



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF BASELINE REPORT

ROMA-Net a Trans-national Partnership between

The City of Almeria
The City of Bologna
The City of Budapest
The City of Glasgow
The City of Heraklion
The City of Karvina
The City of Kosice
The City of Torrent
The City of Udine



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Connecting cities
Building successes



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The thematic focus of the ROMA-Net project closely echoes the recent trends in social inclusion policy for Roma which recognise the important role of cities and municipalities in the development and implementation of social inclusion policies. The trans-national context of ROMA-Net recognises that Roma exclusion is a multi-national issue which spans beyond the boundaries of single nations and at the same time the City partnership approach reflects the commitment and need for action at local level to achieve relevant and sustainable results.

The ROMA-Net Partnership

The partners in the ROMA-Net project include a mix of cities from competitiveness and convergence regions of Europe which bring different perspectives to the operational reality of Roma inclusion. The legal status of the Roma minority differs across Europe from country to country and from group to group. The partnership changed significantly from the beginning of the development phase to the end.

The first phase partnership: Budapest, Amadora, Heraklion, Karvina and Udine was extended by three partners very early in the development phase when in December 2009 Almería, Bologna and Timisoara confirmed their participation. In April 2010 the City of Kosice in Slovakia, confirmed that the city had officially approved and support their commitment to join the ROMA-Net partnership.

However in early May first Amadora then Timisoara withdrew their intention to continue into Phase II, both cited the lack of internal capacity in the city administration. Glasgow and Torrent both agreed to join in May which completed the partnership of 9 cities from 7 countries (4 partners from convergence area and 5 from competitiveness and employment area). Both cities have Roma communities, which are affected by a mix of similar issues as the other members of the partnership. Both Cities face challenges in the effective delivery of services to the community and both believe that an integrated approach is the way forward. From ROMA-Net they hope to share experiences of international good practice and to have the support of other members Cities for the development and implementation of local action plans.

The information contained in the Baseline also contains information gathered during the development phase when both Amadora and Timisoara were committed to remaining in the project in Phase II. Their late departure meant that the two new partners had insufficient time to conclude a full local mapping before the end of the development phase. Both Cities are now working on the local mapping as the situation analysis to underpin future actions.

Phase 1 - Design and Development

The initial 6 month phase for the ROMA-Net project allowed a number of critical steps to be taken to establish a solid foundation to underpin continued implementation of the URBACT and ROMA-Net concepts in phase two of the project. (i) Secured full complement of project partners for the thematic network; (ii) Completed a two phased mapping exercise to establish the baseline profiles for each of the participating cities; (iii) Confirmed participation of corresponding Managing

Authorities; (iv) Completed a programme of city visits to contrast and compare the local situations and the issues identified during the local mapping; (v) Identified the common issues and the shared areas of interest across all the members of the network; (vi) Established Local Support Groups (LSGs) with interested stakeholders to facilitate preparation of Local Action Plans (LAPs) in each partner city.

Phase 2 – Implementation

The horizontal interventions will involve all partner cities and will focus on learning and professional development to increase the operational capacity and the professional know-how of the partner cities. The vertical interventions will be developed and applied in parallel by the local support groups in each participating city.

The horizontal and trans-national level of the project will involve a series of thematic workshops to increase partners' understanding and knowledge on the development and application of successful interventions to tackle Roma inclusion. The vertical city focused activities will include the following: Innovative planning activities that are specially tailored to capture the imagination and to stimulate community engagement in the local development process; and the development of an integrated local action plan (LAP) that is based on local need and that builds on local opportunities.

State of the Art

Background

It is estimated that at least 10 million Roma people live in the European Union, making them the largest minority group in Europe. In a study carried out on behalf of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs the socio-economic conditions of the Roma population were described as follows - 'Roma experience *greater social exclusion* than the majority community, especially in accessing employment, education, health and social services: The Roma present high rates of illiteracy and poor school attendance of children. The Roma show very scant use of health care services because medical treatment may conflict with the Roma rules of hygiene and modesty, and because of the negative attitudes/racism/discrimination of some health care professionals and hospitals. Throughout Europe Roma discrimination is frequent. In particular those countries where many qualified care workers emigrated, the training of Roma must become a priority in the interest not just of Roma but of general social cohesion and of the quality of social service in aging societies.

Exclusion from education

The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2006 reported that Roma children despite increasing numbers of dedicated programmes still suffer peculiarly high levels of discrimination in the education system. In primary education the enrolment and attendance of Roma pupils' are disproportionately low all over Europe; Roma pupils present an uneven and only partial transition to secondary education, absenteeism is a persistent and common and serious problem affecting all pupils. Formal and informal practices of segregating Roma pupils persist, despite

strategies and policies that have been developed to combat such practices. Education remains a channel and perpetrator of intergenerational discrimination and inequality towards Roma.

Exclusion from employment

A complex collection of factors are responsible for the very high, and concentrated levels of Roma unemployment, such as low or lacking educational qualifications, work-based skills that are no longer relevant in a modern labour market, living in settlements that are isolated with limited access to job, or limited access to transport and a level of detachment from information about what jobs are available on the labour market.

The Roma or migrants often seem to be portrayed largely as responsible for their labour market exclusion". This situation results in the even worse treatment of Roma people and the lack of encouraging policies on the national level.

Empirical evidence shows that the vast majority of working Roma, men and women, operate in the segment of the labour market which provides low skilled, low paid - menial work. The lack of disaggregated employment data makes it impossible to determine where, which employment sectors Roma that have jobs are actually working. Discrimination impacts on the employment opportunities of qualified Roma, many are trapped in their current positions, and feel they would not be considered for any other position except another Roma related job. The lack of education and the low skill levels of many Roma do not account for the significant gap in labour market performance between non-Roma and Roma.

Exclusion from social and health care

Mortality hits Roma groups much earlier than the broader population due largely to the health service providers being unable to deliver consistent, accessible, timely and prolonged health treatment for Roma communities. Higher rates of illness and mortality are present among Roma than in majority populations. Persistent discrimination and marginalisation are a daily reality that results in poorer health for Roma individuals. Life expectancy for Roma populations in Eastern Europe is about 10 years less than the overall population. Infant mortality rates are twice as high among the Roma than the non-Roma in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Access to social and health care services for Roma, as described in recent studies across Europe, is hampered by a number of common factors: discrimination by social service practitioners, territorial segregation, inability to pay for expenses that fall outside of insurance such as medicines or transport to health facilities; poor information and sometimes great distrust and a lack of understanding between health and social service providers and Roma communities.

Integrated Housing Solutions- tackling residential segregation

The 2004 European Commission report, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* highlighted access to housing among the key challenges to achieving full equality for Roma in Member States and called for the use of the

European Regional Development Fund (2007-2013) to adequately address housing and complementary infrastructure. Now EU Structural Funds 'can support measures to improve housing stock – another fundamental issue for Roma communities'.

Some past housing projects have served to maintain or even further the isolation and segregation of Roma settlements. Roma today are struggling for equal participation in mainstream society, while wishing to preserve their unique culture. Mistaken beliefs, uninformed interpretations of a situation and general stereotyping can impact and, not infrequently limit the direction of public policy provision in a number of areas, including housing.

Multi-dimensional / Integrated policies and practices

According to the European Parliament - *Because of multiple deprivation within Roma communities, a multi-dimensional "package" approach which seeks synergies between different aspects of Roma issues (also referred to as "synergy approach") is the best way of tackling the problem in a comprehensive way.* Whatever their approach, effective social inclusion policies should balance three distinct objectives (World Bank, 2005) • "increasing Roma economic opportunities", by enhancing and qualifying their participation in the labour market; • "building human capital", with the levers of education and health; • "strengthening social capital and community development", by facilitating Roma participation in the public sphere and in civil society initiatives.

Roma exclusion is more than a CEE issue

EU membership for countries with Roma populations has brought about a new dimension to the complex situation of Roma exclusion, namely that in significant numbers Roma have begun to exercise their freedom of movement and have chosen to live and if possible to work in another EU country. Even in old member states that have well developed anti-discrimination, equality and social inclusion policies the extent of exclusion of Roma EU citizens in the society of their Member State of origin and in their host Member State creates insurmountable barriers to formal employment and it hampers their ability to access key civil and political, economic and social rights. The recent FRA study concluded that Roma from other EU Member States are now part of the townscape of almost every Member State of the European Union.

The Current Policy Framework for Roma Inclusion

The policies and practices that offer legal protection and that provide the framework for economic and social inclusion of Roma communities are complex and in the main not Roma specific. There is a wealth of EU and political and high level commitment to Roma inclusion and to widespread use of the common principles for Roma inclusion.

In 2003 the Decade of Roma Inclusion emerged from the high level conference "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future," hosted by the Government of Hungary. The Decade countries all have significant Roma minorities that are disadvantaged, both economically and socially. The negative situation of Roma prompted the 56 OSCE states to adopt, in 2003, a comprehensive Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.

At the December 2007 Roma summit there was a call for a renewed examination of the policies and instruments available at EU level to improve Roma inclusion. The European Parliament's resolution of 31 January 2008 represented an urgent call for a comprehensive European framework strategy on Roma. The first EU Roma Summit in September 2008 was an important event for Roma in Europe, for the first time top level European politicians and decision-makers gathered with Roma organisations and activists to discuss how to overcome exclusion, racism and deprivation that still oppress the Roma people. It generated production of the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion to guide the EU institutions and Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries when they design and implement new policies or activities.

While this action has been ongoing, very little has changed on the ground and the living conditions and economic situations for most Roma in Europe have not improved and may continue to decline.

Roma and the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2008 – 2010)

Although Member States have mainstream actions and a wealth of policies that favour disadvantaged groups, without significant effort and explicit intent there is a strong probability that the actions by-pass and fail to reach the Roma communities. For example the National Action Plan reports from the countries with a ROMA-Net City partner provides details of the actions implemented for Roma communities:

- **In Czech Republic** the report recognises that ethnic minorities are one of the groups most at risk of social exclusion but they do not actually name Roma as a specific group;
- In the **Greece** report there is almost no mention of past interventions tackling Roma exclusion.
- **The Hungary report** states that 'based on the data of TÁRKI's Household Monitor Survey of 2007 half of the Roma can be considered poor. They are the most social group most in damage of poverty and exclusion. Closing regional disparities is closely related to the improvement of the situation of the Roma and housing and anti-desegregation plans feature significantly in the Hungary action plan.
- **The Italian National Report** makes some small references to migrant Roma from Romania and also to indigenous Roma and Sinti populations. The measures target minors and adults belonging to the Roma communities from Romania. The National Strategy Framework of structural funds for 2007-2013 includes action plans providing for structural measures in support of the Roma communities, through the ESF and ERDF funds.
- **In Portugal** measures to integrate the Roma community tend to be covered by mainstream measures accessible to the general population. A High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue have set up an Office to Support Roma Communities with a view to developing a set of activities aimed at the promotion of social inclusion of Roma communities.
- **In Romania** – Roma inclusion is on the political agenda of the Government A national study called 'come closer' provides qualitative and quantitative analysis of data for example - The percentage of those who do not have an income in the

month of reference (July 2007) was 2 times higher for Roma than for non-Roma: 41.9% of the Roma, compared to 20.2% non-Roma; and the most important sources of income for Roma (26.1% of the Roma population) proved to be social benefits (maternal allowance, children's allowances, additional family allowance etc.).

Non EU Initiatives Focusing on Roma

The Soros Foundation and the Open Society Institute provides financial support for a range of initiatives targeted at Roma inclusion and supporting other wider activities that also have a strong relevance for Roma inclusion. For example *The Roma Initiatives* is part of the Open Society Institute, and continues to build on the many years of support that OSI has invested in Roma communities; *Decade Watch* provides the monitoring and assessment of government action on implementing Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015. *The Roma Decade Matching Fund* was set up by Open Society Institute Roma Initiatives to support innovative projects that promote intercultural dialogue and challenge negative attitudes towards Roma.

ESF is the main financial instrument to support the implementation of social inclusion policies and the implementation of interventions focusing on Roma inclusion in EU Member States. *EURoma Network* was established to ensure structural Funds are more accessible for Roma initiatives and to assist organisations to take advantage of the funds and actions targeting access to employment, which are implemented within the framework of the ESF.

The Trend Is Towards Motivating Local Actions

Many of the core Roma inclusion policies such as education, employment, health, housing, infrastructure, the fight against poverty and to increase equality are the responsibilities of National and local Governments. The European Parliament's resolution of 31 January 2008 stressed the importance of involving local authorities in ensuring the effective implementation of efforts to promote Roma inclusion and combat discrimination.

There has been a general and widespread inability to transfer policy intentions into clear, operational and sustainable practices for the benefit of Roma communities. The OSDHI Status Report in 2008 reports that 'Too often the implementation process suffers from a lack of political will at the national level, and from a failure to implement policies at the local level. Funding levels are often insufficient to support large-scale projects and programmes... many strategies in place are often implemented in an ad hoc, symbolic manner, and they have little hope of long-term sustainability'.

The trend for integrated actions at local level may be current but it is not new and has been recognised as the core of good practice on many occasions in the past. In 2003 the World Bank *Roma in an Expanding Europe - Behind the Poverty Cycle* report, set out the gravity and extent of Roma poverty and exclusion in central and eastern Europe, and called for a multi-layered, cross-country partnership saying that - "There is not one single road forward, but several. What we need is a multi-layered approach that involves cross-country partnerships among Roma and international organizations, national and local governments, NGOs and communities" - J Wolfensohn 2003

A 'Review of the European Union Phare Assistance to Roma Minorities' published in December 2004 also recognised and supported the integrated development approach. The same review pointed out the importance of self-organising capacities of Roma communities, whether in terms of support, advocacy, self-representation and or service provision. Many of the problems that exist stem from the systemic and stigmatising approach that has, and continues to be applied to Roma individuals and Roma communities. The OSCE motto of "For Roma, with Roma" will be at the core of ROMA-Net and will guide the development and implementation of the local action planning process.

The partnership and local development approach that is foreseen in this URBACT ROMA-Net project will support its City members to turn social inclusion policies into relevant local actions through the development and implementation of local action plans that take account of local circumstances, reflect local need and involve local communities and other critical local stakeholders.

Good practice in other cities

There is no blue-print to tackle Roma exclusion what is most effective is a 'Step-by-Step' approach, supported by long term commitment, that includes a variety of interventions specifically designed to tackle the different layers of the problem. Thus far the 'Art' of developing projects and implementing interventions for Roma communities belongs more to the NGO sector rather than with municipal public authorities.

ROMA-Net offers a new chance for the participating municipalities to change their position and to adopt an active approach to Roma inclusion and through the development of a local action plan they will create the strategic direction and the common goal necessary to create a Step-by-Step pathway towards Roma inclusion. The findings of the baseline supports an integrated, co-operative and co-ordinated approach and Chapter 3 provides a summary of relevant practices in other cities that can offer an insight into some of what has worked in other places, albeit on a relatively small scale.

Sectoral Mediators working at community level

Mediators in the fields of health, education and social services, to create connections between the public authority service and the Roma community have proven to be good practice. Success has been because the majority are Roma, creating a build up of trust, the ability to break down barriers, and it provides positive role models and good quality jobs for members of the community. For as long as Roma inclusion remains an underdeveloped practice, the role of community mediators will remain crucial to support less capable members of the community to utilise the services of the main social and public sectors such as health, education, social care, social welfare, housing and general advocacy services.

Community led regeneration and community development

Some NGOs have been successful with development and regeneration type interventions, sometimes in partnership with a municipality. Examples of integrated

Urban Regeneration activities led by municipalities and focusing on Roma communities are hard to find.

Integrated Community Housing - Brno, Czech Republic - Roma people reconstructed their homes to help pay debts and obtain valid rent-contracts. The project delivered a number of results, people worked on the buildings, managed to clear debts, made regular rent payments, tenant committees were set up and it generally activated local people. The project encouraged a local authority to allow Roma people to live in inner city. This is the first time an integrated approach has been used to solve problems with Roma people. The success is both 'the active involvement of residents in the management and administration as well as financial support and commitment from the local authorities'. This example should be looked upon as a model of good practice relevant in all five countries.

The Life Together project is an ongoing community development centred type project in the city of Ostrava, which delivers many integrated local actions including social service delivery, health services, early education, further education and eradication of usury practices in the city. Life Together uses the experience from its first initiative to develop projects focused on integrated living of Roma and non-Roma, focused mainly on young families. They believe that initiatives focused on housing of vulnerable groups, especially Roma should continue and the model of housing with supporting social services is the right formula to approach the housing issues with these groups.

The Magdolna quarter and the Bihari street program are in the most deteriorated inner city areas in Budapest. The aim of the projects are to improve the life chances of local people through regenerating and upgrading the physical environment combined with parallel social, employment, education, community development interventions. Participation in the housing reconstruction program demands that communities of tenants actively take part in planning, implementation and long term maintenance.

In Cluj Napoca, Romania the Resource Centre for Roma Communities is a strong advocate for a community development approach. The Centre has a diverse workforce of Roma and non-Roma and has been the provider of good quality professional employment for qualified Roma. The centre supports efforts by Roma communities to resolve their specific problems, to contribute to the identification and neutralising of prejudices and discrimination against Roma, and works to help improve communication between Roma and non-Roma people. In 2008 the European Social Fund/Operational Sectoral Programme Human Resources Development - Romania approved a project with a value of €3.8 million to continue and expand the community and economic development approach that has already been established by the Centre.

Health, Pharmacy scholarship programme and employment

Open Society Institute and the Roma Education Fund offer a health and pharmacy scholarship program for Roma medical students and health professionals in Romania. "Leadership in Health: A Generation of Professionals in the Health Care System," represents an innovative and new approach. The program seeks to address the issue of discrimination by assisting Roma to join the ranks of health care

professionals. The scholarships will offer financial and mentoring support Roma students enrolled in medicine faculty courses, nursing and midwives colleges, and to resident doctors.

Alternative Secondary Schools in Hungary

Hungary has experimented with alternative approaches to secondary school education that aim to help Roma children bridge the gap between basic and secondary school, improve their academic performance, and create future opportunities. The schools also take different approaches to the underlying socioeconomic disadvantages of students. Some, target disadvantaged students, provide housing and other support to boost attendance and most try to engage parents.

European Social Fund/Operational Sectoral Programme Human Resources Development Romania approved a project with €3.5 m budget. To be implemented by the NGO Romani CRISS, in Bucharest during the period: December 2008 - November 2011. Project Partners are the The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth; Equal Chances Association (Salaj), The Roma Alliance Association (Galati); Roma ILO Association (Brasov).

Acceder - Employment Programme - ESF (DG EMPL) Spain

The Acceder programme in Spain is the most comprehensive and successful employment and training project focusing on the Roma population. Acceder is a multi-regional programme to help Spain's Roma population gain access to employment. Like elsewhere in Europe, the Roma community in Spain suffers from direct and indirect discrimination and a negative social image. Acceder aims to apply an integrated, multi-dimensional and individualised approach to finding jobs for Roma applicants in Spain's mainstream job market. Also to adapt vocational training to enhance the professional skills of Roma jobseekers and to create greater access for the Roma to paid employment and simultaneously to meet the demand for workers from private companies. Acceder creates direct links between Roma jobseekers and employment service providers, enabling Roma jobseekers equal access to these services.

Mainstream Spanish society knows relatively little about the Roma culture and the issues faced by Europe's largest minority. Raising awareness about prejudices and discriminatory practices against the Roma community has helped to improve their image in society. It has changed employment prospects within the Roma community and in mainstream society.

Analysis of Local Situation

Using a two staged approach, the aim was first to provide real understanding of the local situation for each city, both in general terms, and in respect of the Roma population specifically, their interaction with the wider community, the particular issues they face, and any barriers to be overcome.

Stage 1 examined the place and provides a clear current picture of the city, its existing Roma strategy and expectations from membership of the project. The information was based on Roma specific demographics including best estimates of population size, spread, living conditions, levels of segregation, relationship with contiguous communities. Articulation of the key issues and sub themes, including access to essential services, labour market inclusion and self-help programmes.

Stage 2 builds the information using a targeted questioning technique. Who is implementing the projects - Local authority, public agency, NGO? Which organisations either regional or national are already active and working with the Roma community? What is the main focus of local activity? What physical infrastructure is available and accessible for local initiatives, for example, schools, community centres, health centres? What the ROMA-Net project must avoid is repeating these mistakes by taking too narrow a view on the issues.

The ROMA-Net project set out to encompass a wide mix of city partners from competitiveness and convergence regions across Europe, each with their own unique identity, their own perspective, their own blend of influences and range of experiences. What unifies the partners is a common goal, an overwhelming desire and commitment to improve the lives of a severely marginalised sector of society, through targeted Local Action Plans, founded in best practice and developed in partnership with the community. By focusing on the broader context of what has been successful, we hope to be able to capitalise upon the best practices demonstrated elsewhere, to re-align our thinking around the issues of Roma inclusion. Building on the knowledge and support of our local stakeholders we aim to translate them into meaningful and innovative new interventions that are sustainable because they are founded on an approach that we know can work.

Synthesis

Regardless the size or locality, it is interlinked and intergenerational factors that are at the root of the social and economic exclusion experienced by Roma in Europe, and also in the ROMA-Net partner cities. For many it means poverty, discrimination, unemployment or informal exploitative work, dependency on social assistance, low or no educational attainment, poor health and inadequate living conditions often without legal tenure.

The absence of disaggregated data on Roma is common across much of Europe and in all our partner cities and like most policy and programme makers we have to rely on empirical evidence, local expertise and best estimates. From the local mapping we identified that under each of the key policy areas there are common issues from the perspective of the Roma population and from the perspective of the city.

For example all local mapping cited, discrimination and negative views by the majority population; and for the cities a common challenge is how to overcome the negative attitudes of the majority population, how to improve consultation and engagement with the Roma community. In relation to education all area cited low levels of educational attainment and attendance, low literacy levels and discrimination as an issue for the Roma population and the challenge for the city is to keep young people in education; to overcome the lack of aspirations and low expectations of young people; and home environment not suitable for study. In the

area of employment the issue of informal non contracted work is an issue and the lack of work opportunities for young people.

Given the scale for some cities and the complexity of the issues in all cities, the partners acknowledged that ROMA-Net needs a clear focus and an overarching theme within which ROMA-Net activities will broadly concentrate. After extensive consideration and discussion the ROMA-Net partners have agreed on the overarching theme to provide the focus for project activities in Phase II of the project:

ROMA-Net is a trans-national partnership to inform and support its City partners to develop local action plans that facilitate better services, through improved access and an integrated approach, to support young Roma adults in their transition into socially included, active adult citizens.

As ROMA-Net partners, young adults will motivate positive acceptable change and provide insight into the barriers and challenges caused by exclusion and discrimination.

The theme does not limit actions but provides the context for the bulk of activities and interventions that will be included in the local action plan. The context of improving services will involve, looking at what is available; identifying gaps and taking partnership actions to close gaps; ensuring the relevance of the services; adjust components to improve relevance and accessibility; empowering young people to make better use of the services and bridging the gap between the service providers and the community – increasing understanding from both sides. The type of actions that are foreseen for local action plans under each key priority are as follows;

- **Health** not service delivery but much more on health promotion of preventative measures and provision of information and age relevant guidance such as sexual wellbeing, family planning,
- **Education** –there is formal and non formal. *Formal* – the role will be challenging the current education methods; and influencing change (by bringing in alternatives and educating teachers to better more relevant teaching practices. *Non formal* – encompasses the supply free time activities with an education orientation which will be seen also as an empowering tool for the young people; provision of support education services for example for children of the target group or parents of the target group. Also education in other areas such as rights, crime prevention etc,
- **Employment:** in the format of - training for work - support for starting career - engaging employers - formalising employment, ie legal contracts
- **Housing** – *two sub categories related to physical and allocation/ placement.* *Physical* – the legal title for land, accommodation. Planning for the physical regeneration and rehabilitation of housing stock. *Allocation/ placement* - ensuring integrated placement practices are available; better understanding how housing policy limits housing choices; empowering young people about the housing choices they make; finding housing; providing/access to information; promoting the ability to defend/ challenge housing decisions.

Thematic Exchange and learning themes

ROMA-Net will provide three learning clusters designed to provide local support groups with increased know-how, with the necessary tools to tackle the complexity of issues that have been identified during the baseline research and local mapping. The learning aims to make local support groups more effective in the development and the implementation of their local action plans. Within each learning cluster there are three inter-connected topics where the exchange and learning will concentrate.

- **Community engagement** - including participatory activities / tools; anti-discrimination awareness; social marketing;
- **Integrated and area based approach to tackling exclusion and segregation** including the application of an area based approach; innovative approaches to tackling segregation using housing improvement; and inclusive approaches to area regeneration.
- **Building a transitional labour market** – creating, supporting and using an intermediate labour market; the role of the social economy/ social firms ; justification using social accounting and audit.

The three exchange and learning clusters will:

- contribute to a continuous and expanding cycle of learning in each partner city and in each local support group. Each event will build and complement the knowledge and insight gained in previous events;
- prepare and disseminate tools and guidelines to the cities that will support and underpin their work within the URBACT Local Support Groups to build a step by step, integrated and area based approach to social and economic inclusion of Roma, with a focus on young adult Roma; and
- maximise the impact of the trans-national exchange on the local activities in the partner cities through a feedback and reporting structure after each international event.

Development of the local action plan will be more effective if a robust project development methodology is applied during planning and implementation. ROMA-Net has made provision for local support groups to learn the principles of PCM - project cycle management. The baseline provides the situation analysis to understand the wider strategic context for the local action plan. The priorities set out in associated operational programmes should provide strong indications of the priorities that should also be incorporated and reflected in local action plans. Each local support group, with the help of the managing authority members, will review the content of the Operational Programmes to find the relevant priorities that match the aims of local action plans.

We envisage that the Regional Operational programmes and the Human Resource Development Operational programmes, in each country will provide the essential funding stream to ensure that the local action plans generated by ROMA-Net local support groups are translated into real and sustainable actions. Where appropriate we will maximise opportunities and coordinate between ERDF, ESF and EARDF at regional and local levels.

Indications are that the recent European Parliament decision, 18 May 2010, and amendment to regulation 1080/ 2006 article 7 will be of crucial importance for the future activities of the ROMA-Net partner cities. The amendment to the regulation is very recent, and how it is translated into national programmes will obviously have a bearing on the relevance and accessibility of assistance at local level. However the indications are that the changes are very much in line with what we already foresee as the integrated area based approach that will emerge in the local action plans that will be developed and implanted in ROMA-Net cities.

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