## Workshop: “Stigmatized, Excluded and Rejected

Date, Time: Thursday, 25.03.2010, 10:30 - 12:30 and 14:15 - 16:15

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### Workshop content/theme

Society usually sees the people on its margins, especially the Roma/gypsies, as simply lazy people who do not take opportunities which allow them to join the mainstream and integrate themselves. The objective of the workshop was to question such stereotypes, to try to empathise with the situation of socially excluded and stigmatised groups and to understand that mainstream society is often not as open as we believe. By means of a role-play simulation the participants explored the life situation of socially excluded groups and thought about possible strategies to overcome this social exclusion.

### Aims

The workshop focused on the practical demonstration of the concept of social exclusion and the role the social, financial, cultural and human resources of an individual play for his/her participation in social interactions. A game was played in order to show that belonging to a group which is excluded from access to information (game rules) limits the individual’s chances to be successful in society, regardless of individual willingness. Participants in the game could eventually resort to strategies which increased their chances to be successful, however, these strategies were rule-breaking. The experience from the game helped the participants to empathise with the position of members of marginalised groups of society who are often condemned to exclusion. This exclusion is hard to overcome by means of individual effort alone and while respecting the rules of society. After the game, the issue of social exclusion (concretely of the Roma/gypsies) was discussed in the group and linked to the participants’ feelings from the game.

### Method(s)/Approach

1. At the beginning of the game, the group was divided into two sub-groups. Members of one group had to wear yellow vests and were separated from the rest of the participants (as a “segregated settlement”). They had to discuss an issue while the rest of the participants was informed about the rules of the game (at least most of them).
2. The remaining group (non-yellow) was informed about most of the game rules, and plastic cups were distributed among the group’s members.
3. All participants were asked to go to a corner signed “school”. There, everybody who had a cup could receive half a cup of Coca Cola. Those who had no cup did not receive any Coca Cola. Some members of the yellow group “stole” empty plastic cups from a nearby table in order to get some Coca Cola.
4. After “school”, the two groups returned to their respective “settlements”. The yellow group felt frustrated, because noone (or only some of them - those who had stolen plastic cups - got Coca Cola. Of both groups, some people who got Coca Cola drank it up, some drank just part of it, others left it untouched.
5. The second round of “school” was called. The rule was modified – attendees received only the same amount of Coca Cola as they had left from the previous round. Thus, those who had drunk it up and yellow-group members who had stolen empty cups between the two rounds got no extra Coca Cola. Only those who had some Coca Cola left got the double of the original quantity of Coca Cola.
6. A job interview was organised: The employer selected candidates according to the amount of Coca Cola in their plastic cups. Unless they removed their yellow vests, the candidates with the yellow vests, even those who had some Coca Cola, were excluded from the selection process “because people with yellow vests usually do not have any Coca Cola”.

7. Game over.
8. The game was interpreted in terms of social exclusion, considering diverse resources necessary to be successful in the game as well as stereotypes: To be successful in the game the participants needed some kind of material resource (plastic cups), information (game rules) granted through social networks (participation in the privileged group) and situational behaviour (not to drink the Coca Cola; to "steal" a plastic cup). The combination of these factors determined each participant's success in getting a job. Moreover, unless they removed their vests, the members of the yellow group had to face discrimination and stereotypes even if they were able to get some Coca Cola. This, however, is not possible in real life for members of many stigmatised and discriminated groups.
9. Discussion about the participants' feelings, stereotypes they have about diverse marginalised groups, experience about being discriminated because of belonging to a stigmatised group. Discussion about Roma/gypsies as a group which is systematically discriminated and excluded and about stereotypes which are not true for all Roma/gypsies.

**Further tips, sources, resource material or links**

- Dosta! Go Beyond Prejudices, Discover Roma (Campaign of the Council of Europe): http://www.dosta.org/
- European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC): http://www.errc.org
- The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap (UNDP Report): http://roma.undp.sk/
- Social Capital Gateway: http://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/

**Impressions, Outcomes of the workshop**

The topic and the game raised strong emotions; some members of the group with yellow vests said that they had felt very frustrated when they were treated unfairly. Some of them did not even want to continue the game.
A substantial difference in attitude towards the topic in participation, in discussion and in emotional involvement could be observed between two groups. While some members of the first group with participants from countries with large Roma minorities were sometimes projecting their own stereotypes about Roma/gypsies into their role performance, they were strongly emotionally engaged in the discussion of the issue. A turning point in the discussion - which had until then been very stereotype-reproducing - was a statement of one participant that, actually, not all the Roma/gypsies are the same. She mentioned that as a teacher she has also good experiences with Romani pupils. Afterwards, other participants realised that their own experiences are also not only negative and that judgements about Roma are often based on a negative image which is being reproduced as a stereotype. Lateron, participants coming from diverse countries remembered situations when their own nationality, ethnic or other group was the target of stereotyped, unfair treatment. The second group composed of participants coming from countries without large marginalised Romani populations were rather interested in facts and information on the situation of Roma in countries with a large population of marginalised Roma. In those countries, discrimination against Roma is widespread, systematic and often part of established practice, such as the placement of Romani pupils in special schools for handicapped children. Participants expressed their concerns about such practices and raised questions about why the European Union does not act against such practices, as they are obvious violations against Human Rights which are part the EU´s fundamental values.