



UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR DIACONAL ORGANISATIONS ON ROMA PARTICIPATION

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THIS DOCUMENT IS AN UPDATED VERSION OF THE
*2014 GUIDELINES FOR DIACONAL ORGANISATIONS ON
ROMA PARTICIPATION.*



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About this document

The aim of this document is to provide guiding principles for diaconal (or other) organisations who are developing or re-evaluating existing projects with Roma communities. This internal document is intended to be a flexible resource, proposing some starting points for reflection on how to ensure participation and empowerment of Roma communities and individuals. It is based on the conviction that top-down approaches have a limited effect and that projects aimed at Roma inclusion should actively involve Roma at all stages. Only a participatory approach will allow Roma to take co-ownership of the project or service, and to be empowered by the process.

This document is an updated version of the *2014 Guidelines for Diaconal Organisations on Roma participation*. This recent version has been based on discussions held by Eurodiaconia members at the 2023 Network meeting on Roma inclusion in Bratislava, Slovakia. It provides guidelines which come directly from representatives of diaconal and church-related organisations working with Roma communities; during the meeting, participants discussed how their respective organisations worked with Roma in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their services/projects. On this basis, they explored which methods work, or do not work, to ensure Roma involvement and co-ownership of projects.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

OUR MISSION

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

Editor: Anne-Sophie, Wislocki

Authors: Gisela, Guari Cañada

Designer : Donata, Cagnato

OUR VISION

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.



PROMOTING ROMA PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVELY

Diaconal organisations believe that all people are made in the image of God and that everyone is equipped with unique skills, ideas, and competences, which should be nourished, and which can enrich the lives of others. They provide services which allow users to develop these skills and they aim at empowering individuals to fulfil their potential. This empowerment is a continuous process rather than a one-off event; it is driven by Christian values and societal needs.

Eurodiaconia acknowledges that some specific groups of the society, for instance, Roma communities, feel discriminated when accessing public services. All public services should be equally accessible for all and consider the needs and requests of service beneficiaries and involve them in decision-making processes, to allow them to gain co-ownership over the process of service delivery. This is not only a precondition of empowerment; it can also have a positive impact on service quality, as it allows a better understanding of the beneficiaries' wishes, capabilities and needs. Services can be adapted to the specific requirements of individuals, which also boosts user satisfaction.

Experience shows that empowerment is effective in the prevention of institutionalisation and service dependency by fostering autonomy and inspiring progress.



Our members agree that beneficiaries should be offered the opportunity, as well as any necessary support, to participate in the provision of services if they so wish – however, they should not be obliged to do so. In addition, beneficiaries should be free to choose whether they would like to use a service or not. Public services should be equally accessible for all members of a society, regardless of their country of origin, background, race, religion, or gender.

EMPOWERMENT & INCLUSION

- **Start from the needs of the local Roma communities.** The first step is to support Roma in setting their individual objectives, identifying the existing challenges, and exploring ways of achieving the desired outcomes.
- **Establish short, medium, and long-term goals and objectives.** Identify general goals and specific objectives which will lead to concrete end results and step-by-step achievable goals.
- **Involve Roma in the running of projects and service centres to create co-ownership.** Involve Roma from the early planning stages and not only during the implementation phase. Thus, involve specific groups of Roma population in the development, implementation, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation.
- **Ensure transparency of the participation process.** Disseminate clear and accessible information about the project or service to ensure participants are aware of its aims and underlying expectations.
- Encourage the involvement in **Roma-specific governmental consultative and advisory bodies** for ethnic and national minorities.
- **Support data collection** regularly to feed reporting, monitoring, and transparency.
- **Employ Roma as volunteers** and staff members in projects and services where possible.
- **Empower Roma to be ambassadors** for their culture in local, regional, and national level, and in their positive engagement with the media.
- **Fight antigypsyism** by raising awareness on Roma traditions, history, culture, and language.
- **Build capacity about their rights** and available administrative procedures and assist Roma to enter the regular social system.

FOSTERING TRUST & BUILDING COOPERATION

- **Build cooperation and trust** between Roma and non-Roma communities.
- **Promote Roma engagement in the political, economic, and cultural life** of the local society and create sense of belonging.
- Ensure that Roma who are working at the highest political level maintain contact with grassroots-level Roma initiatives and communities.
- **Appoint and engage local Roma mediators**, especially for children and youth work, to maintain connections between Roma and non-Roma communities.
- **Train staff working on Roma inclusion** in Civil Society Organisations to understand the core values, traditions, culture, and language of the Roma local community.
- **Invest resources into intercultural relation-building** and intercultural communication activities.
- **Take an intercultural approach to ensure positive interactions between Roma and non-Roma communities.** Promote interaction, embrace diversity, ensure equal opportunities, and active participation, and avoid segregation.
- **Provide role models and share success stories** of former service beneficiaries from the Roma community. Personal testimonies can inspire hope and trust.
- **Establish genuine partnerships**, rather than making Roma passive beneficiaries of services.
- **Support the involvement of Roma in all stages of implementation of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs) and EU funds programmes** at national, regional, and local levels, as well as in the monitoring and reporting of NRSFs. For instance, cooperating and supporting the work and involvement of National Roma Platforms or equivalent consultative and participatory processes.

TAKING A HOLISTIC & INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

- **Involve all Roma groups in the territory**, applying an intersectional approach.
- **Approach individuals in a holistic way**, which means looking beyond mere material or physical needs and considering spiritual needs. Support services for spiritual matters can greatly reinforce personal development, and in turn support the empowerment process of Roma.
- **Build capacity and develop skills** of all Roma people regardless of their age and gender.
- **Build the capacity of practitioners in social and healthcare services**, as well as security forces, and decision-makers in local Roma values, traditions, and history to consider their needs, prevent discrimination, and improve their inclusion.
- **Promote meaningful participation and consultation of Roma women, youth, elderly people, and persons with disabilities** to provide an effective support for Roma equality and non-discrimination.
- **Support Roma families** in modelling positive behaviour in the education of their children.
- **Involve parents and other family members when working with children**, to encourage them to provide further support and promote intergenerational learning.
- **Establish and strengthen multi-purpose Roma community centres** that provide a variety of services such as healthcare, development of parental skills, support for participation in education, literacy and after-school activities, and guidance and support in accessing job opportunities.

USEFUL LINKS & RESOURCES

- [European Commission's Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030.](#)
- European Commission's [Assessment report of the Member States' National Roma Strategic Frameworks](#).(2023).
- [Eurodiaconia Policy Report on Addressing Barriers for Roma to Access Employment.](#) (2022)
- [Situation of Roma in Europe- Education, Training, and Lifelong Learning.](#) European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (ERGO). 2021
- [Eurodiaconia Assessment of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks](#) (2022).
- [Eurodiaconia policy paper: 'Social Inclusion of Roma'](#) (2014)
- [Eurodiaconia briefing: 'Social inclusion of Roma'](#) (2014)
- Eurodiaconia user participation and empowerment toolkit in [English](#) , [French](#) , [German](#) and [Serbian](#) (2010)
- [Community of the Future: Challenges and New Approaches to Community Based Social Work and Diaconia from the CABLE Approach](#) (Editors Jouko Porkka and Marja Pentikäinen)
- [Participation toolkit](#) (FEANTSA), the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (October 2007)
- ["Get a different result...get people participating!"](#) Participation toolkit for organisations who provide services for people experiencing inequality, exclusion and homelessness (FEANTSA, October 2013)
- [Roma People's Participation in Civil Democracy Processes: +Respect Participatory Working Groups, Training and Information Sessions, Thematic Seminars](#) (ERIO 2011)
- [Mainstreaming empowerment of Roma grassroots women](#) (ERGO Network)
- European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) <http://www.errc.org>



Eurodiaconia

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Contact

Tel.: +32 (0)2 234 38 60
Email: office@eurodiaconia.org
Fax: +32 (0)2 234 38 65
Web: www.eurodiaconia.org



Rue Joseph II 166 – 1000 Bruxelles – Belgium



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