

**ROM-ACT**  
**EUROPEAN GUIDE**  
**ON VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL**  
**AND INFORMAL LEARNING**  
For providers and civil society organisations





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Project No. 527507-LLP-1-2012-1-ES-GRUNDTVIG-GMP -  
This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
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## Contents

<b>1. Introduction to the guide</b>	4
<b>2. How to support learning validation as adult education providers and civil society organisations</b>	5
a. Learn about validation and how it works in your country	5
b. Recognise the importance of validation	6
c. Acknowledge the specific needs of the target groups	7
d. Provide information (especially to marginalised and disadvantaged groups)	8
e. Offer concrete, tailor-made and constant support	9
f. Offer alternatives	13
g. Follow-up the process	13
h. Be involved in the policy-making on this issue	14
<b>3. Conclusions</b>	15

# 1. Introduction to the guide

The ROM-ACT project's main aim is to widen Roma women's access to non-formal and informal learning validation systems, and to strengthen their educational, social and labour inclusion. The project builds on research studies including Workaló, Callí Butipén, Includ-ed and Drom-In which all pointed to non-formal and informal learning validation as a means to tackle exclusion, particularly the exclusion of roma women who have a breadth of knowledge, skills and competences but few formal qualifications.

The suggestions presented herein were gathered via communicative discussion groups held with roma women, roma organisations and adult education centres in the concerned countries. While suggestions are formulated in broad enough terms to ensure adaptability to different contexts some may be only partly applicable due to the specificity of cases, the resources available and validation arrangements at country level.

Therefore this document shouldn't be considered as step-by-step guide, but as a list of tips and possible ways to act in order to support disadvantaged groups to undertake and success in the validation process.

Said so, it is fundamental here to underline the importance to try to follow those suggestions in order to make validation more inclusive and allow disadvantaged and marginalised groups to progress in their personal lives and educational and working careers.

This is particularly true for Roma people. Indeed, despite lacking certified qualifications and being marginalised on the labour market or totally excluded from it, Roma have important assets: competences that they accumulated throughout their life, mainly through informal learning. Unveiling and valorising this hidden treasure can be of huge importance in promoting personal development, equality and a pathway towards their self-respect and social inclusion.



## 2. How to support learning validation as adult education providers and civil society organisations

### A. LEARN ABOUT VALIDATION AND HOW IT WORKS IN YOUR COUNTRY

Validation is understood as the process of identifying, assessing and recognising a wider range of skills and competences which people develop through their lives and in different contexts, e.g. through education, work and leisure activities. In lifelong and life-wide learning, 'validation' is a crucial element to ensure the visibility and to indicate the appropriate value of the learning that took place anywhere and at any time in the life of the individual.

By 2018 European Member States have to have validation systems in place. The situation varies considerably from one country to the next. However, the European Commission and its agencies are publishing reports to monitor the policy developments and guides<sup>1</sup> to make the decision-making on this issue effective.

»»» **TAKE SOME TIME TO LEARN LEARNING VALIDATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN YOUR COUNTRY AND MAKE SURE YOUR INSTITUTION IS ACQUAINTED WITH THE PROCESS.** In some countries this could be rather complex and require an in-depth understanding but you could ask for more information from the national actors with responsibility for it. At the very least, and if your country operates a 'call out' system, make sure you receive these call outs.

»»» **IDENTIFY AREAS WHERE YOUR ORGANIZATIONS ARE OR COULD BE INVOLVED AND DRAFT A MAP OF ORGANISATIONS, KEY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKERS IN CHARGE OF THE VALIDATION PROCESS IN YOUR AREA AND ON A NATIONAL LEVEL.**

#### PROPOSAL

Spain: "If possible create a network between all stakeholders in the process of validation, to share ideas, proposals, initiatives, etc. in relation to this issue."

»»» **IF THE INSTITUTION'S RESOURCES ALLOW IT, TAKE PART IN IN-SERVICE TRAININGS AT THE EU OR NATIONAL LEVEL (MOBILITY GRANT KA<sup>2</sup>) AND THEN SHARE WHAT YOU LEARNT WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

<sup>1</sup> Last version of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/fr/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>;  
Last version of the EU Guidelines: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/node/11010>

<sup>2</sup> Key Action 1 supports mobility in the education, training and youth sectors and aims to bring long lasting benefits to the participants and the organisations involved: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/study-and-volunteering-in-another-country\\_en\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/study-and-volunteering-in-another-country_en_en)

## B. RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF VALIDATION

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a central component of the lifelong learning policies, programs and strategies currently being rolled out across Europe. Indeed, more and more European countries are underlining the importance of valuing and making visible the learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, in leisure time activities and at home.

During two years of the project's lifespan (2014-2015), ROM-ACT has highlighted the specific ways in which validation can foster the inclusion of women from the Roma<sup>3</sup> community and similarly marginalised and disadvantaged groups. For marginalised and disadvantaged groups, validation can build self-confidence and assist people to overcome the barriers they face in accessing education opportunities and the labour market.

»»» **PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF VALIDATION WITHIN YOUR INSTITUTION AND AMONG YOUR COLLEAGUES AND EMBED LEARNING VALIDATION IN THE INCLUSION STRATEGIES OF YOUR INSTITUTION.**

### QUOTE

Ireland: "It boosted our self-confidence, it's a way of ensuring that our ways of working are recorded for the next generation; it was an opportunity for us to take stock and see all that we have come to know through our work, it's a way to prove to outsiders what are able to do and how we do it, it can serve as a model and inspiration for other Traveller women who are experienced / capable and who want to progress but who lack formal education or confidence"

<sup>3</sup> In Ireland, the project concerns Traveller women, while in all other countries involved the target group consists of Roma women. Therefore, for the references to Ireland we will use "Travellers", and for the rest we will use "Roma", either as referring specifically to Roma women, or as a generic term, as recommended by the Council of Europe in its Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues: The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diver

## C. ACKNOWLEDGE THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THE TARGET GROUPS

Women throughout the EU still face inequalities in many respects. In the case of Roma women, extreme poverty and exclusion reinforce these disadvantages and places an additional burden on them. This affects their chances of accessing and participating equally in quality education, which in turn affects future employment prospects, income levels, housing conditions and health status. It also limits their belief in their own capabilities and the opportunities available to them<sup>4</sup>.

**QUOTE** Ireland: “Travellers know from the very beginning that they’re discriminated against and that they’re different. So if I go into a college, well I have it in my brain that you’re different from who I am, completely different background. Am I going to be accepted in here? How am I going to get on here? What will happen when they find out that I’m a Traveller? Am I hiding who I am?”

»»» **TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATIONS THAT YOUR TARGET GROUP MAY BE FACING AND HOW THIS IS INFLUENCING THEIR LIFE, THEIR WORKING AND EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS, AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.**

»»» Consult ROM-ACT’s range of products including national reports and the detailed accounts of the Roma women who participated in the project (all available at [www.rom-act.eu](http://www.rom-act.eu))

»»» Consider contacting the partners involved in the project and/or other organisations working with Roma in your area as there may be much that you can learn from them

»»» **MONITOR THE NUMBERS OF ROMA, AND SPECIFICALLY THE NUMBER OF ROMA WOMEN THAT PARTICIPATE IN YOUR INSTITUTION AND THE MEASURES UNDERTAKEN BY YOUR INSTITUTION TO REACH OUT AND SUPPORT THEM.** If you find that the numbers are small, try to think about why and implement measures to foster their access and participation in your programs.

»»» **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE ROLE YOU CAN PLAY IN REACHING OUT TO AND INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF SUCH TARGET GROUPS.**

**EXAMPLE** Czech Republic: “It is generally known that there are opportunities to participate in upskilling courses and gain certificates in various fields. Such courses are provided by Job Offices and NGOs that also cover the costs. In those communities, where NGOs have been involved in high-quality activities, Roma have participated in such courses.”

<sup>4</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - Discrimination against and living conditions of Roma women in 11 EU Member States

## D. PROVIDE INFORMATION (ESPECIALLY TO MARGINALISED AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS)

Roma women who participated in ROM-ACT stressed the need for more information on the validation process in each country. Where there are concrete avenues for learning validation in your country, your Institution can play a major role in increasing awareness.

### ►►► USE YOUR OWN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS TO PROMOTE VALIDATION OPPORTUNITIES:

- Put the information on your Institution's website
- Do not underestimate the role of social media (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter)

**PROPOSAL** | Czech Republic: "The Roma women we work with are not used to reading newspapers and magazines. They mostly get their information from television and Internet which they commonly use to communicate with family members (Facebook, Skype) and to play music and videos (YouTube). This shows that using the web tools such as videos, music videos and other visual means can be a good way of spreading awareness"

- Print some leaflets or hang some posters in your Institution
- Use other types of media (TV, radio, outdoor advertisement tools, flyers, etc.)

When possible, **create ad hoc advertisement which could reach out to the target group:**

- Campaigns (advertisements, public events, competitions, etc.)
  - Discuss the topic at schools
  - Organise an information session in your Institution (maybe using role models that have already undertaken the process)
  - Recruit or establish contacts with social workers or mediators that could try to talk to the communities and families and get more participants involved in the process
  - Use the communication internal networks within the Roma communities.
- **Benefit from partnership:** In your information actions involve Roma associations or Job Offices as far as possible. This will allow them to talk to the people they're in contact with and invite them to join the process.

**PROPOSAL** | Czech Republic: "Increasing awareness about the system of qualifications recognition can be significantly enhanced by Job Offices. Job Offices can provide unemployed people with information, and individual employees can give their clients detailed explanations of the benefits that the qualifications recognition system brings them"

**PROPOSAL** | Spain: "Another channel for higher awareness is the activity of social workers in the field. These workers visit Roma families and communities and have contacts with them on a daily basis. As part of their everyday consultancy, they could provide information on learning validation. This method would allow Roma beneficiaries to discuss details with people they already know well and remove potential barriers and shyness."

»»»» When the information is available, it is often difficult to understand by the target group. **MAKE SURE ANY TEXT THAT YOU PROVIDE IS ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL.** Practical information such as step by step guidelines and clear instructions on what to do if one wants to have some kind of learning recognized and who to talk to.

**EXAMPLE** | Czech Republic: “Through the Project we were able to inform Roma women about the website which includes all details about the qualifications recognition in the country. The website publishes information about professional qualifications that are valid and can be used on the Czech labour market. Visitors can also find news about qualifications recognition and further education opportunities. The main benefit of the website is the fact it includes detailed descriptions of requirements for individual exams as well as information on the way they are carried out – including qualification and evaluation standards. There is also a list of authorized experts and other details. It’s a great resource but what we find is that the language is rather complicated and uses many foreign words and official terms. An ordinary visitor will probably have problems trying to understand all the information published here. This can be quite discouraging, and many people would not be able to use the website without assistance. It seems the website was created mainly for experts, institutions and organizations and not for general public.”

## **E. OFFER CONCRETE, TAILOR-MADE AND CONSTANT SUPPORT**

Support needs vary from case to case and range from general guidance to counselling, technical, linguistic, or even psychological support. The followings are suggestions on how to make support effective for the target group.

### **E.1 - PROVIDE THE TARGET GROUP WITH BASIC SUPPORT**

Our target group has specific needs which shouldn’t be underestimated. In countries where there are avenues to secure validation for learning, Roma women’s participation could be hindered by basic lack of access to a computer or logistical problems. If this is the case, your centre or organisation won’t need to do much to help them overcome those obstacles.

**EXAMPLE** | Spain: “In Spain, the pre-registration to the call is done online through the Virtual Procedures Office and then you have to deliver, in person, the documentation of experience and training. This double step is not easy for most Roma women and involves time. Moreover, many Roma have neither computer nor internet access at home which makes it difficult to pre-register in advance.”

**EXAMPLE** | Greece: “Most Roma women interviewed said that now they feel ready and want to continue to another education course, for example the School of Second Chance, but there are some logistic problems: first of all the time lack of time due to their family commitments, secondly the impossibility to reach the school alone, without public transport. The coordinator informed them that there is a new urban bus line that has a stop outside the Roma community of Alivery and that this can serve those who want to reach the centre of Volos where services, main schools and other education centres are. The coordinator proposed to go together with the above-mentioned bus to the School of Second Chance in order for them to have a look and to get acquainted with the bus service”.

## E.2 - WISE PLANNING

With regard to the guidance and counselling, it is important to consider the extent to which qualifications pursued correspond with labour market demands and the background of the participants themselves. If the educational activities are oriented in this way then participants will have a greater chance of progressing.

**PROPOSAL** | Spain: “One consideration is to promote and facilitate the establishment of qualifications that are officially recognized by the professional bodies and in the areas in which Roma have experience.”

## E.3 - SUPPLEMENTARY TRAINING

Consider providing specific trainings to boost the dividends of the validation process. Often these can be useful for other target groups as well.

**PROPOSAL** | Spain: Before starting the validation process, it should be organised a cognitive and position empowerment. These are special units where communication skills are implemented, as well as social skills, study skills and involvement in the centre (making rules for coexistence adapted and consensus to the groups). This could overcome some obstacles that roma women from Spain mentioned, such as the difficulty in being interviewed.

**EXAMPLE** | Romania: When asked about what do they considered to be the biggest barrier for social inclusion and validation for Roma women, participants in Romania mentioned lack of formal education. One of the participants mentioned that the validation process itself was difficult for her because she does not read write easily and therefore had to take more time to read and understand the notions presented.

## E.4 - FLEXIBILITY

When courses are part of the process, they should be tailored to the needs of the specific target groups. Courses offered should be well designed and flexible enough to overcome physical, cultural and educational barriers.

**EXAMPLE** | Greece: Roma women participants cited lack of a flexible schedule as a barrier, and also highlighted need for separate sections for men and women.

**EXAMPLE** | Romania: The learning process was fun. The women really enjoyed the new knowledge, the process and the socialization, but it did not come as easy as it seems. The women found it difficult to combine their work at home work with class work. They faced some rigidity in their families; usually the husbands did not see this fact as a good thing. Another obstacle mentioned by the women was the fact that the learning process took a long time, more than 3 months and up to 6 months. This was a long term commitment for them.

### E.5 - CONTINUITY

Where there are avenues for learning validation, the experience of ROM-ACT partners is that is not enough to advise and prepare individuals for the process. They may as well need accompaniment through the process and right to the very end. In order to do so, it is key to put the participant at the centre and try to understand his or her background, current situation and purpose for validation.

**QUOTE** | Spain: “The tutorial/support actions, and the referent, are key “tools” in order to follow up the support. How can we provide support so that the vital choices lead to inclusive opportunities, if we do not contemplate tutorial spaces? Which competences, values, skills, personality and vital paths have the participant?”

Your centre or organisation could play a key role in this. Working with groups as opposed to individuals can also be beneficial in this respect, since they can support each other (peer support).

**QUOTE** | Czech Republic “The interest in sharing experiences was visible among the women. It was very nice to see how they supported each other with kind words. It was especially apparent among those who have children. Those used to hard work and family duties had many strategies on how others could overcome some of the barriers encountered”.

In other cases, volunteers can come in and support the participants as mentors.

**EXAMPLE** | Ireland: “We had the case of a young girl who was struggling to stay on in school to get her Junior Certificate so we offered her to come and do her learning from here. We took it in turns to help her with her subjects and got a volunteer in from the local volunteer centre as well and she ended up doing really well”

The level of support you are able to provide will of course be contingent on levels of staff expertise and available resources. It is important you always have a further place or person to contact in case the participant can't receive the support he or she needs from you. This is why it is useful to have a list of organisations operating in your area with expertise in validation as well as the main actors in charge of it at the policy level.

## E.6 - INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES OF TRAINERS

It is vital that trainers and facilitators are capable of working with and supporting cultural diversity, and the lived experiences that Roma women bring with them to learning spaces.

Thanks to such competences trainers and facilitators could create specific spaces for dialogue and community interaction in their classes and groups, which will make participants perceive differences as enriching experiences and thus break down barriers and prejudices.

### QUOTE

Ireland: “It’s the other learners that make the difference. They’d never say but you’d always know. Name is one of the identifiers...from your name they will kind of know. Overcoming cultural barriers of the course participants is really down to the teachers though and how they’re aware and how they respond”.

## E.7 - OPEN AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

In general, the environment where the support is provided is very important and should be welcoming and open. It would be ideal to provide facilities for children and access for Roma people living outside of the main cities.

### EXAMPLE

Greece: Roma women from Greece reported that they really liked the environment in the testing centre where they had the examinations because it was friendly and they felt comfortable.

### EXAMPLE

Ireland: The women valued the facilitation of the learning validation process -they felt listened to, and feel ownership over what is in their learning folders

## E.8 - IT'S MORE THAN A QUALIFICATION

Acknowledge the social aspects that a course might have: Roma women might not always have a place to meet and talk and thus your institution or class can be useful for this as well.

### EXAMPLE

Romania: “Roma women mentioned the learning action was also a social activity for them and a place where they were able to meet and talk and a chance to change habits and routines.”

### QUOTE

Ireland: “There were plenty of reasons as to why the women came in such numbers to the old Traveller Training Centres and it wasn’t because the teaching was amazing and the opportunities so plenty – for many it was company (not all the Travellers in the area live together – some are living in private rented accommodation and it can be lonesome for mothers during the day). Another positive outcome was that it gave them some independence (time away from home for themselves as well as the financial independence of at least bringing money in to the home)”

Do not underestimate the importance that participants give to this process. In some cases they may have had faced resistance from their own families and community, looking at themselves (self-reflection) in new and challenging ways, and may be making concrete sacrifices (work and family-wise) as well. For these reasons, when participants don’t successfully complete a validation process, organisations should help them to think through the wide range of causes and support them in finding a way to overcome the difficulties and reach the objective the next time.

## E.9 - SUSTAINABILITY

When planning or implementing activities aimed at reaching out to marginalised and disadvantaged groups, it is very important to think about their sustainability. Carrying out a project on a short term – especially if it is based in the targeted community- might not only be inefficient, but could also undermine the trust of the target group.

**EXAMPLE** Ireland: The Further Education centre close to the Senior Traveller Training Centre tried to do some integration work in the run up to and shortly after the closure of the STCC: it brought some of the young traveller learners into a settled group on some kind of computer course for 6 months (the younger ones because they were more adept at/interested in computers) but it was funding specific I think and then the funding ran out.

## F. OFFER ALTERNATIVES

Many Roma or non-academic groups have worked in sectors where they have acquired valuable skills and knowledge that, would just a little more opportunity, could be very valid in other sectors. If the sectors where Roma have worked before doesn't have many positions available, organizations are invited to promote, support and advice on such a knowledge transfer and upskilling opportunities.

**EXAMPLE** Czech Republic: "As part of various European projects, NGOs and Job Offices organize upskilling courses. Many Roma have completed these courses, some of them even participated in more of them, yet they were not able to find a job. Based on this negative experience, there are concerns that the Roma community will not show much interest in the system of lifelong learning results recognition."

## G. FOLLOW-UP THE PROCESS

It is important to evaluate the process outcomes sometime after completion of validation since this could offer interesting data on the benefits of validation for individuals and the community. When the validation process is successful, participants might be encouraged to learn more. You can play a role in guiding them towards further learning opportunities.

**EXAMPLE** Romania: Participation in the process was a big motivator for the women. It has motivated them to take more classes and to learn new things and seek better jobs.

Encourage the participants to become role models. This could be done by providing them a space to talk about their experiences, providing them with the negotiation/mediation skills needed to have this role in their communities and families

**QUOTE** Czech Republic: The main motivator for the Roma we work (to start working on their qualification recognition) is the existence of real jobs, i.e. the demand in the labour market. Programmes focused on supporting Roma to enter the system of skills validation should lead to improved employment rate of the successful participants.

## H. BE INVOLVED IN THE POLICY-MAKING ON THIS ISSUE

Members States are currently working to achieve the goal set by the European Council in 2012: having in place validation systems by 2018. These years are thus crucial to advocacy for more accessible and inclusive arrangements.

»»» **TRY TO FOLLOW THE VALIDATION ARRANGEMENTS' DEVELOPMENTS** (i.e. reply to consultation at the European and national level to make your voice heard)

**EXAMPLE** | Greece: Some adult education providers and civil society expressed their views and opinions on the existing validation arrangement in the framework the formal public consultation that was organized in 2010 (5/3/2010-5/9/2010) by the Greek Ministry of Education<sup>5</sup>.

»»» When possible, **ADVOCATE FOR MORE SUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND FREE VALIDATION CALLS, MORE SUPPORT TO ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN THE FIELD AND INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY AS WELL AS GRASS-ROOT LEVEL ORGANISATIONS IN THE PROCESS CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION.**

**PROPOSAL** | Spain: One of the barriers that Roma community and non-academic groups have encountered with past call outs is that the professional areas proposed did not correspond with the professional areas where these groups work. It is proposed that the associations that are in contact with these communities define the professional areas where the majority of these groups work in order to present to the ICQP a proposal of professional areas to for validation.

Transparency and control of certification procedures for avoidance of exclusions or infringement of any list of certified professionals should be put in place. Try to gather consensus on that.

**EXAMPLE** | Spain: As the majority of Roma people or at risk of social exclusion are typecast in Block 6 in the prioritization criteria, which reduces their chances of accessing the validation procedure. The following measures are proposed to policy-makers to overcome this barrier:

- Apply the criteria of affirmative action in the selection of participants to access validation. One concrete measure may be specific shares for participation in the Acredita't programme for the Roma community and, in general, groups at risk of social exclusion.
- Roma people should be able to choose their programmes voluntarily and according to their personal interests. They cannot be forced to choose the program which is assumed to be most beneficial for them. A voluntary selection according to their field of interest can facilitate the integration of Roma people into the learning society, since a big share of Roma systemically withheld from entering it.
- only the years of experience - regardless of whether documentary can be provided - should be a criterion for access to the validation procedure. Thus, it would allow these groups to have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills although they are not able to provide documentary proof experience.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.opengov.gr/ypepth/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/10/EthPP-Final.pdf>

### 3. Conclusions

In its Recommendation on this matter issued in December 2012, the Council of the European Union acknowledges that validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.

Roma women involved in the project believe the same. They believe that validation can play an effective role in fostering their inclusion<sup>6</sup> and the inclusion of similarly marginalised and disadvantaged groups. These views are supported by researches and studies<sup>7</sup> in this area at national and European level.

The members of the consortium are determined to continue advocating for accessible and inclusive validation systems at the national and European level. In the meantime, we hope that this guide provides your organisation with ideas on practical ways to do the same. No matter how nascent validation arrangements may be in your country and no matter how little involvement your organisation has had to date, never forget that you can make a difference with few and simple efforts!

Understanding, raising awareness, putting the participants at the centre and cooperating with other stakeholders are the main points of a winning strategy that your institutions could consider to adopt.

If you found them interested and decided to apply them in your institutions, do inform the ROM-ACT about it by writing to the project coordinator DROM KOTAR MESTIPEN ([info@dromkotar.org](mailto:info@dromkotar.org)).

In case you want to develop this topic further and continue exchanging practice with other providers and civil society organisations from different EU countries, be aware that there is a possibility of being part of a ROM-ACT network by following the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/romactproject>).

Let's work together to build accessible and inclusive validation systems for all!

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<sup>6</sup> Don't miss the ROM-ACT DVD, available in the project's website: [www.rom-act.eu](http://www.rom-act.eu)

<sup>7</sup> Workaló, Calli Butipén, Includ-ed and Drom-In

