



Cities delivering Roma inclusion in Europe – Learning from Berlin

On 14-16 October 2020, Eurocities working group Roma inclusion met for a digital mutual learning visit. For 3 days, 28 participants from 12 cities¹ learned from Berlin's experience of implementing an integrated local action plan for Roma inclusion that ensures a broad participation of civil society organisations and in particular Roma organisations. The meeting took place shortly after the European Commission published its proposal for the new [EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030](#). Thus, beyond exchanging best practices, cities were able to discuss their role in the new framework and the opportunities it offers for Roma inclusion at local level.

Berlin's action plan for the inclusion of migrant Roma

Since 2011, Berlin identified a strong pressure on certain districts of the city that are confronted with the arrival of EU mobile citizens in particular from Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. While Germany does not collect ethnic data, it quickly became clear that many Roma people were among these groups. As a response to the dire needs identified at local level in terms of access to the labour market, health, education and housing, Berlin adopted in 2012 a strategy for Roma inclusion, implemented since 2013 through an action plan. Besides a clear local need, this consisted of a direct response to the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.

Concretely, the action plan consists of a set of measures to tackle social exclusion by promoting social and economic participation and the fight against anti-gypsyism. Four fields of action have been identified:

- Education, youth and training opportunities
- Health care and social services
- Housing and conflicts in urban areas
- Inclusion prospects – combatting poverty and social exclusion

The variety of measures aim at shifting from a crisis management situation to a long term plan by improving access for Roma people to employment, education, health and housing; opening-up regular institutions and public services; supporting the participation of Roma people and fighting anti-gypsyism.

The management of the action plan is strongly cross-sectoral and brings together the city administration as well as the districts. The concrete actions are then implemented by 16 Roma and

¹ Berlin, Bradford, Ghent, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Leeds, Lille, Oslo, Sheffield, Turin, Vienna and Zagreb

migrant-support NGOs. The action plan is funded by the city but several additional measures are co-financed by European funding such as ERDF and ESF.

The evaluation process

After 5 years of implementation, Berlin mandated an external evaluator to conduct a thorough analysis and provide recommendations for the future of the action plan and for Berlin's work on Roma inclusion.

During the meeting, Anne von Oswald shared the key results of that evaluation. A number of key strengths were highlighted both on the strategic approach (adopting medium-term planning, fostering interdepartmental work and coordination with districts, ensuring the visibility of Roma inclusion) as well as in the concrete actions (increased professionalisation of services, outreach work etc.). Several major challenges were also pinpointed including the lack of affordable housing, anti-gypsyism and discrimination or the absence of a Roma and Sinti advisory council. Based on these observations, several recommendations were proposed:

- Reinforcing the focus on the fight against anti-gypsyism with a focus on the majority society and on empowerment measures
- Targeting measures explicitly, but not exclusively at Roma people
- Establishing quality standards

From an action plan to a regional framework

Following these recommendations, Berlin decided to convert the action plan into a Regional Framework for Countering Anti-gypsyism. Through this process, the city ensures the sustainability of the plan, and consolidates the social inclusion measures. It also reinforces the focus on combatting anti-gypsyism and the fight against discrimination while promoting participation and empowerment.

Several recommendations from the action plan are already being implemented, for example through the inclusion of representatives of Roma communities in the State Advisory Board for Integration and Migration Issues and in the steering committee. The creation of an official Roma and Sinti State Advisory Council is also ongoing, and a dedicated working group was set up in the meantime. Additional funding is being dedicated to community building measures and a strong focus is put on building capacity of NGOs implementing the programme to counter anti-gypsyism (including through legal action) and collaborate with other bodies such as Berlin Equality Body.

One of these collaborations will be with the Office for Equal Treatment and Against Discrimination which works towards reducing inequalities, assisting victims of racism and empowering vulnerable groups. It covers anti-gypsyism under the new framework but also right-wing extremism, racism and antisemitism. Thanks to the new Berlin State legislation, the gaps of the national law could be covered. A broader understanding of discrimination is now used (including discriminations based on language, disability, chronic disease or perceived social status) and applies also to public entities and administrations.

The example of Berlin is noteworthy, because it showcases how in a context where national legislation or action plans are absent, cities can take the leading role and develop their own strategies, to be drivers of inclusion that can then inspire other levels of government. For the future framework, Berlin identified the lack of funding as a fundamental obstacle, as well as the fact that current anti-discrimination legislation does not cover access to social rights, and therefore limits the scope of what the city can do.



Deep diving into local good practices

Following a general presentation of the action plan and the new framework, Berlin highlighted a set of projects that illustrate the key aspect of its efforts towards Roma inclusion and combatting anti-gypsyism.

Nevo Drom, a contact point for EU mobile Roma citizens

Nevo-Drom is run by the organisation Amaro Foro, composed of both Roma and non-Roma members. Overall, Amaro Foro seeks to create a space for young people's empowerment and socio-political engagement through youth work.

The Nevo-Drom project was initiated in 2010 and it is since 2014 part of the Berlin Strategy for the Inclusion of Foreign Roma. Nevo-Drom, was a reaction of the Berlin State to the worrisome number of Romanian families that had no alternative to rough sleeping. Its aim is therefore to support newly arrived migrants, inform them about their rights, and to work towards their empowerment and long-term independence. Most solicitations for counselling are related to financing and debts, housing, employment and health concerns, highlighting that the coverage of basic needs remains a challenge for many Roma people. Nevo-Drom offers individual and family counselling services in Bulgarian, Romanian and Romani, as well as mediation with public authorities if needed. The project also conducts outreach activities to homeless people and to those without access to social services, a situation directly linked to unemployment or unstable employment.

As Georgi Ivanov shared, some challenges remain for Amaro Foro and their projects. Social issues are for example often perceived as ethnic, or cultural, instead of having a socioeconomic origin, thus leading to strong negative prejudices against Roma people or those perceived as such. Structural anti-gypsyism and institutional discrimination, combined with harassment in the public sphere remain.

DOSTA, the monitoring unit for the documentation of discriminatory and anti-gypsyist motivated incidents

To counter this last aspect, Amaro Foro also created in 2014 DOSTA, a monitoring unit for the documentation of discriminatory and anti-gypsyist motivated incidents. It documents anti-gypsyist incidents, follows the situation of Roma asylum seekers, monitors anti-gypsyist talk on the media and social media, and intervenes when needed. The project also aims at improving reporting of anti-Roma incidents which are rarely declared, by fear of negative consequences or lack of awareness of ones' rights and the avenues to report such cases. To do so, they work in close contact with regulatory agencies, police authorities and judicial bodies. They offer trainings on anti-gypsyism for social workers and local authorities, especially those in charge of state benefits. Awareness raising also is a strong scope of action, as many people still do not perceive anti-gypsyist incidents as such, which can also limit reporting rates. Trust is another key aspect of their work as they provide a safe environment where Roma people know that their concerns will be heard and taken seriously.

Limited funding however impedes their capacity to do more. German legislation also created barriers for reporting discrimination (particularly due to short deadlines and a limited scope) but Berlin's new state law is expected to cover some of the gaps.



Nostels

Throughout their work, Roma organisations have clearly identified housing as a key priority for inclusion. In Germany as in many places, without official housing it is not possible to register in the municipality, which then hampers access to work, and blocks the possibility of obtaining social benefits.

To tackle this issue, Berlin developed with the organisation Phino the concept of Nostels. Twelve emergency housing are made available to families where at least one parent is an EU national, with underaged children and with no access to social welfare. The project is addressed in particular, but not exclusively, to Roma people. Targeted families are often homeless or in precarious housing. Related difficulties include precarious employment, unschooling of children, lack of health coverage, limited German knowledge and debt.

Following a comprehensive needs assessment by social workers, families benefit both from temporary accommodation and tailored holistic support for their inclusion (health, language, classes, education, employment, guidance on life in a flat and within a neighbourhood, etc.)

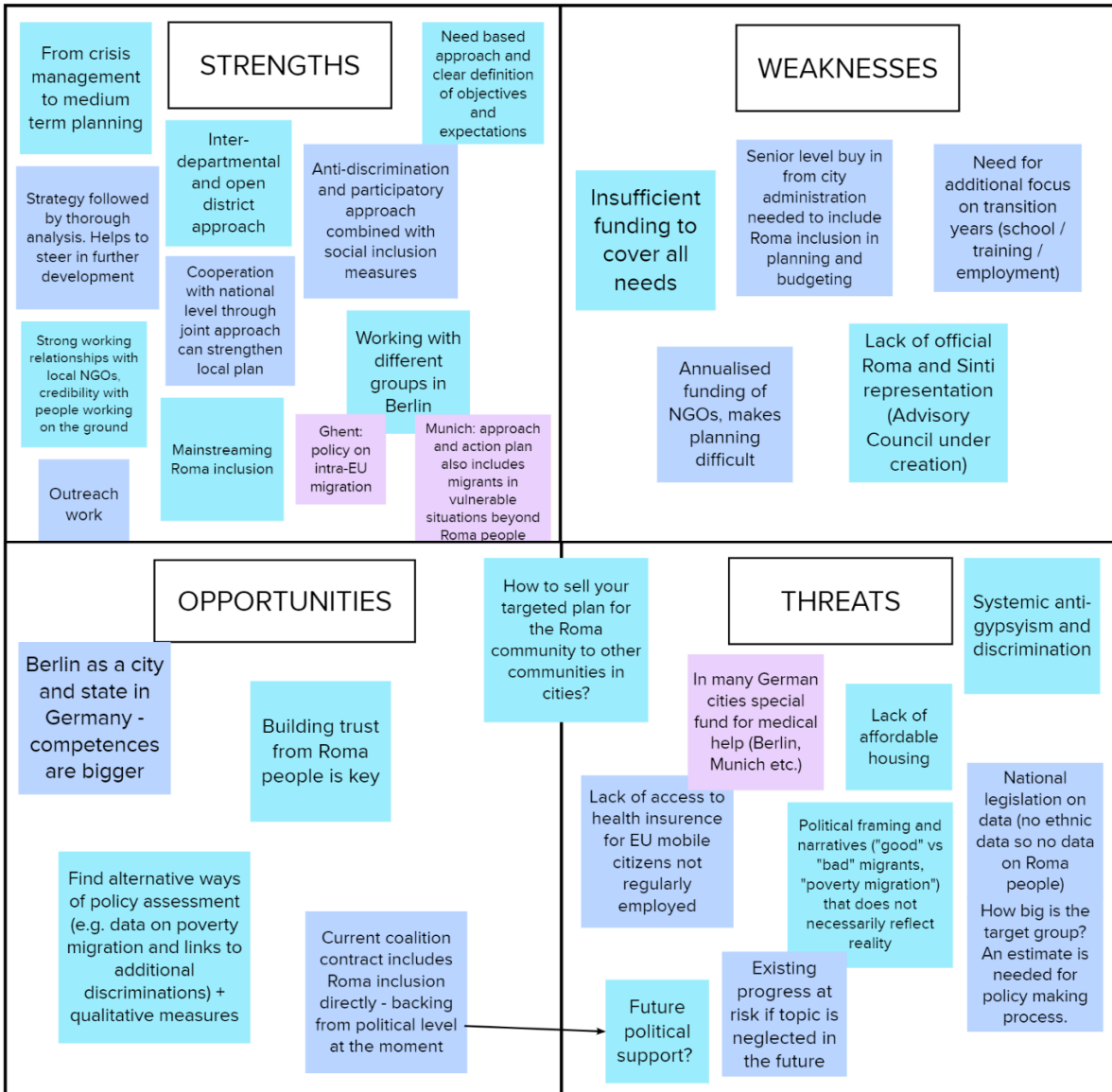
In 6 years, 73 families for a total of 303 individuals (half of which were children) used Nostrels' services. The vast majority of families attended to were of Romanian and Bulgarian origin. During their stay in these accommodations, more than half of the beneficiaries had transitioned to regular employment, and 55% had gained entitlement to social benefits.

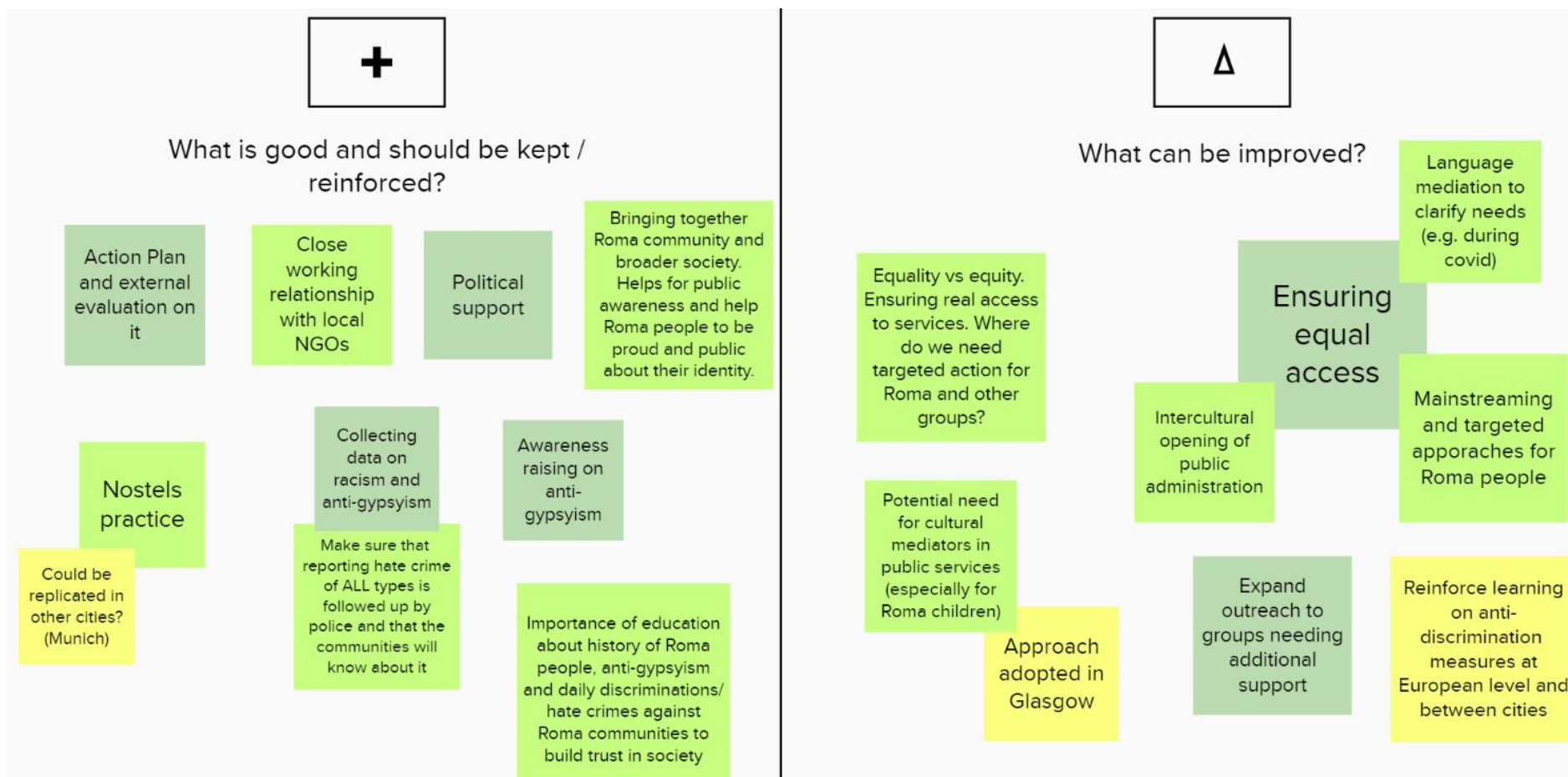
After an average duration of 5 to 6 months, beneficiaries move out into regular housing, either in the private market or in social housing, and are assisted through continuous support by social workers. The organisation acknowledges that efforts are still needed to facilitate the transition to independent living. Access to healthcare also remains challenging. Whereas children and young people are almost fully covered irrespective of their residential status, and exceptional gynaecological services are available, access to, for example medicines and dental health, are still largely unavailable for people without registered residence.

Tacking stock of lessons learnt from Berlin's model for Roma inclusion

Following the exchanges on the different practices and approaches in Berlin, the participants then conducted a SWOT analysis. This aimed at fostering exchange, learning and potential transfer of some of the key elements of Berlin's model.

This workshop was then continued through a +/Δ analysis, which enabled participants to both identify successful elements that they could adapt to their local context and share their own experience to benefit Berlin.



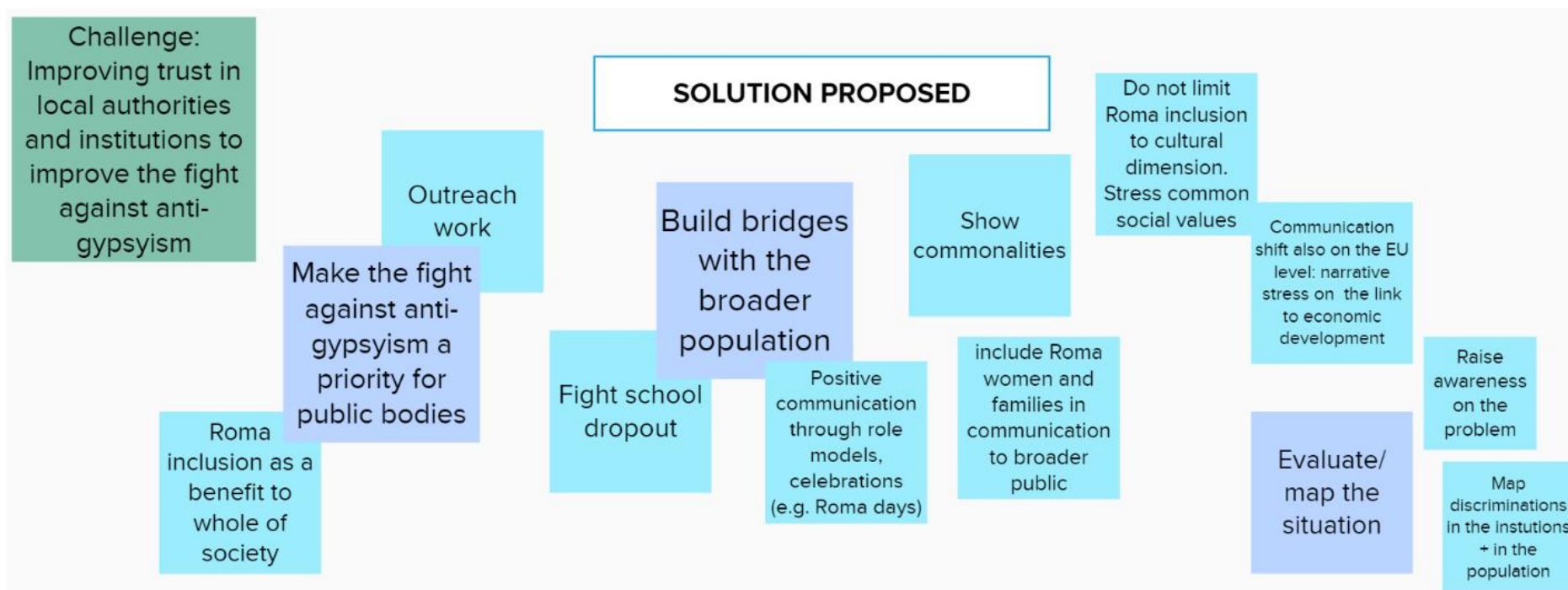


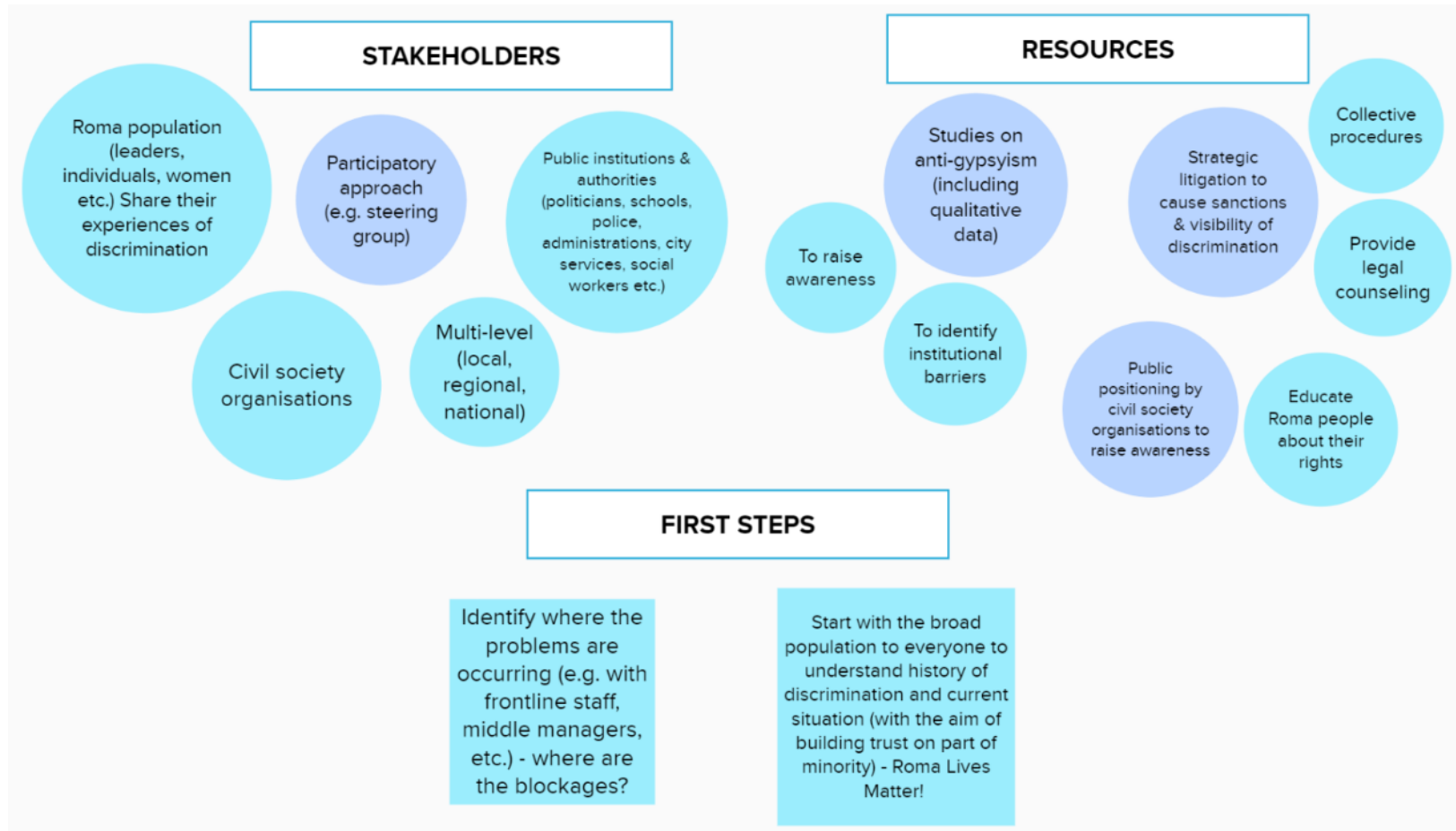
Co-Creating local measures to fight anti-gypsyism

After learning in detail about Berlin’s strategies to promote Roma inclusion at local level, cities engaged in a co-creation exercise. Systemic anti-gypsyism had recurrently come up in discussions as a key concern for cities, and a space where they considered that additional efforts were still needed. Beyond cities, the fight against anti-gypsyism was also identified as a key priority in the new EU Roma framework for equality, inclusion and participation. In this interactive session, cities reflected on the strategies they have implemented so far to tackle anti-gypsyism and counter negative narratives, as well as on possible ways forward.

The first challenge encountered by cities is the lack of a common and clear-cut definition of anti-gypsyism. For the purposes of this activity, it was approached as a specific form of racism that affects Roma people, including Travellers and other groups and manifests through the holding of stereotypical beliefs, the use of pejorative wording, hate crime, the explicit or implicit manifestation of discrimination, and implicit bias.

The fight against anti-gypsyism can be addressed through different approaches that are often complementary. For this exercise, the participants focused on the notion of trust. Improving the trust of Roma people in local institutions and authorities can contribute to reporting of anti-gypsyist incidents and hate crime. A better understanding of the situation will in turn provide useful information on additional measures and solutions.





High Level Political Panel Debate: What Role for Cities in the New EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation?

The final day of the meeting was dedicated to a high-level political panel debate. Panelists discussed the impact of the previous EU Roma Framework and the opportunities the new one opens to foster Roma inclusion at local level, how cities can work with and push national governments to develop strong national strategies, and how they can ensure sufficient funding for Roma inclusion and participation is available at local level. The recording of the debate is available [here](#).

The session was inaugurated by Helena Dalli, EU Commissioner for equality. She addressed the main objectives of the new EU Roma Framework, such as the will to address systemic discrimination and anti-gypsyism, the importance of mainstreaming Roma inclusion across policy areas, the need to improve data collection and monitoring and to foster the active involvement of Roma organisations and communities as key stakeholders. Commissioner Dalli insisted on the vital role that cities play in Roma inclusion, and expressed her support to involve local authorities in designing, implementing and monitoring national Roma frameworks. She stated that community-led local development is essential, as a top-down approach cannot account for the high diversity in contemporary European society. Berlin's local plan for the inclusion of Roma people was cited as an example of how beneficial city actions can be. Commissioner Dalli also pointed to the need to channel resources to the local level and ensure avenues for dialogue.

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world” (Commissioner Dalli, quoting Eleanor Roosevelt)

Throughout the debate, cities' potential to foster Roma inclusion was made clear. Sedat Arif, Malmö's deputy mayor and chair of Eurocities' social affairs forum, highlighted how cities are in the best position to identify the challenges that Roma people face and to develop tailored solutions, as Malmö has done by developing a Roma Knowledge and Information Centre. Many cities have shown their willingness to take action, as Eurocities' campaign [Inclusive Cities for All](#) shows. In this context, panellists agreed that multi-level governance and close cooperation amongst stakeholders is essential, and emphasised cities' need to push for being full partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of national strategies that follow the new EU Roma framework. Daniel Tietze, Berlin state secretary for integration, insisted on the benefits of sharing best practices and having avenues for dialogue at the EU level, beyond ad-hoc events, but rather by institutionalising a constant exchange between stakeholders to learn from each other. It was therefore deemed crucial that member states allow for sufficient flexibility to adapt to each city's needs and that national strategies reflect the situation on the ground. Such recognition should come hand in hand with financial support. Without adequate EU funding, cities will not be able to take the leading role they can and should have in the inclusion of Roma people.

As was throughout the three days of this event, participation was another area that panellists considered crucial. They all highlighted that more efforts need to be done to empower Roma people, to make their voices central to the discussion and ensure their real participation. Barcelona's City Council of the Gypsy people offers a platform for dialogue amongst stakeholders, and as Sonia Fuertes, Barcelona Commissioner for social action and integration, puts it, “we decide together and work on policies together, we establish priorities of social policies together”. Gabriela Hrabanova, Director of the European Roma Grassroot Organisations network ([ERGO](#)) reminded participants of the need to include Roma organisations and civil society into all relevant city committees and departments. Participants welcomed the New EU Roma Framework as a step in the right direction of strengthening participation.

Panellists also put a strong focus on monitoring, evaluation and accountability. ERGO highlighted the potential of using the Roma Civil Monitoring to advocate for evidence-based policies. Berlin Senator Daniel Tietze supported this argument and explained that one of the central aspects of the Berlin local action plan was its conscious review as the path to constant improvement.

Finally, the topic of non-discrimination and tackling anti-gypsyism was brought up, with panellists reminding us that anti-gypsyism is still embedded in public institutions, and that awareness-raising and staff training are key, as is providing avenues for the reporting and monitorisation of experiences of discrimination, such as the Barcelona office for non-discrimination.

Useful documents:

- [Background Paper on Berlin's action plan on the inclusion of migrant Roma](#)
- [Powerpoint presentations used during the meeting](#)
- [Eurocities' policy brief on the EU strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participants](#)
- [Summary of the report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 'Roma and Travellers in 6 countries'](#)



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