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RAISING AWARENESS AND CONTRASTING DISCRIMINATION WITH YOUTH: THE STORY_S PROJECT



GUIDELINES



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THE STORY_S PROJECT

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1. Educational challenges and Roma Groups in Europe

The Roma are one of the minorities with the biggest laps in school attendance compared with non-Roma children, especially following compulsory levels of education. Low instructive levels are one of the most pressing issues, since they create barriers to employment, to breaking the vicious cycles of poverty and exclusion, resulting in difficulty in participating in civil society. The project Story_S: Springboard to Roma Youth Success—the actions and results of which are presented in these guidelines—tackles the educational disadvantage of Roma youths and the discrimination processes that at the root of this disadvantage.

Roma groups experience social exclusion and multiple forms of discrimination. Low school attendance is one of the elements which cultural discourse on racism uses in order to sustain that the Roma “do not want to integrate”, whilst not looking at actual significant barriers to education such as

poverty, housing insecurity, structural and inter-generational discrimination. Gender issues also play an important part. The Roma are criticised for holding a patriarchal approach to gender relations whilst recent counter-stereotypical tendencies are unknown to most and changes in family formation and gender balances in couples, along with the increase in the age of marriage can support an improvement in Roma girls’ education and freedom (Marcu, 2014). These and many other issues are shared between Roma and non-Roma youths, including those from a migratory background, in the increasingly multicultural environments in neighbourhoods and schools in which intercultural learning and interactions take place today.

If we look at the overall levels of participation in compulsory education, the 2016 data is quite encouraging, as emerges from the table below.

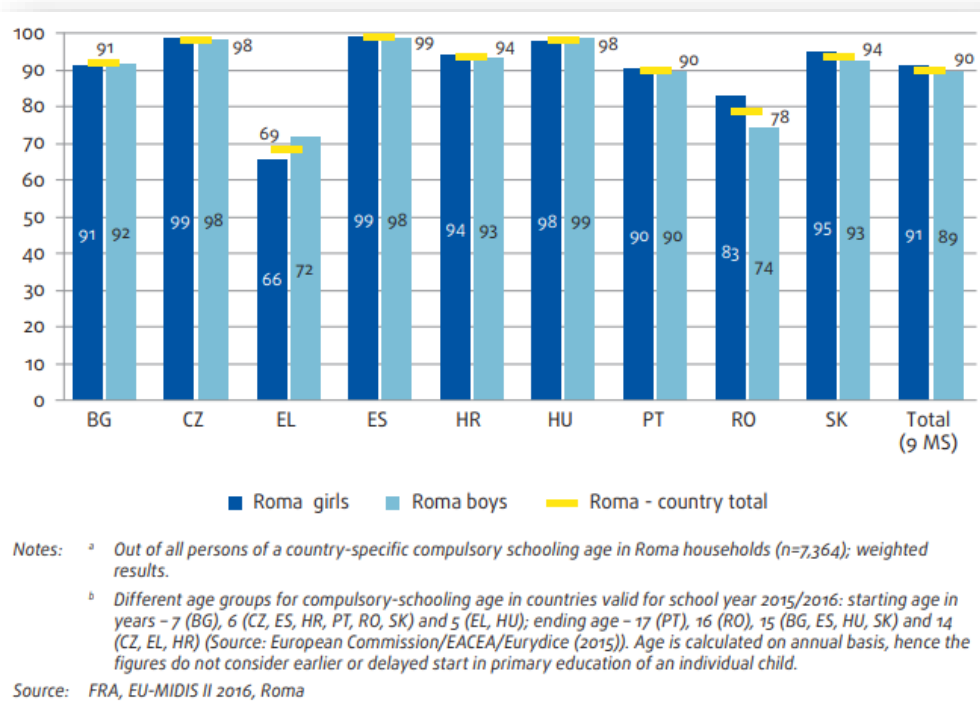


Figure 1: Compulsory-school-age children (country-specific) participating in education, by EU Member State (%)^{a,b}

But if we look in detail to the characteristics of school and education, their low quality remains a common feature given the issues of segregation and early dropout. According to FRA (2016) “about 18% of Roma 6–24 years of age attending an educational level lower than that corresponding to their age, and often (ranging from 4% to 29%) in segregated schools or classrooms”. In regards to school segregation, Roma children attending classes where all classmates are Roma increased on average from 10 % in 2011 to 15 % in 2016.

Early school dropout remains the main issue across all European countries. Roma youths aged 18–24 years represent the range with the highest rates of early school leaving in almost all EU countries with a significant Roma minority (FRA, 2016). Many of those who continue studying are enrolled in technical and professional schools so that they may start working sooner than if they were to attend high schools oriented towards continuing with University studies.

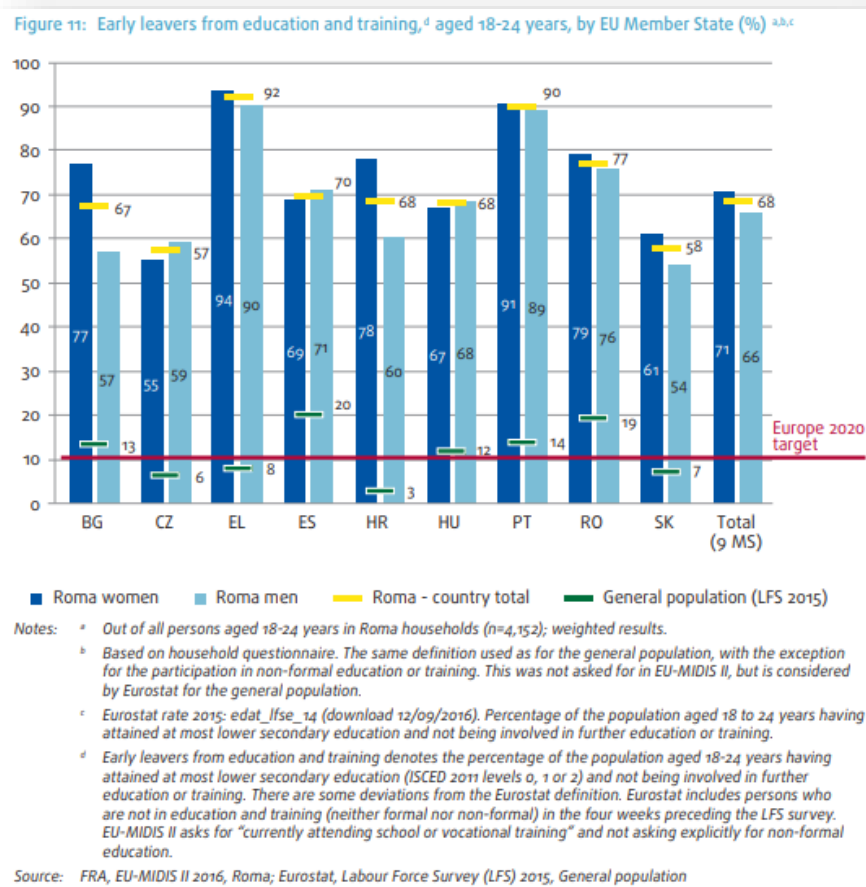


Figure 2: Early leavers from education and training, ^d aged 18-24 years, by EU Member State (%) ^{a,b,c}

Also, in this age range, about two thirds of Roma youngsters are not in work, education or training (FRA, 2018). In terms of experiences of

direct discrimination, 14% of the students reported having felt discriminated against within the school system both in 2011 and in

2016 (FRA, 2018). This may also contribute to early school leaving, given that discrimination often leads to high absenteeism and alienation (Eurofound, 2016). Below, we will detail the situation in each country included in the Story_S project activities.

The first element to be considered is the significant lack of reliable data on the schooling of Roma and Sinti in **Italy** and the total lack of data or official reports regarding Roma and Sinti youths attending tertiary education. As happened in several European States, a National Strategy on Roma Inclusion was implemented from 2012 also regarding schooling—from 2014 to 2020, a national project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children will be implemented in some Italian regions (Persico, Sarcinelli 2017). At a national level, the most recent available data (MIUR, ISMU) refers to the year 2014-2015 and indicates an increase in the presence of Roma and Sinti children across all levels of schooling compared to the previous year. The reports only refer to “non-Italian Roma” without any information about who these Roma and Sinti students in Italy may be. That which emerges from the official reports, even if showing signs of improvement, is still quite alarming.

In **Spain**, there is very little reliable data available on the Spanish Romani population and its schooling. Recent surveys (Laparra 2007) and empirical studies (Abajo and Carrasco 2004; Bereményi and Carrasco 2015) show that the general level of schooling for Roma is significantly lower than amongst the general Spanish population. The academic level of adult Roma is very low, with high illiteracy and functional illiteracy rates, along with elevated levels of early school leaving and academic failure. Still, reports confirm an educational gap, measurable via several indicators (FSG, 2013): enrolment rates in the last year of compulsory education at 57%; approximately 80% of the enrolled students drop out before completing secondary education, with significant gender differences, with Roma students being over-represented in

remedial education scheme (39%) in a dispositive manner. Supporting platforms and services targeting such students are becoming popular in the various Pro-Roma ONGs projects, albeit thus far at an experimental stage and still trying to determine the most pertinent type of support able to expand to a broader segment of Roma students.

According to Garaz and Toroctoi (2017), a system of earmarked places in **Romania** for Roma in higher education has been functioning to reduce the exclusion ratios between Roma and non-Roma since 1992, when the programme began with ten places within the Department of Sociology at the University of Bucharest (Toroctoi, 2013). Since then, the initiative has been scaled up to cover the entire country and implemented as a government-led initiative (Bojinca, Munteanu, Toth, Surdu & Szira, 2009). According to an analysis of this programme conducted in 2009, the allocation of university places for Roma has been predominantly in the fields of humanities and social sciences, with approximately 35% of the places reserved for Roma students occupied in faculties offering humanities specialisations (Bojinca et al., 2009).

Despite decades of efforts from the **Bulgarian** governments concerning the educational integration of Roma, the results are far from optimistic. The findings from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey (2011) indicate that the primary education attainment rate of Roma increased nine percentage points from 77% in 2004 to 86% in 2013. Nevertheless, the FRA Roma Survey found that a large majority of Roma respondents in Bulgaria had left school before completing secondary education (85% Roma from the 18-25 age group, compared to 32% amongst non-Roma of the same age). The share of Roma who attended school but left before reaching 16 years of age was 73%, compared to 17% of non-Roma. Enrolment rates for University education for Roma is 1%, compared to 42% non-Roma for the same age (Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, 2019).

Although school segregation is legally prohibited in Bulgaria, 60% of school-age children attend *de facto* segregated schools (EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 2016). Nearly half of Roma children aged 3-5 remain excluded from the kindergarten system. By the time these children reach second grade, their educational achievement lag is already too large to overcome. Most Roma students drop out of school and even the 15-20% who manage to graduate from high school are often barely literate with very little opportunity for career development. These young people not only lack the necessary education, but also the basic life and social skills they need to satisfy their employers' needs. Adequate early childhood development to the "excluded" 3- to 5-year-olds is necessary in order to breach the gap between the non-Roma and the less-

prepared Roma children. Most state measures so far have been directed towards institutions but school enrollment alone does not guarantee a real education and opportunities, given that many children do not regularly attend the schools in which they are enrolled and/or graduate with very low academic standing and functional illiteracy.

The Health and Social Development Foundation (HESED) works with children of all ages and their parents through integrated services promoting skills and opportunities for personal and community development, health and social well-being, as well as to create and popularise effective approaches for the successful integration of socially-excluded communities.

2. Why mentoring?

One way of promoting positive development in adolescents who might be at risk for academic, social and behavioural problems could be through mentoring programmes. Mentoring relationships can have a range of positive effects, as shown by various evaluations. Beside supporting academic achievements and self-empowerment, they can have impact upon peer and parent relationships, help lower recidivism rates amongst juvenile delinquents and reduce substance abuse (). Mentors intentionally focus on building quality relationships; they share life experience and positive views and perspectives on the future. The role of the mentor is broad in scope, offering wide-ranging advice about academically-related topics and working on long-term goals to help the mentees in the areas of adoption of academic values, beliefs and attitudes to form and reach academic targets. A distinctive essence of mentoring is its combination of developmental functions with a caring relationship, almost a friendship. Mentors are expected to provide both instrumental and personal support to their mentees whilst placing greater emphasis on

the latter in practice. . That implemented in the project is specifically peer mentoring, which can be described as a one-to-one non-judgmental relationship in which the mentor supports one to three mentees of Roma origin. From a top-down perspective, in **Catalonia**, mentoring actions are strongly embedded in the parallel processes of Europe's Roma Development/Empowerment agenda (Roma Decade and Roma Strategy), the correlated emancipation, empowerment-focused calls for intervention (DG Justice, EACEA), whilst ethnically-targeting actions are fostered, ROMED (CoE, EU), mediation ethos, along with several mentoring projects focused on Roma. On example is the well-established Programa Ruiseñor (Fundació Girona Universitat, 2018). The most popular organisations are FSG (Programa Promociona), Pere Closa (Programa Siklavipen Savorença), and even FAGIC, which accumulated experience but with a greater focus on occupational training. All the aforementioned projects include some mentoring component along with other more "classical" extracurricular actions. What is different is the recently-emerged grassroots

initiative, CampusRom Network, which offers mutual support amongst Romani university students and continuity to Roma students undertaking the plan's integral courses. Finally, it is worth mentioning a map that shows a clear territorial unbalance in the distribution of such resources, which are mainly around the Barcelona area. In **Italy**, the situation is quite different. In Rome, some mentors and mentees have been involved in the "Today, Tomorrow, ToNino" project in recent years, developed by the association Casa dei Diritti Sociali. The aim of the project was to combat the phenomenon of early school leaving by minors in economic and social difficulty to promote the universal right to study, experimenting and spreading innovative practices to combat school drop-out. In Milan, a few mentors (and peers involved in an Awareness-raising Workshop) took part in a prior European project named "Luoghi Comuni", led by the BIR organisation two years ago. Most of mentees are involved in peer-to-peer activities, school support, counselling with Sant'Egidio, La Casa della Carità and the Valdesi Church.

In **Romania** within Carusel, there are two main programmes pertaining to education. Obor Community Centre is an educational and socialisation programme for children from disadvantaged groups between the ages of 5 and 16. Through non-formal education

workshops, the objectives of the centre consist in empowering disadvantaged children to attend school and offer other extracurricular activities that may support the process of social integration. A second programme is the Risk Groups and Support Services Summer School run by Carusel since 2012. The goal is to improve the quality of life for vulnerable and marginalised groups by increasing young professionals' ability to provide support services and ensure the implementation of the right to non-discrimination.

In **Bulgaria**, some mentors in the programme had participated in previous training on leadership for Roma youth. One of the mentees volunteers at an NGO that works with youth.

The Story_S project—through the peer-to-peer mentoring programme—intervened on individual trajectories. The mentors' support was not always effective as structural barriers were occasionally found at a level of policies and accessibility to services. The anti-discrimination campaign built throughout the course of the project can be considered as a form of intervention within the context but this of course was not able to impact the system and its structures. In order for integration processes to be effective, changes to the policies has to be enacted to overcome institutional discrimination that Roma suffer.

3. The project

"*STORY_S - Springboard to Roma Youth Success*" is a project funded by the European Commission DG JUSTICE, Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, implemented in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain.

The main objectives of the project is to raise awareness and combat stereotypes related to the Roma and to promote integration by encouraging and supporting the school careers of Roma girls and boys through a participatory approach. According to the project proposal,

the main action was an 18-month **mentoring** programme. This peer mentoring action involved both young Roma and non-Roma as mentors. The mentors acted as positive role models and supported the young Roma, in some cases by building a significant relationship with them. The second action of the project was an **anti-discrimination campaign**, built by Roma young people and other peers during the "**Awareness raising workshops**", involving young people from high

schools, universities and volunteering associations. The campaign was extended to schools, universities, volunteering centres, places frequented by youths, places of public interest and on social media with more than ten launch events in each country. Moreover, **citizenship incubators** were organised in order to discuss the campaign in depth with the youths involved thanks to active methodologies. The Story_S project¹ sees the

University of Bergamo as leader of a group of Third Sector Associations and Universities from Italy (BIR), Romania (Carusel), Spain (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Fagic) and Bulgaria (HESED and Bulgarian Youth Forum).

4. Context: where did the activities take place and with whom

4.1. Italy: Milan and Rome

In the city of Milan, in northern **Italy**, after years of housing concentrations and exclusive intervention on Roma populations, there has been a de-centring of housing solutions for the Roma in recent years, regarding all neighbourhoods throughout the city. The eviction policy was part of this de-centring process and targeted both larger, authorised camps and informal, smaller and spontaneous slums. These were followed by temporary housing centre solutions close to being unliveable, due to being overcrowded and insufficiently supported by integration projects.

One of the places of provenance of our mentees and mentors in Milan is a squat in the south of the city. Some other young Roma in our project, either from Ex-Yugoslavia or Romania, live in social housing following a history of living in informal slums and transition centres. Some mentees live in occupied houses, with serious limitations in obtaining recognition of their legal status in Italy, despite living in the country for 10 years or more. Other young Roma in the project lived in a CAS—an extra-ordinary assistance centre—until May 2019. These centres served

to accompany the transition from encampments to housing autonomy.

The centre was closed on the 24th March 2019 and a resistance movement was created inside the structure that was supported by the Kethane Movement, a Roma rights, ethnic revivalist group (financed by a three-year project of the Open Society Foundation) organising public protests, involving other activists in the city.

Other families live in houses rented on the private market. They have received support from NGOs along their integration pathways and a contribution (sometimes time-bound) to the payment of the rent.

Rome, in central Italy, is going through substantial transformations. On the one hand, there are intense political pressures on the nomad camps that led to some evictions without any alternative solutions; on the other hand, the assignment of apartments in public housing is resulting in the discharge of existing camps. As an example, we can take the eviction of the River Camping in Rome, of which mentees and, indirectly, certain mentors involved in the project have experience. Some families who used to live there were hosted in an emergency centre. Others were also victims of racist attacks whilst

¹ For further information about the Consortium, please see <https://www.projectstorys.eu/who-we-are/>

entering their social housing and were forced to move to another location.

The group of mentees in Rome was very diversified from the beginning. In regards to schooling, the situations vary widely, from being at risk of dropping out after the years of compulsory schooling throughout to attending university. Their migratory background is also different, some of them come from Bosnia, others from Serbia and Romania. The group of mentees in Milan is mostly comprised of Romanian migrant Roma, living in the city since early childhood or even those who were born in Italy. Only few of them joined the family during primary school or later. Many of those young boys and girls and their families experienced living in shanty towns and being evicted throughout the years. Their housing conditions changed mostly thanks to NGO social welfare projects, sometimes in cooperation with the local public administration.

4.2. Spain: Barcelona and Manresa

The city of Barcelona is the capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia, of the Barcelonés region and of the homonymous province. Manresa is a city and Catalan municipality, capital of the region of Bages, in the province of Barcelona, 65 km to the north. In the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, the project is implemented in three neighbourhoods: Sant Roc, La Mina and Bon Pastor. La Mina and Sant Roc are the result of action that took place in 1969, the objective of which was the eradication of different sub-housing centres (barracks/shanty houses) in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. The majority of people living in such settlements were migrants from different regions of Spain, especially from the south. There was also a high percentage of Roma people living there. At one time, La Mina was isolated from other neighbourhoods. It didn't have social services or a health care centre and there was only one primary school. This has changed in the last 15

years, with the neighbourhood and public services having been improved but the social and economic situation remains the same, with many basics lacking and a very negative stereotype persisting.

In relation to Sant Roc, the situation is very similar to that of La Mina. The neighbourhood was built to accommodate people from barracks occupied by a majority of Roma, with signs of social exclusion such as drug trafficking, high unemployment, low economic status and high illiteracy rates. The stereotypes of the neighbourhood remain set in place to this today.

In Bon Pastor, there are still some cheap houses in which some of our mentors and mentees live but the idea is to demolish all of them and transform one into a museum. The neighbourhood is different to Sant Roc and La Mina, not burdened by stereotypes and being located in the city of Barcelona, hence being easy to access by public transport. It also offers all basic services.

The Roma participants are "*Caló*", being from the Roma subgroup from the Iberian Peninsula, hence all are local Roma (with no migrant background). The Roma in the project are living in neighbourhoods with a high percentage of Roma amongst the population, with the Roma from Manresa (Catalan Roma) also living in the town in an area in which the majority of the Roma live.

4.3. Romania: Bucharest and Ilfov

Bucharest-Ilfov (largest city: Bucharest) is located in the south of Romania and includes the capital of Bucharest City and Ilfov county. The 2011 census figures show that about 96.6% of the population of Bucharest is Romanian. Other significant ethnic groups are Roma, Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Turks, and Chinese.

The mentees were selected from all districts within the Bucharest-Ilfov region, however almost half of the mentees are part of the

Chitila-Bucurestii Noi area, situated in the north-western part of Bucharest, where there is a large Roma community. Since the mentees hail from different parts of Bucharest and are from rather diverse backgrounds, we cannot speak of a certain urban dynamic that is relevant for the mentoring project.

The Roma population we worked with was heterogeneous and consisted of young people, aged 14 to 20 years, non-migrant, all documented. What's more, all mentees were enrolled in some type of formal education, with 5 of them in the foster care system. The risk of dropping out from school for the mentees is relatively low, with only 1-2 youngsters in jeopardy.

4.4. Bulgaria: Sofia and Kyustendil

As of 2017, the official population of Sofia is 1,240,000. Unofficially, the capital's population is over 2 million. The largest Roma

neighbourhood in Sofia ("Fakulteta") has about 50,000 inhabitants and the second largest ("Filipovtsi") has about 7,000 residents. There are many other "pockets" of Roma dwellings. Most of the housing in "Fakulteta" and "Filipovtsi" is shanty town-like with a very small number of legitimate houses. The neighbourhoods in Sofia are somewhat close to the centre of the city, with some parts being further away.

The population of Kyustendil city is approximately 43,000 people.

Inhabitants of the Roma neighbourhoods are almost entirely Roma. There is some access to public transportation and public schools. The Roma that we worked with were all born and raised in Bulgaria. Most of the Roma in the country are Bulgarian citizens, whilst some of the mentors are Roma. The mentees attend local public schools and all of the mentors are enrolled in university or have already earned their degrees.

5. Activities

In this section, we are going to present all the phases of the project before exploring each of them and considering the specificities of the local context. Firstly, we will present a table of contents that summarises the recruitment and selection procedures for each partner; then we will explore how the pairing process was implemented according to the needs of the mentees selected. Further on, we will present

a common model of mentor training, trying to clarify how it was adapted to each country's training needs in view of the participants, their knowledge of local contexts, Roma groups and so on. The last part of this session will analyse the mentoring process in-depth, looking at quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the project.

5.1. Mentor recruitment and selection

For each country, the table describes the mentors' recruitment and selection process in order to clarify the strategies and the tools implemented.

	SELECTION CRITERIA	CONSIDERATIONS ON TEAM DIVERSITY	COMMUNICATION AND SCREENING STRATEGY	SELECTION
BULGARIA	<p>Age (18-28)</p> <p>Motivation</p> <p>Experience in mentoring</p> <p>Secondary higher education</p> <p>Knowledge of Roma language (optional)</p> <p>Live in the same city</p>	<p>Diverse group of people, with different professions (teachers, social workers)</p> <p>Most of them volunteering</p>	<p>Offline: HESED Employees who do community outreach in Roma neighbourhoods</p> <p>Presentation of the programme in 4 schools with large Roma student population</p> <p>Online – website and social networks (Thematic Facebook groups) of HESED, Social Development Foundation, and Bulgarian Youth Forum, and other NGOs.</p>	<p>1st Publish call mentors with an attached application form.</p> <p>2nd Interview with 2 staff members: experience, availability, motivation, expectations</p> <p>3rd Group session, with committee and candidates: observe mentors' behaviour and skills.</p> <p>4th List of additional mentors.</p>
ITALY	<p>Age</p> <p>Relational skills</p> <p>Life path (common background)</p> <p>Motivation</p> <p>Availability (time and flexibility)</p> <p>Previous experience in projects or volunteering</p>	<p>Diverse school or working path, age, social background.</p> <p>Gender balance</p> <p>*Roma mentors from different countries of origin, and life experiences (migration and residential paths)</p>	<p>Open call online: website and FB BIR.</p> <p>Mailing an phone calls to Roma and Pro-Roma organisations that serves Roma and Sinti populations</p> <p>City of Rome: direct contact with persons previously involved in other projects against school drop-out, through local organisations.</p>	<p>1st CVs and letters or Videos of presentation.</p> <p>2nd Interview with 2 member staff: motivation, possible problems identified, personal resources, economical and organisational issues, past similar experiences, expectations about the project training + Valuation of the soft skills by the interviewer</p>
ROMANIA	<p>Experience in:</p> <p>University (Social Science), activism, mentoring or target group</p>	<p>Majority (9) Social Sciences graduates (BA and MA), and 2 arts.</p> <p>Diversity of skills, jobs and interest: acting, dancing,</p>	<p>Dissemination through: Volunteers, Local administration, other NGOs with mentoring programmes, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, first mentors and mentees.</p> <p>These parties helped to intermediate meetings with</p>	<p>1st CV and cover letter.</p> <p>2nd Face to face, and open phone discussion without script (experience, educational background, motivation)</p>

	<p>Social skills: open, tolerant, communicate with youth, arts</p> <p>Availability and flexibility in their jobs/ studies</p>	<p>social work, employees in multinationals</p> <p>Homogeneity in ages: 20/25</p> <p>4 Roma</p>	<p>beneficiaries, and gave advice about target group eligibility (Ex. foster care)</p>	
SPAIN	<p>Proximity: knowledge of local schools, resources, families.</p> <p>Deep-rooted in Roma families of the neighbourhood. Families recognises the mentor</p> <p>Social network, trust, experience with target group.</p>	<p><i>*All team Roma: "Trust is build when Roma people work for Roma people".</i></p> <p>Social class: same as mentees, coming from same neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Similar age (Exception of a women of 42)</p> <p>2 profile: professionally working in projects of educational drop-out for Roma youth or children/ Referent in community (pastoral, associations, AMPA).</p>	<p>FAGIC has a large network with local Roma associations and programmes in the same territory and target group.</p> <p>Mentors linked to federated associations, and to other Roma or pro-Roma organisations that work in educational field, from primary school to university.</p> <p><i>*Mentors that propose their own mentees.</i></p> <p>Mentees and their families asked to have as mentors of their children young Roma referents from the neighbourhood.</p>	<p>1st Presentation of project to FAGIC federated associations</p> <p>Informal meetings with facilitator, to explain the project and comment the mentor role.</p> <p>2nd Formal interview, checking availability, motivation, if they propose their own mentees.</p>

5.2. Matching

Starting from a common proposal, each partner has implemented a particular matching model that entails: different definitions of the criteria for assigning a mentor to a mentee; a view on who makes the decision about the pairing.

The four methods (DuBois, David L. i Karcher Michael, 2014) we employed in Story_S are:

- **Administrator-assigned:** the pairing is based on a previous survey on similarity of interest, completed during the recruitment stage. This survey can consider demographic variables (such as age, gender, class), or similarity of interests, and other practicalities. In Bulgaria, a mentee's first interview with staff is followed by an in-depth interview with mentors to inform them about their interests, hobbies, and so on, with a follow up some days after. This is considered as a good practice, given that the first moments of the relationship have proven to be the most critical ones.
- The **meet-'n'-greet event:** Held to help mentors and mentees to get to know each other. The Italian and Romanian team have designed this sort of inter-relational space to offer relative freedom the youth participants to interact amongst each-other, using icebreakers and activities. In Italy, the group meetings were followed by an interview with a mentor and finally home visits. In Romania, especially for mentees in foster homes, meetings were arranged where the mentees live in order to also have their staff involved.
- **"Choice-based" or "youth-initiated mentoring" model:** Each participant has some decision in the choice of their partner. This model was implemented in some cases

in Spain, where a percentage of the mentors would propose their own mentees, from within the kinship, vicinity, religious community network.

- **Corporate or educational settings:** In Spain, for some particular cases the relationship was embedded in an educational setting, where the mentor develops a role as an education or social civil agent.

Following the pairing, territorial proximity between mentor and mentees and affinity such as having common interests or hobbies were identified as valued criteria to strengthened relationships. For example, in Bulgaria, shared interest (in an academic field) seemed of less importance than personal affinity or the capacity of a mentor to make meeting pleasant. In some cases, experience in volunteering or in the field was identified as a factor that helped to successfully manage challenging relationships or to cope with frustrations in the case of drop outs (Italy and Bulgaria). In Spain, gender, singularity of a lived experience, being part of the same circle of friends, religious community or neighbourhood was considered as reinforcing the identification and the bond itself, being adopted as matching criteria.

5.3. Mentor training

First, the partners defined a general training programme—aims and methodologies—which each Country later adapted to the specific context in order to make the proposals more effective and fitting for each group. The common points concerned the choice of methods in order to warm up and to facilitate self-expression along with the topics that would be touched on during the training; a photo-voice inspired process was also

implemented where mentors had the chance to improve their skills and to move around doing pictures and discussing in small groups. The training was scheduled over 3 days and was ideally residential, although not all could stay overnight. In Spain, the training was based on community participatory research, with trainers being part of Roma community; the first 3 workshops were held, with the trainers having to adapt the content

and instructions to the local group. In Romania, a specific focus on the local context and Romanian Roma groups was applied with the help of some of the mentors.

The following themes were discussed:

- project presentation;
- role of the mentor and phases of mentoring;

- administrative requirements and tools (mentees' personal diary, etc.);
- ethical code as a measure to protect mentor and mentees;
- relational skills;
- mentoring activities proposal;
- monitoring and assessment system;
- Roma groups and local context.

5.4. Mentoring process

The mentoring process officially started in June-July 2018. Each mentor was initially assigned 2-3 mentees but after some dropouts, some mentors had just one mentee. 141 young Roma participated as mentees and 49 peers (Roma and not) as mentors in the 4 countries. 15 mentors dropped out and have been partially substituted by new mentors, with the same going for 48 mentees. Some of the mentee dropouts can be considered as success cases, since they reached their objectives and did not need mentor support, whilst 2 mentees were "promoted" from mentees to mentors.

The average number of months of participation in the project was 11 as of July 2019 (with the

mentoring having commenced in June 2018), given that some mentees were recruited and included in the ongoing project. The average age of the mentees was 16 in Bulgaria, 17 in Italy, 16 in Romania and 20 in Spain.

The mentors age ranged from 17 to 42 (one mentor in Spain was significantly older), with an average of 23.5 years old. 29 women and 20 men took part in the programme as mentors; 27 were of Roma ethnicity, although the composition changed with the recruitment of new mentors and with dropouts.

Some mentee characteristics are provided below, having been self-declared in the evaluation questionnaire.

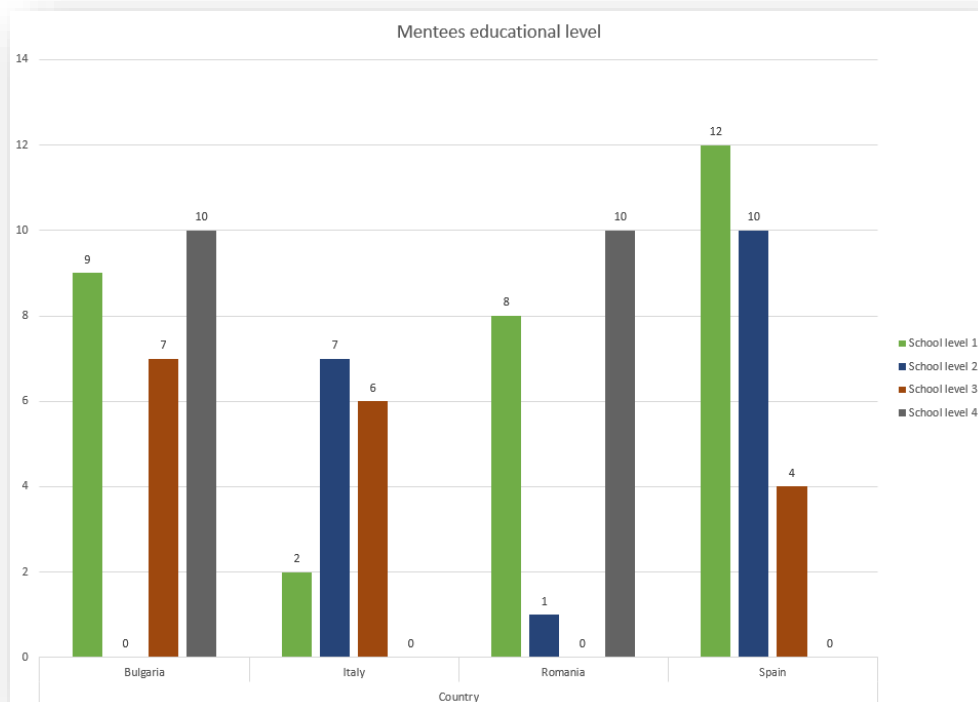


Figure 3: Mentee school level in July 2019. (School level 1 = Elementary education (up to 8 years); 2 = Basic vocational education; 3 = Full vocational education; 4 = Secondary education; 5 = Low tertiary education; 6 = Higher tertiary education.

Most mentees are enrolled in Secondary or Vocational Education but many are still in compulsory education.

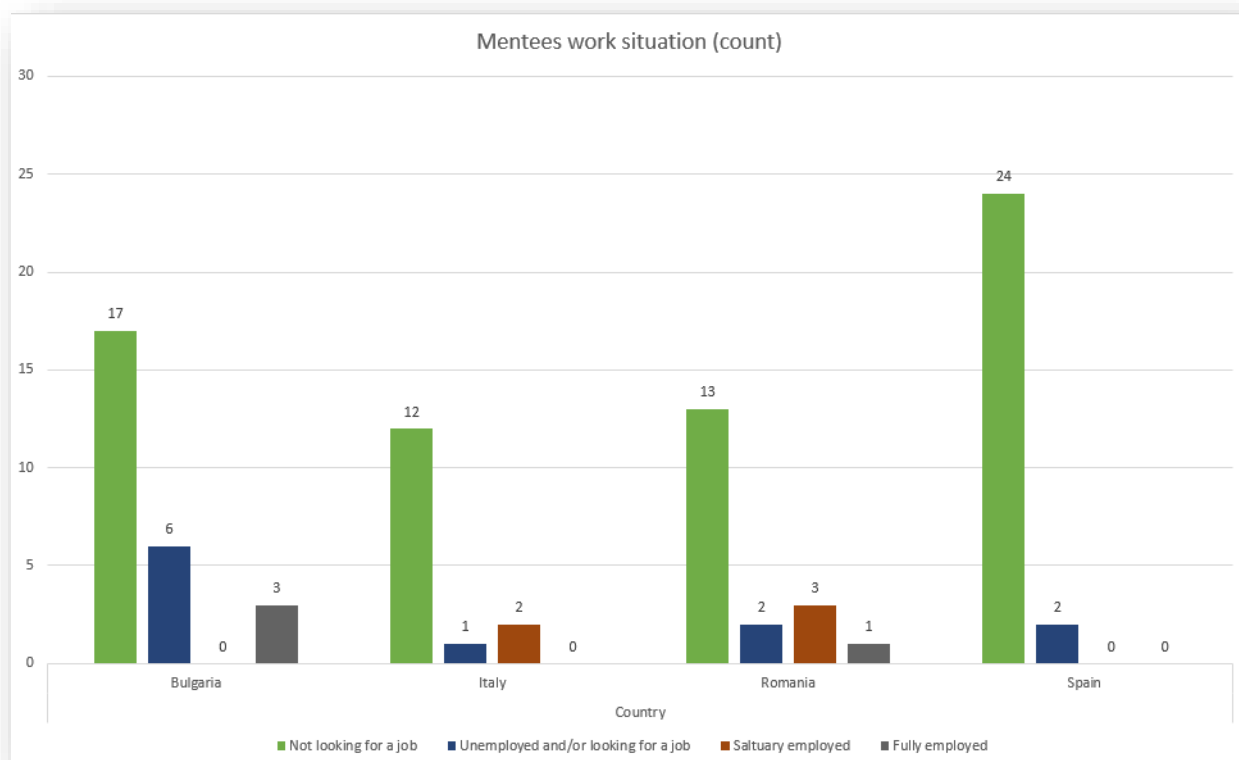


Figure 4: Mentees' work situation. Most mentees are not looking for a job since they are enrolled in education. A small number of beneficiaries is in or wants to be in the job market.

The mentoring process was built through individual meetings, discussions with the families, group activities (with all the mentors and mentees), group mentoring (one mentor and their mentees or a few mentors and their mentees) and the supervision of the mentors (individually and as a group). The process was backed up by different means of documenting the activities, able to support reflexivity and allow for data collection for monitoring, evaluation and research purposes.

Individual meetings

The goals of individual meetings were relationship building, personal and academic orientation, emotional support and connecting the mentee to local resources.

One-to-one meetings between the mentors and mentees were organised autonomously, using the preferred contact method for each mentee. In some cases, if this didn't work out due to lack of motivation and risk of dropout, school and family problems, or limited phone usage, the facilitator intervened to smoothen out communication with

the family and the mentee. The types of individual activities proposed depended on the local context and on mentors' skills, contacts and interests, mainly consisting in support for school (advising, exploring interests, facing problems, but also concrete assistance to study), educational and professional orientation (exploring training opportunities, looking for a job, preparing a résumé), leisure time (visiting public libraries, parks, swimming-pools, going to the movies, taking walks).

Mentor and mentee schedules and geographical vicinity were important factors in individual

meetings (although in the initial pairing, it was difficult to take this into consideration and people changed residence or school during the project). Synchronising the mentor and mentee schedules, especially when both are studying and working, was a big challenge. Guaranteeing the accessibility of the meeting places and sometimes the need to accompany mentees (especially young girls who weren't allowed to go out on their own) were significant challenges that mentors had to face, supported by the facilitators.

Family meetings

Family meetings were important, especially in the beginning in order to explain the project and to present the mentor to the family. In order for young people to be supported and allowed to go out with the mentor alone, building trust with the families was done on the basis of previous common contact with project personnel, with the organisation or with the mentor, when they were part of the family or member of the neighbourhood community. Often, parents had different ideas or priorities with regard to the educational work necessary for their children, in the sense that they wanted the project to help them discipline their kids. A lot of negotiation work, sometimes emotionally charged, was done in this regard by the mentors. As the Spanish report explains, one of the dilemmas was "to negotiate interdependent parental practices to a more liberal ideology of mentee self-development", being the empowerment factor put forward by this project.

Except for the informing and consent meetings at the beginning of the project, the project staff in Bulgaria also discussed dropouts with families, whilst in Italy, meetings with families occurred when difficulties or issues arose. In Romania, the mentors did not consider necessary or did not have the opportunity to meet the families regularly. In Spain, where mentors lived in the same neighbourhood as the families, informal meetings occurred in the church, on the street or at home, whilst in one intra-family mentoring situation in Italy, some mentoring meetings occurred during family reunions, yet the mentor took separate time out with the mentee to discuss personal problems. Issues regarding secrecy (when the mentee is hiding something from the

family) can be at stake and it is very important that the mentee and their wishes remain central to the mentoring relationship.

Group activities and group mentoring

Group activities were aimed at building a social network between Roma young people and their mentors, whilst enhancing group cohesion, with the belief being that a large group is a source of spontaneous friendship, solidarity and support. Group activities were either organised ad-hoc, such as by taking existing opportunities offered by cultural events, leisure, training by other NGOs, volunteering associations, sports groups. Mentors and mentees were consulted regarding their desires for group activities, although not all suggestions proved feasible or equally attractive to all. No budget was foreseen for these activities but free options were available in some countries. Sponsorship (with free tickets for matches, ice-skating, cinema or theatre) was a good way to guarantee access to places that mentees would normally not be able to access (such as at the Inter Stadium in Milan, which has a very expensive entrance fee). Football matches were organised in Spain between two mentee/mentor teams from the two areas in which the project was held (La Mina and Manresa), whilst in Italy a game was held by mixing mentees and local refugees along with volunteers. In the latter case, the playfield was offered as sponsorship.

At the beginning of the project, when the relationship between mentors and mentees had not yet developed, the facilitators and mentors agreed that additional group meeting were a good way of strengthening the relationship and forming the group. Still, they required significant organisational effort. During busy school periods for participants (December, July) and as the project drew to its conclusion, they became more difficult to organise in terms of finding places, times and activities that would suit all. Group mentoring became the preferred alternative, with the mentor meeting their 2-3 mentees or 2-3 mentors meeting their mentees as a group. This allowed them to better select activities and to have more flexibility in regards to the schedule or location.

Supervision of mentoring

The mentoring was supervised by the facilitators, researchers and trainers, as well as periodically by the external expert. It consisted of personal meetings, interviews, monthly or bimonthly group meetings, evaluation focus-groups, skype meetings, WhatsApp groups, phone calls and monthly submission of diaries and timesheets. The facilitator and sometimes the researchers and the external experts assessed how the pairing was going, supported the mentors in organising meetings and contacting the mentees, replacing mentors when the relationship wasn't working out, negotiating the degree of autonomy and organisational support, along with suggesting approaches to problems of mentees and their families. It also addressed the ongoing training needs and supported the development of skills by the mentors, such communication, planning, mutual learning, coaching, access to specialised resources, and raising awareness of the Roma condition.

Conclusion of the mentoring process

In the final phase of the mentoring process, individual interviews between mentors and facilitators/researchers or group meetings with all the involved figures were held. All the mentors were invited to reflect, together with their mentees, on how and if they intended to continue their relationship or if they preferred to remain distant friends once the project was over.

In all countries a final meeting with mentors and mentees was organized. This group meeting aimed at celebrating the beneficial effects of the process and the achieved results, it was an occasion to reflect on the past two years and to share the positive experience of the participants in the program and lessons learned.

In some cases, the staff also found out that some mentors were interested in continuing their commitment within voluntary organizations, so they put them in contact with NGOs or associations or directly involved them in activities within their organizations. An official "certificate" was also given to the mentors as an official

recognition of their expertise and tasks performed.

Success factors and challenges

The success factors in mentoring were:

- Being able to create a safe environment and relationships of trust;
- The presence of common interests, desire to be guided by the mentee;
- The mentor's attitude: full commitment, open, perseverance in trying to gain trust, not too busy with other activities;
- Cooperation: not imposing decisions, but supporting the mentee to reach a decision of their own;
- Listening, as many mentees don't feel heard by their parents, in their need to share feelings, emotions and problems that they do not always share with friends;
- Pre-existence of a kinship/friendship relationship;
- Positive expectations from the group and the persons around the mentoring relationship.

With regards to being able to meet easily, success factors included:

- Responsible attitude of the mentees regarding the meetings;
- The mentor's capacity to manage time, appointments, travelling throughout the city;
- A positive past experience with mentoring;
- Having a meeting place and time that was accessible to both parties;
- Maintaining contact when meetings are difficult (WhatsApp, phone, Skype) and the mentee possessing a personal phone.

Positive, supportive and effective relationships between the mentor and the project facilitators were also important.

The challenges rather were:

- Academic and educational support through listening and support regarding other problems mentees might experience (romantic, friendship or family relationships, drug use, health issues, unemployment, family poverty and housing problems).

- The availability of services and resources where the mentor can accompany the mentee to receive support for issues proved important. Mentoring is effective when it's a resource amongst a set of other, already existing, resources.
- Insecurity (housing conditions, family poverty, unemployment) could hinder the participation of mentees, both in terms of the recruitment phase and with dropouts. Some dropouts are related to these unjust and fragile conditions that require structural solutions to solve basic needs. Young people worked in or outside the house, assisting with children and the elderly, whilst an informal education project did not offer financial incentives or an explicit connection between the activities and an improvement of the life conditions of the family.
- Dropout rates were a challenge for the project. Mentees difficulty to regularly keep up with the activities along with not showing up without warning, which proved to be demotivating for mentors (Italy, Bulgaria). This issue was faced with additional training, more direct support for the facilitators or even swapping mentors in the case of dropouts.
- In mentoring initiated on the basis of existing relationships, the mentees giving recognition to the project was difficult, as their participation and communication with other project roles was mediated by mentors. This implied variations in formal (project-appointed) and informal (natural, family) solidarity in everyday, family and friendship relationships.
- Finding free time (both for the mentors and mentees) was a challenge in all 4 countries, as participants were full-time students, worked, participated in other programmes, were the breadwinners of the family and had to devote time and energy to economic activities. A contract with few hours and unclear responsibilities may lead to mentoring activities losing centrality in mentors' everyday life. Remote coordination (text messages, phone calls) and facilitators' support and supervision diminished these negative effects. Also, mentors have managed to creatively adjust the pace of their activities, which led to uneven patterns.

In spite of the challenges, the project was well appreciated by its participants and did offer significant occasions for encounters and connections, as well as role-model relationships, as we will see in the section dedicated to the analysis of the evaluation data.

5.5. Awareness Raising Workshops and anti-discrimination campaign

The goal of the Awareness Raising Workshops (ARWs) was to design an anti-discrimination campaign through a participatory design methodology. The activities can be listed as follows:

- a. Group activities aimed at raising awareness on discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation and their common roots;
- b. Meetings with volunteers and professionals from organizations fighting all kinds of discrimination;
- c. Team-building activities aimed at strengthening the relationships among participants and fighting prejudices towards other members of the group;
- d. Activities based on theatre or art aimed at learning effective communication strategies;
- e. Activities aimed at helping participants co-design the anti-discrimination campaign with the help of the project staff.

Three days of workshop were held in each country between October 2018 and the end of January 2019.

The participants were a mixed group of male and female Roma and non-Roma youth coming from different social classes. Taking into consideration all the countries, the participants were aged between 14 and 28. The groups were composed of the mentors, mentees and some external participants which were friends of the mentees,

other youngsters were invited through youth networks and Youth Centers and a half-high school class was involved in the case of Italy. Both Romania and Italy posted a Call for participants on their social media accounts. The workshops were held in public and private schools, universities, Roma associations and aggregation centers with high youth presence.

All the opening sessions started with ice-breaking and team-building exercises. When the participants did not know each other yet, it was important to create group cohesion and a good dynamic through more ice-breakers. In case the participants came from very different social classes, the planned exercises and games intended to emphasize common traits. Before starting to work on the photographic campaign, the topic of discriminations was introduced through various exercises, so the participants could reflect on their own experience facing direct or indirect cases of discrimination. In order to make them feel comfortable, safe spaces were created from the beginning of the workshops by supporting everybody in the process of telling stories, asking clear questions and showing that every opinion is respected. Two were the main ways the topic was approached with, in plenary and in smaller groups. In some countries the sharing process was found easier when the participants worked in small groups or expressed themselves through written exercises. During the brainstorming in plenary it was more difficult to get everyone to talk, the group size made the sharing of personal discrimination-related experiences more difficult; in some cases, although not all of the participants shared their experiences, there were several young people who opened up about situations they lived through, which helped others to share their stories as well. Small group sessions gave the opportunity to go more in depth than the plenary session. Several participants eventually admitted they have painful experiences that they are not ready to share.

Some interactive exercises were also proposed (see the related section in the [Story_S Handbook](#)) to make the participants reflect on the different types of discrimination and share more examples: gender, ethnicity, skin colour, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc. It was interesting to notice how some of the participants felt safe enough to share their Roma identity and how discrimination

affected them or their families and friends. Some examples were related also to the camps (ethnic housing policies) and to different treatment in public venues. Across all four countries, the shared experiences were mainly related to discrimination on the basis of the socio-economic status, appearance and gender, on the basis of ethnicity. The conclusion of the meetings with a final moment in plenary was planned so that the participants did not leave with unsolved emotions. Listing antidiscrimination sentences helped the participants to focus on the objective of the workshops and to channelize their energies in a positive and constructive way.

In Romania and Italy, the photovoice process was used. In order for participants to better express themselves through photography, the basics of photography and communication techniques were taught. The communication specialists used visual materials, which helped the participants understand communication methods and message delivery. Street photography, directed/constructed photo shoots and the use of metaphor (using concrete objects or elements to stand for abstract concepts, ideas or emotions) were also some of the discussed topics.

In Italy and Romania, it was asked the participants to take the photos on discrimination or on what works as anti-discrimination, alone or in small groups, giving them time (at least two weeks) between sessions. Cameras were provided to those who did not own one. In shooting the photos, the mentees have been followed by the mentors, going for photographic walks in their neighbourhoods or around the city. In Italy, a pre-selection of better-quality photos was put in place before final meeting for aesthetic and communicative efficiency reasons. Common themes were identified by the group(s) by assigning all the pictures a category. Then, in order to choose the photos for the campaign, each person voted their favourite one for each category. In Romania, more posters were kept than initially envisaged, in order not to exclude ideas and to value each participants' work. The final photos were accompanied by a short phrase or explanation which reflects participants' initial intent/thoughts and some meanings emerging in the group discussion about each photo. In Bulgaria the process was slightly different: the

participants were divided in groups of 6-8 based on two main criteria: their interest in a chosen area of discrimination and their age; every participant was given the chance to switch groups. The topics identified and covered by the six groups were: ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, and appearance. Group drawing was then employed as the participatory arts-based method of choice for Bulgarian ARWs. In Spain, the pictures played a more conceptual role which was decided in plenary, as participants chose to show their own faces in order to provoke reflection about discrimination, this being a very strong and emotional choice. In this case the decision was shared, but participants contributed to the messages (that varied from poster to poster) while the visual element did not vary among posters.

Thinking of the overall experience, some recommendations can be put forward: working

with smaller groups would have made the process more efficient. Also, the time between the workshops and the campaign should have been shorter, not to lose some of the participants; sometimes, it was difficult to get them involved and enthusiastic again. In addition, it would have been useful to have more time, perhaps a fourth day of workshops, to discuss campaigns more in-depth and increase the motivation. More time for team-building would have been useful as well, to have Roma and non-Roma participants bonding enough to form mixed groups to perform the task of taking photos together. For some partners, the participants could have had more freedom in choosing their campaign methods/medium. The Spanish team believes that reaching the large planned number of participants should have been second in importance to finding a fewer but more motivated youth. Eventually, part of the activities could have been more participant-driven and not pre-scheduled.

5.6. Opening Events and Citizenship Incubators

After the realization of the campaign, this was exhibited and presented in a minimum 10 Opening Events (OEs) in each country - 53 events in total -. The aim was to create a “thinking space” to promote awareness raising about discriminatory dimensions of culture and subcultures where young people could act as agent of change.

The key players of these meetings were the participants of the ARWs. During this phase, which lasted from February till July 2019, they in fact acted as facilitators, supported by staff members. Overall, we were received warmly and enthusiastically at every location: schools, community and youth centers, sports centers, other public events, achieving a total number of 2.173 participants among the four countries. Here, the young facilitators (or, in their absence, the staff members) described each photo of the national campaign, talked about how the campaign was built and at the end dedicated some time for questions or peer-to-peer debates on these topics. People were invited to tell us what messages drew their attention the most and why. There was only one occasion in which someone expressed disapproval and walked out of the room. That was an intimidating experience that

we did not anticipate enough but fortunately, it did not happen at other locations. In many occasions the youth from the audience also started sharing personal experiences of discrimination feeling empowered by the message the campaign was sending. In one Italian school the Professors started a contest on their own on the topics of the campaign to actively involve the students. The campaign was also shared on the social media accounts of the partner organizations and on the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the project.

A minimum number of 10 citizenship incubators (CIs) were also organized in each country - 47 meetings in total -, which took place between March and July 2019 reaching the total number of 1.434 participants. The locations were schools, universities and youth centers as for the opening events, but involved smaller groups such as single classes. With the expression of “citizenship incubator” we mean a place in which we tried to co-create a culture of inclusion and respect. Thanks to really concrete and interactive activities, the participants could share several personal experiences, sometimes reporting events in which they were victims of discrimination, other times

sharing situations witnessed in “public” places, or admitting some behaviours that put them in the shoes of the perpetrator. What often emerged, was that discrimination affected in several ways the daily life of a lot of persons from different points of view. It was interesting to note that sometimes there was a difference in the kind of participation between the students at the events that took place in schools and the participants at other venues – youth and community centers. This could be due to the fact that those who attend youth and community centers are youngsters who have chosen and taken initiative to be active and participate in community life. They were bright and engaged, open to this project, eager to learn,

grow, and contribute. Still, the smaller group-size format of the incubators allowed the students from the schools to also participate more than during the launch events. Also, it was interesting that the participants of the CIs knew each other. This simulated an actual community in which different participants had different roles. The CIs have been implemented taking into account the target group and, in some cases, with the use of some video or PowerPoint presentations. In some countries also the mentors and mentees were involved, creating a friendly atmosphere, so everybody was invited to participate openly and respectfully debate.

6. Evaluation of the project: analysis of the results

This section presents the results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted on the data gathered from the mentoring process for the entire consortium. To be submitted monthly was a diary kept by the mentor for each mentee, providing a brief description of the activities. A periodic evaluation questionnaire was administered by the facilitator, researcher or external expert to all mentees who agreed to such. This comprised a description of the school or work situation of the mentee, a mentor relationship scale adapted from Rhodes (2014), a scale measuring the satisfaction with the activities and a scale measuring various other aspects (personnel, support given, fun, etc.). 90% of the mentees responded in the first wave and 85% in the second wave. Dropouts were documented with interviews, where possible.

5 in-depth mentee interviews were completed, one every 6 months in each country, by various figures involved in the project (except for mentors), focused on the educational attainment, knowledge and skills transmitted by the project, relevance of the activities and satisfaction with the project and its relationships. Monthly supervision meetings with mentors were conducted by facilitators, researchers and occasionally external experts, periodically asking them to reflect on points of “pride and regret” in order to gather their perspective on the activities and relationships. Individual and group interviews were not recorded but narratively transcribed during and after the meeting. Thematic analysis was conducted by local researchers and a transversal analysis was conducted by the coordinator on the national results reported.

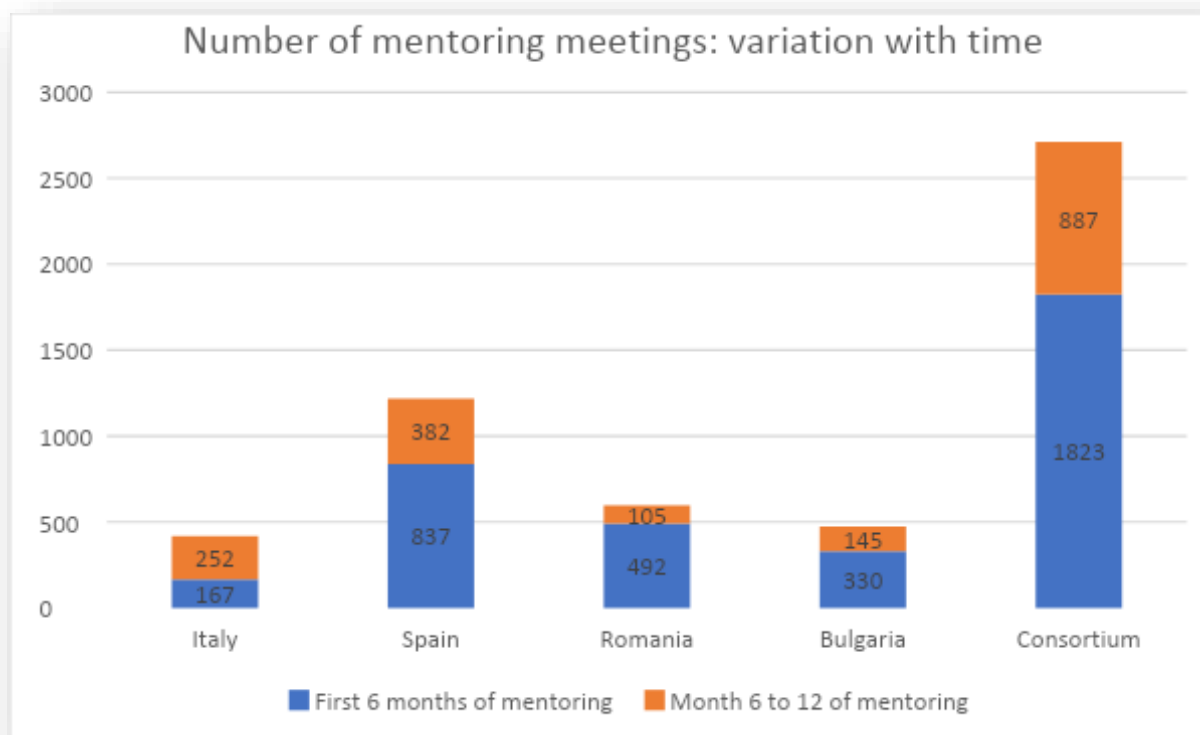


Figure 5: Number of mentoring meetings, according to mentor diaries (individual or group).

The indicator of the number of mentoring meetings shows that at the beginning of the mentoring process, more meetings were held in each country. The first 6 months actually range from June to November 2018 but due to delays in the mentee recruiting process and to the school holiday period (August), we can consider the two time periods approximately equivalent in terms of duration. The slowdown of the pace of the mentoring process after the first 6 months depends on a natural change occurring in relationships, as mentoring responds to the individualized needs and circumstances of youth, and every relationship follows a distinctive trajectory (Keller, 2005). It was useful to re-evaluate the initial objectives periodically, to adapt to changing circumstances. The slowing down of the pace is reflected also in the results of the mentor relationship strength scale (see below) and with the qualitative reflections of the personnel. Such downsizing is not recorded in Italy, perhaps because various measures were explicitly taken during this period to overcome the low number of meetings registered in the first 6 months, which led to a timely increase. These measures consisted in recruiting an additional

facilitator, sustained advice and supervision to the mentors, recruiting new (and more motivated) mentees and mentors, redefining objectives and re-assignments.

A short version of the mentor relationship strength scale has been used to understand mentees' opinion and feelings, after 6 months and after 12 months of mentoring. The combined score ranged from 5 (best) to 15 (worst), with responses averaging 5.68 after 6 months of mentoring and 6.56 after 12 months, showing high satisfaction with the relationships in all countries (especially in Spain and Bulgaria). The slight worsening of the scores might be due to mentor turnover and re-assignment or to the gradual decrease in intensity of the relationship throughout the year, as suggested above by the decreasing frequency of the meetings. The best evaluated aspects, on average at the consortium level, were "my mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me" and "I feel close to my mentor". The worse evaluated aspect was "my mentor has a lot of good ideas on how to solve problems", which indicates that the relationship was closer to a peer-relationship than to a professional educational relationship.

Nonetheless, satisfaction with the programme did not decrease significantly, being 7.24 in the first wave and 7.87 in the second (min. 5 - best, max. 14 - worst); whilst the average vote for various other aspects of the project (min. 8 - worst, max.

30 - best) was 25.7. These indicate a correspondence between the mentees' expectations and the project, leading to a good satisfaction level overall.

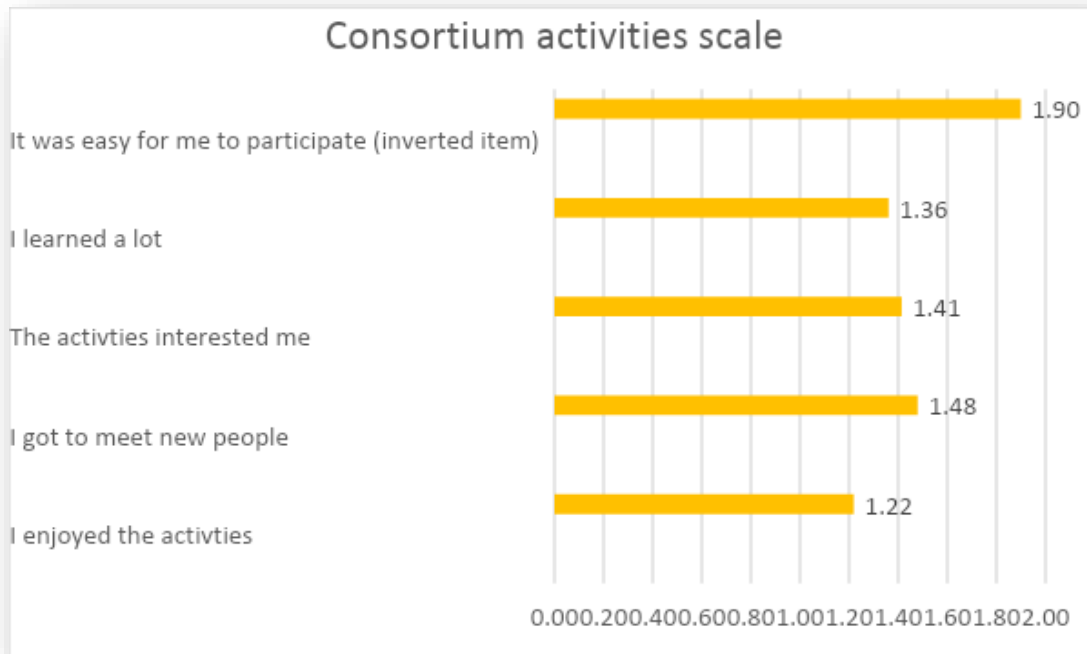


Figure 6: Enjoyment of activities, consortium average, scale from 1 (agree) to 3 (disagree), 169 valid answers (both first and second wave).

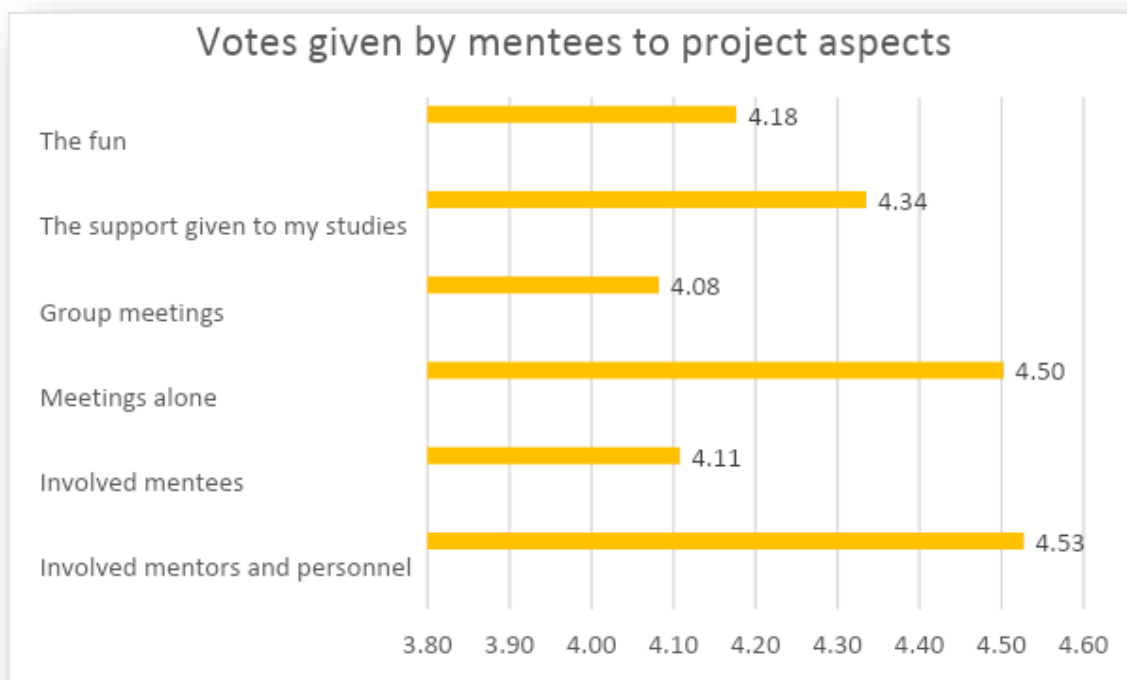


Figure 7: Votes (1 worst - 5 best) given by mentees of the consortium to various aspects of the project. 170 valid answers (both first and second wave).

The qualitative evaluation with mentors and mentees aimed at determining their perspective throughout the process and at understanding mentees' and mentors' profiles relative to the project themes.

Mentees generally described **qualification** as a personal goal and an expected turning point in their life. In most cases, the mentees' goal was social mobility and escaping labour instability. In Spain, participants enrolled in a programme for school reinsertion and had to determine what "going back to school" signified, along with socially adapting to the new role of being a mature learner, in a context in which their decision is not always understood or supported. They had to accommodate new tasks at a cognitive and social level, with the management of time and fatigue, and frequently negotiating changes with workplace and family. Another example comes from Italy, where most mentees were enrolled in professional or vocational schools that had strong programmes for labour market integration. The mentees strictly connect education to the possibility of being employed in the very same sector they are studying. When the study goals were not so clear, the results of the mentoring process varied: in some cases, even higher aspirations than the initial ones came out after discussions with mentors who had higher educational levels; in other cases, the mentees' decisions (changing or dropping out of school) were not apparently swayed by their mentors' advice.

The mentees who achieved their educational goals during the project described feeling happy and somewhat proud of their experiences. They defined the relationship of trust with some of the teachers, who appeared supportive of them; moreover, some of the mentees described very positive relations with classmates. Yet other mentees had difficulties in meeting the teachers' expectations and adapting to entering high-school, leading to the desire to change school.

The **relationship with the mentors** was facilitated by having common interests or shared backgrounds (such as both coming from a big family). The mentor was mostly a source of advice,

suggestions or even pressure and an impetus for doing things together. Mentors were seen as those who can teach some "soft skills" that are fundamental when dealing with hirers and colleagues. They appear in the words of the mentees as "life example" because they demonstrated that it is possible to become an autonomous adult by achieving personal goals such as schooling or work.

Trust was a key element, requiring the mentee to believe that the mentors could help with personal development. This is connected with setting the initial goal—a clear one in which there is space for personal development—and with the mentee having good motivation to participate. When the mentee was not clear about how the mentor could support him/her and could not envisage specific goals/decisions for which they relied on their own capacities, the relationship was not successful. Periodic checks of the objectives and of the interest in project activities and successively, a redefinition of the activities, seems to be an impetus for maintaining good motivation for both the mentor and mentee.

The **group dimension** also further acts as a motivator on the mentees, reinforcing the project objectives and legitimating the mentors' role as part of a network. At the beginning of the project, the group meetings were greatly appreciated by mentors and mentees. Sometimes, more successful mentees negatively judged the group of mentees as having some elements that "disturb" and that are "not really motivated".

One of the biggest challenges in the mentors' viewpoint was finding a mutually-convenient time to meet the mentee, with busy schedules (having other full-time jobs) being the main reason for dropping out. Deciding what and how to address issues during the meetings—mostly informal—was also a reported as a challenge in Bulgaria.

The degree of involvement was also difficult to manage: some mentors thought that the hours available were not sufficient, still many did not manage to use all the available hours, whilst others felt at an emotional level that they should have been more involved, even though this was not required by the project. An example of the

latter sentiment came from a mentor in Italy whose mentee ran away from home due to her mother forcing her to cease a romantic relationship. Constant support was requested by the mother but the programme did not foresee and did not have the resources for such a high level of involvement with members of the family other than the mentee themselves.

The reasons for **mentees dropping out** of the project were connected to low motivation in attending school altogether. When the mentee dropped out school, he/she would also drop out from the project. Changes in residence (also due to forced evictions, for example in Italy), family migration (including back and forth, with long periods in the country of origin), family conflicts over choosing a romantic partner or romantic relationships outside of marriage, family-making, family deaths for three mentees and a fear for girls' safety on public transportation were amongst the reasons mentees cited for dropouts. During the interviews, opinions on and evaluation of the Awareness-Raising Workshops were also requested. In Italy, opinions regarding the workshops were diverse amongst the participants, as was their participation. Many perceived the training before the actual recording as being long and technical, on the other hand some were very

happy to participate in the training sessions with other students. Some declared feeling proud for speaking about these topics in front of classmates or schoolmates, whilst others stated that it was too difficult for them due to not being used to speaking in front of others.

In Spain, participants' thoughts and impressions were all positive, as they saw how non-Roma are interested in learning about their experience, combined with their noticing that non-Roma do not know much about their people.

In Romania, the interviewed mentees described the ARWs as the best project experience, with their being were happy and proud to have participated and to having met new people.

In Bulgaria, mentee participation was motivating, with mentors seeing it as an occasion for the youngsters' development and transitioning from a role of passive learners as students to people who talk about important topics in an accessible way to thus change the environment in which they live, making it more inclusive.

The project teams realised that it was extremely necessary to talk about the issues concerning discrimination, given that people usually only discuss its extreme forms, whilst the more implicit and hidden forms are legitimised.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, we intend to share some strengths of the project and some lessons we have learnt, in order to make as concrete and operational as possible the reflection on the possible replicability of STORY_S or its components.

In Story_S, we engaged with Roma and non-Roma youths in a participatory, visual group process, with the aim of opposing discrimination. In each country, the project partners collaborated with a network of organisations and schools in order to set up a process of reflection amongst students, regarding discrimination that young people (aged 15-25 years) experience everyday life, with Roma youth playing a central role. Moreover, at a European level, we strengthened a network of partners with expertise in the field of research and education, such as universities, volunteering associations, Roma and outreach organisations, in

supporting successful educational pathways for Roma youth.

The youths were not only able to proactively build a campaign but had the chance to communicate its messages within their networks, including other young people who participated in the Awareness-Raising Workshops who liked the Facebook and Instagram pages of the project, along with participants in the Opening Events and Citizenship Incubators, echoing the messages to their networks. Thanks to the two-year mentoring programme, the partners had the chance to reflect on contextual factors influencing the educational paths of young Roma people, such as growing up in the child protection system in Romania or in an emergency shelter in Italy. Mentoring proved to be a process that relies mostly on peer relationships. Building a rapport takes time, yet programmes that are too long can

produce disaffection and loss of motivation as life circumstances change. Also, as predicted at the beginning of the project, some difficulties emerged in relation to housing conditions, personal and family contexts, economical and mobility issues, and so on. These turned out to be sources of major complexity and in some cases, affected the participation of some in a mentoring programme. A number of drop-outs were related to these unjust and fragile conditions that require structural solutions to solve basic needs (for example, evictions from shelters in Italy). Despite the project and its management being quite complex, some positive dynamics and synergies with other actors in social service provision emerged during the mentoring activities along with the development and sharing process of the anti-discrimination campaign.

The anti-discrimination campaign confirmed the importance of young people finding a safe space in which to share their experiences and to discuss amongst each other the effects of their behaviours and the discrimination they experience. Speaking to peers means communicating in a language that connects due to being in line with their own experiences. Still, the need to have an efficient product and the lack of continuity in the participation of some young people made expert interventions (from facilitators, trainers, communication experts) necessary in order to drive the process towards its outcomes. Ultimately, as per other arts-based action research projects, the final media product is achieved by continuous collaboration and negotiation between the participants, facilitators and experts.

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