

BERLIN MAKING ROMA PEOPLE FEEL AT HOME

Berlin is taking action to ensure that newly arrived Roma, and every resident, has the right and possibility to actively participate in society through access to work, housing and public services. Roma people are involved in making the policies that directly affect them.

Fighting discrimination and social exclusion of Roma

Since 2011, as a result of EU enlargement, some districts in Berlin have become destinations for European migration, especially from Bulgaria (+23.9%) and Romania (+25.2%), and to some extent from Poland (+6.7%). A rise in people reaching Berlin from Serbia and North Macedonia, primarily to seek asylum, was also prominent. Although national regulations do not allow for the collection of ethnic data, Berlin district workers and civil society organisations pointed out that a high percentage of these people were Roma. Most of them have low levels of education, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and have a poor health condition. As a response and based on the EU framework for Roma inclusion up to 2020, Berlin adopted an Action Plan for the inclusion of migrant Roma. The aim was to promote Roma people's socioeconomic integration, with a focus on education, employment healthcare and social services, housing and combatting social exclusion.

After 5 years of implementation, Berlin mandated an external evaluator to conduct a thorough analysis and provide recommendations for the future of the action plan and for Berlin's work on Roma inclusion.

Berlin's regional framework for participation, diversity, empowerment and non-discrimination

The thorough evaluation of Berlin's action plan, that involved a wide range of stakeholders (public administration, social agents, Roma organisations and activists etc.) highlighted the need for a deep structural reform, pivoting around the development of the regional programme. A major shift was engaged by mainstreaming framework actions to all vulnerable groups in the city while ensuring the continuity of positive targeted measures when necessary. This prevents the stigmatisation of Roma people and the ethnicisation of certain social challenges.

Evaluators indeed noticed that despite the positive steps towards inclusion resulting from measures in the action plan, anti-gypsyist sentiments and attitudes remain strong and impedes further progress. Prejudice and anti-gypsyist attitudes are one of the key obstacles for integration faced by Roma people in Berlin, with impacts on their access to the labour market, education, housing and health. Berlin therefore decided to aim the regional framework at fighting anti-gypsyism, ensuring equal participation in public life and equal access to basic services while strengthening already positive measures for social inclusion.

After the evaluation, Berlin began to increase the **avenues for participation** for Roma people, starting from the very design of the new regional framework. Two representatives of the Roma community were granted a seat at the State Advisory Council for Integration and Migration, and two



representatives of Roma organisations were included into the steering committee of the Action Plan. The Berlin Senate also set up a Roma and Sinti Working Group, as a precursor to the new Roma and Sinti Advisory Council, which will be tasked with advising the Senate and giving policy recommendations. In so doing, Berlin seeks to set the example of how to increase engagement by making the Roma community part of the whole process, from design to implementation and evaluation, of the strategy for their inclusion.

With regards to the **fight against anti-gypsyism**, Berlin has established a platform for dialogue between the local administration, NGOs and civil society organisations to foster capacity-building and improving their capacity to counter anti-gypsyism, especially through legal empowerment. The new framework will enable a more systematic recording of incidents, increase counselling for victims, and raise awareness amongst the population and within public institutions. This will amplify successful programmes like the DOSTA project, a documentation centre that monitors anti-gypsyist incidents and supports victims. Other actions considered in the programme are awareness raising on Roma history and culture, or the incorporation of awareness raising measures on anti-gypsyism into Berlin's school curriculum.

Empowerment is another axis on which the framework is anchored. To achieve this, the new framework will support the implementation of training for young people and adults from the Roma community, to prepare them to work in day-care centres, schools, youth welfare services and the public administration. Specific measures targeting the empowerment of **Roma youth** will also be strengthened, building up on already successful ones like Amaro Foro. This is a self-organised group, which represents the interests in Roma youth and actively works against discrimination and towards empowerment.

A specific policy area that the framework aims to tackle is the lack of access to decent **housing**, especially for EU citizens who are not entitled to benefits. Temporary accommodation and counselling to transition to permanent housing will be strengthened. The Nostel project has proven successful in this regard. It provides shelter to families with children and accompanies them in their journey towards inclusion from a holistic standpoint covering access to employment, education, housing and health. As of September 2020, Nostel had provided accommodation to 303 people, including 156 children, mainly from Romania and Bulgaria.

In a nutshell, the regional programme will strive to ensure that newly arrived and settled Roma people can actively participate in society, access work and public services on an equal basis as any other Berlin resident, and that Berlin's public service and broader society are free from anti-gypsyism.

Funding

The measures related to the action plan are mainly funded by the state of Berlin, with support from EU funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD).

Successes

Exchanges with other city experts from the Eurocities Working Group Roma Inclusion helped identify some of the success factors in Berlin's approach. One of its key strengths is the combination of **targeted** measures for integration with a **mainstreaming** of Roma inclusion across policy areas. A further success is its strong **participatory** approach, materialised in the collaboration between a wide array of local stakeholders including those working on the ground. Moreover, city experts praised Berlin's commitment to comprehensively **evaluate** the implementation of the action plan, where once again, the participation of Roma communities and social actors was essential to gather the real impact of actions on the ground. The fact that Berlin has also been working closely with the national level to bring attention to local issues in the national debate was considered a constructive step forward, opening pathways for stronger **multilevel governance** on the matter and setting the example for other cities in Germany.

The city state of Berlin also managed to increase the visibility of Roma people in the city and of the challenges they face. The endeavour to **raise awareness** amongst the general public was successfully combined with steps towards educating Roma people on their rights, to better equip them with the tools to identify and fight anti-gypsyist practices. Social services improved their **outreach** to the Roma population, especially families, and the support provided was undergone an increased professionalisation in the past years, resulting in better quality support. The above successes can be attributed partly to Berlin's competencies as it is a city-state, but also to the strong **political will** to create an inclusive city for all Berlin residents.



Challenges

Although strong political will and sustained engagement with social actors and the local community have paved the way for a positive enforcement of the framework, there are still some obstacles in Berlin's strategy for Roma inclusion. The annualised budgets of NGOs, who play a key role in implementing actions set up by the local government, make planning in the long-term difficult, and project implementation often suffers from **underfunding**. Funding for Roma inclusion should also be more present in senior level budgeting and planning in the city administration, which should dedicate a targeted and higher amount to anti-discrimination measures and response mechanisms.

The fact that national legislation does not permit the **collection of data** based on ethnic origin challenges the obtention of accurate estimates on the target population, essential for an adequately evidence-based policy. Lack of data also makes it easier for some particularly vulnerable groups to fall out of the social services' radar and makes outreach more difficult. Alternative ways of mapping the size, diversity and needs of the target group are needed. Moreover, despite efforts by the city, anti-gypsyist attitudes remain strong, and they can be bolstered by **political narratives** framing migrants as 'good' or 'bad' that contribute to stigmatising. Finally, dynamics in the housing market, often outside

of the local government's control, and fundamental **shortages in public housing** units hinder the promotion of affordable and decent accommodation.

Lessons to transfer to other cities

Since the beginning of the implementation of the action plan, and especially after the in-depth evaluation, Berlin has learnt some key lessons that can help other cities looking to implement a similar strategy.

- Local authorities need to make sure that there are platforms available to facilitate open dialogue between the city administration, the agencies implementing measures, civil society, the Roma community and any other relevant stakeholder.
- Cities should clearly define the scope of the action plan, set realistic goals and manage expectations of what can be really achieved in practice.
- Roma people should be involved in all stages of the process; in the design, the implementation and the monitoring of any action plan. This can take the form, for example but not exclusively, of an advisory council or a representative body that is in constant communication with local policy-makers.
- Combatting anti-gypsyism needs to be at the centre of all policies. An anti-discrimination strategy needs to be integrated into the workings of the city administration and it should be a priority for all relevant departments.

What next?

While the specific evaluation lasted two years, Berlin's approach includes a process for constant monitoring and revision of the local policies for Roma inclusion. As such, the incorporation of new measures for improved participation of Roma people in the planning and implementation of diverse actions, as well as on the fight against anti-gypsyism are ongoing. Yet they will not mark the end of the evolution and Berlin will continue to the needs reported by the variety of stakeholders involved in making Roma inclusion a reality in Berlin.

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Additional Resources

[Eurocities policy brief on the new EU Roma Framework](#)

[European Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation](#)



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