



## Scouting in the Roma Community in Slovakia

PROMISING PRACTICES

### The Results

- The main achievement has been the integration of Roma Scouts into Scouting in Slovakia 'Slovensky Skauting' and the impact this has had on the young people concerned and their communities. There were no Roma Scouts before year 2000 and during the last 4 years the number has risen by over 800 new members.



Slovensky Skauting has successfully reached out to integrate young people from the Roma community

- Roma Scouting is fully integrated into Slovensky Skauting but it also retains aspects which meet the particular needs of the Roma community and its specific history and culture.
- Scouting in Slovakia is playing a role in the integration and development of the Roma community in Slovakia.
- This rise in Roma Scouts has meant that the overall membership of Scouting in Slovakia has risen by 5%.

### The Reasons

The Roma community, often referred to as 'gypsies', is seen as a problem in most European countries, due in part to their nomadic nature and exocytic culture. In eastern and central Europe the Roma community is the region's most marginalized and vulnerable minority. The community is spread across most of this region and the Roma population in Slovakia is around half a million, from a total population of five and a half million people.

Poverty is widespread within the Roma community and many live in ghettos on the edge of urban centers in unhealthy housing. There are high levels of unemployment, partly due to the low level of skills within the community. The children are most affected. As many as half of Roma children do not complete primary school and Roma children often end up working on the streets to support their families. This results in the community becoming more and more marginalized from the rest of society in Slovakia.

Scouting didn't exist in the Roma community before year 2000. The small independent Club of Right Roma boys and girls was founded in that year but to have a bigger impact in their community and become part of the world-wide family of Scouting it had to become part of Slovensky Skauting.

### The Methods

Following discussions with the Roma Scout leadership, the Club of Right Roma boys and girls transformed to Roma Scouting and very early Roma Scouts accepted '*in whole the constitution of Slovensky Skauting*'. They were however set up as a Scout District and this has enabled them to keep some of their specificity. The following aspects were also part of the overall agreement.



Slovakia: Slovensky Skauting

# Strategic Priority 4

Reaching Out – breaking down barriers and working with all segments of society



World Organisation of the Scout Movement

- An education programme has been designed to meet the specific needs of Roma children and youth. Literacy rates among children and adults are very low. The programme has been designed with their particular skills and interest in music, dance, Roma culture and sport in mind.



The Scout programme develops the Roma Scouts interests in music, dance, culture and sport

- Roma Scouting has retained its own symbols, uniform, badges, flags, hymn etc. and agreed to present national symbols on their uniforms at national and international events. This is important because the Slovakian Scout uniform would be too expensive for many of the Roma Scouts.
- Again because of the economic situation in the Roma community, there is a different fee structure for Roma Scouts within Slovakia and Slovensky Skauting has agreed to make up the difference for the WOSM membership fee.
- An Advisory Council for Roma Scouts, which reports to the National Council, has been formed and its members receive training and support in Scouting and strategic planning to strengthen their management capabilities.
- Trained Slovak leaders and Rovers who were interested in this project are now providing leader training for Roma leaders and training Roma Scouts as Patrol leaders.

This work has received financial support from the European Scout Foundation.

## Our Learning

Through the project there is now a more tolerant attitude towards the Roma community in non-Roma Scouts. There are now many positive examples which help to eliminate the prejudice against the Roma community in Slovakia.

The participation of Roma children and adults in Scouting is having an impact on the wider community. Results show that many Roma Scouts are more active and responsible students and their school attendance and school grades have improved. Conversations with parents report an improvement in their relationships with their children. There are also noticeable changes in public life, with Scouts (young people and adults) being more active in volunteering and community service.



Roma Scouting is a 'hit' with young people, parents, communities & Slovensky Skauting

The results of the work have been validated by experts in the professional sphere and it has been described as one of the best projects for Roma children and youth in the field of education. The media are also following the project closely and being very appreciative.

## Our Future Plans

- To further develop the educational framework for Roma Scouts, which uses the Scout principles and method while meeting the specific needs of the Roma community.
- To develop the patrol system in Roma Scouting, by providing training in patrol leadership for young people and adults.
- To build a network of both Roma and non-Roma volunteers who will work directly in the field, visiting Roma settlements and communities with the aim of setting up new groups with the help of local community leaders.

The project has generated energy and enthusiasm in Slovak Scout leaders, with leaders volunteering to organise camps and training courses. Scouts from both communities performed songs in public and a CD has been produced.

This project is instrumental in opening up Scouting to a new group of young people and reducing prejudice and intolerance towards the Roma community in Slovakia.

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