

Welcome to COYOTE 0

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BETWEEN EUROPE AND MY COMMUNITY

Young Roma and their Communities

[In Spanish](#)

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Training can make a difference

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What does it mean to be a Roma in Europe today?

Being a Roma in Europe today means facing every day discrimination, unemployment, social problems, facing the prejudices and the negative image that the society has of you, only because you belong to a different culture, because you have different values, a different ethnic background, a different name and sometimes a darker colour of skin. This is what it means to be Roma - the largest minority group in Europe today.

It does not matter if you are a Roma from Albania or from Spain, if you are a Roma from Ukraine or from Greece. It does not matter either how you call yourself - Roma or Hitanos, Sinti or Manush - , because in addition to the blood we all share the same problems, with different nuances. And if somebody tells me: "This is because Roma people are different!", then I will answer: "Yes, Roma people are different and only their culture makes them different. In all other things we are equal to the people we live with. We are born, we live, we love and we die like all of the people in the world".

I ask myself then why, at the end of the twentieth century, there are still people living without water, who face every day the challenge of how to find bread for their children, who are not able to send them to school, because the children just have no shoes to wear, and anyway - what is the sense of sending them to school when even with an education they will still not be able to get a job? I have still not found the answer, but I hope that we can fight and look for solutions to these problems together, because we all want our children to live in a better world, if not today, then at least tomorrow.

What does it mean to be a young Roma in Europe today?

Being a young Roma in Europe today means to live every day with the problems of your family, with your neighbours and with the reality of your community. To live without pocket money. To be unable to see any opportunity in society to change your life. To have your values clashing not only with the values of society, but also with the values of the older generation in your community. To have a lower status there also, because you

should respect the traditions of the community and follow the decisions of the family. The authorities and the existing associations do not care to help you to find your own way in this life, and nobody is interested in developing you as a competent and motivated person who can develop him/herself and can contribute to the development of his/her community and the larger society.

If you are living in a situation like this, what will be the easiest way for you to behave, especially if you have no positive role models from the community around you? You are going to follow the negative role models, of whom everybody knows how they reached their better status in the community. And then you can easily drop out of school, try drugs and even find yourself involved in crimes.

Of course, when we speak of the young Roma people, we should consider that not all of the young people live in the same situation, because there are also two other much smaller groups: first, the young and well educated Roma, who are part of another social class and prefer to forget the name Roma, and second, the young Roma, well and not so well educated, who are motivated and working for a better future of their community.

What are the needs of young Roma?

As every young person, and probably even more strongly so, young Roma need to have positive role models from their own community with whom they can easily identify, whom they will be willing and able to follow. They need young Roma who can improve their self-esteem, give them a positive view on life and something to work for (e.g. for themselves or for their communities), improve their motivation and, at the same time, give them the necessary social skills for this.

Young Roma need somebody to show them the existing opportunities for personal or professional development that are offered by society, if there are any. They need somebody to organise their free time. They - and also their societies - need them to be active citizens and to participate at all levels and processes in their societies. Another question is if and how both sides see this as an existing opportunity and process.

We all know the necessary preconditions to participation: structure, access, competence and motivation, and I would like to look at some of these, namely structure and competence, from a different angle.

What are the existing structures that are dealing with the problems of young Roma people at different levels? And what is their role in promoting their participation and in breaking the existing exclusion of this minority group from the society, and their self- exclusion on the other side?

At what stage is the Youth Roma movement?

It was not very long ago, and it is still the reality in some communities, that no distinction was made between the problems and needs of the Roma community in general and the particular needs and problems of young Roma. Fortunately, almost five years ago the situation started to change. The NGOs working on Roma issues started to work also on issues concerning young Roma. Youth associations were established at different levels and in different countries.

At about that time, the Council of Europe organised the first activity with young Roma from different

European countries, the "training course for Roma Youth Leaders", held under the Campaign against Racism, Anti-semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance. I had the pleasure to participate in it, and it gave me a lot of motivation and self-confidence. At this course, the idea for the establishment of a Roma IYNGO was born. Today, the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP) is a reality. And I should point out the fact that this is not the only Roma INGYO in Europe.

So, the structure, even if only in child status, is existing presently at local and also at European level. Now what is the major need that should be addressed to deal with the problems of the Roma community in general, and in particular of young Roma people? Competence, I think, to develop those structures and to be able to carry out the programmes and projects of these associations and, moreover, support, be it purely technical, including money, or moral support.

Back to competence - **One of the greatest opportunities in getting training** that young Roma were able to gain was participation in the training activities that were organised by the Council of Europe and last year within the partnership with the European Commission. They received serious training on how to plan and carry out, within the framework of their association, effective projects and programmes of relevance for the Roma community. And on how to involve other young Roma in their work. They had the opportunity to share their experiences and motivation with other young Roma or other minority young people, to obtain information about institutions and structures relevant to their work, to discuss a number of political issues which are concerning their everyday lives, to reflect upon their own culture and on the relations between Roma and non-Roma people and, finally, on what is our perception about Europe and our place in it.

As a result of these trainings we have an impact on these young people as individuals, on their associations, on the community and also at a more global level.

How? These trainings are widening the participants' horizons. Well trained, competent young Roma leaders and workers who come back to their local level can be a very important resource for the development and concrete work of their organisation. They are able to plan and implement relevant projects and activities, they are self-confident, motivated and also able to be role models and leaders for the other young Roma around them. They are able to multiply their experience and to pass on their knowledge and skills. They are able to work for a better tomorrow of the Roma youth, the Roma community, their society and hopefully also the world in which we live.

The questions remain.

How can we provide opportunities for more young Roma people to be trained? And what are the other ways to support and promote their participation in society? Have you got the answer? What you are going to do?