

# Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Greek Roma

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This paper reflects only the opinion of the authors.

The comments and remarks to the discussion paper reflect the situation of Sinti and Roma in Germany and some aspects of the Peer Review in Athens at the 26th and 27th of May.

## Historical background

As in other European countries there is a very long tradition of Sinti and Roma people living in Germany. Since the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century, the Sinti have been living in German-language territory.

Roma came to be at home in Germany at a later time from Eastern Europe. In the course of history Sinti and Roma had to suffer discrimination, were crowded out from various trades and driven out of towns and regions. Despite these problems, the Sinti and Roma by and by managed to establish themselves locally, and in their respective home regions they worked among other as manual workers, employees, craftsmen, artists, small tradesmen and handicraftsmen.

Due to the racist fanaticism under the Nazi despotic rule, the Sinti and Roma in Germany and in the occupied areas were exposed to persecution and genocide with the aim of their extermination. Of the 40,000 officially registered German and Austrian Sinti and Roma more than 25,000 have been murdered by May 1945. This persecution left its mark on the survivors and also has an impact on the generation born after 1945.

After 1945, many of the surviving German Sinti and Roma, whose health had been impaired and whose material basis of existence had been destroyed, still had had to struggle with discrimination and prejudices even by police and local government.

In 1982 the German government declared, the persecution of German Sinti and Roma to be a crime against humanity. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1997 the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe entered into force for Germany.

This convention as well as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages are perceived as legal instruments that are used to protect national minorities and their languages. Only those groups of the population which meet the following criteria are considered national minorities within this convention:

- their members are German nationals;
- they have their own identity;
- they wish to maintain this identity;

- they are traditionally resident in Germany; and
- they live in the traditional settlement areas (As regards the last criterion, an exception is made to the German Sinti and Roma).

The convention applies to the Danes, Frisians, Sorbs and Sinti and Roma.

## Facts and Figures

Germany has a population of 82,218 million inhabitants of whom 9% are foreigners. The German Sinti and Roma are estimated to number up to 70,000 persons. Some Sinti organisations put the number even higher. Most of them are settled down. Precise figures are not available, because the personal decision whether he or she chooses to be considered a member of German Sinti or Roma is neither registered nor reviewed nor contested by the German State.

The majority lives in the old Länder, including Berlin. Within the organizations of German Sinti and Roma, there is no general agreement on the designation as either a national minority or an ethnic group. But there is a common agreement, that the German Sinti and Roma are an inseparable part of the German people.

One major problem is the education of Roma children. It begins already in the kindergarten, which is often not attended by Roma children. They are over-represented in special schools and under-represented in higher education; some Roma children are said not to attend schools regularly, with the known negative consequences for their personal and professional development. Under the conditions of a difficult labour market young Sinti and Roma have difficulties to find a job or to participate in vocational training. Special programs are funded by the European Social Fund.

Besides the German Sinti and Roma Roma people from other countries and of other nationalities live in Germany; they have the same rights and obligations as all foreigners.

## Assessment of the possible relevance of an integrated programme for Roma inclusion in Germany

German experience shows that problems and difficulties of people living in poverty or are excluded are mostly the result of a bundle of reasons. Different measures have to be taken to combat the different origins of exclusion and to realize inclusion. Certainly coordination is useful. But an integrated programme and comprehensive planning from national to the local level is often difficult, time-consuming, costly and lengthy.

An integrated programme for Roma inclusion planned, organized, managed and implemented by the national government would not fit to the German situation and its political system.

The Federal system in Germany gives only limited powers to the federal government even in legislation; normally the Länder – the regions – are responsible for the implementation of federal

laws and are – for example – primarily responsible for all matters concerning education. There is no direct link between the federal and the local level. Actually the German constitution forbids the German government and parliament to impose new tasks directly on local government. In its 3<sup>rd</sup> report under Article 25 paragraph 2 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities the German government declared national inclusion plans designed for German Sinti and Roma hardly to be feasible.

Local and regional governments often establish or finance programmes and measures to solve problems of Sinti and Roma. They are often assisted in these tasks by organisations of the Sinti and Roma and welfare organisations.

Since 1991 the Federal government supports the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma by public means. Actually a memorial of the victims of the Nazi genocide of Sinti and Roma is built in Berlin with federal funding and support by the Land of Berlin.

As recognised minority German Sinti and Roma have the possibility to work together in a consultative council at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, but do not practise this for internal reasons.

Regional government often supports regional associations of Sinti and Roma; some funds projects to the cultural identity of Sinti and Roma or support educational and remembrance projects.

## Assessment of similarities or differences to Greek policy

The Peer Review showed the great efforts the Greek government has made the past and will undertake in the future for a better social and economic integration of Roma. Due to the great political and legal differences between Greece and Germany it is difficult to make a serious and detailed comparison between the two countries.

One important difference – as already mentioned – is the lack of an integrated inclusion plan at the national level in Germany. Besides the mentioned legal problems it is to point that a plan designed specially to the minority of German Sinti and Roma could be only implemented with the consent of the group concerned.

Similar to Greece; most activities are realized at the local level which is of great importance for every form of better inclusion.

Also if there are no great differences in absolute numbers of Greek or German Roma – 65,000 in Greece and 70,000 in Germany – but in comparison to the total population there is a net difference. From a purely quantitative aspect the integration of Roma is more difficult in Greece than in Germany. National plans for German Sinti and Roma would not be reasonable if they included measures focused on specific regional areas, because there is no large concentration of German Sinti and Roma in defined regions.

Instead of creating separate housing areas for Sinti and Roma as it has been the case in the past in Germany too, the actual trend is to integrate the housing of Sinti and Roma into new

neighbourhoods for all citizens. For example, the city of Muenster decided in 2000 with the approval of all parliamentary groups of the city council, that refugees, particularly Roma from the Kosovo and southern Europe should be better integrated in German neighbourhoods. Instead of building houses for up to 225 person only smaller houses for about 50 persons with similar standards as the surrounding buildings of Germans were realized. Before the buildings were constructed future owners were informed and encouraged to support the newcomers. These volunteers' activities as well as those of a so-called cultural-interpreter (mediator) of Roma origin, who helped Germans and Roma to understand the different mentalities, avoided conflicts between neighbours and helped Roma to get acquainted with the new situation and the German administrative structures, are steps for a better mutual understanding.

The signing and implementation of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is regarded by the German Sinti and Roma as well as by the German government as an important step to more inclusion of German Sinti and Roma. Through contacts with German Sinti and Roma associations it became clear, that the groups accept special measures only if they are necessary to document their discrimination in history, to gain acceptance for their group and understanding for its historical fate, to overcome prejudices and to prevent future discrimination. Otherwise German Sinti and Roma do not wanted to be treated differently from members of the majority population in a similar social situation. So they reject special classes for Sinti and Roma children to prevent segregation.

## Assessment of learning value of Greek policy for your country

### German experiences that could be useful in the Greek context.

As the situation in Germany is different from that in Greece it will be difficult to apply Greek experiences, measures and projects directly to the German situation. But it will be useful to get to know the Greek experiences to tackle the problems of education, health, occupation and housing; for example the idea of "housing loans" seems to be interesting. As the migration of Roma will continue in Europe it is always important to have more information about Roma from southern Europe and their reactions to certain measures and proposals.

As in other countries Sinti and Roma in Germany are confronted with prejudices and different forms of discrimination; therefore it will be helpful to get to know by what means and measures the Greek government tries to influence and change these attitudes.

The already mentioned Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities is regarded by the German Sinti and Roma as an important political success and a step to help to preserve their identity. It is also regarded as a step against discrimination even by public authorities.

German experiences showed, that close contact and cooperation with Sinti and Roma associations are helpful, to identify problems and to start common activities especially at the local level. At the local level it seems important to have no segregated housing, to give help to Roma and German inhabitants to get along with each other and to offer social-pedagogical support for Roma families and help at school for their children.

It seems to be very useful to have especially skilled persons of Roma origin who are familiar with the German social and administrative structures and who can act as interpreters between Roma and Germans communities.

Also a large political consent helps to establish measures which contribute to social inclusion.

### **Important questions about social inclusion of Roma debated in Germany**

At the national level the discussion concerning German Sinti and Roma has been dominated in the past decades by their historic fate, the necessity of a fair compensation and their efforts to combat any form of discrimination of their group. Looking at the situation of German Sinti and Roma one has to bear in mind, that the racial persecution by the Nazi regime has had direct or indirect impact on the survivors and the next-born generation. It was only in the decades after World War II that a general process of change within the state and society, gradually evolved towards acceptance of the German Sinti and Roma. With reference to the overall population the process has undergone a positive development, but is yet not completed.

The German Sinti and Roma see the Act on Equal Treatment to be an important legal signal to prevent discrimination in civil and labour law. They noted, that cases of discrimination by companies were satisfactorily resolved.

By funding counselling bureaus of Sinti and Roma organisations and other initiatives the government side gives help to members of the minority in difficult life situations and contributes to enhance their chances of economic and social integration.

In the past decade a great number of Roma people from foreign countries, which are refugees or asylum seekers, came to Germany; due to this situation these newcomers have been confronted with the residence and integration problems of foreigners too, which made their integration in Germany even more difficult.

Exaggerated press reports on criminal activities of children of Roma origin in Cologne obliged the Cologne youth office to take the steps necessary for a comprehensive programme of more help in school, more help to the families and other measures. The success of these measures showed that a large number of children and their families were willing to cooperate.

In the stakeholder paper of Valeriu Nicolae "Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma" it is mentioned, that - besides the problems within the member states and within the EU-Commission - " the existing Roma civil society has , in general, failed to address or stimulate debate within the Roma communities on problems related to responsibilities of Roma citizens.

### **Potential contribution of such a policy to the objectives and strategy of the German National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**

Due to the limited number of German Sinti and Roma there is no national social inclusion plan for Roma in Germany. The German Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion do not mention Roma people expressively; but the problems they are confronted with are treated in the report.

## Measuring success of these policies in Germany

The success of measures and activities can be judged from different standpoints: those of the people directly concerned, in this case the Sinti and Roma, those who planned and implement these activities (administrations, welfare organisations) and the acceptance by the neighbourhood or by the general public.

Experiences with housing projects showed that in cases where Sinti and Roma became involved in the planning and decision-making, these houses and flats were accepted as their homes and no vandalism and destruction was not to be seen.

Creating new settlements in the town of Muenster the future owner of houses were informed, that a small group of houses for refugees (Roma) was build there too; in consequence of this early information, conflicts were avoided, good neighbourhood relations established and help for children was organised by volunteers of the neighbourhood.

In the Cologne case the help for children and families led to the following results:

- more registration to schools and kindergarten,
- most parents accepted the help
- children taking part in the project are coming more regularly to school and are making their homework more often,
- a net reduction of pick pocketing,
- no more participation of children living in Cologne at housebreaking,
- a reduction of intensive offenders among children and no follow up by younger children.

In the framework of the Dutch-German Interregio-project "Integrating migrants" at Muenster an effort was made in 2007 to evaluate the costs and benefits of the different measures. The new instrument

**SROI** (Social Return On Investment) allows

- the exact evaluation of realized measures,
- the description of intended and non-intended effects,
- the estimation of the effects, which would be realized without these measures and
- a final rating in Euro of the consequences of the measures taken.

This instrument should allow social investors to judge the social and economic effects of their investments; the project has not been finished.

## Key issues and main questions at the review meeting

1. Does the Integrated Action Plan for Greek Roma has had a large political support by all parties or parliamentary groups at the national, regional or local level? How can such a support be realized?
2. Is there any legal possibility to strengthen the power of the Inter-Ministerial Committee?
3. What can be done to reduce prejudices of the Greek majority? Will it be possible to gain volunteers from the Greek majority to help Roma children to continue school? How can municipalities get interested in decent housing for Roma or other activities to support them? Which incentives or sanctions may be necessary to achieve the targets of Roma integration?
4. How can a dialogue between Roma and the Greek majority be established? What could Roma do?
5. Can professional “interpreters” of Roma origin help to fulfil the gap between Roma and Greek people?
6. The Greek programme for “house loans” seems to an interesting way; will it be continued?
7. The introduction paper of Will Guy comes to a very pessimistic perception of the actual results of all efforts for social integration of Roma all over Europe. What are the reasons for these negative results? Can it be changed? What has to be done, by whom differently?