



## ENGAGE Project

# Summary of best practices selection of intergroup contact, anti-Gypsyism and mobilization for social change of Roma and non-Roma

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### Executive summary

- Based on qualitative analysis of nine interventions in three countries (Hungary, Spain, Slovakia) we found that most interventions were **contact based** for reducing stereotypes of non-Roma and for **empowering** Roma people.
- Increasing knowledge about Roma culture and history was a central element of most interventions.
- Personal stories and perspective taking interventions are important to increase empathy and sympathy.
- Weaknesses of the interventions are the lack of attention to responsibility taking of the non-Roma in social change and the lack of distinction between paternalistic (e.g. white saviour) and ally action.
- Roma people should be involved in the design and implementation to offer contact, empowerment and authenticity.

### Aim of the study

Anti-Gypsyism appears as an overtly expressed form of prejudice consisting of negative stereotyping and strong negative emotions, and it is endorsed by a large proportion of society. Furthermore, research shows that positive contact experiences not only reduce antigypsyism, but also can reduce the commitment and mobilization of minority groups to defend their rights, therefore it is extremely important to understand the precise effects of intergroup contact interventions.



In the ENGAGE project social psychologists, sociologists, and social intervention professionals of three European countries with large populations of Roma people (Hungary, Slovakia, and Spain) aim to understand low socio-political participation of Roma and non-Roma people for social change and to examine the positive and negative effects of contact experiences between Roma and non-Roma people. The project aims to achieve this through identifying best practices which helps to successfully battle anti-Gypsism, to understand and promote factors that raise awareness, empower, and mobilize Roma and non-Roma people to achieve a more egalitarian society.

## **Method**

In the report we present nine interventions (three for each country) collected with qualitative methodology, which are selected for the following reasons: (a) addressing the problem of anti-Gypsyism and the indifference of the non-Roma majority, (b) promoting the empowerment of Roma identity and/or the social and political participation of Roma people, and (c) raising awareness about inequality and/or mobilize non-Roma people as allies for social change.

## **Results**

The explicit goal of the selected interventions related is empowering of Roma people, increasing social engagement, reinforcement of group identity, and collective action. Prejudice reduction, increasing empathy and promoting ally action is another goal of these programs.

### Reducing stereotypes

- through greater knowledge about Roma culture and history
- by creating a safe space for discussion about their perceptions of Roma and pointing out that everyone has prejudices
- by amplifying the voices of Roma youth
- through drama pedagogy working with Roma youth, Roma actors and actresses and developing educational materials
- through direct and indirect contact by presenting counter-stereotypical examples about Roma people
- by perspective taking methods

### Fostering empathy

- by encountering Roma youth and their personal stories, and discussing Roma related questions
- through social cohesion which promotes affective ties among the Roma and non-Roma students

### Empowering Roma people



- through greater knowledge about the history and culture of Roma people
- through direct contact with positive role models from their community
- through amplifying the voices of Roma youth, strengthening their skills, self-confidence
- by empowering them and enabling young people to identify their own heroes living in their environment and to articulate their own heroic deeds in the form of creative products
- through appreciation of cultural diversity in general, and on the promotion of group cohesion
- by motivating and supporting them to continue their academic training.
- by developing the competencies of young leaders
- by coaching young non-Roma children

Increasing social engagement and reinforces group identity

- through greater knowledge about Roma culture and history
- by providing them social capital and opportunities to be active and encouraging them to stand up and raise their voices in regard to different social and structural inequalities
- strengthening a positive social identity

Promoting engagement on collective action and allyship

- through policy recommendations and action plans written by Roma youth
- by raising awareness of different social issues that Roma people still face and experience and make them more visible and understandable for non-Roma audience
- by advocating for and raising awareness about the rights of Roma
- by directly encouraging participants to think about (collective) action that would alleviate the situation of disadvantaged groups

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Based on the analysis key elements were identified that should be applied in planning and implementing contact-based interventions to facilitate empowerment of Roma people while reducing anti-Roma attitudes of the majority. Recommendations are the following:

- Involving the Roma in the process of deciding on interventions, design them, and in their implementation.
- To base the designs of the interventions on scientific research and to evaluate the effects and impact.
- To ensure equal conditions and participation during the intervention.
- To recognize and make visible the existing socio-economic inequality of the Roma in the presence of members of both the minority and the majority (and thus prevent the sedative effect of contact interventions).
- To ensure continuity of interventions over time.



- When planning interventions, invest efforts in involving as many representatives of the selected target group as possible (so that the intervention is not carried out only in selected classes, with selected employees, but that the whole teams are actively involved)
- To promote cultural diversity and allyship for equality during the intervention.
- To consider emotions and their importance on social interventions, especially the promotion of empathy.
- Interventions should be held regularly, because one occasion is not enough to achieve permanent change.

In the ENGAGE project, social psychologists, sociologists and social intervention professionals from three European countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Spain), meet with the objective and commitment to successfully deal with anti-Gypsyism, as well as understand and promote the factors involved in raising awareness and mobilization of Roma people and non-Roma as allies for the achievement of a more egalitarian social change. ENGAGE aims to understand the factors of low socio-political participation of Roma and non-Roma people for social change, as well as to study the positive and negative effects that derive from contact experiences between Roma and non-Roma people.

Recent research shows that, while positive contact experiences can improve attitudes, it can also reduce the commitment and mobilization of minority groups to defend their rights (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013; Hässler et al., 2020; Wright & Lubensky, 2009), so it is vitally important to know the precise effects of intergroup contact interventions.

Therefore, the **main objective** of the best practices analyses is to present a description of interventions for Roma inclusion and engagement, justifying in each case why it should be considered an example of good practice for: (a) addressing the problem of anti-Gypsyism and the indifference of the non-Roma majority, (b) promoting the empowerment of Roma identity and/or the social and political participation of Roma people, and (c) raising awareness about inequality and/or mobilize non-Roma people as allies for social change.

For the selection of the practices in each country, a **qualitative research methodology** was used based on interviews with involved agents (professionals and Roma participants of each practice and Roma activists), the analysis of documents of the institutions that implemented these practices and the identification of the psychosocial processes targeted by the interventions and their connection with the scientific literature.

## Results of selected practices

### Spain

#### **Lección Gitana (Romani Lesson)**

(<https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/126020.html.en>) is an awareness campaign



created by the organization *Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, and it is aimed at reducing anti-Gypsyism and empowering Roma people through greater knowledge about the history and culture of the Roma people. The content of the campaign is massively disseminated to the general population and is also used to teach Master Classes for specific targeted groups (e.g., university students, mass media professionals, etc.). The practice is destined to both Roma and non-Roma people, and it promotes both direct and indirect intergroup contact.

The increase in knowledge about Roma's culture and history contributes to **reducing stereotypes and prejudice**, and **increases awareness of the inequality** that Roma people suffer. Increasing this knowledge also reinforces a **positive Roma identity** and favors their **empowerment** by showing Roma referents (both in the past and in the present). Further, the direct intergroup **contact** caused by the Master classes takes place in a space in which the **Roma professionals speak from their own perspective**—and for a non-Roma audience—about their history, culture and the discrimination they suffer, contributing to their empowerment. This space also allows to work on the **emotions** that arise in the sessions, and to share experiences of real discrimination, generating critical thinking and an **intercultural debate free of oppression**.

**Verano abierto (Open summer)** (<http://www.anaquerando.com/category/acciones-soporte/verano-abierto/>) is a community action arisen in response to the demands of the citizens of a multicultural and disadvantaged district (mainly habited by Roma people) implemented by *Anaquerando*. This practice aims to increase the organized citizen participation for the use of public spaces and resources, as well as to improve intercultural relations through positive intergroup contact. The methodology is organized in three blocks: (a) planning the activities considering the citizens' demands or necessities; b) implementation of activities along summer (activities related to sport, art, emotional work, and improvement of technological abilities); and (c) the organization of **neighborhood assemblies** in which citizens express their demands to professionals and political representatives.

This practice contributes to **reduction of anti-gypsyism** by promoting **positive encounters** with leisure and artistic activities, **guaranteeing equal power** between different cultural groups. Also, a **shared group identity** (neighborhood identity) is created, while different **cultural identities are recognized**. Further, citizens living in different areas of the district (which differs on the level of poverty and marginality) can express their **emotions** in a workshop aimed to elaborate a "map of emotions". These activities contribute to increasing **empathy** toward people living in the most disadvantaged areas, thus reducing prejudice. *Verano Abierto* also contributes to the **empowerment of Roma** people by promoting a more **positive identity of the neighborhood** and creating and promoting **spaces of social and political participation** in which Roma express their demands to social and political representatives. As some Roma activists highlighted, these activities are a "school of democracy" that increase engagement for disadvantaged groups.



**Educación para la Igualdad (Education for equality)** (<https://fagavalencia.com/programa-educacion-para-la-igualdad>) is a project carried out in the **educational context** with the aim of combating anti-gypsyism, empowering young Roma people and motivating and supporting them to continue their academic training. Workshops are held on Roma culture and history, on the appreciation of cultural diversity in general, and on the promotion of group cohesion. The target is a multicultural group composed of Roma (mostly) and non-Roma students with different nationalities. Additionally, the professionals of the practice work with the families and teachers of the schools. Therefore, **intergroup contact is present at different levels**: between Roma and non-Roma students, Roma professionals and non-Roma students, and between Roma professionals and non-Roma teachers. Three editions have already been carried out and it has prospects for continuity, in such a way that it offers continuous support and advice both to minors and their families as well as to the educational centers.

The intervention increases **knowledge about Roma culture and history**, contributing to **stereotypes** and **prejudice reduction** of non-Roma students. In Roma students, the higher knowledge contributes to reinforce their **group identity** and to **increase awareness about the inequalities** that affect them and the need to eliminate them. Further, Roma professionals and previous Roma students act as **empowered referents** for the Roma youth, motivating them to continue their academic training. The **positive impact on the academic trajectory** of Roma young contributes to reducing inequality in the future and fostering their **participation in the academic and intellectual sphere**. On the other hand, the activities on **social cohesion** promote affective ties among the Roma and non-Roma students which can foster **empathy and allyship**.

## **Hungary**

**The UCCU workshop** (<https://www.uccualapitvany.hu/en/>) The workshop aims to create a safe and interactive space without taboos where participants can freely share their opinions, experience and ask their Roma related questions that they never dared or could not ask, even if it is stereotypical and prejudiced. The workshop highlights that everyone possesses prejudices and helps to admit and deal with it. Additionally, the aim of the workshop is to introduce the diversity of Roma society to the students to challenge their stereotypes, misconceptions, and attitudes towards the Roma by sharing real knowledge and information about Roma identity, culture and history.

This workshop **reduces anti-Gypsyism** by providing non-Roma with real knowledge and information about Roma. This best practice assists its participants to freely talk about their perceptions of Roma and points out that everyone has prejudices. Also, during the workshop, encountering Roma youth and their personal stories, and discussing Roma related questions assist non-Roma to be **more socially sensitive**, have more **empathy** and see the



bigger picture. This practice **empowers Roma youth as well and increases their social engagement** by offering them knowledge and awareness of the **Roma culture and identity**, providing them **social capital and opportunities to be active and encouraging them to stand up and raise their voices in regards to different social and structural inequalities**. In terms of impact on the Roma, this practice contributes to empowering them, being proud of their origins and culture, and strengthening their identity.

**So keres europa? What's up europe? Seminar** (<https://phirenamenca.eu/>) It is organized every 2nd year by *Phiren Amenca* and takes the actual European Youth Capital as an opportunity to destroy negative images about Roma in Europe and to bring international attention to the rise of anti-Gypsyism. It is promoting the importance of the recognition of challenging anti-Gypsyism by education and by activities and initiatives lead by young people.

The seminar **promotes the engagement on collective action of Roma people and call to action for allyship** from decision and policy makers through the policy recommendations and action plans written by Roma youth. The event **reduces anti-Gypsyism and structural inequalities by amplifying the voices of Roma youth, strengthening** their skills, self-confidence, holding workshops about Human Rights, stereotypes and prejudices and raising awareness of social issues by collective actions and events within the Roma and non-Roma community. This best practice educates and sensitizes the majority society **to break down stereotypes and makes them aware of the inequalities** and discrimination suffered by the Roma.

**Roma heroes workshop** (<https://independenttheater.hu/en/about-us/>) It was created based on the selection of Roma monodrama volumes collected after the world's only international Roma theater festival, which was organized by the *Independent Theatre Hungary* since 2017. The workshop is available online from 20th March 2020. It helps young people to get to know and discuss the variegation, challenges and values of Roma plays, Roma dramatic heroes and communities. Furthermore, it helps discover the hero in themselves and in their environment by introducing their own stories with creative tools. The "hero" and the "heroism" carry positive narratives, while many people think of Roma people and communities as victims. Hence, the aim of the best practice is to shape the perception and attitudes of Roma and non-Roma youth, to empower Roma youth and to draw the attention of non-Roma youth to their personal responsibilities when it comes to inequalities.

The workshop increases the engagement of Roma, **by empowering them and enabling young people to identify their own heroes living in their environment** and to articulate their own heroic deeds in the **form of creative products**. It also **reduces anti-gypsyism** by discussing and raising awareness of social issues that affect Roma **through drama pedagogy working with Roma youth**, Roma actors and actresses and developing educational materials as well. This best practice raises awareness of different social issues



that Roma people still face and experience and make them more visible and understandable for non-Roma audience.

## **Slovakia**

**Young Roma Leaders** programme by NGO Divé Maky (Wild Poppies) (<https://divemaky.sk/domovska-stranka/rozvoj-mentoringu/>).

About organization: Divé Maky was established to reduce societal prejudices against the Roma minority while helping the Roma community by supporting talented children in developing their competencies and education, and by raising awareness of Roma issues, stereotypes, and prejudices among the majority. The individual support program for talented children aimed to create conditions for exemption from social exclusion.

About the programme: The students and graduates later came up with the initiative to be actively involved in their community and together with the organization they developed the Young Roma Leaders programme. The aim was to develop the competencies of young leaders who should then be involved in various activities to engage young people at risk. The Young Roma Leaders project includes several activities: 1) communication, leadership, advocacy and activism skill trainings aimed at young leaders; 2) workshops by young leaders with primary school students; and 3) meetings with representatives from the educational, political and social spheres.

At the trainings **Roma youth were empowered** through building their competencies. Young leaders had the opportunity to meet **positive role models** from their community. Feelings of belonging to others in the trainings, and building their community and relationships was an important resource for **strengthening a positive social identity**, and thus for **increasing participation**. After completing the training, the young Roma leaders held workshops in primary schools, where the aim was to map the relations between Roma and non-Roma pupils, to initiate a discussion on the disadvantage of the Roma minority. During the workshops **direct contact** between Roma and Non-Roma pupils took place, and young Roma leaders were passionate about **discussions on stereotypes and discrimination** of Roma people, and with their example they purposefully violated the stereotypical idea that people from the Roma minority are uneducated, uneducable, or without aspirations to learn. Young Roma leaders subsequently personally supported several children from these workshops by coaching them. Some of the young Romani leaders became counsellors for non-Romani families who have adopted a Romani child in the Volunteer Counsellors program (implemented by NGO Eduma). Young Roma leaders have also **advocated for and raised awareness about the rights of Roma** (and their educational disadvantages) on various occasions at local, national, and European level. At meetings with representatives from the decision-making sphere, they presented their solutions. The Young Roma Leaders project was also linked to a **media campaign**. Media activity in the form of campaigns, discussions





and other outputs used **indirect contact** to present **counter-stereotypical examples** about Roma people.

**Living Library and Volunteer counsellors** by NGO Eduma (<http://eduma.sk/online-ziva-kniznica/>)

About organization: Eduma was co-founded and led for years by a social pedagogue of Roma origin, who has many years of experience in working with young people, especially people from ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups. The **aim of the association is to strengthen social environments in their ability to successfully integrate minorities**, e.g., vulnerable groups in society. Their main methods are **storytelling, learning through emotions and experiences**.

About the programme: Eduma uses the Living Library (Human Library) method, where either during a face-to-face meeting or via video (**direct or indirect contact**), an authentic story is told by people who have overcome obstacles related to prejudice or discrimination in society. During the trainings, **perspective taking** method is used (which leads the participants to empathize with the member of another group). The storytelling is directly followed by a discussion with the participants and other activities that support empathy for the situation of the vulnerable group and thinking about the consequences of the majority's actions. The Roma are one of several vulnerable groups thematized in the activity. The method directly **encourages participants to think about (collective) action that would alleviate the situation of disadvantaged groups**. The method points out the **social inequalities** of minorities and the possibilities of addressing them.

The advantage of the method is also its **availability - online material** for schools is available along with the methodology. Eduma also offers **trainings** with the use of the Living Library and related activities to companies and employers. Organizations must develop a project and are subsequently evaluated regarding the fulfilment of predetermined inclusive values. Institutions that successfully complete the training (4V Academy), will receive a certificate from the Perceptive School, Perceptive Company, or Perceptive Community. The **participation of Roma in interventions in Eduma is active and takes place on several levels** - in decision-making, designing activities, as well as in the activities themselves. "Living books" (people who tell their stories) are experts, bearers of their experience and knowledge, which they are willing to share. Finally, Eduma also organizes other activities - such as the Volunteer Counsellors program or trainings for Young Roma Leaders from Divé Maky, where **Roma men and women have a position of expertise and professional guidance**. Counsellors and tutors are a positive role model and source of support for Roma children (eg. those adopted by nonRoma families). The Volunteer Counsellors project also aims to help officials, social workers, psychologists, and other professionals better prepare potential applicants for the adoption of Roma children.

**Conclusions:**



Both selected examples of good practice followed two main goals, each with a different stress on them. While Young Roma Leaders programme focused primarily on empowerment and advocating for the rights of Roma, Living Libraries target the members of majority in order to acknowledge social inequalities and encourage action. The conducted interventions that (1) **increased the awareness of structural inequalities** both in the majority society and in members of the Roma minority (e.g. discussion of worsened access to education of disadvantaged groups of Roma - Wild Poppies; identification of what lies in vulnerability of various minorities - Eduma). Therefore, intergroup-based interventions aimed at improving intergroup relations in society should be designed so as not to perpetuate structural inequalities (Dovidio et al., 2016; Thiessen & Darweish, 2018). Both organizations (2) **supported the empowerment of Roma men and women, worked with their identities** (eg. the preparatory training of Young Roma Leaders, or the Voluntary Advisers program), thus increasing the potential for collective action for the benefit of the Roma minority. Interventions that mobilize disadvantaged groups through their empowerment have greater potential for achieving social change (e.g., Hargašová et al., 2021). Strengthening Roma identity (as opposed to finding commonalities between the two groups) is one way to prevent the sedative effect of contact interventions (Kende et al., 2020b). Interventions may also focus on highlighting a common group identity, which is important for both majority and minority participants in the context of the intervention. However, it is important that interventions respect the identity of the Roma and guarantee their cultural recognition. Both organizations were further characterized by the effort for **long-term, repeated interventions, in contrast to short-term and one-off activities, they also implemented several supporting activities**. Both organizations used storytelling methods, which can mediate not only empathy with the situation of others, but with the right combination of activities (use of subsequent discussion, assignment, reflection) also awareness of social inequalities and thinking about the steps needed to achieve social change.

#### Slovakia main findings:

Potential for increasing the collective action of the majority in favor of the Roma minority and for positive changes in the area of improvement the intergroup relations of the majority and the minority have: activities aimed at empowering members of the minority and supporting their participation; work with Roma identity; engaging the Roma in an active and counter-stereotypical position in contact with the majority; interventions that raise awareness of structural inequalities in both the majority society and members of the Roma minority; emphasis on long-term or recurring interventions as opposed to short-term and one-off activities; and the implementation of several support activities.

In the Slovak environment, where anti-Roma racism is normatively accepted, it is important to combine methods aimed at accepting Roma men and women as members of the majority society, as well as to strengthen the position of the Roma minority.

#### Slovakia recommendations



We have identified the following key elements that we believe should be applied in the planning and implementation of contact-based interventions to facilitate effective mitigation of anti-Gypsyism while promoting participation and empowerment of the Roma minority. We recommend:

- involving the Roma in the process of deciding on interventions, designing their implementation and also their implementation;
- invest resources in empowering Roma men and women, support knowledge of cultural diversity and (self-) acceptance of Roma identity;
- to recognize and make visible the existing socio-economic inequality of the Roma in the presence of members of both the minority and the majority (and thus prevent the sedative effect of contact interventions);
- ensure continuity of interventions over time, ie. as far as possible, one-off and short-term activities, whether those aimed at the majority or within the Roma community, can be avoided;
- when planning interventions, invest efforts in involving as many representatives of the selected target group as possible (so that the intervention is not carried out only in selected classes, with selected employees, but that the whole teams are actively involved);
- combine interventions aimed at alleviating prejudice against the Roma and the Roma in the majority together with empowering and supporting the involvement of members of the minority.

For more information about the project visit <https://polrom.eu/engage/>

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