Training to strengthen the integration skills of Roma inclusion professionals

IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE **"STRENGTHENING INCLUSION SKILLS OF PROFESSIONALS IN ROMA INCLUSION"**,
ERASMUS KA210-ADU-7177C78A

Rosa Parks Foundation *(Hungary) and* **NGO World Without Borders (Sviat bez granici)** *(Bulgaria)*

Rosa Parks Alapítvány

СВЯТ БЕЗ ГРАНИЦИ
Сдружение с нестопанска цел

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In the framework of the ***"Strengthening Inclusion Skills of Professionals in Roma Inclusion"****, Erasmus KA210-ADU-7177C78A Small-scale Partnerships programme, Rosa Parks Foundation from Hungary and the NGO World Without Borders (Sviat bez granici) from Bulgaria implemented a joint adult education programme. Below is a summary and evaluation of the two organisations' programmes.*

Contents

- **Social sensitisation - what works and what doesn't?**
- **The aim of the training**
  - Structure of the training, presentation of tasks and exercises
  - Who participated in the training?
  - Evaluation of the training from the participants' point of view
  - Evaluation of the training from the trainers' perspective
- **Workshop on social sensitisation - sharing training experiences**
  - Script of the workshop
  - Who participated in the training?
  - Evaluation of the workshop
- **Training evaluations of NGO World Without Borders (Sviat bez granici) from Bulgaria**
  - Aims and Topics of the Training
  - Content/Structure of the Training
  - Participant Characteristics (Professions, Institutions, Female/Male ratio)
  - Evaluation of the Training from the Participants' Point of View
  - Overall Evaluation of the Training from the Organisers' Point of View

Social sensitisation – what works and what doesn't?

That **obsolete racial categories** are rooted in biology is not only the view of outright racists, but often also of well-meaning people who, because of **cultural-historical conditioning**, hold views that are not at all supported by human genetics: black people's' sporting success has nothing to do with their ethnic origins, East Asian students are not inherently better at mathematics, and Jews are not genetically good with money. Stereotypes and myths such as these have been part of Western cultures steeped in pseudoscience for centuries. But **what are the facts about race** that are not based on xenophobic beliefs but on **scientific evidence**?

- if anything, our **various adaptations to specific places** in our evolutionary past explain most, but certainly not all, of the physical differences between humans;
- **skin color as a basis for racial classification** is **based on a pseudoscience** invented during the years of European empire building and colonial expansion;
- the primary physical characteristics of race are **not representative** of the general similarities or differences between various people and various populations;

- the notion of **racial purity is unhistorical and pseudo-scientific**: people migrate and reproduce, mixing between different and previously separate populations is now the norm;
- **genetic differences** between populations **do not explain differences** in academic, intellectual, musical or sporting achievements
- **race is a social construct**, which is not to say that the way in which we perceive each other is invalid or insignificant, but the everyday linguistic use of the word race cannot be supported or justified by the taxonomy of genetics and evolution

This is precisely why the claim that "race does not exist" or that "race is just a social construct" is inaccurate, since race exists precisely because it is a social construct, and **racism is real because people make it real**. As Jonathan Swift says, *"reasoning will never make a man correct an ill opinion, which by reasoning he never acquired"*.

*(**Note:** according to the state of science, all humans on Earth belong to a single biological species: Homo sapiens, or more precisely, its single unified subspecies, Homo sapiens sapiens. What is often called race in English is formally known in Hungarian as the great race, which refers to the various populations of Homo sapiens sapiens, often geographically distinct and characterized by heritable traits. In Hungarian, both species and race can be translated as species, and the two meanings are often confused.)*

But how can you **influence people's opinions** and change their ways of thinking about a belief that is not supported by common sense nor science?

The **basis of it all is evolutionary**. If someone looks very different from you, it is inherently threatening. The formation of prejudices is a cognitive process whereby one does not place the characteristics of a group in a cultural and historical context. Prejudices can develop without people actually thinking about the reasons behind them.

In addition, identity - also known as **social categorisation** - plays a role in prejudice as well, because I can only put myself in a category by way of saying that there are others who do not belong in that category.

It helps a lot in overcoming prejudice if we see stigmatized people in roles which contrast the stereotypes about them. The female boss, the black professor and the Roma cancer researcher can help in rewriting the cognitive associations we have become accustomed to during our socialization.

But it can also help if you realize that **the other person is actually not so different**. This means building a relationship with another group, getting to know a group that you didn't really know that well before, and realizing that they're actually similar to us, which can weaken those stereotypical categories created through habit.

And at what age are people most receptive to **changing their attitudes**? When they already understand what is at stake and their ideas can still be shaped: the teenage years. Going to secondary schools with programmes designed to reduce prejudice is the most effective method. It's harder to change attitudes in adulthood.

There is a lot of research on how well "social influencers" work in secondary schools. If you pick the most influential opinion leaders in the classroom and hold a sensitisation programme for them, these opinion leaders can then spread the message in the group and there is a demonstrable reduction in prejudice at the classroom level as a consequence.

Structural or **systemic racism** is rooted in everyday life and in the indifference to the experiences of those who suffer from racism. According to various studies, it is not really an anti-Roma sentiment that characterizes the majority of Hungarian society, but rather a **sense of indifference** towards Roma people: the majority of society is not interested in the well-being of Roma people. The biggest challenge is to **motivate social solidarity**: motivating people to show solidarity with a minority of nearly a million people. In Hungary, most people do not see their own privileged situation vis-à-vis the Roma, because everyone feels that they are in a bad situation, that they are struggling and they do not want to help others, when they themselves feel the need to be helped, they feel more deserving of support.

Nevertheless, some **methods** do exist of course. One of them - which is part of the World Bank's intervention method - is to convince people that it is worthwhile for their country not to have such a marginalized social stratum. The other method is more of an emotional nature - that is what social sensitisation education and training are trying to build on.

When a Roma boy has a hard time because he is Roma, they sympathize with him and recognise that this boy has a hard time because of his ethnic background. But when you have to talk about **discrimination at the group level**, at which point we, as **members of the majority society**, are also guilty, it becomes very difficult to acknowledge responsibility. They **do not want to take responsibility**, they feel burdened by it. Consequently, blaming whole groups or blaming the victims becomes more prevalent. While individual responsibility is difficult to grasp, in the case of a specific person it is easier to determine who is to blame. This answers the question of why the same people who see injustice clearly and cannot personally report any bad experiences with, say, Roma, still express seriously prejudiced thoughts in their general attitudes.

If you confront someone with your prejudices, they will immediately become defensive. But if you have to **put yourself in the other person's shoes** in a sensitivity training session, for example, and think with the other person's mind, evoking their emotions, then there is a chance that you can get out of the stereotypical way of thinking, understand and express how Roma people can experience **humiliation**

during processes of discrimination. Then there is a chance that such a training will have an impact and that a process of understanding will begin. The "living library" method of sensitisation can also be very effective: when someone **influences others through their own story**. For example, there was a Roma woman who told a story that when she was a little girl she was totally excluded in her class because they were so poor that she didn't even have proper clothes. But her teacher helped her not to be excluded, so she managed to find herself in her studies. This woman was invited to students studying to be teachers to tell her story, which became a real breakthrough for the students because they understood the responsibility a teacher has in the life of a child. How do these realizations become lasting? The change of one person in a community is incidental, which is why you need to involve leaders because they can be more effective. But it's also good to be able to work with the whole community and it's also very important to involve Roma staff in sensitisation because that can also have a serious impact.

Here, gypsyism is so normal that people are not afraid to voice their opinions. Nevertheless, **the aim is not to make silencing your thoughts** about the Roma the new social norm, but to make people understand that prejudice is not a rational conclusion, because the behavior of a group is not shaped by internal characteristics, but by the social environment.

Presenting numbers or facts - for example, that racism has no genetic basis - can make people think, even change their minds slightly. But, approaching the facts from a purely theoretical or logical point of view cannot effectively influence prejudice. One needs to see and hear the experiences of minorities. It is much more useful if participants talk about their feelings, and in turn, we aim to influence those feelings.

▲ photo by Kende Ágnes

The **Rosa Parks Foundation**'s **rural sensitisation trainings** were attended by professionals working in schools, kindergartens, family support services or as protection workers, who work with Roma children and families. Our approach is to accept the way participants think and to **listen curiously to their experiences**. We in turn create situations where trainers can say what they think about the issue, just as participants can, but it is very important **not to judge their views** when we disagree

with what they say. It can also be effective when participants in training are given thought-provoking exercises that allow them to experience the pain of discrimination first hand.

▲ photo by Kende Ágnes

But the participants' favorite part was when **they brought their own conflict situations with the Roma into the training**, and then we can see what we can do to help them, what tools we can give them other than just complaining about the Roma. This can also be educational for others, even though it did not happen to them.

In the early 1990s it was already clear that the Roma were the real losers of the regime change. The conflict, which was deepening, was first addressed by mediation. **Conflicts** between Roma and non-Roma **are always local**:

if, for example, a child who happens to be Roma has a hard time studying in school and starts to behave unruly as a consequence, a stigma very quickly gets attached to him: he must act like this because he is Roma. He starts to be ostracized, which creates tension. Then, if the school wants to do something about this situation, they can bring in professionals. There are **many different methods of sensitisation**, but all of them are based on **communication and empathy**. Seeing what one side needs and then what the other side needs. But their methods also include making a leading voice of the Roma community, who might have a connection to the majority community, a mediator. An example of success is when Roma people started to develop a salt room in the kindergarten of a village, which was good for the whole community, so in the end everybody got involved in the implementation, and it brought together the Roma and non-Roma of the village.

In professional development, you need to work on the cognitive level, but if you are prejudiced, you also need personal experience to understand how prejudiced behavior works. Because even if people know what prejudice is, they will bring it into their daily practice if you don't do something about it on an emotional level. But to become a good professional, **apart from personal experience you also need to have an understanding of what prejudice is.**

The aim of the training

The **Rosa Parks Foundation** has developed training material in the framework of an **ERASMUS+ grant** to help professionals to deal more successfully with their relationships with Roma pupils, clients and customers, and with the potential difficulties of Roma and non-Roma relations. The training helped the participants to do their job better through **case studies**. The two-day training was based on the participants' own experiences and cases, thus helping the professionals to acquire more useful and tangible knowledge and/or methods. It covered local needs, managing conflict situations, the benefits of local cooperation, case management and, finally, planning for the future.

The training sessions, both comprised of two trainings, took place on 10-11 November and 8-9 December 2022 in Hévíz and Zalaszentgrót.

▲ photo by Kende Ágnes

Structure of the training, presentation of tasks and exercises

DEFINING THE GOAL, RULES, ARRIVAL, FIRST SPEECH

The **goals and themes** of the training

Round of introduction:

- Name, workplace
- what is your profession?
- 'The reason I applied here...'

FILM TITLED 'TRIPE AND ONIONS/ SZALONTÜDŐ'

The film is based on the misunderstanding that a homeless person eats the lunch of a well-off person, the film is stopped at this point by the trainer and the participants discuss the following:

- What did you **think and feel** while watching this film?
- What do you **think of the figures** in the film?
- How does this **relate to conflicts**?

Then he plays the end of the film, which shows that it was exactly the other way round, the well-off man ate the homeless man's lunch.

Then the questions come again, asking how this new information makes the participants feel.

PRESENTING YOUR OWN SITUATION

What is the situation **in the municipality, in the community** where you work? - here, you should try to have mixed groups, so that people from the same institution are not in the same group

Local co-operations:

- what works **within**, between each other?
- what is **outside** (external connections)?
- what can be **improved**?

CONFLICTS, NEEDS, EMOTIONS

This was a role play in groups of 4 people, with **two actors and two "mediators". Two children had a fight at school and this conflict had to be resolved during the game.**

DISCUSSION OF CASES

Case discussion group - in small groups, they choose a **case** they have encountered in their work involving Roma people, which has **caused difficulties or conflict situations** for the trainee. The selected case was presented to the large group and at the end one case was selected by vote. Then the person whose case it was presented the story in detail and the group then identified the participants in the story. As many groups were formed as there were participants in the story. Each group then developed the story from the point of view of the character of their choice. The case was worked through in a way that the participants had to **put themselves in the shoes and emotions of each character**. At the end, the case owner gave feedback on how much this had helped him/her to look at the case differently and what he/she thinks now.

DISCRIMINATION

Our animated film on systemic racism – discussion

How do you encounter this in your daily work:

- What were your **first impressions** of what you saw?
- What **emotions or sentiments** have surfaced for you and why?
- What emotions or thoughts have you had to **deal with the most**? Why do you think that is?
- Was there anything in the film that **surprised** or even **shocked** you?
- Did you see anything in the film that **challenged your previous ideas** about Roma people?
- What made the **biggest impact** on you in the film?

PLANNING, FUTURE

Planning and discussion in small groups.

Focus on the next 1 month - 1 year

- What can you **use**?
- What will you **focus** on in the coming period?
- What will make their work **more effective**?
- Who do they need to **strengthen cooperation** with?

Who participated in the training?

15-15 people attended both training courses, the first training course was mainly attended by **teachers** from primary schools and vocational training institutions, but there were also **school social workers, psychologists** and **family support workers**. Of the 15, 3 were men, the rest women, and there was a very mixed age range.

Evaluation of the training from the participants' point of view

The participants of the training all came from different institutions inside one small municipality. Consequently, they appreciated it and found it important that **the focus was on their specific problems**, which everyone was aware of. The participants of both trainings were very energized and seriously recharged during the two days. What they particularly liked and appreciated were the **case discussions**. The rounding up of a problem or conflict from different perspectives was appreciated by all and had an eye-opening effect that really made them think about how many distinct perspectives can be taken into account when understanding a problem. Although they liked the short film on systemic racism, at that point deflection and shifting the responsibility of the majority society away from themselves was noticeable, it came up more often than before.

Evaluation of the training from the trainers' perspective

Both trainings turned out to be very good and effective, although we know that two days will not change the world. It would only be possible to achieve real results in the field of social sensitisation if we could continue the work we have started together. It was clear from the training that **what works is situations which people can identify with emotionally**. It is much easier to identify with specific cases, than with general social problems. As much as the **case discussion exercises were successful** and as much as they were able to appreciate issues of justice and feel the pain of Roma exclusion, **it was not so effective when it came to anti-Roma sentiments in society in general**, because the recognition of personal responsibility was too abstract and complex. In this block of the training a lot of prejudiced ideas were expressed. The short film 'Tripe and onions' showed that people can most easily identify with, and behave in the most understanding way about situations, which are more familiar to them.

Workshop on social sensitisation - sharing training experiences

We invited professionals to the workshop who themselves work in the field of social inclusion. The aim of the dissemination workshop is for the trainers who developed and delivered the training to present what specific training they have delivered and to discuss with participants what can be effective; what can and cannot work in sensitisation.

Script of the workshop

- Round of introductions + aim of the workshop
- Short presentation of the project
- **In small groups:**
  - What does systemic discrimination mean to you?
  - What can be important for professionals in this field?
  - What can make their work more effective?

  Plenary discussion
- **Structure of training:**
  - Why did we do it this way? - our **considerations** for the design of the training
  - **What works**, what doesn't?

  Presentation and evaluation of some exercises and methods
- **Screening of our animated film on systemic racism** - discussion of the training
- Q and A

Who participated in the training?

The workshop was attended by staff working in other programmes inside our Foundation, as well as **Roma and pro-Roma organizations**. All participants encounter in their work the situation of having to deal with prejudices or false perceptions of professionals working with Roma people.

▲ photo by Kende Ágnes

Evaluation of the workshop

There were lively **question and answer sessions** in the workshop, because everyone has a serious difficulty in dealing with the prejudices of professionals, which they themselves are not aware of in most cases. The vast majority of professionals who have daily contact with Roma people

rarely have overt prejudices. However, everyday **latent racism**, which often manifests itself in metacommunication situations or paternalistic behavior, is very difficult to catch, let alone to make these people **self-reflect**. Therefore, perhaps the greatest achievement of the workshop was to go through all the exercises in the training and to talk in a practical way about what works and what doesn't. In addition, because we were sitting with professionals working in similar fields, the workshop was much more of a **professional exchange** and much less of a training. The big lesson from the workshop, and from previous trainings, is that you can sensitize the majority society about minority groups through individual stories, which appeal to their emotions. Furthermore, knowledge transfer about the group as a whole also has an important role to play.

Training evaluations of NGO World Without Borders (Sviat bez granici) from Bulgaria

Aims and Topics of the Training

Within the project **„Strengthening Inclusion Skills of Professionals in Roma Inclusion“**, the NGO World Without Borders has elaborated **training materials for professionals working in the Roma Community**.

The first training was held on 16.09.2022 and on 14.10.2022, and the second training - respectively on 08.12.2022 and 09.12.2022. Both trainings took place in the International Youth Center in Stara Zagora. In terms of the first training, there is a difference of 1 month between the two dates for the fact that most of the participants were just starting their professional experience in the Roma community.

During the training, **interactive methods and presentations** were used aiming to encourage the participants' activity, encourage **exchange of information** about their experience and help them **develop new skills** by independent work in groups.

All trainees had to fill in two questioners: one before and one after the training giving an answer to questions related to

attitudes, knowledge and evaluation of the training held. After completion of the training, the participants filled in a training evaluation feedback form.

Content/Structure of the Training

SETTING THE AIMS, THE RULES, AND THE INTRODUCTION

The **aim of the training** and the **topics** covered. Exercise with a focus on values. Discussion.

Introductory round:

- name, workplace
- what your job is
- what is your professional experience with the Roma Community

FILM TITLED 'SNACK ATTACK'

Eduardo Verastegui's award-winning CGI animation ***Snack Attack*** (2012) has been viewed over 36 million times since it was shared on YouTube in 2016. Hit pause at the 3m15s mark to discuss what's happening between the woman and the teen.

A wordless animation, Snack Attack is a perfect animated short for all ages to discuss **perceptions, stereotypes, inferences, predictions, aha moments, flashbacks, and more.**

Discuss again at the end of the film.

- Have their thoughts been **negative** about someone after a mishap only to find out later that the mishap was their own fault?
- Are they guilty of making **a rash judgment** only to find out later it was incorrect?

FILM TITLED 'SNACK ATTACK'

- If they were the grandmother and had a chance to apologize to the teenager, **what would they say**?
- Did the character traits you might have used to **describe** them during the first viewing of the video **change** when you reached the end?
- Where does **compassion** come from?

What is the lesson of Snack Attack?

The video tells the story of an old lady and her intention to eat some snacks (cookies). The short movie touch on a sequence of quite compelling themes: **understanding elder people, judging someone based on their appearance, looking and stereotyping them, learning to share**.

PRESENTING YOUR OWN SITUATION

What is the situation **in the municipality, in the community** where you work? - here, you should try to have mixed groups, so will not form a group coming from the same institutions.

Local cooperations:

- **What works?** - internal relationships, external relationships
- What can be **improved**?

CONFLICTS, NEEDS, EMOTIONS

In this part of the training, we discussed the **needs of the Community** and the **external factors' degree of impact.** The participants had to draw an Expectation Tree with regard to their work with the Roma Community.

Role-Playing Game «Natives and Europeans»

Objectives and context:

This game aims at developing:

- a **positive attitude and sensitivity** when making the first contact with representatives of various communities;
- **better understanding** of the participants' own reactions in difficult situations.

The game is designed **for professionals who are to do fieldwork in various local communities.**

The game is suitable for a group of 10-20 people.

The host summarizes the main points and puts an accent on those **behavioral patterns** which help build trust between various communities.

A particular attention should be paid to the fact that a given community should be accepted with its **unique values** and possible external interference should be aimed only to development of those values but not their extinction.

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

The second day of the training was dedicated on **solving case studies** from the daily routine of the participants.

- Tolerance, empathy, acceptivity
- How to work with the Community?

DISCRIMINATION - SYSTEMIC RACISM AGAINST THE ROMA IN HUNGARY - FILM

How do you encounter this in your daily work?

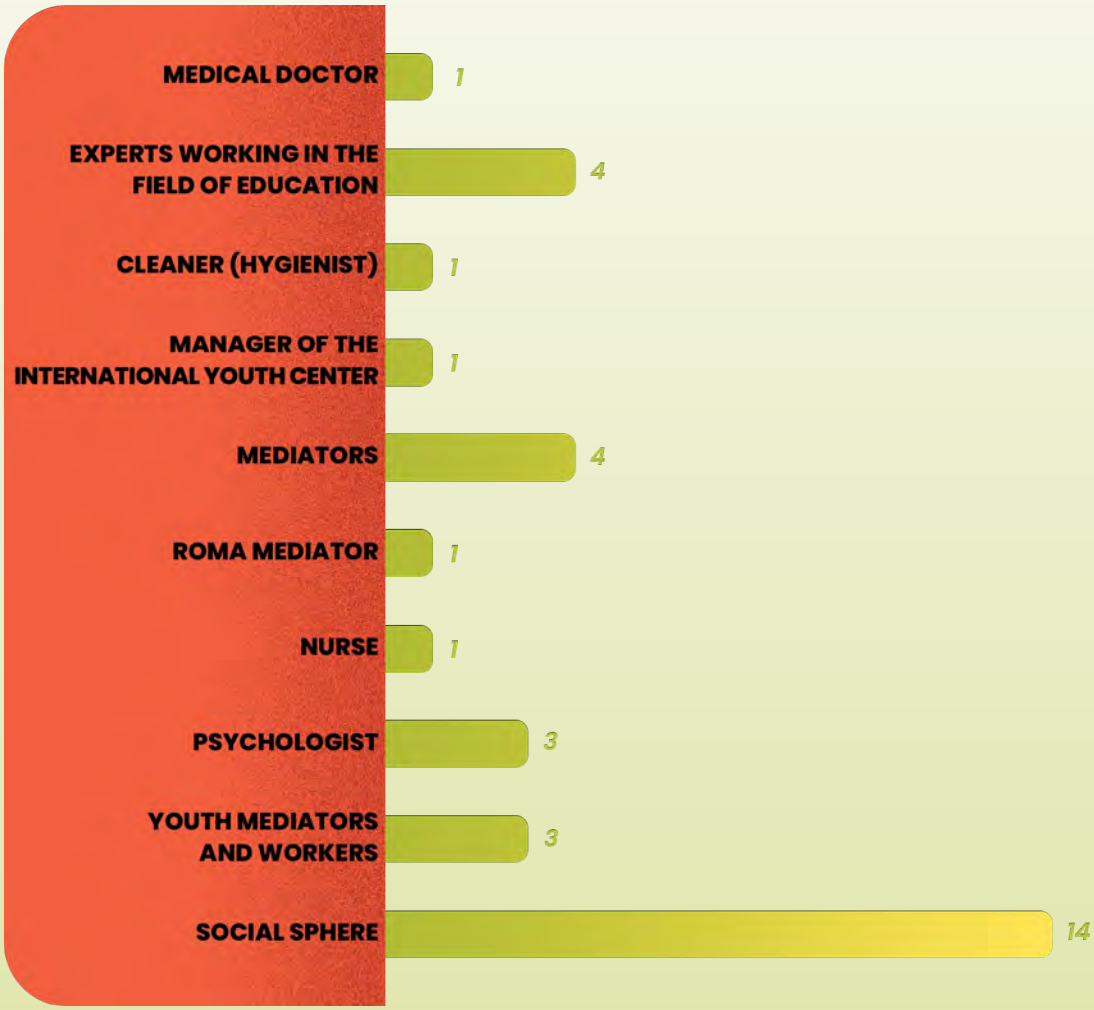
- What were your **first impressions** of what you saw?
- What **emotions or feelings** came up for you and why?
- What emotions or thoughts did you have to **deal with the most**?
- Was there anything in the film that **surprised** or even **shocked** you?
- Did you see anything in the film that **challenged your previous ideas** about the Roma?
- What made **the biggest impact** on you in the film?

PLANNING AND FUTURE

Small group planning, discussion.
Focus on the next 1 month - 1 year:

- What can they **use**?
- What will they **focus** on in the next period?
- What will make their work **more effective**?
- Who do they need to **strengthen co-operation** with?

Participant Characteristics (Professions, Institutions, Female/Male ratio)



The participants differed also in age. The average age of the trainees was 40 years.

Evaluation of the Training from the Participants' Point of View

The first group of participants included people in different professions who did not know each other.

The major part of them were just getting hired in an upcoming social service: a complex of three centers in three socially isolated communities in the villages Kaloyanovets, Khan Asparuhovo and Bratya Kunchevi. The complex is intended to provide integrated services – health services, social and educational services, work with parents and stakeholders.

▲ photo by NGO World Without Borders

Due to this, group work creating a team atmosphere was a key element in the training.

It is to be noted that after comparing the answers from the two questionnaires, seen is a **positive change in the participants' attitude.**

However, 3 of the participants think that trainings with a focus on Roma community are not needed; two of them point

out that if their neighbor were Roma, they would have some concerns. Still, three of them are fully satisfied with the training held.

Overall Evaluation of the Training from the Organisers' Point of View

It is obvious that the participants have rated highly the **usability of the gained knowledge** and the **practical exercises**. Highly rated is also the training itself in terms of organization thanks to the good logistics on side of World Without Borders.

The participants in the training have given a positive opinion with regard to all the topics included in the programme. An important element from the training is the satisfaction with the pleasant working atmosphere creating favourable conditions for **sharing ideas** and **effective communication**.

The fact that the training was rated highly means that it has **achieved its goals** and the participants are confident in their new job.

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