



Policy transfer on Roma access to housing

WG Roma inclusion & WG Homelessness

8-10 April 2019, Toulouse

Highlights and key takeaways



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TOULOUSE, 8-10 April 2019 | How can cities support Roma to move out of camps into adequate housing? This is what 35 local policy-makers and practitioners on homelessness and Roma inclusion from 15 European cities addressed during a policy transfer study visit to Toulouse. Representatives from the Council of Europe and the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights also took part in the meeting.

Over two days of workshops, site visits and discussions with the host city's leaders and beneficiaries, the visiting city delegates learned how to transfer some of the inspiring policies and practices from Toulouse to support Roma to move out of camps into adequate housing in the city. All participants improved their know-how of available housing solutions to foster Roma inclusion at local level.

Setting the scene

On the occasion of 8 April, the International Romani Day, Toulouse opened a new exhibition entitled 'Frontiers' at its municipal centre for diversity and inclusion. The exhibition showcased the milestones of integration of migrants, refugees and Roma people in France. In addition, it gave voice to real stories from refugees who came to France in search for a better life. This exhibition marked a joint kick-off for the parallel meetings of EURO CITIES WG Roma inclusion and WG Migration & Integration, both occurring on the same dates in Toulouse.

On 9 April, the Mayor of Toulouse, Jean-Luc Moudenc, opened the event with a video address in which he showed a strong commitment towards diversity and inclusion, and invited all: "Let's do the impossible possible for better social inclusion at local level".

Learning from Toulouse's approach to Roma inclusion

Since 2015, Toulouse has changed its strategic approach to Roma inclusion by shifting from the model of 'village d'insertion' (insertion villages) to piloting a new model to support Roma move out of 'bidonvilles' (camps or illegal settlements) directly into adequate housing in the city, be it social housing or regular rental on the private market. Most of the Roma people living in 'bidonvilles' come from Romania and Bulgaria, being EU citizens but not French nationals.

The city's strategic approach consists of proposing housing solutions (desegregated in the city) to each Roma family from the camps accompanied by a social support programme, which is entrusted to two services providers, insertion associations selected via public contract: SOLIHA 31 and France Horizon. These associations work together with all the adequate public services to ensure access to schooling, healthcare, literacy and learning programmes, employment and citizen involvement, which are pre-conditions to a sustainable inclusion pathway to accompany housing inclusion.

The 'Toulouse model' has three phases in managing the move out of a camp into adequate housing:

- 1. Social assessment** ('social census') - interviews with each Roma family to discuss their situation (health, employment, children's schooling etc.), identify their needs and find out their wishes for their long-term project for social inclusion.
- 2. Social accompaniment** - for a period of 4 months, five social workers are present all the time in the camp to help each Roma family with their individual applications for administrative documents (residence permits, family allowances), healthcare (mediation with health professionals), social housing, professional insertion (a job), training or French classes, depending on each situation, with the aim of having a personalised plan for social inclusion after moving out of the camp.

3. The move - upon prior notification, all families are given access to a place where to store their belongings that will be transferred to their new housing location by a moving company. The families receive orientation in a municipal centre with all counselling and support for the next steps in their inclusion pathway, which continues also after the move by case managers.

So far, 11 illegal camps have been dismantled in partnership with state services, social housing organisations and social support NGOs with financial support from the government and the city.

The success of this approach lies in:

- **Coupling housing inclusion with job insertion** - the focus is helping Roma people find a job that can pay for rent on the long term, as a building block for social inclusion.
- **Give Roma the support to access available, mainstream services and provisions** - this involves a shift from seeing Roma as vulnerable and needy to considering them as having duties and responsibilities, needs and assets, as any other residents in the city, but giving them the support from social workers to access the existing pathways towards social inclusion (training, job insertion, health mediation, clearing administrative issues etc.).
- **A steering committee** formed of the city services, state services, insertion associations and Roma organisations working together to find alternative housing for Roma families well before the moving out of camps takes place
- **Strong cooperation** between the city and state services and insertion associations (France Horizon and SOLIHA) offering complementary support to build trust with Roma people
- **Identify resource people** in the Roma camps to reassure them and involve them in the process
- **Have human resources** - social workers, interpreters etc. - present to give social support
- **Have a coordinated strategy** with clear definition of steps and roles for each stakeholder

Toulouse's measures for housing inclusion

Toulouse is one of the 23 areas in France that is piloting a Housing First approach since September 2018 until 2020 with financial support from the government. The need is great with over 10,000 people in 2017 asking for emergency housing (shelters) and over 29,000 applying for social housing, an increase of 40% in the last five years.

The approach Toulouse is taking is to shift from emergency sheltering to offering from the very beginning an autonomous housing unit with social support in view of assuming the rights and duties of being a tenant able to cover the cost of rent in the long-term. The model is being rolled out over 30 areas of Toulouse metropole in the pilot 'Un chez-soi D'Abord'.

Toulouse works to enlarge the housing offer by:

- **supporting renting in social housing** - Toulouse is working directly with 13 social landlord associations by giving rent subsidies and guarantees from the city for the tenants (by creating conditions for social support and accompaniment to ensure they stay as tenants)
- **seeking housing units in the private sector** - Toulouse aims to create a social real estate agency by 2020 to increase housing stock by giving some level of security to private landlords: e.g. guarantee for regular payment of rent, appropriate use of housing units, prevention of risks of degradation, social support to the tenants in extreme vulnerable conditions etc.
- **social support platform** - reorganise and coordinate the various types of social support by pulling efforts with financing from the state, metropole and the city to finance the accompanying for this social support (health, training, professional insertion etc.) so necessary for housing inclusion.

What works and why

To discover what works for Roma housing inclusion and why, city delegates went on a field visit to Bellefontaine neighbourhood of Toulouse, which is a deprived area but has been regenerated recently.

We spoke to Association Rencont-Roms-Nous who works in partnership with social workers from the city services to give social inclusion support to Roma people living in bidonvilles. For example, in the planning and preparation for closing down an illegal settlement, the association works with the Roma families to support them towards labour market integration and social inclusion. This is done through

language learning, job preparations (CV and mock interviews), accompanying to job centres and job interviews, partnerships with second-chance schools for vocational training etc.

While the insertion associations prepare the Roma people for jobs, the city services are actively seeking to match them with available job vacancies on the local labour market, acting as mediator and facilitator between job seekers and local employers.

A good practice that many visiting cities would like to transfer back home are the so-called 'citizenship workshops'. Such workshops are held once a month outside of the camp to allow Roma people to discover support structures in the city and to build their capacity in key life areas to become active members of the local community. For example, a workshop was held on how to apply for social housing, another on waste management, also on equality between men and women etc. The participatory approach is at the very core of all activities, Roma people being directly involved.

Another good practice presented is the project under 'Civic Service' supported by the French state, putting together French and Roma young people with the aim of teaching-learning French language while breaking down prejudices and helping each other achieve inclusion and mutual understanding.

Testimonials

Andrei, 17 years old: "I came to France in 2012 and lived in a camp for 5 years until my mum found a job and we could move into an apartment. I am here today because I don't want other children to go through the difficulties I had in the camp, I want it to be easier for them. That's why I am with association Rencont-Roms-Nous. We bring together young people who left or drop out of school."

Bulgarian woman in her 50s: "I arrived in France in August 2017 with my daughter. When I came here, I lived in the camp for a month, every day looking for a shelter. I applied to the social housing association in November 2017 and was offered shelter for 5 months. In February 2018, SOLIHA gave me a mobile home. In March 2018, I got a job. I work every day, my daughter goes to school and is very happy there and me too. Very soon, we have a visit for a new flat on the private market".

Fostering transferability of Toulouse model for Roma inclusion to other cities

Four 'transfer' cities - Cluj-Napoca, Ghent, Gothenburg and Turin - presented their Roma inclusion challenges and received feedback and ideas for solutions from peer city experts, including how to transfer lessons from Toulouse. The result was impressive and leads to concrete follow-up actions:

- **Ghent** is motivated to go on a bilateral study visit to Lille to learn about 'village d'insertion' in order to apply it with an integrated approach to find a land and put mobile homes for Roma families and provide them with social support for professional insertion and social inclusion.
- **Turin** wishes to transfer Brno's practice of increasing the stock of social housing by renovating unused public buildings where to move Roma people from camps while providing social support; the city will investigate the possibility of using EU funds for renovation as is done in Brno.
- **Gothenburg** is keen to work on improving access of EU-mobile citizen Roma to labour market by supporting them to get validation and recognition of their informal skills and incentivising employers to hire Roma people.
- **Cluj-Napoca** took back two inspiring ideas for initiatives to bridge the Roma and non-Roma communities: first, to organise a yearly Roma Week in the city with cultural events to promote the Roma culture and history, and second, to work with the universities in the city to develop training modules for public services on equal access and non-discrimination of Roma.

All city delegates worked together to develop guidelines for cities on Roma housing. The guidelines will be finalised at the next WG meeting, which will take place at the end of September 2019 in Braga.



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