

# Cooperating to integrate most deprived people at the local level

8-9 December 2015, Brussels

## Main Messages

On 8 and 9 December 2015 the European Commission had convened in Brussels an event under the banner "[cooperating to integrate most deprived people at the local level](#)". The event brought together more than 100 [representatives](#) from EU and international institutions, national, regional and local authorities as well as civil society organisations.

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The event was opened by **Manuela Geleng**, Acting Director for Social Affairs in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission, **Pernilla Baralt**, State Secretary to the Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality in Sweden, and **Soraya Post**, Member of European Parliament.

Initiatives supporting capacity building and facilitating cooperation between local authorities with the aim of integrating marginalized communities, as well as the potential of microfinance and social enterprise were presented. All PowerPoint presentations are available [here](#)

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The event was very well received by participants as it provided a platform for consultations and exchanges between cities and other organisations represented at the event. It also provided constructive feedback for schemes supported by the Commission, the Council of Europe, Eurocities and others.

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The main messages put forward by the participants were that:

- The inclusion of most deprived people, in particular those of Roma ethnicity, is hindered by two fundamental structural issues: discrimination and anti-gypsyism on the one hand, and territorial inequality on the other hand, which in turn lead to poverty and exclusion.
- Addressing these structural issues requires long term efforts which might require deep systemic changes, in some cases even changes of paradigm and political leadership.
- The responsibility to improve the situation lies as much with the majority population as with marginalised people themselves.



- To be successful the inclusion of most deprived people cannot be dissociated from the existence of an effective process of local democratic governance. This means that the target group, for example the Roma community, needs to be empowered to participate and to own its own integration process. One should however not build unreasonable expectations about democratic participation as it cannot per se solve all blockages.
- Social integration, in particular of marginalised Roma communities, is a long process for which a project approach does not work. Political will to act exists only in a limited number of municipalities and cities. Building political will and creating trust take a lot of time, energy and action.
- Expectations about achieving social inclusion need to be realistic: no policy, no fund, no programme is a “silver bullet”: achieving social inclusion happens through incremental changes. Temporary failures need also to be understood and accepted as steps towards long term success. Short- and medium-term outcomes are necessary however as they help keep people motivated and involved.
- Synergies should be pursued with efforts to integrate other marginalised people such as refugees as - despite differences in their legal status – their needs are often similar.
- It is essential to ensure the sustainability of integration processes initiated through projects supported by international donors, so that local stakeholders pursue the integration process when the external intervention ends.
- Public authorities need to find pragmatic solutions to address the challenges faced by those "falling in the cracks" of the social safety net. They need in particular:
  - to clarify the rights and entitlements of EU citizens;
  - to enhance their employability in other countries through the recognition of their qualifications;
  - to address issues related to transnational/cross-border living, for example, when communities are on the move, concerning schooling, access to healthcare, transfer of administrative information or employment;
- EU/national authorities should address the disconnect which sometimes exists between policies and programmes and the concrete needs of people, in particular by:
  - enhancing links between efforts to integrate people at the local level and the wider policy context, in particular the European Semester, National Roma Integration Strategies, the Urban agenda, anti-discrimination legislation, public procurement legislation, etc.
  - ensuring that EU funds and programmes, for example Youth Guarantee schemes, are in line with the reality on the ground and reach those most in need;
  - reducing administrative burdens associated with their financial support and making funding more accessible;
  - focusing on outcomes rather than on outputs;

- avoiding fragmented approaches and the multiplication of pilot projects without future – in a word stopping reinventing the wheel.
  - Entrepreneurship is not the panacea to get people out of poverty, but it does have considerable potential which is currently under-exploited. Promoting it implies a long term process as there are no quick fixes to years or decades of exclusion. This process requires flexibility, pragmatism, patience and the acceptance that failures are normal events on the way to success. It is also important to recognize that earning money is not the only benefit of entrepreneurship; (re)integrating society is also a major benefit.
  - There is not one-size-fits-all model to successfully promote entrepreneurship in marginalised communities. It is a step-by-step process which needs to be adjusted according to the characteristics of each community. It also requires a proactive approach, going towards the potential beneficiaries instead of waiting for them to come forward. Marginalised people require not only financing to become entrepreneurs, but also mentoring and coaching, in the form of integrated packages of support.
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Participants were informed that the ROMACT programme will be pursued and extended across the EU. Its aim is to continue to respond to local needs in a pragmatic way, helping building the capacity of local authorities to integrate marginalised people, in particular those of Roma ethnicity, both in their home countries as in countries where they move to. It will also support interested municipalities in cooperating, connecting and sharing information.

Starting in early 2016 the ROMACT programme will offer new concrete support measures to municipalities aiming at integrating marginalised people, in particular those of Roma ethnicity, originating from other EU countries. These measures will consist of:

- intercultural training sessions and support for field visits in countries of origin for public administration staff, social workers, police officers and NGO workers;
- trainings of intercultural mediators to facilitate relations between local authorities and vulnerable people/communities coming from other countries;
- support for visits by project managers from cities of destination to help develop and implement social integration projects in countries of origin;
- an online platform to facilitate partnerships between municipalities across Europe, through the sharing of information and contacts,

Municipalities will be invited to submit applications in response to calls for interest published by the Council of Europe. Information about these calls will also be disseminated through national authorities and associations of municipalities.

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