

ECRI – EUROPEAN
COOPERATION FOR
ROMA INCLUSION

MARIA LUIZA MEDELEANU

ALEXANDRU ZAMFIR

MENTORING

METHODOLOGY



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OBJECTIVES

TO CLARIFY THE CONCEPT OF THE MENTORING/MEDIATION PROGRAMME

TO DEMONSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE ROMA HISTORY AND CULTURE IN THE MENTORING ACTIVITY

OBJECTIVES

Part I – The Mentorship Programme for Roma Communities

1. Why do We need a Mentoring Programme for Roma Communities?

Roma people represent a historic European minority. The first documentary attestation of the Roma ancestors appears in 1054 in a manuscript from Mount Athos under the name of *athinganoy* (Sarău, 1997, p.27). However, they have remained unknown to Europe, a marginalized minority perceived as a threat to others, and persecuted for centuries because of their different way of living compared to the European. Roma have been the inner strangers for Europe, similar to the description of The Stranger in Simmel's article (Simmel, 1950, p.1). People do not seek to know them and sometimes prefer to invent stereotypes according to their imagination, which implicitly leads to racism and persecution.

Likewise, Jean-Pierre Liegeois highlights in his book "Roma in Europe" that the least negative attitude towards Roma is that of romantic sympathy influenced by folklore, but as soon as an opportunity arises, the most negative sentiments are reactivated. "Roma, travellers, gypsies



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are considered thieves, noisy, dirty, immoral, cheating, not working, teaching others evil things and their art of fortune-telling inspires fear". (Liegeois, 2008, p.141).

Thus, throughout history, the Roma have had a distorted and contradictory image in Europe, as having deviant social behaviour - vagrants, poor, criminals, thieves, with a deviant and uncivilized lifestyle, but, paradoxically, romantic and free. This distorted image of the Roma continues to perpetuate itself today, negatively impacting their evolution in society and their development as individuals. The following common case of a Roma girl being rejected by a Romanian kindergarten is presented here to illustrate how this image affects them.

Rebeca is a student at a private kindergarten in Romania. She is Roma and has some minor communication difficulties. These seem to be strong enough reasons for the kindergarten to reject her. Even if Rebeca attends kindergarten and makes friends, and there is progress in her communication abilities with the help of the kindergarten speech therapist, these are not enough for the headmistress and she keeps asking her grandmother to take Rebeca to another kindergarten "more suitable for her"¹. What will the future of Rebeca the adult be if she is rejected by the education system when she is most in need? What can be done for Rebeca to be included in the education system and not to be deprived of her right to education, in order for her not to become an adult who, in turn, will reject the system and not develop educationally and socially? What kind of support does Rebeca and her grandmother need in order to fight for quality education? Can the school mediator help Rebeca, and where is the cultural or social mediator? Does Rebeca need another type of support, specific, more applied to her situation, which not only mediates but also provides support from within the community / family to the society that often does not see beyond the stereotypes and prejudices with which it is accustomed?

Rebeca's case is not unique in the Romanian or European society when speaking about the Roma community, because people often act driven by their own stereotypes and images without checking the reality. The people interviewed for this methodology have also had this

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHViCwhVQnc&t=14s>

This short movie is made by Unicef and it is inspired by the reality of the Romanian educational system.



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type of experiences, but they have found the internal resources to go further and even reach out to support others to overcome such situations.

To argue the need for mentoring for the European Roma community and to draw some general lines about what a mentoring programme means, there have been conducted a series of interviews with Roma people who have succeeded professionally, and some of them work in Roma communities, trying to support children like Rebeca to develop harmoniously and cope with the rejection they are still facing in society. The interviewees are teachers, social workers, people working in the culture sector, and even students, who have at least once in their lifetime gone through rejections like the one presented above, but who managed to overcome them in one way or another. Now, they have decided that it's worth supporting other children / young people who are going through such situations. They understand the difficulties, and how necessary it is for people to work with others who have already been through this kind of experiences.

Cristian Pădure is a lecturer at the Department of Romani Language, University of Bucharest, and Romanian language teacher in the pre-university environment. When interviewed in June 2021, he mentioned that he would have needed a "mentor" in his educational process because unfortunately his parents did not know how to support him, and at school he was rejected or ignored by both teachers and colleagues. Cristian was one of the few Roma in his school, and he repeated the first year because he did not know the Romanian language since at home his family only spoke Romani. This did not discourage him and he continued school, but not all students have this endurance. Some of them, when they have such failures, give up. This is the reason why they need someone to support them from the inside, and to take their side when they encounter difficulties.

Mrs. Alecu Florica is a teacher at Bora School in Slobozia and a mentor in a project carried out by the Roma Education Fund Foundation for Roma students from pedagogical high schools. She says that she had her brother as a mentor, who was a writer. If her older brother had not been with her, her educational career would have been much more difficult. That is why Mrs.



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Alecu Florica chose to be with the Roma students who need her, and to support them when they encounter difficulties in their educational path.

Crina Mureşanu, Roma social worker and Political Science PhD., told us how difficult it is when social workers do not seek to understand the Roma they work with, but they only judge and treat them according to the image they have of them. Having practiced this profession for years, has made Crina realize how important it is for the social worker who works with Roma to be Roma or at least to know aspects of Roma culture and history very well in order to be able to offer real support regarding work.

The need for mentoring is urgent if we want to bridge the gap and to provide real support to the Roma community. It needs to be supported from inside, by people who have gone through the same experiences of rejection and discrimination, and who have succeeded in overcoming them.

At the same time, when measuring the importance of a mentoring programme for Roma communities, every individual case has to be taken into consideration, in view of reaching their maximum potential. Perhaps these people could have developed even more if they had benefited from an appropriate mentoring programme tailored to their needs.

A mentoring programme is an opportunity for development and an essential instrument that can change the negative perspective of the society on the Roma community, which is perceived as a problem. The result of this process is a fair exchange between the two cultures, and not a unilateral influence of the majority, as it is the case now in many situations.

Therefore, the goal of this project is, on one hand, to clarify the concept of mentoring with its preliminary steps, methodology and structure, and, on the other hand, to explain how important it is to know the culture and history of the community one works with, in this case the Roma, in order to truly support its members.

In summary, a European mentoring programme is needed for the Roma community to:

- ▶ support people in their difficult moments;



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- ▶ help them in finding a better version of themselves;
- ▶ support them in coping with different challenges in their lives;
- ▶ encourage the mentees to reach their full potential;

2. The Mentor Profile and the Mentoring Process

For a mentor to be adequate, they must have a series of skills and competencies that they can put into practice in the mentoring activity. Firstly, the mentors must have a more elevated professional status compared to the person or group they mentor. Secondly, they must know and understand the cultural and social specificity of the community with which they work with, in order to be able to support these people in their development and process of becoming independent.

The notion of *mentor* was borrowed from Latin and it refers to an educated person who guides someone else, an inspiring spiritual leader. However, even the Latin language borrowed it from ancient Greek. Mentor was a friend of Odysseus and an educator of Telemachus. Thus, its synonym is the word educator, but its deeper ancient meaning is that of a private educator responsible for the education, practical and spiritual initiation of a young person in the world full of challenges. Therefore, the mentor refers to the image of the sage who is talking to the novices. In other words, the mentor is a guide to the one who is learning, using their expertise (knowledge + personal experience in the field) and also their personal example as a tool. The meaning of a spiritual leader shows us that mentoring is based on the fact that those who follow do that because of the example of their leader. So, the mentors need first of all the intrinsic motivation of those who they mentor, as well as the desire of those who are apprentices to resemble them.

Another way to consolidate the meaning of a mentor is to analyse the term encountered in botany, where a mentor is a graft from an old plant inserted on a young one in order for it to lend its properties. This comparison is also suggestive for the process of training a person, or in an even broader sense, for the personal development of children and adults. Therefore, the



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similarity highlighted here is the “borrowing of the desirable, beneficial properties” of the mentor, without necessarily meaning the imitation thereof. The whole process leaves room for the personality of the one who follows the mentor, and the intention is that the apprentice may even exceed the mentor. Thus, the process results in important personal, but also educational, professional, and economical development. It can be carried out by strengthening the trust between the two parties, and it can even lead to a spiritual development, not necessarily in the religious sense, but rather in the sense of seeking and discovering the maximum potential, as well as the meaning of life.

Regarding the aspect of trust, another definition for mentor indicates that he/she is a "wise, trustworthy counsellor, teacher, or coach". Therefore, a mentor is not simply a person who helps another to learn something that in other conditions would have learned harder, more slowly or not learned at all. The mentor is much more than that; mentoring entails on the part of the mentor involvement, knowledge of the other and openness, so that in the end, the mentored person or group can be sure to listen and follow.

In the common sense, the mentor is a person with a certain experience, accepted as a guide by a person or a group who goes through a series of challenges in different areas. The mentor can facilitate the transition of the person or group to a better, improved or solved situation (in educational, professional, social, spiritual terms). The mentor can only achieve this through successive support and interventions, and by successfully overcoming barriers and challenges that may inevitably arise. In this sense, mentoring is a developmental relationship in which both the mentor and the mentees are involved in the dynamics of finding solutions through permanent consultations and constant monitoring of the whole situation. The transitional aspect must be emphasized here, in the sense that the mentor plays a role in the development of a person or a group for a certain period of time, a critical period in which the mentees need support and guidance, as they fail on their own to find the best solutions to solve or improve the difficult situation they are going through.

Additionally, in the specialised literature, mentoring is defined as the process through which skills and information is transmitted from the experienced people to the ones who need



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support. According to Barnett (1995), the mentors can be “teachers, coaches, trainers, role models, protectors and sponsors up to a certain point during their relationship with the mentees. They can provide opportunities for the development of others by identifying situations and events that contribute with knowledge and experience to the lives of those mentored” (Barnett, 1995, apud. Crocker C., Harris, S.). The notion of protectors is important, in the sense that mentors must defend the interests of the mentees, to fight and represent their needs and rights in relation to others (local authorities, school, society in general). Some good examples here are the concrete situations that arose from the discussions with the representatives of the Roma communities in Bulgaria, Stolipinovo district, Plovdiv, who also highlight the importance of the mentor's specific knowledge of the Roma community. In an ideal situation, the mentor should come from within the community in order to be able to defend its interests, knowing them in detail. Moreover, regarding the discussion on this topic, it was highlighted that an important role in the case of the mentor for Roma communities is played by the ethnic aspect, thus it is preferable for the mentor to belong to the Roma ethnic group, in the sense that she/he can better understand the specificity of the Roma and can more easily integrate in the role of representative and defender of community interests. Of course, the non-Roma mentor is not excluded, but they need to have relevant experience in working with Roma and, very importantly, to be recognized at the local community level, or at the level of the extended community of people working in the field of Roma mentoring, as having the qualities of a good mentor and manifesting genuine intentions in getting involved in working with the Roma and solving the situations for which one intervenes.

In Boston's definition (1976), mentoring implies "a protected relationship in which learning and experimentation can occur, as well as potential skills can be developed." The aspect of the protected relationship is also emphasized, in the sense that mentoring, especially mentoring as a process, takes place in a predefined framework, monitored and that gives a certain security and safety to both the mentor and the mentored-one/s. At the same time, the definition highlights the learning component, first of all from the mentors, who take elements from the mentor's experience, but not only. Learning is also valid for the mentor,



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who gets to enrich his experience, skills, and competencies, with each mentoring process in which she/he is involved, taking in particular elements from different contexts and situations.

Another definition of mentoring is that of Shea (1992), for which mentoring involves a significant, long-term and beneficial effect on another person's life or style, generally as a result of one-on-one personal contact. A mentor is a person who provides knowledge, insight, perspective, or wisdom that is useful to the person being mentored". Thus, mentoring not only aims to solve a specific situation or momentary problem, but also takes into account the long-term effects, precisely because it is also aimed at the further development of mentoring, even involving major changes in lifestyle, perceptions, beliefs or even certain values. Another aspect highlighted in this definition is the relationship between the two parties, with reference to individual mentoring, which, in certain situations for increased efficiency and guaranteed results, is recommended to be one-on-one. This may be the case of mentoring in education, where the personal relationship between the mentor and the developing person is essential; the student needs a customized intervention programme as well as meetings in which he feels supported and guided according to his specific needs.

Similar aspects are noted in Kay's definition, which describes mentoring as "an interactive, one-on-one process to guide the development of learning, based on the premise of active involvement of both parties, the assumption of their obligations according to the statutes" Kay (in Croker C., Harris, S., 2002). In addition, it suggests that mentoring is an "effort" in terms of the involvement and responsibilities that each party assumes and that some effort needs to be made to be successful. At the same time, we can see another feature of the mentoring process, encountered at various times during the programme, namely that it is not always comfortable to get out of the position or situation you are used to, even if it is difficult, and some effort must be made to overcome that situation. The aspect of lack of comfort is valid both for the mentored person, who has to get out of a certain situation, but also for the mentor, who has to constantly adapt to the new situations he encounters and overcome his own barriers for the well-being of the mentored person or group, even if this is not easy for the mentor.



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That is why the training of mentors is very important. A successful mentoring programme requires first and foremost initial training in which the mentor learns the concepts and principles they are going to put into practice. Even in the case of a more experienced mentor, initial training is important, on one hand because they can learn new things about the specifics of the community or group they work with, but also for a good alignment of values and principles shared by the whole team running the mentoring programme. For example, it is very important that there is a clear equivalence between mentor, trainers and the project team with respect to values such as respect, fairness, non-discrimination, empathy, or equal opportunities. Moreover, in the case of mentoring for Roma groups, initial training is especially important for learning about Roma culture and history, in general, or perhaps even more in detail, about the specifics of the community to be addressed. Also, the Romani language – or basic elements regarding the Romani language – is an important component in the mentoring process in Roma communities, a part that can also be included in the initial training of mentors.

The initial training is as important as the ongoing training of mentors and their monitoring throughout the process by knowledgeable people from the project team, or from the institution that runs the mentoring programme. This has the aim of supporting and providing constant and constructive feedback in order to achieve the proposed objectives as efficiently and realistically as possible. Thus, in the ongoing trainings, individual or group meetings can also take place in order to discuss different aspects that the mentor is facing at that moment. For example: "Students face difficulties at school in their relationship with teacher X", or: "Student X is frequently absent and at risk of dropping out of school", or: "X City Hall is late in issuing the documents required to solve the housing problem for Y family". Thus, for each case, both the trainers and the other mentors participating in the course can intervene with proposals to solve or improve different situations. For example: "Talking first with the school principal and then with the teacher in question about his relationship with the students in the class"; "Talking with the family of the student at risk of dropping out of school and identifying



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the causes that led to this situation"; "Requesting an audience with the mayor for a timely discussion on the status of the requested documents" etc.

Of course, in the development of mentoring programmes in the future, it is also opportune to have a final training or meeting of mentors in which to share, on one hand, the examples of good practice, but also the challenges or things that were more difficult or went in another direction than the predetermined goals. Let us consider the example of a student who dropped out of college and got a job. Thus, even if the initial goal of the mentor was to support and motivate the student to stay in college and complete their studies, we should finally understand that it is not necessarily a tragic thing that they decided to get hired, if that was their wish, and maybe there are opportunities for professional development in the field they have chosen. Therefore, future mentoring programmes, in addition to making the objectives more flexible and correlating them with the mentee, including during the process, should consider the possibility of modifying or even changing the initial objectives, depending on the dynamics and needs of the mentored individual or group, as long as they remain within the parameters of the values and fundamental principles of the project. Usually, these trainings are carried out by psycho-pedagogues, psychologists, school counsellors, experts in Roma culture, sociologists, anthropologists so that the mentoring process has an integrated approach that meets the needs of those mentored.

The mentoring activity can be applied in different fields, such as educational, cultural, and social, with respect to employment or obtaining a house; mentoring can also take place in areas such as the artistic, professional or religious domains. For all these areas mentioned above, mentoring can work in two main forms: **The Mentor as an image** and **Mentoring as a process**.

The Mentor as an image involves someone, most often a young person in training, choosing a public figure as a reference term or a famous person as a source of inspiration. The mentor as an image represents a model that the person wants to follow; the mentee demonstrates



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admiration, devotion, determination, commitment, aspiration, involvement, and in general, a lot of emotion towards them. Most of the time, the person who assigns a mentor as an image does not get to meet or interact directly with his mentor, the relationship therefore implying distance, lack of mutual feedback, or collaboration that serves a common interest or purpose. The mentor as an image is even referred to in official documents, its importance being recognized in the personal and professional development of a person or a group. Such an example is found in Romania, in the Occupational Standard, published in the Official Gazette no. 713 of October 22, 2007, where we find the following definition: "Each of us had a mentor at least once in our lives, a model we admired and tried to imitate, even a proverb said that imitation is the sincerest form of admiration" (Occupational Standard, page 1, 2007, apud Trăistaru Maria, *Fundamente teoretico-explicative ale mentoratului românesc*, 2018, EDICT – Revista educației - ISSN 1582 – 909X).

On the other hand, **mentoring as a process** involves a much more structured and organized activity. Mentoring as a process most often occurs in a predetermined framework, with certain coordinates, in which the two parties involved, the mentor and the mentee/s have very clearly defined roles. In this regard, the mentor establishes, among other things, a set of objectives, customized in relation to and in consultation with the mentored person or group, as well as a plan of actions, activities, methods and strategies to achieve those objectives. The mentored person or group has the responsibility to follow the programme, to work with the mentor, to consult with him. By strengthening a relationship based on mutual trust, the mentored person or group allow themselves to be guided by their mentor and to partially or fully meet those goals that are recognized as the most important and accepted by both parties.

Coordination in the mentoring process involves the establishment of a framework and directions in which mentoring activities can take place. Of course, they can change or adapt depending on the specifics of the person, or the mentored group, or depending on the



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dynamics of the process, changes or unforeseen things (perceived as disadvantages or, conversely, as opportunities) that may occur along the way.

Another important feature of mentoring as a process is the exact period of time in which the activity takes place, involving a certain frequency of meetings, a rigorous planning of activities, correlated with the proposed objectives, as well as a series of deadlines by which certain tasks to be performed in order for the mentoring process to be effective and to follow the desired trajectory.

Finally, mentoring as a programme is addressed to a person, or a clearly defined group of people, registered as a target group and monitored according to a set of fixed criteria from the beginning of the programme to its end.

In summary, mentoring as a process includes the following key features:

- Structured mentoring programme
- A specific period
- Clear objectives
- Clear and structured activities
- A specific target group

Thus, it is distinguished from mentoring as an image, which is defined by:

- The admiration of a famous person from a distance
- Mentor as an image representing a model
- Lack of a clear structure and programme
- One-way relationship without receiving feedback

The optimal goals of a mentoring programme are:

- To build the character
- To learn life skills
- To obtain economic and social stability
- To gain self-confidence
- To discover their own potential/inner strength

The skills of a good mentor are:



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- To be a person with an elevated professional status compared to the mentee/s
- To know and understand the cultural and social specificity of the community with which one works;
- To support the people one works with in their development and independence.
- To adapt to the socio-cultural context of the community;
- To be a good communicator;
- To be empathetic to the mentees' needs
- To document oneself about the work to be done and to apply what one learns in one's work;
- To treat the people one works with on an equal footing and to build relationships based on mutual trust with them;

3. Good Practices in Education

Therefore, mentoring is a complex process that requires mutual trust and the support of the mentors to develop harmoniously on all levels, discovering their intrinsic motivation to evolve. As mentioned above, mentoring can exist in any area of social life because people need support to achieve their goals and dreams. The following include some examples of good mentoring practices in the field of education, this being the main field of activity of the Roma Education Fund. Roma Education Fund Foundation carries out educational projects with a focus on the Roma minority, which have a strong mentoring component for Roma pupils, students and teachers, but also projects whose main purpose is mentoring to support the community from within.

Below are two of the most important successful mentoring projects developed by the Roma Education Fund:

Project Romaversitas

This project lasted for a period of two years (2016-2018) and was addressed to Roma students from the University of Bucharest from different faculties. The main goal of the project was to increase the academic performance and graduation rate, while building the advocacy, self-esteem and identity of about 80 Roma full-time students. Its main activities were mentoring and tutoring to support these students to develop professionally and personally. Students received both individual and group support from mentors. The individual support consisted of



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counselling and career orientation, delivering learning techniques, finding the balance in the relationship student – family – school, helping the student to plan their time, guiding the students to elaborate individual study plans, support the beneficiaries to adapt in the new environment, show them the opportunities inside the university (library, medical office, youth club, theatre club, educational competitions etc.) and outside (different youth clubs, theatre, hospital, city library etc.). The group support facilitated the interaction between the beneficiaries and students from other universities, encouraging the participation of the beneficiaries in extracurricular activities: exchange experience meetings with other beneficiaries, organizing group activities that can contribute to increasing their self-esteem and assuming their ethnic identity (inviting role models, mini training session delivered by Roma students), encouraging the interaction with other youth groups, local Roma NGOs). The frequency of individual meetings was once a week, and group meetings once a month.

In order to be a real support to the students they worked with, the mentors received initial training on what a mentoring programme means and how to be with the students. This training was conducted by psychopedagogues and psychologists specialized in working with students and experts in the field of Roma culture and history. Even though Roma mentors were targeted in this project, Roma culture and history had to be brought back into discussion especially that important topics on Roma history and culture are not taught in school. As a result, in such a programme it is important to make these topics known and to discuss them even with Roma students who have not had the opportunity to know their own history. The mentors also benefited from continuous training, monitoring, coordination as well as the opportunity to share their field experience and the difficulties encountered in working with students to find the best solutions in providing support to mentors.

As for the selection of mentors and students, a national announcement was made and then they applied, meeting the required criteria. It was very important at the project level for the mentors to be professionally fulfilled in order to set an example for the students. The



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allocation based on the professional fields was also taken into account, so that each student had a mentor in his field of activity.

In addition to mentoring, students benefited from other opportunities for their professional development: English language courses at a specialized school (British Council), IT courses taught by specialists, workshops on Roma culture and history, paid internships within the Foundation, the provision of grants for mini-projects for students to develop, and the provision of support from mentors in the implementation of these mini-projects. All these activities aimed to motivate Roma students to continue their careers despite all the difficulties encountered – because of the society, educational system or even family. Another important goal of the programme was to make students feel that someone is with them in this educational endeavour and helps them make the best decisions for their development and reach their full potential.

Scholarship programme in pedagogy

Another project whose main activity was mentoring was the "Scholarship Programme in Pedagogy". This project lasted for a period of 6 years (2014-2020) and was addressed to Roma students from high schools with a pedagogical profile in the following countries: Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czech Republic. The aim of the project was to support Roma students during high school, through a mentoring scheme and scholarships, as well as internships in kindergartens. In addition, students received assistance in finding jobs in kindergartens, especially in regions with a large number of ethnic Roma. About 580 students participated in this project. Each student benefited from individual and group mentoring sessions, the frequency of meetings being on average twice a month. The topics covered during the sessions were about students' personal and professional development, Roma history and culture, self-knowledge and other relevant topics adapted to the needs of high school students.



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The main activities of the project were to offer meditations to students in subjects like Romanian Language and Mathematics with specialized teachers, or to other subjects, depending on their needs, in order to reduce the gap between Roma students and other students. The gap is due to historical factors, especially slavery and the Holocaust, and ongoing discrimination, which have directly prevented Roma from gaining access to education. In addition, students benefited from support from within the community through the mentoring programme. The students also received a monthly scholarship during the project as well as numerous opportunities for personal and professional development, such as: a storytelling workshop with Roma actress Alina Şerban, summer camp with pedagogical themes, workshops on Roma history and culture.

In this project, the mentors also received initial and in-service training, as well as the opportunity to share their experiences working with students and to find the best solutions to support them. Most of the mentors were Roma teachers, starting from the premise that they are the most suitable to support students from a high school with a pedagogical profile, keeping in this case the correlation of the fields of activity in within the mentoring programme.

The previous presentation of the various mentoring projects emphasizes the importance of the direct benefits for the mentored people, who fully complete the mentoring programme. These additional benefits directly contribute to achieving the goals and to encouraging those in need of such a programme to actually access it. These benefits and opportunities must be presented clearly and completely from the beginning, so that the mentored people can see and understand the real benefit of the activity, but also the individual responsibilities that they have to assume during such a programme.

Among the most important benefits and opportunities that have been offered to students by the Roma Education Fund Foundation through the implemented mentoring programmes are the following: English classes, IT courses, Workshops on Roma culture and history, Paid



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internships within the Foundation, Mini-project grants for student activities, Monthly scholarships for students, Storytelling workshops, Summer camps with pedagogical themes.

Part II – Roma Culture and History

1. The Importance of Knowing the Culture and History of the Roma in the Mentoring Activity

This part of the methodology aims to answer the question: "Why is it important for a mentor to know the culture and history of the Roma". This was a very commonly asked question. Even in the cases where the mentors were Roma, our firm response was that Roma history and culture is a key factor in this type of activity. Only by knowing the history and culture of a people and understanding their specifics can we truly adapt to the needs of that group. In this way we demonstrate that we respect those we work with, both as individuals and the culture they come from. In most cases, economic and social needs are intertwined with cultural ones, and by taking into account certain cultural specificities, a number of situations can be solved. Two concrete examples from the experiences of the projects show us the importance of knowledge, on one hand, and the consideration of cultural specificity, on the other hand, when a mentor tries to find solutions to various situations.

A first example is the one in which, in order to solve a request in which two Roma families wanted to live together, two apartments were joined together. This demonstrates that an important cultural aspect has been taken into account, through which Roma families express a desire to live with their extended family. Another example is the one that took into account the need of some Roma families to respect their cultural principle of pure - impure dichotomy. Put in the situation of washing the laundry together, Roma families refused to do so because they violated an important aspect of Roma culture. The solution found together with the people involved from the outside was to buy washing machines for each family. Thus, the practical and economical need was met, but also, just as important, the cultural one.



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The risk of not knowing the cultural specifics of the community one works with leads to misunderstanding and misbehaviour in certain situations, and a lack of necessary and appropriate support for that community. In education, there are multiple examples in this regard, the most common being that in which the child knows only the Romani language. At school, this is perceived by teachers as an inability of the student to understand and assimilate the content taught in class, when the actual issue is the language barrier. Thus, due to the lack of knowledge of the student's cultural specificity, the teacher does not correctly identify his need as a linguistic one and cannot provide adequate support. Mostly, in this type of situations, the student abandons the school, because he/she feels misunderstood and abandoned by the school.

In summary, it is important to know the cultural and historical specifics of the Roma in the mentoring activity, for the following reasons:

- ▶ create better relationships with the people;
- ▶ better understand their way of thinking and the way they live;
- ▶ have a better connection with the people; who in turn
- ▶ feel valued and important for themselves and for society;

2. Roma vs. Gypsy

The first and most important thing we need to know about Roma, when working with them, is the distinction between Roma and Gypsy. In Romani, the word gypsy does not exist. The origin of the word is the term *athinganos* which in the Greek language meant untouchable, pagan, heretical, impure, and referred to a group considered heretical by the official clerical structures of the time in which it was attested. The Roma received this name in the medieval period when they arrived in the Byzantine Empire, being considered a group of heretics, nomads, star readers and wizards whom Christians were advised to avoid.



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In the Romanian Medieval Lands, since the first attestation of the Roma reported in 1385, they were identified by the term *ațigan*, who later became țigan (gypsy), designating rather a social status, that of the slave and not the ethnicity. Once spread, this word brought with it many negative consequences for this ethnic group that led to the stigmatization and association of an entire ethnic group with the negative values of the society. In addition, it affected the self-esteem of many generations, and other members of the community did not want to be identified as Roma, but rather with the negative name of gypsy.

Later, the word gypsy kept in the Romanian collective mentality and language a deeply pejorative meaning; the term gypsy became a nickname of mockery and a label for all those who promoted negative aspects in society. The term Roma is an old word in the Romani language used for at least a millennium by the Roma to address each other. According to the hypothesis issued by Donald Kenrick, (Kenrick, 1993) the term Roma comes from the prakrit word "dom" (with voiced /d/), which means "man" and referred, on one hand, to Indian immigrants from various ethnic groups, who mixed and performed mixed marriages in Persia, forming a people and afterwards moving to Europe, and on the other hand, to an ethnic subgroup in India, which still exists today.

The Roma address each other in the Romani language when they ask each other about their Roma ethnicity with the following formula: "*Tu san rom?* - trad. Are you Roma?", because the term Roma has the meaning of a man belonging to the Roma ethnic group, in the Romani language. Therefore, for a good communication in the work of mentors with people within the Roma community, it is important to address the term Roma, both because it best captures the culture and identity of the community, but also because in this way we show respect to the community and we value a central aspect of Roma culture.

3. Roma Origins



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If in the Middle Ages it was believed that the Roma were "Egyptians" and almost nothing was known about how they arrived in the Balkans and implicitly in Romania, linguistics was the only discipline that could elucidate the unknowns of Roma history. Thanks to linguistics, it is known today that the Romani language is of Indian origin, and there is approximate data about the road travelled by Roma ancestors from India to the Balkans and about the formation of the Romani language today. The first linguistic finding that the Romani language is of Indian origin belongs to the Hungarian student Istvan Wali, who in 1776 during his studies in the Netherlands together with three Malabrian students compiled a vocabulary of 1000 words proving the belonging of the Romani language to the Indian languages.

Below is a table with some words that show the similarity of the two languages:

English word	Romani	Hindi
Rain	Briśind	Bāriś
Ear	Kan	kān,
house	Kher	Ghar
Earth	Phuv	Puthvī
Water	Pani	Pānī
Milk	Thud	Dudh
Red	Lolo	Lāl
Black	Kalo	Kālā
Big	Baro	Barā
Good	Laćho	Accā
New	Nevo	Nayā
Old	Purano	Phuranā
Beautiful	Śukar	Sundar
Tight	Tang	Tāg
One	Jekh	Ek
Two	Duj	Do
Three	Trin	Tīn

For	Śtar	Cār
Five	Panʒ	Pāj
Six	Śov	Chah
Ten	Deś	Das
To bring	Anel	Anā
To give	Del	Denā
To see	Dihkel	Dekhñā
To fall	Perel	paṛnā
To drink	Piel	Pinā
To walk	ʒal	Calnā

* Table made by Alexandru Zamfir, graduate of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Bucharest, Romanian-Hindi section, in his bachelor's thesis that approaches the similarities between Romanian and Hindi.

4. Roma Migration from Indian Territories

Linguistics also managed to elucidate and reconstruct the path taken by Roma ancestors from India to Europe. By analysing the Roma lexicon, Miklosich (Miklosich apud „Romii, India si Europa”, Gheorghe Sarau) identified in the Romani language ancient elements from the Afghan, Persian, Armenian, Turkish, and Slavic languages, which led to the identification of the geographical areas travelled by the Roma ancestors and the peoples with whom they came into contact. Thus, it seems that after leaving the Indian space in about the II-VIII centuries AD, the ancestors of the Roma crossed the present territories of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran within several hundred years, and then by the end of the X century they had reached northern Mesopotamia.

According to Miklosich's theory, (Miklosich apud „Romii, India si Europa”, Gheorghe Sarau) the main branches of migrant peoples were:

1. **Lom or Northern Branch** - They continued on their way to today's territories of Armenia and Georgia and reached the Balkans through Caucasus and then they arrived in Eastern, Central and Western Europe.

2. **Dom or Southwestern Branch** - had as directions Syria, Palestine, North African countries, crossing the Mediterranean and reaching Spain.

3. **Rrom or Western Branch** - It is the ancestors of the Roma who continued their journey through the Byzantine Empire, where they remained for several centuries, and from there they went on to Central and Western Europe.

This distribution of migrant peoples of Roma origin is relevant precisely to demonstrate that the Roma people are present internationally and have a long history.

The following are the main aspects arising from the origin and migration of Roma from India:

- Due to **linguistics**, we know today that the Romani language is of Indian origin and we have approximate data about the journey of Roma ancestors from India to today's Europe
- By analysing the Roma lexicon, Miklosich (Miklosich apud „Romii, India si Europa", Gheorghe Sarau) identified in the Romani language ancient elements from the Afghan, Persian, Armenian, Turkish, and Slavic languages, which led to the identification of the geographical areas travelled by the Roma ancestors and the peoples with whom they came into contact.
- Lom or Northern branch - They continued their way on today's territories of Armenia and Georgia and reached the Balkans through the Caucasus, and then they arrived in Eastern, Central and Western Europe.
- Dom or Southwestern Branch - had as directions Syria, Palestine, North African countries, crossing the Mediterranean and reaching Spain.
- Rrom or Western Branch – They are the ancestors of the Roma who continued their journey through the Byzantine Empire, where they remained for several centuries, and from there they went on to Central and Western Europe.



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- The first documentary attestation of the Roma ancestors appears in a manuscript from Mount Athos, in 1054, under the name of athinganoy. Later, they are mentioned under different names (*cingari, țigani, zingari, tsiganes...*)

5. Roma Slavery in Romania

The first attestation of the Roma in Romania took place in 1385, when Dan I, the ruler of Wallachia, donated to Tismana Monastery the possessions that had previously belonged to Vodița Monastery between 1370 and 1371, donating 40 Gypsy dwellings (Petcuț 2015). The origin of Roma slavery and the means by which they were enslaved with their arrival in the Romanian Lands are two issues that are difficult to reconstruct due to the lack of a sufficient amount of historical information on this topic. Historiography presents two hypotheses. The first belongs to the historian Viorel Achim and claims that the Romanians took over the institution of slavery from the Tatars who used to turn their prisoners of war into slaves. He states that the Roma were the slaves of the Tartars, and what actually happened was the change of masters for the Roma slaves when they arrived in the Romanian territories (Achim, 1998).

The second hypothesis is supported by the historian Petre Petcuț. He states that when they came to Romania, the Roma had the status of free people, a fact confirmed by documents issued in Moldavia in 1414 and their status as free people in Transylvania (Gypsy chiefs were called princes). Petre Petcuț states that there is a possibility that the enslavement of the Roma on the Romanian territories occurred due to the custom of the land according to which the free peasants became serfs after 12 years spent on the estate of a boyar. This may have been transposed to the Roma as well, given their peaceful nature as opposed to the warrior character of other migrants (Petcuț, 2015).

Categories of slaves - Depending on the masters to whom they belonged, slaves were divided into 3 broad categories:



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Royal slaves - included all slaves in the country who did not belong to monasteries or boyars and were slaves of the ruler and his wife. They had specific names, by profession: *aurari* (goldsmiths), *cărămidari* (bricksmiths), *spoitori* (tinsmiths), *geambași* (copers), *lăutari* (Romani folk musicians), *florari* (flower-sellers), etc. They had the right to move freely around the country in order to be able to exercise their trades by paying a donation to the state. However, they could also be given by the ruler to boyars (nobles) or monasteries, and then they lost their right to move freely and were forced to work only for their master.

Monastic slaves - took care of the work around the monastery and that of its estates. Their number was the highest, with the monasteries having the most slaves, due to the gifts they received from the ruler and the boyars.

Boyar slaves - they were "court gypsies" and "field gypsies". The field slaves worked on the estates of the boyars and the court ones had occupations such as maids, house boys, cooks, laundresses, coachman, among many others. There was another category, that of the caretakers who took care of the yard and the raising of the animals. The boyar slaves were led by a *vataf* (administrator), who was accountable to the master for the duties of the slaves.

The legal status of the slaves - As Petre Petcuț claims, Roma people, during the period of slavery, did not benefit from a legal status that would give them minimum rights and protect them in court. Slaves were assimilated to the properties of the master (Petcuț, 2015). In the following, we present some excerpts from the legislation of the time for a clearer picture of the status of slaves:

The Gypsy or his woman, or the child, who would steal once or twice, even three times, a chicken, a goose or other little thing, shall be forgiven; if they would steal a bigger thing, they shall be punished for stealing; (The Guide book of Law 1652, apud. „Roma Slavery in Wallachia. Fragments of Social History", Furtună Adrian-Nicolae, 2019, p.19).

[...]We order you that from now you cannot disobey the three things mentioned here[...]. If a Romanian man wish to marry a Gypsy Women, or a Gypsy man to marry a Romanian women, you are not allowed to wed them, because people would get indignant and many quarrels will arise especially because the free people might fall into slavery. (Ecclesiastic Laws, Antim Ivireanu's Fragments of orders 1714 apud. „Roma Slavery in Wallachia. Fragments of Social History", Furtună Adrian-Nicolae, 2019, p.20).

1. *All the slaves are somebody's property. This is the status of Gypsies in Wallachia;*
2. *All people born from slaves shall remain slaves;*
3. *All born from a slave mother shall be slaves;*
4. *A Gypsy's master has no power over his life;*
5. *A Gypsy's master is free to sell or donate him;*
6. *All Gypsies in Wallachia who cannot prove who their master is, belong to the Royal Court.*
7. *He who deliberately keep hold of a Gypsy man or women, shall return him/her to the their master (paying 40 tl. by year for a skilled Gypsy, and 20 tl. by year for an unskilled Gypsy, 30 tl. a year for a skilled Gypsy women, and 15 tl. for an unskilled one); the one who keep hold of them unconsciously shall return them to their master;*
8. *He who would wed a Gypsy with a stranger Gypsy women consciously, or against their master's will, shall lose that Gypsy man or women and their children into possession of their master. And if he would wed them unconsciously, an exchange shall be made, always the Gypsy women following her husband. If the stranger was skilled, shall be exchanged with another skilled one; and if this cannot be fulfilled, than the talent of the skilled person shall be appreciated and paid;*
If the Gypsies get married without their master's consent or knowledge and if it happens to have children, the boys shall remain to the master of the Gypsy man, while the girls shall belong to the women's master subjected to exchange;
9. *Gypsies belonging to the Royal Court who would marry obeying the law can ask their masters in Court to change the rule aforementioned and go after their wives or husbands;*



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10. *The Gypsy who would marry a free women or the free man who would marry a Gypsy women without the knowledge of their masters, shall be separated. However, if their master allows them to get marry, then shall remain together as free people and their master shall be impaired.*

(Caragea Law, 1818, Chapter VII For Slaves and Gypsies, apud. „Roma Slavery in Wallachia. Fragments of Social History", Furtună Adrian-Nicolae, 2019, p.21).

The liberation of the Roma in the Romanian Lands - In both Principalities, slavery as an institution was abolished by a series of laws adopted between 1843-1856, that targeted firstly the slaves of the state, then of the monasteries, and finally the slaves of the nobles.

Selective chronology of liberation laws

1843 - Wallachia, the liberation of state slaves

1844 - Moldova, the liberation of the Ruler's slaves

1844 - Moldova, *the liberation of state slaves*

1847 - Wallachia, *the liberation of the Ruler's slaves*

1855 - Moldova, *the abolition of slavery*

1856 - Wallachia, *the abolition of slavery*

(Chronology taken from the Roma Teaching Auxiliary Manual in Romania: *Identity and Otherness*)

In summary, the following is the most important data about Slavery in the Romanian Lands:

- The first documentary attestation of the Roma in Romania dates from 1385;
- The ruler of Wallachia, Dan I, gives to the Tismana Monastery the possessions that had previously belonged to the Vodița Monastery;
- Among these goods, movable and immovable, there were 40 gypsy dwellings;
- In both Principalities, slavery as an institution was abolished by a series of laws, adopted between 1843-1856, that targeted in turn the slaves of the state, then of the monasteries, and finally of the nobles;



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- The liberation of the Roma was made without developing policies for their inclusion in the Romanian society, economy and culture.

6. Roma Holocaust

The deportations of Roma from Germany and Austria to German-occupied Poland began in 1940. They were placed in ghettos with the Jews. The first deportation took place in May 1940. The extermination of the Roma during World War II was not only in concentration camps, but also in the communities where they lived. A large part of the Roma living in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany was the victim of SS troop shootings of the whole community or individuals. Subsequently, they were buried in forests. The exact number of Roma killed in this way is unknown, but it is estimated that there are 180 places where Roma were shot in Ukraine, Belarus, Yugoslavia and Poland. (Slawomir, K. Martyniak M. , Talewicz-Kwiatkowska J., 2011).

The Gypsy Camp in Auschwitz was established in February 1943, and Roma were brought there from all over Europe, mostly from Germany and Austria. By the end of 1943, 18,736 people lived in the gypsy camp and 2,207 were gassed on the night of May 16, 1944. Of these, 9,500 were children under the age of 4 and 380 were born there. (Ibidem)

About 21,000 Roma from 12 countries died in Auschwitz. Other Roma in Europe from other concentration camps suffered the same fate. Unfortunately, it is not possible to estimate the exact number of the Roma Holocaust victims during World War II, especially since mass executions took place outside the concentration camps. However, there is a consensus among several researchers that approximately half a million Roma from all over Europe were exterminated during this period.

During the Second World War, approximately 25,000 ethnic Roma were deported from Romania to Transnistria for racial reasons, as it was the case in Germany. These people were exploited, abused, and ultimately destroyed both physically and spiritually. 11,000 Roma died in Transnistria.

Below are excerpts from interviews with Roma Holocaust survivors in Europe:



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At the end of September 1942, I was loaded onto a train. After travelling for a few hours, the train stopped. Someone opened the door with a bang and a moment later I heard loud shouts: Raus! Raus! Raus! I was one of the first to jump off the train and the SS officer immediately hit me in the stomach with the head of the rifle. After a while, I realized that in addition to the German soldiers armed with rifles, there were also many people dressed strangely in striped clothes holding wooden sticks in their hands. After a moment of general confusion, these people (I later found out that they were Kapos prisoners) lined us up in rows of 5 and we were escorted by SS officers. After about 5 minutes we were standing in front of a gate with the inscription "Arbeit macht frei" and then I saw the barbed wire fence.

I had to give my name, date and place of birth, occupation, parents' names and my mother's maiden name. The man who wrote all this down gave me a card with the number 66485 and my brother received the following number, 66486. Then, the same man told us that we were prisoners in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

I remember being beaten often because I couldn't learn my prisoner number in German fast enough. (Edward Paczkowski, former Polish Roma prisoner number 66485, deported to Auschwitz before the construction of the Gypsy Camp)

After travelling for 4 or maybe 5 days I arrived at Auschwitz. The door of our wagon was suddenly opened. In front of us on the ramp, there stood the SS officers with their weapons ready to fire. However, they lowered them when they saw children in front of them. After registering our name and tattooing the camp number on our arm, we went to the Gypsy Camp in Birkenaw. All the children brought from Mulfingen remained together in block 16 for the next 14 days. Then, they separated us. Children over the age of 14 remained there and the youngest were taken to the children's block, called the orphanage block. We, the older ones, were made to build roads. I visited my other brothers as often as I could ... One day, in the summer of 1944, the guard shot two Roma boys from the orphanage near the barbed wire fence. All he wanted to do was bring back some water he had collected from the ditch near the fence. One of the boys died on the spot and the other was seriously injured. He was carried around the camp as a means of intimidation. None of the boys was more than 11 or 12 years old.

(Excerpt from the testimony of Amelie Schaich who was deported to Auschwitz as a child in May 1943. Amelia was born into a Roma family but in 1938, at the age of 9, she was separated from her parents and placed in an orphanage with her brothers. Her parents were taken prisoners in a concentration camp. Amelie was one of the children studied by Dr. Robert Ritter and Eva Justin at the Institute of Racial Hygiene)

On March 12, 1943, around 4 in the morning, the Gestapo took us from our house: my parents, my sister Anni, my brother Willi Karl ... I was on the road two days and two nights, and finally, we arrived by train in Birkenaw ...



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The doors suddenly opened and we had to get off. The whole family, we were taken to block 28.... The SS physicist, dr. Josef Mengele found me in the camp hospital and I had to work for him as a messenger.... I was there when Mengele looked for twins for his experiments. I had to take them to him, and then give them some special numbers. I was not allowed to be present when he was experimenting; he always sent me somewhere else. However, I once happened to be in the room when Mengele was experimenting. I saw him put drops of some kind of liquid in the children's eyes, after which they started to have very dilated pupils. A few days later, I saw the bodies of those children at the morgue.

(Excerpt from the testimony of Helmut Clemens, a former Roma prisoner at Auschwitz)

... I remember this very precisely: I was in a suit, wearing white shoes, a hat and a tie. We had to get into some kind of room where they took everything from us. I protested; I was immediately beaten for the first time. We had to undress and then they cut our hair. I was in the BIIe camp, the so-called Gypsy Camp. (...) We're going to Kapo to work in Buchenwald. There was supposed to be more food there. My mother cried when we were separated and told me to take care of myself. I never saw her afterwards. She was gassed in the night of August 2, the night of the liquidation of the camp.

(Excerpt from the testimony of Franz Rosenbach, born into a settled Roma family in Austria, deported to Auschwitz in the spring of 1943)

These fragments of interviews were taken from Slawomir, K. Martyniak M. , Talewicz-Kwiatkowska J. (2011) *Voices of Memory 7. Roma in Auschwitz*, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

... They picked us up from Suroaia, thirty carts, because my father was a Roma-head (bulibasă). He had thirty carts under his command, and we had to walk for three months. Village after village, and when we got to another village, we were escorted by another police officer. And so on. We drove our carts continuously for three months until we crossed the border.

(Dănilă Mimi, Romanian Roma, 79 years old, interviewed in 2009 by Adrian Nicolae Furtuna. The interview was published in Furtună A.N. Grigore D. Neacșu M. (2010) *De ce nu plang?..... Holocaustul Rromilor și povestea lui adevărată*, Centrul Rromilor „Amare Rromentza”, București).

They said that they were giving us land and other things, but we understood the matter. Others told us that they were making a cardboard ship and putting us all in there and sending us across the water. But it wasn't. That's what others said. Still, they took us to kill us. Then, a herd of gypsy carts from Sinaia passed by and the



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Queen saw them. "Where are you taking them? Who are they? Gypsies. But where are you taking them? We are taking them to Transnistria. Why? To kill them. Are you crazy? Put them to work in agriculture, don't kill anyone! Put them to work in agriculture!" See? That was it! Here came the order not to kill anyone. Now, many died of cold, and hunger, but to kill them, to shoot them, no! They never did it anymore.

(Kaizer Stănescu, 94 years old, Ivești, Galați County, Roma Kalderash, interviewed in May 2016 by Maria Luiza Medeleanu).

For example, after about 3 or 4 months, because of the dirt, the lack of food and water, an epidemic of typhoid fever began - a contagious disease. It could be transmitted. This disease was very dangerous because people no longer had any clothes, as what they had when they left was worn out, destroyed and they were left naked, barefoot, and unwashed. Therefore, this epidemic disease appeared. And they died. For example, when these gendarmes came to pick them up and to take them to work in the field, the ones who they found dead, they came with a cart, threw them in, and took them to the trenches that remained after the war. They threw them into the trenches and covered them with earth.

(Constantin Brăilă, 85 years old, Bucharest, born in Alexandria, Roma silversmith, interviewed by Luiza Medeleanu and Adrian Nicolae Furtuna in May 2016).

In summary, the main aspects of the Roma Holocaust in Europe are:

- ▶ In 1940 began the deportations of the Roma from Germany and Austria to German-occupied Poland, where they were placed in ghettos with the Jews;
- ▶ About 21,000 Roma from 12 countries died in Auschwitz;
- ▶ Other Roma in Europe had the same fate in other concentration camps;
- ▶ Unfortunately, it is not possible to estimate the exact number of the Roma Holocaust victims during World War II; however, there is a consensus among several researchers that approximately half a million Roma from all over Europe were exterminated during this period.

7. The Consequences of History on Roma Culture and Interethnic Relations

When discussing the Roma slavery and Holocaust, it is also important to emphasise that these two major events still have a visible impact in the Roma community from today. As Gaspar Gyorgy argues in his work *The Invisible Child*, we carry in our genes the feelings



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and experiences of our ancestors. Therefore, each generation has the opportunity to heal its traumas and leave to future generations a smooth path on which to build their life story. Gaspar explains that over time there is an exchange of energy and a flow of information between people and implicitly between generations. For example, a life situation involving a trauma that had not been properly processed and integrated can reach future generations, and the lives and feelings of the descendants may be influenced by what happened in the past (Gyory, 2016, p.78).

Gaspar also claims that we can extend this logic to the system of information transmission that occurs at higher levels, such as the national or cultural one. The cultural context and the events from the past influence both our feelings and our whole life, if this past has not been reconciled and integrated. However, when a life experience is integrated and accepted, the legacy passed on to the descendants is harmonious. This process does not involve the loss of identity, but it refers to accepting differences and sustaining the existing connection (Gyory Gaspar, 2016, *ibid*).

The same applies for the Roma, as their enslavement in the Romanian Lands lasted for about 500 years, which affected both adults and children, who were separated from their families, exchanged with other slaves or even animals, donated or sold, in accordance with their masters' interests. Slavery placed them on the fringes of the society and excluded them from the condition of human beings. As seen in the law extracts presented above, Roma people were considered "moving goods", which meant that they could be sold whenever their masters decided. Neither their liberation nor the modification of their name in the official documents from slaves to "emancipated Romanians" changed their status in the society. History shows this change was limited only to a legal emancipation and sometimes a forced sedentism of the Roma without developing policies for their inclusion in the Romanian society, economy and culture.

As a result, the consequences of slavery persist even today in the collective mind of Roma and non-Roma, influencing their self-esteem and implicitly their relationships with others. The study carried out in 2013 by the Association "Amare Rromentza" analyses the discourse of the



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Roma regarding their relations with others and with themselves. Features of the identity stigma were present in the speech of those interviewed: *What do you want from me? I'm a gypsy. Do you think I'll be the boss? That's how we gypsies are... more backward. I have four years of school, too much for a gypsy. Have you seen somewhere a gypsy priest?* (Grigore, Neascu, and Furtuna, 2013 p.51).

The other event that continued to affect the Roma community both culturally and socially was the Holocaust of the Second World War. Due to this tragic history, the Roma have developed a culture of survival, and not one of memory, as remembering the suffering can lead to the repetition of suffering (Grigore, Neacșu, Furtună, 2013, p.25).

The failure to assume their ethnic identity as Roma is another consequence of the Holocaust even nowadays. Fearing persecution and discrimination, Roma avoid assuming their ethnic identity in public, especially since they do not feel encouraged to do so by the others.

Therefore, the marginalization and historical social exclusion of the Roma have created in time a socio-cultural gap between the Roma population and the majority. They have negatively influenced the self-image of the Roma.

8. Roma Migration Today

The historical gaps between the Roma and the major population continue to have multiple effects, one of them being the migration of Roma from Eastern to Western European countries, mostly to Spain, Italy, France, and Germany.

The main reason why the Roma people have left their native countries, especially Romania and Bulgaria, but also Serbia and Poland, is an economic one, which is strongly associated with this policy of rejection, marginalization and discrimination, including in the labour market. All these are correlated with the poor management of the services provided by the authorities (health care services, social assistance, and housing) and strongly influenced by the problems in the educational system, which fails to intervene appropriately, and follows the same direction of marginalization, rejection and discrimination.



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The societies from these Eastern European countries follow the same pattern regarding public policies, showing the same tendencies associated with rejection, marginalization and a fundamental lack of interest in understanding the Roma community. Furthermore, there is no realistic intent to support its evolution while respecting certain internal values and principles. At the next level, there is no attempt to borrow the positive aspects of the Roma culture in order to enrich their own life experience and culture. At most, both the authorities and the societies as a whole have pursued a policy of assimilation, causing a loss in the Roma identity, culture, and language.

The danger of cultural, linguistic, and identity assimilation is also a consequence of the recent Roma migration. In France, for example, various studies indicate that there is a real pressure under many forms in this regard. According to Cousin (2020), the pressures are related to the French way of integration and its injunctions, thus confusing integration with assimilation, as integration involves a number of conditions, such as 'you must speak French', 'your children must go to school', 'you must accept administrative relocation'.

Even though Roma emigrated from their countries of origin many times in recent centuries, and some have already been in the countries of residence for several generations, they still carry the historical and cultural heritage of their birthplaces. Thus, the cultural background of the Roma from different regions becomes very important in the interactions with the population of the countries where they go. Another important aspect is the way the society relates to these new groups of Roma arriving and settling in Western European cities, and the willingness of people and local authorities to understand them, their past and identity. The specialised literature in recent Roma migration calls this phenomenon *autochthony*, which is "the process of affirming group membership from an external, historical legacy of previous administrative and symbolic boundaries. We prefer to speak of autochthony and not of territorial embeddedness to emphasise the symbolic dimension of the legacy of the past" (Cousin, 2020). In contrast with the notion of *autonomy*, *autochthony* focuses on the symbolic home-grown nature of group boundaries, looking at long-term family territorial belonging (Cousin et al, 2020).



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Another element that influences the settlement and development of the Roma communities in different regions of Europe is that of brotherhood. This is one of the fundamental principles of the traditional Roma culture. Thus, through the interaction between the Roma families or groups, which can sometimes come from different regions or countries (Romania and Bulgaria), and on the background of this fraternity, the relations within the newly formed community are strengthened. This can also be helpful in resolving a variety of situations, such as mediating the relations with the public authorities, and finding jobs or housing for the newly arrived families. Help and support is provided from within the community, from those who arrived earlier in that region. In other words, the permanent reconfiguration of the Roma communities in these areas reproduces the models from their countries of origin, including values and principles such as that of the fraternity (*Phralipen* in Romani language).

Different groups of Roma settled in Western European countries generations ago, and there are links between the families who left first and the people or groups who came later. The genealogical bonds were formed mainly based on the blood line, but also on other criteria, namely the place of origin, the community, village or city where the Roma came from. This phenomenon was also noticed by other researchers, such as Cousin et al, who mentions that: "These migratory chains were identified as a major 'push factor' in contemporary Romanian emigration to Western Europe and, more specifically, as an important factor for Roma migration" (Cousin et al, 2020).

In summary, these are the main aspects regarding the historical consequences and their effects in the development of the Roma communities:

- Low ethnic self-esteem;
- Identity stigma;
- Non-assumption of ethnic identity;
- Socio-economical and educational gap between Roma and non-Roma;
- Historical stigma for Roma;
- Discrimination and marginalization;
- Recent migration of Roma from Eastern to Western European countries.



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9. Roma Traditions - Cultural Barriers in Mentoring?

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this project, only by knowing the history and culture of a people and understanding their specifics, one can truly adapt to the needs of that group. The risk of not knowing leads to misunderstanding and misbehaviour in certain situations, and a lack of necessary and appropriate support for that community.

This chapter aims to present elements of both traditional and contemporary Roma culture; so that Roma and non-Roma mentors can have a better understanding of the communities they work with, and subsequently, they are able to act accordingly. The elements presented here are universally valid for Roma culture; however, some of them are more specific to Romania, because they are the most familiar to the authors, and most of the Roma immigrants in Western Europe come from this country.

Romanipen elements

The Romanipen or the Fundamental Law of the Roma, as it is called by Delia Grigore, a Roma ethnologist, who studied Roma traditions and culture, is based on four main pillars that constitute the most important values of the Roma community:

phralipe (fraternity) - form of mutual aid and shared responsibility;

pakiv (respect) - how community members relate to or should relate to each other;

ujimos (purity) - norm of social control, refers especially to the purity (virginity) of the girl at marriage;

lajimos (shame) – children are educated in the spirit of shame, so as not to violate the norms of moral conduct that could make the family to be ashamed.

Roma marriage

One of the most important events in the traditional Roma culture is marriage, the family being one of the central values. According to Delia Grigore, this has several stages: the



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marriage proposal, the engagement, the confirmation through the wedding night vow, and the rite of final integration - the celebration of the virginity of the bride (Grigore, 2012, p. 81).

At the marriage proposal, the boy's parents bring to the girl's parents a wineskin wrapped in a red shawl, to which gold money is tied. This symbolic gift, of representation and confirmation of the communion, is the arvuna (a promise/assurance of the relationship between the two people – so that the girl can no longer be available to date other boys) for the girl. The exchange of gifts during the engagement, at the wedding and at the pakiv table, constitutes a mandatory ritual gesture, a sign of mutual trust and understanding.
(Ibid. p. 81)

The wedding night is marked by the verification of the bride's virginity by old and respectable women. If the bride was a virgin, the mother-in-law validates her honour with the confirmation gift - the golden coins necklace - and the "rachia" dance, when the blood-stained sheet or shirt is sprinkled with brandy, in order to fertilize the couple. This ritual is exclusively feminine, men do not participate, but they are announced by the symbolic gesture of being invited to wash their hands and sit at the table confirming the marriage – the celebration of the bride's virginity and, at the same time, the consummation of the nuptial act (Ibidem).

Romani justice for peace

Another important aspect in the traditional Roma culture is the Romani peace trial or Kris Romani. Usually, the justice for peace process begins when the victim sends judges to the guilty party. The guilty-one must also have judges, and then the discussions begin. The discussion with the witnesses is held separately. After the discussions, the judges go to a neutral place and debate, and after the debates, they give the verdict to each party. The way every situation is judged and resolved is another important particularity. The main results that have to be achieved are peace, conflict avoidance and order in society. The emphasis is not on punishing the offender, but on finding a balanced way for the parties to

be satisfied. Most of the time, the offender has to pay a sum of money, determined by the judges, to the victim in order to reconcile. Therefore, the role of such a judgment is to restore order in society and to regulate transactions between people, to make peace and not to punish.

Traditional Roma clothes

The traditional Roma clothing is an important element in its culture. They are not just simple clothes, but it has a whole meaning, exemplifying the philosophy on which this culture is based, namely the pure / impure dichotomy.

Delia Grigore claims in her paper "*Romanipen. Fundamente ale Culturii Rromani*"

The whole philosophy of life in the traditional Roma culture is based on the opposition pure / uzo - impure / maxrime; the purity of the ritual representing the observance of the universal order and harmony through the conformity to the model, and the impurity of the ritual, invisible but spiritually strong, being the deviation from the model, thus breaking the intra-community balance pre-established by a series of conduct and behaviour laws, whose validity has long been verified by experience. Starting from this opposition (pure / impure), a fairly high number of rules refer to the human body and ritual hygiene, starting from the idea that the human body is divided into two parts, above the waist - the upper pure part and below the waist - the lower impure part."

(Ibid. p. 90)

Thus, Roma women (especially those from the Kalderash branch) do not wear dresses or other pieces of clothing in one piece, because they do not delimit the impure body from the pure one, the norm being to accurately draw the demarcation line between the bottom and the upper part of the body.

As for the men's suit, the head covering - the hat - is a very important element because it is pure, and nothing human can pass over it, just as it cannot pass over the head. "If a woman passes over a man's hat or accidentally touches it with her skirt, the hat is thrown." (Ibid. p.



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92). Also, the lower part of the body must be permanently covered; Roma men wear long pants, never shorts, as the knees are an impure part of the body.

The Roma branches/families

According to the socio-occupational criterion, the Roma are divided into several families and branches. In the traditional culture of the Roma, the notion of race does not refer to the kinship of blood, but to the grouping of the Roma according to the following common elements: the traditional profession, the structures of social organization, and the family customs. The branches listed below are valid especially for the Roma in Romania:

- **Ursari Roma** (Bear trainers Roma) - they are those who, in the past, were engaged in "walking" with the bear. Now most of them are involved in trade businesses.
- **Musician Roma** - they are Roma musicians, especially instrumentalists, coming mainly from *Ursari* and *Vătrași*.
- **Boyash (Rudari) Roma** - most of them have lost their mother tongue and the traditional Romani culture, they deal with wood processing, making spoons, spindles, forks, furniture, wickerwork;
- **Kalderash Roma** - they are the Roma who, in their majority, have kept their mother tongue and traditional Romani culture. They are spread in the Oltenia region, in the following counties: Vâlcea, Dolj, Olt, Gorj and Mehedinți, but also in the Transylvanian region, especially in Sibiu and Alba-Iulia. They are the Roma whose traditional trade is the processing of copper from which they make boilers, cauldrons, trays, kettles
- **Silversmith Roma** - they are the Roma who traditionally process silver and gold and make jewellery and other ornaments. The vast majority of them are keepers of the traditional Roma culture and the Romani language.
- **Tinsmith Roma** - they are the Roma who in the past were engaged in smelting or tinning metal vessels. Most of them are keepers of the traditional Roma culture and the Romani language. They speak the Tinsmith Roma dialect with Turkish influences.



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- **Flower-sellers Roma (*boldeni*)** - there are the Roma who in the past used to make artificial flowers for wreaths, and garlands. Nowadays, they sell flowers and do business in general.
- **Hungarian Roma (*Gabori*)** - They are Hungarian Roma, who speak both Hungarian and Romani, settled mainly in Transylvania (Romania), who were traditionally tinsmiths, but today they also trade carpets, blankets, and other household items.

Roma symbols

International Roma flag - It was adopted at the first International Roma Congress in London in 1971, and it consists of blue, red and green. The blue colour symbolizes the sky - freedom and cleanliness, a boundless space. The green colour symbolizes the Earth - the places where the Roma always wander, because they traditionally establish a temporary stop in green forests and fields. The wheel with red spokes - symbolizes the Road of Life of the Roma community.

The international Roma anthem is "Gelem, gelem" ("I walked, I walked"), composed by Žarko Jovanović, which was also adopted at the first International Roma Congress in London in 1971.

International Roma Day - Since 1990, April 8 - the International Roma Day has been celebrated around the world. It was also established at the 1971 International Roma Congress.

Romani language (*rromani čhib*) - is the language spoken by the Roma and is similar to other languages in northern India (Punjab). The Romani language is spoken by millions of Roma from all continents. There are several dialects of the Romani language, but also an internationally standardized literary language that is studied both in the pre-university and academic environment. Also, in 1997 it was established the Department of Romani Language and Literature inside the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature of the



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University of Bucharest. Since 1995, a series of textbooks and teaching materials have been developed, and they contribute to the process of studying the Romani language in the educational system.

Contemporary Roma Theatre – The first to be mentioned here is the feminist Roma theatre company Giuvlipen (formed by two Roma actresses Mihaela Dragan and Zița Moldovan) which staged plays such as *Del Duma (Tell Them About Me)*, a play that addresses the subject of early marriages through the stories of four characters. Another play by the Giuvlipen Theatre Company worth mentioning is *Who Killed Somna Granca*, a play about the educational and family challenges faced by a Roma teenager from a traditional family who wants to continue her studies.

Another Roma actress and director is Alina Șerban, who staged plays like *Marea Rușine (The Great Shame)* - a play that deals with the subject of Roma slavery in the Romanian Lands and its consequences in the Roma and non-Roma collective mentality. Alina Șerban also developed the “I declare on my own” - a play that brings to the public's attention the challenges and discrimination that Roma adolescents face, as well as the identity traumas they go through in a world that is not favourable for them to express their identity. Moreover, Alina Șerban has starred in international productions such as “Alone at My Wedding” or “Gypsy Queen”, which discusses the condition of the modern Roma woman. As a director, she has developed the short film “Letter of Forgiveness”, which addresses the subject of Roma slavery.

Contemporary Roma Fine Arts - There have been a number of European initiatives in recent times aimed at cementing a transnational Roma identity, such as the *European Roma Initiative* and the *European Roma Institute* supported by the Foundation for an Open Society. In Romania, the contemporary Roma painter Eugen Raportoru, the sculptor Marian Petre, and the painters Viorel Curt and George Vasilescu analyse the main cultural elements of the Roma community and question them. Worthy to be mentioned here is the



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graphic art exhibitions about Roma Holocaust and Roma Slavery made by Viorel Curt in collaboration with *Romane Rodimata Centre for Roman Cultural and Social Research*.

Roma Music - Although in the public space Roma are generally associated musically with *lăutari* and, in recent times, with *manele*, there are other important musicians and the musical presence of Roma is much more diverse. Some of the most appreciated cultural expressions after 1990 are Taraful Haiducilor (Clejani), Ciocârlia fanfare, and Zece Prăjini Band. They have been noticed especially abroad. In addition, there is also the band Mahala Rai Banda (2004) who plays a mix of fiddle music and electronic music. Also, the Roma jazz was very well represented by Johnny Răducanu (1931-2011). In recent times, Damian Drăghici has also been noted for playing the panpipes and he is internationally recognized. Moreover, worth mentioning are the violinist Ion Voicu, who is a great performer, and the young pop music singer - Connect-r, well known to the general public.

Roma Literature – Internationally known, Ekaterina Taikon from Sweden is a writer and activist for Roma rights. She wrote the well-known children's series "Katitzi" which present the writer's childhood. Bronislaw Wajs - Papsza, a Polish writer, Holocaust survivor whose poems speak of this lesser-known episode in Roma history and of the difficulties faced by traditional Roma women. It is worth mentioning the Roma writer Mateo Maximoff from France with his book "The Price of Freedom", a work that deals with the period of Roma slavery in Romania.

In Romania, Lumința Cioaba is a Roma writer from the Kaldaresh family, a member of the Romanian Writers' Union who publishes in Romani, Romanian and German. Among her most important writings are the volumes of poems "Rădăcina Pământului" (Earth Root), "Negustorul de Ploaie" (Rain merchant) and the volume of stories "Țara pierdută" (Lost country), as well as the plays Blestemul Șarpelui (Snake' curse) and "Macul Roșu" (The red poppy). Another contemporary Roma writer from the Kalderash family was Valerică Stănescu. He wrote "With Death in the Eye" (Cu Moartea în ochi), a novel that approaches



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the life of the Roma in Transnistria, and “the Laws of Şatra” (Legile Şatrei), whose main subject is Roma traditions and culture. Valerică Stănescu's works are published both in Romani and Romanian. There are other younger poets who publish in Romani and Romanian, such as Daniel Samuil Petrilă, who organizes since 2017 the yearly Roma literature contest "Bronislaw Wajs" (Papusza), and Sorin Sandu, poet and actor from the Ursari family.

Roma civic and cultural institutions – The two international institutions to be mentioned here are IRU (International Roma Union), which has been active for more than 10 years on Roma rights, history and culture, and also the newly established Institute for the Promotion of Roma Culture at International Level - ERIAC Roma Institute for Arts and Culture).

In Romania, there are other two institutions. *The National Agency for Roma* is a state structure whose role is to implement national strategies to improve the situation of Roma in Romania. *The National Centre for Roma Culture* promotes traditional and contemporary Roma culture.

Briefly:

- ▶ The Roma are an international population with a common and international language;
- ▶ They have their own traditional and modern culture;

Part III - Concrete Measures and Future Directions

More than 10 million Roma live in Europe, and there are a number of legal instruments in the European Union that respect their rights. One of the most important is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which prohibits any form of discrimination based on reasons such as race, colour, ethnic or social origin, and sexual orientation (Article 21). Articles on freedom and solidarity include the right to education (Article 14), as well as access to healthcare (Article 35). The Charter also imposes an



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obligation to ensure "a dignified life for all those who do not have sufficient resources" (Article 34). This directive is legally binding on all EU Member States and requires them to adopt a national law that includes its provisions. Directive 2000/43 / EC protects Roma against discrimination based on ethnicity in the field of employment, social protection and security, social benefits, education and access to the provision of goods and services. The Directive requires Member States to set up bodies for the promotion of equal treatment, which can process individual complaints of discrimination on the grounds set out in the Directive. In addition, no rights exist separately, but rather should be considered in relation to other rights and rules. For example, Roma, like other EU citizens, have the right to free movement (Directive 2004/38) and the right to reside in any EU Member State without any conditions, for a maximum period of three months. After this period, they must prove that they have a job or sufficient resources to support themselves (Articles 6 and 7). If they cannot prove this, they may be considered "an excessive burden on the social assistance system" (Article 14). This may involve the loss of the right of residence as well as the right to any social benefits. However, most of the time, this affects the poorest people in society. Under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, states are also obliged to adopt specific policies for the explicit protection of minorities and the creation of conditions to allow the development of their culture. This is the first legally binding document dedicated to the protection of minority rights. In addition to individual rights, there are rights that explicitly recognize and protect specific communities. These are communities with fewer people than the rest of the population of a given state, who are nationals of that state and who have different ethnic, linguistic or cultural characteristics than those of that population (UN definition). Another important instrument on cultural diversity at European level is the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted in 2001. This international document stipulates the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. In this sense, at present, Roma can learn in their mother tongue in schools if they request, and they can learn Romani language at the University at European level. Here are some important universities in Europe where the Romani language can be studied by those interested: INALCO Paris



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(National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations), CEU (Central European University) Budapest, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, Department of Romanian Language and Literature. They have affirmative measures for Roma students in University and High Schools in Romania. Also, Roma have the right to express their cultural identity in the educational process, art, literature, media, and representative cultural institutions (museums, theatres, and research institutes). Moreover, they have political representation in the countries where they live both centrally and locally, and also at European level. They have the right to form political parties or non-governmental associations to protect their civil rights.

Although the promotion and respect of the rights of this minority has become an important policy at European level, Roma continue to be victims of physical violence, social and cultural exclusion and discrimination in Europe. Most of the time, the rights of the Roma are not known first by themselves, but neither by the relevant institutions nor by society as a whole. Therefore, unfortunately these rights are not accessed by the Roma, and thus they remain inactive. Moreover, the importance and usefulness of a mentoring programme that supports Roma to know and demand their rights is increasing.

Unfortunately, mentoring, at the level of European countries, is not seen as a concrete measure that can improve the relationship between the Roma communities and different institutions, organizations, or society as a whole. First of all, public authorities in areas with a high number of Roma, or in regions populated by Roma immigrants, do not consider mentoring as a solution and do not value the benefits that mentoring programmes can bring: create better relationships with people, connect with them and better understand their way of thinking and the way they live. Mentored people feel valued and important for themselves, for the community, and for the society. Mentored people can achieve economic and social stability, and life skills through learning. These help them gain self-confidence and contribute significantly to their character building. Also, a well-structured mentoring programme can have clear objectives, activities and schedule for a certain



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period of time that can significantly streamline the relationship between the Roma community and the authorities, institutions, associations and society. In addition, a mentoring programme can emphasize the identity and cultural specificity of Roma, which can contribute to the personal development of the individuals and groups they belong to, as well as to the development and enrichment of the societies with which they interact, through mutual influence and exchange of the positive aspects from one culture to another.

Thus, our proposal is that such mentoring programmes containing the above elements should be adopted as public policies and implemented consistently, especially in Roma-populated areas, both in the countries where they have lived for generations, and where they currently live as a result of the recent emigration.

Another step that is missing, or not fully in place, is that of affirmative measures for Roma, which would reduce the historical gap as a result of historical persecutions, primarily the Roma Holocaust and Roma Slavery in Romania, and also of general policies and tendencies to marginalize and discriminate Roma.

The following are the most important affirmative measures for Roma:

- Provide special places for them in the educational system, in high school or college;
- Implement additional scholarships for Roma pupils and students;
- Support the implementation of a Roma representative, or a political party representing the interests of the Roma, at local level (Local Council) and at central level (Parliament);
- Facilitate the integration of Roma into the labour market;
- Simplify the process of obtaining basic documents from the authorities, such as identity documents or property deeds;
- Provide equitable health services to people with low or no income;
- Facilitate the acquisition of housing, especially in the case of extended families;
- Grant the right to learn in their mother tongue Romani;



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- Develop cultural programmes to encourage Roma cultural productions, in theatre, literature, music, fine arts and including Roma in cultural institutions (museums, theatres, research institutes, etc.), and cultural media.

These measures should be continued and consolidated where they already exist, for example in Romania, and to be introduced and implemented where they do not exist and are in great need, such as Bulgaria.

Another worrying issue which directly influences the relationship between Roma (individual and group) and public authorities, institutions, associations and society as a whole, is the discrimination, or rather the lack of concrete and effective measures in combating it. Here is a concrete example in this regard, from the experience of the educational programmes of REF Romania, in which a Roma student was not treated properly during the stage of admission to college. She was not given all the details regarding the occupation of a special place for Roma students, more precisely what are the stages and what needs to be done step by step. As a result, she was unable to obtain that place, and she received no explanation why she was not admitted or what she could do next. The situation improved only with the intervention of a Roma professor from the faculty who accompanied the student to discuss the case. Thus, she alone could not obtain all the necessary information, and she was not given all the details about her particular case. Most importantly, she was not provided with any solution. Last but not least, this example highlights the importance of a mentor to mediate such problematic cases that require the intervention and additional help of someone who represents the interests of the person concerned.

The cases of discrimination are multiple and encountered in all areas: education, work, interactions with public authorities, state or private institutions, media, relations at the level of mixed communities, street, public transport, shops or public places. The focus is on the cases of discrimination by private institutions or companies, which seem to be more



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numerous, virulent and sometimes even violent, aggressive and with an increased impact on the self-esteem of the Roma involved in such situations. Examples can be found in all European countries, and here are three similar experiences taken from meetings within our project, in which the access of young Roma to enter a swimming pool was denied on ethnic grounds. This situation was reported in Germany, Bulgaria and Romania. Thus, under the motivation that the respective private places have the right to select their clients, the respective young people and children were not allowed to enter, according to the ethnic criterion associated with the skin colour.

The media and the Internet is another area where Roma discrimination is growing in a worrying way. Thus, TV programmes, news, series or entertainment programmes, in order to benefit from rating and profit, promote different stereotypes about Roma that damage their self-esteem and overall vision of the Roma community, culture and values. The Internet has also become a free space where racist comments can hardly be fought, complained about or sanctioned. Therefore, the proposal is to set up local or national anti-discrimination councils, or at least commissions in local or central institutions to act in this field. Representatives of these institutions or commissions would have the responsibility to report acts of discrimination, or to support the resolution of cases reported at individual or group level, including through petitions, using national and European documents and regulations to penalize situations of discrimination.

Regarding the lack of Roma cultural and identity specificity in education, administration, media and society in general (apart from artistic performances that promote stereotypes and the exotic image of Roma, most often associated with dance and music, or, worse, with negative stereotypes not listed here), a possible way to value Roma culture and history, Romani language, specific symbols and features, would be to hold training courses for representatives of relevant institutions working with Roma, such as social workers, school mediators, health mediators, school principals, teachers, representatives of public authorities, etc.), for a better understanding of the Roma cultural specificity in order to



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improve their ability to relate and interact with them. In addition, in the countries where the Roma minority is present, in order to truly respect and value them, it is necessary to take concrete measures through which fundamental elements of Roma culture, such as language, anthem, flag, history have to be found in the national curriculum.

To conclude:

- ▶ About 10 million Roma live in Europe;
- ▶ At the level of the European Union there are a number of legal instruments that defend their rights;
- ▶ Unfortunately, these tools are not fully known or applied either by Roma or the responsible institutions;
- ▶ Neither Roma nor the majority of the population know the Roma history or the International Roma cultural symbols because Roma History is not taught in schools;
- ▶ Roma people remain marginalized, discriminated and not valued in the European society;
- ▶ They continue as a vulnerable group even if they are recognized as a national minority;
- ▶ The existence of mentoring programmes that facilitate the understanding and communication of Roma communities can lead to a significant improvement in the problematic situations that Roma face in different regions of Europe;
- ▶ The benefits of a mentoring programme include adding value to the Roma culture and the intercultural exchange, facilitating the transfer of positive aspects from one culture to another.

About the Authors

Luiza Medeleanu is a PhD student in the field of Cultural Studies at the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School "Space, Image, Text, Territory", Center of Excellence in Image Study (CESI), Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, with her doctoral thesis "Image of Roma in cinematography and cultural media productions. Ethics of fictionality and cultural identity", coordinated by Professor Caius Dobrescu. She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Romani-English department, a Master in Philosophy from the University of Bucharest and one in Anthropology from SNSPA. For over 10 years she has been working in the Roma non-governmental field, coordinating educational activities with Roma theme and intercultural character. At the same time, she develops intercultural training methodologies for teachers, for children and parents.

Alexandru Zamfir works as an Educational Expert within the Roma Education Fund. He has worked and coordinated numerous activities in the projects implemented by the foundation, involving mentoring activities with students and teachers from partner schools, as well as mediating and developing relationships between public authorities, school, family, and community. In addition to this activity, Alexandru monitored the implementation of a set of Methodologies developed by REF Romania on Roma inclusion in the education system, he coordinated the development of a Guide to good practice in education and wrote the Sustainability report for the project "Formal and non-formal education for sustainable development in the Center region " which aims at involving various public institutions in the continuation of project activities after its completion. He is currently coordinating the work of an expert working group to write a Methodology aimed at including specific elements of Roma culture in the Romanian National Curriculum.

Alexandru Zamfir is also a professor at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, where he teaches the Romani language and other courses on Roma culture, history and literature.



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