

# Peña – briefing paper



## Summary

Roma women face some of the most significant disadvantages linked to discrimination and poverty across Europe. Peña engaged Roma women who live in Govanhill area in the South Side of Glasgow to gain an understanding of the opportunities and barriers to progression they experience. Through practical work with Soul Food Sisters a catering collaborative of migrant women Peña explored creative and practical opportunities which would increase the skills, aspiration and employment opportunities of those participating.

Following a series of engagement events and some practical workshops this study identified 4 key points. First that Govanhill and the wider Scottish context was found to be much more welcoming than the host countries of participants. Second that Roma culture is entrepreneurial and that the women responded to creative development opportunities. Third that while language does present a barrier to skills development that this was not the most significant. More significant were adjusting cultural norms around women's roles and navigating the benefits system. Finally that Roma women had many skills which existing employment services had not recognised, leaving women beleaguered by the often exploitative low skill work on offer.

## Objective

Peña (Stage one) aimed to generate a deeper understanding of the issues and opportunities experienced by Roma women who live in Govanhill. Then drawing from this knowledge create a programme of learning and which supports Roma women to develop knowledge and skills which enable them to access meaningful employment and in doing so alleviate poverty.

## Overview

Migrant women in general and Roma women in particular face significant barriers to obtaining meaningful employment. 3500 of Scotland's total estimated 5000 Roma reside in Govanhill (SM Gateway, 2013). In Govanhill 3,796 (25.6%) of the adult population are 'income deprived', whilst 2,300 (22.5%) are 'employment deprived' and 38.2% of adults do not have any qualifications, (Census 2012). Research indicates that involuntary part time employment of migrant women is twice as big as of UK born women. They therefore face what has been called a 'double disadvantage'. Due to severe levels of poverty and exclusion Roma integration is a concern locally for the NHS and Glasgow City Council as well as wider Europe.

## Approach

- Review of academic literature from across Europe on Roma women and employment
- Consultation with 10 local organisations who provide services for Roma women
- A series of 20 engagement events in different locations (Community centre, school, the street) which allowed us to connect with around 165 Roma women
- A series of practical workshops on catering and business skills with 10 Roma women
- Opportunities to contribute to the cultural life of Scotland through contributions to the European Championships cultural programme and to Govanhill International Festival.

## Findings

### **The Govanhill/Scottish context has noticeable differences from other parts of Europe which offer distinct opportunities for Roma women.**

- 1 Participants repeatedly reported that they did not encounter the levels of racism and segregation that they experienced in their home country. This suggests, notwithstanding many other barriers that Scotland – Govanhill in particular – is distinct from other European contexts.

### **Clearly defined gender roles, social and cultural bonds play a more significant part in generating barriers to employment and education than English language skills for Roma women living in Govanhill.**

- 2 There was a targeted provision of English language learning in the area as this had been identified as a barrier to integration. However more significant underlying barriers to learning and employability relate to cultural norms around women's roles. Creative opportunities through role play and processes of translation allowed participants to explore identity. These not only indicated possibilities for self-development and aspiration but also language skills.

### **Practical, creative and reflexive approaches to learning which accommodate the entrepreneurial interests of Roma women were most effective in promoting engagement and learning.**

- 3 Roma culture is creative, practical and entrepreneurial. Adopting these approaches in workshops through use of role play and the development of practical skills with real life application was a particularly successful form of engagement and skills development.

### **Roma women's previous experience greatly informed their expectations and ability to engage in opportunities offered. This should be taken into account when planning services.**

- 4 Previous experience of discrimination meant that many people were distrustful of public institutions. Trust therefore has to be built first. The Roma women who participated in this project brought a range of skills which they had little opportunity to use since moving to Scotland. A number of women had attended further education while their home nations were under Soviet rule. They stated that they had not used or developed these since moving to Scotland as the work available tended to be cleaning and hotel work.

## Recommendations

- Services should avoid generating deficit views of Roma and instead aim for strengths-based approaches. The tendency of categorising Roma people in general and women in particular as an 'in need' group can have the consequence of rendering individual strengths and capabilities invisible. The re-instates the negative view of Roma as impoverished and needy
- Link learning opportunities to entrepreneurship and lived experience as these were most effective in engaging Roma women
- Use creative role play linked to lived opportunities. Creative role play promoted greater engagement and use of English language
- Policy and research should foreground the voices of Roma women.

## What participants said

### **'Scotland is not racist'**

**'I think your project is great because you give support, you give the chance - we will support you, you don't need to be afraid.'**

**'I think Roma women need to be empowered to make choices. I think I would boil it down as Roma women need to be empowered to make choices for themselves.'**

**'It's not just about learning English it's about changing the whole outlook on themselves and helping them realize they're valuable.'**

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### **Partners**

- **Soul Food Sisters**  
[www.soulfoodsisters.org](http://www.soulfoodsisters.org)

### **Support from**

- **Crossroads Youth and Community Organisation**
- **Community Renewal**
- **Govanhill Community Development Trust**

### **Time Frame**

May – October 2018

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