



DIFFERENT TOGETHER

GUIDE TO CREATING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR
ROMANI WOMEN AND GIRLS

DIFFERENT TOGETHER

GUIDE TO CREATING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR
ROMANI WOMEN AND GIRLS



REYN
УКРАЇНА



The project is implemented by the Zakarpattia Regional Charitable Foundation “Blago” and funded by The United Nations Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) with technical support of UN Women Ukraine. The United Nations Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) mobilizes critical support for local and grassroots civil society organizations working on women, peace and security and humanitarian action. WPHF is a flexible and rapid financing mechanism supporting quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

THIS HANDBOOK IS PRODUCED WITH FUNDING FROM THE UNITED NATIONS WOMEN’S PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN FUND (WPHF), HOWEVER, THE VIEWS EXPRESSED AND CONTENT INCLUDED DOES NOT IMPLY OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT OR ACCEPTANCE BY THE UNITED NATIONS.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is designed for Ukrainian and Romani women’s civil society organizations that seek to expand educational opportunities for Romani women and girls in their communities. It will be useful for those who want to help women gain new knowledge, skills, and resources for personal development, career growth, and active participation in society.

The guide is based on the practical experience of a pilot educational program developed by the Zakarpattia Regional Charitable Foundation “Blago” in collaboration with three Romani and six Ukrainian women’s CSOs. This program was implemented in five communities—Odesa, Uzhhorod, Berehove, and Serednye in Zakarpattia region, as well as Zolotonosha in Cherkasy region—and was adapted to the needs of participants, taking into account their real-life challenges.

This guide provides recommendations on how to develop and adapt educational programs for Romani women and girls, ensuring equal access to knowledge and development. We hope it will support community initiatives in creating inclusive and effective educational opportunities

that contribute to the empowerment of Romani women in society.

For Trainers:

Use this guide as a methodological resource for preparing and conducting training sessions.

For Civil Society Organizations:

Adapt the proposed modules and exercises to meet the specific needs of your communities.

For Activists:

Use this guide as a source of information for advocacy work and for promoting women’s rights in Romani communities.

This guide is not a static document—it can be adapted to your needs and expanded with new case studies, experiences, and methodologies. We encourage everyone working in this field to share their insights and feedback so that together, we can make education more accessible and inclusive.

Eleonora Kulchar
Project Manager,
Director of Zakarpattia Regional
Charitable Foundation “Blago”

INDEX

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM	10
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GUIDE'S CREATION	12
WHAT IS INCLUSION IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS?	18
HOW TO ENGAGE MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN YOUR PROJECTS?	23
ROADMAP	25
PRACTICAL TIPS	34
NETWORKING	44



GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM



SIX TRAINING SESSIONS

ONE FEEDBACK SESSION

AUDIENCE

Romani Women and Girls (Ages 16-60)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER TRAINING SESSION

Up to 20 Participants

THE PROGRAM WAS IMPLEMENTED IN FIVE COMMUNITIES

Odesa
Uzhhorod
Serednye (Zakarpattia Region)
Berehove (Zakarpattia Region)
Zolotonosha (Cherkasy Region)

4 MODULES

1

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE FAMILY

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SOCIETY

2

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

SELF-DEFENSE TRAINING FOR WOMEN WITH ELEMENTS OF WENDO

3

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING METHODS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR WOMEN'S WELL-BEING

4

STRONG TOGETHER – FINAL FEEDBACK SESSION AND PROGRAM SUCCESS EVALUATION

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GUIDE'S CREATION

Romani women and girls in Ukraine often face numerous barriers on their path to education and personal development.

This statement has become so ingrained that it sometimes sounds like a cliché, automatically accompanying any discussion about educational initiatives for Romani women. “Discrimination, economic hardship, early marriages, and large families”—this list of challenges is so closely associated with the word Romani woman that it even appears alongside it in Wikipedia. We have become so accustomed to this formula that we often unconsciously perceive a Romani woman not as an individual with her own story, ambitions, and potential, but as a mere embodiment of these challenges.

However, such an approach not only narrows our perception of reality but can also lead to even deeper problems. When we set out to “help the suffering and marginalized” women, we risk unconsciously dictating to them what is best for them, what they need, and how they should live. This approach strips them of their agency, turning even the most well-intentioned initiatives into yet another form of paternalism.

Recognizing this risk, ten women's organizations—four Romani and six Ukrainian—joined forces to create an

educational program where everyone would learn: the participants, the trainers, and the organizers alike.

This guide is the result of collaboration and aims not only to share knowledge but also to change the way we talk about the education of Romani women. Education can be a key to change, helping women acquire new skills, achieve financial independence, and confidently integrate into society. However, before designing educational programs, it is crucial to ask:

WHAT DO ROMANI WOMEN TRULY
ASPIRE TO? WHAT KNOWLEDGE
DO THEY NEED? WHAT LEARNING
FORMATS ARE MOST ACCESSIBLE
AND EFFECTIVE FOR THEM?



THE INITIATIVE FOR THE PROJECT WAS LED BY THE ZAKARPATTIA REGIONAL CHARITABLE FOUNDATION “BLAGO”,

Founded by Romani women in 2003 in Uzhhorod, the Zakarpattia Regional Charitable Foundation “Blago” has been dedicated for over 20 years to promoting the education of Romani children, ensuring equal opportunities for learning and early childhood development. In addition to working with children, Blago actively engages with parents, encouraging them to support their children's education, explaining its significance and value, and assisting with practical matters such as school enrollment.

Since 2019, Blago has been coordinating the work of REYN-Ukraine—a part of the larger international REYN (Romani Early Years Network), which unites educators, social workers, healthcare professionals, parents, government representatives, organizations, and volunteers committed to supporting Romani children and enhancing professional development in this field.

Through collaboration within this network, three additional Romani organizations joined the project: Romani Rota (Zolotonosha, Cherkasy region), Charitable Foundation “Planet of Good People” (Odesa), NGO “Ternipe” (Lviv).

Together, we identified the key and most relevant educational needs of the women and girls in our communities, developed the training topics, and created the necessary conditions for implementing the educational program. The core topics selected for the training include:

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

In Romani families, a woman's traditional responsibilities typically include managing the household and raising children. Domestic labor is often taken for granted, making its value go unnoticed. Combined with societal prejudices, this leads to a reality where women do not always recognize their rights, hesitate to seek help, and feel disconnected from the world around them. The training sessions on this topic aimed to help women understand their legal and social rights, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to protect and advocate for themselves.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Understanding personal boundaries, recognizing violence, and knowing available protection mechanisms empower women to navigate difficult situations. The training modules included practical case studies, interactive exercises, and consultations with legal experts and psychologists.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND CONTRACEPTION

Access to medical services and awareness of family planning remain significant challenges for women in Romani communities. Education in this area empowers women to make informed decisions about their bodies and health. The program included consultations with healthcare professionals, explanations of contraception methods and reproductive health, as well as practical guidance on self-care.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Entrepreneurial skills, knowledge of the labor market, and employment support provide women with greater confidence in their abilities. This training module introduced participants to examples of successful social enterprises founded by women with experiences of forced displacement and survivors of human trafficking. It also featured stories of successful Romani women, inspiring participants to explore their own career and business opportunities.

At the next stage, Ukrainian women's civil society organizations with expertise in the selected topics joined the project. These included NGO "D.O.M.48.24", NGO "Modern Women of Luhansk Region", Pokrovsk Human Rights Organization "Shchyt", Carpathian Human Rights Agency "Vested", and NGO "Women's Information and Advisory Center". Each organization contributed its own experience, training materials, and methodologies, refined through years of practice.

The result was a program that integrated the knowledge of various organizations while remaining flexible and adaptable to the specific conditions and needs of Romani participants.

COMPETENCIES AND KNOWLEDGE BROUGHT TO THE PROJECT BY ROMANI CSOS:

DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE AUDIENCE AND THEIR NEEDS

CREATING A SAFE SPACE AND BUILDING TRUST AMONG PARTICIPANTS

INSIGHTS INTO CULTURAL SPECIFICS AND TRADITIONS THAT INFLUENCE INFORMATION PERCEPTION AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

COMPETENCIES AND KNOWLEDGE BROUGHT TO THE PROJECT BY UKRAINIAN CSOS:

EXPERTISE IN GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

EXPERIENCE IN CONDUCTING TRAINING SESSIONS AND DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVELY DELIVERING KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGING WOMEN IN LEARNING



This program is the first of its kind and remains unique in its approach. While reading this guide, you may find that some aspects seem self-evident. However, despite their apparent simplicity, truly inclusive educational projects are still rare in Ukraine. The results of our program demonstrated that adapting the learning process to the real needs of Romani women significantly increases their motivation to learn. Many participants noted that, for the first time, they felt truly heard and saw new opportunities for themselves and their children.

The program took into account the realities of Romani women's lives, offering a flexible schedule and informal learning methods that better suited their daily routines and responsibilities.

However, this program was not perfect. It taught us many valuable lessons, as its implementation revealed aspects we had overlooked, things we hadn't considered, and even instances where we ourselves fell into the trap of stereotypes. We openly discuss these challenges and miscalculations in this guide so that you can learn from our mistakes and avoid them in your own projects.

The idea to create this guide emerged as a way to summarize and share our experience, compiling all the insights, methodological recommendations, and practical advice we gained. Its goal is to support other women's CSOs in developing effective educational programs that truly address the needs of Romani women.

THIS GUIDE IS NOT JUST A METHODOLOGICAL TOOL—IT IS AN INVITATION TO COLLABORATION. WE HOPE IT WILL SERVE AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR THOSE WHO SEEK TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ROMANI WOMEN IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, HELPING THEM GAIN KNOWLEDGE, GROW, AND CONFIDENTLY SHAPE THEIR FUTURE.

WHAT IS INCLUSION IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS?

Inclusion is not just a trendy term but a fundamental principle aimed at ensuring equal access to education for everyone, regardless of background, social status, or other factors.

In many cases, inclusion is understood as a formal requirement—much like installing a wheelchair ramp on the street while leaving a large staircase inside the building. True inclusion is not just about technical solutions; it is about equal access to rights and opportunities for all identities, physical and psychological abilities, experiences, and perspectives. It means that every individual must receive not only nominal but genuine inclusion in all aspects of life, where their voice is heard, and their needs are considered.

In educational projects, inclusion means creating conditions that allow each person to learn and grow according to their needs and potential.

INCLUSION FROM AFAR

a concept we encounter in international documents, policies, and strategies. For example, the United Nations defines inclusive education as a process that ensures equal access to quality learning for all, regardless of their individual characteristics, by creating conditions for full participation in the educational process.

INCLUSION UP CLOSE

is about the practical actions we can implement in our communities and educational programs. It means adapting learning materials, creating a supportive environment, and reshaping approaches to assessment and teaching. It is also about challenging stereotypes that hinder equal access to education.

WHY IS INCLUSION IMPORTANT?

The answer to this question can be very simple: because any of us, at any moment, can become part of a marginalized group or a group whose experiences are excluded from the dominant narrative.

We are used to living in a world where the majority has the right to visibility, while minorities do not. But in reality, no one is immune to exclusion. Forced migration, economic instability, loss of home due to war, destruction, or social upheaval—all of these factors can strip a person of their previous opportunities and confront them with limitations they had never considered before.

Similarly, identities that do not align with heteronormative societal expectations can lead to exclusion from social and legal systems. Inclusion is not just about supporting others—it is about creating a world where no one is left out, no matter their circumstances.

Embracing inclusion as a core value goes beyond simply creating formal conditions for equal access. It requires a shift in mindset—the recognition that society must include everyone, not just in theory but in practice. True inclusion means not only allowing others to be present but also listening to them, learning from them, and seeing the world through their eyes. It is a commitment to building spaces where every voice is heard, every experience is valued, and diversity is seen as a source of strength, not division.

EQUALITY OF VOICES MEANS EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE SOCIAL PROCESSES. AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH RECOGNIZES THAT EVERY EXPERIENCE MATTERS, AND THAT EVERY PERSON HAS THE RIGHT TO A SPACE WHERE THEY CAN GROW, LEARN, AND CREATE. THIS IS HOW WE BUILD A SOCIETY WHERE NO ONE FEELS LIKE AN OUTSIDER, AND EVERYONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE THEMSELVES.

When we talk about inclusion in education, we are not just talking about the opportunity to learn. We are talking about transforming the structure of society, where everyone has equal opportunities to shape our shared future. If we embrace inclusion as the foundation of our worldview, then educational projects must aim for meaningful change—creating environments where every voice is heard, and every experience is valued.

WHY IS INCLUSION IMPORTANT SPECIFICALLY IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS FOR ROMANI WOMEN?

People who hold privilege in society often do not recognize its existence. For example, buying a book in one's native language or studying the history of one's people in school may seem like an ordinary right. But for the Romani community in Ukraine, these are luxuries. There is no standardized version of the Romani language, nor are there school programs that reflect Romani history and culture. As a result, books in Romani are rarely published, and those that do exist seldom reach bookstores. The Romani people are one of the oldest ethnic groups in Ukraine, yet their history is absent from school textbooks and university curricula.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine forced many Ukrainians to experience cultural exclusion for the first time. Living abroad, many found themselves in a position where they felt like outsiders, with limited opportunities for self-realization. However, for the Romani community, this is not a temporary situation but an ongoing reality. It is not because they have migrated, but because society often treats them as outsiders. From early childhood, subtle social signals reinforce the message: "You don't truly belong here." In such conditions, it becomes difficult for Romani women to see themselves as full citizens, to access resources for growth, and to pursue self-fulfillment. Most projects aimed at empowering women unintentionally exclude Romani women from the start. Why does this happen? Often, it is due to technical barriers—a lack of adapted materials, failure to consider language barriers, or disregard for the structural challenges that limit access to education.

In the next section, we will explore the underlying reasons for this exclusion and provide practical recommendations on how to design truly inclusive projects—ones that reach a wider audience and provide meaningful support to those who need it most.



HOW TO ENGAGE MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN YOUR PROJECTS?

WORKING WITH ROMANI WOMEN REQUIRES A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNIQUE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY LIVE. TOO OFTEN, EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES EITHER IGNORE THESE ASPECTS OR OVERSIMPLIFY THEM INTO GENERALIZED APPROACHES, TREATING ROMANI COMMUNITIES AS A HOMOGENEOUS GROUP.

IN REALITY, EACH COMMUNITY HAS ITS OWN SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS, SHAPED BY LOCAL TRADITIONS, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES. RECOGNIZING AND INCORPORATING THESE NUANCES IS THE KEY TO CREATING MEANINGFUL AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES. ONLY BY CONSIDERING THESE DIFFERENCES CAN WE DEVELOP PROGRAMS THAT TRULY RESONATE WITH PARTICIPANTS, FOSTER TRUST, AND LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE CHANGE.

USING OUR PROJECT AS AN EXAMPLE:

The project was implemented in six communities.

However, the educational component was carried out in only five of them. Why?

In Lviv region, the project focused solely on providing humanitarian aid and access to essential resources, such as food, hygiene supplies, and firewood. The selected community lives in temporary, self-built shelters in the forest, without electricity or a communal indoor space suitable for training sessions or educational activities. This presented technical barriers, but beyond logistical constraints, the educational materials (though not the topics themselves) were not highly relevant to the realities of this community. In any society, women are at risk of experiencing sexual and gender-based violence. Knowledge on this topic is critically important, but standard recommendations—such as hotlines, contacts for support services, organizations offering assistance, and access to safe housing—were simply not feasible given the isolation of this settlement and its lack of connection to social infrastructure. This situation underscores an important lesson: the conditions, living environment, and structure of a community determine the practicality of advice and the relevance of educational materials for a potential audience. True inclusivity in educational projects requires not only adapting content to specific needs but also ensuring that solutions are realistic and applicable within the given context.

MORE EXAMPLES:

Zakarpattia may not be one of the largest regions of Ukraine, but even within a 70-kilometer distance, the cities of Uzhhorod, Berehove, and the village of Serednye turned out to be completely different communities, each with its own specific needs.

The Romani community in Serednye is a closed-type community, meaning that only Roma live in the village, and it is located at a significant distance from other settlements. Unlike Romani women in Uzhhorod, women here experience far less ethnic discrimination, simply because they have very limited contact with the outside world. Their daily lives are devoted to family responsibilities and household routines, so the topics that resonated most with them were - Women's rights within the family, the value of domestic labor, childcare responsibilities, health and well-being. Most local women understand Ukrainian, but their primary spoken language is Romani, which needed to be considered when designing educational materials and activities.

Due to its proximity to the border and historical and cultural ties, both the Romani and Ukrainian communities in Berehove speak Hungarian fluently. However, unlike the Ukrainian population, many Roma in Berehove do not speak Ukrainian at all—they only speak Hungarian and Romani. This language barrier posed a major challenge in designing the training program.

Ultimately, in Uzhhorod, the training sessions included both local Romani women and girls as well as internally displaced Romani women who had fled from the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. Women with forced displacement experiences noted that the level of discrimination against the Romani population in Uzhhorod was significantly higher than in their home cities. Before being displaced, most of them had jobs, were integrated into social life, and had higher levels of education—they could read and write, had completed secondary education, and in some cases, even higher education. Unlike local Romani women in Uzhhorod, they had not attended segregated schools. The topics that generated the most interest among this audience included: Career development, Entrepreneurship and business creation, Romani cultural history, Inspiring stories of prominent Romani women.

Even from this small sample size, it becomes clear that the needs, opportunities, and aspirations of women in each community differ significantly and are deeply rooted in their personal experiences, geographical context, cultural traditions, and social environment.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO REJECT STEREOTYPES AND MAKE AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO WORK WITH.

ROADMAP

SO, EVERY COMMUNITY IS DIFFERENT—
WHAT'S NEXT?

Developing an inclusive educational project requires not only a deep understanding of the target audience but also a comprehensive approach that considers their needs, challenges, and opportunities.

In this section, we present a step-by-step roadmap to help you structure the process of creating an inclusive project, ensuring that it is effective, sustainable, and impactful.



STEP 1: FIND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Finding partners is one of the key stages in creating an inclusive project. If you represent an organization that works with marginalized groups, look for partners who have expertise in the topic that interests you. Conversely, if you already specialize in a specific field, find organizations that represent these groups.

Exchange expertise—this is your toolkit for work. It is also important to assess your level of engagement and influence. Make sure that your values and vision align, as they will define the design and concept of the future project. Moreover, they will serve as a resource for the team in challenging moments.

STEP 2: CHOOSE THE COMMUNITY FOR YOUR PROJECT

It is worth starting work at the micro level, gradually scaling it up. The connection with the community, understanding its realities and needs, will determine the effectiveness of your project. Choose a community that you are familiar with and with which you have the opportunity to establish a trusting relationship. Start communication through trusted individuals within the community, such as local leaders, activists, and barons. With their support, your ideas and initiatives will gain more trust, and you will be able to ensure that your project is relevant and aligned with the community's actual needs.

STEP 3: LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT THE CHOSEN COMMUNITY

Before starting the active phase, it is important to immerse yourself as deeply as possible in the life of the community:

Spend time with its members, observe their daily routines and leisure activities.

Find out whether the community has organized gatherings, religious services, or collective initiatives.

Determine the level of women's involvement in public life—do they have stable jobs, or do they form interest groups?

Assess the cohesion of the community and identify the key challenges that might affect the implementation of your project.

This phase will not only help adapt your project to real conditions but also identify natural entry points for working with women in the community.

STEP 4: DEFINE THE PROBLEM, GOAL, AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Together with your partners, identify the main problem you want to solve, the project's goal, and the achievable results. Clearly formulate:

Be sure to consult with community leaders and potential project participants. Organize a brainstorming session or an open discussion to find out:

What do you consider a successful outcome of the project?

What exactly do the women in the community expect from the project?

What indicators will confirm that your project is effective?

What will they consider a success and the result of the project?

How will you be able to assess the changes it will bring?

How would they define the indicators for the result?

INVOLVING PARTICIPANTS AT THIS STAGE WILL NOT ONLY HELP TAKE THEIR INTERESTS INTO ACCOUNT AND ENSURE THE RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT, BUT ALSO CREATE A SHARED MOTIVATION FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION. THIS WILL TRANSFORM THE AUDIENCE FROM PASSIVE LISTENERS INTO ACTIVE CO-CREATORS OF THE INITIATIVE

When participants are involved in project planning, they not only gain a better understanding of its value but also become more motivated to continue this work in the future. They acquire skills in self-help and managing collective initiatives, which contributes to the sustainability of the results

even after the project ends. This approach also fosters an internal understanding of the processes required to create similar initiatives in the future and provides women in the community with practical knowledge for independently implementing similar programs.

STEP 5. DEVELOP AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM PLAN

Identify the key topics that your educational program will cover and create a detailed plan for its implementation. Assess your own capabilities and, if necessary, involve external experts: trainers, mediators, specialists in the fields of medicine or law.

Seek consultations on the expertise you lack, expand your network of cooperation and communication. However, it is important not to delegate tasks mechanically. Collaborative work on each stage and discussion of the details will help all participants learn together. On the other hand, superficial delegation without deep immersion in the context may only deepen the crisis you are working on.

When choosing experts, pay attention not only to their qualifications but also to the ethical principles of their work, the values they share with you, and their experience working with the target audience. It is important to ensure that their approach will contribute to creating a safe and trusting environment, excluding any forms of discrimination or paternalistic attitudes.

It is also worth discussing in advance with the invited experts the specifics of the community and its needs. Agree on the adaptation of training materials, the methodology for conducting workshops, as well as basic cultural aspects that may affect the effectiveness of communication and how participants perceive the information.



STEP 6: PROJECT DESIGN

Having a ready plan and a clear understanding of your audience, it is important to test each point through the following question:

HOW CAN WE CREATE SAFE AND COMFORTABLE CONDITIONS FOR OUR AUDIENCE'S PARTICIPATION?

When working with women from the Roma community at the design stage, it is important to consider the following aspects:



WILL THE VENUE OF THE EVENT CAUSE DISCOMFORT FOR THE AUDIENCE, AND WILL IT DEMOTIVATE THE PARTICIPANTS FROM TAKING PART?

Example 1: If you are renting a conference room in an expensive hotel for the event, are you sure that the staff and hotel guests will treat the participants, especially Roma women and girls, with respect? Due to frequent instances of discrimination in public establishments, women from the Roma community often avoid such places to prevent unpleasant situations. For organizing educational events, it is better to choose familiar and safe spaces that consistently demonstrate their openness to your potential audience.

Example 2: If you are organizing an off-site educational session that requires attendance and involvement over several days, make sure of the following:

1. Are these sessions accessible for women with children, especially young ones? Are there caretakers and children's rooms where women could leave their children during the sessions? Does the schedule of events take into account the responsibilities and needs of mothers with children?
2. Consult with relevant NGOs working in the community, as well as community leaders, to determine if cultural traditions and customs allow a woman to travel alone or if someone from the community will accompany her. Such issues are usually easily resolved in collaboration with community representatives.



DO THE PROGRAM, PLANNED ACTIVITIES, AND COMMUNICATION METHODS IN THE PROJECT ALIGN WITH THE NEEDS AND CAPABILITIES OF THE AUDIENCE?

Example 1: One of the common issues in Roma communities is illiteracy. Be prepared for the fact that part of your audience may not be able to read and write, and another part may not have a basic secondary education. This requires adapting most of the materials developed for previous trainings, changes in the formats of activities, and a broader use of video and multimedia materials.

Example 2: Another common issue is the lack of documents (passports, birth certificates) among Roma men and women. It is important to take this into account when planning the reporting conditions or registration for the project.

Example 3: If you have planned an event about career opportunities for women, but your audience consists of women living in a closed community where a career for a woman is not considered a value and is sometimes even viewed with disapproval, the materials and topics of such a training should be significantly adjusted. It is better to start not with a course on starting a small business, but with a series of conversations about work and entrepreneurship, brainstorming sessions with participants, and finding arguments on how work and professional development can benefit the family, the community, and the woman herself.

Example 4: Make sure that the duration of the educational event is suitable for your audience. This may relate to the personal time that women can dedicate to the training due to household responsibilities or the need to care for children. It is also important to consider the average education level of your audience. In fact, the ability to concentrate for a long time on certain information and process it effectively is a skill that we are taught in school and university, but which we gradually lose over time. If your audience does not often attend educational events (and training sessions for Roma women are actually not organized frequently), make sure that the event duration does not exceed 2-3 hours, organize breaks, coffee breaks, split the training program into several days or sessions, use methods of active audience engagement, and avoid lecture-based formats.

STEP 7: COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is the key to successfully engaging marginalized groups; after all, it is the first contact with the potential audience. The communication and its strategies determine whether our audience will hear us, but also whether they will feel that this project is for them, understand that they can feel safe and open here.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Accessibility. Try to explain the idea of your project in the simplest possible terms. For example, the phrase “women’s rights” will say little to your audience, and the term “gender-based violence” will not only be unclear but also alienate the most vulnerable part of your audience. Look for words, examples, and stories that will resonate with your audience, directly addressing their dreams and experiences.

We have already mentioned that information about the project, including invitations, must be accessible to illiterate people. If participation in the project requires filling out a Google form or writing a motivation letter, this could be a significant barrier for Roma women. Consider more inclusive ways of spreading information—such as video invitations on social media.

Multichannel communication. When collaborating with local community leaders and relevant NGOs, identify the most common communication methods in the community—whether everyone has mobile phones (smartphones), whether everyone uses social media or platforms like YouTube (where you could potentially place project advertisements) through your own profile, as you won’t be able to set up the ad profile if the user is not logged in. Some of your audience may not have a phone number (or may not share it with outsiders), and an even larger portion may not have email addresses. Identify places where the community gathers—public centers, leisure rooms, parent meetings at schools, churches—and, together with community leaders, invite participants there. You can also create a space for meeting with the community, for example, by organizing a humanitarian aid distribution.

Sensitivity to context. Take into account cultural specifics, respect traditions and customs, and avoid stereotypes. Additional explanations are likely unnecessary here. Before the project starts, consult with community leaders, provide them with materials for review, and ask for their feedback.

It will also be beneficial to clearly state in the invitation or announcement that the event is specifically intended for women from the Roma community, or that these women are also invited to participate.

STEP 8: MOTIVATION AND EXCHANGE

By dedicating the educational program to complex topics and social challenges, you are likely to encounter specific individual requests from participants. It is important to anticipate the possibility of providing individual support: psychological counseling, legal advice, or social assistance.

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR PROGRAM INCLUDES THE POSSIBILITY OF:

- **Conducting individual psychological sessions for participants who need additional emotional support.**
- **Consultations with lawyers who can help resolve specific legal issues.**
- **Mechanisms for redirecting participants to appropriate support services and NGOs.**

If your project addresses the issue of domestic violence, prepare in advance the contact details of crisis centers, hotlines, and local social services that can provide immediate assistance to survivors.

It is important that participants know they will not be left alone with their problems after the training. Ensuring access to real mechanisms of support will not only increase trust in your project but also make it an effective tool for improving the lives of women in the community.

STEP 9: SYSTEMATIC VALUES

INCLUSIVITY IS NOT A ONE-TIME ACTION, BUT A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

The process of implementing change takes time. Perhaps the first attempts will not yield the expected result – the audience may not respond immediately, may not dare to actively participate, or may not show openness. This is a natural stage, as trust, especially in communities that have been repeatedly excluded, is not built overnight. Contact and mutual understanding require time, patience, and a willingness to try new approaches.

It is important to understand that several training sessions or individual educational programs cannot lead to systemic changes in society. Just as it is impossible to become an astrophysicist after a single lecture, it is unrealistic to expect that one training session can form deep knowledge or change the life of a community. True impact is achieved through a prolonged process.

This process requires not only the transfer of knowledge but also the creation of opportunities for its practical application. The participation of the audience in real-life cases, involvement in initiatives that directly impact their lives, and the integration of acquired knowledge into daily practices – all of this is key to sustainable change. Only in this way will learning stop being formal and become an effective tool for expanding women's opportunities in their communities.

The results of an inclusive approach may not appear immediately, but they will lay the foundation for long-term change. Every small action, every meeting, every joint project – is a step toward a more open and equal society where every woman, regardless of her background, will have the opportunity to realize her potential.

THIS IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.

FROM THE TRAINERS AND ORGANIZERS OF THE PROGRAM

PRACTICAL TIPS

During the implementation of educational projects, it is impossible to anticipate all the challenges that may arise. The most valuable resource in such work is experience – both your own and that of those who have already worked with a similar audience. This section contains practical advice from the organizers

and the trainers who participated in the creation and delivery of our educational program. They will help you better understand which approaches work and which don't, how to avoid common mistakes, and how to make the educational process as effective as possible for Roma women.



NATALIYA VYSHNEVETSKA

D.O.M.48.24 NGO

TRAINING: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SOCIETY

Women's rights is a topic that our organization constantly works on. Most of the time, I conduct training on the observance of women's rights and their empowerment, which are related to gender equality issues. However, this topic is more familiar to people working in the public sector, government structures, or who are activists. Understanding that Roma women face a much broader spectrum of cases where their basic rights are violated, and considering that some of the participants may be illiterate, I adapted the training and addressed the basic human rights, connecting them to the participants' experiences. I also commented on what it looks like in practice to ensure these rights, where to turn, and what to do if they are denied access to guaranteed services.

In different communities, I modified the training depending on the group's mood and level of engagement.

For example, I added an interactive exercise that visually demonstrates the difference in people's social status depending on vulnerabilities – the participants stand in a line, they are given roles, and then statements like “You can go on vacation abroad once a year” are read out. If this statement applies to their role, they take a step forward. Thus, after several statements, the line transforms into a chaotic arrangement of people in space, with whom we “get acquainted” and discuss the difficulties they faced in moving, how they feel about people in front of or behind them. This exercise helps to feel that sometimes, despite the difficulties, our place in society is the result of choice, our confidence, or persistence. For example, when a woman playing the role of a “single mother” walked quite often, defying the stereotype of poverty associated with that category, because she believed that for the sake of her child, she would do everything possible for success.

At the beginning of the training, I asked the participants to recall joyful and sad moments in their lives, writing or drawing an association with those memories. I placed these cards on the wall, where cards with basic citizen rights were already attached. When all the participants shared their experiences, I began to reveal the cards with rights, explaining that all our dreams, experiences, joys, and disappointments are somehow connected to them. These rights are common to all according to the Constitution, but for various reasons, they may be under threat.

We examined such chains – for example, a woman's statement about lost housing corresponded to the "Housing" card, with a comment that even if a person does not have their own housing, they have the right to stay in a place, which is implemented through the provision of shelter, placement in a night shelter, in medical facilities, etc. A memory about a wedding revealed the "Marriage" and "Personal Family Life" cards, with a comment that we choose our life partner personally, and no one has the right to influence this. Or a woman's desire to praise God corresponded to "Religion" and the freedom of choosing a religion. In different groups, we discussed in more detail the provision of those rights that were of interest to them. Separately, I gave advice on how to do in cases of violations.

At the end, I shared a case from our practice, where we restored the rights of a Romani woman with six children who had been a victim of domestic violence. The process took six months, and during this time, we encountered violations of her rights everywhere – from restoring payments, issuing documents, to the right to employment, housing, education for her children, and more. But as a result, when the payments were restored and the arrears were paid, the woman was able to buy an apartment.

Thus, as a result of the training, participants gained an understanding of what human rights are and how they specifically relate to them; that all people are different but equal, so despite varying social status, this difference can and should be reduced, and this is what human rights organizations and authorized institutions work on; and also what access to the implementation of their rights looks like in practice.

After the training, in all groups, participants approached me and asked about meeting their needs – support for mothers on maternity leave, legal consultations, etc. If I could provide advice, I gave it immediately; if I couldn't, I asked them to leave their contact information in case I could offer something in the future.

MARYNA KOHUT, CARPATHIAN HUMAN RIGHTS AGENCY 'VESTED'

TRAINING: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE FAMILY

The specificity lies in the fact that Roma communities lead quite a closed life, and talking about personal topics needs to be done carefully, taking into account the cultural norms of the community. In this program, I focused not only on legislative and regulatory legal acts but also on analyzing the traditional role of women in the family according to Roma cultural traditions.

I tried to build the archetype of the woman-mother/wife/daughter based on folk legends and folklore to enhance the understanding of the high status of women in Roma society and the distortion of this status that has occurred over time. The main goal was to demonstrate that women are equal not only according to the law but also according to Roma traditions.

The participants of the training really want the training to be for them, not just for "the sake of formality". When working specifically with the Roma community, I recommend familiarizing yourself with Roma culture.

listen to songs, read poems, and immerse yourself in their meaning in order to understand the audience and the way to communicate with them.

From my experience, the best approach was to use open-ended questions and clarifications throughout the training. I would "check in" with the participants to ensure that I was correctly understanding their community and that they understood my words. The method where participants share their own stories about family problems did not work. Throughout the process, it became clear that it is not advisable to ask specific questions about the family, as it is very personal, and no woman would bring such issues into the open.

The topic that resonated the most was "distortion of traditions," in which I explained, based on folklore, the role that women historically played in Roma society and how this had been distorted over time, using "pseudo-traditions" as an excuse to justify the violation of women's rights.

YULIIA CHEKHUTA, MODERN WOMEN OF LUHANSK REGION NGO

TRAINING: PREVENTION AND COUNTERACTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The motivation for participating in the project was the desire to improve the capacity of the Roma community members, identify manifestations of different types of domestic violence (physical, psychological, economic, sexual), and foster zero tolerance for its manifestations.

From the participants of the educational program, we expected at least a minimal level of awareness about domestic violence (DV) and gender-based violence (GBV). In practice, it turned out that two-thirds of the training participants had personally encountered domestic violence or had witnessed it in their surroundings but did not know how to act or where to turn for help in such cases. The audience showed a very low level of awareness and had a strong demand for improving their knowledge.

The audience in Zolotonosha, Odesa, and Uzhhorod was more informed than in Sredne and Berehove. Representatives of the last two communities knew almost nothing about DV and GBV. Most of them were

illiterate and needed visual material, simpler ways of presenting information, mostly using real-life examples.

Unfortunately, we never used the program in full. A lot of time was spent on basic concepts, and we had to quickly switch the material from printed content to visual (videos, animated films, real-life stories), which resonated well and sparked a willingness to discuss. References to articles of the Law of Ukraine, figures, and percentages were perceived as unclear. To improve group dynamics, it would be useful to divide the audience by age.

What is striking is the openness and willingness of the audience to engage in dialogue. Women are eager to listen and learn, improve their awareness and skills on preventing and combating domestic violence (DV) and gender-based violence (GBV), share them within their families and surroundings, and recommend attending similar training sessions to other women. The Roma audience requires further work. In each community, there was a request for follow-up training, as due to limitations in the number of participants, not all those interested were able to attend, but such a request exists.

TETIANA VASYLIEVA, ORGANIZATION ON PROTECTION OF RIGHT OF POKROVSK «SCHIT»

TRAINING: STRONGER AND SAFER - A SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND SELF-DEFENSE TRAINING FOR WOMEN WITH ELEMENTS OF WENDO

WenDo is a method that combines strategies for physical protection, assertiveness skills, a feminist perspective, and knowledge based on women's experiences. In this training, women learn how to respond to violence and various forms of personal boundary violations, manage their voice, effectively recognize discrimination and violence, resolve conflicts, break stereotypes, and overcome fears. The training focuses on strengthening confidence, self-worth, and effectiveness. A distinctive feature of the training is that the physical self-defense techniques based on the WenDo method are accessible to women of different ages, physical fitness levels, including women with disabilities.

THE TRAINING CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING THE- MATIC BLOCKS:

Introduction: Includes exercises for introductions, integration, and a brief overview of the method.

Assertiveness: Exercises for developing assertive behavior skills.

Breathing and Voice: Exercises focusing on voice control, breathing techniques, and confident posture.

Physical Elements of WenDo: Exercises for practicing physical elements, strikes with hands and feet.

BECAUSE TOPICS RELATED TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, INCLUDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CAN BE TABOO, I ADAPTED THE SITUATIONS FOR BOUNDARY DEFENSE EXERCISES TO THOSE WOMEN MIGHT ENCOUNTER ON THE STREET, IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT, AT HOME, OR IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. THE WOMEN THEMSELVES PROVIDED EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE THEY FACED VIOLATIONS OF THEIR PERSONAL BOUNDARIES OR INSTANCES OF DISCRIMINATION. AS A RESULT, THEY POSITIVELY RECEIVED AND SUPPORTED ROLE-PLAYING SITUATIONS, IN WHICH PARTICIPANTS SEARCHED FOR ASSERTIVE SOLUTIONS. THE PARTICIPANTS NOTED THAT THE EXERCISES WERE NOT ONLY USEFUL AND SUPPORTIVE, BUT ALSO FUN AND ENGAGING.

Since the WenDo training is primarily practical, all the exercises related to situation modeling, assertive behavior, and boundary protection were well-supported. The challenge was adapting to the conditions of the venue and conducting the physical self-defense techniques, which sparked interest. However, not all participants attempted them, and mostly younger women engaged in these exercises. The more difficult exercises for the participants were those involving the voice. Some mentioned that they found it difficult to release their voice because, in everyday life, they do not shout. It was also challenging to concentrate and speak assertively without smiling.

Regarding the practices or tasks I excluded from the program due to cultural taboos or ethical norms of the Romani community – during the initial development of the program, I did not include situations related to sexualized violence in the topic of personal boundary violations.

IRYNA BABENKO, NGO WOMEN'S INFORMATIVE CONSULTING CENTER

TRAINING: ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR
WOMEN'S WELL-BEING

The training for Roma women was aimed at raising their awareness about ways to improve their economic situation, enhance their living standards, and increase their social status in society by showcasing examples of Ukrainian women who have established their own entrepreneurial activities or participated in social enterprises created by non-governmental organizations.

I have many years of experience in implementing educational projects for women from various social groups: rural women, unemployed women, young women, survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking, and internally displaced women. I did not have experience working with Roma women, but I was interested in gaining this experience and understanding the opportunities for further development.

How did the program of this training differ from similar trainings you conducted for a nationwide audience?

It differs a lot. In entrepreneurship trainings, all components of the business plan, organizational plan, and marketing plan are studied in detail. Profitability calculations for your own product or service are made, and the competitive environment is analyzed. The training is accompanied by practical exercises and the defense of the work done.

What, within the framework of your training's topic, would you recommend that your colleagues pay special attention to in similar projects? Is there even a demand for such a training and a match with the audience?

In my opinion, work with women from the Roma community should begin with raising their self-esteem as mothers, housewives, and wives. Conduct training programs for Roma community leaders on creating social enterprises to provide jobs for Roma women with flexible working hours. It is also important to change the stereotypical attitudes of Roma men towards the role of their wives.

What methods of working with the audience proved effective, and which ones did not work?

Effective methods: dialogue, explanations with examples, visual methods (videos, slides with photos). It is important to exclude exercises that would put a woman in an awkward situation or expose her inability to perform them—such as asking her to write something on the board or flipchart, or to read aloud, etc.

What topics, questions, practices, or tasks were particularly well-received by the audience and received the most positive reaction?

The most effective information for women was about the value of different types of household labor, the evaluation of such services in the labor market, the opportunities for additional earnings through various household work skills, and the contribution of women to the family budget through their unpaid labor. The figure amazed them: over 117,000 hryvnias per month. There were happy smiles on the faces of the women. And for hearing words about their value in the family's life, they expressed their gratitude.

What topics, questions, practices, or tasks did the audience perceive particularly negatively?

There were no such topics.

LILIA MINERALOVA, MEDICAL CENTER MLP-MEDICAL

TRAINING: WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING METHODS

My motivation for participating in this program and working with Roma women is based on the desire to provide access to important health information that can significantly improve their quality of life. The Roma community often faces social barriers, lack of access to medical services, and insufficient awareness of modern family planning methods and reproductive health preservation. My professional mission as a gynecologist is to overcome these barriers, provide support, and create an atmosphere of trust. My audience consists of women who want to understand how to better take care of themselves, their children, and their families. At the same time, I understood that their requests might not always be clearly formulated due to the lack of prior experience or communication barriers with medical professionals. This further motivated me to create an open space for dialogue and convey key knowledge in an accessible and understandable form.

THE SPECIFICS OF THE WORK AND PROGRAM ADAPTATION:

1

SIMPLICITY

Avoid complex medical terms, using understandable examples and visual materials.

2

PRACTICAL ISSUES

Focus on prevention, basic hygiene, and accessible family planning methods.

3

FLEXIBILITY

Adjust the focus depending on the requests, paying more attention to topics that sparked interest or questions.

4

RESPECT

Exclude topics or formulations that could violate the traditional ethical norms of the community.

NETWORKING

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT CREATED THE PROGRAM

Collaboration and knowledge exchange are key factors for the success and sustainability of any inclusive initiative. In this section, we provide contact information and introduce the organizations that played a crucial role in developing this program.

We are open to cooperation, consultations, and further development of the program—expanding its reach, adapting it to new communities, or sharing knowledge and methodologies. We believe that strong partnerships create a powerful impact, and we invite everyone who shares our values to join us in this collective effort.

ZAKARPATTIA REGIONAL CHARITABLE FOUNDATION “BLAGO”

Mission:

The organization is dedicated to providing educational, social, and legal assistance to women and children from large, low-income Romani families.

Objectives:

- Improving the quality of education among Romani children and raising the legal and social awareness of their parents.

- Increasing the enrollment of Romani children in Ukrainian schools.

- Promoting cultural diversity and enhancing the representation of the Romani community in Ukraine.

Director: Eleonora Kulchar

www.blago.in.ua

D.O.M.48.24 NGO IVANO-FRANKIVSK

Director: Nataliya Vyshnevetska

www.dom4824.org

NGO “ROMANI ROTA” ZOLOTONOSHA

Director: Volodymyr Bambula

www.roma.ck.ua

CARPATHIAN HUMAN RIGHTS AGENCY “VESTED” UZHGOROD

www.kaplvested.info

CHARITABLE FOUNDATION PLANETA DOBRIKH LYUDEY ODESA

Director: Maksym Dzhum

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kp.planet/>

WOMEN’S INFORMATION AND ADVISORY CENTER ZHYTOMYR

Director: Iryna Babenko

www.wicc.com.ua

NGO POKROVSKA HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION ‘SHCHYT’

Director: Mariia Shamonina

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100031928246647

NGO “MODERN WOMEN OF LUHANSK REGION” LUTSK

Director: Yuliia Chekhuta

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087189627154



CF BLAGO

WEBSITE

www.blago.in.ua

ADDRESS

17/2, Shvabska st.
Uzhhorod,
88000, Ukraine

CONTACT

+380501518605
eleonorakulcar@gmail.com

©2025, CF BLAGO

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without prior written permission from the copyright holders.