

Dealing with subtle discrimination

A system of educational “incubators” brought to Roma villages may open the way to ending Roma isolation from the rest of society. Helping children with homework and teaching young adults about parenting is a first step forward

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“The main idea behind this project is to open up Roma settlements, of which Slovenia has some 128, so as to break the vicious circle of social exclusion. Most of these settlements are very small communities organised as clans, with some 25 larger ones. The Roma ethnic minority suffers overall deprivation, lacking adequate space, infrastructure, social, cultural or financial capital, and tolerance from non-Roma. They live both in cities and the countryside.



Football school is open to all children, Roma and non-Roma, girls and boys, athletes and couch potatoes

“Over the past 20 years, Slovenia has earmarked considerable funds to regulate the situation, but results have been modest. The primary aim of this project is to create conditions for members of the Roma community to escape the vicious circle of social exclusion, and to do this requires investment in social and cultural capital. We see education as the most efficient way out, and our objectives are both to increase levels of education and to raise awareness about the significance of education for the progress of the community.

“All our activities take place in the Roma villages under a programme called Roma Educational Incubators, with activities focused primarily on formal and informal education: we help Roma pupils with extra tuition and encourage the more gifted to continue their studies as long as possible, while encouraging their parents to support them.

“School assistance is usually offered either at students’ homes or nearby. Over the last three school years, 40 educators have helped more than 200 Roma children. The aim of this activity is to encourage the integration of young Roma into the educational process, improve their results, reduce school dropouts and stimulate their motivation to study.

“We also try to involve Roma children and youth, as well as their parents, in activities that will improve the quality of their spare time. These activities take place outdoors or in the shared premises of Roma settlements, and attract non-Roma people from nearby because of the quality of the offerings. They include film and photography workshops, a Roma summer camp, run mostly by young Roma academics, and a football school open to all children who want to participate. At football training, children are taught about healthy lifestyles – eating well and not smoking or drinking alcohol.

“This project ends in September 2013, and I am concerned about what will remain of our work after that date. The original idea was for these incubators to become an integral part of local policies, but now with the crisis the local communities don't seem as committed.”

The Increase in social and cultural capital in areas with a Roma population

This project is funded by the European Social Fund, and managed by Ljubljana's Institute for Ethnic Studies, among others. Its primary aim is to create conditions, through education, that will allow Roma community members to join the mainstream. See www.kethanes.si