R+SPECT

Increasing
Roma Peoples' Participation
and Citizenship Rights:
Campaign and Tools

Combating anti-Roma Prejudices and Stereotypes through Media: *Knowledge-based Guidelines for Media Professionals*

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Knowledge-Based Guidelines for Media Professionals

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+Respect
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Summary

Foreword

Media and the Roma Story: Time to Speak the Truth

The Roma story is complex and fascinating, but when told by media it is often reduced to stereotype and prejudice. It is a story distorted by unscrupulous politicians and made worse when sensationally portrayed by unthinking journalists. Even so, the importance of media in the fight against race hatred and injustice cannot be underestimated. Ethical journalism laced with fact-based reporting is a crucial ally in the struggle against prejudice and discrimination.

But how do we distinguish between these two faces of media?

How do we confront journalists and editors who appear unaware or unconcerned about the harsh consequences of bias and bigotry in their daily reporting?

How do we nourish support for ethical journalism and truth-telling that enriches public understanding of the Roma people, and their rights?

To answer these questions we need to consider how journalism works in today's fractured and competitive information environment.

The problems facing Roma are easily identified:

- the language of journalism is often loose and dangerous and can lead to xenophobia, even incitement to ethnic hatred;
- the failure of media to make connections with Roma and to use Roma sources of information renders the community itself largely invisible; and
- the lack of context, background and fact-based analysis means stories are often half-told, making it impossible for the public at large to understand clearly the reality of Roma lives.

But improving news coverage will not be easy. The Roma story is only one of the challenging items on the news agenda. Media coverage of migration, religion, the threat of terrorism, asylum seeking, unemployment, poverty and deepening economic crisis are all part of a dangerous cocktail of social problems that make

people uncertain and create anxiety within Europe. In many countries there is a weakening of attachment to traditional consensus-based politics, and right-wing extremism is on the rise. Just at a time when we require visionary and well-informed leadership, politics is being driven by populist rhetoric that aims to find scapegoats for society's problems in our vulnerable and minority communities. Roma are among the prominent victims of this process.

Journalism, like politics, is also mired in crisis. Media are in the midst of historical change. Newspapers are losing circulation in the face of the online revolution. Media are no longer as profitable as they were. At the same time, the Internet has generated a new and inspiring world of information, but it is also threatening. Today we all have free speech, and a range of ways to have our voices heard, but with unrestrained speech comes new opportunities for hatred and malicious misrepresentation.

There is an urgent need to encourage responsible speech and moral values in journalism. Many journalists are committed to defence of human rights and ethical reporting, but they struggle to do good work when media are investing less money in training, investigative journalism and decent working conditions. To confront this range of issues, Roma communities and those campaigning against all forms of discrimination need to forge a new vision of information and journalism that will restore public confidence in media and help journalists to reconnect with their ethical traditions. Journalists across Europe are already aware of the crisis and the desperate plight of their profession. The European Federation of Journalists – representing more than 250,000 journalists in the European Union – has in 2011 launched a campaign to bolster journalism as a public good.

One of the key messages of the campaign is that ethical journalism is vital to the future of media. If traditional media are to survive they must rekindle the spirit of journalism as a force for progressive change. By focusing on the ethical principles of journalism – respect for the truth, editorial independence, fairness and respect for the communities they serve – media can counter the negative trends in both politics and media. There are no simple answers to the problems of bias and media malpractice, but Roma, like other communities can support strategies that will challenge media to change direction and help journalists to find their professional voice.

The struggle for equal rights is gaining momentum in Europe and campaigners against discrimination must take advantage of the opportunities this provides to repudiate the lacerating prejudice and witch-hunting of the 12 million Roma people who make up Europe's largest minority. This can be done in a number of ways.

First, by providing better information and alternative sources that will improve media reporting of Roma issues. Media need access to the pictures, stories and authentic voices to explain the Roma story and its complexity.

Media need to explain how the vast majority of Roma face extraordinarily difficult circumstances in their everyday lives -- poverty, discrimination and the lack of full participation in mainstream society. In some countries, such as Italy, France, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania right-wing groups and in some case the state itself are to blame for violent mobilisation against local Roma communities. There have been forced evictions, deportations, acts of violence, even murder of Roma people.

Journalists need information to counter this wave of hostility. They need to make the link between this latest tide of discrimination and a legacy of racism in Europe stretching back generations, including to the

Holocaust when hundreds of thousands of European Roma were executed by the Nazis. Over the last 20 years Roma have become a target of extreme right parties that began to proliferate in Eastern Europe to challenge post-communist governments. In the resulting atmosphere of extreme hatred, the Roma have been victims of violence at the hands of groups of neo-Nazis and skinheads.

Journalists need to know that their images of modern Roma – as exotic gypsies or nomadic travelers – are old fashioned and obsolete. Today most Roma people attach importance to their heritage but they no longer practice a travelling lifestyle. They seek stability, work, education for their children and prosperity for their families. The Roma story is a rich tale of evolution of different communities themselves divided by geography, culture and language and rooted in the traditions of tribal migration from northern India many hundreds of years ago.

As well as a counter-information strategy actions are needed to monitor media performance and to highlight discrimination wherever it arises. Many journalists' unions and media employers – such as the FNSI and FIEG in Italy – are committed to opposing the use of media to promote discrimination, through, for example, the Charter of Rome. Similar declarations have been made by European employer and journalists' groups.

These codes and guidelines need to be revived and should be used as the basis for discussions with individual editors and journalists whenever media make mistakes. Seminars and training should be organised on issues such as use of language, correct terminology when referring to Roma, gypsies and travellers, finding alternative sources, and use of pictures. Defining alternative stories and positive angles to counter prejudice are a vital part of the mix.

This work can be taken up at a European level through groups such as the European Broadcasting Union, which has its own diversity toolkit for radio and television, and the European Federation of Journalists which has launched the Ethical Journalism Initiative[1] to counter racism and intolerance.

If any of this is to succeed there will need to be a stronger sense of solidarity between journalism and the communities they serve. Roma and campaigners against discrimination would do well to ally themselves with people inside media who are speaking up for ethical and responsible use of information and who are fighting to create new forms of progressive journalism.

Journalists are notoriously bad at admitting their errors, but given the chance they will always take the opportunity to do better. When they do that Roma everywhere will be among the first to benefit.

<div align="right">
Aidan White
Former General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists
May 2011
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[1] www.ethicaljournalisminitiave.org

Preface

For more than one thousand years, the Roma have been an integral part of European civilization. Today, with an estimated population of 10-12 million people [but an exact number is difficult to determine, as the Roma are often not included in official census counts], Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, present in all 27 EU Member States. Most Roma are EU citizens, but they're also a distinct ethnic minority dispersed worldwide and generally form a separate social group distinguished from mainstream society where they live.

This group of people suffers a wide range of human rights violations, in particular racial violence and discrimination in the enjoyment of rights, such those to adequate housing and to education. This situation is particularly severe in Central and Eastern European countries where the Roma are, in general, in an extremely vulnerable position in social, economic and political terms. This vulnerability is manifested in widespread and acute poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of formal education and segregation in the educational system, substandard housing, and other problems. The annual report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) still shows that the Roma are the most disadvantaged population in Europe as they are often victims of racism and discrimination, and have difficulty finding housing, jobs and health protection. [2]

Prejudices and stereotypes against the Roma are still persistent and Roma populations are frequently targeted as scapegoats for the ills of society at large, resulting in violent attacks against them and their property[3]. Roma communities are still too often the subject of racist and derogatory information campaigns. The role that far-right political parties and the press play in disseminating negative messages and conditioning public perception of specific ethnic groups is crucial.

Politicians and media very often make use of stereotypes. Playing with negative feelings or fears is a good way to win an election or to sell a paper[4]. The ones who suffer from stereotypes are not those whose fears

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[2] http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/Annual_Reports/Annual%20report%202009.pdf

[3] According to ECRI Activities Annual Report 2009, published on July 8th, 2010, there is a persistent and "*widespread police practice of racial profiling, abuses in the fight against terrorism and police brutality against vulnerable groups…* " The Report concludes that "*…Roma and Travellers continue to experience open hostility (sometimes encouraged for electoral purposes) and social exclusion, as well as raids against their settlements and murders*".
http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Library/PressReleases/69-08_07_2010_AnnualReport2009_en.asp

[4] "*The growing number of illegal camps or settlements, **coupled with some media and politicians highlighting crimes allegedly committed by Roma in an often inflammatory way**, contributed to the reviving of old anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypes*" –

are exploited but those being presented in a negative light, the 'stereotyped'. Anti-Roma discourse will not be overcome as long as people are not aware that it is a reality: the problem is not the Roma but the way Roma are perceived and pictured!

For the communication theorist Hamelink media are used as a tool to spread propaganda that can "*suggest to their audiences that 'the others' pose fundamental threats to security and well-being of the society and that the only effective means of escaping this threat, is the elimination of this great danger.*"

Media often play a role in emphasizing the link between a perceived lack of public security and Roma communities. The media have encouraged the image that, throughout history, made simply being a Gypsy a capital offence*. "They cannot be expected to single-handedly undo centuries of prejudice, fear and ignorance, but nor should they continue to breed it. The broadcast media has shown a marked improvement in its representations of ethnicity in recent years; the press has too but only with regard to some minorities*"[5].

According to Brian McNair, one of the most prominent media scholars in Europe, the role of the media in a democracy is to *"inform and educate people about the meaning and significance of facts. The media should provide a platform for open political discourse, spreading the message of government and other political institutions"*.

Media are often blamed of unprofessionalism: but in a fast changing scenario of the communication world, where political hierarchies' hysteria make them abuse of negative images against certain vulnerable groups, media need also support to comply with their commitment to ethics and values.

Media can be, on the other hand, a valuable tool of awareness raising and promotion of diversity and multiculturalism, if committed to change. Instead of focusing on negative headlines about Roma emphasis should be put on finding positive stories and on giving the Roma a voice. Following recommendations widely accepted at international level, political leadership should engage their societies in anti-racism campaigns in order to improve the public's perception of Roma population, particularly by encouraging the media to foster intercultural understanding and fight negative stereotyping by promoting a balanced and more objective portrayal of this community.

OSCE/ODIHR Assessment of the human rights situation of Roma and Sinti in Italy [Report of a fact-finding mission to Milan, Naples and Rome on 20-26 July 2008].

[5] Rachel Morris in "**Gypsies, Travellers and the Media: Press regulation and racism in the UK**", Cardiff Law School [http://www.law.cf.ac.uk/tlru/Tolleys.pdf]

Introduction

For the purpose of this work and as it is most commonly used in EU policy documents and discussions, the term "Roma" refers to a variety of groups of people who describe themselves as <u>Roma, Gypsies, Travelers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti, Gens de Voyages, Kale</u>, as well as other titles. The use of the term Roma is in no way intended to downplay the great diversity within the many different Romani groups and related communities, nor is it intended to promote stereotypes.

+Respect focuses on the EU priority of combating racism and xenophobia, with specific actions that are also relevant to the objective of fostering active participation in the democratic life of the Union. Participation in democratic life must critically start from the local/regional level where such dynamics take place daily. This is the reason why +Respect deals with the anti-Roma racism issue with a territorial approach. It is a critical competence of territories to tackle anti-Roma racism and discrimination, access to rights and citizenship. +Respect aims to enhance the knowledge, the intercultural dialogue and the awareness of civil society and practitioners meaningful to the local/regional dimension, but also to contribute to national and European policies and debates.

The history of the multiple discriminations and the racial segregation has been going hand in hand, through centuries, with the negative perception of the Roma communities in Europe. Today, Roma people are still pictured and portrayed as a problematic 'ethnic group', by use of negative stereotypes and prejudices, as if the social exclusion of Roma people is an innate element of their ethnicity and not the consequence of long lasting discriminating policies and untrue stories.

This negative image is seriously widespread in Europe and is given more emphasis by offensive political discourses and deceitful information campaigns. The use of 'institutional racism' is often a way to channel fear and weakness of the majority of the population against a precise target group, Roma people. Media can create and support a vicious circle reporting and passing on negative messages without taking into account the consequences of their words.

This report is a part of the 'Information and awareness campaign' of the project, and more specifically it contains the results of the project WP4.2 which aims to tackle the issue of 'Professional media: communicating the Roma life, debunking stereotypes and combating *anti-Gypsism* by mass media'. 4 thematic seminars (twice in Brussels, and in Rome and Bari) have been tailored for professional journalists, information providers, media activists, civil society organization, institutional communication agencies, international organizations, Roma communities and local authorities in order to discuss, collect and propose

ideas about how to improve communication overcome a general negative perception concerning Roma communities, how to enforce the endorsement of ethical principles, how to achieve effective anti-discriminatory information. Some of those practices are the subject of 'focus section' in each of the part dealt with by the relevant stakeholders.

However, the concept of media itself needs to be properly clarified: although scope of this paper is to tackle primarily the role of journalists understood in the classic sense of the term (people working for TV, newspapers, radio, online journals, broadcasters,...), we should be aware of the fact that the diversification of the media world has become more flexible, pliable, capable to gather different target groups or, on the contrary, to target information according to the age/social group of belonging.

Mass media cover and involve a major variety of actors and communication tools. Many times they are able to influence and distort public opinion and reality, many others they slip out of control or are difficult to regulate (just think about the effect that a quite successful blog page can achieve in terms of conscience shaping around a given subject).

Main objective of this report is to develop a set of knowledge-based recommendations for media and communications professionals (but also relevant to civil society organizations' activists) in order to revert this trend and try to decrease the negative public perception of and to improve media ethical communication about Roma, whilst increasing interaction opportunities and mutual understanding.

Freedom of expression is legally protected in all the EU Member States; freedom of information is part of the legal and democratic framework of each nation through Constitutional Articles or Parliamentary Acts. Many international bodies are supporting initiatives in favour of Journalists must stand up as critical conscience of our societies: their role to inform is vital to democracies; the way they report is crucial to shape common opinions; their mandate and work must not be restricted or narrowed. Nevertheless information should never lead to discrimination or public offence. Negative portrayals must not be squeezed solely on the ethnicity. Roma communities must no longer be presented as a danger as such.

In this sense, there is still a strong need for efforts towards professionalism as a way to let code of conducts and ethical principles be fully implemented. Today's vocabulary is still inadequate to picture and keep the pace with the fast changes in our societies. But no significant result could ever free the Roma story from its vicious stereotyped circle if a radical change will never put knowledge and respect at the core of the cultural and educational background of our societies.

Part One
Roma Anti-Discrimination and Media

1

The European Union and Roma

The EU Anti-Discrimination Legal Framework

The European Union combats discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation. The right to non-discrimination is further reinforced by the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which has the same legal value as the Treaties. The strong legal framework to combat Roma discrimination, based among others, on article 6(2) of the Treaty on European Union, stating that the Union – and, as part of it, the European media sector - must respect fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 13 of the Treaty gives the European Community specific powers to take action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Two subsequent Directives[6] strengthened the EU's commitment to non-discrimination. Member States have the duty to translate the Directive into their own national legislations. At the end of 2008 the Council of the European Union adopted a Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia with criminal law[7]. The text lays down that publicly - including via the media - inciting violence or hatred against a group of people or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, even by the dissemination or distribution of tracts, pictures or other material should be punishable in the Member States by a maximum sentence of at least one to three years' imprisonment.

EU citizens belonging to Roma communities have the same rights as any other EU citizen. A significant number of Roma live in extreme marginalisation in both rural and urban areas and in very poor social-economic conditions. They are disproportionally affected by discrimination, violence, unemployment, poverty, bad housing and poor health standards. Moreover, many of them are legally residing third-country nationals. They share the same severe living conditions as many Roma holding EU citizenship, whilst facing also challenges of migrants coming from outside the EU.

Policy-makers are called on to comply, not only to such legislative framework, but also with certain recommendations: raise awareness to prevent discrimination amongst private service providers, sanction private services that discriminate against Roma. Politicians and other public figures need to speak out and lead by example on human rights protection. Stakeholders working in the field, and Roma populations living in the cities and regions addressed by the project, are especially affected by a number of needs and constraints that +RESPECT aims at dealing with. Among those there is the urgent need to combat a persistent negative general perception (stereotyping) and deceitful media coverage of Roman issues, caused by an inadequate interaction with Roma resulting in dearth common understanding of universal rights

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[6] Directives on Racial Equality (EC/2000/43) and Employment Equality (EC/2000/78)
[7] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32008F0913:EN:NOT

(especially towards the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children), also caused by the inclination of media to focus only on sensationalism (ethical issue) and not on hard facts or comprehensive information with regard to ROMA (professional issue).

Fostering Roma Social Inclusion

The European Commission supports equal treatment of Roma. While competence in this area lies mostly with Member States, the EU has legal, financial and policy instruments which can be used to this end. The social and economic inclusion of Roma is a priority for the EU and needs the commitment and joint efforts of national and local authorities, civil society and EU institutions. The European Commission is committed to taking the necessary steps to improve the situation of Roma people and their social and economic integration in society.

On 7 April 2010[8] the Commission adopted the first ever Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in Europe. The Communication also outlines the complexity and interdependence of the problems faced by Roma in terms of discrimination, poverty, low educational achievement, labour market barriers, housing segregation and poor health.

In the last two years, the EU and Member States have focused on adopting non-discrimination laws and making EU funding more effective in promoting Roma inclusion. This includes fighting discrimination, segregation and racist violence as well as supporting programs to address the vicious circle of poverty, social marginalization, low school achievement and poor housing and health. The European Commission is fully committed to fighting against any form of discrimination, according to standards laid down in EU law.

Following the forced repatriation of Roma living in France during last summer, EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding has warned against Roma discrimination *"As Vice-President of the European Commission with responsibility for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, I am committed to combating all forms of racism and xenophobia, discrimination and social exclusion on grounds of ethnic origin"*.[9] This year, on 5 April[10], the European Commission has published a new Communication on the An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, designed or adapted to meet EU Roma integration goals, with targeted actions and sufficient funding.

The European Commission's mandate also includes stimulating the use of EU Structural Funds by EU Member States in order to support Roma inclusion. This process is supported by the EURoma network composed of representatives from currently 12 Member States, to promote the use of Structural Funds to enhance the effectiveness of policies targeting the Roma and to promote their social inclusion. Unfortunately, "*the Communication lacks adequate strategic intent to address what discriminatory inflammatory rhetoric coming from prominent politicians in Member States, and the fact that such*

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[8] European Commission (2010), The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe, COM (2010) 133
[9] http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/147&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en
[10] European Commission (2011), An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, COM (2011) 173

statements are made with seeming impunity...the Framework must address the challenge of growing intolerance, discrimination and prejudice against Roma".[11]

Stereotyping is problematic when used by adults to simplify and deal with things of which they are afraid and lack knowledge. If the object of our fears and ignorance simply confirms reductive assumptions, a simplistic and sometimes prejudicial thinking will continue. Therein lies a major root of social exclusion.
There is a clear need for explicit goals to combat discrimination in national Roma integration strategies to ensure that prejudice does not derail progress.

The EU Inter-Cultural Approach to Roma Inclusion

On 24 April 2009 in Prague, 10 Common Basic Principles were presented for the first time at the meeting of the European Platform for Roma inclusion. They are a tool for both policy-makers and practitioners managing programmes and projects. Distilled from the experience of successful policies, they provide a framework for the successful design and implementation of actions to support Roma inclusion. The aim is to guide the EU institutions and Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries when they design and implement new policies or activities.

They represent a legally non-binding declaration. However, by referring to the Principles in the Council conclusions, Member States have shown their commitment to base future initiatives on these principles. Among other things, they reaffirm the need for "*an intercultural approach which involves Roma people together with people from different ethnic backgrounds. Essential for effective communication and policy, intercultural learning and skills deserve to be promoted alongside combating prejudice and stereotypes*"[12].

Through this approach, the majority population is provided with tools and competences to help them understand the Roma culture, and the Roma are provided with tools and competences to understand mainstream culture. As a result, promoting mutual understanding helps tackle prejudice on both sides, without any concession regarding fundamental human rights. Actions aim to:

- Promote inter-cultural learning (e.g. training sessions, information materials, etc.) and mutual understanding;
- Highlight inter-cultural exchanges and the role of inter-cultural mediators;
- Involve people with different ethnic backgrounds in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and activities;
- Take into account the cultural specificities of Roma communities when drawing up policies (e.g. be aware of taboos, etc.);
- Pay attention to possible cultural biases in communication, as well as in the process and substance of policies and activities.

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[11] Bernard Rorke, Director of International Research and Advocacy, Roma Initiatives Open Society Foundations, Sofia.
http://eupi.osi.bg/fce/001/0070/files/RomaPolicyinEU_EuPIPolicyBrief31_May2011.pdf
[12] http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fdad/cms/stopdiscrimination/resources/campaign_materials/Roma_Vademecum_.html?langid=en

Media in the International Context

In recent years, the human rights treaty-monitoring bodies as well as public administrations and civil society activists have begun to pay much more attention to the rights of the Roma population. The European Commission is not the only international player: it is involved in initiatives supporting Roma inclusion with a wider international scope and cooperates with the various international organizations active in this field. The European Commission's work builds on existing expertise and experiences of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015[13] and initiatives such as the Roma Education Fund, the OSCE Action Plan, and the recommendations of the Council of Europe and of the United Nations. It also participates in the Roma Informal Contact Group of international organizations.

CERD General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma

In August 2000, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination pointed out that "*...the negative role played by the media in the treatment of Roma, a factor promoting racism in many areas of society, was also worthy of note. A false interpretation of freedom of the press enabled the media to attack and express opinions against the dignity of the Roma*".[14]

The CERD called on, therefore, contracting countries to improve the relations between Roma and non-Roma communities, in particular at local levels, with a view to promoting tolerance and overcoming prejudices and negative stereotypes on both sides. Measures in the field of the media are also mentioned, as follows:

36. To act as appropriate for the elimination of any ideas of racial or ethnic superiority, of racial hatred and incitement to discrimination and violence against Roma in the media, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.
37. To encourage awareness among professionals of all media of the particular responsibility to not disseminate prejudices and to avoid reporting incidents involving individual members of Roma communities in a way which blames such communities as a whole.
38. To develop educational and media campaigns to educate the public about Roma life, society and culture and the importance of building an inclusive society while respecting the human rights and the identity of the Roma.
39. To encourage and facilitate access by Roma to the media, including newspapers and television and radio programmes, the establishment of their own media, as well as the training of Roma journalists.
40. To encourage methods of self-monitoring by the media, through a code of conduct for media organizations, in order to avoid racial, discriminatory or biased language.

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[13] http://www.romadecade.org/
[14] http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/11f3d6d130ab8e09c125694a0054932b?Opendocument

Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area

The OSCE is also committed to the protection of Roma. It was the first international organisation to recognise, in 1990, the 'particular problems of Roma' in the context of the proliferation of racial and ethnic hatred, xenophobia and discrimination (Copenhagen Document). As a result, a Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues was established in 1994 within the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw. In November 2003, the Permanent Council of the OSCE adopted the Decision on an 'Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area'[15]. The aim of the action plan is to ensure that Roma and Sinti people are able to play a full and equal part in society, and to eradicate discrimination against them. The commitment to this plan was reaffirmed and elaborated upon in OSCE Decision No. 6/08, which stresses the value of the reports by the Director of the ODIHR to the Permanent Council on the implementation of the plan

Racism and discrimination (also in the media) against Roma and Sinti – also addressed as "*anti-gypsyism*" – has been on the rise in the last decade and a half. The deep-rooted types of racism that emerged after the collapse of the communist bloc persist, while new forms of hostility, rejection and hate speech continue to be expressed across the OSCE region. As a result of this discrimination, many Roma and Sinti communities have developed strong group-centered identities that can lead, in certain countries, to a sense of marginalization and alienation. On the other hand, groups that are linguistically and culturally assimilated to the majority population can find themselves defined as Gypsies for purely racial reasons.

Such attitudes and racial stereotyping are reflected in the mass media, where the majority of news items and headlines about Roma and Sinti are linked with criminality and "otherness". In contrast, Roma and Sinti victims of racist attacks receive virtually no media coverage

Recommended action by participating States:

36. Launch information and awareness-raising campaigns with a view to countering prejudices and negative stereotypes of Roma and Sinti people.
37. In order to foster freedom of expression, encourage training of Roma and Sinti journalists and their employment in media outlets with a view to facilitating wider access to the media for Roma and Sinti people.
38. Encourage the media to show positive aspects and present a balanced portrayal of Roma life, refrain from stereotyping Roma and Sinti people and avoid inciting tension between various ethnic groups. Organize round tables between media representatives and Roma and Sinti representatives to promote this objective.

Recommended action by OSCE institutions and structures:

39. In co-operation with the ODIHR as well as relevant international organizations, the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM) should consider how the OSCE could contribute to the establishment of a European Roma Radio which would broadcast throughout Europe. The ODIHR and the RFOM should organize public debates, anti-discrimination campaigns and joint training programmes with and for the media.

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[15] http://www.osce.org/pc/17359

40. The RFOM should consider facilitating training seminars for Roma journalists.
41. The ODIHR-CPRSI and the RFOM will organize round tables with journalists on the image that Roma and Sinti communities have in society.
42. The HCNM will continue to elaborate and disseminate guidelines for policy-makers on the use of the State broadcast media in multicultural communities, aimed, *inter alia*, at encouraging support for minority broadcasters, including Roma and Sinti broadcasters, and improving their access to the media.

Council of Europe Joint Programmes and Initiatives for ROMA

The Council of Europe's main objective is to encourage its members to take a comprehensive approach to Roma issues. This involves three main priorities - protecting minorities, combating racism, anti-Ziganism and intolerance and preventing social exclusion. One of the fundamental principles guiding this approach is participation of the communities concerned, through Roma and Travellers representatives and associations. Since 1995, the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) has been tasked with advising member states and encouraging international authorities to take action where needed. Its role complements that of the Secretary General's Co-ordinator of Activities concerning Roma, responsible for promoting co-operation with other relevant international organisations and developing working relations with Roma and Travellers issues organisations.

A Joint CoE/EC programme was launched for 2008/2009 entitled 'Enhancing the domestic capacity to devise, implement and monitor National Action Plans for Roma, and countering negative stereotyping faced by Roma people'. Another example of joint CoE/EC programmes on behalf of Roma people is the Dosta! awareness campaign[16], a collaborative effort with several NGOs to promote a positive image of Roma citizens to combat common stereotypes and prejudices in South-Eastern countries, such as Moldova and Ukraine. Moreover, training activities tailored to Roma/non Roma and journalists are being implemented across Europe in order to make them 'ambassadors of communication', raise awareness and spread knowledge: bringing them together is a key factor to overcome general negative perception.

The objective of the Route of Roma Culture and Heritage is to increase the knowledge of people in Europe about Roma history, culture, values and lifestyle, to encourage the contribution of Roma to Europe's cultural life and diversity and ultimately contribute to giving a positive value to an image of Roma which are, more often than not, perceived in a negative and stereotyped way. To achieve this, the Cultural Route will first develop as a network of organisations (associations, museums, documentation and cultural centres, art and education institutions, festivals, etc) which work together towards developing a common set of activities. As a second stage, the Route will evolve as a series of tourist itineraries across different cities and territories of Europe, which would allow visitors to gain a more thorough understanding of Roma culture.[17]

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[16] http://www.dosta.org/
[17] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/routes/roma_EN.asp?

Part Two
Knowledge Brings Respect

2

Overcoming anti-Roma discourse

The history of the multiple discriminations and the racial segregation has been going hand in hand, through centuries, with the negative perception of the Roma communities in Europe. Today, Roma people are still pictured and portrayed as a problematic 'ethnic group', by use of negative stereotypes and prejudices, as if the social exclusion of Roma people is an innate element of their ethnicity and not the consequence of long lasting discriminating policies and untrue stories.

This negative image is seriously widespread in Europe and is given more emphasis by offensive political discourses and deceitful information campaigns. The use of 'institutional racism' is often a way to channel fear and weakness of the majority of the population against a precise target group, Roma people. Media can create and support a vicious circle reporting and passing on negative messages without taking into account the consequences of their words.

This might result in a widely accepted perception of the 'Roma issue' as painted by media and political elites. Multi-stakeholder initiatives, i.e. those that would include concerted actions by media, CSOs and policy-makers altogether could also prove helpful. The issue of cultural education (of every sector of the society) represents a crucial tool in order to channel information in a correct way and debunk stereotypes and prejudices. Dissemination of information is a way to combat and revert the negative perception of a community. A change in the use of terms (too often related to issues such as security, criminality, control, public order, fear, denial, separation,...) can create a social climate of recognition and respect.

Roma Perception in the EU

The European Commission carried out in 2006 its first ever opinion poll on discrimination and inequality in Europe, including Europeans' attitudes towards ethnic groups in society[18]. This survey was followed-up with a second round of interviews in 2008, asking a more detailed question to ascertain Europeans' attitudes towards the Roma. The 2006 survey revealed that 77% Europeans were of the opinion that being a Roma was a disadvantage in society.

The 2008[19] survey highlighted that around a quarter Europeans would feel uncomfortable having a Roma neighbor and that this tendency is higher towards the Roma than towards a person from a different ethnic origin in general. Whilst Europeans seem to be highly comfortable with ethnic diversity in general, they are notably less so in the specific case of attitudes towards Roma. Nearly a quarter of Europeans (24%) say they would be uncomfortable with a Roma neighbour, compared to just 6% who say the same for a neighbour from a different ethnic origin than theirs.

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[18] Special EUROBAROMETER 263 – Discrimination in the EU
[19] Special EUROBAROMETER 296 – Discrimination in the EU 2008 'Attitudes towards Roma'

Socio-demographic variation follows the pattern established above for ethnicity in general – i.e. the most comfortable respondents with having a Roma neighbour are those who are young, who spent the longest time in education and who have left-wing political views. There also looks to be a complex relationship between having a Roma friend or acquaintance and the level of comfort with having a Roma neighbour.

A third survey on discrimination has been carried out in 2009[20] shows that discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin is seen as the most widespread: 16% of European citizens think that this is very widespread in their country, whilst 45% think that it is fairly widespread. Although EU citizens' social circle is becoming more diverse, having Roma friends it is still at the bottom of the chart (only 17%).

Another survey, the EU-MIDIS (European Union Minorities and Discrimination), has been undertaken by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) asking immigrant and ethnic minority groups about their experiences of discrimination and criminal victimization in their everyday life. The EU-MIDIS 'Data in Focus Reports' targeted specific results from the survey related to different groups: the first of these reports (published in spring 2009) specifically referred to the Roma[21].

The survey showed that one in two Roma respondents was discriminated against at least once in the previous 12 months, and that on average one in five Roma respondents were victims of racially motivated personal crime at least once in the previous 12 months. Beside the EU-MIDIS survey, the Fundamental Rights Agency regularly undertakes studies on various aspects of the inclusion of Roma in Europe.

Prejudices, Stereotypes and Discrimination

A prejudice is an assumption, an adverse judgment made about someone formed beforehand or without knowledge of the facts or accuracy. The word is most commonly used to refer to preconceived judgments and beliefs toward a person because of race, social class, gender, ethnicity, homelessness, age, disability, obesity, religion, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.

The term stereotype (*στερεότυπος*) derives from the Greek words *στερεός* (stereos), "firm, solid" and *τύπος* (typos), "impression": stereotypes are, thus, standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions. They normally assign specific characteristics to any given group in order to categorize on certain aspects. They can be positive, negative or neutral. They originate from and flourish in basic social contexts such as family, school, mass media.

Stereotypes entail certain aspects that keep them constantly in use:

- They are normally shared among wide group (majority);
- They are hard to change and/or to defeat, even when there is evidence against them;
- They simplify the reality (a term to understand a group);
- They generalize the idea of group from an individual perspective;
- They orient expectations, they confirm prejudices, they categorize information.

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[20] Special EUROBAROMETER 317 – Discrimination in the EU in 2009
[21] EU-MIDIS 'Data in Focus: the Roma' - Report examining discrimination and victimisation experienced by the Roma
http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/about/about_en.htm

Discrimination refers to the consequent attitude, based on the prejudices and stereotypes: is the actual behavior towards members of another group. It involves excluding or restricting members of one group from opportunities that are available to other groups. An irrational hostile attitude, fear or hatred towards a particular group, race or religion. In many case it is reflected in common and shared expressions of our languages. The powerful influence of the media on our societies is well known - it shapes our views and our behaviour. The same Eurobarometer survey on attitudes of Europeans towards discrimination (2007) shows that, in terms of influence on society, the media rank in third position after parents and education.

The way Roma are wrongly perceived and negatively portrayed is very often the same from country to country. Roma gain their life by begging or stealing, they do not like working, they do not want their children to attend schools, they do not want to integrate the societies in which they live, they prefer living in shanty towns, they conduct a nomadic way of living, they are the main actors of the trafficking in human beings. Those are only some among the most commonly widespread stereotypes and prejudices against Roma: they are so deeply rooted in European culture that they are most often not conceived as such. Moreover, they tend to define problems mostly related to situations of extreme poverty and social segregation on an ethnic base.

"*One obvious sign is the fact that many people who have never had close, personal contact with Roma are nonetheless able to provide a detailed picture of them. How they look, live, and behave. Very often the behaviour of one individual is automatically applied to all 'Gypsies'. The (negative) behaviour is attributed to Romani culture, not to the individual in question".*[22]

It is often true that those who finds remarks about Roma offensive, inaccurate, racist and personally harmful nonetheless cannot object to the remarks because they are not directed at that particular Roma personally: those who write and speak of Roma often do not know them, and therefore do not often present a complete or balanced picture. Those writing about them do not always belong to their communities, leading this to misleading concepts and inaccurate information. A knowledge-based approach, freed by negative stereotyping projections, should be endorsed by news-providers engaging future journalists and editors in professional training and raising awareness activities.

Media play an enormously important role in the protection of human rights and in securing anti-discrimination attitudes towards vulnerable groups. They expose human rights violations and offer an arena for different voices to be heard in public discourse. Not without reason, media have been called the Fourth Estate – an essential addition to the powers of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. However, the power of the media can also be misused to the extent that the very functioning of democracy is threatened. Some media have been turned into propaganda megaphones for those in power. Other media outlets have been used to incite xenophobic hatred and violence against minorities and other vulnerable groups of people.

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[22] http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/Source/documents/Dosta_Toolkit.pdf

Strengthening ethics in the media

In the current rapidly expanding global environment of movement, mobility, and change, Europeans increasingly carry diverse and multiple identities and expect and deserve to be present and represented fairly and sensibly in the public sphere in political, social or cultural matters. In this regard media play a crucial role as do institutions and civil society itself.

However the current social, economic and cultural realities in Europe, according to political analysts, are exacerbating the discrimination of certain vulnerable or minority groups. Increasing politicisation and group consciousness, as well as unequal wealth distribution, and the current sharp economic shocks are all contributing factors to the worsening position of these groups in political and media debates.

The current crisis and coming challenges can only be met if society recognises and embraces its own diversity. This brings up the issue of conscientious journalism; the responsibility of journalists to report in a manner that, in the long run, will contribute to social inclusion of minorities and the elimination of racism. To succeed is more the task of the majority: an open social climate, which media can help to create, is the prime condition for successful anti-discrimination.

Roma News Coverage

Examples of the dramatic consequences of the role of the media in ethnic and religious discrimination are well documented. They reminds us of the role and responsibility of the media and of the need for a wide and in depth reflection on how the representation of diversity in the public sphere impacts the European society. Nevertheless, many policy makers strongly believe that media are crucial in combating discriminations.

The previous UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan stated during his term that: "*By giving voice and visibility to all people – including and especially the poor, the marginalised and members of minorities – the media can help remedy the inequalities, the corruption, the ethnic tensions and the fundamental rights abuses that form the root causes of so many conflicts.*"

News stories, far from being a pure reflection of reality, constitute a construction of society as defined by criteria of 'newsworthiness'. From the amount of events happening everyday, only a tiny number are reported. The events that are likely to be selected are the ones most compatible with a set of news values which journalists bring to their work. The process of selection enables journalists to organize events into frames or well known patterns which render the event intelligible to the reader as a piece of hard news.

But, as seen previously, those who write and speak of Roma often do not know them, and therefore do not often present a complete or balanced picture. Those writing about them do not always belong to their

communities, leading this to misleading concepts and inaccurate information. Often those who report about Roma nor have access to reliable and direct sources, neither involve Roma in their work.

If not moved by accuracy and sense of respect, media risk to strengthen prejudices and confirm stereotypes boosting the sense of hostility and diffidence already present in our societies towards vulnerable and emarginated groups. Sensationalist reporting may help sell papers but it has contributed to an increasingly fearful climate between communities. It is necessary that media professionals are aware of their special responsibility in shaping the social image of the Roma community.

Codes of Conduct

The term ethical journalism is highly relevant in this context. Reporters and editors can contribute to a better society through genuine professionalism. Ethical journalists serve the public's right to know. They are professional also in the sense that they seek the truth and resist the pressure to convey distortions, be they from media owners, business interests or political forces. These are the ethics which should be promoted.

Within this framework of social responsibility a series of self-regulation mechanisms of journalism as codes, ethical conduct, professional statutes, agreements, manuals or books have been adopted. These tools aim to collect main ethical principles guide the practice of the profession.

Although codes vary from country to country reflecting different sensitivities and traditions (more than 400 versions exist), there are certain elements which are universal and recognised by all journalists – that is a commitment to the truth and accuracy, to independence and fairness, and to minimise harm.

The Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists agreed in 1954 at the International Federation of Journalists Congress in Bordeaux in France is an inclusive and mercifully brief statement about ethics in journalism reflecting universal values.

This code embraces all of the key values and aspirations of journalism. It has been endorsed by unions and associations of journalists coming from vastly different cultures and traditions and under a global standard for media quality. The code calls for respect for truth, ethical expression of fair comment and criticism and the correction of errors; it warns journalists to use fair methods to obtain news; to uphold professional secrecy as a cardinal principle and to recognise the danger of discrimination being furthered by media.

Focus

The Charter of Rome. The National Council of Journalists and the Federation of the Italian Press, in agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have endorsed the Charter of Rome (Conduct Protocol on asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants) to promote greater awareness on issues and subjects related to information concerning immigration. Although not directly addressed to Roma people, the guidelines highlight crucial principles such as: the need to support responsible information, far from superficial and incorrect behaviour and the dissemination of misleading, generalized, inaccurate news. The utmost prudence should be guaranteed in eluding the use of terms which could cause unwarranted alarmism and weakening of the credibility of professional journalists. The Charter of Rome reaffirms the duty to provide the public with accurate information, not omitting to explain, the causes of phenomena, appealing to the contribution of experts and bodies working in this field.

The existence of codes of conduct means that media activity involves a ethical dimension: codes serve to provide journalists with a set of rules regarding the performance of daily activities with the purpose to help them decide on way to proceed. Codes conduct, as tools of self-regulation, represent a guarantee for the journalist's freedom of action, because they can defend their ideas against external pressures. Codes of conduct increases the prestige of the profession and the public confidence on journalists.

Media Accountability

Media play a significant role in the stigmatisation of the Roma minority across Europe. The media may be an important factor in fuelling the witch-hunting against this people minority, but can also be a significant ally in the fight against discrimination and prejudices. "*There seems to be racism encoded in news reports which serves to distinguish the majority from the ethnic minorities and secure a sense of community, of us, of our home*".[23]

And codes of conducts unfortunately can remain just ethical principles: there is no consequent action to the mistakes done by information providers. Of course case of journalists recalled to their duties or even dismissed from their roles do exist; when this happens it is normally because of the abidance to strong rules internal to their workplace.

But what if media are reluctant to implement the principles they are committed to? What to do to let them face the consequences of their work? How to make them accountable for their mistakes to the public opinion? How to compensate the damages caused to people belonging to a given ethnic minority by publishing distort or incorrect images of the facts?

To fight negative portrayal and racism in the media, it is important to be informed about the types of complaint mechanisms that exist in the media, in the journalists unions and within antiracism legislation. Some tools to facilitate complaints and comments are already incorporated in the layout of the newspapers and on the websites of broadcasting organisations. More institutionalized forms of reader feedback are the press councils, who deal with citizens' complaints when these are not directly dealt with by the newspaper itself, or even governmental institutes expressly appointed.

Focus

UNAR. The Italian National Office for Anti-Discrimination and Racism has worked closely with journalists and supported the elaboration of a code of conduct to combat such phenomena in media. The mandate of the UNAR also includes media monitoring of racism and xenophobic expressions and attitudes. In 2008, a database of reports of cases of discrimination in the media against Roma and migrants was created. Identified cases are dealt with by UNAR's officers.

In regard to news coverage on minorities (and among them, Roma), is particularly important not to classify information including ethnicity, colour, religion or culture, unless absolutely necessary to understand the story. The penalties for failing to abide by the code of practice may not be severe; for example, the editor may merely be obliged to publish the criticisms of the regulatory body, which often takes place many

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[23] Media Coverage of Roma Issues. By Nicolina Markidou. July 2008

months later, too late to have an impact or to reduce the damage done. However one should be aware of the complexity which the complaint process might require form case to case.

Media Monitoring

Journalism is considered to reproduce the stereotypes associated with different ethnic minorities as well as failing to allow for a broader reflection on issues of social exclusion, discrimination, etc. Instead of provoking debate by raising awareness, helping fight prejudice and engendering inter-community understanding, a large percentage of the mainstream media has helped to fuel debates based on intolerance and racism. Roma continue to be among the groups most affected by the injury, which filters through the media, ensuring that these people are often described in stereotypical and racist manner.

According to the Council of Europe, "*The media, sometimes unconsciously, too often consciously, spread anti-Roma feelings. In case of reporting a crime committed by a person mentioning the ethnicity does not have any positive impact. By the same token, patronizing attitude is also harmful. In addition, media generally do not pay attention to stories in which the Roma are the victims, as it is the case for racist attacks or hate speeches pronounced by politicians towards Roma, all of these acts that media could help to condemn.*" [24].

The way the press builds up the image of the 'others', addresses the problems of minorities, as well as their rights, the sense of responsibility that shows the use of its undeniable power to inform and guide public opinion needs to be the object of more concrete and thorough analysis. There is a urgent need to monitor violations of ethical standards as established by the journalists' codes of conduct.

Constant monitoring activities can be the tool to observe, react, report and correct deceitful cases of information to combat stereotypes dissemination. Anti-discrimination bodies, associations, engaged journalists, media activists, politicians or citizens themselves could do a lot more to respond to prejudices with knowledge.

Focus

In Other WORDS. Articolo 3 Observatory of Mantua (Italy) monitors the role of media through a key-words based daily press review which covers about 50 newspapers in the Lombardy region. A weekly newsletter with analysis of news and insights is circulated among about 1,500 readers, including individuals, institutions, professionals and associations. The good practice of 'Articolo 3' is at the core of the EU co-funded project '*In Other Words - Web Observatory and Review for Discrimination alerts and Stereotypes Deconstruction*' whose aim is to develop a model for multicultural newsrooms and for monitoring activities. Main goal of the project is to monitor the representation of the various minorities in about 100 media through network of 7 EU Regional Observatory in 6 different Member States.

Monitoring the media is a useful exercise not only for professionals but also for mainstream society. It can help develop a more critical awareness of the media, learn how to interpret what is said or shown and become empowered both as 'media consumers'.

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[24] http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/JP3/arc/toolstereotypesEN.pdf

The results of media monitoring can generally educate the media, and specifically to correct inaccuracies: in this sense monitoring the media is effective on the short, the medium and the long term, being it a process not only of cultural and educational growth of the society but also a way to keep the media accountable for their work.

Training Media Professionals

Roma are among the ethnic groups or nationality more frequently mentioned in the titles of news bound to their (possible, sometimes incorrectly) migrant status or to episodes of crime. The words used to tackle questions related to the Roma make strong reference to concept such as threat, security, illegality, criminality, emergency, control, public order, fear, refusal, separation, exclusion,...

Too often news concerning Roma people fall into the 'crime news' section proliferating negative stereotypes: according to a Study of the University '*La Sapienza*' of Rome (Italy), the portrait of foreigners as well as Romani people captured by the media is often showing a criminal, male, with a personality squeezed to only details of his/her nationality or "ethnicity". [25]

The negative stereotypes which are attached to Roma are thus so pervasive that they influence every aspect of their lives, and result in widespread discrimination. When the picture is positive it iterates the idea that Roma people are communities still willing to live in a free, wild, nomadic way. Both ideas lack of substance and base themselves on common misleading understandings.

There is a tendency to imprison the debate between positive and negative pictures, with the risk to simplify the 'Roma story' and enhance both positive and negative stereotypes. A mere 'dualistic' approach (good vs. bad) does not represent to whole picture; moreover, a strengthening of the distances between two groups (already strongly perceived, 'us' vs. 'them', 'Roma' vs. 'non-Roma') might result. Simply showing the human face of Roma communities could represent a different approach.

When asked about the way Roma are pictured in their news, journalists and media professionals often tend to make use of some common 'alibis' not properly in line with the ethics of their mission ('we publish what people want; we are and expression and a result of the societies we live in; we can not know everything; we do not have enough time', etc...).

Focus

NewsROM - Inform without prejudice. Organized by the Journalism School in Perugia (Italy) as part of the campaign Dosta! promoted by the Council of Europe, coordinated and funded by the National Racial Discrimination (UNAR) of the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, the project aims to foster discussion on the way media normally channel news concerning Roma communities and to develop a knowledge-based approach to break down stereotypes and open up knowledge paths about the Roma world. Education should be done to news-providers as well as address the general public.

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[25] http://www.cir-onlus.org/Sintesi%20Ricerca%20Immigrazione%20e%20asilo%20sui%20media%20-%20Sapienza%20v2.5%5B1%5D.pdf

All journalists should step back from simplistic approaches to information: their role is to report to the public basing their stories on facts, documentation, research, in-depth analysis. In this sense, "*there is also a lack of training on both anti-discrimination legislation and on diversity management both in the initial professional education of young journalists and in the ongoing vocational training of established journalists*".[26] Practical actions to improve the performance of the media through improved vocational training should be promoted.

There is a strong need for widespread awareness campaigns, professional trainings, knowledge based courses in order to make media reflect on their role and improve the quality of their work. A pro-active engagement of journalists associations and federations can support and back up vocational trainings activities (many examples are already in place across Europe); working with journalists schools (as already done in many cases) proves to be a good tool to address this topic by tackling a more effective approach towards tomorrow's information providers.

The urgency for informed and professional journalism is great. Writing about the complexity of our societies requires sensitive, careful handling. This does not mean refusing to report but ensuring that articles are written with objectivity and impartiality: care must be taken to avoid incitement to hatred and a perpetuation of bias. Widespread negative assumptions about immigrants need to be questioned and tested.

Focus

Guía prática para periodistas. In Spain, the latest editions of the report '*Discriminación y comunidad gitana*' delivered by *Fundación Segretariado Gitano*, indicate the media as the area where there are more cases of discrimination against Roma (28.1% in 2009 and 36.6% in 2010). Media professionals should be more aware of their special responsibility in shaping the social image of the Roma community. The Guide for media professionals stresses on the importance of the civil society, shows a practical approach on how to overcome bad journalists customs while providing some simple, yet necessary, recommendations.

Shared Ownership and Responsibility

The discourse over Roma tends to follow a very predictable pattern, either addressing Roma as a 'problem' group, or as 'victims' at the hands of the majority. In both cases, a divide is maintained between Roma and the rest of the population.

There is a need to establish structures and round tables for dialogue between media representatives, governments and civil society members to overcome deceitful information and avoid news' manipulation and societal polarization.

Overcoming this divide will require a change in the discourse. It will require a dialogue on equal terms between Roma and the majority society on their respective rights and obligations, in every country in which they live. In this way sustainable change can be brought about.

Mechanisms for ongoing consultations with all members of Romani communities should be enhanced and implemented. Journalists, CSOs representatives and Roma communities should join their forces, sit and work

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[26] Media4Diversity: Taking the Pulse of Diversity in the Media - http://www.media4diversity.eu/

side by side. Shared ownership and responsibilities of the coverage that media give of Roma issues is a crucial factor.

CSOs and minorities groups can influence the tone and content of stories and the portrayal of Roma people in the media. There should be a call for inclusive journalism and stronger interaction between different players: Roma communities should be widely included as sources and speakers of their own stories; both sides of the story have to be reflected: the actions of one single person should not lead to the demonization of entire communities.

- **Ethnic Media**

The role of the Media is crucial in bringing to the fore the Roma issue, addressing the problematic areas and contributing to the elimination of the stereotypes about Roma people. But with regard to reporting on minorities, it has been argued that there often seems to be an "us/them" binary running the news account that gives the impression that the implied reader can only be a member of the majority population.

This professional failure in the area of media responsibility demands a greater role of Roma-initiated media to provide a better and clear picture of the everyday reality of Roma communities. The issues of diversity are relatively absent from the political and media agendas. Articles written by people with a different ethnic background are under (sometimes not regularly) represented by media.

This sometimes reflects the conservatism of local political and media establishments, which see the issues of diversity as 'too sensitive' and are unwilling to put them onto the public agenda from the fear of losing voters or audience shares. Some see encouragement of diversity as an encouragement of social segregation or even as a way to promote separatist agendas (in the case of ethnic minorities).

However, some newspapers and broadcasting companies have started to open themselves to writers whose voice was not being heard. Those teams have understood that readers want also alternative perspective on the societies they live in, focusing both on the general debate about diversity, discrimination and minorities rights and on the way culture and countries are perceived by non-mainstream communities: a way to share different experiences about the same society.

Focus

Media4Diversity. In order to help deal with the challenge of diversity in our societies and counter discrimination in the media, the European Commission has commissioned a study whose objective has been to assist in the process of promoting diversity and fighting discrimination in the media on a pan-European level. The has looked for best practice by identifying the most significant and/or innovative initiatives taken by or about the media to combat discrimination and/or to promote diversity: 13 initiatives concern Roma people. Based on this research, recommendations have been submitted to the European Commission for further action to be taken to help promote diversity and combat discrimination in the media.

Practice has also shown that results are better when Roma media entities work together, or, at least, do not harm one another. Roma media will continue to play an important role in shaping the way Roma communities are perceived, by supplying mainstream media with quality features related to Roma issues, they can influence mainstream media coverage and non-Roma society in a positive sense

Ethnic media are playing an increasingly centrality to the exercise of full citizenship: citizenship should not only be understood in a legal sense, but as a key word in debates over desirable combinations of rights, responsibilities and competences. An effective participant democracy can only succeed if the individual, the citizen has a real capacity of action on the public sphere. In this sense ethnic minorities, through their media, intend to be involved in the society of residence.

- **Empowering Roma Communities**

Most of the time, journalists seem unaware or unconcerned of the consequences of their daily work. Journalist's language can be crucial in the cultivation of prejudice, xenophobia and even incitement to ethnic hatred. Many journalists lack Roma sources of information and have very limited contact with Roma communities. Several prefer the "safe approach" and choose to interview non-Roma experts - politicians and police officials - in talk-shows and news features about criminality within Roma communities.

Journalists are not always well informed; they may have no social networks in the communities or access to alternative information, and little time to do investigative work. Many times media have to face a lack of sources from the Roma communities. By creating relationships and offering relevant facts, Roma communities and associations can help them improve their reporting and implement effective monitoring. Roma have to start being present in the media under a totally different light.

Focus

Let your voice be heard!. A small but useful guide that aims at enhancing the media activism of Roma organisations and advocates. It has been produced by ERIO (_European Roma Information Office_) in collaboration with '_Redattore Sociale_', an Italian news-agency specialising in social issues, which is among the few media sources that depict the Roma situation without prejudices, stereotypes or stigmatisation. With 10 simple steps, Roma organizations and activists can overturn the negative trend of their representation: the guide gives some tips to be followed in order to make Roma voice be heard tips and on how to deal with the media and journalists to reverse negative trends, both at local and national levels.

This change predominantly has to come from the Roma community: being passive is no longer an option. The Romani struggle for equal rights and opportunities is gaining momentum and the Roma community has to take advantage of this situation. On the other hand, as a result of the economic crisis, there is an increasing amount of prejudices and hatred directed towards the Roma population. However when a crisis arises, the fight for more decent conditions has to rise to the occasion as well.

Focus

Nestlings. First Czech "docu-soap", delivered by Czech Television. Sixteen eight-year old (mostly) Roma children are main characters of the story, 'small birds ready to leave their nest'. They were not supposed to be all together in one class, but parents of other "normal Czech" kids wrote a petition at the beginning of children's first school year to separate their kids from the different ones. A creative documentary series about children able to break isolation and borders. Kids from minorities are making their own film about their life. This project tries to find big stories of small children that have different starting level than others; the other important part is to show the life of middle class minorities in Central Europe.

The challenge is thus enormous: centuries of social exclusion, discrimination and disempowerment are a legacy that is difficult to overcome. And although often accused of preferring to remain separate, the Roma clearly aspire to an equal status in society: participation and empowerment seem to be the key words to grant visibility and get more respect.

- **Civil Society Activism**

The role of the media is crucial in bringing to the fore the Roma issue, addressing the problematic areas and contributing to the elimination of the stereotypes about Roma people. Media organizations are well-established institutions informed by their own set of rules and criteria that rarely align with the minority concerns. However, they are, to some extent, starting to be aware that they can improve the accuracy of their news by establishing dialogue with minority groups and media professionals from ethnic backgrounds.

In order to reach a fair and balanced portrayal, CSOs must share the responsibility of the coverage they get with journalists and media professionals. CSOs play a major part in the construction, upholding and cohesion of society.

Editors and journalists, on the other hand, have also realised that they can develop their networks to ensure they have a better understanding of the minority community and the issues that affect them, so that they can better cater to their needs. In order to do so they need to speak either to people who are directly involved, or to a person who can speak accurately and legitimately on behalf of those people.

When Roma communities are weak, or even worse, not ready or able to express their views and influence public debate, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) representing minorities can influence the media's approach to diversity. They can thus operate as "media change agents" at different levels; working to improve the quality of the media in relation to their particular interest group. CSOs should initiate and participate in constructive dialogue with media organisations and program makers.

But building stable relationships with one or more journalists, or becoming a reliable source of information for the media needs time. Making a change in the media requires detailed knowledge of the media structure; sometimes CSOs' personnel are insufficiently trained in media relations or communication strategies, often due to a lack of funding opportunities allocated from policy makers and authorities.

Focus

MENTER. When media tend to be lazy, to report without investigating, to repeat stories without and in-depth analysis, then it is time to become the media. Influence important people, work with them, take them as close as possible to the primary sources, tell them your story: this seems to sum up a 'do it yourself approach', effective strategy adopted by Menter, the East of England Black and Minority Ethnic Network, based in Cambridge. MENTER vision is for a future where inequalities are addressed, there is no racism and all targeted communities are properly valued for their contribution to the region and their participation in local democracy.

10 Simple Rules to tell Roma Stories

Finally, a set of 10 basic, simple, yet fundamental, rules for media professionals to be used when reporting on Roma communities. Inaccurate information, deriving from a lack of knowledge, can only reinforce prejudices and stereotypes. This list could serve media as a practical toolkit to foster a more responsible approach to information.

Media should engage themselves to further develop a knowledge-based and anti-discriminatory way to tackle and cover Roma issues in European media and to respond to the information needs of an increasing diverse population, thus contributing to social cohesion in European societies.

- Abide by codes of conduct and international standards: maintain professionalism

- Avoid generalization, simplification: stories are personal, not ethnic related

- Ban stereotypes and prejudices: they are not evidence-based

- Abstain from sensationalism: choose right words and images, be objective

- Report and condemn discriminatory articles: enhance credibility of media

- Inform about positive stories: do not squeeze Roma images only on exclusion and illegality

- Make media monitoring a long-term regular process: a constant training exercise

- Consider the consequences of inaccurate information: it fosters discrimination

- Let the voice of Roma be heard: involve Roma as sources, write their stories with them

- Build stronger ties with Roma communities and civil society: participation is a crucial factor

Conclusion

Many journalists' unions and media employers are committed to opposing the use of media to promote discrimination, The Charter of Rome and similar other declarations have been made by European employer and journalists' groups.

Ethical codes and guidelines need to be revived and should be used as the basis for discussions with individual editors and journalists whenever media make mistakes. Seminars and training should be organised on issues such as the use of language, the correct terminology when referring to Roma, the involvement of other sources (first of all among Roma), and the selection of pictures.

Defining alternative stories and positive angles to counter prejudice are a vital part of the mix. Involvement of Roma communities, civil society activists, expert in intercultural mediation and communication should be also brought on board and invited to play a key role in the definition of efficient strategies.

Nevertheless there still a long way to go. Positive experiences are still limited either in their scope (i.e. an agreed glossary which can fit to report on Roma does not yet exist) either in their implementation (many violations pass unnoticed and are not reported, accountability lacks still effective measures).

Changes in the media are difficult to bring about in the short term; breaking down prejudices and stereotypes needs major efforts that imply a radical cultural change in our societies and political discourses; a deep understanding of social issues related to Roma communities requires time.

Knowledge-based information is the key to deliver a different message, increase tolerance and respect, overturn widespread negative theories, whilst creating empathy in the public audience. In an increasing competitive, diversified and fragmented media space, this report has looked at the many measures media, but not only, have undertaken to tackle discrimination and to promote tolerance and respect.

They can bring up ideas and strategies on how to give voice to Roma people; they can provide tools for the inclusion and the empowerment of Roma communities in the media context; they can help our societies to change attitude towards the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, inseparable part of our common history.

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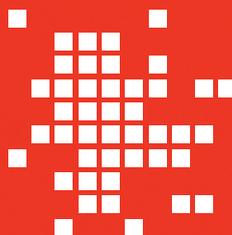
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