

Belgian Country Fiche



IO 1: Guide for Positive Narrative on Romani Integration through

*“Boosting positive narrative on Romani integration through Arts” with
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Introduction

The aim of this report is to give an overview about the current situation of the presence of the Roma in Belgium and more specific in Flanders.

This report includes a short introduction to the current policy on Roma in Belgium and which initiatives are supported at national and local level, including statistical information.

A second focus is to examine and moderate different art methods and techniques supporting social tolerance practices and adult education for Romani to boost a positive narrative of themselves through Art. An on the desk literature research was conducted to compare existing initiatives on social integration for Roma or other minorities and gave insight to some good practices that show how art can contribute to this social integration of minorities and thus, through greater understanding, lead to better tolerance.

Statistical Information about Romani in Belgium and their characteristics

Context

The foundation stone for a European policy was laid in 2005. Since then, this policy has been followed up by the European Platform for Roma inclusion. It brings together governments (Belgium is represented by the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration), international organisations, the EU and representatives of Roma civil society. The aim is to work together on a policy of Roma inclusion and integration. The Council of Europe drew up a Roma action plan in May 2011: the 'EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020'. It requires Member States to draw up their own Roma action plan.

Roma in Belgium

It is impossible to say exactly how many Roma there are. Roma is not a nationality but an ethnicity, they do not always have legal residence, they move easily and they are not always known as Roma. ¹ In Belgium, there are some 30,000. In Flanders and Brussels 15,000 to 20,000. Roma often live in large cities such as Antwerp (4000), Brussels (6500 to 7000) and Ghent (5500). There is also a Roma community in smaller cities such as Sint-Niklaas, Temse, Leuven, Tienen, Diest and Heusden-Zolder.

Roma in Flanders come mainly from EU countries Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. But also from other (non-EU) Member States in the former Eastern Bloc.²

Flemish / Belgian action plan CEE-Roma

In 2012, a National Roma Council was installed with the aim of increasing Roma policy participation and ensuring equal treatment. The council was given an advisory role. Its mission is to ensure the participation of Roma and inhabitants of halting sites in the Belgian policy and to ensure that the Roma are treated equally.³

¹ Agentschap voor Binnenlands bestuur. (2012). *Vlaams actieplan MOE(Roma)-Migranten*. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/vlaams-actieplan-moe-roma-migranten-2012>

² Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering. *Wie zijn de Roma*. Retrieved from <https://www.agii.be/thema/bijzondere-groepen/roma/wie-zijn-de-roma>

³ Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering. *Wie zijn de Roma*. Retrieved from <https://www.agii.be/thema/bijzondere-groepen/roma/wie-zijn-de-roma>

At the Flemish level, the Action Plan for CEE-Roma was rolled out. More attention was to be paid to Central and Eastern European migrants, with a specific focus on Roma.⁴ CEE stands for Central and Eastern European migration.

The plan pays special attention to the Roma. It is an integrated plan for all policy areas. It is part of the integration and integration policy.

The plan contains 42 concrete actions. These are addressed to all newcomers from CEE countries (Central and Eastern Europe). The nine priority action areas in the plan are: counselling with a view to integration, work, psychosocial counselling, housing, education, correct perception and anti-discrimination, participation, supporting coexistence, training, expertise and research.

The local level is the first and most confronted with CEE and Roma issues. Local authorities are best placed to detect and control social problems. A policy on CEE migrants must therefore be conducted primarily at the local level. In view of the complexity of the problem, the Flemish government and its CEE(Roma)- policy to support local authorities with CEE(Roma) problems where necessary.⁵

In 2019, however, the Roma policy in Belgium has been criticized from various organizations. Under the directives of Flemish Minister of Integration and Equal Opportunities Liesbeth Homans, the Roma policy was incorporated into the general minorities policy. With regard to the Roma policy, there is still only one federal contact point within the POD Social Integration.⁶

Kim Janssens, staff member for Roma at the Minorities Forum, regrets this choice. She emphasizes that this is a 'special' group that requires a separate approach. Janssens does see positive developments at the local level. "We notice that taking action is currently mainly done at city and municipal level. Good initiatives are being taken at that level, but of course there is also a demand for coordination from above and for freeing up the necessary resources."⁷

⁴ Torremans, G. (2019). Voordurende zigeunerhaat vormt een belangrijke barrière voor inclusie. Retrieved from <https://www.mo.be/nieuws/het-romabeleid-draait-vierkant>

⁵ Agentschap voor Binnenlands bestuur. (2012). *Vlaams actieplan MOE(Roma)-Migranten*. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/vlaams-actieplan-moe-roma-migranten-2012>

⁶ Torremans, G. (2019). Voordurende zigeunerhaat vormt een belangrijke barrière voor inclusie. Retrieved from <https://www.mo.be/nieuws/het-romabeleid-draait-vierkant>

⁷ Torremans, G. (2019). Voordurende zigeunerhaat vormt een belangrijke barrière voor inclusie. Retrieved from <https://www.mo.be/nieuws/het-romabeleid-draait-vierkant>

Good Practices in pedagogical techniques and methodologies using arts for social inclusion groups inclusion

This chapter is based on a 'on the desk' study. The aim was to look for pedagogical techniques and methodologies in which art is used to achieve social inclusion. To this end, various sources were consulted from different perspectives.

On the one hand, local initiatives were included with concrete examples described in local news media or on the websites of the initiating organizations. On the other hand, scientific papers were also consulted in order to gather more background information about the target group and/or to give more insight into the use of art as an instrument for social inclusion and social inclusion.

Good practice: The Roundabout artwork⁸

This is an example of **how art can connect people and raise community engagement**.

Through a project to provide a piece of art for a specific roundabout; community work, adult education, artists and local government joined forces to increase the chances of work or personal development through creating an artwork.

It is a cooperation between different adults with a migration background who change something in their own environment. They all live in the same community, a multicultural resident. They weld a work of art, by doing so they learn a concrete skill that increases their chances of getting a job.

After all, the diverse neighborhood has a positive story to tell in the media.

Good practice: Refugee atelier⁹

Two artists organise workshops in an asylum centre in Belgium to give refugees **the opportunities to tell and process their story through art** and a meaningful interpretation for their aimless and fearful waiting time.

In previous conversations with refugees, Frida and Youssef, two artists, experienced how residents of the asylum centre revive and blossom when they are given opportunities to tell and process their story through art. After great success, they decided to organise painting workshops outside the asylum centre as well, in order to promote their integration

⁸ Rimo Limburg. Rotondekunstwerk. Retrieved from <https://www.houthalen-helchteren.be/rotondekunstwerk>

⁹ Bollen, F and Hajam, Y. (2016). Atelier vluchtelingen. Retrieved from <https://www.gastvrijegemeente.be/initiatieven/atelier-vluchtelingen>

Painting, drawing, sculpting... all creative techniques... Art as a universal language to communicate. In previous conversations with refugees, they experienced how residents of the asylum centre revive and blossom when they are given opportunities to tell and process their story through

Good practice: Roma children talk about their school and home situation through selfmade drawings¹⁰

Morgane Evard, a master's student in pedagogical sciences at Ghent University, wrote a master's thesis on a roma children speak about their school and home situation (2012). For this, she conducted an exploratory study from the child's perspective.

Prejudices seem to be completely absent in the child's perception, At least on the issues mentioned by the Roma children themselves.

It is very interesting to compare general prejudices and to consult the effective situation and also the opinion of the target group itself. Children were involved in this study in a creative way. Art was used as a form of communication in order to give shape to their ideas and emotions.

Good practice: 'De Karavaan' 2016, a Roma project that brings people together through music.¹¹

De karavaan is a project from the organisation Madam Fortuna in 2016. Madam Fortuna creates theatre and music performances with a mix of professionals and enthusiasts. The projects are characterised by their diversity, both ethnically and in terms of generations.

A diverse group of musicians is the driving force behind 'De Karavaan'; an intercultural meeting between young and old, between enthusiasts and professionals, with particular attention to cooperation with the Roma community. But also an inter-city meeting between Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels.

DE KARAVAAN started as a film project, but soon the idea grew to start a music project that would concretely bring Roma and non-Roma musicians together through music. Music serves as a means to make different musicians (young, old, professional, amateur, Roma, non-Roma) search for a common language. Meeting each other while making music can be a positive reason to enter into a dialogue with each other, even without an instrument, and to grow towards each other.

It is no coincidence that Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels are three major cities where the Roma community is strongly represented. Rehearsals started in each city in the spring of 2014. Each city set up its own orchestra/choir under the direction of a Roma and a non-Roma musician. Each city worked on its own repertoire, and there were also inter-city rehearsals on the

¹⁰ Evard, M. (2012). Roma-kinderen aan het woord over hun school-en thuissituatie: een exploratief onderzoek vanuit het perspectief van het kind. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from https://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/893/934/RUG01-001893934_2012_0001_AC.pdf

¹¹ Organisation Madam Fortuna. (2016). De Karavaan, editie 2016. Retrieved from <https://madamfortuna.be/projecten/de-karavaan-editie-2016>

programme. The three cities worked together towards a big concert/festival in the Roma during the ENTER festival on 25 April 2016.

Good practice: In het hart van Vera Bila, a music performance that brings together Roma and Flemish culture.¹²

Vera Bila was a Czech Roma singer with international allure. She was described several times as the "Ella Fitzgerald of Gypsy Music" or also as the "Queen of Romany". In this project, a Roma youth choir and Roma musicians with Slovakian roots perform a unique concert together with musicians from Ghent. The collaboration of the Roma culture and the Flemish culture go hand in hand on and off stage. The project is in cooperation with the participatory art organisation.

¹² Organisation Madam Fortuna. (2020). In het hart van Vera Bila. Retrieved from <https://madamfortuna.be/projecten/in-het-hart-van-vera-bila>

Conclusions

In Belgium, the Roma are still often disadvantaged and prejudiced. They are often prejudiced because of their culture and history is not known to outsiders or only partially. These good practices show that art can be a useful way for an individual or community to express their emotions, stories and cultural background in a creative way on the one hand, and on the other hand, these works of art can form an accessible access to show outsiders a piece of their story. This fits completely within the project PAL Art “Boosting positive narrative on Romani integration through Arts”.

List of items /Publications

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