



DGIV/EDU/ROM(2005)17

Pedagogical fact sheets in the field of Roma history and culture

Introductory fact sheet

Directorate General IV
Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education
Division of Educational Policies and European Dimension

Training tools for educational staff

The Council of Europe launched its Project “*Education of Roma children in Europe*” as part of its action to implement a Recommendation adopted in 2000 by the Committee of Ministers. Training educational staff is a major part of the Project, and involves drawing up special fact sheets for the training courses.

This document is designed to introduce the fact sheets that are circulated, explain the context and spirit in which they are produced and present their basic structure. It targets not only the users of the sheets but also anyone involved in educational activities who might be interested in using them (teachers, school mediators, inspectors and those involved in extracurricular activities such as social workers). It may also help administrative staff and decision-makers by informing them of current actions and opportunities for using the material produced under the Project, which covers all 48 States signatory to the European Cultural Convention.

The context

A reference document

The Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation No. R(2000)4 to member States on the Education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe on 3 February 2000. This Recommendation is the founding text for the Project “*The Education of Roma children in Europe*”: the Project endeavours to implement this text, and, as a reference point geared to defining and fleshing out the work, provides a vital framework for the Project.

A difficult situation

In the Recommendation the Ministers acknowledge “that there is an urgent need to build new foundations for future educational strategies toward the Roma/Gypsy people in Europe, particularly in view of the high rates of illiteracy or semi-literacy among them, their high drop-out rate, the low percentage of students completing primary education and the persistence of features such as low school attendance”.

The Ministers also note that “the problems faced by Roma/Gypsies in the field of schooling are largely the result of long-standing educational policies of the past, which led either to assimilation or to segregation of Roma/Gypsy children at school on the grounds that they were ‘socially and culturally handicapped’”.

Lastly, the Ministers consider “that the disadvantaged position of Roma/Gypsies in European societies cannot be overcome unless equality of opportunity in the field of education is guaranteed for Roma/Gypsy children” and “that the education of Roma/Gypsy children should be a priority in national policies in favour of Roma/Gypsies”.

A need

The future of Roma communities largely depends on the type of schooling provided for their children. *Active* adaptation to their environment in the social and economic fields involves acquiring basic skills that will enable them to analyse and grasp a changing reality. In the cultural field, these same basic elements can serve as tools for people wishing to maintain, affirm and develop an original identity.

An exemplary transnational dimension

In a Europe which is currently seeing the emergence of both *minorities* and greater citizen *mobility*, the Roma people provides an outstanding example of both phenomena. Over the years, since the first teacher training seminar organised by the Council of Europe in 1983, efforts to school Roma children have played a pilot role in a number of fields, especially that of intercultural education.

Developing a European approach with Roma people is a logical corollary of the fact that they constitute the numerically *largest European minority*. So the approach has:

- *demographic* legitimacy: Roma people account for some 9 million of the total European population;
- *geographic* legitimacy: Roma people live throughout Europe, with no single reference State;
- *historic* legitimacy based on centuries of existence and the marginalisation which they have suffered throughout history.

The Roma people's experience is instructive for other minorities in terms of the whole area of intra-State multiculturalism and its mode of socio-political management. Acknowledging and publicising the fact that this gives an exemplary status to the Roma people, in its dynamism and in the implementation of the corresponding activities, mean *enhancing their presence and giving a positive value to their existence*. For the Roma community this means *enhancing and giving a positive value to an image* among outsiders which is, more often than not, negative and stereotyped.

This brings us on *from an example of stigmatisation to a model for coexistence, and from a European "integration problem" to a European integration model*.

Training: a key theme

- insufficient attention has so far been paid to training for educational staff, which is a *vital driving force* for improving schooling conditions;
- the players involved, including the training course organisers and prospective trainees, are demanding *qualified training* which must become *qualifying training* for the trainees. However, there is seldom sufficient prior consultation and course complementarity, and so the

activities are scattered and repetitive, which leads to a waste of time, resources and energy, and a concomitant failure to meet the enormous needs that remain. The Project has made a considerable contribution to solving this problem, and in addition to co-ordinating and exchanging information, it strives to improve the qualifications of educational staff in general;

- this strand of the Project provides a direct response to several of the points set out in *Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2000) 4*, as follows:
 - “It is important that future teachers should be provided with specific knowledge and training to help them understand better their Roma/Gypsy pupils. The education of Roma/Gypsy pupils should however remain an integral part of the general educational system”;
 - “The curriculum, on the whole, and the teaching material should therefore be designed so as to take into account the cultural identity of Roma children. Romani history and culture should be introduced in the teaching material in order to reflect the cultural identity of Roma children. The participation of representatives of the Roma community should be encouraged in the development of teaching material on the history, culture or language of the Roma/Gypsies”.
- furthermore, many documents (official texts, reports, etc) emphasise the *priority* status of training for educational staff, which must be conducted alongside or even prior to any other activities; a well-trained teacher can cater for pupils from a variety of cultural origins, even if he or she lacks the ideal teaching or educational materials, whereas the opposite is not true: even if they have a wide range of sophisticated materials at their disposal, teachers will be unable to take full advantage of them in their teaching practice without appropriate training;
- this activity is also a *response* to the repeated recommendations from the *Roma organisations* (the first of them emerging at the 1st World Congress in 1971) and by the international institutions, with a view to promoting the development and “revival of Gypsy language and culture” (*Recommendation 1203 (1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, February 1993; other relevant texts include Resolution 249 adopted in March 1993 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, the Resolution adopted in May 1989 by the *Council and Ministers of Education of the European Union*, as well as the various *OSCE* declarations);
- this whole strand of the Project is designed from the *intercultural education* angle, designed to provide teachers with the necessary training to deal with culturally diversified pupils; the modules relating to the history, language and culture of the Roma people may be used by all teachers and not exclusively by those with Roma children in their classes. The fact sheet presentation is devised with this idea in mind.

A range of tools for training courses

In order to meet demands in the training field, the decision was taken to draw up *educational fact sheets* in accordance with the *modular principle* facilitating *organised dissemination*. This principle presents the following main features:

- *flexibility* of the potential uses for training purposes (training institutes or open distance learning); the same documents can also be used by teachers as back-up for their

educational work with their pupils. Again, the fact sheets can be used as educational files in other contexts, eg Roma cultural museums or exhibitions; moreover, some of the sheets are to be produced under the educational strand of the *European Roma Cultural Route*, which is included in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme;

- *versatility* for individuals (teachers, mediators, inspectors, etc) who are directly concerned by the schooling of Roma children or who, although they do not work with Roma children, would like to acquire knowledge of this culture to transmit to other pupils;
- possibility for *integrating* it into various training systems and levels: the fact sheets are reference documents that can be used in different training programmes rather than actual teaching units in themselves; they provide content for training courses designed from the intercultural angle and facilitate inclusion of historical, linguistic and cultural elements forming part of the European heritage;
- *openness*, to the extent that the fact sheets, whose structure is set out below, are not a cut-and-dried finished product but an infinitely variable corpus which can and must be constantly added to as educational needs emerge and in accordance with local contexts. The whole system is an open one with a conventional tree structure, ie there is a common core supporting and contextualising all the different knowledge items, while thematic or geographic (examining a given State in particular) branches provide an overall structure on to which new fact sheets can be grafted, with more in-depth analyses of specific themes or local illustrations to help local schools.

At a time when knowledge is easy to access via the new information and information technologies, this whole system takes advantage of these new resources and also helps organise knowledge items into a *structured whole* in order to guarantee their *quality* and, above and beyond their *visibility*, to make them *readable* by means of a *comprehensive approach*. This fact sheet production and utilisation activity is accordingly an educational choice – and an educational act – within a training process which transcends its mere contents.

Working principles

A comprehensive European perspective

- The Roma people have *no reference State* or country of origin that has historically provided them with support or a development framework for their history, culture and language. The Council of Europe has leapt into the breach here by implementing, and prompting its member States to implement training activities for educational staff and producing the necessary back-up material;
- It is plain to see in States that have developed an educational policy on *minorities*, eg as regards the use of educational material, that the Roma people are often the only minority to lack tools from a hypothetical State of origin or identification;
- It should be added that for the same reasons, Roma people require *construction, development and organisation of knowledge* of their history, culture and language, which is yet another reason for ensuring cautious, serious work in co-operation with all the countries of Europe;

- The Council of Europe must play a specific role here as a *unifier and co-ordinator of European activities* which are otherwise liable to remain unsystematic or be duplicated, and it must strive to enhance high-quality actions which are often isolated and overlooked, acting as an overall co-ordinator in charge of the production of training documents.

The vital need for quality

- Roma history, language and culture are completely *unknown* to both the general public and educational staff;
- Many deeply rooted *prejudices* and *stereotypes* subsist in this field;
- The themes addressed are highly *sensitive* for both the Roma people themselves and their environment; great circumspection is therefore required in this area, and the documents produced must, as far as possible, be of impeccable quality;
- This presupposes enlisting the services of highly *qualified experts* to deal with specific items included in the document preparation and production programme;
- Furthermore, each fact sheet must be *painstakingly proofread* by several experts before any planned dissemination.

Fact sheet production strategy

- Seminars were held in Dijon, France, in 2002 and 2003 to improve the *definition of the themes* deemed necessary for educational staff training. These events were attended by several types of groups with complementary competences: students training for multicultural teaching, teacher trainers on initial or further training courses, and teacher researchers capable of providing trainer training and helping develop training contents. These seminars produced a definition of profiles and priorities in terms of training content, concentrating on the three main lines of history, culture and language. The meetings led to another series (in Brno, Czech Republic, 2002, and Graz, Austria, 2003) during which specific aspects of the training contents were examined in greater depth. Lastly, in the run-up to finalising the fact sheets, educational staff training seminars were held in order to test the quality of the material produced in a real-life situation;
- A *work plan* was drawn up with a view to organising fact sheet production within a consistent framework and enhancing important facts or events in the historic, cultural and linguistic fields; this overall framework was also designed to improve the appraisal or presentation of each section, while also providing an instrument for guiding the work;
- We must adhere to a *programme*, but that does not mean following a rigid plan: we must rather *piece together knowledge and know-how* as in a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece is relevant, but the order in which it is used is less important; some of the pieces of the puzzle can be up and running very quickly, while others, which are equally important, take more time;
- There are *several types* of fact sheets: “transverse” or global sheets aimed at improving understanding of Roma issues in a wide European context and, for reasons of educational curriculum and more localised interests, national or regional fact sheets for individual

member States. For instance, such a fundamental theme as the Nazi period in Roma history is covered by complementary “European” fact sheets and specific national ones. Some fact sheets may concentrate on a specific event of general importance in the history of the Roma people, such as the period of slavery in the Romanian principalities or the Great Gypsy Round-up in Spain.

Fact sheet profile

This section will comprise an overview of the *profile of the documents* and the conditions under which they will be drafted. The items set out in the fact sheets may inspire future authors to propose new documents; moreover, the fact sheets already available could clearly illustrate this point, and they should be referred to, eg by consulting them on the Project website. Authors also receive a framework document specifying the more technical data for preparing fact sheets.

Objectives

- Each fact sheet has an *educational use* as a medium for *training educational staff*, as well as the aim of *providing information* and *promoting awareness* both for Roma people and other interested users. It must be a tool promoting knowledge, communication, understanding and mutual respect among the different communities;
- Consequently, the text aims to fulfil the dual requirement of *readability* for as many users as possible, and content *quality*. Scientific quality must be guaranteed on an equal footing with educational quality.

Languages used

- The document will be circulated by the Council of Europe *in English, French and Romani*;
- The *original language* will be specified on the published document in order to ensure the quality of *subsequent translations* as commissioned by Ministries of Education or other institutions in the member States, into the languages of the various countries, including minority languages or, if necessary, variants of Romani. Translations must always be based on the original document rather than on another translation.

Format

- The fact sheets will be published in standard form, with short fact sheets covering *four pages* in A4 format and long sheets *eight pages*;
- The formatted, illustrated documents will be posted in PDF format on *Internet* and presented on the Project *Website*; they will also be available in *paper versions*;
- The fact sheets will be made available in the form of *teaching files* grouped according to theme – history, culture, language, etc).

Dissemination

- Upon written request, the Council of Europe may grant translation rights and the right to transmit the fact sheets on any type of media (printed sheets, CD-ROM, Internet, etc), provided such transmission is free of charge;
- The texts are *illustrated* in order to promote their *educational purpose* and *didactic uses*, and thanks to the new technologies they can be placed on a CD-ROM or a website;
- Particular attention has been paid to fact sheet *readability*: it comprises a *summary*, explicit *subheadings*, and an *introduction* setting out the subject in the overall context of the issue being addressed; there are no footnotes or appendices. Reader-friendly boxes are used. “Learned” words are explained; where necessary the text includes recapitulative tables, which are often more informative than a long text, as well as illustrations (photographs, maps, reproductions, etc);
- Information is provided on the *bibliographical or documentary sources* used, and a *bibliography* is recommended, centring on the document’s training objectives and excluding rare or inaccessible books, academic articles, etc. This accessible, complementary bibliography is designed as back-up to the training course;
- Further *lines of inquiry* based on the text and illustrations provided might be suggested by the author and the experts responsible for revising the fact sheets; these ideas would be aimed at the trainers who will be using the fact sheets to train educational staff, or else for the educational staff themselves, who might use it for self-training; such lines of work comprise recommended further reading or ideas for using illustrations (maps, photographs, graphs, etc) for educational purposes, possibly also involving the pupils.

List of documents

- The fact sheets cover four main areas: *history, culture, language and music*;
- A number of *series* are scheduled for each of these main areas, with a set of fact sheets, eg: origins; policies; the Holocaust period (in Europe as a whole and State by State); history fact sheets for each State, comprising a section on history right from the earliest archives attesting the presence of Roma in the State in question, and another on contemporary history, specifying the size of the Roma population, their geographical distribution and their political situation; a series on famous Roma figures; arts and crafts activities; and dwellings;
- The fact sheets can be compiled into an unprecedented *encyclopaedia* of Roma history, culture and politics, as an offshoot of the Project during the training process;
- There will be a hypertext-type function for surfing from one fact sheet to another using keywords while consulting the whole set of sheets; this will facilitate a dynamic, motivating, enriching “fun” approach.

The fact sheets can be *consulted* on the Council of Europe website/Project site, where they can be *downloaded* and/or *printed*:

<http://www.coe.int/education/roma>

Enlarged participation

- It would be useful for those interested in this activity and which to use the documents to contact us
 - in order to comment on the fact sheets
 - in order to propose any new facts sheets needed for training or information
- comments and proposals can be submitted to the Council of Europe at the following address:

Project "Education of Roma children in Europe"
Division for the European Dimension of Education
Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education
DGIV - Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex.