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

## ANNEX 1 CASE STUDIES

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**ROMED**  
Médiation pour les Roms  
Mediation for Roma

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## BULGARIA, Byala Slatina Municipality

*Byala Slatina is a case about the challenges of the local cooperative process launched by ROMED2/ROMACT in a municipality with political will for Roma inclusion and open to a consultative process with the Roma community in the long term, but lacking funding opportunities for the implementation of policies related to Roma. The Community Action Group (CAG) consisting mostly of committed women went through ups and downs, going from initial high motivation to reduced trust due to interruption of the process and the frequent change of ROMED2 facilitators. The group has been re-energised by the support for a project for a Roma women's community-based centre and is discussing continuing its work through reactivation of a previously successful local Roma organisation.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Byala Slatina is situated in the district of Vratsa, north-western Bulgaria. It consists of the town of Byala Slatina and 14 surrounding villages. According to the 2011 census, it has a population of 24,606 inhabitants, out of which 2,544 people (12%) have identified themselves as Roma. This data is probably incomplete, since over 15% of the population who participated in the 2011 census did not answer the question on self-determination for the ethnic community. From the point of view of religious beliefs, the majority of the Roma are Muslim, with some smaller groups of Adventists, Orthodox and Evangelists.

The labour market in Byala Slatina municipality is characterised by high unemployment, resulting from both insufficient job opportunities and a mismatch between demanded and available qualifications and specific skills. The unemployment rate for the municipality reached 38.1% in 2013, almost double the average for the district and almost three times the national average. The alternative for Roma in Byala Slatina is to seek employment outside of Bulgaria, which results in increased migration to Western Europe.

Despite the challenges, there are many local assets and opportunities that can be mobilised for an effective Roma inclusion process. Byala Slatina is one of the municipalities where the educational level of the Roma community is much higher than the national average. There are many young Roma university graduates, however their professional prospects are not good since employment opportunities are very limited. Another opportunity is the high representation of the Roma community in the Municipal Council. At present there are four Roma Councillors and the new Deputy Mayor is also Roma. There are five NGOs in the municipalities working on different aspects of social integration of Roma, but most of them are not that active and cooperation among them is fragmented. The local administration has a good tradition of cooperation with all Roma NGOs in the municipality over the years.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group (CAG) was established as part of the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme at the end of January 2014. At the beginning of the Programme, the group consisted of more than 15 people but, after several changes of facilitators and interruptions of the Programme, it currently has only seven members, the majority of whom are women (five). The CAG is organised around the health and labour mediators working in the municipality. Its meetings are sometimes attended by the newly elected Deputy Mayor of Roma origin. The local administration has supported the CAG by providing one of its rooms for meetings for a symbolic rent of 6 EUR per month. The members of the group are from the city of Byala Slatina and there are no representatives from the neighbouring villages.

The main motivation for participation in the group has been the strong desire of each of the members to change the situation of Roma in the municipality so that there are more opportunities for their educational and professional development. The CAG is well-rooted in the Roma community of Byala Slatina, since the members themselves are part of this community. However, members do not

communicate actively with the Roma communities in the surrounding villages as the CAG has no means of support for travel outside the city.

The CAG members explained that, at the beginning of the ROMED2 process, their involvement in the group gave them the confidence to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of local policies. The ambitious start of the CAG also created high expectations within the Roma community. The group developed a Community Action Plan and presented it at the round table on improving the situation of Roma in the municipality. Together with the local administration, the CAG developed a Joint Action Plan adopted by the local council on 10 December 2014 and included in the Municipal Plan for Roma Integration.

Unfortunately, two factors led to the reduced motivation of the CAG and decreased the trust of the community. The first factor was the limitations of the municipality in attracting funds for the implementation of promised projects due to the fact that Byala Slatina was not a priority region for the previous financing period of the Operational Programmes in Bulgaria. A second negative factor was the interruption of the Programme related to the frequent change in external facilitators working in the municipality. As reported by the CAG, there were months of silence and no contact with the Programme, as well as a lack of clarity on the questions raised.

An impulse for re-energising the group was the recent help provided by the ROMED2/ROMACT National Support Organisation "Integro". In the framework of another of Integro's programmes, women who are the core active part of the CAG were supported in starting a project to create a community centre providing services for Roma mothers.

The CAG also started to discuss how to become institutionalised as an NGO. Instead of creating a new organisation, one possibility is to reactivate the Roma association "Alternative – BS", a local NGO that generated in the past a number of successful community-based initiatives in the field of Roma education and employment and has cooperated closely with local authorities. The CAG members believe that, if they are organised in a legally-registered NGO, this will increase their legitimacy as a partner of local government and create additional opportunities to attract funding for the implementation of some of the initiatives in the Joint Action Plan.

#### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The municipality administration has a long tradition of working together with representatives of the Roma community and they have worked well in the past with all local Roma NGOs in the town.

In the course of the evaluation, a meeting was organised in the office of the Mayor of Byala Slatina, attended by the Mayor, the newly-appointed Deputy Mayor of Roma origin, and representatives of the departments on integration and project development. All demonstrated commitment to working to solve the problems of the Roma community. Furthermore, they explained that they benefited from working with the CAG in the preparation of the Local Strategy and Plan for Development 2014-2020. All proposals made by the group in the Joint Action Plan were subsequently accepted in the Local Strategy and Plan.

Representatives from local administration consider that the CAG was very helpful in solving specific problems of the Roma community in Byala Slatina. The active role of the CAG was appreciated as a basic prerequisite for overcoming the accumulated stress and tension between the Roma community and the local electric company in developing a project for a new power supply in the Roma neighbourhood.

A major problem outlined by the local administration was that the municipal budget is insufficient and it is very difficult to earmark the necessary resources to implement planned measures for Roma integration. The municipality needs to rely on external sources of funding, but it had limited opportunities to access the Operational Programmes. Although Byala Slatina has already been included in the priority regions for these programmes in the new financial period (which was not the case before), due to a delay in the opening of the different funding lines, the municipality could not

provide timely and concrete commitments for the implementation of the adopted Municipal Action Plan. This also affected the part of the plan related to the strategy for Roma integration. The municipality continues to look for support for different projects to address different problems of the community.

A sign of recognition of the CAG is that, despite its own limited budget, the municipality allocates funds for small joint activities with the CAG, mainly in supporting the organisation of traditional and cultural celebrations.

The local government explained that the creation of the CAG is extremely important and useful to them for several reasons. Firstly, cooperation with the group allows them to plan programmes based on the real needs of the people in the Roma community. Secondly, through its interaction with the CAG, the local administration verifies and legitimises their policies related to the Roma community. The representatives of the administration indicated that they had been the proactive party in this interaction, with the CAG more passive but nevertheless responsive.

### Results and impact in the communities

The main result of the interaction between the local government and the CAG is the joint development of the Local Strategy and Plan for Development 2014-2020. The section of the strategy that relates to the Roma community has been prepared entirely through the collaboration between representatives of the local administration and the CAG. The strategy is a good basis for addressing Roma inclusion in a consistent way, by using the opportunities of national programmes when available.

Following the priority given to education in the strategy, the municipal project for early childhood development "Me and my family", supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, has resulted in a renovated and refurbished building that will be used by 2,825 children and 630 parents.

A visible success of the cooperation between the CAG and local administration was the complete replacement of the electrical transmission network in the Roma neighbourhood in Byala Slatina. Before changing the network voltage, there had been serious conflict between the representatives of the Roma community and the local electric company. With the help of the CAG and the local government, the conflict was resolved and the entire electrical transmission network replaced.

Another success story is the initiation of the process of drawing up detailed plans of Roma settlements as a first step in the legalisation of illegal houses in Roma neighbourhoods. The cooperation of the municipality with the CAG also resulted in small improvements in the Roma neighbourhood's infrastructure such as the installation of street lights or speed bumps on the street to protect children.

### Lessons forward

The ROMED2/ROMACT process in Byala Slatina municipality can be considered successful. The presence of many well-educated Roma together with well-intentioned and open local authorities is a guarantee for achieving better results in the future. Another source of optimism is the fact that Byala Slatina is already among the priority municipalities in the new financing period of the Operational Programmes in the country.

The development of the CAG has been hindered by the irregular support provided by the Programme relating to the frequent changes in national facilitators. This has resulted in difficulties to preserve the levels of motivation, increase the capacity of the CAG members and maintain the active relationship between the CAG, the local authorities and the representatives of the Roma community.

An important lesson for the CAG and the local government is not to create expectations within the Roma community that cannot be met. All discussions and planning must comply with the opportunities provided by either the Operational Programmes or other feasible sources of funding. Otherwise, with no possibility of support, suggested measures from the local budget will remain just

an empty promise that will reduce the trust of the community in both the local authorities and the CAG itself.

In order not to lose the momentum of the local process, especially in municipalities where there are no opportunities for attracting EU funds, ***a small fund to support joint initiatives of the local government and CAG can serve as an engine for empowerment of community members.*** Without such a resource, the CAG will not be able to meet the created expectations and this will lead to demotivation of the representatives from both the Roma community and the representatives of the institutions. This will also help to gradually create capacity for the development of projects, initiatives and looking for funding from other sources.

There is a need for continued support for the CAG to fully develop its potential and capacities, as well for the local authorities, in order to benefit from the expected opportunities during the new programming period. The CAG has recently launched a new project related to the problems of Roma women and has started to re-activate the Roma association "Alternative" which has a good history of cooperation with local authorities. This positive development towards institutionalisation will need support from the national facilitators and indeed the Programme as a whole. The members of the CAG consider that, if they are representative of a formally-registered civic organisation which is recognised positively locally, this will increase their legitimacy with local authorities and with the community. The plan is to continue working with diverse interest groups inside the community, especially young women and mothers, thus practising the participatory principles that were the basis of the establishment of the CAG.

## BULGARIA, Tundzha Municipality

*The municipality of Tundzha demonstrates a very successful model of good governance, inclusive to Roma, supported by the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme since 2013. We saw a highly-motivated Community Action Group of 18 active Roma citizens (the majority of whom are women) and very competent and collaborative local authorities. The long-term vision is guided by the main priority of the education of Roma children and youth as an engine for Roma empowerment and inclusion in the long term. Both have well-established communication with each other and work together in the pursuit of the jointly-developed local integration strategy. Both are highly committed to finding joint solutions to existing problems and there are already visible results and impacts in Roma communities, especially in the area of education and infrastructure. Sustainability of this success will require further support from a follow-up phase of the ROMED2/ROMACT Programmes.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Tundzha municipality is a large rural municipality in south-east Bulgaria, comprising 44 villages located around the town of Yambol which is the municipal and regional centre. The total population of the municipality numbers 24,182 people. 3,000–3,500 of these are Roma, concentrated in ten of the villages, where they comprise one third to one half of the population. As in all rural areas, residents of the municipality are facing economic deprivation, although opportunities for employment are provided by some larger enterprises (mainly textile), wineries and furniture producers in Yambol.

The unemployment rate among Roma is between 15%-20% compared to the overall unemployment rate in the municipality of 10%. Roma from the villages are mostly employed in large enterprises with transport provided to the town. Some of the Roma families work in farming. The unemployment rate of women is higher. In the past years, migration of Roma to western countries (mainly to Germany and Belgium) has increased in order to earn a better income. Many of these migrants support their extended families back home.

The major challenge to social inclusion is the low educational level among Roma, only a very small percentage of whom complete secondary education. A number of adult Roma leave school before concluding eighth grade, which severely limits their access to jobs. Other serious issues are early marriages resulting in girls dropping out of school at a very young age, especially in four of the villages, as well as poor infrastructure and living conditions, lack of health literacy and access to health care services.

The main developmental opportunity in the municipality is the openness of the local administration with its history of consistent policy and innovative initiatives for Roma integration. The Mayor and his administration are in their third mandate and are genuinely committed to providing equal access to services to the entire population, including Roma. Notably, this was the first municipality in the country to provide free of charge pre-school day care for all children, full board and food in schools, and free transport for all children from the villages to the schools and kindergartens. Tundzha's local administration is often referred to as one of the few examples of good governance inclusive to Roma and has received national and international awards for Roma inclusion. In 2011, Tundzha municipality received a UNICEF "Friend of children" award for effective policies benefiting children and their parents. Later in 2013, the Deputy Mayor of the municipality, Mr Stavrev, received the award for "The best social partner" from the European Committee on Education and the Syndicate of Bulgarian Teachers. The award was recognition for his special achievements in the area of education and social policy development. Mr Stavrev participated in the development and successful implementation of 16 educational projects and is the author of methodologies and publications in the area of civic education.

Another key factor for success in the field of Roma inclusion is the history of self-organisation within the Roma community. The "Patients with No Asthma" Roma NGO has been working since 2004 with mothers and families in the villages for increased health literacy and access to healthcare. This NGO

has a truly passionate leader – a health mediator herself, working in a team with five health mediators. None of these attended the ROMED training for mediators, but they are active members of the National Network of Health Mediators in Bulgaria and were trained by the Network. An increasingly important role in the Roma communities is played by the local Roma evangelist church which has more than 300 members.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The CAG was established as part of the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme at the end of 2013. It consists of 18 people: five men and 13 women from the ten villages in which the majority of the Roma population lives. The main engine for developing the group was the leader of the NGO "Patients with no Asthma" and the core group of six health mediators. As a result of previous initiatives, they already had a good informal network with active Roma community members in the villages. The NGO provides its office space for the meetings of the CAG. One of the leaders of the local Roma evangelist church is also a very active member of the CAG and helps with outreach and links to communities and local authorities.

The main drive for participation in the CAG is the personal motivation of its members to create better conditions for their children and to increase the educational level of the Roma community. As shared by three of the women who joined the CAG, *"we are mothers and we want our children to have an education and better chances than us, instead of repeating what we did not have"*. As a result of their involvement in the CAG, they have decided to continue their education and finish secondary school. One of them has taken professional hairdressing courses, whilst the other two have become educational mediators hired by the municipality within an educational project. As shared by all members of the CAG, participation in the group is an opportunity to voice the needs of people, together with a responsibility to be a positive model for Roma, encouraging them to get involved and thus improve the life of their communities.

The group is very stable and committed to continuing. No member of the group has dropped out, even though some of them need to travel more than 30 km from their village to Yambol in order to attend CAG meetings. Due to lack of travel resources, some members cannot attend all meetings. According to the CAG members, the ROMED2/ROMACT process gave them the confidence to formulate issues and the opportunity to put the collective demands of the community to the authorities which in turn can lead to solving concrete problems.

The CAG members are in constant interaction with the Roma communities in their villages. They use any informal and formal gatherings, especially of youth, women and the church, to discuss issues and to inform people about the work of the group. They have gained support from mayors in rural areas, as well as from the formal and informal Roma community leaders. The group remains politically neutral, as they believe that any perception of affiliation to a political party will be a serious threat to the trust gained in communities. The group is also concerned about the changing political situation since the last elections with the visible growth of nationalist votes and of those less supportive to Roma inclusion.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

*"Programmes for Roma do not start with ROMED and will not end up with ROMED, but the Programme gives us the best collaboration tools and the right people directly from the community for the formulation of local policies"*. These were the opening words of the Deputy Mayor in our first meeting.

We met a very committed local administration – Mayor, Deputy Mayor, experts in education and social issues. All of them believe that the inclusion of Roma is part of a development opportunity for the municipality. They view the CAG as a legitimate partner representing the community. In May 2014, the municipality established the Public Council on Ethnic and Integration Issues which has institutionalised the dialogue with the CAG and is a sign of recognition of the importance of the consultative process with Roma communities. However, the work of the Council is not limited to



formal gatherings – the administration and the CAG have ongoing intensive communication, mandatory monthly meetings and sometimes interaction on a daily basis when issues need to be resolved.

All proposals of the CAG have been considered and included in the Local Action Plan for the implementation of the municipal Roma integration strategy. These include both long-term priorities related to access to quality education, healthcare and resolving housing issues, as well as other identified urgent problems that require immediate reaction, for example, the lack of water in one village or the poor condition of the roads and infrastructure in another. The Mayor, Deputy Mayor and experts in the municipality are in constant contact with the representatives of the CAG to quickly resolve emerging issues. In addition, eight members of the CAG were also hired on a part-time basis as school mediators in the framework of educational projects implemented by the municipality.

The Tundzha local administration has completed various projects for Roma inclusion. For them, the main added value of the ROMED2/ROMACT Programmes is the investment in the structured cooperative process with Roma communities through the creation of the CAG. This increased the capacity of the municipality to gather more concrete and real data concerning the problems of the Roma community, as well as to get feedback from the communities on the implementation of local policies: *"If previously we worked on some assumptions we developed from our desks, now we have a direct link with communities and they give us much more accurate statistics on a range of issues. This helps us learn directly with communities and find together what can make a difference for them and for the whole municipality."*

#### Results and impact in the communities

The main visible results are in the area of education, identified as a leading priority for the municipality. As shared in the focus group with the CAG, *"investing in all our children, including Roma, is investing in our future as a municipality"*. As shared in all interviews with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and their team, this is a human mission, not just a paper plan. The local administration works based on a long-term vision in the area of education. It has already been very successful in ensuring full coverage and enrolment of children in preschool and school education. Whilst with the optimisation of the school system other rural municipalities are closing schools, Tundzha has invested in a new general school in the village of Skalica which is more accessible for the children from the surrounding villages.

Another example is the construction of a kindergarten in Hadjidimitrovo near the Roma neighbourhood, which is aiming for a complete change of attitude of the Roma families towards education. As a result, 50 Roma children have the opportunity to attend the kindergarten, which will give them an equal start at school. As the Deputy Mayor pointed out, *"I was touched when a Roma mother from a very poor family came to my office to thank me for her child having the chance to be in kindergarten and learning poems like other children"*. The funds for the construction of the school and the kindergarten are from the municipal budget. Yet full coverage and enrolment of children in school is not enough. As shared by the Deputy Mayor, *"we need to also invest in the quality of education, so that all children from our rural communities - both Roma and non Roma - are competitive with the children in the district centre"*. At the moment, the municipality is investing in the qualification of teachers to teach in a multi-ethnic environment. The municipality is also developing a project to raise the quality of education of students in schools in the villages with the help of the ROMACT expert.

Another success is that the local administration has hired eight educational mediators to work in the schools in the framework of educational projects. Even though they could only be hired on part-time contracts, this consistent work with the children and their parents will help to increase motivation and educational results. By raising money from outside sources, the local administration wants to demonstrate the benefits of having educational mediators and, based on that, to persuade the local parliament to support this practice in the future with funds from the local budget.

In addition to the focus on children's education, with the support of the CAG the municipality has supported adult Roma in completing their basic education. 27 elderly people in the village of Kukorevo have already enrolled to complete secondary school. Another 50 Roma adults in the village of Veselinovo have been motivated to start education to finish eighth grade, an initiative which will be assisted by the local authorities through the launch of an adult education programme in one of the schools. As a result, 77 people in the two villages will have more chances of finding work, as completing secondary school is a requirement for most job opportunities.

As a result of the advocacy of the CAG, the municipality has already resolved a number of ad hoc infrastructure problems in different villages with a concentration of Roma. The problem with the lack of drinking water in the village of Boyadzhik has been resolved. Electric meters in villages have been installed. Five completely destroyed streets in different villages that flood with mud and water when it rains have already been asphalted thanks to funds from the local budget. In other places, the problem with street lights has been resolved. A children's playground was built in one of the villages. In addition to providing children with a place to play, it will help improve communication between the majority population and Roma, as it is built in the very centre of the village.

The municipality has started steady work on another priority in the Local Strategy for Development – to improve the housing conditions of the population, including Roma. It has paid for the preparation of detailed regulation plans as a first step in the legalisation of illegal housing. It has also prepared a project for the construction of social housing which was approved. However, due to the redirection of funds to the national priority for road construction done by the central administration, the project was not funded.

The health mediators continue their work for the increased health literacy of mothers and families. Especially important are their ongoing discussions and campaigns with families for reducing early marriages. As stated by health mediators in the interviews, there were previously about ten early marriages per year, a number since reduced to three.

#### Lessons forward

The ROMED2/ROMACT process was very successful in Tundzha municipality. The main local factors for success are the commitment and previous experience of local stakeholders, active people within both the Roma community and the local administration. Some of the emerging lessons and needs for the future include:

- ***If not led by a shared vision for Roma inclusion as part of local development, the ROMED2/ROMACT process can hardly be consistent and there will be only fragmented actions or just plans on paper.*** Yet developing such a vision takes time and years of cooperation. In Tundzha, the cooperation process did not start from scratch. Long before ROMED2/ROMACT, the municipality was ready with its strong belief in the benefits of Roma inclusion and had a clear long-term vision for that. Having a long-term policy vision of Roma inclusion as an integral part of the developmental strategy for the municipality is a critical success factor. However, it took more than ten years of previous work by the municipality of Tundzha to develop and start testing this vision. The main driver for this commitment was the strong belief that investment in the education of children and youth in the municipality would guarantee its future development.
- ***A second success factor was ensuring the diversity and representation of the different Roma communities in the CAG.*** The group was not just a random gathering of Roma people who wanted to be active and do something. It built upon existing resources and skills inside the communities – a local NGO, the health and school mediators, the local Roma Church and active women in the neighbourhoods – which, in turn, can mobilise other groups and resources in the village communities. Women, as the majority members of the group in their capacity of health or school mediators, helped achieve better outreach inside the communities.
- ***The commitment and competence of the national facilitator is another critical factor for success.*** The ROMED2/ROMACT National Facilitator working with Tundzha municipality is

extremely committed, very competent and experienced in work with health mediators, community empowerment and facilitation of local processes. As she explained, starting a local process is a responsibility to maintain the trust of *local stakeholders – both people in communities and in the administration.*

There is high potential for the sustainability of the local processes initiated in Tundzha municipality. Both the CAG and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. However, there is a visible need for follow-up support focused on sustainability:

- ***The sustainability of successful cooperation is vulnerable to political changes that can come after elections.*** While the Tundzha local administration is a model of work for Roma inclusion, it is questionable as to what extent this model will stay in place after electoral changes. Some signs in this direction came as a result of the last elections in 2014. The new local parliament does not always share the same commitment and vision for Roma inclusion. Evidence in this direction is that it has not voted through parts of the local budget suggested by the local administration. A major deficiency in the ROMED2 process is that it works mostly with the mayor and the administration and not with the local parliaments where political decisions are taken.
- ***Another shortcoming of the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme is the scarce resources allocated at the very local level.*** The CAG had very limited support covering only the travel costs of members to meetings attended by the national facilitator and very few consumables for printing. As shared by the group, they need to meet more often, not just when the facilitator is there, but they cannot afford to pay for their own travel costs, printing and other expenses.
- ***A second gap in the ROMED2 approach is that it relies on bringing resources for the identified local initiatives from external project money or the local municipal budget.*** These are not always in place immediately or at all, and in some cases there is a need to prepare the ground for accessing these resources. Including in the Programme a small local fund to support small initiatives was recommended by both the local administration and the CAG. This could help pilot initiatives and avoid losing momentum and trust in communities. It can also prepare the ground to convince the local parliament to allocate money from the local budget if they see the practical benefit of the suggested approach.
- ***Further investment in the capacity for Roma inclusion processes of the various levels of local government and local parliament can help sustain the process.*** Despite its high competency and experience in Roma inclusion, the local administration in Tundzha has underlined the need for further training and capacity-building in effective approaches to working with Roma communities. The exchange of experience at national and international level among municipalities was also emphasised as essential for learning and disseminating good practices.
- ***The institutionalisation of the CAG and local cooperative process is still at a very initial stage and will need support and mentoring from the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme.*** The CAG is strongly committed to continuing but the process so far has had no space for an in-depth discussion for identifying the best form of institutionalising the process. This will require consistent assistance and facilitation from the National Facilitator, which needs to be provided by a follow-up stage of ROMED2.

If the CAG continues to exist as an informal active group, sustainability will be provided if members are hired in programmes and projects of local government. However, this can jeopardise their definition as an independent civic group.

There is an established formal Public Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, however the effectiveness of its practical usage will be vulnerable to potential political changes after local elections. It is important that the CAG participates there as a "strong and collective civic voice". This is the second option discussed by the group - to be institutionalised as a community-based NGO with representatives from all villages. This option can provide for much more sustainability as a legitimate but independent partner of the municipality. It can also become a model of a new type of Roma community-based organisation, gathering active groups based in the ten villages in the municipality. Effective Roma organisations based on the self-organising of people in village

communities are lacking in the rural areas of the country. This will require training and assistance in organisational development, advocacy and community mobilisation.

## “THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”, Prilep Municipality

*Prilep municipality is a good example of how the ROMED2 approach can activate the involvement of the Roma community by identifying the right “entry point” on issues of real interest to the community which can further be expanded in a broader process of Roma inclusion. The main initial driver was the interest of the older informal leaders in building a mosque in a Roma neighbourhood, which later expanded into other important issues and led to very good results in education, infrastructure and support for various community initiatives. Key factors for the success of the processes in Prilep were the openness of the local authorities, representation of Roma in the local council and local administration departments and the gradual involvement of diverse interest groups in the Roma communities, as well as the search for synergies between resources from the local budget and existing national programmes in support for Roma inclusion.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Prilep is the fourth largest city in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, located in the southern part of the country. Based on data provided by the municipality, at present the population of Prilep numbers approximately 73,925 people, out of whom 4,500 are Roma. The majority of Roma living in Prilep are Muslim.

Prilep is an industrial production centre of high quality tobacco and cigarettes, metal processing, electronics, wood, textiles, food and white marble. The Roma community lives mostly in the neighbourhood of Trizla, which has poor infrastructure (lack of a sewage system and street lights, non-asphalted streets). Some of the Roma population is employed in local industry, but a great number of Roma in Prilep are unemployed and rely for their incomes on support sent by relatives working in western European countries.

The Municipality of Prilep has a good record of work over the years on issues towards Roma inclusion. It has implemented a number of projects for improving the infrastructure of the neighbourhood, as well as renovating the local elementary school. Prilep is the only municipality in the country with an established Department for Roma Issues. Five Roma are employed within this department, all of them trained through the ROMED1 Programme. There are two Roma elected in the local council of the municipality, as well as a number of Roma employed in various programmes.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group (CAG) in Prilep was established in November 2013 and consists of 15 members. Initially, the CAG was organised around older informal leaders of the Roma community. They got involved in the group due to their interest in building a mosque in the Roma neighbourhood. At a later stage, young Roma from the community joined the CAG, bringing new perspectives and experience into the group. Some of them worked in the Roma information centres of the municipalities, whilst others had experience in the NGO sector or were students. Locally-elected Roma municipal councillors are also involved in meetings and discussions of the CAG.

The participation of women in the CAG has been minimal throughout the ROMED2 Programme, due to the cultural and religious specificities of the Roma community in Prilep.

At the beginning of its activity, the main priority of the CAG was the construction of a mosque in the Roma neighbourhood. However, once the group started discussions with the representatives of local authorities, many other important priorities around this initial leading priority were identified. In order to build the mosque, it was desirable to have a comprehensive cadastral and reconstruction plan of the whole Roma neighbourhood. The Joint Action Plan developed by the CAG included as long-term priorities both issues – the building of the mosque and improvement of the infrastructure of the entire neighbourhood. The plan was adopted through a decision of the local council in August 2014. The

effective interaction with the local administration, as well as the participation of the young Roma interest group in the CAG, shaped two more priorities - the development of a local education strategy and the creation of opportunities for the professional development of young Roma after completing secondary school.

The CAG has very good relationships and visibility within the Roma community. The CAG also enjoys enormous respect from the Roma community, an indicator of this demonstrated with the building of the mosque in the Roma neighbourhood. The CAG received an initial contribution of 30,000 EUR from the municipality and the Ministry of Transport, but subsequently mobilised the Roma families in Prilep and their relatives working in western Europe and succeeded in raising 300,000 EUR towards its construction.

The age differences in the group and their diverse interests are the reasons for the wide range of issues submitted to institutions. In the course of the ROMED2 process, the Mayor requested having legal representation of the CAG in order to be able to sign agreements with them. To interact more effectively with the local government, the CAG created two organisations. The first one was organised by the older informal Roma leaders around the completion of the construction of the mosque. The second one, "Roma Perspective", is a civic association of young representatives of the Roma community and their focus is more on the education and political representation of the Roma community.

#### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The system of interaction and communication with representatives of local authorities in the municipality of Prilep was very effective. The mayor appointed two people from the municipality who are in constant contact with the representatives of the Roma community, the institutions, the representatives of the CAG and the Roma organisations. There are monthly consultations between the CAG and the representatives from the local administration, as well as daily communication as needed.

The work of the local administration with the CAG follows three basic directions. It contributes logistical support, for example, by providing the municipal meeting hall for meetings of the CAG. It consults with the CAG on identification of priorities and development of local policies and it works together with the CAG to design concrete programmes and projects.

The municipality has adopted a local development strategy in consultation with the CAG and the priorities identified by them were included within it. From the perspective of the municipality, the main long-term priority for development of the Roma community is increasing the access of Roma children to quality education. The strategy includes work in the direction of preschool education, reducing the number of school dropouts, improving school infrastructure, extracurricular activities and improving the environment in schools.

The local government views the ROMED2 process as a valuable tool that contributes to the clear formulation of local issues with the participation of people from the Roma community, putting them on the policy agenda of the municipality. Improved interaction between local authorities and representatives of the Roma community also contributes to the successful implementation of various programmes.

#### Results and impact in the communities

Good cooperation between the representatives of the Roma community and representatives of local authorities has resulted in long-term policy and concrete plans for the improvement of the situation of Roma in Prilep. A local development strategy has been adopted which includes measures for improving the infrastructure and education of the Roma community with funds allocated to execute the strategy and projects in the process of implementation or application.

There is already a development plan for the infrastructure of the Roma neighbourhood, as well as applied for or implemented projects to repair streets and resolve other infrastructural issues. The

mosque is already built and, upon completion of some additional interior work, it is planned for the mosque to carry out not only religious but also cultural and educational activities in the community.

There are also various achievements in the area of education. A new kindergarten was opened and there is ongoing improvement of school infrastructure. Eight educational tutors working with 188 children have been employed in schools. According to the municipality, this has already resulted in a reduced percentage of school dropouts from 30% to 15%. The municipality has also provided a building for the "Roma Perspective" association to use when organising extra-curricular activities for children from the Roma community.

The Roma Perspective association, together with the contact points in the municipality, are currently working together on developing a fundraising strategy to create a fund for the implementation of small projects in education.

To support the Roma community, the municipality has opened a Roma Information Office. It has also allocated a separate budget for the Roma community for specific activities on various issues.

### Lessons forward

The ROMED2 process was very successful in Prilep Municipality bringing some important lessons:

- ***It is important to identify the right "entry point" of issues of real interest of the community in order to further activate its involvement in a broader process of Roma inclusion.*** The main initial driver was the interest of the older informal leaders in building a mosque in the Roma neighbourhood. This was the initial cause that "sparked" the processes of activation of the Roma community which later on expanded to other important issues and led to very good results in education, infrastructure and political representation of the Roma community. One of the members of the CAG was elected in the local council of the municipality. His credibility in the community has increased due to his participation in the CAG.
- ***Diverse representation of Roma community members in the Community Action Group*** in terms of age, interests, level of education and personal motivation is the guarantee for keeping the process open to the broader issues affecting the community, not only confined to a specific interest group. This can help the understanding and consolidation of the community around the long-term vision for the empowerment and inclusion of Roma, which will be the engine to work on specific causes.
- ***To obtain good results, there must be the political will of local authorities to develop appropriate local policies and programmes*** concerning the problems of the Roma community. Good representation of Roma in the local councils and the structure of local administration is a key factor for ensuring the long-term commitment and political will of the local administration.
- ***One of the main factors for success is the search for synergies between the ROMED2 Programme and other available programmes in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".*** The splitting of specific funds in local budgets to supplement funds allocated by national programmes is an indicator of the political will to solve the problems facing the Roma community.

There is high potential for the sustainability of the local processes initiated in Prilep. Both the CAG, through the two registered organisations, and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. However, there is a visible need to continue the support in order to further sustain this effort in the long term:

- It is important to provide support for organisational development and mentoring to the new organisation that has emerged from the "youth" group in the CAG.
- To overcome the minimal participation of Roma women, the CAG should receive support from facilitators and the NFP to better address the issues facing Roma women and their involvement in the consultation process with representatives of local authorities.

- There is also a need to invest in increasing the capacity of local authorities and representatives of the CAG to absorb the national funds allocated for Roma inclusion, in order to address the broader problem of underspending the allocated funds from the national budget for Roma.



## “THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”, Tetovo Municipality

*Tetovo municipality is a very good model of strategic synergy of matching existing local resources to develop and implement strategies for Roma inclusion to policy and funding opportunities provided by national programmes. The local administration's openness and commitment to Roma inclusive policies, together with the capacity of the ROMED National Support Organisation (Roma NGO "Sonce") to develop and host the Community Action Group, have been the two main factors for the success of the ROMED2 process. The initiatives launched are not fragmented but guided by a consistent vision and strategy of the municipality. It was developed in consultation with civil society and is organised around the core priority of increased access to education for Roma children and youth as an investment in the sustainability of Roma inclusion in Tetovo.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Tetovo municipality is one of the oldest and biggest municipalities in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, located in the north-western part of the country. Tetovo, the municipal centre, is considered as one of the most developed cities in the country with a developed private sector and two universities - the Tetovo State University, teaching in both Albanian and Macedonian languages, and the South East European University.

According to the last census in 2002, Tetovo has 86,580 inhabitants of multiple ethnicities, the majority of whom are ethnic Albanians. Roma residents in the municipality number 2,357. Based on interviews with the local administration and the representatives of Sonce, the population of the city is currently estimated to be much higher at over 100,000, with an estimated 4,000-5,000 of this number being Roma.

Roma live in six different neighbourhoods of Tetovo. Five of these neighbourhoods have mixed inhabitants from different ethnicities – mainly Roma, Macedonians, Albanians and Turks. Only Roma live in the Krasniki settlement. About 50 people live there in poor conditions, with no water or sewage supply and non-asphalted streets.

According to the interviews with local Roma representatives, the main income of Roma in Tetovo comes from relatives living and working in western Europe. The majority of Roma have been working in the local textile factories, although many of them are currently unemployed due to the downsizing of these industries as a result of past conflicts. During the crisis of 2001, there was a wave of immigration of Roma to Tetovo from other parts of the country. These Roma were well-accepted by both Macedonians and Albanians, as they were not viewed as taking sides in the conflict.

The local administration in Tetovo is very open to working with Roma NGOs and active citizens in the community. The Mayor himself has worked as part of the NGO community in the past. There are consistent efforts to develop strategic interventions in the area of Roma inclusion based on a consultative process with Roma. This is also supported by national policy in support of Roma inclusion priorities, as well as the mobilisation of significant funding allocated for that.

There are several Roma NGOs based in Tetovo. The Roma association Sonce, the National Support Organisation for the implementation of the ROMED2 Programme, is the most visible one with a history of working for Roma inclusion in the municipality with recognition from both the local authorities and the Roma community. The Roma community in Tetovo has formed a football team composed mostly of Roma players. There is a football team from each settlement and several tournaments per year are organised, notably on 8 April for the International Roma Day celebrations.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group (CAG) was established as part of the ROMED2 Programme at the end of 2013. The group consists of 14 people out of which only three are women. The core group that

gathers more often numbers about eight people. Most of the members of the CAG have been working on various initiatives organised by Sonce for many years and the group has been receiving outstanding support from this NGO and its leaders respectively. The CAG uses the office of the organisation for meetings, as well as any other resources it can provide for the group's activities.

The strategic and operational embedding of the CAG in the overall work of Sonce is a key factor in the development and sustainability of the CAG. The organisation has many years of experience, a well-developed structure and a very good reputation among the Roma community and local authorities. This has opened many doors to the CAG and the ROMED2 process and has also helped to grow the capacity of the group.

The group is very active and informed about the available options for resolving specific problems of the Roma community. Its members have very good relationships with representatives of local authorities and a good image within the Roma community. The main motivation of members for joining the CAG is that the group provides a platform to communicate directly with the representatives of local institutions and plan together local programmes and projects.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The Mayor of Tetovo has extensive past experience of working in the NGO sector and is very familiar with Sonce, due to years of cooperation with them. From this perspective, ROMED2 was launched in an environment which was open and ready for the process suggested by the Programme.

The municipality regards the CAG and the ROMED National Support Organisation as equal partners and relies on regular meetings with them for formulating problems and looking together for solutions. The CAG, Sonce and the local administration meet on a monthly basis. There is also ongoing communication between the contact person in the municipality with the CAG and Sonce. This helps achieve an effective cooperative process and adaptation of priorities according to both long-term and emerging short-term needs.

One of the main results of this fruitful cooperation is that the municipality has appointed Roma in the local administration, as well as Roma to work on various projects and programmes. This was a response to the priority identified by the CAG in the Joint Plan.

One of the main long-term priorities of the municipality is the education of Roma. The municipality has a long-term education strategy which was developed in consultation with the CAG and the ROMED National Support Organisation. Through this strategy, the municipality has developed educational programmes for children from fourth up to eighth grade, for high school students, as well as for increasing adult literacy and vocational training. These programmes are supported by funding from the Ministry of Education. One of the main achievements is that 150 stipends were paid to Roma students upon completion of secondary education with a particular vocational specification which, in turn, secured employment. In addition, eligibility criteria have been adapted to increase the enrolment of Roma children and youth into schools.

The municipality and CAG representatives are also actively working together to reduce the number of children begging on the street.

The city budget has allocated funds for cultural and educational activities of the Roma community, which are spent in consultation with representatives of the CAG and Sonce. Activities promoting cultural interaction between different ethnic groups are also planned. On 8 April, the municipality allowed the representatives of the Roma community and CAG representatives to raise the Romani flag in front of the municipality.

### Results and impact in the communities

Good cooperation between the representatives of the Roma community and representatives of local authorities has resulted in visible achievements in the process of inclusion of Roma. One of the main results is the long-term education strategy developed in consultation with the CAG and Sonce, with a

special focus on secondary and vocational education supported by concrete allocations provided from the local budget and projects for the implementation of the envisaged measures. The local administration, CAG and Sonce consider together the improvement of education as an important investment in the sustainability of the Roma inclusion process in the municipality.

Launched by the municipality, educational activities such as appointed educational tutors in schools and kindergartens, as well as the aforementioned stipends for Roma students in secondary schools with a specific vocation orientation and amended entrance criteria, have already achieved a drastic reduction in the number of dropouts from school. Whilst the overall rate for the country is 30%, it is situated between 12% and 15% in this municipality

Another success with visible impact on the Roma community in Tetovo is the support for cultural and social activities. Funding provided for cultural activities gives the opportunity to energise community involvement by organising events that bring people together around cultural issues and celebrations. An agreement has been reached to transform the former cultural centre in the centre of Tetovo into a Roma cultural and educational centre. Once the old cultural centre is moved to its new building, the old building will be available to the ROMED National Support Organisation and the CAG to carry out cultural, educational and social activities with different groups from the Roma community. This Roma cultural centre will also accommodate other structures working on Roma issues, like the Roma Information Office.

#### Lessons forward

The ROMED2 process was very successful in the Municipality of Tetovo. The main success factors are the openness of the local authority and the availability of a skilled Mayor, as well as the well-developed Roma organisation "Sonce" around which the CAG was formed. Some of the emerging lessons and needs for the future include:

- ***For each location, it is extremely important to have a local administration which is open to work and consult with Roma organisations and groups and has a clear vision and long-term strategy for working with the Roma community.*** The development of such a long-term vision and commitment requires a strong local civil society – local Roma NGOs in a partnership with the CAGs functioning in strategic synergy, rather than parallel structures.
- ***The presence of active and well-educated Roma and local Roma organisations working on specific causes can serve as a strong support network for organising and developing the CAGs.*** They can increase the legitimacy of these groups due to their previous good work record with local authorities. Creating Community Action Groups around various issues or for the overall planning process can increase the constituency of these organisations within the Roma communities and a more adequate presentation of their needs and interests. The existence of organised groups within the Roma community working as a network guarantees the successful implementation of policies and programmes aimed at resolving the specific problems of the Roma community.
- ***Another important factor of success was the search for synergies between ROMED2 and other available programmes in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".*** The existence of national programmes served as an impetus to allocating funding from local budgets. Matching funds from national programmes with funds from local budgets is a clear indicator of the political will to solve the problems of the Roma community.

There is high potential for the sustainability of the local processes initiated in Tetovo. Both the CAG and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. A guarantee for this sustainability will be Sonce with its well-developed structure and position in the municipality. However, there is a visible need to support the sustainability of this process in several directions:

- The CAG needs additional support to become a full partner to local institutions. These are people coming directly from the Roma community and their capacity to be able to work actively for the development of local policies and programmes for Roma needs to be enhanced.

- The expected handing over of the building in the city centre to the CAG and Sonce will provide the opportunity to develop social, educational, cultural and other activities. The CAG will need support from the facilitators and the ROMED National Support Organisation to develop a long-term strategy for the use of this centre, which will be done in close consultation with the various interest groups in the community.
- The inclusion of women in the initiatives in Tetovo was less visible. It will not happen by itself due to the specificities of the local Roma communities. It will be important to have a targeted strategy and initiatives to stimulate the participation of women in the activities in Tetovo.
- There is a need to invest in increasing the capacity of local authorities and the representatives of the CAG to develop initiatives and projects that can effectively absorb the funds allocated under the national programmes and budget. As outlined in the interviews with national institutions, the serious issue in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" is not so much the lack of funding, but rather the lack of local capacity to attract and spend allocated funds from the national budget for programmes for Roma.

## HUNGARY, Nagyecsed Municipality

*The Municipality of Nagyecsed is an example of the demanding process of empowering community representation through self-organisation and the challenges of ensuring independent representation of the community's interests from those of the municipality. We can see on the one hand a motivated Community Action Group (CAG) and a new committed Roma organisation but, on the other hand, these people are socially, economically and politically dependent on the local institutions for making a living. The established community structures have reached the position of recognition by the municipality and the Roma community, which brings them the opportunity for further development and work in the interests of the entire community.*

### Context: problems and opportunities

Nagyecsed is a town in Szabolcs-Szatmar-Bereg County, near the border with Ukraine and Romania. According to the official statistics, its population numbers 6,042. Officially, it is estimated that 16% of the population are Roma; however the unofficial estimation provided by NGOs is higher at around 30-40%. There are two Roma segregated settlements on the two edges of the town. The bigger one with approximately 300-400 inhabitants is populated by Romungro, the smaller one by Olah Roma. The area is agricultural and Roma live in deep poverty, as there are only temporary job opportunities and public work provided by the municipality. Since the local church started its school within the locality, Roma children are facing segregated education since non-Roma tend to enrol their children into the church school. As such the public one is quickly becoming a Roma school only. In the segregated school, the dropout rate is high, as are the numbers for early marriages and pregnancies.

There is a local Roma Minority Self-Government and two Roma NGOs, "Vazdune Cherhaja" Roma Women Association and "Jovokep" Association which was established by some of the members of the ROMED2 Community Action Group in 2016. The main partner of the municipality is the Roma Women Association which has been active for 13 years in Nagyecsed. There are also two community centres located in each of the Roma settlements which are maintained by the municipality. There are some services provided in these centres such as public laundry and public bathrooms, which were financed by the National Roma Complex Housing Programme.

### Community Action Group (CAG)

*"The Community Action Group is one of our achievements, but we see our future as a NGO, where we can keep our independence from the municipality and apply for funding" - CAG members.*

Nagyecsed was also part of the ROMED1 Training of Mediators. The first mediator completed the ROMED1 training, worked as a mediator and, motivated by the ROMED experience, decided to continue her education (she is currently attending tertiary education). She has also developed professionally and joined the Budapest team of Partners Hungary in 2015. A new local mediator was identified. She is a Roma youngster who completed her secondary education and has highly developed her competences since she joined as a mediator.

However, the Programme has to work more to ensure its recognition by the Roma community. The CAG became operational in February 2014 in the Olah Roma settlement. It included members from both Roma communities and both genders. During its implementation, the project shifted its focus to the bigger and more disadvantaged Romungro settlement and the CAG meetings started to take place there in 2015. At that time, the CAG was over-represented by Romungro members.

The main priorities identified by the CAG were employment, road building in the Romungro settlement, refuse collection and the educational situation of Roma children.

Apart from ROMED2, training to the CAG members in civic education, communication and activism was provided by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Roma Produkcios Iroda and Partners Hungary.

Generally, the fluctuation of CAG members was high and the dynamic of work varied. For a few months, the CAG did not operate due to the overall interruption of the ROMED2/ROMACT process in the country. In 2015, one of the CAG members initiated the registration of a civil organisation and invited some CAG members to join the new association. In 2016, the Jovokep Association was officially registered with the leadership of one of the CAG members. The leader of this new NGO does not see the organisation as either a formal representation of the CAG or as a direct result of ROMED2. However, the Programme did contribute to the creation of the NGO as it invested in the capacities of its leader and the other members of the CAG that joined it. Currently, the initial Community Action Group formed by ROMED2 is not in operation.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The Mayor of Nagyecsed is in his position since 2001. The municipality is open for collaboration and is active in accessing EU and governmental programmes, as well as Roma-related programmes (NDI, Complex Housing Programme, ROMED2, Tanoda, etc.). A Joint Action Plan was not developed however as, according to the Mayor, the suggestions of the CAG members were already incorporated into the Complex Housing Programme. One of the main results of ROMED2 is that there is a small active volunteer community (of approximately 20-30 persons) which was not previously the case according to the contact point of the municipality.

Most of the CAG members were or are working in the local community centre, currently employed through public work for the municipality. Not having other employment opportunities makes them dependent on the municipality. Questioning the status quo of those who are in power is impossible when someone is socially, economically and politically dependent. Independent and effective mediation is not possible in such circumstances.

### Results and impact in the communities

*"The impact on individuals and new formal (civic organisation) and informal (the CAG) representations of Roma are already visible achievements of ROMED2. However, this cannot be attributed as results of ROMED2 only, as there are other efforts and support from other programmes"*  
– CAG and NGO member.

- The mediator and the CAG members agree that ROMED and other programmes have changed the thinking of Roma people about their rights and citizenship. Community members already have formal and informal practices of advocating for their individual interest. This was not the case before, but today Roma recognise their individual, citizenship-based power and they have more confidence to negotiate with public officials and representatives of institutions.
- Roma people have recognised their power which is in their rights as citizens. Training and practical mediation both helped and required further development by providing the basis for understanding on how public administration and governmental institutions work, and also how to negotiate in the most effective way. A practical example of their skill was the action regarding the refuse collection. Although the service provider charged each household monthly for the service, it did not collect the refuse due to the lack of proper dustbins. The CAG applied to the National Democratic Institute for a very small grant to cover the cost of their action. The municipality provided 60 dustbins and the group got in direct contact with the service provider to organise the proper transport of the refuse. The service provider also agreed to cancel the unjustified debts of the households.
- Putting the focus on the Romungro settlement is one of the main achievements of the Programme. Before ROMED, the municipality and other civil programmes were mostly targeting the smaller Olah Roma community, which has a better economic situation due to their business activities. The Romungro community is much more marginalised with a poor housing situation and economic status. However, this community has experienced many changes since 2011 from identifying good role models to getting self-organised and registering a civil organisation. The

process of community empowerment of the Romungro community was supported by the National Team of the ROMED2 Programme which also attracted the support of other programmes as well.

- For the first time in the locality, the CAG organised the celebration of International Roma Day with the involvement of the Roma Self-Government and the Roma Women Association. Both Roma communities were represented.
- Nagyecséd Municipality recognises the members of the CAG and the Roma NGOs as potential partners for implementation of programmes and providing services. This helps with the mutual understanding of interests and functions as a bridge at this stage for further developments.

#### Lessons forward

- The importance of representing the interests of the Roma community, as recognised by the members of the Community Action Group, is a great opportunity for further advocacy for the development of favourable programmes for Roma by the municipality or other external stakeholders.
- *The CAG and local NGOs are important community-based structures for community building and common understanding.* The establishment of a Community Action Group is a good basis for new local initiatives, but it needs to represent both Roma communities and to ensure the involvement of the wider community.
- ***Effective representation of community interests is much more difficult if the members and the mediator are economically dependent on the municipality.*** In Nagyecséd, the CAG members were also employed by the municipality in public work. In such a hierarchical situation, when the municipality is the employer, it is challenging to ensure impartial mediation and equal communication between the CAG and the municipality.
- ***Better consistency of the implementation of and support to the initiated process in the locality is needed: a long interruption of the Programme and unclear communication about its future can reduce the fragile community trust.*** CAG members stated that they were disappointed by repeated discussions and not having the chance to move to action implementation due to the lack of financial support. This impacted their motivation and desire to participate as well. In addition to that, according to the CAG members, participation in the ROMED Programme caused them some financial difficulties. When the Programme was active, there were monthly meetings and frequent training provided by the ROMED team. The municipality, as the employer of people participating in the CAGs, was not always flexible in letting them attend CAG meetings and training during working days. CAG members were asked by their employer to take leave days to participate in the activities. When they ran out of annual leave, CAG members had to take unpaid leave days and the Programme did not compensate them for that, as it was based on the volunteer and unpaid involvement of people.

**Ensuring the representation of the broader community and synergy of the efforts of NGOs from the different segments of the Roma community is important for improving the situation in the settlements.** *Registering an NGO can be a good opportunity to establish a formal relationship between the Romungro community and the municipality, but it needs to make sure that it will represent the interests of the broader community. The other Roma NGOs in the municipality are seen as representatives of Olah Roma. However, the joint organisation of the celebration of International Roma Day is a good new practice of successful collaboration among the different Roma groups and their organisations, as well as the municipality.*

## HUNGARY, Nyirbator Municipality

*The ROMED2 Programme in Nyirbator has been implemented successfully with the contribution of other programmes and of the municipality. The Programme focused on education and employment, with concrete results obtained. The engines of the Community Action Group are eight women committed to the empowerment of their Roma community. The Community Action Group remains active and the municipality is open to further collaboration. These two factors give high prospects to sustain and further develop the results achieved by ROMED2 in Nyirbator.*

### Context: problems and opportunities

Nyirbator is located in the North-Alfold part of Hungary with approximately 13,000 inhabitants. It has one large Roma settlement with approximately 3,000 people. The municipality has experienced an upward trend in its economic development in the past few years with the relocation into the town of multinational companies which offer job opportunities to locals and people from neighbouring localities.

The unemployment rate at municipal level is between 10% and 20%. Roma are facing high unemployment due to low qualifications, high requirements of employers and discrimination. Besides spatial exclusion, educational segregation is also present in the locality since the church opened its private school. Most Roma attend public schools while the non-Roma families prefer to enrol their children into the church school. In terms of civil society, there are no real visible and active Roma organisations.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

Nyirbator participated in ROMED1 and then continued with ROMED2. The local mediator is an active, credible and educated Roma lady with many years of field experience behind her before joining the ROMED Training of Mediators. For her, the main added-value of the ROMED training was that she learned to facilitate impartially between the Roma community and institutions, as well as the social network that she established as a result of the Programme.

With the start of the ROMED2 Programme, the Community Action Group (CAG) was established by the mediator/local facilitator and initially consisted of eight people, the majority of whom were women. In the course of the Programme, the only two male CAG members dropped out of the group due to working obligations. The CAG members try to meet every other week, or at least monthly, in one of the member's houses.

Members pointed out that the Programme developed greatly their communication skills and provided them with practical information about the local public administration system. Another important impact was the new self-confidence they gained in presenting their opinions to the institutions. In addition, CAG members were included in additional training sessions in civic education, communication and activism provided by other programmes attracted by the ROMED2 National Team and the local mediator/facilitator. The CAG is a group of motivated and reliable women who truly want to support their community. They are considering formally registering as a civil organisation in order to access financial resources for their activities.

The priorities set by the group are education and employment. As part of the work, the CAG and ROMED2 facilitator organised an educational institutional meeting, where representatives of public and private schools and of the municipality discussed the main educational challenges faced by Roma children such as segregation, cooperation with parents and school dropouts. In the area of employment, the ROMED2 Programme also organised a meeting with the representatives of local companies and institutions in order to draw their attention to the available Roma human resources. The companies presented their selection process and, as a result of the ensuing discussions, a new initiative was born – a scholarship programme which aims to increase employability.



An additional problem identified by the group that needs to be addressed is the high level of drug usage among youth, refuse collection and stray dogs.

The CAG is able to represent adequately the general problems of the Roma community, but not the specific interests of all of its segments since the CAG is quite homogeneous, consisting of women of the same age. The need for a more diverse group and inclusion of more community representatives was formulated by both the mediator and the municipality.

#### Interaction between the CAG and local government

Cooperation between the local authority and the CAG is good and stable and was not affected by the change of mayor after the elections. The current mayor was the supporter of the previous one and both of them belong to the same left-wing party. In addition to that, the current mayor was working in the previous administration prior to his appointment. He was in charge of public works in the municipality and gained an insight into the employment difficulties of Roma from that experience. The municipality considers the Programme to be valuable because it is politically neutral and *"shows the problem of Roma from a different point of view due to community involvement"*.

The contact point for ROMED2 in the municipality commented that sharing information as part of the institutional meetings with the CAG helped the municipality to better understand the situation of the local Roma and that they have been learning a lot from this process. A Joint Action Plan was developed with the involvement of local institutions, CAG members, the mediator (local facilitator) and the ROMED2 National Team. The priorities of the Roma community development identified by the CAG have been incorporated into the document. However, as of January 2016, the plan had not yet been adopted by the local council.

At the start of the Programme, the motivation of the CAG members was higher and the interaction with the local institutions more dynamic. After a while, development stagnated and the CAG did not manage to move forward in its work. According to the Mayor, *"the CAG narrowed its operation and was not able to become an independent actor"*. The CAG was unable to include more people from the community and be active without the support of the ROMED2 National Team. Although interaction was facilitated and initiated by the ROMED2 facilitator from Budapest, it could not make the step to regular and direct professional collaboration between the CAG and the municipality.

However, despite these difficulties, the ROMED2/ROMACT local process contributed to some visible results and significant favourable decisions for the Roma, one example of which is the introduction of a local scholarship programme by the local council, as described below.

#### Results and impact in communities

The ROMED2 process has created direct communication between the Roma community and the municipality by establishing the CAG and introducing the joint institutional meetings. This process had an impact on both sides: it helped the municipality to understand the main challenges of Roma and it increased the competences of the CAG members. It also identified a group of active members, whose skills developed significantly since the start of the Programme. However, additional support and learning opportunities should be ensured in order for the members of the CAG to become stronger advocates for the interests of their community.

As a result of the institutional meetings, the commitment of the municipality and the support from the ROMED2 team, the following results can be highlighted:

- The CAG initiated the introduction of a second school bus for pupils. It was very much needed as the sole existing bus was not sufficient to take all children to school. The municipality found the request justified and put into operation a second bus for children commuting from the Roma settlement to their school. Although small in terms of support, this greatly improved the access of Roma children to mainstream education.
- The local council adopted a local scholarship programme for primary and secondary school students with multiple disadvantages, jointly financed by the municipality and by local companies.

The aim of the programme is to ensure completion of secondary vocational school and a skilled labour force for local companies. The programme is due to start in the 2016-17 academic year with approximately 50-100 students per year from fifth grade until the last grade of vocational school.

- The municipality approved a sports scholarship programme which is due to start in September 2016 for talented and disadvantaged students.
- The municipality hired two Roma public workers<sup>1</sup> to work as school mediators. They are responsible for facilitating communication between Roma parents and the school, as well as for following students' attendance at school. The school mediators report to the municipality and the feedback from the schools on the effect of their work is positive.
- In terms of refuse collection, the municipality and CAG worked together to eliminate the illegal dumping ground and to ensure organised collection of refuse. The CAG applied to the NDI (National Democratic Institute) for a mini-grant to finance the minimal cost of their action. The proposal writing was a great learning experience for the CAG members.
- There is an ongoing discussion about the establishment of a Roma office/department as part of the local administration. The concrete responsibilities of the team and their location are still not finalised.

### Lessons forward

The ROMED/ROMACT process in Nyirbator opened new channels of more structured communication between the Roma community and local authorities which have achieved some visible results in the community. The main lessons from factors which contributed greatly to the positive outcomes of the Programme include:

- *The qualities of the human resources working in the locality such as the skilled local mediator/facilitator, national facilitators and motivated CAG members* are critical to the success of the local process. The national team and local mediator were working even when not contracted to do so and the CAG still met regularly during the overall gap resulting from the negotiations of the Council of Europe and European Commission on the ROMACT grant agreement.
- *The sustainability of the openness of local authorities is critical for the consistency of the Roma inclusion process.* The Mayor has a good understanding of the need for targeted policies for Roma inclusion as benefiting overall local development. He is supported in this by the local council and the changes of administration after the elections did not affect the openness of the municipality in supporting the Roma inclusion processes.
- *Municipalities that are economically advantaged can become more open to launching new initiatives if Roma are identified as an opportunity to match the demand for human resources needed for economic growth.* In the municipality, there are quite a few companies lacking human resources, whilst Roma are facing a high unemployment rate. The Mayor and the ROMED2 team understood this opportunity. As a result, the scholarship programme was adopted with the aim of providing local skilled human resources which, in turn, will reduce unemployment.
- *The proactive role of the national team to attract diverse resources from different programmes to optimise the impact of the work in the municipality* (Roma Produkcios Iroda, NDI, Partners Hungary training). The municipality attracted other programmes which supplemented the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme with additional aspects of training and resources that were lacking. They also ensured training and community activities when the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme in the country was "dormant" during the nine-month "contractual gap" in 2015.

There are also some barriers which challenged the development of the Programme and could have been addressed differently:

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<sup>1</sup> Public work is financed by the government for short-term employment of people benefiting from regular social support and registered as jobseekers. Public workers can be employed part-time or full-time and receive a salary lower than the minimum wage. In most of the disadvantaged localities, these are the only employment opportunities for Roma.

- *There is a need to clarify and clearly communicate the role of the mediator/local facilitator in the process to all local stakeholders.* Transparent communication about the role of the local mediator/local facilitator was not ensured by the ROMED2 team in terms of responsibilities, payment and reporting obligations towards the local institutions, which were not aware of the concrete role of the mediator at local level.
- *Continuous information flow between the CAG and the community was not ensured.* This was due to the homogeneity of the CAG which did not represent all segments of the community. The CAG also lacked tools and resources to organise more formal gatherings which were needed to reach the wider local Roma community. A good approach in the future would be to include in the Programme regular public meetings where members of the CAG would share their work with the Roma community, as well as gather inputs from others. Such meetings would also increase the visibility of the Programme and provide opportunities to involve new CAG members.
- *Lack of financial support at local level caused demotivation and dissatisfaction.* The CAG was not able to move forward to action implementation due to a lack of financial support to implement their initiatives, while the local mediator did not receive proper payment and equipment (laptop, printer) to conduct her work.

## PORTUGAL, Municipality of Figueira da Foz

*In Figueira da Foz, the Community Action Group (CAG) is led by a majority of women with ambition and determination to promote Roma inclusion, Roma identity and culture as a positive strength. The municipality has been very supportive and a dynamic collaboration was established. The maturity of the CAG gave rise to the constitution of a local NGO called "Ribaltambição" - Association for Gender Equality in Roma Communities – in order to promote more initiatives. Near the Atlantic Ocean, ROMED2 is bringing hope, optimism and opportunities to a land where Roma continue to fight for social inclusion. Despite all the merits of the ROMED2 process conducted over more than two years, the achievements and the direct impacts were valuable but limited in time, raising some questions about sustainability in the long term. The framework provided by ROMED2 can be seen as an anchor, providing a context and a driver for a good start that needs to be continued.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Figueira da Foz is a municipality in the Centre Region of Portugal, having a population of 62,125 inhabitants. Figueira da Foz is situated near the coast, with a harbour on the delta of the Mondego River. There are beaches on the seafront and tourism, especially in the summer, is an important economic driver. Industry is also relevant in the municipality, as well as the traditional activity of fishing.

The Roma community in Figueira da Foz is estimated at 950 inhabitants living in seven neighbourhoods (Leirosa, Fonte Nova, Vila Robim, Quinta do Paço, Buarcos, Ferrugenta and Marianos), mainly in social housing administered by the municipal housing enterprise Figueira Domus. In Ferrugenta and Marianos, families live in prefabricated (temporary, ALGECO type) houses. Most Roma families in Figueira da Foz ensure their monthly income by selling clothes in markets, stores and flea markets. The economic recession had a significant impact on their way of living, aggravating social problems, with many Roma families relying only on social welfare subsidies.

Prior to the ROMED2 Programme, the municipality did not have any projects focusing specifically on the inclusion of the Roma community, however some efforts were made in terms of social housing and other issues, according to a more general municipal agenda for social inclusion ("Figueira Solidária"). The participation of Figueira da Foz in the Programme can be credited to the initiative of the ROMED2 National Support Organisation (Letras Nómadas). They motivated the municipality to participate and proposed the constitution of the Community Action Group (CAG), identifying members and establishing preliminary contacts.

#### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group in Figueira da Foz has ten to twelve members, with more women than men, in a proportion of 60% - 40% present in the meetings. The age of the members of the group varies from 17 to 58 years old and most of them have finished primary school. Currently, there are four members of the CAG at university studying different subjects, resulting in part from the commitment in ROMED. Some members are working in local markets and stores selling clothes. Most of the Roma neighbourhoods in Figueira da Foz are represented in the CAG. Several members are followers of the evangelical church and the pastor is also an active presence in the CAG. The composition of the group is relatively diverse and heterogeneous, with members highly-motivated and skilled, having communication abilities. Meetings are characterised by a high level of interaction, with different voices expressing opinions in a positive group dynamic. There has been an evolution over time, with periods of higher or weaker commitment, depending also on the results from the cooperation with the municipality. The first meeting of the CAG was in March 2014 and, during the last two years, members met almost every month, depending on the evolution of the proposals. Meetings are normally held in a place provided by the municipality.

The local facilitator, Tânia Oliveira, an active and communicative person, had previous experience in educational mediation and gained more skills with the training provided by the ROMED2 National Support Team. Nevertheless, her role has been influenced by her unstable professional situation and she had no previous experience in mediation. After starting the process, she became unemployed and this affected her motivation, with an influence on the dynamics of the CAG. Over time, the situation improved, the CAG made a request and the municipality was able to provide the local facilitator with a temporary job working on the transportation services of municipal children. This example shows that, when the local facilitator is only a volunteer and has an unstable professional and financial situation, there are impacts in terms of group instability.

The short-term priorities of the CAG focused mostly on cultural and civic interventions; in the long term, the leading priority was to create employment for the Roma community.

The CAG created an NGO (Ribaltaambição - Association for Gender Equality in Roma Communities) in 2015. This is viewed as an opportunity to enable access to new possibilities, for example, applications for small grants in order to implement activities proposed by the group. This transition to a formally-registered civic association is a sign of the maturity of the group and determination to continue, despite the future of ROMED.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The relationship between the CAG and local government was positive with communication channels open for dialogue and cooperation. Nevertheless, implementing the proposals was not very easy to accomplish, notably due to legal and administrative reasons. The first proposal of the group suggested the creation of three jobs for members of the community. Achieving this took several months with some periods of delay and frustration along the way. One of those in charge of the process in the municipal company Figueira Domus was moved and the CAG had to start the lobbying process again. In addition, the procedures for social employment measures were long and complex. In the end, the municipality was able to obtain the funding and satisfy the proposal, however along the way the CAG suffered impacts in terms of motivation and it was not easy to move forward from that.

The second proposal from the CAG was presented to the municipality in July 2015, focusing on Roma culture and identity. The objective was to organise specific events in order to promote the intercultural diversity in Figueira da Foz. On 24 October (municipal day of equality), the CAG organised a cooking demonstration in the municipal market, promoting Roma gastronomy, with the 250 people in attendance tasting Roma dishes. The CAG also collected food products to be delivered at the "homeless support centre" as a sign of solidarity. In December, another "solidarity soup" event was promoted. In 2016, a photographic exhibition was held with support from the municipality and more initiatives were on the CAG agenda.

The third proposal from the CAG was launched in 2016 and addressed the difficult access of Roma families to dental treatment. The group proposed an initiative called "Figueira da Foz Smiling". It suggested to the municipality the establishment of an agreement with private clinics and dental laboratories. The proposal was complex and the municipality had to analyse the legal and administrative issues involved, therefore the CAG was waiting for feedback on the viability of the proposal. New ideas are in the CAG pipeline and the municipality is willing to collaborate. ROMED2 provided the context for that good relationship between both parties.

### Results and impact in the communities

There are positive direct results from the proposals made to the municipality. The local facilitator was employed by the municipality. The CAG asked for three jobs (for women) and obtained six jobs (three women, three men) for the positions of cleaning staff, animator in the local library, animator in the children's hospital and operational staff in the Salt Museum. In some cases, the workers were positively recognised for the work developed, but others suffered from prejudice and discrimination from their colleagues. The working contracts were temporary (generally one year), but there were

indications that in some cases the renewal was a strong possibility. In the field of culture and identity, the CAG was able to organise several initiatives (for example, cookery demonstrations, solidarity initiatives and a photographic exhibition), showing creativity and organisation skills.

There are also more indirect impacts and spillover effects for the Roma community in Figueira da Foz, especially in terms of ownership, self-esteem and pride at having members of the community doing proactive and innovative efforts for inclusion. There are benefits in the public perception about Roma people, especially due to the significant communication efforts of the municipality (for example, in the local media) to show the activities and achievements of the CAG, thereby raising the awareness of the local community. In the long term, these indirect impacts are even more important than the aforementioned direct achievements of the CAG. The municipality is also more motivated to work for the inclusion of Roma communities. Several departments and even other local institutions have become aware of the efforts of the CAG, gaining a more positive image about the Roma community, perhaps becoming even more willing to act for their benefit. In the long term, those attitudes may improve the lives of the Roma community, especially in accessing public services.

In terms of education, ROMED2 contributed to creating conditions that enabled a group of Roma students to obtain university scholarships. These active younger members of several CAGs in different municipalities had over time expressed their interest and motivation to continue their education to a higher level, provided they had the necessary economic support. The National Support Team (Letras Nómadas) identified several young men and women and prepared a project called "OPRÉ CHAVALÉ". They obtained funding for Roma scholarships under "Programa Escolhas" (a national funding programme that receives applications for inclusion projects). In Figueira da Foz, four members of the CAG are engaged in the Programme with the possibility of studying in the University. That innovative project was born from ROMED2 and is helping to improve the levels of formal education, whilst also being an example of social inclusion.

#### Lessons forward

ROMED2 in Figueira da Foz is viewed as a valuable and constructive Programme, becoming a spark for social change in Roma inclusion. The CAG is showing signs of maturity and its evolution to becoming a local NGO (Ribaltambição) can be seen as ambitious and audacious. There are several factors that are relevant for understanding the good performance of the process:

- Guidance and support from the National Support Organisation (Letras Nómadas) helped significantly. The facilitator is also skilled, experienced and empathetic, with good communication skills, which contributed to managing group dynamics.
- The Community Action Group is solid and skilled. Several members have a reasonable level of formal education and are motivated to learn more and gain new competences. The high level of women's participation is a result of inclusion efforts enabling this to happen and also of the openness associated to the local process, representing an important social capital.
- Municipal support was another crucial factor in the success of the ROMED approach in Figueira da Foz. Political commitment and operational conditions were granted since the beginning and even in difficult moments. It is also important to highlight the active communication effort from the municipality (and also from the National Support Team) in order to raise local awareness and create a positive dynamic.

The organisational and social learning obtained over the last two years must also be considered as a ROMED achievement.

The future holds several risks and challenges. Despite the optimism and achievements, it is important for the CAG and the stakeholders involved in the process to be able to manage expectations and maintain the focus on concrete goals and actions. There are also operational issues to be assured, for example, the working contract between the municipality and the facilitator in order to sustain the commitment and the activity of the group. The various parties involved in the process are motivated

and willing to continue the collaboration initiated under ROMED2, having expectations towards a new stage of the Programme.

## PORTUGAL, Municipality of Torres Vedras

*The municipality of Torres Vedras embraced ROMED2 as an opportunity to promote the social inclusion of Roma communities, actively supporting the empowerment of the Community Action Group (CAG), through a bottom-up participatory approach. The municipality believes in public participation as a tool for good governance and provided all of the support needed for the CAG to evolve and present their proposals. The prospects for the future are positive and the seed for sustainable inclusion of Roma is growing. Nevertheless, there are challenges ahead in terms of capacity-building of the group, the broader engagement of the community and the definition of goals to be followed in the long term, including an agenda of specific actions to be promoted in the future.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Torres Vedras is situated close to Lisbon (approximately 50 kilometres to the north) and has a population of around 80,000 inhabitants. The Roma population living in the municipality is estimated to be 350 individuals and the majority of the families live in the largest social neighbourhood of the city (Boavista). The community is strongly affected by unemployment and, over the last years, the economic recession has had a significant impact on their traditional activities as street vendors. Many families rely on social welfare and the future is far from bright especially in terms of education and living standards. Over the years, the municipality has developed several inclusion efforts in order to minimise the vulnerabilities affecting the Roma community and also promoted cultural projects focused on Roma identity and tradition. Over several years the "Romale" project brought artistic performances, with music and dance, to the historic centre of the city. The municipality had a good track record in its relations with the Roma community prior to its involvement in ROMED2, which was seen as a tipping point for a new approach.

It is also important to highlight that Torres Vedras already had a strong practice of participative planning. The municipality developed the Local Agenda 21 based on a wide process of social engagement, with public meetings in all the parishes and with many stakeholders, leading to a municipal action plan focused on sustainability. The culture of participation was therefore present and the political executive saw ROMED2 as an opportunity to promote the social inclusion of Roma communities, using innovative participative tools.

The story of the former President of the municipality (Mayor), Carlos Miguel, is especially relevant for the case. He comes from a Roma family and that fact did not inhibit his professional and political evolution, becoming Secretary of State of Local Municipalities of the Portuguese Government at the end of 2015. After forty years of democracy, he became the first Roma in office in the government. Due to that nomination, he left the presidency of Torres Vedras after eleven years in charge. He was also a member of the Advisory Group for the Inclusion of Roma Communities in Portugal. As Mayor of Torres Vedras, he was the main person responsible for its participation in ROMED2, ensuring the needed collaboration with his team. Almost all the other Portuguese municipalities participating in ROMED2 were selected at a national level, having participated in the first phase of ROMED in the provision of training to mediators.

Before ROMED, Torres Vedras had no mediator dealing with the Roma community and the problems were managed by the social department in charge of issues related to social inclusion, in collaboration with other departments and institutions. The Programme highlighted the need to have a local facilitator to coordinate the work of the Community Action Group (CAG). This was seen as an opportunity to recruit somebody capable of performing the dual role of facilitator and (sometimes) mediator assisting with the work of the social department. Lindo Cambão was a member of the local Roma community and was selected and hired to work within the municipality on the ROMED2 process. One of his first assignments was to help the municipality to improve the level of knowledge about the community living in the territory. A survey was prepared and conducted on the ground by the facilitator, with the support of some members of the CAG. A comprehensive diagnosis was



produced, becoming a landmark and an important tool for dealing with the problems of the community. Prior to ROMED2, the lack of information was a handicap preventing more accurate social interventions.

The survey was conducted among 90 individuals, corresponding to almost a quarter of the total members of the Roma community in Torres Vedras. The results were worrying: 74% of the individuals surveyed were unemployed and 58% were living off social welfare subsidies. About 80% of the individuals were living with less than 500 EUR per month. In terms of housing conditions, 47% of the individuals considered their houses in a good state of conservation, 29% in a reasonable state and only 15% pointed to a poor state of conservation. In terms of education, only 34% completed the first cycle, 13% never went to school and just 3% went to university; the main reasons given for dropping out from school were "tradition" (36%) and the need to get to work (29%). In terms of active citizenship, 94% of the individuals had never had an experience as a volunteer.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group (CAG) in Torres Vedras started to meet in the beginning of August 2014. The CAG is composed of 12 to 14 members, mostly men, with ages ranging from 18 to 36 years old and schooling levels up to secondary level. One member started university studies but left due to economic reasons. One member is a pastor in the evangelical church. Two women are regulars in the group and other women also attend meetings sometimes. The local facilitator had a key role in the selection of the members of the CAG, identifying individuals with the necessary motivation and profile, sometimes from a closer circle of personal relations inside the community.

During the first months after constitution of the CAG, efforts were made in terms of capacity-building. The National Support Team of the ROMED Programme (Letras Nómadas) played a determinant role in the whole process in terms of motivation, organisation, mentoring, transmissions of concepts and skills, support given to the local facilitator and to the municipal team along the way. Their work was highly recognised and they became partners of the municipality in other activities. It is also important to highlight the support provided by the municipality, including providing a place for the group to meet in the city hall. The Municipal Councillor for Social Affairs was a major supporter of the process, highly available, dynamic and extremely focused on improving the levels of social inclusion of the Roma community. The Social Affairs Department also collaborated with the facilitator to provide operational support to the process.

Despite the favourable context surrounding the CAG, the internal evolution was difficult and demanding. The local facilitator made significant efforts in order to motivate and convince group members to join the meetings. Sometimes members did not initially understand well the objectives of the process. There were also misunderstandings and moments of distrust, for example, when some members of the group thought that ROMED2 had money that belonged to them. In addition, the local facilitator had no previous experience in terms of mediation or facilitation; therefore he had to gain skills and competences to deal with group dynamics, as well as to win the trust of the members of the CAG.

Again, the support given by the ROMED2 National Team and the municipality was fundamental in overcoming the problems. For example, when the group presented the first proposal to the municipal executive, several questions and problems were encountered, requiring a budget and time in order to be resolved. The situation provoked some distrust and disbelief inside the CAG, despite the efforts from the municipality and the positive outcome of the proposal. The learning curve was long and the deficits in terms of participation and skills were difficult to overcome. After almost two years of ROMED2 in Torres Vedras, the CAG seems to have stabilised as a group, with a more prepared facilitator and an improved internal work dynamic, with several individuals becoming more participative and motivated. Nevertheless, without the framework of the Programme and the support from the national team, it is hard to see here a sustainable group in the long term, even if there is support from the municipality.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The CAG became a platform for communication and collaboration with the local government. The main priority identified by the group was job creation for the members of the Roma community. The facilitator worked as a pivot player on that relationship and over time gained trust from both sides. Interaction really started with the presentation of a first proposal to the executive, consisting in the resolution of a problem affecting the local evangelical church, in terms of accumulated debt in the payment of rent and electricity. The CAG asked for economic support and requested 2,500 EUR to help the evangelical church. The second proposal from the CAG focused on employment, considering all the problems related to the high levels of unemployment affecting the Roma community and the low levels of formal education. The group proposed the hiring of five Roma people - three men and two women - by the municipality or other local institutions. The third line of proposals were more focused on the cultural dimension, including the organisation of a photographic exhibition associated to the initiative "Experiencing ROMED" in November 2015.

### Results and impact in the communities

In terms of impacts, there were direct and objective achievements resulting from the proposals made to the municipality. From an overall perspective, they accomplished a significant degree of success. In terms of employment, the CAG obtained four jobs for Roma individuals on temporary contracts, the local facilitator was also hired by the municipality and another job is to be created soon. The financial support requested by the evangelical church was also obtained, solving the debt problem and gaining the respect of the community members of the church. In the field of culture and identity, the CAG was able to organise initiatives (for example, a photographic exhibition) increasing local visibility and impact.

There were also indirect and spillover effects in terms of ownership, self-esteem and pride at having members of the Roma community making a proactive and innovative effort for inclusion. The CAG appeared as a sign of change and as a social achievement in the eyes of the community. There are benefits in the public perception about Roma people as well: in that regard, the municipality made a significant communication effort to show the activities and the achievements of the CAG, raising the awareness of the local community. In the long term, those indirect impacts may be more important than the aforementioned direct achievements of the CAG.

Today, the municipality is more prepared and more motivated to act for the inclusion of Roma communities. The survey and the diagnosis prepared became an important piece of knowledge for planning specific interventions. Several departments of the municipality and even other institutions became aware of the efforts of the CAG, gaining a more positive image about the Roma community, perhaps even becoming more willing to act for their benefit. The stronger commitment for action on behalf of the local institutions is also a ROMED2 result, which may be an important achievement in the long term for improving the life of the Roma community, for example, in terms of access to public services.

### Lessons forward

ROMED2 in Torres Vedras has been a positive Programme due to several factors. There was a high level of municipal motivation with strong political commitment and operational support. The previous experience of the municipality with participatory processes for good governance was also a relevant factor. The municipality hired a local facilitator under a working contract that gave him motivation and stability to perform his role adequately, sustaining the activity of the CAG. Alongside the process, the municipality gained more knowledge about the local Roma community as a result of the survey conducted by the facilitator with the support of CAG members. There was also a significant communication effort made (for example, in the media) in order to raise local awareness about the process, with an impact on community ownership. It is also important to highlight the continuous efforts made by the National Support Team, who are always very near to the local process, providing guidance and motivation. The good collaboration between the municipality and the ROMED2 National

Support Team also created conditions for new projects and initiatives. ROMED provided a collaborative framework that stimulated the networking and the exchange of perspectives between the municipalities and multiple institutions involved in Roma inclusion (for example, events such as "Experiencing ROMED" were relevant arenas for discussion and social learning).

- For the future, there are several risks and challenges to be addressed. Looking towards the CAG at the core of the process, it is important to improve and to sustain the group dynamics from a capacity-building perspective (for example, regular meetings, motivation levels, organisation and skills).
- It would also be relevant to bring new members into the group, giving the chance for other parts of the community to join and collaborate on a more open and accessible basis. Another challenge is to bring more women into the group and to promote their active participation in it.
- In terms of education, it would also be important to engage members on professional training or educational courses, raising their skills and possibilities of employment. The sustainability of the process also depends on the capacity of the municipality to maintain the facilitator, considering that it is becoming more difficult to hire public servants with low levels of formal education. The CAG is still very dependent on the support granted by the ROMED2 National Support Team and the group therefore needs to gain more autonomy and initiative. In that regard, they must define goals and actions to be addressed in a more long-term perspective. They have already achieved short-term goals (subsidy for the evangelical church, local jobs, civic initiatives) and therefore they need to find a wider agenda, with new activities to be promoted in the future in order to keep the group dynamic. If they can gain more associative maturity, from there onwards another step might be taken, with the CAG taking the transition to a formal local association, with a management board and statutes, allowing new possibilities in terms of activities and funding. Nevertheless, more commitment, capacities and skills are still needed, in terms of leadership and organisation as well.

There is a strong will from all the parties involved in the process to see the continuation of ROMED2, even if under a different programme framework. The municipality will try to maintain the efforts to sustain the CAG, but without the support from the National Support Team, it will be more difficult. A different collaborative arrangement might be possible to maintain that operational collaboration, but ROMED is also a strategic framework, with an international dimension, which enables organisational learning and networking between institutions from several countries. The European nature and dimension of ROMED is highly valued and recognised by the Portuguese participants. The municipality of Torres Vedras is very proud to be part of ROMED and the Roma community is starting to benefit from the active participation of the municipality.

## ROMANIA, Targu Jiu Municipality

*The municipality of Targu Jiu represents a very successful model of social inclusion of Roma communities, supported by the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme since 2014. There is a highly-motivated Community Action Group of 27 active Roma citizens and an Institutional Working Group committed to solving the problems of the Roma community. The Community Action Group and local administration are working together in developing projects and programmes that address the community's needs.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Targu Jiu is located in the central part of Romania and is the administrative capital of Gorj County. According to the census conducted in 2011, the population of Targu Jiu municipality is 82,504 inhabitants, out of which 2,650 are Roma. Unofficially, based on data from the Roma Relation Office of the City, the estimated number of Roma living in the municipality is 7,411. Roma live in three compact communities inside the city – Obreja, Meteor and Luncilor.

One of the main problems faced by the members of the Roma communities is the lack of property and identity documents. In two out of the three communities, many houses were built illegally during the communist era and after 1990. The land on which they were built was claimed by former owners which caused a lot of disputes, some of which are still not resolved. The people from these two communities who have no ownership documents for the land and their houses cannot obtain permanent identity documents, which seriously limits their access to public services.

Another problem is the lack of employment opportunities. Until 1989, Targu Jiu used to be a heavily industrialised city with a strong wood processing industry and factories for glass and porcelain, cigarettes, cement, brick, tile, tyres, etc. At present, the city's economy is very different – only a small part of the old industry has remained and services and trade are prevalent. The income of the Roma in the three communities comes mainly from two sources: social aid and trading of second-hand clothing. The local government has arranged a special place in the market where the second-hand clothes trade takes place in more civilised conditions. Some young people migrate to other EU countries in order to find employment opportunities.

The three Roma communities from Targu Jiu do not have infrastructure problems. They all are connected to the water, sewage, gas and electricity systems, the streets are lit and asphalted. The situation is very different compared to 17 years ago. As pointed out by one of the members of the Community Action Group (CAG), *"back in the past, the children who went to school walked in rubber boots. They kept their shoes in bags and put them on only once they reached the asphalt road"*.

These changes were due to the good self-organisation of the Roma community prior to the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme with the purpose of improving their living situation. An important role in this process of change was played by the Del Youth Foundation, headed by a leader with the vision and ability to mobilise community members. Organised for a common purpose, the community members initiated, developed and maintained a collaborative relationship with the local authorities. This relationship is described by the Head of Strategies and Community Policy Office of the City Hall of Targu Jiu as a "win-win" strategy for both the community and the local administration.

The Roma Party "Pro-Europe" is the largest and most representative organisation of Roma in Romania. From the legal point of view, this organisation is an NGO that acts as a political party during elections. Many Roma from Targu Jiu are members of the Gorj branch of the Roma Party "Pro-Europa", which is considered to be one of the strongest branches in the country. Despite this, there is no Roma elected representative in the local council.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The CAG was established through ROMED2/ROMACT at the end of March 2014 and has 27 members coming from all three Roma communities. Based on the interviews with local stakeholders, the

majority of CAG members continue to be actively involved. Evidence for this was also the fact that more than 20 CAG members from the three communities participated in the meeting and discussions during the case study implementation.

During these first meetings, it was mutually agreed that each of the three communities would put forward nine people to join the CAG. As a result, discussions were initiated in all three communities, with the aim of selecting the people that would take part in the CAG and to identify common community needs. In the end, each of the communities wrote minutes of the meeting summarising priority community issues and the list of members nominated to join the CAG. There were no formal selection criteria. The choice of people to join the CAG was made taking into account the individual desire of involvement, willingness to attend meetings and to be accepted by the community.

The CAG has a very stable membership of community representatives who remain involved and are motivated to carry on. The meetings are usually hosted by the local council. One of the county councillors comes from the Roma community and intends to run again for a seat in the County Council in the upcoming 2016 elections.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The Head of Strategies and Community Policy Office explained in the interview that *"we (local administration) have more than 15 years of good collaboration with Roma communities from Targu Jiu, but the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme made it possible for us to see for the first time the leaders and representatives from all Roma communities sitting together at the same table and discussing the community issues."* Two out of the three communities are highly organised with strong leaders, but with differences in their approach. These differences led them in time to build separate communication channels with local administration. The ROMED2/ROMACT Programme created the opportunity for those three communities to share common ground and work together

The local administration is very committed and active in dealing with the issues that the communities are facing. In the past 15 years, it has implemented a large number of projects, most of which address community infrastructure issues, but are not only limited to that. For example, in 2002, Targu Jiu was among the first municipalities to create a Roma Relations office as part of its local administrative structure and in accordance with the National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma in Romania (adopted by the Romanian Government in April 2001). Currently, the task and responsibility of the seven Roma experts in this Office is to provide assistance and facilitate the access of Roma to public services. Targu Jiu is the only Romanian municipality with such a large number of employed Roma experts.

Another example relates to the issue of healthcare. In 2004, the local administration created, with the support of PHARE, a medical office very close to one of the Roma communities. After the project ended, the administration continued to support it and it currently provides medical services to about 2,800 patients, Roma and non-Roma. This is considered to be among the best practices in the healthcare field in Romania.

Based on the minutes of community meetings organised at the start of the Programme, the local council initiated its decision to recognise the CAG, establish the Institutional Working Group and approve the Local Action Plan including the priorities identified by the communities.

On 31 March 2014, the CAG was officially recognised by the local authority through Local Council Decision 97/31.03.2014. An Institutional Working Group was established, consisting of two representatives from the Local Council, three CAG members (each representing one of the three Roma communities), a local expert on Roma issues, one representative from the structures of the County Employment Agency, Public Health Directorate, School Inspectorate and two local Roma NGOs (Del Youth Foundation and Roma Union of Romania Christians). Both organisations have a good record of working for Roma inclusion over the years and have played an active role in informing and mobilising the community in the ROMED Programme.

There is ongoing communication between CAG members and the local authority, meetings are carried out when a situation arises, when a decision must be taken, or when consultations are necessary.

All proposals of the CAG have been considered, adopted and included in the Local Action Plan. The initial plan was adopted in 2014 by the Local Council with the support from the National Facilitator. It was for a period of one year and contained measures/actions in four areas (education, health, employment and housing) that could be addressed with local resources.

#### Results and impact in the Roma community

The main results of the interaction between the local administration and the CAG are in the areas of resolving housing issues and identity documents. Based on the needs identified and prioritised by the CAG, the local administration submitted a project proposal to the National Agency for Roma to solve the issue of Roma housing. The aim of the project was to start the cadastral measurement as a first step towards issuing property ownership documents. Prior to this project, thanks to the efforts and involvement of the ROMED2/ROMACT facilitator, a significant number of people (80 people) from Roma communities received their IDs in 2015.

Another important result relates to introducing the new way of municipal planning based on a thorough and structured survey of community development needs. At a joint meeting of the CAG with the Local Council in November 2015, a decision was taken to consider including a long-term proposal in the Local Action Plan that could be funded by European funds in the 2014-2020 budgetary period. In order to have accurate information, the CAG members initiated a full survey in all three Roma communities in the municipality. The survey was carried out with the technical supervision of experts in social science and with the support of the Roma Relation Office. The results of the survey will be ready in May and will be used to update the Local Action Plan at the beginning of June 2016. They will help to identify measures that can be introduced in the local development strategy and to plan strategies and projects for local level interventions. The local development strategy of Targu Jiu municipality is planned to be subject to public debate in June 2016.

One of the priority directions of intervention that emerged in the preliminary stage of the analysis of the survey results relates to education. There is a need to develop projects like "school after school", where students receive a meal and support for doing their homework after school classes. Another direction is increasing employment opportunities for Roma by creating small enterprises and/or social businesses.

At this very moment, there is an ongoing process to develop two integrated projects and Targu Jiu City Hall is a partner in both of them. Through its team and expert, the ROMACT Programme provides technical support to develop the projects. So far, two training sessions have been delivered by the ROMACT partner organisation, Resource Centre for Roma Communities, and the ROMACT expert for developing integrated projects, the third one being planned for mid-May 2016.

#### Lessons forward

ROMED/ROMACT was very successful in Targu Jiu Municipality. Three factors contributed to this success:

- *Very strong history of previous collaboration and cooperation between the local administration and the Roma community.* This collaboration started in the mid-nineties with the establishment of the Del for Youth Foundation gathering people dedicated to Roma inclusion and with a very clear long-term vision. When Targu Jiu municipality joined the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme, there was already a history of more than 15 years of collaboration and the infrastructure issues in the community were resolved.
- *Democratic process of selecting the members of the Community Action Group and discussing the priority needs with all communities resulted in a CAG which is community based and representative.* The way the CAG was selected in Targu Jiu is a model for participatory

community-based organising. This was a key factor in the success of the CAG and its strong links with the communities represented by its members.

- *Openness of the local authorities and wide representation of all local stakeholders in the process.* The Institutional Working Group that was established through a Local Council decision had representatives from practically all key local stakeholders – local authorities, local institutions, county departments of various services and Roma NGOs.

There is a very high potential for the sustainability of the local processes in Targu Jiu. The CAG and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. Neither the CAG nor the local administration perceives the political change with elections to be a threat to the process started by ROMED2/ROMACT. This is because the left wing has dominated the political arena in the region over the last 25 years and Roma communities traditionally support this group in elections.

The Community Action Group is thinking forward of how to ensure the future sustainability of empowerment of the community. The main need they have expressed is to increase the capacity of young Roma to carry on their work.

Targu Jiu can serve as a model for both community self-organisation and a broad-based cooperative process involving all Roma communities and all local stakeholders. The Roma community representatives in the CAG did not have any training in community self-organising, but they can definitely train and inspire others. Their experience needs to be shared with other communities to inspire people that such a process is possible. The experience of the municipality and its approach to the broad-based Institutional Working group as an alliance of all local stakeholders can “open the mind” and help develop the skills of other municipalities in the country.

The main lesson that can be learned and be applicable to other contexts and environments is the power of community self-organising. As defined by a CAG member, *“If somebody from another community asks how we succeeded in achieving all of what we have achieved, our answer will be: a well-organised community knowing very well what we want, dedicated and committed people involved and constant dialogue with local authorities. There are ups and downs in the communication with the local institutions, but we have to show that we are strong and reliable long-term partners”.*

## ROMANIA, Bucharest – Sector 6

*The ROMED2/ROMACT Programme in Bucharest – Sector 6 is a case showing the challenges of local cooperative processes between the Roma community and local authorities when the local administration is open to collaboration only formally but seems to react only under civic pressure. It also shows the importance of Roma community mobilisation and self-organisation for resolving urgent problems of the community through democratic tools, including peaceful civic protest, thus making the authorities take action and rehabilitate the roads and restore public transportation, which is the only link the Roma community has with the rest of the city.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Sector 6 is the second largest district in Bucharest, located in the north-western part of the capital with a population of 380,000. It has its own Mayor and Local Council, both directly elected in the local elections. According to the last census (2011), there are 1,776 Roma living in the district. However, according to the estimates of Roma NGOs, the Roma population in the Roma neighbourhood of Giulesti Sarbi within Sector 6 is in the range of 20,000–40,000 people.

The Giulesti Sarbi Roma neighbourhood of Sector 6 has very poor infrastructure. Water supply and sanitation was introduced only after 1990 wasn't finalised. Thus, most of the houses still do not have running water and a sewage system; instead, they have wells in the courtyard. Most of the land in southern Giulesti Sarbi is flooded due to the rising level of groundwater in the area close to the Dambovita River and Morii Lake. In such an environment, no construction is allowed on many of the open spaces. Many roads and streets are improperly maintained, except for Giulesti Road and Săbăreni Road which were recently modernised. The rest are, at best, cobblestones. This part of the neighbourhood is linked with the rest of the city through Giulesti only; residents can use several bus lines and a tram.

The neighbourhood also has a poor school and healthcare infrastructure. There is only one kindergarten and two schools, just one of which is modernised (the other one has outside toilets and no running water). There is only one medical centre. The nearest pharmacy is located 5 km from the neighbourhood. There are no school or health mediators.

In recent years, parts of this area have attracted the attention of investors, changing the vision of the authorities who have since understood the high potential of the area in terms of investment. Possible future investment in this area will create employment opportunities for Giulesti-Sarbi inhabitants.

There are no Roma councillors elected in the Local Council. The City Hall has a Roma person, employed as a local expert, who is considered to provide a "superficial involvement" in solving community problems (statements of facilitator and CAG members).

The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection of Sector 6 have implemented a total of seven projects funded by the ESF that have targeted the Roma community in Giulesti Sarbi. Under these projects, a lot of vocational training courses were conducted in qualifications such as trade worker, caretaker for the elderly, baker, data operator, hairdresser, manicurist and massage therapist. As a result, 1,688 persons from Sector 6 who belong to vulnerable groups, including Roma, have received new qualifications.

There is an active Roma NGO, "Romano ButiQ" association, established to promote non-discrimination by holding cultural and educational activities. Its headquarters are in the Roma Museum in Giulesti established in 2014. The association has organised a series of cultural events which aim to raise awareness of non-discrimination on ethnic grounds. Other areas of intervention of Romano ButiQ include the promotion of Roma craftsmen and their products, theatre activities with children in isolated districts, as well as lobbying and advocacy for Roma inclusion.



### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The Community Action Group (CAG) of Giulesti Sarbi neighbourhood was formed in November 2013. The members of the CAG were selected based on a democratic process with a wide participation from the community. The initial meeting was attended by over 400 Roma citizens, both men and women, living in the neighbourhood. After discussions, the participants in the meeting elected 27 community representatives as members of the CAG. The leading motivation of people in joining the CAG was to solve the problems in the neighbourhood which affect them as individuals, as well as the entire community.

Initially, women from the community were also part of the Community Action Group, but they gradually dropped out from the group due to their household and childcare obligations. The membership of the group has been fluctuating and gradually reducing. A number of members dropped out due to their responsibilities in needing to make a living. The constant number of members that stayed in the group over time was about ten members which had stabilised to five members by the end of the ROMED2 Programme.

Community Action Group members have been invited, under the ROMACT programme, to participate in the mixed Working Group of Sector 6 created in April 2016. The mixed Working Group is a mechanism specifically designed to implement the Strategy for Roma Inclusion at local level. It consists of representatives of local institutions, NGOs and private persons (Roma citizens). The CAG as a community-based structure, as it was set up within the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme, was never recognised by the City Hall. Instead, some members were accepted as part of the Mixed Working Group as a compromise.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The Deputy Mayor of Bucharest Sector 6 supports the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme, even though he did not participate in any CAG meetings. As an example, the City Hall of Bucharest Sector 6 provided material resources to support the efforts of the CAG in organising the Pakivalo Solidarity Festival.

The Action Plan was developed by the CAG under the guidance of the facilitator and submitted to the City Hall in order to be approved by the Local Council.

Communication between the CAG and the City Hall, as assessed by CAG members, was good during the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme due to the openness of the Deputy Mayor and the Directorate of Social Assistance. However, in the course of the Programme, the Deputy Mayor resigned and the CAG was left without support from City Hall. After the resignation of the Deputy Mayor, CAG requests began to be ignored, the local action plan was not approved and the group was not officially recognised by the municipality.

As outlined in the interview with the ROMED/ROMACT facilitator, when it comes to assuming responsibility, *"they are continuing to act superficially or pretend that there are no human and financial resources"*. As an example, the local public authority did not budget for the local action plan which remained in the drawers of various departments at City Hall. In the beginning of 2016, efforts related to the Action Plan were resumed by members of the CAG, which is currently being updated.

### Results and impact in the communities

There are several noticeable results in the framework of the ROMED/ROMACT Programme:

#### **Community-based campaign that resulted in repair of the main road linking the neighbourhood to the city**

In August 2014, transport services to the Roma neighbourhood were interrupted due to the catastrophic state of the main road connecting it to the city. This affected the whole neighbourhood, but especially the children who had to walk more than a kilometre on a road surrounded by vacant land and full of stray dogs. The general metropolitan City Hall of Bucharest was "bombarded" with

over 200 petitions and complaints from community residents. Due to lack of action from the municipality, in September 2014 the neighbourhood inhabitants, the CAG members and the Roma NGO working in that area started a "peaceful protest" with the main request to repair the road and restore transport services. As a result of this effective community-based civic action, the metropolitan administration of Bucharest took the necessary measures for complete reconstruction of the road. The road was repaired and the transport services restored in October 2014.

### **Approaching the issue of property documents and IDs**

The most pressing issue that people from Giulesti-Sarbi neighbourhood are facing is the issue of property documents and personal identity documents (IDs). Many neighbourhood residents bought the homes where they live using so-called "receipts by hand" which do not have any legal value. In addition, many of them cannot afford to pay for the necessary procedures to obtain legal documents for their houses and land. In the absence of property documents, IDs cannot be issued and, without IDs, it is not possible to have a regular job or to have contracts for utilities (e.g. water, electricity, sewage system) and other most basic services. At the request of the Community Action Group, Romano ButiQ initiated a partnership with the City Hall District to include Giulesti-Sarbi in the National Cadastre and the Land Registry Programme, to enable neighbourhood residents to acquire legal ownership documents for their houses and land. The certificates and cadastral documentation necessary for registration in the integrated Cadastre and Land Registry of holders as owners were then issued free of charge. About 20% of cases have been solved through the involvement of CAG members. Being involved in this initiative, CAG members became familiar with the procedure and now provide help and assistance to other community members on how to obtain property documents and IDs.

### **Organisation of the Solidarity Festival by ROMACT**

The second edition of the Solidarity Festival was organised as a joint effort involving several organisations, institutions, foundations and independent individuals. The Community Action Group from Bucharest Sector 6 was strongly involved in mobilising the local community's participation in the event, especially that of the Roma children who were involved in artistic activities. It was the first time that such an event had been organised in Giulesti-Sarbi neighbourhood. The event helped to increase the sense of pride of identity and belonging to the Roma community.

### **Lessons forward**

The ROMED2/ROMACT Programme was very successful regarding the empowerment of the Roma community from Giulesti-Sarbi neighbourhood in Sector 6 of Bucharest. According to the statement of the ROMED2/ROMACT facilitator, the most important step was to overcome the thinking from the perspective of personal self-interest and problems only and making the leap to caring about community needs and priorities.

Community members experienced and saw that together, through self-organising, they could solve problems that affected them. They were supported by Romano ButiQ and other Roma leaders, who helped bring national television to broadcast the issue. The experience of organising a peaceful protest that put pressure on the local administration to repair the main road and to put back into operation the interrupted bus services helped the people from the community to understand that they can be strong and their voice can be heard, but only if there is unity and a common community goal.

The main lesson from Giulesti-Sarbi is that when the local authorities are not responsive to urgent problems of the community, it requires community self-organising for effective pressure and advocacy to resolve these problems.

In terms of sustainability of the process initiated by the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme, it is very vulnerable if we take into account the fact that, although the local authorities may show a formal commitment, they seem to (re)act only if under pressure. As shared by the CAG members, *"we never see the Mayor (of Sector 6), he never came to speak with us"*. The only real support that came from

local administration was from the Deputy Mayor, but after his resignation, there was no institutional support given to the process.

Regarding the Community Action Group, even though the number of the actively involved members has been reducing, they will continue to work for the community. Very helpful in this will be the support of Romano ButiQ based in Sector 6. It is most important that the contact with the community is maintained and that the latter is constantly informed about the actions that take place.

## ROMANIA, Valea Seaca Municipality

*Local authorities from Valea Seaca are very committed to improving the situation of Roma communities in the municipality and the development of the Community Action Group (CAG) has helped them to better understand the needs of people in communities. The cooperative work of the local administration with the CAG has brought a number of tangible results in the Roma communities due to the projects developed. In order to be successful in their efforts for Roma inclusion, small rural municipalities need to mobilize partnerships, especially with NGOs and other actors, in order to be able to access financial resources provided by European funding.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Valea Seaca is a small rural municipality in the Moldova region of Romania, located in the southern county of Bacau, composed of two villages - Cucova and Valea Seaca. According to the 2011 census, the population of Valea Seaca is 3,867 inhabitants, slightly increasing as compared to the last census of 2002. Most of the inhabitants are Romanians (58.91%) with a minority of Roma (33.1 % or 1,700 people).

There are four schools in the municipality, including one secondary school in Valea Seaca (with classes I-VIII) and three primary schools (with grades I-IV), as well as four kindergartens and two community centres - one in Valea Seaca and one in Cucova which is rehabilitated. Only part of the village is connected to a water supply and sewage system. The main economic activity is primitive farming oriented towards a self-sufficiency and sustenance livelihood. Some people work in the few shops or local services of immediate necessity.

The main problem facing the Roma in Valea Seaca is the high level of unemployment, with most people surviving on occasional work. The majority of Roma have at best a secondary school education and a very low level of qualifications. There is continuous dropping out of school of boys in order to earn money for their families, whilst girls often drop out due to household duties and marriage. There is a growing wave of emigration of Roma from the municipality, usually to Nordic countries.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The CAG was established with the support of the ROMED2 Programme at the end of February 2014. Initially it consisted of 12 people including representatives of the villages of Valea Seaca, the school mediator, the health mediator and the school principal. Five of the members were Roma women but in time they have gradually dropped out from the group.

The group is affected by migration and its structure has been changing over time. The core part of the group that participates in its meetings on a permanent basis consists of five people – the school mediator, the health mediator, the school principal and two community members. The CAG has tried to engage different segments of the local community in various activities in support of the Roma.

The CAG has been officially recognised through a decision of the Local Council in March 2014.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

According to the Mayor of Valea Seaca, there is a close and good working relationship between the local administration and the Roma community: "*We have many Roma who currently respond to every request for assisting our difficult work*". The main issue is migration and the change of people involved in the CAG.

The Action Plan was developed by the members of the CAG under the guidance of the ROMED2/ROMACT Facilitator. It encompasses many problems in different sectors: education, health, agriculture, employment, housing and identity documents. All proposals of the CAG have been considered and included in the local Joint Action Plan, which was adopted on 5 March 2014 by the Local Council of the municipality.

## Results and impact in Roma communities

The main visible results are in the area of community infrastructure and IDs. Local administration is very committed and involved in dealing with issues that communities are facing. So far, local administration has implemented a significant number of projects for a small rural municipality, most of them dealing with community infrastructure issues.

The water supply system has been developed in the whole locality and partly in the Roma settlement. A modern treatment plant for water was installed in the whole village.

The municipality has worked a lot to improve the road infrastructure and accessibility of the villages, which was lacking before. Previously, many Roma children used to suffer injuries whilst trying to get to school, especially on rainy days. A large modern bridge over Cucova brook was constructed ensuring the link between the two villages. A second bridge was then built over the Valea Seaca creek in the Roma settlement. The main road was paved starting from the national highway to the entrance of the Roma settlement, as well as the road between Valea Seaca and Cucova. Street lights in both villages were repaired and modernised.

In the area of culture, the municipality financially supported the local churches including the ones attended by Roma. The local Cultural House of Valea Seaca was refurbished with a bathroom and an equipped kitchen. This followed a request from the Roma community members to renovate the local cultural centre so that they could hold cultural events and music courses there.

A six-month project initiative, which was developed as a partnership between the municipality and a local NGO "United Europe" and funded by the National Agency for Roma, provided access to IDs and cadastral documents to 54 Roma households from Valea Seaca. CAG members were involved in all the implementation phases of the project.

Lack of education was one of the biggest problems identified by the CAG. A number of children could not get enrolled in school due to the lack of a birth certificate. The procedure for obtaining birth certificates for six-year-old children is very complicated, since certificates can only be obtained by a court decision which usually takes years. Thanks to the efforts of the ROMED/ROMACT facilitator in the framework of the Programme, 13 children obtained a personal identification code, a unique number that every child gets when the birth certificate is issued. This helped to enrol those children without their birth certificate in the first grade of school.

Ensuring access to pre-school education was another significant success of the cooperation process between the CAG and the municipality. A new modern kindergarten was built in the centre of the village, equipped with all utilities. Roma children with socio economic problems were also enrolled and the expenses were ensured by the municipality. A day care centre for disadvantaged children is being established as a result of an initiative developed by the Star of Hope Romania Foundation in partnership with the City Hall of Valea Seaca and with the financial support of 150,000 EUR provided by private donors from Norway and Sweden. The centre will provide better pre-school care for 40 children daily which is an investment for their enrolment in school. It will also actively work with parents instructing them on how to care for their children, as well as the importance of their education.

The municipality has hired one school mediator. Another educational initiative included second chance school education for adults to enable them to finish their secondary education.

Several main initiatives contributed to the increased access to healthcare services of Roma families and especially children. The local medical centre was refurbished; a local pharmacy was opened in the centre of the village and an apartment was renovated to open a dental surgery. Access of children to healthcare was supported by the project "Non-discrimination means equal rights! Roma children have equitable access to health services - a fundamental condition in a non-discriminatory society". This project was implemented within the RO10 - CORAI Programme financed by the EEA Grants 2009-2014 and managed by the Romanian Fund of Social Development.

The City Hall of Valea Seaca is planning other projects in support of the integrated development of the Roma community and is actively looking for finance to support job creation initiatives in the community (for example, greenhouses).

#### Lessons forward

The ROMED2/ROMACT Programme was successful in assisting the empowerment of the Roma community in the villages of Valea Seaca municipality. By assisting the creation and development of the Community Action Group, it provided the opportunity for local community members to organise themselves. This significantly improved the communication between local administration and the Roma community. The increased mobilisation of different resources by local authorities to address issues that were prioritised and raised by the CAG, is a clear sign that local authorities have become much more aware of community needs. This has led to visible initial results towards changing the situation of Roma communities in this poor rural municipality.

Despite the results, the initiated local process had its challenges and the sustainability of established cooperation is still vulnerable. Among the factors affecting the sustainability of the process is the instability of the members in the Community Action Group due to increased migration to other countries, as well as some deficiencies within the local administration. The capacity of the municipality to access and to manage projects supported by the European funds is limited. This is due to some of the specific conditions related to these funds which are restrictive to small rural municipalities. Another obstacle is the lack of local human resources with specific expertise to work on European projects. Such categories of localities are eligible to apply only for a few programmes. To meet the eligibility criteria, they cannot apply by themselves and they need to establish partnerships in order to access to projects supported by European funds.

The main lesson from Valea Seaca is that small rural municipalities depend on additional external resources which provide for the sustainability of the process in the medium and long term. External funding (especially from Operational Programmes) can only be successfully approached as a result of strong alliances and partnerships with other actors (especially NGOs) in order to mobilise the needed additional expertise and human capacity.

## SLOVAKIA, Jarovnice Municipality

*Jarovnice is an excellent example to demonstrate how the approach behind ROMED2 can support local change. It shows that empowerment can work around tangible issues directly engaging the community. The main reason for success in Jarovnice is that the real participation of Roma was ensured in addressing the challenges of Roma communities. This is due to the shared commitment and vision for Roma inclusion of the Mayor, local councillors – the majority of them Roma - the local administration, and their effective partnership with all community structures and representatives of the Roma community: the Community Action Group, local NGOs, community centres, the Roma pastoral church and other active Roma citizens.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Jarovnice is one of the largest Roma rural communities in Central Europe. According to official data, 5,831 people live in the village, of which 4,879 are Roma and 2,700 of them are children up 18 years of age. Experts predict that Jarovnice will become the first Roma town in Slovakia<sup>2</sup>.

Jarovnice faces most of the problems that other localities with a high Roma population face, as well as some unique ones. The unemployment rate among Roma is almost 100%, there are problems with housing and the school works on two shifts. The village experiences high demographic mobility. Slovaks move to live in a nearby town, the better-off Roma buy their houses, leave the neighbourhood and young families take their place in the settlements. The Secretary of the Municipality, Rastislav Zubaj, recognises development potential in this movement with young and motivated Roma seeing the example of their better-off kin and also wanting to improve their lives, but this doesn't happen automatically. Every year, the village has about 200 first-graders which the school still needs to teach in two shifts. Every day, between 150 and 180 children are tutored and/or mentored. If these children do not receive good education and skills, they will follow the unemployment and marginalisation path of their families. The stakes are therefore high for the "first Roma town in the making".

The social work in the settlements has solid foundations resulting from earlier investments. A project on "Improved conditions for mutual tolerance between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of municipalities" aimed at improving the co-existence of Jarovnice citizens was implemented already under PHARE. A project "Better conditions for Roma self-realisation in the education system" followed, aimed at increasing the school success of Roma children. Jarovnice was also one of the pilot municipalities which employed Roma teaching assistants, health field assistants and social field workers and its community centre was one of the first in the Slovak Republic. A Roma pastoral centre also was established and remains active. In 2009, the project implemented by the NGO "Wild Poppies" and supported by EEA and Norway Grants reinvigorated the community centre.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

In this context, the establishment of the Community Action Group (CAG) came naturally. The CAG consists of 11 members, two of them women. Several of the CAG members are Roma municipal councillors; others are members of local Roma NGOs, the Roma sports (football) club and the women's club. They all are motivated to improving life in their community and discussing the problems facing the settlements, the possible approaches to addressing them and the feasible financial sources. The needs assessment was built on the existing Local Strategy of Comprehensive Approach for Roma Community. Membership in the CAG is stable, nobody drops out.

The Joint Action Plan has ten priority areas and the CAG held a discussion on what could be done and where the resources could come from. The plan proposed by the CAG was discussed and approved by the local government and is integrated into the municipal development plan.

<sup>2</sup> <http://suvada.sk/jarovnice-buduce-romske-mesto.html>

An important factor contributing towards the successful process in Jarovnice is the quality of the national facilitator, Roman Estocak. An educated Roma with a vision and knowledge of the local issues, he has lived in the region for many years and works as a consultant for community problems, a mediator and an assistant. He is currently the regional coordinator of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities in Slovakia for the Presov region. His vision is that municipalities with a predominantly Roma population need the function (and position) of "crisis manager". This should be a person familiar with the region, municipality, its problems and the possible solutions. This person should also have information on alternative financial sources and calls for projects and see the bigger picture, with vision and a three to five year perspective to work with the community and bring it up to a new level.

Another factor contributing to the success is the presence of two dedicated local active people, Jan and Rastislav Zubaj, who currently work in the municipality of Jarovnice. Both brothers are highly educated with many years of experience as social workers and health assistants. Years ago they started as volunteers but have both now been employed by the municipality. They were also trained as mediators under ROMED1. Rastislav is currently the secretary of the municipality. He recalls that, during the CAG meetings, each representative from the distinct groups in the community was insisting on their own priority – the representatives of the football club were lobbying for football, whilst the representatives of the Roma community for hygiene and safety in the neighbourhood. Yet all had some specific and tangible issue to push for. That was the basis for the pragmatic discussion of which one to choose. All CAG members united around the idea that unemployment is a major problem, therefore solving it would essentially address a number of other problems. However, they didn't see any opportunities and real solutions that would be in the competence of the local stakeholders.

#### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

The situation in Jarovnice is unique to a large extent– the mayor, the municipal councillors and local administration are one team. They work together with the local Roma pastoral centre, the NGOs, the community centre and the educational institutions, involving the active citizens in the Roma community to solve everyday problems of the village and the Roma neighbourhood. Some of the CAG members are already members of the Local Council, which makes the group sustainable and able to solve problems.

The majority of local councillors (seven out of 13) are Roma, participating in CAG meetings. All the projects carried out by the municipality are the result of active communication and cooperation between the representatives of the municipality and the members of the CAG. The role of the CAG is not limited to determining priorities. Members also participate in committees selecting the people involved in the completion of different projects addressing the outlined priorities, for example, deciding upon whom from the community will be most appropriate and most need to be involved.

Recently, the municipality constructed a social housing block with apartments for people living in areas at risk of flooding, a project of Civic Guards was implemented, four health assistants were employed and seminars on various topics connected to the health situation in the settlements took place.

Many activities and projects have been carried out but huge challenges remain. For example, there are still more than 250 wooden shacks so this is the priority of both the CAG and the local authority. In Jarovnice, there are real opportunities for improvement of the living conditions of the Roma in the coming years using the available funding from the new programming period of EU funds and the state budget. However, the Mayor, Gina Florian, is a realist. It is his second term as Mayor and he knows it is not possible to solve all the problems at once: *"One has to prioritise, to seek external resources, outside the municipality and its budget"*.



## Results and impact in the communities

All projects in the Municipality are prepared by the mayor, deputy mayor and the head of the municipality office. In the past, there was active cooperation with the Roma Institute in Bratislava which prepared all the projects for EU calls and national calls, but this is no longer the case, mainly because the funding of the Roma Institute from OSI Budapest has ended.

Obviously, this support will be missed because the problems are very serious, but the local administration in Jarovnice has not wasted time and has since learned to draft, manage and report on large projects. They are able to prepare large projects financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) on their own, although they will need to consult with the ROMED2/ROMACT National Support Team or contract external companies and experts for some of the projects. Jarovnice is also on the Plenipotentiary's list of 150 priority municipalities for the new programming period.

The CAG is able to mobilise the community and gain real support. A project application for sports equipment and support for the football team was drafted. One of the conditions of the donor ("Slovenska Sporitelna" Bank) was to have that support documented in the form of SMS messages sent in their favour. The local activists, together with the future footballers (the Roma children), campaigned door-to-door and managed to generate enough messages for their application to win. This may look like just a small step from a larger "Roma integration" perspective, but it is nevertheless a huge leap for the local people who saw how change is dependent primarily on their own activity and commitment.

Things are therefore set to move – slower than the local activists and authority would like but still in the right direction. What makes Jarovnice a case particularly worth promoting is that *"in Jarovnice, Roma are actively involved in the local government and this is one of the most important factors for success. This is how their voice is heard"*.

## Lessons forward

This local change has gained momentum due to long years of work and persistent investment that are starting to bear fruit. This momentum has been matched by the support provided by the ROMED2/ROMACT national facilitator and the active local people who are committed to facilitating the process in the municipality. At the same time, the people in local administration with their history of working on initiatives for Roma inclusion have sensitivity to, and awareness of, the issue. The work on the block of flats or the container school started before the establishment of the CAG, but the group has helped different stakeholders reach consensus on core priorities and helped further focus the decision-making process around tangible initiatives that can make a difference and energise the community. The CAG's participation in the decision-making process of the committees determining the important issues for the community is also real empowerment of the Roma. Last but not least, the CAG managed to achieve success in an apparently small issue (a successful project application). This apparently "minor" success is much more meaningful than just technical training. Such facilitation of the role of the Programme might be the right "niche" for its possible expansion in the future.

Another important factor for the success of the local cooperative process is the direct involvement of Roma in the decision-making process – they are directly represented in the local council (the majority of councillors are Roma). This involvement is also a major sustainability factor that is particularly important given the demographic trends in Jarovnice.

## Slovakia, Ziar nad Hronom Municipality

*Ziar nad Hronom is an example of how a good idea (that of bringing together local stakeholders through a CAG to achieve progress in Roma integration) can become meaningless if it does not take into consideration the complex reality on the ground. It suggests that it is unrealistic to expect immediate improvement in communities facing a combination of mutually-reinforcing factors, like unregulated land, unemployed and marginalised people, anti-Roma prejudice, a weak NGO sector and lack of financial resources. In such a situation, the establishment of a CAG and drafting of a joint action plan risks turning into a "box-ticking" exercise in response to donors' demands. It can raise people's expectations and demotivate them in the long run if such plans are not part of comprehensive integrated approaches coordinated with the National Roma Integration Strategies and matched with financial resources.*

### The Context: problems and opportunities

Ziar nad Hronom is a medium-sized city in Banskobystricky region, with a population of about 20,000 residents. During the 2011 census, 2.84% of them declared themselves to be Roma (1.94% in 2001). Experts, however, put the number of Roma higher because many do not report Roma ethnicity. The Joint Action Plan refers to "1,600 Roma listed" but does not specify by which criteria they have been "listed". Most of them are dispersed (integrated in the city). The most marginalised Roma live in a segregated settlement "Kortina" in the outskirts of the city.

Kortina emerged in 2007 when the municipality decided to privatise a hostel where several Roma families lived. Some of them were not paying the rent regularly and were creating problems for the municipality. When an investor popped up and expressed an interest in the building, the city administration decided that privatising the hostel would be an elegant way of getting "rid" of the Roma-related problems. The hostel was sold and the new owner evicted all families, both those paying and non-paying, in violation of the existing legal obligations regarding evictions which require the provision of alternative accommodation.

Having become homeless overnight, the Roma squatted on the outskirts of the city, which have gardens and garden houses. From the initial two families who squatted there, there are currently 85 families with an estimated 400 residents. The area is not suitable for permanent residence. It has no water supply or sewage system. In the zoning plan, the plots are either "gardens" or "forest", in both cases with restricted construction rights.

The community uses a water spring some 350-400m away. According to the situation analysis in the Joint Action Plan, only ten families have access to electricity but visibly all huts are connected. Electricity consumption is measured through a common meter; the amount due is distributed equally among users. Again, some are paying, others are not. There are cases of blackouts by the municipality due to unpaid bills and, as a result, some of the residents install their own generators and wish to separate and be independent from the municipality for the electricity supply.

The people in Kortina experience prejudice on a daily basis, as if it was their voluntary choice to live in such conditions. The "get rid of these gypsies" attitude is still broadly shared. It was only three years ago, after an outbreak of hepatitis in the Roma neighbourhood, that attitudes started changing and some support for tackling the problem at its source started emerging. More advocacy work would definitely help but, based on the interviews with local stakeholders, there are no strong and influential NGOs "working in the city for the city". The existing active NGOs (including the ROMACT National Support Organisation SKOLA) are not working in the Roma community in Kortina and most of their projects are targeted outside the city.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The CAG was established at the beginning of 2014 with the assistance of the national facilitator, Ingrid Kosova. It included four social workers (Roma women), one health assistant and three activists from the settlement (Roma men). The CAG conducted several meetings. Short-term and long-term

goals were set and an action plan was drafted with the support of the Head of Department of Social Policies in the Municipality, Ing. Minarova, and her colleagues. The plan has four “immediate” and five “long-term” priorities. The immediate priorities are lack of access to water, lack of access to electricity, “inability of the kids to spend time in the playground of the majority” and “poor hygiene habits of children entering the zero grades”.

The short-term goals envisage the relocation of a community centre, currently located in the city, to the segregated settlement (with the argument “to be close to the community”) and hosting it in a “container unit”<sup>3</sup>. A playground for children in the settlement was also among the priorities. Another goal shared by both the CAG and the representatives of the Social Department of the municipality was to improve the “hygienic conditions” of the people from the community through the establishment of a “hygienic centre” (public showers and washing machines, also in the ghetto, estimated cost 9,000 EUR).

In April 2016, when the evaluator visited the project, the community centre was where it used to be in the city centre and there was no playground.

There was no “hygiene unit” either and the Joint Action Plan gives some clues as to why. All four immediate priorities envisage “measures” for addressing them, but three out of the four state in brackets that they are “conditional on putting the land in regulation”. The current status of the land (gardens and forests) does not allow for any construction and no permanent infrastructure (water, sewage system) can be legally laid there.

The CAG does not exist now. A few active members continue their efforts for improving the conditions in the community independently. One of them is Michal Choler, a former member of the CAG. He lived in the hostel and was paying rent regularly, but his family was evicted with the rest. Michal has a dream of going home one day, turning on the tap and having flowing water. He also has a vision that the municipality lays down the central water supply pipes and each family “on their own account and with their own labour” connects their houses to it. He admits that relationships in the neighbourhood are tense, with everyone seeking rescue individually.

Ingrid Kosova sees demotivation as one of the reasons for such individual rescue strategies. The CAG raised expectations and, when nothing really happened, people got even more frustrated and demotivated. *“ROMED2 resembles to me the Decade of Roma Inclusion, which also had big plans and raised expectations but not much happened when real financial resources were not committed”*.

### Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government

In 2015, the municipality “improved” the access to the spring, laying the road with old chunks of asphalt – leftovers from old tarmac replaced in the city. Instead of dumping it, the asphalt was brought into the neighbourhood and “utilized” for “rehabilitation” of the muddy road.

Ingrid Kosova recalls the many meetings and discussions with various departments in the municipality. There is a willingness to solve the problems but it is not shared by all departments. The Social Department is “on board” but the others defer to legal constraints preventing them from taking action. The Mayor’s attitude was also positively evolving, unlike public attitudes in regards to Roma. Seen from today’s perspective, the national facilitator would have invested more in direct work with the individual members of the municipal council persuading them to vote in favour of taking action: *“Having a Joint Action Plan is not enough – a comprehensive integrated approach to the challenges of the marginalised Roma is needed. It has to be matched by financial commitment.”*

The Head of the Department of Social Policy of the municipality admits that the majority of residents in Ziar do not accept Roma and, nearly eight years after she started work on this issue, she still

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<sup>3</sup> These are modular constructions erected from specially engineered containers. Each container is one room fitted with the respective appliances depending on the purpose of the room.

meets fellow citizens who ask her “when will you remove these gypsies?”. She recognises the committed work of the local field social worker, Adriana Sarkoziova, admitting that without her there would be no access to the neighbourhood and no contact with the Roma community, yet *“instead of increasing, the number of field social workers was halved”*. Ing. Minarova also regrets that Ziar nad Hronom has vocal NGOs but they work elsewhere, they do not work in the city to change the majority’s attitude towards the Roma.

### Results and impact in the communities

The CAG in Ziar nad Hronom was established, the Joint Action Plan was drafted and listed the real problems the community of Kortina faces. Yet one wonders what its practical value can be if there are no legal channels to address the priorities that were set therein? The community needs a comprehensive, integrated approach to solving all interrelated challenges and not short-term initiatives detached from the reality that demotivate people in the long run. No wonder both sides (the people from the community and the institutions involved) are no longer excited, albeit for different reasons.

Any comprehensive approach needs bold determination and resources. Both are scarce in Ziar nad Hronom. The city is not among the 150 priority municipalities and a shortage of financial resources is expected. Anti-gypsy feeling is another real challenge. The local authorities seem to follow the general mood, putting all Roma (those paying their rent and those who did not) under a common denominator. The “resentment of the majority” is also used by some local councillors as an excuse not to act. Indeed, one cannot expect the municipality to legalise construction on the current land, but investing in social housing is a perfectly legal (but unused) option.

Investing in long-term solutions in a segregated settlement like Kortina (for example, in a decent water supply and sewage system) requires not just huge financial resources but is also against the latest regulations regarding ESIFs (EU Structural and Investment Funds), which prohibit spending of the latter on measures reinforcing or contributing to segregation. Even if the land was regulated, building and connecting a water supply and sewage system to the neighbourhood would fall into this category. This locks the local authorities and the community into a tough choice between the ineligible short-term improvement responding to emergency needs and an unrealistic “integrated” solution. As a result, no sustainable improvement for the community is in sight.

### Lessons forward

ROMED2 in Ziar nad Hronom did not yield tangible results on the ground but provides a number of important lessons. Firstly, it suggests that it is not realistic to expect immediate improvement in places like Kortina which face a combination of factors, like unregulated land, unemployed and marginalised people, anti-Roma prejudice, a weak NGO sector, and lack of resources. The establishment of the CAG and drafting of a plan does not help. Given the high expectations it raises, it may even contribute to further demotivation. It also shows that only comprehensive integrated approaches coordinated with the national strategies and matched with financial allocations have a chance of success.

Secondly, the regulations concerning ESIFs on non-segregation need to be implemented with the real people in sight. Obviously, one should not allow the erecting of segregated villages with EU money, but pretending that this ghetto does not exist until the next outburst of hepatitis is not an option either. Addressing the emergency needs on a temporary basis might be an option if it is part of, or conditional to, the existence of a comprehensive integrated solution.

Thirdly, any action violating the national and international legal obligations (such as mass evictions without provision of alternative accommodation) is not acceptable. It only triggers even more serious, and financially expensive, implications.

## Ukraine, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky Municipality

*The regional centre of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky has been an active participant in ROMED2 programme since 2014. There had been no Roma-related programmes in the region prior to ROMED2. The visit demonstrated highly motivated local authorities committed to Roma inclusion. The Community Action Group (CAG) is a mix of Roma representatives and local authorities. They have developed open and engaging communication and see the added value of such cooperation. Limited financial resources at the local level impede the development of plans, such as for increasing supply of social housing, supporting families in need or providing medical assistance. The results at this stage include targeted assistance to Roma families in need and establishment of effective cooperation of ROMED2 and local authorities. However, both local authorities and the ROMED2 National Project Officer (NPO) have the vision for the necessary steps for Roma inclusion and see the opportunities that could arise from fiscal decentralisation, increased self-governance and empowerment of Roma communities.*

### Context: problems and opportunities

The municipality of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky is located about 90 kilometres south of the capital city of Kyiv. Its population is around 30,000 (2013). The town has great cultural significance with around 20 different museums related to Ukrainian culture and ethnography. The main industries include services (trade and restaurants), a sewing company producing traditional Ukrainian embroidery and a local farm growing mink for fur production. Many residents commute to work in Kyiv.

The Roma population is not numerous and consists of around 600 people. Roma families live mainly in the villages in the region. The proximity to the capital makes the region attractive for Roma families who move seasonally from other parts of Ukraine. This makes the population of the settlement dispersed and changing overtime.

The problems of the local Roma community are similar to those in the other regions of Ukraine: mainly unemployment, housing issues, access to education for Roma children from families with many children, poverty and lack of social protection. There are cases of discrimination, in particular related to employment, for example, local supermarkets, despite having vacancies for different technical staff, refuse to hire Roma. Social housing is insufficient – the whole region has only one social housing building with 18 rooms. There are instances of discrimination when Roma are not able to rent adequate houses.

One of the most urgent problems in the municipality is the lack of financial resources to feed children. The families are big and may have up to ten children. Children need clothes, shoes, vitamins and school stationery. There are also particular gender problems in the region. Many women have reproductive health issues and cancer. Cases of domestic violence are frequently reported but women are generally afraid to file official complaints.

The level of organisation and mobilisation of the Roma community in the region is weak. There is no local Roma NGO and the young are not involved in civic or charity activities. In general, civil society at regional level is weaker than in the capital, with only a few groups dealing with social and human rights issues, including the Veterans of Chernobyl, and groups helping women with domestic violence issues.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

ROMED2 and the municipality of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky signed a cooperation agreement on 20 May 2014. The CAG was established as part of the Programme in September 2015. On average, eight CAG members participate in the meetings. Five of the CAG members are women. The CAG is a mixed

group of representatives of the Roma community and the local authorities. As its key priorities, the group has identified more visits to Roma families in the region, improved access to social protection of Roma women, support to families living in difficult conditions, and engagement of youth and children in social activities in the municipality.

In the long term, the CAG would like to focus on improving education, employment and the promotion of equal opportunities for Roma. There is also an idea to open a "Roma for Roma" centre to provide free consultations and information to Roma and explore ways of addressing the issues facing female victims of domestic violence.

The general dynamic in the CAG is positive and its members sustain regular communication with the community. However, the dynamic of the group's work often depends on the stimulus given by the mediator and the NFP (Chiricli Foundation). CAG members' motivation to participate is linked to their desire to improve the social conditions of Roma families and to contribute to the local community. The capacity of the CAG to increase the involvement of the Roma community is developing slowly. The key problem, as stated by a participant of the CAG during a meeting, is the *"lack of trust, as people do not believe they could get some tangible results out of such activism"*. Another obstacle at this stage comes from the dispersed settlement of Roma families in the villages around the municipality. The lack of funding for transport (local private mini buses are expensive) impedes the enlargement of the CAG at this stage.

CAG members are strongly motivated to create opportunities for the young generation of Roma. The young boy present at the meeting said he feels happy growing in the community and feels "no different" in terms of attitude from teachers or other children at school. His grandmother, a member of the CAG, mentioned that it would be great to showcase more Roma culture and engage more young Roma in local activities.

#### Interaction between CAG and local government

A special working group with CAG representatives and local authorities was created in June 2014. It consists of 11 representatives, including eight women and three men. The key priorities of the working group are the development of tolerant attitudes to the Roma community, improving access of Roma to social services, provision of support to women in a crisis situation and assistance to Roma children with special health issues.

Interaction between the CAG and local authorities takes place via regular meetings which usually take place in the municipality building or in communities (in the houses of Roma families). Sometimes, the Roma CAG members meet without the representatives of local authorities. When needed, the contact person, Mrs Lubov Onoprienko, invites state representatives from various services (registration, housing, health). The mediator and the contact person are always present at these meetings.

The National Focal Point and mediator often travel to the neighbouring villages to meet the community. For example, from January to March 2014, there were meetings with community groups in the village of Erkovtsi and in Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky, as well as three meetings in the municipality. Such visits are important as they help to identify the needs of the families. Local authorities also visit these communities regularly as part of their social support system.

The project has established great working relations with the local authorities. The contact person in the municipality is very committed, open to cooperation and extremely motivated to effectively address social issues. She participated in the exchange trip to the United States in the framework of another technical assistance programme in Ukraine and was inspired by the things she saw. At the same time, she had never had the opportunity to be on an exchange visit to EU countries to see working practices there. She regularly conducts individual meetings with the families and advocates for their interests in the municipality. The dialogue between the contact person, the CAG and the community is very effective.

The mediator working with the community is very experienced in mediation, in particular in women's health issues. She is highly respected but also overwhelmed with work, as she covers the Roma communities in Kyiv and the region. Recently, a new mediator was selected to work with the local Social Centre. She is a young Roma woman who was trained for her work by the Chiricli Foundation based on the ROMED1 curriculum.

The Local Action Plan was developed and approved on 21 January 2014. It includes a set of activities related to training for employment, assistance in solving social problems, support to Roma internally displaced people (IDP), celebration of International Roma Day, commemoration of Roma holocaust, training for regional government officials on Roma inclusion and health check-ups.

The plan is directly linked to the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) as it focuses on social issues, human rights, education, access to medical services, education, employment etc. The municipality gives serious priority to women, an area which is rather weak in the NRIS.

### Results and Impact in the Community

The most visible results in the municipality are related to supporting families with many children, as well as providing assistance to women with difficult family situations and victims of domestic violence. The work of the CAG covers a rather small segment of the Roma population and delivers fragmented results. However, it is able to support the neediest families.

From May 2014 onwards, the local municipality conducted a needs assessment of the Roma community and the information was transferred to the Centre of Family, Youth and Children to improve planning and service delivery.

The approach of the local municipality is to provide services to all citizens equally. The key contact person from the municipality is motivated to cooperating with the ROMED2 Programme because it provides them with a better understanding of local Roma issues, as well as the culture and mentality of Roma. Mediators are very useful for facilitating communication as local authorities often do not speak the languages of the Roma.

In 2015, in just three months of work, the working group produced the following results: six families raising 32 children received humanitarian assistance; four women received support in preparing documents for post-natal assistance; 32 Roma received access to medical services (including three linked to childbirth); and four people became employed. Families from Erkvitski village have many children and little financial resources. In order to address the problem of school attendance there, the CAG, with the municipality, tries to help by providing mentoring and support from the Social Centre (two families) or relocating some families into social housing (one family).

Special focus was given to Roma women and their health. These issues are regularly raised at the meetings dedicated to the status of women held at the working groups of state agencies, with the participation of the CAG, the National Project Officer and the mediator. As a result, the state provided temporary accommodation to victims of domestic violence in the Social Housing Centre. The Centre was opened several years ago with the help of western technical assistance and is now run and funded by the state.

Following the conflict in the Donbass, there were some Roma IDPs from the region. 22 people arrived from Luhansk oblast in 2014. The CAG, together with the local authorities, provided them with housing in the village of Guashyn and basic humanitarian assistance. After the relocation, the CAG representatives visited the families to provide psychological assistance and help mediate the relations with the local community.

### Lessons Forward

The ROMED2 Programme was successful in Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky municipality. The main drivers of success were the commitment of the local authorities, the hard work of local mediators, the interest on behalf of the Roma community and the visible benefits in terms of improved social services to

needy families resulting from the cooperative process between the CAG and the municipality. Some of the emerging lessons and needs for the future include:

- **Openness and determination of local authorities to cooperate on Roma issues is crucial.** Personal commitment of the head of the contact group is a major success factor. Opening up the vision of people holding key positions in local authorities and institutions can be supported by more exchanges as part of ROMED2 for the participating municipalities. Exchanges of experience among municipalities in the country were also mentioned as an important element for any future Programme. The municipality has allocated 670 EUR (20,000 UAH) in the local budget to the Roma action plan for assistance to families in crisis situations. This is a small amount but starts a good practice of public funding for solving Roma issues.
- **Viable and effective cooperation between civil society and local authorities takes time.** At this stage, the Programme has created the basis for effective partnership in the form of an action plan and good working relations between the mediator, Chiricli Foundation and the community. Sustainability is uncertain however. Both the local authorities and the CAG expressed the need to involve more young people into the CAG's work and to train several young people as activists. It is difficult to ensure sustainability at the moment in the municipality, where there are no Roma NGOs to develop the work. The CAG and activists should therefore consider setting up an organisation but, at this stage, CAG members are reluctant to take on such responsibility. The local municipality suggested including a CAG representative into the Regional Administration Civil Society Advisory Council, but nobody from the CAG has volunteered to join. Even if the NGO is established, it will require serious capacity-building efforts on behalf of the National Project Officer in order to develop advocacy, programme management and community mobilisation skills.
- **The empowerment of the local Roma community is a difficult and long-term undertaking.** It is particularly complicated in the areas of scattered settlements. The CAG is working well at this stage because it is a mixed group, including local government officials. The representatives of the community are not always active enough to drive the process, therefore the work of the mediator and the NPO is crucial. Their interest could also be stimulated by tangible results that the CAG could deliver. That is why it is important to share widely success stories of how the CAG improves the lives of the local Roma community. This could be done during local community meetings, publications in local media and radio programmes.
- **A lot depends on human resources and the ROMED2 training helped increase the capacity of social workers.** People have to be trained in how to approach Roma issues and the needs at local level for such skills are high. Joint training between Roma mediators and social workers could help reinforce the network, increase knowledge and break stereotypes.
- **A difficult political and economic situation in the country leads to a lack of financial resources for development.** Local authorities struggle with funding for social services. The only social housing project in the municipality was constructed with western donors' funding. Therefore, it is important to coordinate the work of donors in Ukraine around Roma issues and, where possible, join efforts together around infrastructural and technical assistance projects.
- **A shortcoming of ROMED2 is the lack of funding for small local projects that the Roma community could do to accelerate the trust and the process of empowerment.** The National Project Officer is trying to attract other project funding through the ROMED2 National Support Organisation, Chiricli. Chiricli is in a contracting process with the EU Delegation in Ukraine for a project that will include local small grants.
- **Decentralisation reform could provide a new pathway for working on Roma inclusion.** According to the reform, each village would have a village head (*starosta*) who could act as a communicator and a focal point for people living in the villages. Fiscal decentralisation would also allow communities to tailor their budgets in accordance to local needs. Financial resources would be accumulated at community level. It would be important for the budgetary process to be participatory and to involve the community. The Civil Society Advisory Council could be such a consultative body. It is important that Roma mediators and CAG representatives are active and



voice Roma needs. To achieve this, more capacity-building should be done for the CAG, mediators and local government officials on how to run consultations, plan budgets, do needs assessment and ensure inclusive decision-making.

## Ukraine, Darnytsia Region, City of Kyiv

*The work of ROMED2 in Darnytsia Region (Kyiv municipality) could serve as a pilot for developing effective Roma integration programmes in a large city. The diversity of the community, which includes both a small settlement and a group of Roma families permanently residing in Kyiv, provides an interesting case. The National Project Officer and the local mediator managed in a short period of time to develop effective working cooperation between the Community Action Group (CAG) and the local authorities. Despite challenges in sustaining the work of the Community Action Group, the Darnytsia case offers some interesting examples of how the conditions in the settlement can be improved, how cultural activities can help inclusion, how activities for children can stimulate the civic activity of adults, and how cooperation between mediators and local and national institutions can help develop new state standards for effective social work. It also points to the challenges of running the Programme in only one part of the capital, which is dependent on funding from the overall municipal budget and wider municipality's attitude toward Roma issues and integration policies need to be changed.*

### Context: problems and opportunities

With a population of over 200,000 people, Darnytsia is among the largest of the ten regions of the city of Kyiv. It has a strong economic base rooted in various industries including chemicals, machine building, transportation and consumer goods. There are over 30 industrial companies located on its territory.

Darnytsia is a multinational region with more than 100 various nationalities. The Roma population is not numerous and consists of around 600 people. Many Roma families live in apartments dispersed in the region. There is also a Roma settlement in the area of Teplovizorna with between 100 and 200 residents, including children. The settlers migrate from Western Ukraine (Zakarpattia oblast) due to lack of employment and insufficient living sustenance there, seeking better access to medical services in Kyiv and more job opportunities. Many Roma women come to Kyiv to give birth as they get better treatment. Roma usually collect metal and other goods from abandoned industrial sites, public waste bins or construction sites.

The key problems facing the Roma community in the region include unemployment, lack of affordable housing, lack of documents and social protection, and discrimination. Many large families have to share one room of ten square metres in size. There is also a lack of vocational training in order to get decently paid jobs. Most Roma are working on the market, as truck drivers or in construction.

In the settlement, there are problems related to sanitary conditions (no showers, no waste collection) and children dropping out of school. In the winter of 2016, there were between ten to 20 children living in the settlement. Since 2016, due to the difficult economic situation in the country, the numbers of families who temporarily migrate to Kyiv increased. This creates tensions between Roma and the local population. The Ukrainian media, often in search of sensationalism, only escalates the situation.

There is no Roma-led NGO in the area, so the ROMED2 National Support Organisation Chiricli plays a key role in serving the community. A non-Roma NGO, "Information and Training Centre" which is linked to the municipality, has started becoming more involved in Roma inclusion. Its leader is also working for the Darnytsia regional administration in the Department of Social Services. The NGO has received funding from the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) to improve the living conditions in the settlement.

The local social services are increasingly under pressure due to the large scale resettlement of Ukrainian internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Donbass region. An estimated 20,000 people from Donbass have settled in Darnytsia, one of the highest concentrations in the capital of Kyiv. Local service providers admit that they have difficulties in giving priority to Roma because of the large IDP community they have to serve.

### The Community Action Group (CAG)

The ROMED2 Programme and the district of Darnytsia signed a commitment letter in May 2014. The CAG members in Darnytsia changed during the implementation of the project. The original group included a core of five women living in Darnytsia who left Kyiv in December 2015. Their efforts were mainly directed at legalising their own houses and connecting them to the electricity system. They truly believed that the CAG would be a vehicle to help resolve this issue. Unfortunately, it was a lengthy, bureaucratic and ultimately unsuccessful process which led to the departure of the women from the CAG and indeed the city. The NPO subsequently had to start engaging new CAG members.

In January 2016, a new Community Action Group (CAG) was established from Roma representatives living in permanently in apartments in the region. On average, seven CAG members, four of whom are women, participated in the meetings. The CAG has an active leader who demonstrates interest and support. He is highly respected by the community and has contributed to its development, including leading the initiative to build a church in the area.

The Roma community of Darnytsia is very diverse. It consists of a settlement and Roma families who live permanently in the apartments. This creates two target groups with different sets of problems. While in the settlement there is a lack of basic living conditions and problems with documentation, the permanently-based Roma are struggling more with poor housing conditions, lack of employment and weak integration into the community. There is also a certain tension between the two groups, with some mutual accusations and stereotypes. The National Project Officer and local mediator are aware of these issues and are trying to address them by building links between the two groups. The leader of the new CAG is accompanying the National Project Officer and the mediator to the settlement to help arrange waste collection there. This interaction could help facilitate better understanding between Roma living in the settlement and Roma with permanent housing in Darnytsia.

There is good interaction between the new CAG leader and the National Project Officer. During the meeting with the CAG members, they also expressed their satisfaction with the cooperation with the National Project Officer and reported a positive attitude from the regional administration.

### Interaction between CAG and local government

A special working group with CAG representatives and local authorities was created in June 2014. The Head of Darnytsia District I Administration, Mr Gennadyj Sentsov, and the municipal contact person are very supportive.<sup>4</sup> The administration sees an added value in cooperating with ROMED2 because the Programme helps them to improve their access to the Roma community and increase their trust in institutions. It also helps to raise the understanding of Roma issues by the institutions.

Both officials participated in the 13th Annual Meeting of the Strasbourg Club related to refugees. The study visit to Strasbourg was supported by ROMED2. They visited several NGOs working with Roma, exchanged experiences with local administration and brought back to Kyiv new ideas inspired by approaches made by Strasbourg's municipality and local civil society. During the interviews, they mentioned how impressed they were to see how European municipalities are managing the issues related to the new wave of refugees and the systemic approach to addressing their needs in terms of housing, education and employment. The model for developing a stock of social housing was of particular interest to her as it could help solve some of the problems in Darnytsia district. This experience was inspiring and showed new ways of achieving Roma inclusion.

The key priorities of the CAG are the continuation of the courses for Roma children on culture and Romani language, assistance to Roma women victims of domestic violence, improved access to the pre-school (kindergarten), improved sanitary conditions in the settlement, provision of assistance to families with social housing and assistance with employment benefits and registration. In the medium term, in order to work on Roma inclusion in a strategic way, a Kyiv municipal programme needs to be

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<sup>4</sup> On 26 April 2016 Mr. Sentsov was dismissed from his position.

developed and adopted in order to secure state funding. At the time of this report, the drafting of this programme was only at the inception phase.

The Joint Action Plan for 2015 included activities such as a needs assessment of the Roma community, support to Roma mediators, support to Roma families in difficult situations, and involvement of Roma families in the local competition "Talents of families with many children". The Action Plan for 2016 has not been adopted yet but cooperation between the group and the municipal authorities continues.

The local authorities are trying to address the issue of Roma unemployment by searching for job opportunities which the rest of the population does not want to take. There is a plan for a local municipality project on the renovation of sewage collection and Roma could be offered some jobs there. Although low-qualified work, this could offer more steady income for families.

### Results and Impact in the Community

ROMED2 has developed a strong partnership with the local Darnytsia District I Administration and is steadily building trust among the local Roma community. The results of the cooperation are most visible in the areas of building cultural tolerance, improving the conditions in the settlement and developing opportunities from the Roma community to learn their language and traditions.

The settlement, which was regularly targeted in the past by police (including a major eviction on the eve of the Euro 2012 football championships), is now receiving more positive attention from the local authorities. The major issue of waste removal was solved through cooperation with them. An agreement was signed with the local utility company and waste will be removed from the settlement twice a week. Chiricli will pay the service fee and the regional administration will pay the price of the container. The funding comes from individual donations. The local authorities donated a container and waste bags. Roma from the settlement were given the opportunity to bathe and were provided with humanitarian help and medicine in cooperation with the private day centre charity for vulnerable groups "Stefania". The centre provides food, health and medical assistance to the homeless and other people in need. The National Focal Point approached the charity after a radio programme discussion, when one of the listeners suggested this idea. Now many Roma from the settlement know about the centre's work and regularly use its services.

Another positive result in the settlement is the decrease in the number of children who live there during the school year and a reduced number of cases children from the settlement who beg for money. This proves that the educational work conducted by the mediator, social workers and the National Focal Point with Roma settlers is bringing results.

As a result of ROMED2, the administration provided a place for the Roma permanent residents in the Regional Library, where the Romani language Sunday school takes place each week. The courses are getting more popular in Kyiv and parents from other regions of Kyiv have become interested. The school is run by the National Focal Point on a voluntary basis. Currently, around ten children attend the course. The fact that there is a place to convene where the children are occupied allows more time for their parents to work with the CAG. Thus, while the children study, their parents discuss local community problems and plan future activities together with the mediator.

A deliberate effort is made for the increased involvement of children in community life. For example, special invitations for the Christmas party organised by the local administration were sent to Roma families with many children. The children in the settlement were also pleasantly surprised by the visit of the representatives of the local administration dressed as Santa.

To facilitate Roma inclusion, Darnytsia integrated Roma into their annual Rodovid Festival of ethnic minorities. This idea was positively welcomed by the Roma community of Kyiv where the leading Roma theatre came to perform. They were invited each year but only joined when local Roma families could showcase their traditions. Darnytsia District Administration would like to expand this festival and engage Roma communities from all ROMED2 participating municipalities. For

International Roma Day in April 2016, the authorities hosted a photo exhibition featuring life stories of various Roma families. A Roma NGO from Odessa prepared the exhibition.

ROMED2 helped improve access to healthcare services. Thanks to the support from the District Administration, local hospitals and local polyclinics accepted Roma without registration papers for treatment and check-ups. The region is known for its good access to medical services for Roma.

In addition, the Programme contributed by joint work on State Standards with the Ministry of Social Policy. The Kiev Social Centre worked on the approval of the Standard together with the Roma mediator.

Darnytsia district is a leader in Kyiv in Roma inclusion and its leadership uses this fact to promote its work. A meeting was convened for all heads of Kyiv district administrations to discuss the need to develop a Roma Action Plan for the city of Kyiv. In November 2015, a representative from Darnytsia shared their experience in implementing ROMED2 at the OSCE National Meeting on Roma Strategy. Many high level officials from different regions of Ukraine attended the meeting.

Another important result is the development of active cooperation with the administration of the City of Strasbourg. The Erasmus Plus Programme has approved an exchange proposal submitted by Chiricli and Darnytsia District Administration for the European Voluntary Service. Starting from September 2016, one Roma volunteer will spend a month in the Education Department in Strasbourg. Roma youth from Ukraine are also included in Strasbourg administration's project for young people, Roma young people from Ukraine will also have an opportunity to participate in project activities organised in Strasbourg.

### Lessons Forward

The ROMED2 Programme's cooperation with Darnytsia district is a good model for the implementation of Roma inclusion in a large city. The main factors for success include the political will of the local administration to address Roma issues, a high level of trust in the National Focal Point and the National Support Organisation "Chiricli" led by her, both from the community and local authorities, and a creative approach to facilitating the work of the CAG with Roma by developing a weekend activity for their children.

Some of the emerging lessons and needs for the future include:

- ***The scale of Darnytsia region and the fact that it is located in the capital city of Kyiv creates additional challenges for community mobilisation.*** Large cities tend to be magnets for domestic migration for people in search of jobs and the local Roma community is also very mobile. The diversity of the Roma community (settlement and permanent residents) creates a diversity of needs, which are often hard to combine in one CAG. Therefore, it is important to find the right composition of the group that represents the different interests and needs of the community, whilst being effective and interested in civic activism at the same time.
- ***There is a growing understanding in Darnytsia that violent demolition of the settlement is not bringing lasting results, as Roma simply resettle nearby.*** What is needed is increased state attention and monitoring of the situation, mobilisation of the Roma community, and a coalition of non-state actors, including religious charities and NGOs. More financial resources are required for state centres for social protection to serve the Roma community. This effort should be accompanied by educational work in the community aimed at increasing tolerance toward Roma. The case of the Rodovid Festival is a good example of how stereotypes can be tackled and a more positive image of Roma promoted.
- ***ROMED2 was working in only one district of the city of Kyiv,*** which created certain limitations with regards to the opportunities and scope of such a Programme. Darnytsia's budget is dependent on the municipal budget. Kyiv city has no municipal programme for Roma inclusion and this blocks the effective development of ROMED and the scaling up of its activities. In this respect, the efforts of both Darnytsia's leadership and the National Project Officer to promote the Programme and bring it up to municipal level is a good strategy and should be continued.

- ***Goodwill, determination and commitment of regional authorities are the keys to the successful implementation of the Programme.*** The municipal contact person and the head of administration are determined to advance Roma inclusion and are looking into ways to sustain the work. There is a striking contrast to another region of Kyiv (Golossiv) where there is also a Roma settlement. The head of Golossiv shows no interest in cooperation and is even hostile to Roma issues. Local police regularly threaten the settlement. At the same time, Darnytsia is demonstrating the opposite approach of constructive cooperation with civil society and the community. The fact that a local non-Roma NGO is also getting involved in supporting Roma issues is also encouraging. The National Support Organisation Chiricli and the CAG should try to develop further Darnytsia district's cooperation strategy between all stakeholders in order to avoid competition for funding and conflicting priorities.
- ***Creating useful and meaningful encounters is a powerful means of attracting parents to participate.*** Chiricli's Sunday school for Roma children demonstrates how effective this could be for reinvigorating and stimulating adult participation. It also provides opportunities for more women to participate, while children are occupied with their activities.