



Interaction Institute
for Social Change

PO BOX 969, Belfast BT5 9AN, N. Ireland +44 2890 803296
625 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138, USA (617) 234-2750
www.interactioninstitute.org

EFC Forum for Roma Inclusion

Hosted by the Bernard van Leer Foundation

Bernard van Leer  **Foundation**

Summary Note of

Workshop on Early Childhood Development
March 4 & 5, The Hague

Designed and facilitated by:

Louise O'Meara
Regional Director
IISC Ireland
0044 28 90 803296

Content managed by:

Linda Guinee
Senior Associate

1. Introduction

Workshop Purpose

On March 4 and 5 the Bernard van Leer Foundation hosted a workshop on Early Childhood Development and Roma. The overall purpose of the Workshop was to bring together a group of major stakeholders concerned with early development of young Roma children to develop key policy messages, based on current research and best practice, to take to the Roma summit in April 2010. There were four main desired outcomes.

- i) A shared understanding of existing research in relation to issues facing young Roma children so that this can be used to frame and substantiate policy messages.
- ii) Greater awareness of what best practices are being used that best support the needs of young Roma children so that this can feed into our discussions.
- iii) A shared understanding of the main barriers that prevent the effective implementation of programmes for young Roma children so that this can influence our policy responses.
- iv) Agreement on the 4 – 5 key policy messages (directed towards the EU and member countries) we should convey with respect to early childhood development and Roma children at the Roma Summit in April 2010.

Of the four, the preparation of the workshop did not allow for the first to be achieved. Elements of best practice were discussed but not exhaustively. There is room for a further workshop on this issue to be undertaken once Bernard van Leer Foundation finishes examining existing research. The third and fourth desired outcomes were achieved.

2. Background

Following welcome from Lisa Jordan, BVL Executive Director, and participant introductions, a number of updates to set the scene were shared. These focused on the background to the workshop; the history of the Forum to date; the forthcoming ROMA summit; and the wider EU context in relation to early Roma childhood development. In general the European Union has focused a lot of attention on Roma communities which has allowed for greater opportunities for Roma people. However, the enthusiasm at the EU level does not always trickle down to its Member States. Furthermore, decentralization of social services in many countries has complicated the possibilities of Roma communities to take advantage of EU opportunities. Many challenges were noted. Three in particular surrounding early childhood were: challenges of scaling up good programs, transitioning from segregated to integrated services and the limitations inherent to many municipalities in being able to run sophisticated interventions for Roma populations. Nevertheless, if there ever was a time to develop good policy and practice, it is now.

Participants representing Roma people spoke about the latest developments in relation to the situation of Roma people in their respective countries. Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Germany Greece Serbia Croatia were covered. The participants noted that education is better valued within many Roma communities and more kids are going to school. However, the schools are often not ready for the kids, kids are being sent to segregated schools, and barriers like bullying, costs, legal status, and serious discrimination keep drop out rates very high. Some states such as Croatia and Romania still have discriminatory practices.

This was followed by an overview of existing research in relation to issues facing young Roma children presented by Selim Iltus, Studies & Research Officer, Bernard van Leer Foundation. It was noted that the research is not as robust as is desired and that analysis of the research still needs to be undertaken. Bernard van Leer Foundation has agreed to do this. Selim's summary of what we now have is attached.

3. Elements of best practice to support the needs of young Roma children

Working in small groups, participants identified quality programs, best practice, and gaps.

Quality Programs

Integrated interventions between home, community centers and schools in which health and education are intertwined work best. Tests conducted by foundations and others show that bundling services leads to greater outcomes for all services. Needs can be addressed more holistically. However, the necessary conditions for establishing such programs are often beyond the capacity of local governments.

Second best options for quality ECD programs are:

- Home visiting nurses who include a focus on early childhood development (0-18 months)
- Home based ECD services with mothers and children
- Roma health mediators
- Early and family literacy programmes
- Roma role models in schools and in health services (teacher or teacher assistant programs, nurses, doctors, etc.)
- Schools as community centers or multifunctional centers
- Child to child interventions

Program Best Practice

Standards and training are key to getting the most out of early childhood development programs. Good standards are needed for quality teaching include

standards on diversity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity and for learning outcomes, that are culturally sensitive. Useful training modules have been used on anti-bias, intercultural issues with focus on specific communities and second language learners. Training should be oriented toward teachers, non-minorities and other professionals and should allow enough time for in-depth reflection, monitoring.

Meaningful participation of community in the design of programs, both Roma and non-Roma is often the difference between success and failure. A strategy that recognizes and values the engagement of parents and encourages local authority involvement has been proven to work. Benefits need to be clear for diverse actors in program - parents, teachers and local authorities. Culture of shared responsibility among all stakeholders is required – a process of empowerment starts with catalysts. A needs assessment should be conducted as part of program design. Start early, from neo-natal ideally, and focus on specific needs. Continuously share developments and knowledge with all stakeholders. Be prepared for the long term as longitudinal approaches are key to collecting data, building knowledge and seeing returns on investment.

NGOs have a role to play in monitoring the implementation of government led initiatives and in launching publicity campaigns on diversity, early childhood, etc. Participants appreciated the EU funded media campaigns. Another important role for NGOs is to look at policies and step in when implementation is absent or flawed. Universities/academies involvement in ECD can make a big difference in NGO advocacy. Academies can help build political will. Lastly, pushing for universal services across all populations would necessarily include Roma.

Gaps and Challenges

The following challenges related to ECD were raised by participants.

- ~ Scaling;
- ~ Transition from segregated to integrated services;
- ~ Moving from projects to policy;
- ~ Capacity of local authorities to design and implement interventions;
- ~ Discrimination;
- ~ Quality and capacity-building of teachers, local authorities
- ~ Condition of housing is not receiving enough attention
- ~ Preschool tends to assume working parents – it should be accessible to non working parents, like Roma women

In the workshop warnings were shared on programs. For example, a programme in Romania that was meant to be a temporary summer programme was adopted by the Government as a replacement for preschool. This is not what the groups initiating the programme wanted to happen. They wanted the kids to go to regular preschool.

Other words of warning: even with good national policies, local governments may fail to implement programs. Local authority is often weak or politically opposed. Cooperation networks between NGOs and government are not always successful. The participants had mixed experiences. Participants found it was important to work towards integration, not assimilation.

The field itself lacks longitudinal research on Roma to substantiate program interventions. Documentation of experiences, learning across and between programs is often undervalued. We need more beneficiary feedback and 360 evaluation. We also need answers to questions like when is best period of intervention for second language learning?

5. Main Barriers that prevent integration of young Roma children

There are three types of barriers that prevent integration: institutional, political and barriers inherent to Roma communities.

Barriers include a number of political perceptions. These are a perception of Roma as travellers; political beliefs that poor people are expensive – providing services to poor communities is seen as a cost, not an investment. Ignorance on the value of providing pre-and post-natal services and providing services for 0-3 year olds. ECD specialists know that is the most important time to provide services – but not understood in political realm. In some post-communist states, inability to imagine flexible services, e.g., kindergarten in any other way than it used to be provided through factory settings.

Non-political barriers begin with a lack of physical infrastructure. There are simply not enough preschool services in many countries (general issue, not only Romas). Those that do exist are often too far away to be realistically used. Services are supposed to be free but have out of pocket hidden expenses (shoes, clothes, pencils, etc.) which make them unaffordable. There is a lack of responsibility for ECD services – no locus of responsibility. Communication between local authorities and national authorities is very poor. They don't communicate, and thus approaches are fragmented. Decentralization of financing often results in no responsibility. Lastly the complexity in accessing funds is an enormous barrier for NGOs and local authorities. Lack of disaggregated data (in many countries illegal to disaggregate by ethnicity).

Within the Roma community the experience with services is that the quality of services and provisions is very low and that puts Roma parents off. Dignity and the perception of poverty can decrease the likelihood of using services. Awareness of majority population's prejudice and fear of the Roma community can decrease the use of services. The lack of a united voice, or fragmentation weakens the possibility to demand services. Lack of trust toward service providers, and not seeing themselves in positions of authority can diminish returns. In general Romas do not trust bigger systems which have never been friendly to Roma communities.

A fear of assimilation and loss of culture can keep people from participating and ignorance of what is available as well. Language – not knowing dominant language and not having a large vocabulary because of lack of experiences. Having a different cultural capital than the one that school demands.

Attitudes within dominant populations also cause serious problems. Politicians are not rewarded for providing services to Roma communities and may even be punished. Discrimination and prejudice from dominant majority can lead to bullying of Roma children. There is a tendency to blame the victims.

6. **Key Political Objectives of ECD/Roma Community**

Key messages for policymakers were considered through a what/why/how lens.

What

Every child should have access to two-year quality mainstream kindergarten

- Only 25% of Roma children have access to services. 75% are left out today. Universal access tied to Roma decade.

0 to 3 year policies should enable Roma families to provide a healthy, secure and stimulating environment for the young children through accessing a combination of quality health, education, protection and economic support services

Member States need to define quality – based on a set of common early childhood development principles [term 'guidelines' suggested to replace 'principles'], grounded in research and the needs of communities – developed through a dialogue with governments and local communities.

Member states need to define a set of universally available core services that would target Roma.

Review staff quality and training (pre-service and in-service) in order to promote inter-professional and to support Roma employment in these positions.

Why

- ~ Roma are European citizens and have rights (CRC, conventions on culture, etc.)
- ~ EU is first and foremost an economic community – ECD is essential to human capacity development needed to push forward wealth and wellbeing of European Continent (e.g., GP). Reference Heckman investment. An early intervention is more valuable than a later one

- ~ ECD is a critical period of development which determines life course of an individual and is worthy of investment – moment to bridge to overcome gaps in equality. EU leads the world in ECD.
- ~ For funds to be effective, it depends on equal, comprehensive services for Roma.
- ~ Europe leads the world on ECD, has the capacity to do this, and is compelled to make changes in order to remain cutting edge and develop its human capacity and 'should be ashamed if it doesn't'.
- ~ These require that the EU and states commit political will and money to bringing effective services to Roma children that are currently afforded to the majority population.
- ~ Needs of the last 10% of the population are not being met by any service in Europe.

How

It is the responsibility of political leaders to fight the fear in Europe of the Roma community.

Services should not be "delivered" – Roma community themselves should be enabled to participate and play an active role. Include local government in the 'how'.

Review alternative ways of financing and delivering core services including intensive use of local (including human) resources...

- Do this after core principles are defined.

6.1 Agreements

The following summary of key messages was agreed by the group.

ECD begins with prenatal services. Only 25% at best are getting services. At least 75% of Roma children will be left out. Barcelona targets will not be reached for Roma kids. A unified approach to reach communities are needed.

Thus we are asking ECD states to **establish common guidelines**, which we believe should include:

- Beginning with the most disadvantaged and building universality around that;
- Asking the community so as to build trust with the community, to make sure it's cost effective and will work;
- Deliver services with Roma playing an active role;
- Community based;

- Multi-functional – addressing multiple needs at the same time (bundling, complex, integrated) – works better than singular interventions. Understand that it’s difficult, so local authorities will need support in doing that;
- Target of access to quality kindergarten services for Roma children and other disadvantaged communities;

In addition, there should be an agreement of what would be universally available core ECD services – with a huge focus on quality and understanding of early child development.

7. Next Steps

The following next steps were agreed:

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| i) | Draft a paragraph for Weinheim II Declaration | Lisa, Hywel |
| ii) | Prepare a 2-4 page policy document | BVLf |
| iii) | Prepare two ‘snazzy’ talks for Cordoba | Lisa, Hywel |
| iv) | Review and synthesize research | BVLf |
| v) | Terms of reference (for person to synthesize research and create policy document) | Toby, UNICEF, OSI & BVLf |
| vi) | Consider outcomes of this meeting and chart further next steps | The Forum |