Introduction to the Council of Europe database on Roma-related policies and good practices

This introductory presentation of the Council of Europe database on Roma-related policies and good practices is aimed at defining the scope of the database, clarifying the terminology related to “policies” and “good practices” and explaining the methodology used.

This document contains extracts of reference documents such as the article “Identifying and sharing good practices” published by Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, in Knowledge Solutions, in November 2008.¹


Rationale

“Most organisations know that learning from the past increases the chances of success in the future - finding ways to do so can also link staff with the resources they need to complete tasks faster, better, and more cheaply. Frequently, this is done by means of instruction manuals or “how-to” guides - which typically provide information or advice on a particular topic. Leading organisations maximize opportunities across all core knowledge activities to identify, create, store, share, and use better” (Olivier Serrat).

Why a Council of Europe database on Roma-related policies and good practices is needed?

The Council of Europe, as a pan-European organisation ensuring fundamental values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, provides its 47 member states with inter alia the possibility to share with each other experience/expertise in specific thematic policy areas.

As reflected in the Strasbourg Declaration adopted at the High Level meeting on Roma on 20 October 2010, there is an urgent need for drawing up lessons from the implementation of Roma–targeted policies and for sharing good practices at all levels, whether international, national, regional and local.

In reference to the need for setting-up a database on Roma-related policies and good practices, the Strasbourg Declaration states the following:

(43) "Recognising the need to contribute to the implementation of these priorities through the use of good practices, expertise and available financial resources which exist at European, national, regional and local level, the member states of the Council of Europe:

(44) welcome the decision of the Secretary General to re-organise resources in a transversal manner within the Council of Europe Secretariat with the task of further

³ http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/index_goodpractices.html
⁴ To consult the Strasbourg Declaration, as well as the Strasbourg Initiatives by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, see http://www.coe.int/lportal/web/coe-portal/event-files/our-events/council-of-europe-meeting-for-roma?dynLink=true&layoutId=410&dlgroupId=10227&fromArticleId
developing co-operation with national, regional and local authorities and international organisations in collecting, analysing, exchanging and disseminating information on policies and good practice on Roma, providing advice and support upon the request of national, regional and local authorities as well as practical assistance in the implementation of new policy initiatives, especially at the local level, and providing access to training, capacity-building and educational material;

(48) take note of the list of good practices elaborated by the Secretary General, entitled "Strasbourg Initiatives" for which he calls for support. This open catalogue of projects having an immediate and measurable impact could serve as a catalyst for future action;

Elements required for good practices programmes

"Since knowledge is both explicit and tacit, good practice programs should comprise two elements:

1. good practices databases that connect people with information, and
2. collaboration or knowledge sharing and learning mechanisms, such as communities of practice or peer assists that connect people with people." (Olivier Serrat).

The Council of Europe’s action following the High Level meeting responds to the two aforementioned directions:

1. the Secretariat was tasked to set up the present database on Roma-related policies and good practices;

2. an ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM) was established by the Committee of Ministers. The Terms of Reference of the CAHROM include the following tasks:

   i. study, analyse and evaluate the implementation of policies (national programmes and/or action plans) and identify good practices of member states concerning Roma, with a view to promoting implementation of relevant Council of Europe standards and contributing to the European database on policies/good practices for the integration of Roma to be set up by the Council of Europe;

   ii. exchange information, views and experience on member states’ policies, good practices and measures relating to Roma at national, regional and local level, and in the context of relevant instruments of the Council of Europe, in order to assist member states in the development and implementation of the "Strasbourg initiatives" and effective policies for Roma integration, with due regard to the relevant standards and instruments of the Council of Europe and bearing in mind the specific situation in each member state;

Benefits

"The benefits from identifying and sharing good practice are that doing so will
• Identify and replace poor practices;
• Raise the performance of poor performers closer to that of the best;
• Reduce rework and prevent “reinvention of the wheel”;
• Cut costs through better productivity and efficiency;
• Develops reciprocity and cooperation among beneficiary." (Olivier Serrat)

Process and methodology used by the Council of Europe

When setting-up the database on Roma-related policies and good practices, the Council of Europe Secretariat has decided to take inspiration from the six-step approach to identifying and sharing good practice suggested by David Skyrme Associates:

• **Identify Users’ Requirements.** Although this step seems obvious it is not uncommon to start by designing a database. [...] One should start by considering where one can really add value, [...] who will benefit most from better knowledge and understanding of good practices? How will they access and use these?

• **Discover Good Practices.** There are several ways to identify good practices. One is to examine individuals and groups that deliver excellent results and are therefore likely to be using good practices. Having discovered these, one will then need to discern what parts of their overall approach or methodology represent good practice. This is likely to be done best by people knowledge of the relevant practice. But other approaches exist too: they include communities of practice, after-action reviews and retrospects, and exit interviews. Also, much can be learned from the practices of other organisations in the same field, or even from organizations in others.

• **Document Good Practices.** Good practice descriptions are commonly kept in a database in standard format. A typical template might include the following:

  – **Title:** A short descriptive title that can be accompanied by a short abstract.
  – **Profile:** Several short sections outlining processes, function, author, keywords, etc.
  – **Context:** Where is this applicable? What problems does it solve?
  – **Resources:** What resources and skills are needed to carry out the good practice?
  – **Description:** What are the processes and steps involved? Are performance measures associated with the good practice?
  – **Lessons Learned:** What proves difficult? What would the originators of the practice do differently if they were to do it again?
  – **Links to Resources:** Expert contact details, workbooks, video clips, articles, transcripts of review meetings, etc.
  – **Tools and Techniques:** A description of the approach and methodology used in developing the good practice.

• **Validate Good Practices.** A practice is only good if there is a demonstrable link between what is practiced and the end result. Still, in most cases judgment is needed as to what constitutes good practice. A frequent approach is to have a panel of peer reviewers evaluate a potential good practice. It is better to seek input and feedback from clients too.

• **Disseminate and Apply.** Databases of good practices are a useful starting point but most organizations find it necessary to complement these with face-to-face knowledge sharing. This is where true value is added for the process can also generate two-way benefits. Mechanisms include communities of practice, quality circles, visits to individuals and groups displaying high performance, organized learning events, secondments, and exchanges.
• **Develop a Supporting Infrastructure.** To successfully implement a good practice program, you need to ensure you have the required infrastructure in place. This infrastructure is often developed as part of a wider knowledge management strategy. Typically, several generic aspects need attention. The people to facilitate and drive the process through its initial stages, until it becomes embedded in the organisation’s ways of working, e.g., a good practice team or a network of good practice coordinators. The technical infrastructure for document sharing and databases. The content management infrastructure to ensure that good practices are documented and classified electronically in a way that makes them easy to find. “(Olivier Serrat)

The Secretariat of the Council of Europe will also take into consideration the Do’s and Don’ts of identifying and sharing good practice, as suggested by Olivier Serrat:

- "Good practices are not a quick-fix solution and setting up the required processes and infrastructure can be resource intensive.
- Good practice evolves constantly.
- Do not underestimate the importance of organizational culture.
- Resist the temptation to focus on explicit knowledge: it is through people that deep knowledge is transferred.
- Do not be too prescriptive about good practices and focus instead on encouraging people to identify and share them voluntarily.
- Focus on those that add value, demonstrate benefits, and give evidence.
- Recognize the individuals and groups who submit good practices.
- Promote the good practice resource actively.
- Monitor usage of the good practice resource.
- Make contact to the provider of the good practice easy."

The present website was developed by Vegas Deluxe following a call for tender. The company Arpegio has accompanied the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Roma Issues in the process of setting up the database, and in ensuring that objectives and deadlines are met. The database is accessible through the Roma portal of the Council of Europe [www.coe.int/roma](http://www.coe.int/roma) or directly at the following address: [www.goodpracticeroma.coe.int](http://www.goodpracticeroma.coe.int). It was designed in accordance with the graphic charter of the Council of Europe. The Directorate of Communication and the Directorate of Information Technology have been involved in the process.

The database website is accessible in English and French, the official languages of the Council of Europe, and is open to the general public although the target groups are primarily governmental officials, representatives of local and regional authorities, international organisations, media, researchers and academics.

Bearing in mind the six-step approach described above, the Support Team of the SRSG for Roma Issues will include in the database transferrable, innovative, long-term impact-oriented projects and policies that have been identified as good practices through cross-cutting assessments, including by beneficiaries, and validated as such, e.g. by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe monitoring bodies (ECRI, Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), through reports of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM), the European Steering Committee on Education (CDED), or through the Dosta! Prize for municipalities awarded by the Congress for Local and Regional Authorities. Projects and policies validated as good practices by other international actors (European Union institutions, OSCE, United Nations, World Bank, Roma Decade Watch, Roma Education Fund, etc.) and Roma or pro-Roma international organisations
(ERTF, ERIO, ERRC, FERYP, IRWN, OSI, Amnesty International, etc.) will also be taken into consideration.

Projects and policies can be submitted by national, regional and local institutions and NGOs using the online form following a prior request to be accepted as a contributor to the database that will require validation by the Support Team of the SRSG for Roma Issues. Additional support documents can be submitted, including in national languages, provided that the forms summarizing the policy or project are completed in English or French. A user-friendly research tool is available for searching information by country or thematic area.

The Council of Europe reserves its right to delete projects and policies from the database on policies and good practices if new information indicates a negative change in the policy or project implementation or negative side-effects.