

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



Implemented
by the Council of Europe

EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND EUROPEAN UNION JOINT PROGRAMME 'ROMED'

COUNTRY FINDINGS SLOVAK REPUBLIC



ROMED in Slovak Republic

By Anna Ivanova, country expert Slovak Republic

1.1 Introduction

During the 2011 census, 105,738 persons (or 2% of the population) self-identified as Roma.¹ This number is however underestimated because many Roma prefer not to declare their identity. The Atlas Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013 estimate the number of Roma at 402,840, which makes up 7.45% of the country's total population. Three quarters of them live in Eastern Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov Regions). Less than half (46.5%) live dispersed among the majority. As many as 68,540 Roma (or 17% of the total Roma population) live in segregated settlements.²

Both ROMED1 and ROMED2 were launched after more than 20 years of targeted activities by the state institutions, non-governmental sector, various donors and EU-funded programmes.³ By 2012, according to the Slovak Government, 183,115,291 EUR had been provided in direct support for Roma integration. Other donors (OSI, EEA/N Grants, SDC, etc.) also implement interventions targeting and empowering Roma communities.

Most of the funding for Roma integration is channelled through national projects. One of the most important of these is the project on field social workers who have worked directly in the communities since 2002. Their core task is to know the community (even the individual families' problems) and help solve the problems they face. Since 2011, the approach is implemented under the "National Project Field Social Work" with an allocation of almost 30 million EUR. As of 2014, the programme had been implemented in 291 localities by 895 people working as field social workers.⁴ Another intervention relevant to ROMED is the national project on "Community Centres" coordinated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary.

For the current programming period, Slovakia managed to double the volume of resources devoted to Roma integration. The allocated funding exceeds 380 million EUR.

The concept and practice of mediation (and the vocation of mediator) existed before ROMED1 but was applied in a different legal context. The country has had a Mediation Act since 2004 (Act No. 420/2004) that defines mediation as an activity for resolving disputes out of court performed by a mediator (an independent expert with a Masters in Law who has undergone special training in mediation). A "Registry of mediators" is maintained by the Ministry of Justice and an [Association of Mediators in Slovakia](#) exists, as well as a "Slovak Institute of Mediation" (a private entity).

Thus at the time of the launching of the Council of Europe and European Commission Joint Programme ROMED1 "Training of Mediators" in 2011, Slovakia had almost a decade of experience in using dedicated staff to mediate between the local authorities and the Roma working with the community. The field social workers were effectively mediating (although not called mediators) and professional mediators were solving legal disputes (although not focusing on Roma inclusion issues).

¹ The 2011 Population and Housing Census Facts about changes in the life of the Slovak population, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, p. 77.

² Mušinka, A. Škobla, D. Hurrel, J. Matlovičová, K. Kling, J. Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku 2013. Bratislava 2014: UNDP, pp. 22-43

³ In 1995 the position of a "Plenipotentiary for Roma communities" was established; in 1999 the first "Strategy for addressing the problems of the Roma National Minority" was adopted and in 2002 a "Comprehensive Development Program for Roma integration" was launched. In 2004 the "Marginalized Roma Communities" (MRC) are set as a "horizontal priority" for the programming period 2007-2013.

⁴ Škobla, D., Grill, J., Hurrel, J. Exploring field social work in Slovakia. Bratislava, 2016, p. 22

In addition, two other supportive professions that mediate the relationships between Roma and the institutions were facilitating access to social services (health and education assistants).

ROMED2 was launched in 2013 when the 2007-2013 programming period of EU structural funds was closing and the next one was being planned. The long-term programme on establishing and running community centres, a large-scale initiative functionally similar to ROMED1, was also in place and working successfully.

1.2 ROMED1 key findings

1.2.1 Relevance

For the reasons outlined above, the launch of ROMED1 in Slovakia faced difficulties. In the beginning, the Council of Europe team contacted the Environmental Training Programme (ETP) to take on the coordinating role of National Focal Point (NFP) but, shortly before the official launch, a different NFP was identified (the Roma Institute headed by Ms Klara Orgovanova). Within a few days, before even formally signing a contract with the Council of Europe, the Institute started to prepare for the first training and send out invitations using their channels and contact lists. As a result, the first training brought together people with different profiles from different regions but local authorities were heavily underrepresented. None of the interviewees recalled any prior consultations held in Slovakia on the Programme design, training modules or the form of the training. As one interviewee puts it, "*the impression was that the design of the programme is set and all you have to do is take it and implement it*".

1.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

Three training programmes were organised in the course of 2011 involving different groups of people engaged in the mediation profession, mostly community workers and teaching assistants. In total, 42 mediators were trained, of which 25 received certificates.

The mediators interviewed suggest that the efficiency and usefulness of the different training sessions differed. The second training was considered much better prepared and, due to more careful selection, participants seemed to be more motivated. Negative feedback was provided on the third training, especially regarding the contribution of one of the national trainers, who is a mainstream mediator from the University and the Chair of the Slovak Institute of Mediation mentioned above. He was introducing conflict mediation as a method of legal dispute resolutions (different from the field social work interpretation of mediation) and offering his private institute's services in mediator training. This caused a lot of confusion among participants as it completely shifted the discussion away from the real mediation work done by field social workers and assistants.

Another reason why the Programme was not particularly effective in Slovakia might be its universal design aimed to be applicable in any country with a large Roma population. Local trainers and mediators interviewed doubt this, pointing out that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work nowadays.

In addition, local trainers outlined that the training materials from the Programme were too complex, written in an incomprehensible language (maybe due to poor translation) and they had to prepare their own materials for the training.

1.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition

The Programme met expectations with regard to the development of skills. The participants interviewed state that the training was helpful and provided them with additional skills. Some continue using the skills and techniques acquired during the training. The introduction of six months of practice with the subsequent exchange of experience on possible responses was also considered successful and highly-praised.

Most of the interviewees recall participants' disappointment regarding future employment. The way in which the Programme was presented raised expectations for future employment opportunities, which was not realistic given the situation in Slovakia. Firstly, the profession of mediator already exists. Secondly, among the selection criteria for the training was that trainees were already employed (and indeed most of them were). Those who were unemployed could not get a job after the training because the Council of Europe did not envisage funding for such positions, the state did not have any available and opening new positions is difficult. The NFP tried to negotiate with the Plenipotentiary and the Ministry of Labour but with no results.

The ROMED1 training in Slovakia was not repeated. The NFP initiated a project supported by the Open Society Institute to intensify mediation in five selected sites (Kendice, Bystre, Zborov, Cicava and Detva) which was implemented between November 2011 and April 2012. After April 2012, the ROMED1 Programme in Slovakia became dormant.

3.2. Contribution to increased access to services in communities

The trained mediators were selected among people working already in the communities (mostly field social workers). The training provided them with skills that were used later in their daily work. During the evaluation, a trained mediator shared her experience in applying the skills acquired in solving a potential conflict between three Roma families squatting in close proximity to a plot of land on which its owner planned to develop a business. The owner was afraid that the endeavour would be jeopardised by the presence of squatters and asked the municipality to evict them. The municipality did not have the means to relocate the families and the negotiations stalled. At this stage, the trained mediator intervened, conducting a number of meetings between the families and the owner of the plot. The mediator proposed a solution that was acceptable to both parties, as well as the municipality. Currently, families continue to live where they have lived and the developer will implement the initial business plan. The mediator interviewed was very proud of the outcome and highlights that she used the techniques and skills learned during ROMED1 in solving the case.

The successful mediators encountered during the evaluation are Roma with a natural aptitude for communication, knowing closely the challenges in the community and with long experience of community work. They have gained a good reputation among representatives of the municipality. Their work is recognisable, results are expected and demanded. Most of them work in the same municipality in which they underwent the ROMED1 training.

Impact at the national level

The Programme did not have the anticipated impact at national level due to three interrelated reasons:

- **Low awareness of the local context and the ongoing interventions at national and local level** and, respectively, failure to identify strategic partnerships with national institutions

and programmes. The Programme was useful in Slovakia to the extent to which it complemented the skills of the already-existing system of field social workers, teaching assistants and health assistants. However with its modest scope (42 mediators trained compared to over 800 field social workers), ROMED1 could hardly have a national-level impact.

- **The existence of a codified profession of mediator** that had the same name but with different content (focused on legal conflict resolution and not mediating engagement between Roma and non-Roma). The choice of the leader of a private institute for legal mediation as one of the trainers (and later as NPO of ROMED2) additionally reinforced this bias.
- **Unrealistic expectations regarding the independence and impartiality of the mediators.** This expectation reflected the legalistic approach to mediation (as a conflict resolution tool) but was far from its social work interpretation. The idea that an employee (dependent on the employer) would play an independent and impartial role is internally contradictory. Being local-level employees, the mediators are inevitably dependent on the local administration.

1.3 ROMED2 key findings

1.3.1 Relevance

Based on the interviews with local and national stakeholders, ROMED2 could have been more relevant if it had succeeded in matching strategically its modest resources with the existing large-scale national programme. As outlined in the interviews, this might have been the “Community Centres” national project launched in January 2014 for supporting the already-existing ones and establishing new ones. Within one year, 168 already-existing community centres joined the project. An “Ethical Code of the Community Centre Employees” was developed and implemented. However, no evidence of synergy between the community centres and ROMED2 was found.

1.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

Launch of the programme and setting up the national team

ROMED2 was launched at a conference in Kosice in November 2013, matched with the initial training. The participants interviewed claim that the programme and content of the conference remained unclear until the very last moment. None of the persons interviewed recalls being consulted on the design or the content of ROMED2.

The Office of the Plenipotentiary supported the initial selection of municipalities with the desire that the NPO be positioned within the Office’s structure. The Council of Europe did not accept this proposal and selected the leader of the Slovak Institute of Mediation (who was outlined as a problematic trainer in ROMED1) as NPO. He had to be replaced later due to insufficient performance in the Programme, but remained in the position of national facilitator in Cicava until July 2014. Failing to achieve significant progress there, he was also later replaced in this function.

The newly-selected NPO is the leader of a strong Roma NGO “Skola Dokoran” and has a much better understanding of facilitation of local processes for inclusion.

ROMED2 was launched together with ROMACT, contributing to the confusion between the two. Locally and nationally, the Programme is perceived as ROMACT.

Selection of municipalities

In Slovakia, ROMED2 was implemented in six municipalities – three big cities (Kosice, Ziar nad Hronom and Michalovce) and three rural municipalities (Chminianske Jakubovany, Jarovnice and Cicava). After ROMED2 was discontinued in Cicava, ROMACT is now implemented in the remaining five municipalities.

The selected six municipalities are diverse in context and have diverse experience in the Roma integration process. In five of them (except Chminianske Jakubovany), a lot was going on already before ROMED2.

- **Jarovnice** (the biggest Roma municipality in Slovakia with 5,300 Roma) has had Roma-targeted interventions since 2004. The NGO "Wild Poppies" started an integration programme here in July 2009 (of 698,776 EUR) for a period of 21 months, with a priority focus on Roma children.
- **Cicava** was awarded the "Roma Spirit" prize for 2012 and the mayor was one of the key speakers at the ROMACT High Level Conference held in Brussels on 2-3 October 2014.
- **Michalovce** occupies the third place in the ranking of municipalities by success in applications for EU funds. In April 2013, the Roma Institute launched a project "Grundtvig", part of an international programme entitled "Bridge for the community" which intended to strengthen the Roma mediators in the communities with regards to education. The project covered Jarovnice, Cicava and Kosice.

Hence, the impression is that, with the exception of Chminianske Jakubovany, the Programme was launched in localities with ongoing projects and structures, where the risk of failure was low and success could be easily reported. Chminianske Jakubovany is a special case – an isolated settlement with a high intermarriage rate and high rate of mental and physical disabilities. Such a challenging locality requires totally different approaches and decade-long interventions. It is unclear as to why it was included.

Development of the CAGs

In all six localities, CAGs were created in 2014 (lastly in Cicava). The members of the CAGs vary between ten and 13 members in Jarovnice, Chminianske Jakubovany, Cicava and Kosice. The CAG in Michalovce is larger (17 members) and much smaller in Ziar nad Hronom (six members). In most cases, membership is fluid and fluctuating. The overall impression is that women are better-motivated and tend to be permanent members.

The ROMED2 Guidelines were considered as adequate, in particular its components with a practical focus (project management, financial reporting, etc.); however, based on the interviews with the local and national facilitators, feedback on training was given for both ROMED2 and ROMACT and people did not differentiate between the two Programmes. In addition, the training modules could have been targeted to the specific needs of the different municipalities. For example, big cities have separate departments for EU-funded projects and would benefit more from training on communication addressing prejudice than on applying for EU funds. On the other hand, the small municipalities might need training on how to mobilise resources.

People with no previous experience in developing and implementing local-level interventions could not benefit equally from the technically-focused modules (this is the case in Chminianske Jakubovany and Ziar nad Hronom). For people who already had experience, ROMED2 added additional visibility and skills. This is the case in Cicava or Jarovnice.

The composition of CAGs, as well as the number of members, varies between localities and over time in the same locality. The results are the best in localities where the mediators have become local facilitators (Jarovnice).

Motivation is also different from locality to locality, depending on various circumstances. One shared factor of (de)motivation is real change. People were expecting tangible change in the life of their communities. Motivation declines when they see that no such change is in sight. In Ziar nad Hronom, individual active members are working independently with individual attempts to approach the local authorities. In Chminianske Jakubovany, the project did not have any activities and was being prepared for closure.

All of those interviewed positively assess the presence of the national facilitator as an external impulse for activating the community. Even in places where the community is already developed and active, the external facilitator plays a disciplinary role, for example, with regards to meeting deadlines, conducting meetings in a timely manner and sticking to the time schedule.

Interaction with local authorities

The members of the CAG, who are community workers, social workers and health assistants, are in direct contact with the local authorities on a daily basis due to their professional responsibilities. In some localities, they are also the mediators trained under ROMED1 (Jarovnice, Cicava and Ziar nad Hronom). Thanks to these multiple roles, effective interaction with local authorities is achieved by default. In cases where the CAG members are municipal councillors, one can see clear synergy between the CAG, the priorities of the municipality and the real work in the community (for example, Jarovnice).⁵

Furthermore, in Slovakia, the CAGs work in an environment in which the state is supportive and provides resources for Roma integration at local level through so-called national projects. The priorities of the Joint Action Plans of the CAGs coincide with the priorities envisaged in the state Roma integration strategy and its implementation plans, which is most logical since the funding for Roma integration at local level reflects the state policy for integration of MRC and is matched by funding from existing state-managed and EU-funded programmes.⁶

In Cicava, the JAP focused on improvement in early childhood education and care and on removing possible segregation at schools. One of the goals was to promote the active involvement of Roma parents and help them overcome prejudice against their children at school. Cicava has a primary school which the Roma children attend. After completing primary education, they go to the secondary school in nearby Vranov nad Toplov. However, the children there were discriminated against, having to eat lunch separately from the non-Roma in a second shift. The school principal in Cicava (member of the CAG), together with the mothers of the children and the local facilitator, organised a number of meetings with the principal and the staff of the secondary school asking the simple question, "how would you feel if it was your child?" Today, both Roma and non-Roma children eat together in one shift – a small lesson on overcoming prejudice that is important both for teachers and pupils alike.

Efficiency of provided support and resources

A major challenge outlined in the interviews was the insufficient volume of resources that reached the local level, since the Programme covers only costs of training, travel costs, coffee breaks etc. During

⁵ This depends on the internal dynamics within the community. During the evaluation, a conflict within the local authority (the current councillors boycotting the mayor) was taking place in Cicava and, as a result, no CAG exists.

⁶ The most significant are the three-year "subsidiisation schemes" (implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary), the "Roma civic neighbourhood Guard" project (by the Ministry of Interior), "Field social Workers" (by the Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) and the funding schemes of the Ministry of Education.

the interviews, the members of the national team noted delays in payments, although ultimately all costs were covered. In one locality (Cicava), the facilitator left because he did not receive an extension of his contract for months and had to find another job.

Another challenge was that there were no resources allocated for small initiatives by the CAGs, which the stakeholders interviewed see as a major gap of the Programme in Slovakia. It reduced the scope of the CAGs' intervention to merely soft measures with limited potential for addressing the needs of the people in the communities. Seen from this perspective, the main strength of ROMED2 strategies was their potential to augment the existing efforts undertaken by other players (community centres and community workers). Three bottlenecks prevented these potential strengths from materialising though:

- The national facilitators have short-term contracts with long gaps;
- The Programme does not attempt to interact with, and build on, approaches and interventions that already exist;
- The Programme does not reward the hard work of the local facilitators who are expected to engage more and more Roma.

Another aspect underlined by national stakeholders and the team was the lack of clarity on the selection of the National Project Officer.

The Slovak experience also shows that the efficiency of the support provided depends very much on the commitment of the national facilitators and their proximity to (or remoteness from) the Programme's localities. In places where the national facilitator was from the locality itself (Jarovnice) or from nearby but working on a daily basis in the locality, the visits were frequent, real results were achieved; the groups exist and are active. When the facilitator is not from the region and does not live in close proximity to the municipality, the engagement is inevitably sporadic (Chminianske Jakubovany and partially in Cicava). In these cases, the risk of failure is high and sustainability is questionable. In addition, when the facilitator is changed frequently (for example, in Cicava where three facilitators were changed), the interventions were unproductive and did not yield results.

1.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

Impacts on empowerment of communities

All stakeholders interviewed agree that empowerment is important, but point out that it is possible to achieve only through long-term presence in the field and work with the specific groups in the community (youth, school-age children, mothers, elderly adults, etc.). Otherwise, "empowerment" becomes vague. This is why the national facilitators see the community centres as a natural partner for ROMED2, as these structures engage different groups in the community. They also share the concern about the feasibility of empowering marginalised communities, most of whose members are unemployed, poorly educated and lack knowledge both of the procedures at local level and how institutions work (for example, Chminianske Jakubovany). In some cases, the community may be empowered, socially and politically active but, if this energy and empowerment is directed to solving personal rivalries, the energy is wasted (like in Cicava).

The capacity of the CAGs to participate in the local decision-making process also depends on the existing potential and capacities of the local stakeholders prior to the establishment of the CAGs. The CAGs have achieved results in localities where a lot of field and social work has been done already and the communities are open to participation. In localities where this was not the case and Roma integration did not gain momentum before ROMED2, the CAGs did not achieve much. In Jarovnice,

the community is strong and the CAG is active; there is synergy between the priorities of the local authority and the community, as well as a shared willingness to improve life in the municipality. Other localities lack such capacities however and need more regular support from an external facilitator to bring together the CAG and the local authorities.

The experience in Slovakia shows that the approach of ROMED2 is more tangible in small localities/villages where the interactions between Roma and non-Roma are more direct and the problems of Roma communities are more visible and less abstract for the non-Roma. In such small localities (villages), the chances of identifying issues of shared interest are higher and the CAGs could be a vehicle facilitating that process. This is more difficult to achieve in the big cities (Ziar nad Hronom, Kosice, Mihalovce) where Roma and their problems are less visible.

Concrete results and impacts in communities

The degree to which the priorities identified by the CAGs were adopted in the local strategies and plans for local development also varies from locality to locality. If a priority identified by the CAG is on the agenda of the local government, it has a high chance of adoption; if it is not, the chances are minimal.

In most places, JAPs have been adopted and reflect the priorities already defined in the state policy for Roma integration and have a chance of obtaining funding. Five out of the six localities are on the priority list for Roma inclusion interventions of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities. Thus, the chances of meeting some of the long-term priorities are high. Ziar nad Hronom however is not on the list and may face problems mobilising resources.

In many localities, concrete results are visible – refurbished kindergartens, children better prepared for mainstream education who would otherwise end up in special schools, etc. In such cases, CAG members have been involved in the work leading to these results. It is difficult however to determine to what extent these results are due to the existence of CAGs. In Ziar nad Hronom for example, the field social worker who is also a CAG member works devotedly to prevent Roma children ending up in special school, but she was also doing so before ROMED2.

1.3.4 Sustainability

In Slovakia, the CAGs can continue as providers of supportive functions, not as a standalone structure. In places where the consultative process with the local government is ongoing, it will continue, as in places where Roma are represented in local self-governance or where the local authorities are aware of the problems of the community.

Small but tangible changes in the communities help sustainability and keep the people's interest and active involvement. In order to materialise, some require minimal financial resources (for example, to cover after-school activities for children and not just training or meetings).

1.4 Lessons and recommendations

1.4.1 Lessons from ROMED1

ROMED1 did not envisage activities that would provide the trained mediators with the opportunity of maintaining direct contact over a long period of time (such as an online platform or newsletters analysing cases and disseminating successful solutions, either locally or internationally). The trained

mediators were left to themselves and they maintain contacts with their colleagues exclusively on an individual basis and upon their own initiative.

The national facilitators interviewed mention that it would be worth repeating the training in Slovakia. Many Roma have heard good reviews from the mediators trained and expect to receive a similar opportunity. Those who were already trained share the need to deepen their knowledge, in particular with regard to legal aspects.

The inadequate choice of NFP, together with the fact that the same person held different positions throughout ROMED1 and ROMED2, negatively affected the image of the Programmes. For possible follow-up, it is imperative to choose future partnerships based on a better knowledge of the local actors.

It was unrealistic to expect that the profession of mediator could be codified and mediators employed, as envisaged by the Council of Europe. However mediation as a horizontal skill can be useful if it complements other substantive skills. Helping build such horizontal skills within the existing structures (and not erecting parallel ones) could have been the appropriate niche for ROMED1.

1.4.2 Lessons from ROMED2

Empowerment of the communities is important but requires long-term engagement and work in the field. This is the reason why results are visible in places with years of successful work in Roma inclusion and huge investment in opening the community (as in Jarovnice). The lack of results in localities like Chminianske Jakubovany is a negative confirmation of this rule.

The role of local authorities is critical. Empowerment cannot be achieved while disregarding that role, not least because the local authorities have the financial resources for implementing changes on the ground. When they are not convinced that Roma inclusion efforts are worthwhile or where the majority is prejudiced against Roma, deliberate efforts are needed for addressing prejudice.

The Programme does not sufficiently reward the efforts of the people who work directly with the community, are in contact with the Roma on a daily basis and bear the real burden of the work. The anticipation of doing that on a voluntary basis makes the Programme unsustainable. Most of these people are Roma and they clearly communicate the message that it is unacceptable to be expected to work free of charge simply because they work for their own people.

Currently, Slovakia has more than 30 Roma mayors and a large number of Roma municipal councillors. These people have a real need for specific targeted training that might be addressed in a possible follow-up to the programme.

1.4.3 Recommendations

The NFP and the Roma Institute recommend repeating the training for mediators but on specific topics, with a narrow and focused specialisation on mediating the process of legalisation of land plots and housing or dealing with evictions. It is even more important, given the fact that legalisation is enshrined as a priority for the current programming period, but the municipalities lack the capacity to cope on their own.

Some mediators are studying (mainly social work or pedagogy) while working in the field, which makes them ineligible for scholarships from the Roma Education Fund. They can be a real asset for future Roma empowerment and integration and deserve support. Establishing a joint Council of

Europe/Roma Education Fund scholarship scheme for supporting the trained mediators who continue their education would not just help the people working as mediators to grow professionally but would also be a modest reward for their devoted and low-paid work.

It is necessary to clearly define the term mediator in Slovakia and root it in the country's legal context, so that any misinterpretation is avoided. It should also take into account that the mediators, if employed by the municipalities, are by definition dependent on their employers. The impartiality requirement would be challenging to achieve fully.

Regarding possible follow-up to both ROMED1 and ROMED2 in Slovakia, the facilitators recommend looking at the network of community centres which could be included as key actors.

As a possible follow-up to ROMED2, the selection of future project sites is critical. The choice of locality should be determined by a map of future interventions already envisaged by all the stakeholders active in the Roma inclusion process in Slovakia.

The Programme should also envisage and allocate resources to CAGs for small initiatives and to reward the local facilitators/mediators. The external (national) facilitators should have long-term and regular contracts to secure the continuity and long-term vision of interventions.