and black market income. She had fallen into debt as a result. Having been advised by a friend, she approached the Roma Civic Association for help to find a job. The individual had good experience and seemed a good potential employee on paper, but sometimes found it hard to work as part of a team, getting into conflicts with colleagues.

The Association met with the woman and discussed various employment opportunities. She enrolled on their mentoring programme, which involved visiting the office twice a week for group mentoring and individual consultations. The programme covers a range of practical skills such as job searching methods and interview techniques, as well as offering support for issues such as anger management, motivation and self-respect.

After three months of mentoring, she was selected for a 3 month probationary contract with a local authority gardening company who maintain the parks and recreational spaces in Budapest. She was very enthusiastic about this role.

The programme provided ongoing support even once the position had been secured. At times, the woman experienced some conflicts with her co-workers and falls in motivation, but the programme supported her to resolve these issues.

By working together and offering a range of different support services, the programme was able to secure a job for this individual for at least a year. She has been able to repay some of her debt and is catching up with other bills because of this regular income. She enjoys her work and is developing leadership qualities. Her employer has recognised this and has rewarded her with a new position, which has boosted her self-esteem.

"We are really proud of Juli. She is starting to take responsibility for her life and growing as a person."

(Mentor of Roma woman)

Juli working for the public gardening company



Personal skills development is helping young people to find sustainable employment in the UK

Around 3,500 Roma currently live in Glasgow. They experience the same high levels of unemployment as those in other EU countries. The aspirations and ability of young Roma to work towards their dreams vary widely. Many stakeholders e.g. local schools, advocacy projects and employment programmes report that the aspirations of young Roma are extremely low, with many feeling undervalued and detached from mainstream life.

A locally based NGO established the Roma Youth Project to support young people in education, improve their attendance, assist with homework and boost their confidence. The ultimate aim is to improve their employment prospects, giving them the same opportunities in life as non-Roma.

The project has been working intensively with 20 young Roma people to help them to create personal development plans and up skill towards getting sustainable employment. The targets for this project are young Roma – many still at secondary school – who are struggling to succeed due to language or literacy problems. The young people receive mentoring support and are encouraged to take part in volunteering activities.

One young Roma woman joined the project when she was 17 with great ambition. Due to the intensive support she received and her enthusiasm, she began volunteering in youth work and administration at the Tramway Theatre. Her hard work has paid off as she now works as a Youth Worker for a youth sports agency called Basketball Twilight.

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This is her first job and she is thoroughly enjoying it. The support from the programme has been integral to her success.

Not everyone is as successful as quickly, but one of the key benefits of the programme is the fact that each individual who joins the project receives a tailored support package. The project recognises that each person is at a different stage and has different needs and ambitions and works hard to help them reach their individual goals. This approach delivers clear results.

"...They were both so motivated, it was impressive; it's obvious they understood how important this is for their communities and really gave the best they could give..."

(Project staff)

"...The network of stakeholders in Glasgow value greatly the work that is done with young Roma, through this project and in the schools and with other organisations. Many young Roma are now approaching the Roma Employability Project ran by Jobs and Business Glasgow. They are reporting that young Roma are keen to work and their aspiration levels are improving."

(Project stakeholders)

Other Roma MATRIX practice

The Roma Women Association in Romania (RWAR) provided entrepreneurship training to Roma to enable them to learn the basic concepts of entrepreneurship in order to open their own businesses in the future, with a view to becoming financially independent. The training course was accompanied by a comprehensive course guide. The majority of the 15 participants have successfully founded their own businesses. Support with completing the paperwork to establish a business was particularly helpful.

In Bulgaria, the Association of Young Psychologists held an 'Enterprise/Entrepreneurship' programme covering business creation, company law, managing small and micro enterprises and human resource management, as well as 'how to find a suitable job' seminars. The Roma who attended were particularly interested in improving their IT skills to improve their job prospects. A 'Practical Guide for Employers and Employment' was produced. Feedback from participants was positive.

In the UK, Glasgow City Council used a partnership approach to help Roma to access services across the city. Participants were offered support and access to job searches, further training, learning opportunity and English language classes.

Also in the UK, Rotherham ran a number of initiatives including the 'Pathways to employment' programme for young Roma. The programme aimed to build skills and knowledge that will improve participants' ability to make positive progression to further education,

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Lessons for Policy and Practice

training and employment, including command of the English language and raising their aspirations. It also supported learners to access apprenticeships. Schools helped to identify suitable participants. The young people were given opportunities to explore vocational work, with workshops run on a range of professions such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, catering and hospitality, motor mechanics and construction. One young person has started an apprenticeship with Rotherham Metropolitan Council and is now working with children in a local primary school.



A young Roma woman at her workplace

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 - Working intensively to understand how to fit the needs of individuals with the needs of the local labour market is crucial

Intensive, one-to-one support works best, particularly when resources are scarce. Working closely with individuals and in small groups is most effective because it builds trust amongst Roma who may otherwise have little reason to trust non-Roma. Once trust is built and good relationships develop, it is much easier to understand the needs of each individual and then to find ways to meet them.

A strong understanding of the local market needs and the capabilities and aspirations of individuals can lead to a successful and sustainable job placement. Programmes need to understand the jobs available in the local market and how to develop the right skills for those jobs amongst Roma. This is resource-intensive for all and takes time to develop, but the results are worth it in the end.

Lesson 2 – A full stakeholder approach is the best way to ensure long-term sustainable employment for Roma

Programmes must work with all stakeholders to create employability for Roma. Employers and prospective employees need to be involved from the start. It is not enough to help Roma to write a CV, learn interview techniques and new skills if there are no employers who see Roma as a credible workforce.

Awareness-raising and relationship-building has to take place with employers on a long-term basis. Progress is unlikely to be quick, but it is important to bring all stakeholders together to work in partnership and to understand each other's needs.

Working closely with employers will also help to increase Roma's employment rights. The culture of working with no contracts, no security and low pay can only be changed if employers see the value of the people they employ. Compatibility between employer and prospective employee is as critical as skills, if not more so. This will require continued mentoring of both Roma and the employers they find work with.

Lesson 3 – Support should start as early as possible

It is important to invest in young Roma early to raise aspirations and improve their potential. They need to know from a young age that they are valued that they have opportunities too and should believe in their own abilities. This is particularly, although by no means only, true of young people who have been brought up in care. Experiential learning can be particularly useful when preparing young people for work.

Lesson 4 – The importance of empathy

Empathy and patience are very important when mentoring people who have not been in work for a long time. Understanding and helping to tackle potential barriers to employment, such as childcare responsibilities for Roma women, is also key.

Lesson 5 - Support should be ongoing

Securing employment for Roma is only the beginning – programmes need to continue to offer support in order for them to keep their jobs and start to turn their lives around.

References



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Additional References 🔂

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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 <u>www.romamatrix.eu/research</u>

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

For further information on Roma MATRIX visit <u>www.romamatrix.eu</u>

- 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: www.romamatrix.eu/goodpracticeguides



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