

ROMA CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Manual for Local Authorities



A youth-led alliance, building @active Roma citizens

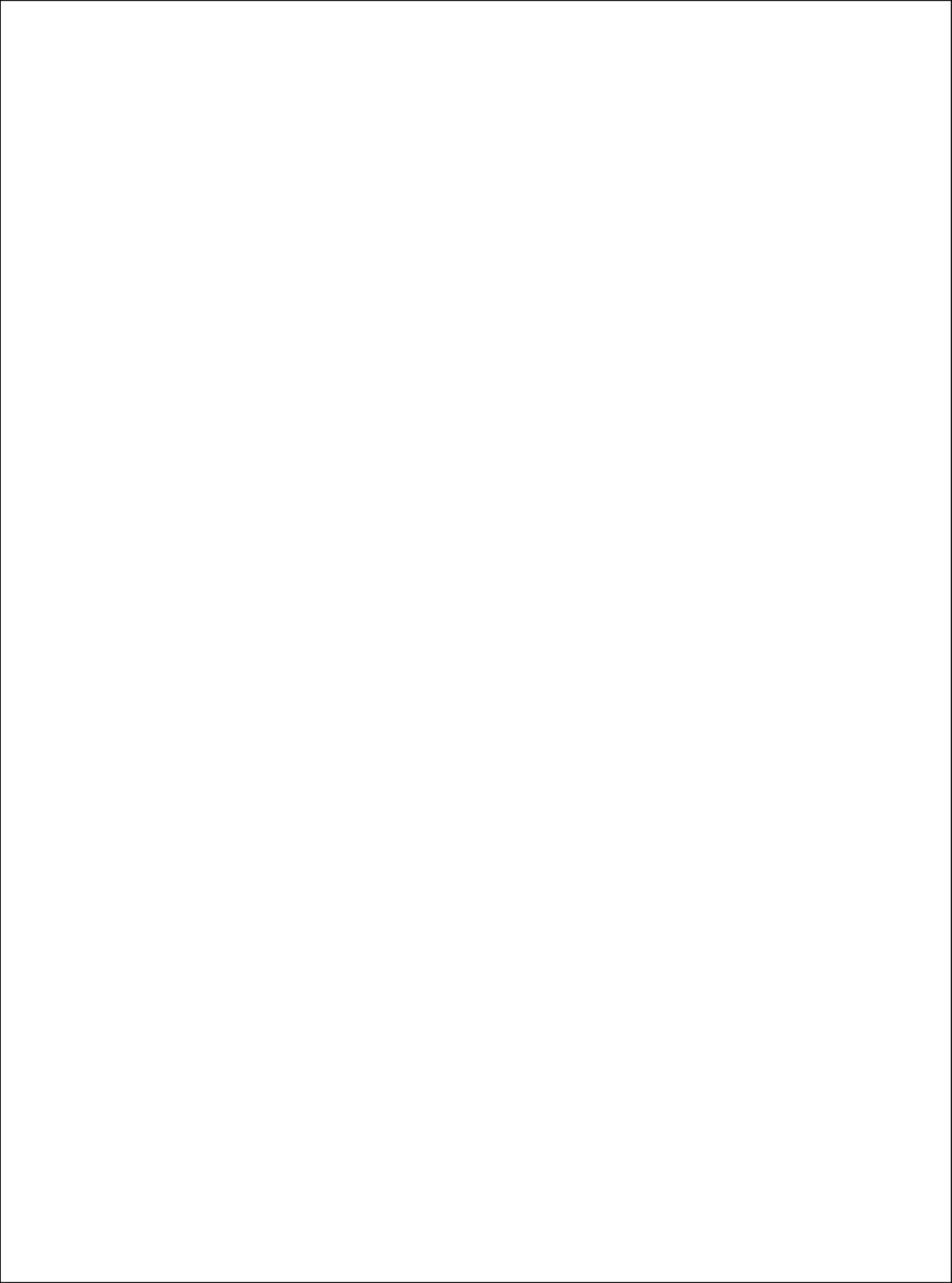
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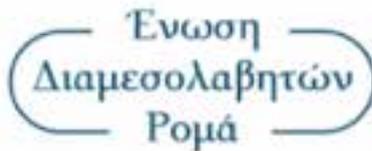
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The I_do Project Consortium



Project Coordinator



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Introduction

This Manual for Local Government bodies was developed in the context of the implementation of the EU co-financed Project “I_do: A youth-led alliance, building @ctive Roma citizens”.

The aim of the I_do Project is to support the active participation of young Roma in public life on an equal footing, with the specific objective of providing knowledge about the functioning of Local Government and empowering them to be active citizens.

To this end, young Roma from 3 Greek Regions (Attica, Thessaly and Central Macedonia) after a 5 month training course, participated, with the support of Local Government officers, in a youth-led Digital Assembly for six months with a view to developing comprehensive proposals for the benefit of the whole local society in which they live, including the local Roma community.

This manual aims to prevent and combat social exclusion and, building on the experience gained in implementing the I_do Project, seeking to promote issues of active citizenship and equal participation of Roma in local affairs on the basis of the principles of open, participatory and good local governance.

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Active citizens are ...

Those citizens who:

- ▶ Feel they belong to society as a whole.
- ▶ Are responsible for themselves and towards the society to which they feel they belong.
- ▶ Know, assert and exercise their democratic rights.
- ▶ Recognise and fulfil their democratic obligations.
- ▶ Understand that a Democracy requires and relies on people actively being involved in public affairs.
- ▶ Comprehend that their right to participate in civic life, which is recognised and guaranteed by the State, is not limited to the right to vote and stand for election.
- ▶ Are knowledgeable about all civic activities that pertain to themselves as individuals, as well as their local community and society at large.
- ▶ Strive to be well informed in order to keep abreast of developments.
- ▶ Check the validity and credibility of the information they receive.
- ▶ Participate actively in public life, in shaping opinions, in decision making, in controlling institutions and the policies implemented.

A citizen is well-informed, reflects, dares to decide and takes on risks, because he acts responsibly, in other words, based on knowledge, due consideration and having factored in every eventuality. The uninformed citizen acts in a timorous manner devoid of reflection.

Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration

- ▶ Take a position in public discourse using sound judgement and express their views without avoiding self-criticism and constructive criticism.
- ▶ Participate in the community, but not for personal gain.
- ▶ Seek to pursue personal interests, provided that the conditions for ensuring the “common good” are safeguarded.
- ▶ Act judiciously and responsibly without prejudice and stereotypes.
- ▶ Support democracy, equality, human rights and the preservation of common goods in theory and in practice.
- ▶ Strive to address social problems, foster sustainable development and social prosperity individually and collectively.

Active citizens discuss, take a stance, evaluate, propose, act.

Citizens' participation in public life is the essence of Democracy. Reason, in the form of logical thinking, and discourse, in the form of dialogue and debate, is the way of capitalising on citizens' knowledge and disposition, but also of consolidating political freedom.

Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration

Citizenship of the European Union

Every person who holds the citizenship of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Every citizen of the Union shall have the right: To move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. To vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal and community elections in the Member State of residence, under the same conditions as for its nationals. To enjoy protection by the consular and diplomatic authorities of all Member States. To petition the European Parliament and to file complaints to the Ombudsman to identify instances of maladministration in the context of the activities of the EU institutions and bodies. To have access to documents of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission (subject to conditions), to write to any EU institution or body in one of the languages of the Member States and receive a reply in the same language.

Treaty for the European Union, Maastricht, 07 February 1992

Article 8 Citizenship of the European Union through additional rights

Public expression - Public exposure

Speech, as a public or private expression of positions and views, has power.

It may affect and mobilise society positively or negatively. New information technologies and modern social media have multiplied the opportunities for public expression, making the power of speech even greater.

Active citizen engagement, being an active citizen, includes the element of public expression.

However, active citizens fully grasp the fact that a public expression of positions and views entails at the same time public exposure, which they are able to handle, when:

- ▶ They have self-awareness and self-confidence.
- ▶ Deploy self-criticism, pursuing personal improvement.
- ▶ Are honest with others.
- ▶ Do not adopt behaviours that are foreign to themselves, in order to be liked.
- ▶ Do not play roles, which they cannot uphold.
- ▶ Know that public expression is free, but not uncontrolled.
- ▶ Respect the rules that govern public speech.
- ▶ Are not afraid to tackle problems and their consequences.

Every person may express and propagate their thoughts verbally, in writing and through the press in compliance with the laws of the State.

The Constitution of Greece, article 14.1

Freedom of speech is a feature of Liberty.

Demokritos

- ▶ Their speech is authentic and direct.
- ▶ Express well-reasoned views.
- ▶ Avoid voicing views publicly if they cannot support their positions with arguments.
- ▶ Avoid public exposure, when they are unable to take public criticism.
- ▶ Accept well-intentioned criticism.
- ▶ Are able to accept new ideas and proposals, without prejudices.
- ▶ Bravely own up to their mistakes and freely review them.
- ▶ Assess and judge institutions and policies objectively, constructively and without ulterior motive.
- ▶ Act in a responsible manner, with the goal of social progress and common interest.

Active citizens know that:

Truthfulness and directness have greater force than eloquence and demagogic practices.

Think correctly, speak correctly, do what is right.

Demokritos

Active citizenship is defined as participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy.

Centre for Educational Research and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) / EC, 2010

European Convention on Human Rights

Article 10 Freedom of expression (amended on 1 June 2010)

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

Greek Roma

The presence of the Roma has been constant in the area of Greece for the last thousand years as witnessed by historians, researchers and travellers and they were to be found in various parts of Greece, under the rule of Byzantines, Ottomans, etc, depending on the area and the period under study.

The creation of nation states that followed the collapse of the empires put an end to large population movements, with the Roma finding themselves within the territorial limits of various nations either by choice (identification with the nation-states created) or by force, through various forms of coercion and pressure.

These different conditions resulted in major divergences in identity and the degree of consolidation of a feeling of belonging and self-determination, amongst the Roma present in Europe today. In Greece, the Roma identified with Hellenism as illustrated by the fact that many Roma came from Turkey during the mandatory population exchange in 1922.

The common trajectory of Greek Roma with the rest of Hellenism is recorded in a host of scientific publications and is reflected in popular tradition.

Thus, although the Greek State granted Greek citizenship to Greek Roma as late as 1979, by means of a resolution of 46 Associations members of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma, in 2001, the latter differentiated themselves from the Roma of Europe in issues related to self-determination.

The Roma arrived in the Byzantine Empire and from there entered into the area of Greece; and many settled in its various regions. Either as craftsmen or land labourers, or tradesmen, they participated in the division of labour, exercising professions that the economy of that age considered necessary.

The co-existence of different peoples and cultures in the area of Byzantium was an experience that contributed to their friendly treatment.

Roma traded and socialised with the people in local societies.

Sp. Asdrachas, *Greek Economic History of the 15th - 19th Century*, 2003

“We, the Greek Roma, state categorically and to all concerned, that we an integral part of Greeks worldwide.”

Self-determination of the Greek Roma, 2001

The resolution on the self-determination of Greek Roma in 2001, however, was the outcome of their effort to differentiate themselves from the Roma of other European countries, which had started a lot earlier.

- ▶ In 1971 various countries established the International Romani Union to give voice to the “Roma Nation”.

The term “Roma Nation”, which included, by way of self-determination, the members of the International Romani Union was further amended in 2002 to “Roma - a Nation without a State”.

- ▶ In 1939, Greek Roma established the Panhellenic Cultural Association of Greek Roma to represent their collective interests, without differentiating themselves from the rest of Hellenism.

In 2001, in response to the self-determination of “Roma – a Nation without a State” of the International Romani Union (2000), the Greek Roma voted unanimously on their self-determination as an “integral part of Greeks worldwide” claiming that “even in the event of a hypothetical dilemma, they would choose to delete the term “Tsigans” and to maintain the term “Greek””.

In Greece the Roma have played an important role in our folk songs and their preservation.

Certain towns (Karpenissi, Giannena, Chalkida, Konitsa) had an entire neighbourhood of Roma musicians.

They would go to the fairs and weddings throughout Greece. They played musical instruments such as pipiza or zournades (an evolution of the ancient flute), daouli and later on the clarinet and violin.

T. Giannakopoulos, 1983.

The self-determination resolution of the Greek Roma became the trigger for a large scale discourse launched on a national and European level, with respect to issues related to identity, also giving rise to an analysis of the causes and a search for ways to tackle social exclusion through an inclusive and holistic approach.

Although their presence in scientific, economic and social matters is constantly increasing, the majority of Greek Roma continue to experience social exclusion and marginalisation on many levels even to this day.

On the basis of the foregoing, the discussion about matters of active civic engagement takes on greater importance, revealing possibilities for Greek Roma to have a stronger feeling of belonging through civic involvement.

As I furthered my research through participatory observation in areas where Roma live, I observed that behind the obvious differences, there were hidden similarities in people, who for centuries lived together and yet apart, on the one hand as the dominant society and on the other hand those born as pariahs and destined to remain so throughout their lifetime, without any references being made to their common cultural elements.

This makes us understand that compared to the rest of us there exists a large distance in terms of "cultural time", which is the result of their exclusion from key organisation structures of Greek society.

Anna Lydaki, 2019

Self-determination of the Greek Roma 2001

Resolution 46 of Associations-members of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma

"We, the Greek Tsigans, state categorically and to all concerned, that we are an integral part of Greeks worldwide.

Not only do we disagree with any other point of view, whoever may express it or wherever it may stem from, but we are set against it.

Even if the question is ever asked regarding the deletion of one of the two components of our Identity, which are so proud of, namely:

- a) "Greek"
- b) "Tsigan"

We would like to state unequivocally, categorically and unanimously, that we would choose the deletion of the term "Tsigan" and retain solely the term "Greek".

Greek Roma and active citizen engagement

Being an active citizen presupposes the recognition of citizenship, which in the case of Greek Roma was conferred by the Greek State as recently as 1979, with the result that:

Over a very large period of time, Greek Roma were deprived of civil rights, state protection, refugee settlement, equal access to education, labour rights, freedom to choose their place of residence and, in general, access to social goods.

However, in some few communities (Petalona, Drapetsona, Dendropotamos, Serres), small groups of Greek Roma collectively exercised active citizen engagement, founding the "Panhellenic Cultural Association of Greek Roma", in 1939 at a period when all political actions or collective claims were restricted.

The initiative of these individuals from a social group, whose members in their overwhelming majority were deprived of citizenship, were homeless and illiterate, bears witness to the fact that a long time ago the groundwork had been laid for them to understand the importance of active citizen engagement and to develop skills to effectively exercise it.

The first fruit of the Association's action was borne at the start of World War II and the integration of the majority of its founders and members into the National Resistance; many of whom were executed in the period 1941 - 1945.

Following the end of the war, the Association's work focused on the effort to acquire Greek citizenship.

80% of Greek Roma came into the area of Greece together with refugee Greeks during the Asia Minor destruction (1919 - 1923). However, Greek citizenship was given to Greek Roma in 1979 by General Decree no. 69468/212/20.10.78 of the Ministry of Interior. Until then the Greek State considered them as foreigners of "Romani descent and undetermined citizenship".

The small number of communities in which the first groups of politically active Greek Roma appeared were those that in the following decades had the highest social inclusion levels and played a leading role in the political engagement of Greek Roma throughout Greece, contributing to their self-organisation with the establishment of collective representation bodies.

Typically, certain of these communities have elected without fail at least one municipal councillor since 1975, whilst in 1990 a Greek Roma party was in the running for the municipal elections.

Greek Roma hold offices in municipal authorities, as well as in the administration of municipal bodies, legal entities and agencies throughout Greece and have participated in European, national and regional elections, as representatives of various political groupings and ideologies.

Vassilis Mitrou was a Roma captain of the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) from Kymi, Evia, known as "Capetan Gyftos", he was killed in the battle of Lambousa in September 1944.

There is a monument in Chamosternas street in Petralona commemorating the 11 Roma who were executed by Germans in August 1944 for their resistance work.

Sevasti Troumbeta, *The Roma in the modern Greek state*, 2008

Roma active citizens are ...

Roma citizens who:

- ▶ See themselves as equal members of a society, a land, a collectivity, a cause.
- ▶ Realise that participating in public life on an equal footing entails both rights and obligations.
- ▶ Push for an improved quality of life overall, for the country, their land, their neighbourhood and their family.
- ▶ Push for the elimination of exclusions to the benefit of society as a whole.
- ▶ Are ready to fight for the needs of others, not only their own.
- ▶ Push for public debate and participate in it.
- ▶ Express honest and well-reasoned views, seeking constructive criticism.
- ▶ Disassociate the problem from people's origin, either as a cause or as a symptom.
- ▶ Do not have self-appointed defenders.
- ▶ Are aware that societies change through collective effort and individual improvement.

Citizen show interest in their city, as they are interested in themselves, because they know that only in this manner will they have a better future.

Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration

Greek Roma and Local Government: the ROM network

In the 1990s, by virtue of Presidential Decree 2218/1994, Greek Local Government acquired greater competences and at the same time substantial potential to address local problems.

In 1995 this event motivated Mayors, who had perceived the importance of Roma integration for social progress at a local community level, to establish the “Panhellenic Intermunicipal Network for Supporting Greek Roma - ROM Network” with the support of the Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government (EETAA), the General Secretariat for Popular Education (GSPE) and the General Secretariat for Youth (GSFY).

The ROM network was the first City Alliance on Roma issues, at a national and European level, which in the decade at which it was at its peak (1995 - 2005), forged the most effective and strongest relationship between Local Government and Roma.

Specifically:

- ▶ It played a definitive role in the self-organisation of Greek Roma, resulting in the establishment of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma (POSER) in 1995.
- ▶ It enhanced Roma participation in central decision-making bodies, restoring trust between the state and the communities.
- ▶ Its action resulted in the creation of the Interministerial Coordinating Committee for designing, implementing and monitoring national policy for Greek Roma (GG Issue 24A/2000), headed by the Ministry of Interior with the participation of the Rom Network, 8 Ministries, 3 General Secretariats and the Office of the Prime Minister.
- ▶ It contributed to the development of the “Integrated Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Greek Roma 2001 – 2008” (IAP), which the Government adopted in 2001 as a national policy for addressing the problems of the Greek Roma and included it in the National Action Plan for the social inclusion of vulnerable populations. The Ministry of Interior was responsible for the IAP, being drafted by the ROM network and jointly competent Ministries, in cooperation with the University community and POSER.

- ▶ It created tools to address Roma social exclusion in collaboration with Local Government, that are still used today.
- ▶ It educated Greek Roma in matters of active citizen engagement, providing the means and opportunities for their civic literacy.

Factors that determined its success were that the ROM network:

Was steadfastly focused on the objectives of integration, defending the interests of society as a whole,

Established itself in the social sector as an unbiased agency,

Formulated an honest and well-reasoned discourse,

Struck a much needed balance, managing to be accepted by both the Greek State and Greek Roma.

ROM Network Milestones

Residential Issues

Drafting of the first comprehensive study in Greece on Roma housing by the Public City Planning and Accommodation Enterprise (DEPOS) in 1998, entitled “Study for a Programme to Tackle the Immediate Residential Problems of Greek Roma”. The Study was a point of reference for drafting the IAC and constituted a model for residential studies of a national scope, on a European level.

Mediation

Six-month training of Roma mediators in collaboration with the General Secretariat for Popular Education, in 1998. Education programmes for Roma mediator were carried out in 2011 again in Greece (2 weekly training cycles), in the context of the European ROMED Programme of the Council of Europe.

National Strategy

Recommendation regarding the need for a “National Inclusion Policy” for the integration of Roma, 1995. The need was expressed by the European Commission in 2011, when the member states were asked to formulate and submit a “National Strategy for Roma Inclusion”.

National Contact Point

Request regarding the operation of a central coordinating and monitoring body for the national inclusion policy for Roma, 1995. This request was satisfied through the creation of an Interministerial Coordinating Committee, which was the first national Contact Point for Roma Inclusion.

The 56 Municipalities - members of the ROM network¹

1. Municipality of Agia Varvara
2. Municipality of Agrinio
3. Municipality of Aigialeia
4. Municipality of Alexandria
5. Municipality of Alexandroupoli
6. Municipality of Ambelokipoi - Menemeni
7. Municipality of Arta
8. Municipality of Acharnes
9. Municipality of Velo - Voha
10. Municipality of Volos
11. Municipality of Delta
12. Municipality of Delphi
13. Municipality of Didymoteicho
14. Municipality of Drama
15. Municipality of Western Achaia
16. Municipality of Erymanthos
17. Municipality of Elis
18. Municipality of Erakleia Serres
19. Municipality of Herakleion Crete

¹ Data following the administrative reorganisation and merging of LGAs ("Kallikratis", L. 3852/2010).

20. Municipality of Thiva
21. Municipality of Mesolonghi
22. Municipality of Ilion
23. Municipality of Kavala
24. Municipality of Karditsa
25. Municipality of Corfu
26. Municipality of Kefalonia
27. Municipality of Kordeli – Evosmo
28. Municipality of Corinth
29. Municipality of Lamia
30. Municipality of Larissa
31. Municipality of Lesbos
32. Municipality of Messini
33. Municipality of Nafpaktia
34. Municipality of Neapoli – Sykees
35. Municipality of Nestos
36. Municipality of Xylokastro – Evrostini
37. Municipality of Orestiada
38. Municipality of Orchomenos
39. Municipality of Patras
40. Municipality of Pineios

41. Municipality of Preveza
42. Municipality of Pyrgos
43. Municipality of Rhodes
44. Municipality of Serres
45. Municipality of Sofades
46. Municipality of Trikala
47. Municipality of Tripoli
48. Municipality of Tyrnavos
49. Municipality of Farsala
50. Municipality of Farres
51. Municipality of Florina
52. Municipality of Fyli
53. Municipality of Chalandri
54. Municipality of Chalkidona
55. Municipality of Chalkida
56. Municipality of Chios

Permanent Partners of the ROM Network

- EETAA (Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government)
- KEDKE (Central Union of Municipalities in Greece)
- GSPE (General Secretariat for Popular Education)
- HASW (Hellenic Association of Social Workers)
- UNICEF (office in Greece)
- UNESCO (office in Greece)
- GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers)
- ADEDY (Supreme Administration of Greek Civil Servants Trade Unions)
- OTOE (Greek Federation of Bank Employee Unions)
- DOE (Greek Primary Teachers' Federation)
- POE - OTA (Panhellenic Federation of Workers Associations in the Local Government)
- OLME (Greek Federation of Secondary School Teachers)
- INE - GSEE (Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour)
- NKUA (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)
- AUTh (Aristotle University of the Thessaloniki)
- University of Ioannina
- University of Thessaly
- University of the Aegean
- ESIEA (Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers)
- DSA (Athens Bar Association)
- DSTh (Thessaloniki Bar Association)
- ISA (Athens Medical Association)
- EINAP (Athens and Piraeus hospital doctors' association)

Local Government and active citizen engagement

According to the Greek Constitution, the Local Government bodies have a remit to manage those local affairs, whose administration falls to the first and second tier Local Government Authorities, as well as a remit to manage general public affairs assigned to them based on the comparative advantage of strong democratic legitimacy and a direct relationship with the citizens.

Article 102 of the Greek Constitution showcases the dual nature of Local Government as an institution, which expresses local democracy and local autonomy, comprising at the same time an integral operational component of the administrative system. These characteristics give greater weight to Local Government both in developing local societies, as well as building a better quality democracy.

The principles and goals of European Governance (White Paper on European Governance, 2001), as well as Open Governance (Open Government Partnership, 2011) apply, first and foremost, to Local Government bodies.

Democratic governance is integrally linked with the participation of citizens in public life. Participating in public life safeguards the democratic form of government, reinforces the relationship between citizens and the State, creates citizens with collective consciousness, gives impetus to the effort for social progress.

The Local Government bodies can design local development so that it enables the redistribution of goods ensuring quality of life for citizens on an equal footing.

The New Architecture of the Local Government and Decentralised Administration organises the exercise of power in terms of citizens' greater participation and deepening democracy, as well as highlighting the role of civil society, social organisations and volunteering.

**New Architecture of the Local Government
and Decentralised Administration,
Kallikratis Programme
(Explanatory Memorandum)**

Such design can be on the basis of objective and fair management of local interests and, by drafting and applying development plans through a participatory process, Local Government bodies can reach widely accepted, effective decisions that are beneficial for the whole of local society.

Local Government is the cornerstone for the administrative system with local communities at its core, and constitutes fertile ground for the consolidation of democracy and a first contact with participating in public affairs.

On that basis, strengthening active citizen engagement proves to be a wager that Local Government can win, ***provided it shows vision, audacity and a conscious decision to strive for a sustainable city,***

and ensures:

- ▶ a favourable environment for citizens' active participation in public life;
- ▶ wide dissemination of information on local issues and alternatives, so that all citizens can be informed and responsibly take action;
- ▶ wide ranging information on democratic procedures, in which citizens can participate;

Local government must adopt the basic principles of the Lisbon Treaty: proximity, transparency, openness, respect for human rights, participatory democracy and its deepening.

New Architecture of the Local Government and Decentralised Administration, Kallikratis Programme (Explanatory memorandum)

- ▶ the creation of structures and mechanisms that permit the participation of young people in discussions and decisions that concern them;
- ▶ public consultations with complete transparency and in a spirit of respect for diverse opinions, knowledge, experiences, ideas and interests;
- ▶ the elimination of stereotypes and prejudices;
- ▶ greater engagement of citizens in finding solutions on local problems, designing local development, controlling local government and assessing policies that it implements;
- ▶ investment in lifelong learning geared towards developing citizens' individual and social skills;
- ▶ encouragement and support of initiatives by citizens and bodies aiming to protect common goods and defend collective interests.

The "Kleisthenis I" program strengthens popular initiative and sovereignty, with the aim of actively and substantially involving citizens in local affairs and fostering their social and political awareness.

Kleisthenis program
(Explanatory memorandum)

European Charter of Local Self-Government
Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority

Article 1

1. The States Parties shall secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.
2. The right to participate in the affairs of a local authority denotes the right to seek to determine or to influence the exercise of a local authority's powers and responsibilities.

Article 2

1. The Parties shall take all such measures as are necessary to give effect to the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority [...]

Active citizens are not ...

Those citizens who:

- ▶ Do not realize that they are part of a whole.
- ▶ Do not understand their social responsibility.
- ▶ Do not know their rights and do not assume their obligations.
- ▶ Perceive civic engagement simply as an obligation to participate in electoral processes.
- ▶ Are not passive bystanders of social events.
- ▶ Do not demand to be kept informed on matters that concern them and the society to which they belong.
- ▶ Do not check the validity and reliability of information received.
- ▶ Do not act because they rely on others to take responsibility.
- ▶ Do not act because they depend on the individual or collective efforts of others.
- ▶ Do not act because the "leaves things to run their course".
- ▶ Avoid public debate and self-criticism.
- ▶ Focus on their individual interest.
- ▶ Do not care for democratic values, human rights and the preservation of common goods.

It is common for many people not to engage in public affairs and let others decide for them. We do not regard a person who takes no part in these duties as unambitious but as useless.

Thucydides, Funeral Oration

- ▶ Do not realize that in helping advance society to which they belong, they are investing in themselves.

As soon as a man, thinking of the affairs of the State, says: "They don't concern me", it is time to conclude that the State is lost.

J.J. Rousseau, Social contract

Young Roma active citizens: cui bono?

The challenge of the I_do Interregional Alliance

The importance of being an active citizen

In modern societies, with their mosaic-like diversity, where many different social groups have to coexist, we can create conditions that foster social progress if we realise the importance being active citizens. Citizens can demonstrate active civic engagement through general and objective information, knowledge of their rights and obligations, free and responsible public expression and pushing for participation in decision-making.

Investing in young Roma

There are young Roma in Greece, who, through their personal achievements - particularly in the field of education – could on the one hand set a positive example on how to empower communities to actively participate in public life and on the other hand, help mitigate established stereotypes, which undermine discourse with the Roma, thus intensifying the phenomena of their social exclusion.

A collective, systematic and coordinated effort to showcase this positive, real, albeit unpublicised image of the Roma may call into question widespread beliefs, which hinder democratic dialogue within Greek society.

Furthermore: investing in these young Roma means tapping into our social capital, enabling young people, Roma and non-Roma alike, to fight for their own achievements.

The role of Local Government

Local Government is the institution of the State, which is closest to the citizen and is, by its nature and operation, the primary field on which citizens can become civically involved. Local Government has as its mission to promote local interests and must act to strengthen social cohesion and improve the quality of life of all social groups that make up the local population. This means it is in a position to provide the necessary means and forum for young Roma to participate on an equal basis in public debate.

Ensuring democratic and sustainable societies

Investing in the social capital of youth as enablers of change; highlighting the importance of active citizen engagement; empowering young Roma to become active citizens; and tapping into Local Government's potential and means to ensure participation on an equal footing in the management of local affairs, constitute safeguards for promoting democratic dialogue within open, inclusive and, as such, sustainable societies.

In the context of the implementation of the I_do Project, young Roma from the Greek Regions of Attica, Thessaly and Central Macedonia, and local government officers established an Interregional Alliance for the submission of proposals to Municipal and Regional Councils for the benefit of the whole of local community in which they live, including local Roma communities. The following assumptions were the starting point for their joint efforts:

Greek Roma are Greek citizens

Greek Roma are Greek citizens with rights and obligations enshrined in the constitution since 1979, they self-identify as Greeks of Roma descent since 2001.

Greek Roma experience social exclusion even now

Roma experience social exclusion in most of the areas where they live in Greece and in several instances their living conditions offend human dignity.

Social exclusion is not an option

The adverse conditions under which Greek Roma live, are no longer an option and cannot be considered to express a "special culture" that must remain unchanged, as a sign of respect to their tradition. Such approaches condemn any effort to tackle their social exclusion to failure.

Social exclusion can be addressed

Without ignoring the difficulties that exist in tackling social exclusion, examples of Roma social inclusion exist on both a national and European level, proving that, through a systematic, methodical and coordinated effort, social inclusion is possible.

Tackling social exclusion requires a holistic approach

Tackling Roma social exclusion requires that all individual root causes that give rise, maintain and reproduce it have to be simultaneously addressed in parallel. The fragmented approach towards tackling these causes results in the preservation, perpetuation and worsening of their social exclusion.

Addressing social exclusion is an obligation of the State

Addressing social exclusion is an obligation of the State, which must take all the measures to support its vulnerable members, as set out in the Greek Constitution and in accordance with European acquis on the protection of human rights.

Tackling social exclusion benefits society as a whole

Greek Roma constitute an integral part of Greek society, which ultimately stands to gain from the effort to tackle social exclusion, ensuring social cohesion and peace through this effort.

Social inclusion requires positive discrimination and “unequal distributions”

Proportional equality terms must be applied in order to achieve social inclusion: compensatory measures to ensure equity amongst the members of society, whereby more resources should be allocated to those who are unable to adequately meet their own needs with their own resources. Positive discrimination comprises compensatory measures, whereby “unequal” distributions gradually help level the playing field for members who are initially not on an equal footing, ensuring that individuals and groups tread a common path toward social progress.

Social inclusion requires and involves the granting of “social space”

The social inclusion of Roma requires their acceptance as equal members of society and this can be attested by their active participation in public life.

Greek Roma have the right and obligation to participate in public debate for the benefit of society as a whole

Roma Greeks have the right and obligation to participate in public debate as active citizens who know their rights and obligations, interact and claim their equal participation in decision-making for the benefit of society as a whole, including the Roma communities.

Roma and non-Roma share a common future, which belongs, mainly, to young people

As members of the same society, Roma and non-Roma must be able to get along together and invest in youth as vectors of change within open, inclusive and sustainable societies.

