

### “Life choices for a better living”

This document is part of a larger collection of examples of current policies for young people in Europe. The collection is an outcome of a European research project called “UP2YOUTH – Youth: actor of social change?”

The basic idea of the “current practice” collection is to see how current practices and policies relate to young people as active agents in shaping their lives. Therefore, our intention is not a collection of “good” or “best” practices. Rather, it includes also practices, which are interesting because of their relation to young people’s agency but which involve problematic aspects, such as restricted financial resources, a very thin spread, or no clear evaluation criteria. We have applied a searching pattern which asked for “strengths” and “weaknesses”. This explicitly opens space for your own evaluation, because also policies are included, which definitely do have weaknesses, but are highly interesting for specific reasons. Therefore we have to stress that the researchers did not evaluate these practices themselves.

The whole collection can be found at

<http://www.up2youth.org/content/view/192/60/>

Section	Indications of contents
<b>Title of programme/ practice</b>	Life choices for a better living
<b>Location</b>	Country: Romania The project was implemented in 5 counties: Calarasi, Ialomita, Tulcea, Constanta and Brăila.
<b>Main theme</b>	1) Civic participation 2) Young parenthood 3) Transition of young people with an ethnic minority or immigrant background
<b>Practice/Programme-related keywords</b>	Early marriage, early motherhood, child labour, school drop-out, ethnic discrimination, gender discrimination, access to education, children’s fundamental rights
<b>Summary of programme/ practice</b>	The project works in the direction of:  Raising awareness among Roma girls, women and men towards the risks incurred by early marriage and early motherhood.  Raising awareness of the target-groups towards the children’s fundamental rights hindered by proliferation of early marriage among Roma.  Creating and/or strengthening the feedback mechanisms between school and community (parents, teachers, local authorities) in preventing early marriage and childbearing.

	<p>Developing and strengthening a community mediators' network in order to create the premises for improving the school-community relationship and disseminating the good practices on early marriage and motherhood prevention in Roma communities.</p> <p>Lobbying on a local and national level for policy design and implementation in this matter.</p>
<b>Target</b>	<p>Main target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 300 Roma girls between 12 and 18 years old (15 girls in each implementing school)</li> <li>- 300 uneducated Roma women who married at an early age, experienced early pregnancy and who have a large number of children (75 young women in each implementing county)</li> <li>- 300 Roma men.</li> </ul> <p>Other target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers</li> <li>- Parents</li> <li>- Representatives of local and national authorities, civil society</li> </ul> <p>Target groups/issues/problems addressed:</p> <p>Roma girls' education continues to represent a major challenge not only because of socially marginalization and severe discrimination in all aspects of life that Roma population is facing in general, but also because of gender disparities and lack of mainstream schooling that prevent Roma girls in particular from accessing quality education and thus ensuring that they remain ill-equipped to function in the workplace society.</p> <p>The target-group is established by also taking into account counseling for Roma men, as main decision-makers within the Roma family.</p>
<b>Objectives of programme/ practice</b>	<p>The main goal of the project is to raise the awareness of the targeted-group towards the risks incurred by early marriage and early pregnancy phenomena, to increase the chances of access and completion of mandatory education for Roma, to strengthen local partnership in order to design and implement the necessary educational tools for setting up an effective and efficient "second chance" education opened to this specific target group.</p>
<b>Content of programme/ practice</b>	<p>Main actions/ steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing teaching materials adapted to the main target-group focused on children's rights, risks of an early pregnancy, contraception, sexually-transmitted diseases (STD), hygiene and its importance in disease prevention.</li> <li>• "Caravan-type Seminars", organized in every implementing county</li> <li>• Role play and case studies as teaching methods within the caravan-seminars</li> <li>• Peer to peer counselling</li> <li>• Training seminars for peer-counsellors and monitors focused on program implementation issues and on efficient evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Time scale</b>	<p>Project length: 12 months (October 2006 – September 2007)</p>

## Programme/ practice design

### Development of programme/practice:

- Establishing partnerships with local authorities responsible for Roma assistance
- Start-up conference which is meant to gather all parties involved – target-groups, beneficiaries, local authorities, organizers and to clarify, for all those concerned, the project objectives, actions, quality indicators, monitoring and evaluation methods. Participants: 40 ; length: 1 day; location: Bucharest
- Developing support-materials to be used within the training seminars
- Training sessions: community mediators were trained for offering peer to peer counselling and education. The local coordinators, selected in the 5 counties were in charge with the pre-selection of the mediators to be, while the project implementation team selected the final candidates. The role of the community mediators was to organize and mediate several interventions on community level and reunions with the target-group focused on awareness rising towards the risks incurred by early marriage and early pregnancy.
- Caravans: A raising awareness campaign addressed to the main target-groups regarding the risks involved by early pregnancy and early marriage, carried out in the 5 implementing counties through successive caravan-type seminars. The main beneficiaries of such a campaign are the 300 Roma girls with ages between 12 and 18, 300 Roma women who married at an early age, have a large number of children and experienced early pregnancy from the 5 implementing counties and 300 Roma men as main decision makers in the Roma family.
- Peer to peer counselling: each community mediator worked with 5 distinct groups of 10 to 15 Roma girls, women or men within 6 counselling sessions for each group, addressing the issue of children's fundamental rights, risks of early marriage and motherhood, the importance of schooling for reaching better living standards.
- Monitoring visits: the project's implementing team performed regular monitoring visits during the whole period the mediators were active.
- Summer school for Roma girls: number of participants: 50; length: 6 days
- 10 Round tables (2 per each implementing county) aimed at offering local leaders, community representatives, inspectorate representatives, teachers, city hall representatives and local press the opportunity to meet, interact, debate and identify ways to prevent early pregnancy and early marriage among Roma and to further disseminate the message of the project during the implementation phase and after its completion.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final seminar: is meant to present the detailed results of</li> <li>• the project and to identify ways of dissemination at national level. Participants: 50; length: 1 day; location: Bucharest</li> </ul> <p>Decision-making actors and process:</p> <p>One local coordinator per each implementing county was selected. The local coordinators had an active role within subsequent activities of the project such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- organizing the training sessions at local level within the caravan-type seminars</li> <li>- pre-selecting community mediators that continued the counselling sessions within caravan-type seminars organized in each implementing county during the whole implementation period</li> <li>- coordinating the activity of the community mediators</li> <li>- writing narrative activity and monitoring reports in attention of the Project Coordinator</li> <li>- disseminating the project's message at community level during the implementation of the project as well as the project's results after termination.</li> </ul> <p>The support of County Schools Inspectorates and of local inspectors on Roma was requested.</p> <p>Implementation: Foundation Centre Education 2000+</p>
<p><b>Resources involved (financial, human, others)</b></p>	<p>Budget information not provided</p> <p>According to the 2002 census, In Romania 26% of Roma were illiterate compared to only 3% of all Romanians.</p> <p>Further than that, it is common knowledge that Roma girls are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to education and schooling as opposed to Roma boys.</p> <p>Relevant factors blocking girls' education completion include:</p> <p><b>Parent attitudes.</b> Parents are less likely to wish to enroll and keep their girls in school as opposed to their boys. Parents who married young themselves and did not receive much education tend to pass on these expectations to their children.</p> <p><b>Child labour.</b> Driven by poverty Roma parents frequently keep their girls out of school in order to help look after their younger siblings and, less frequently, to earn income in the informal economy.</p> <p><b>Early marriage and motherhood.</b> Roma traditionally marry very young, even today, including through arranged marriages. In Romania many couples marry below the legal age of 16 for women and 18 for men and girls tend to drop out after grade IV. Early childbearing as a result of early marriage further constrains those young married women who do school, most dropping out when they children.</p> <p><b>School safety.</b> When girls approach marriage age (12-14 years old) parents become reluctant towards keeping them in school as they fear boys from other clans will abduct and force them to</p>

	<p>marry against their parents wishes.</p> <p><b>Lack of identity papers.</b> Many Roma do not have identity papers and are consequently unable to access public services, including registering for school.</p> <p><b>Discrimination.</b> Non-Roma parents continue to discriminate heavily against Roma, both explicitly with segregated schooling and more subtly by discouraging their children to interact with Roma.</p> <p>The project is a coherent sequel of the previous project (<i>Children's rights for Children Comprehension and Teen Pregnancy – Risks and Responsibilities</i>) that UNICEF together with Centre Education 2000+ had in this area and to address the issue of early marriage and early pregnancy as it has been proven to be an important factor that influences the drop-out rate for Roma girls.</p> <p>Centre Education 2000+ doesn't aim at attacking cultural values or traditions but at changing mentalities by presenting the advantages of school attendance as opposed to starting a family at an early age.</p>
<p><b>Evaluation</b></p>	<p>Evaluation process consisted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the narrative and financial reports presented to the Donor by the implementing project team</li> <li>• the activity, monitoring and financial reports presented by local monitors to the Project Coordinator</li> <li>• the brochures and the training guides edited and published within the project</li> <li>• the training for trainers and peer-counsellors guide</li> </ul>
	<p>Results / impact of programme:</p> <p>Beneficiaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 25 schools in 5 counties</li> <li>– 2700 Roma girls, women and men</li> <li>– 25 Roma communities</li> </ul> <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the decrease of drop-out rate for the target-group, from primary to lower secondary education as well as from lower secondary to upper secondary education;</li> <li>– the increase of local authority involvement towards strengthening the school-community relation;</li> <li>– the increase of parents involvement and interest towards supporting their children through school;</li> <li>– the development of support-materials and impact studies.</li> </ul>
	<p>Difficulties encountered: not reported</p>
<p><b>Lessons to be drawn from</b></p>	<p>While it is unsure whether the project activities will have had long-</p>

<b>programme or practice implemented</b>	<p>lasting or only temporary effects on people's mentalities and behaviours in the target communities, one may take for sure the increased awareness and level of involvement of children themselves in dealing with intercultural aspects of putting into the practice the child's rights and the principle of equal opportunities. This is an important educational achievement, which may also have positive influence on parents' mentalities.</p> <p>The practice is easily transferable if properly acknowledged, especially among NGOs acting in fields of human/child rights and education.</p>
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