

## **An unforgettable experience for Roma youths and adults from the Czech Republic**

When we (Life together NGO from the Czech Republic, Ostrava) learned about the opportunity to join the project and to build new partnership with great people from Poland and Slovakia, we did not hesitate a moment. The participation in the project enabled us to provide Roma youths from Ostrava with new experience and knowledge. The event enriched all participants, both youths and adults (representatives from Life together). The event was attended by youths (mostly secondary school students) who have potential for their personal development, they may once become respected Roma leaders.

There is no mention about the history of Roma people in history lessons at schools in the Czech Republic. There are some cultural and other institutions where information can be obtained, but in general, people, including many Roma children and youths, know little about the history of Roma people. WW2 and all the horrors associated with the war may seem as an ancient past to young people, but sometimes the history may repeat itself if the mankind is not able to learn from the mistakes.

Nowadays there is e.g. some tension between part of Roma community and people from Ukraine in the Czech Republic. There are more reasons to this fact, but the dangerous point is when people, who may be in difficult situation themselves, blindly follow, share and do not critically analyse some fake news, which then may result e.g. in a common and shared hate and frustration. Hitler was once also able to manipulate and brainwash the crowds. That is also why we consider it very important to strengthen civil society, give especially young generation the chance to broaden their horizons, learn how to think critically, be able to consider the consequences of such acts. Also according to some respected Roma personalities in the Czech Republic it is crucial for this community to have strong Roma leaders, which can hardly be achieved without their own empowerment, education and awareness.

We are convinced that the projects like this one are unique in the possibility to bring together people from Visegrad countries, which is rarely possible from national sources. They have not only gained a lot of information, but they were also able to meet new people, hear about the

situation of Roma in other countries, what troubles they face, but also what challenges may be realized. People could hear about a lot of interesting ideas, projects, which may also be applicable in our country. The event enriched not only the youths, but also the employees of Life together, who work with Roma children in Ostrava on a daily basis and during the camp they learned new and for them inspiring ways or methods of work with the Roma. People had the chance to find out something about themselves during a series of interesting, teambuilding and other activities. Although speaking different languages, they all shared their common way of expressing themselves, their emotions, troubles or dreams, through music or singing. We believe they will never forget this week and it will bring them new perspectives or dreams into their lives.

We, as a NGO, also value and appreciate the newly build cooperation and networking of participating organizations. There were a lot of great ideas and plans for the future cooperation risen from many participants during the camp (e.g. art-based activities etc.), and we believe we will be able to strengthen and extend our cooperation when planning some new, innovative projects together, which will be beneficial for us all.

We would like to thank the Visegrad Fund for supporting this unique project and the Culture House Foundation for inviting us to the project and look forward to new challenges and collaborations.

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