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

## ANNEX 2 COUNTRY FINDINGS

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Creative Development Alternative

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European value(s)



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

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# 1 ROMED in Bulgaria

## Nikolay Kirilov, country expert Bulgaria

### 1.1 Introduction

According to the 2011 census, Bulgaria has 7,265 million inhabitants out of which 323,345 (4.8% of the total population) are people of Roma descent. The unofficial estimate is that the Roma of Bulgaria number between 700,000–800,000.

In recent decades, the Roma community in Bulgaria has faced difficult social exclusion challenges. Although the right to education is a basic human right, thousands of Roma children remain outside the education system. According to various institutions<sup>1</sup> 4.2% of children of school age do not attend school. Each year, nearly 18,000 children and youths drop out and leave school early, the number increasing with every subsequent educational level. The vast majority of Roma aged 18–24 leave education without obtaining a vocational or general upper secondary qualification and therefore lack an essential condition for participation in the labour market.

The infrastructure of Roma neighbourhoods is very poor – more than 40% of Roma live in houses without a water supply, 60% of houses are not connected to the central sewerage system and 80% have no indoor bathrooms. A number of neighbourhoods are outside of the city regulations and there is a serious problem of illegal housing construction. There are also serious issues with the health of Roma people and their access to healthcare services.

The National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) of the Bulgarian Government envisages a number of measures to address the structural problems of Roma social exclusion. The main challenge is the inadequate budget allocation for its implementation. A total of 71 out of 120 activities in the NRIS Action Plan are not budgeted for<sup>2</sup>. A positive step in late 2015 was the opening of Roma-targeted operations within the Science and Education Operational Programme which dedicates, for the first time, relatively significant financial resources to Roma integration, covering pre-school, school, high school and adult education. The operations provide opportunities for the engagement of diverse stakeholders - schools, municipalities, NGOs and universities. However, funding distribution is on a highly competitive basis and this is a challenge for the small municipalities in the greatest need of support for Roma inclusion initiatives, whose capacities are limited.

There is also a clear tendency of the decreasing political participation of Roma. The number of Roma city councillors at municipal level (between 100 and 200) was higher after the elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007 and decreased sharply after the 2011 elections (between 50 and 100)<sup>3</sup>.

Another alarming tendency is the deterioration of the overall public environment for Roma inclusion. In the past three years, there has been a significant rise in anti-Roma rhetoric and stereotypes, as well as anti-Roma clashes at local level, which have not been properly addressed by Bulgarian institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.bg/bg/themes/36>; [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014\\_roma-survey\\_education\\_tk0113748enc.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014_roma-survey_education_tk0113748enc.pdf);

[http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/bg\\_country\\_assessment\\_2015\\_web.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/bg_country_assessment_2015_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://amalipe.com/files/publications/amalipe\\_assesment\\_NRIS\\_2015.pdf](http://amalipe.com/files/publications/amalipe_assesment_NRIS_2015.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Roma in Bulgaria Information Guide, OSI Sofia 2008 (Ромите в България. Информационен справочник, институт „Отворено общество“ – София, 2008) and data from NGO research

## 1.2 ROMED1 key findings

### 1.2.1 Relevance

In the context of Bulgaria, intercultural mediation has a long history. Practices of health mediators and teacher assistants were piloted by a number of NGOs in the 1990s. The most successful experience was that of the health mediators, where pilot models of NGOs were expanded by large scale PHARE programmes and led to the institutionalisation of the position of health mediators. There is a national standard for the training of new health mediators: they are included in the NRIS as one of the successful practices in the country and there is a budget allocated by the Ministry of Finance for their remuneration. Since 2007, the national programme “Activating the inactive persons” has provided support to employment mediators.

Based on interviews with national and local stakeholders, ROMED1 is considered to be relevant to the needs of the country in several ways. Firstly, it provides the opportunity for upgrading the skills of practicing mediators in functional competencies that are usually missing in other trainings, focusing mostly on specific skills in the sector of work of mediators. Secondly, ROMED1 also reached out to employment mediators, who had not had as many opportunities for training as the health mediators. Last but not least, it brought back the focus of national institutions onto the importance of Roma mediators and their professional development. As mediators are already a well-established practice in the country, there is less attention on the development of systems for further upgrading their skills and for addressing the need of adopting the practice of mediators in other sectors such as education, where they are needed so much.

### 1.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

#### *Organisation and implementation of the ROMED training*

Over the period 2011-2014, ROMED1 provided training to 163 mediators, 154 of whom received ROMED1 training certificates. The distribution of mediators who completed the Programme and received certificates per year of training and type of mediator is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Distribution of certified mediators in Bulgaria 2011-2014<sup>4</sup>**

Year	Number of mediators	Women	Type of mediator	Number of locations
2011	14	11	Employment	13
2011	14	6	Health	13
2012	29	19	14 employment; 15 health	29 <sup>5</sup>
2014	96	62	6 health; 31 school; 59 <sup>6</sup> employment	55

<sup>4</sup> The data comes from the internal database on the ROMED1 training in all countries provided by the Council of Europe. Lists of participants per country are for mediators that completed the courses

<sup>5</sup> Only the health mediators noted their address, the 14 employment mediators had either an unknown location or did not provide an address

<sup>6</sup> At least ten of the employment mediators participated in the previous ROMED training in 2011-2012

Totals	153	98		76 <sup>7</sup>
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This data shows that the training included diverse groups of mediators. Out of the 153 certified mediators, 35 were health mediators, 87 employment mediators and 31 school mediators. More than half were women (64%).

There is a significant difference in the training programmes over time. Those implemented in 2011-2012 followed the complete training cycle of ROMED1. It resulted in 57 mediators who received ROMED1 certificates for completed courses. These training programmes included two sessions and a period of six months of practice in between. The overall work was coordinated by the National Focal Point (NFP), Mr Deyan Kolev, who is also the leader of the Amalipe Intercultural Centre, one of the leading Roma organisations in the country.

The training in 2014 was matched to the opportunity provided by the project “The Vulnerable Empowered” of the “Diverse and Equal” Roma association, funded by the NGO Programme of the EEA and Norway Grants with 17,883.64 EUR and aimed to train 102 mediators (health, school and employment) based on the ROMED methodology<sup>8</sup>. This training was developed as a much shorter version of the ROMED1 methodology and consisted of a three-day session for each of the four mixed groups of mediators organised in four different districts in the country. It did not include a period of six months’ practice and a follow-up second training of the same groups. The financial contribution of ROMED1 covered the cost of the trainers and the adaptation of the methodology for this shorter version of the training. ROMED1 issued certificates for 97 of the participating mediators.

From the interview with the “Diverse and Equal Association”, we did not receive any details on the participation of institutions and the follow-up to this training in terms of further promotion of the position of mediator. For this reason, the main findings of the ROMED1 Programme in Bulgaria relate to the core group of 57 mediators who were trained in 2011-2012 and received certificates for completing full courses and practice, as per the ROMED1 methodology.

The selection of mediators for the full ROMED training in 2011-2012 was done in close cooperation with the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII), which is the CAHROM National Contact Point in Bulgaria. Based on the interview with the NCCEII, they were consulted throughout the implementation of the Programme. This cooperation led to mobilising the involvement of other national institutions like the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Healthcare, as well as the National Network of Health Mediators in Bulgaria (NNHM). The employment mediators were selected by the National Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

#### *Feedback of mediators on the effectiveness of ROMED training*

Based on the two focus groups with trained mediators (one focus group with health mediators and another with employment mediators), the feedback on the usefulness of the ROMED1 training is very positive. The most valuable aspect was that the Programme focused on the role of the mediators and the human rights and empowerment perspectives of their work, which are lacking in other training for mediators. The involvement of institutions in some of the training days was also considered as useful and raised the profile of the mediators, however it was insufficient to ensure sustained understanding of the mediators’ work and to influence the improvement of employment conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the municipalities from the 2014 training are the same as those in the training from 2011-2012

<sup>8</sup> <http://ngogrants.bg/public/portfolios/proposal.cfm?id=49&applicantLevelID=3844&prID=14>

Feedback on the approach used by the ROMED trainers was very positive. They were knowledgeable about the local contexts and succeeded in “translating” the general methodology to respond to the local specificities. Mediators also valued the interactive way in which training sessions were conducted, allowing for sharing of practical cases from their everyday work. All mediators agreed that the idea of having six months’ practice was very good, but none of them considered that they received the required mentoring and support during this practice.

The main challenges to the effectiveness of the training were outlined in two areas. The first was the diversity of the mediators who participated, especially in terms of level of experience and previous capacity-building. The second challenge is rooted in the nature of work of the employment mediators. Based on their job description, they do not have field work and direct interaction with communities. They function more as an administration service to register the unemployed. From this perspective, it was difficult for them to apply the ROMED method in practice. Advocacy is needed for revising their job description and including field work as part of their tasks.

### 1.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

Based on the focus groups with mediators, ROMED1 contributed to the development of their functional capacities for more effective communication with institutions and with the community, as well as increased knowledge of human rights and the functioning of the institutions at local, national and international level. This, together with knowledge of the multiple aspects of the role of mediators, was viewed as the training’s main added value.

In terms of the “neutral role” of mediators and their impartiality in working with institutions and the community, most of the mediators shared that this is very difficult to achieve because they are employed by these institutions and are part of their staff. They have job descriptions to follow and, especially in the case of labour mediators, the job descriptions do not provide for field work directly in communities.

Participants of the focus groups did not refer to the Code of Ethics as a factor that contributed to better employment conditions; they valued the Council of Europe and European Union certification, but it made no direct contribution to changing the attitude of local institutions. They also pointed out that it took a long time after the training to receive the ROMED1 certificate.

As outlined in the focus groups, the recognition of local institutions remains a difficult task and, in some cases, it takes years to prove the beneficial effect of the work of mediators. For health mediators, critical to obtaining this recognition and ensuring that they are engaged only in mediation work is the support of the NNHM, which acts as a watchdog organisation and reacts immediately when cases of deviation or misuse of mediators are reported.

In terms of employment, the majority of the health and employment mediators continue to work. All of them were employed when they joined the ROMED1 training – health mediators on permanent contracts and labour mediators on temporary contracts renewed on an annual basis in the framework of the national programme “Activating the inactive people”. Based on the interviews with the NNHM, more than 70% of the mediators trained by ROMED1 are still working in their municipalities. There are different reasons as to why some of the mediators have since left their jobs. A few have decided to move abroad and look for better income opportunities. Others have continued their education in universities to pursue improved professional development. The NNHM also outlined a growing tendency

of “removing” health mediators for political reasons, especially after elections, when the new administration wants to hire people closer to them.

We did not succeed in obtaining concrete data on the employment status of employment mediators, as their network is less well-developed and they do not have such a database. However, it was reported that there is a much higher turnover among employment mediators due to unstable labour conditions (temporary contracts), as well as a very low pay (common for all mediators) at the minimum wage level of the country. Due to this, a number of employment mediators have left their jobs and are moving to other countries in search of a better income.

### *Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

Based on all interviews and focus groups, the mediators have an important contribution to make in increasing the access of Roma communities to various services in the locations where they are working. However, systematised data on this impact over a longer period of time is missing. As outlined by respondents, a serious problem is that there is no system of monitoring the impacts of the work of mediators as one of the measures of the NRIS for Roma inclusion.

Based on the reports developed by the NFP for the six month period of ROMED practice in 2011-2012, the health mediators assisted 844 people for routine immunisation and 772 for health screening, resolved 2,111 individual health cases and 2,268 social ones. They also provided support to 581 people from risk groups, including pregnant women and young mothers, as well as information on prevention of various diseases to 1,197 people through events and campaigns. Employment mediators registered and contributed to the employment of 281 unemployed people.

Due to the fact that the ROMED1 Training of Mediators Programme has ended in Bulgaria, there is no follow-up system to monitor the continuous effect of the work of the trained mediators in terms of increased access to services.

On a broader scale, the impact of the work of mediators can be illustrated with data provided by the NNHM which gathers systematised information from its members (195 health mediators, only 30 of whom were trained by ROMED1). Based on its annual report for 2015, the 195 health mediators provided 130,657 services to Roma individuals and families, as well as organising information campaigns. The majority of these services relate to healthcare prophylactic exams, immunisation campaigns, prevention campaigns, health literacy and information, reproductive health, campaigns and work with families for prevention of early marriages, and assisting people with documentation and health insurance, etc. Over the ten-year period of the work of the mediators, the level of immunisation of children in Roma settlements increased from very low to 90% at present.

A good development is that currently the NNHM is working together with the Ministry of Healthcare to establish a uniform reporting system on monitoring the results of the work of health mediators, which will be sent to municipalities.

### *Impact at the national level*

ROMED1 was well promoted at the national level by the NFP and the Programme was implemented in good cooperation with the relevant key national stakeholders – the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII), the Ministries of Labour and Social Policy and of Healthcare, as well as the National Network of Health Mediators in Bulgaria.

The NFP made special efforts to promote changes in the role of employment mediators, especially with the inclusion of direct field work in the communities as part of their job description. These included piloting field work practice in some municipalities (based on another of Amalipe’s project), as well as

numerous meetings with relevant national institutions. However, these efforts did not result in revising the employment mediators' job description.

The NFP was very successful in advocating at the National Employment Agency in order to end the trend of reducing the number of employment mediators employed practically by the national programme "Activating the inactive people". Although the initial aim of the programme was to hire at least 100 mediators, at the early stages of ROMED in 2011, their number had dropped to 59. Due to the active involvement of the NFP in 2012, the Agency increased the number to 96. However, at present the number of employment mediators has again dropped to around 60.

The NFP contributed directly to initiating the establishment of the new National Network of Labour Mediators, supporting, through one of Amalipe's projects, the initiation meeting of 18 employment mediators held in Veliko Turnovo in 2013. However, this new network did not receive follow-up support for its development as such resources were missing both in the ROMED1 and Amalipe Programmes.

ROMED1 did not make any contribution to the further development of the National Network of Health Mediators, which is also responsible for the training programme organised and accredited by the Government's educational institutions. More direct work with this network could have helped mainstream some of the ROMED training aspects amongst all health mediators in Bulgaria. The NNHM participated only as a resource for selecting participants for the initial training in 2011-2012, based on the suggestion of the CAHROM National Contact Point.

By providing training resources (curriculum and trainers) to the above-mentioned project of the Roma NGO "Diverse and Equal", ROMED technically increased its outreach to 97 more trained mediators, however the anticipated scale-up effect from this project seems to be missing. Some of the trained mediators did not get recognition as they do not cover established standards for their training and qualification (former health mediators). "Diverse and Equal" has formally registered a new network of teacher assistants (school mediators), but it exists only in terms of court registration and has no activities. The profession of school mediators is still not recognised. As "Diverse and Equal" deals with other projects as well, it has no follow-up work in support of mediators.

### 1.2.4 Sustainability

The professions of health and employment mediators are officially recognised, although the former is better established. Professional standards have been developed and health mediators are hired on long-term contracts by the municipalities which are funded by the Ministry of Finance. Municipalities have to pay for the training of new mediators which is delivered by accredited educational institutions and monitored by the National Network of Health Mediators. The main vulnerability in terms of sustainability is that there are no funds allocated from the Government for upgrading the training of hired mediators, which is considered as very important for the improvement of their work. So far, this has relied instead on project funds raised by the NNHM, most recently from a four-year international project with Glaxo SmithKline. As this project ends in 2017, the continuation of systematic upgrading of training of mediators will be challenging. The NNHM will need help to continue its effective advocacy work so that at least some core governmental support is allocated to the ongoing training of existing mediators.

There are no funds available for the training of employment mediators. The newly-established National Network of Labour Mediators needs further support to grow its capacity. The established network of teacher assistants/ school mediators exists only on paper and is not active in practice.



## 1.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 1.3.1 Relevance

All stakeholders participating in the evaluation, especially at local level, consider that ROMED2 is very relevant to the needs of Roma inclusion. Its main value is that it puts the empowerment of the Roma community at the centre of the work and aims to create sustainable mechanisms for its active participation in local development processes. By providing concrete instruments for interaction between the local authorities and organised community representatives in Community Action Groups (CAGs), it addresses an important need for expanding the local capacities for inclusive good governance in multi-ethnic communities.

ROMED2 came to the country at a very strategic moment of planning of the strategies, plans and programmes for applying the principles of cohesive regional policies for the period 2014-2020, as well as of drafting of the National Development Programme 2014-2020. One of the main principles for applying the instruments for regional development relates to overcoming all forms of discrimination in the process of planning and implementing regional strategies and plans. The ROMED2 approach provided local authorities with a tool to put into practice the necessary consultative process in the preparation of the local development plans. It also ensured the direct participation of the Roma community in this process by increasing their capacities to identify and constructively suggest the most important problems to be considered by the new development plans.

### 1.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

The ROMED2 Programme was launched in Bulgaria simultaneously with the ROMACT Programme in late October 2013.

The Roma association “Integro” was selected as the National Support Organisation (NSO) and its leader as the National Project Officer (NPO). Integro is one of the leading organisations in the country, with years of experience in initiating and testing new community-based approaches for integrated development in Roma communities. The National Focal Point (NFP) and national facilitators are experts with a lot of experience in working on various initiatives of Roma inclusion, especially at local level.

#### *Selection of municipalities*

Selection of municipalities to participate in ROMED2/ROMACT was carried out by the National Support Team in cooperation with the Open Society Institute, which was implementing the “Making the Most of the European Funds” (MERI) programme of OSF Budapest. Selection was based on the following criteria: the political will of the local government, the diversity of municipalities (in size and share of Roma population), previous experience of work on programmes for Roma inclusion, presence of active people in the Roma community and presence of working mediators (where possible trained by ROMED1).

The six selected ROMED2/ROMACT municipalities are very diverse in size, type, share of Roma population, history of work on Roma inclusion and level of economic development opportunities. Two of them are rural municipalities (Muglitzh and Tudzha), three are medium-sized cities (Byala Slatina, Sliven and Shumen), the latter two with a high percentage of Roma, and one is a large city (Varna). The municipalities are also very diverse in their history of successful policies and initiatives in Roma inclusion. In the majority of rural municipalities and medium-sized cities, Roma communities are also very diverse – some living in Roma neighbourhoods in urban areas, others in smaller or larger

communities in a number of villages surrounding a town acting as a municipal centre. In some municipalities, like Sliven, the two urban Roma neighbourhoods are very different, with little potential for cooperation between them.

Based on the interviews with stakeholders, there was no clarity on the vision for success and to what extent using the same approach and timeline could meet the expectations for success in all places with such diverse contexts. Last but not least, the six municipalities were selected to serve both ROMED2 and ROMACT. The two programmes started and ran simultaneously but with a different purpose and focus – ROMED2 is focused on community empowerment, while ROMACT's priority is the expanded capacity of municipalities for project generation. These different expectations for success require different resources, such as type of expertise, time and funding.

### *Development of the CAGs*

The CAGs were established in the first quarter of 2014, with the exception of Sliven where the process took longer and so the group was established later. The identification of the members of the groups was carried out by the National Support Team with the help of active mediators and active people in the community.

The groups differed in the number of people involved in the six municipalities and over time. While initially the CAGs were larger, varying between ten and 24 members, later in 2015 a tendency to see a decreased number of active members was outlined in the written reports of the NPO and confirmed in the interviews with the national team (with between five and ten core group members regularly attending CAG meetings). An exception was the CAG in Tundzha which remained comparatively stable - we met 17 people actively involved in the CAG.

Based on the case studies in two of the municipalities (Tundzha and Byala Slatina), as well as individual interviews with CAG members from other locations, the main motivation of the people to join the groups was to contribute to tangible changes in the life of their communities. An especially strong driver was the future of their children and their education, in order to offer them a better future.

CAGs are very diverse in terms of capacity, level of development, extent of sustained motivation for participation and outreach to the broader Roma communities. The effectiveness of their development depended on a number of interrelated factors – the specificities of the local Roma communities, level of experience in previous citizen action, experience and approach of the national facilitators and consistency of their presence to support the group, as well as the extent to which the interaction with local authorities brought tangible results or faced difficulties.

In some CAGs, like Tundzha, there was a shared and sustained motivation due to a positive set of factors – a good national facilitator, an open local authority, good representation of the diverse Roma communities from all villages in the municipality, as well as a shared vision of the CAG and the municipality for future development organised around education.

In other CAGs there were a number of difficulties, some relating to the challenge of representativeness of the CAGs of the diversity of local Roma communities:

- ***Organising one CAG in large and diverse urban Roma communities faced difficulties.*** An example is Sliven, where there is little communication between the two very different neighbourhoods. This made it difficult to organise one CAG representing the interests of both. The National Support Team had to get involved in conflict resolution among the members of the CAGs representing the two communities.

- **Organising one CAG to represent the interests of Roma communities in different locations within the municipality.** If, as in the case of Tundzha, the CAG was established by representatives of all Roma communities in the surrounding villages, in most of the other locations, members of the CAGs were mostly from urban neighbourhoods and representatives from the surrounding villages were not involved. This reduced the possibility of including them in the process of identifying needs and priorities for the local development plans.
- Last but not least, **the participation of local Roma NGOs in the CAGs also had different effects.** In cases like Tundzha, the local NGO "Patients with no Asthma" became a stimulus for the development of the CAG, whilst in Sliven the strong local NGO leaders were sometimes counterproductive to the strengthening of the CAG. In other places like Byala Slatina, the CAG had no communication with other local NGOs, which did not contribute to the effectiveness of either the CAG or the local NGOs.

A second group of challenges relates to the efficiency of the Programme itself, which is further outlined in the next section of the report.

In terms of linkage of the CAGs with the broader community, practices were also different. Based on the focus groups with the CAGs in the two municipalities, one of the good practices (well-established in Tundzha and at an earlier stage in Byala Slatina) was organising meetings with diverse interest groups, such as women and young people, to discuss their proposals and include them in the local community plan.

#### *Interaction with local authorities*

With the exception of Varna, the interaction between the CAG and the local authorities was constructive and beneficial. Varna, the largest municipality in ROMED/ROMACT, was excluded from the Programme. This was due to the growing resentment of the local council towards the Programme, increased conflicts and protests against Roma projects and, finally, the decision of the municipality not to adopt the local strategy for Roma integration. Without such a strategy the municipality cannot be eligible to apply under Operational Programmes. Another problem was that Varna is a very large city and it is questionable whether the establishment of only one CAG could effectively influence the challenging local processes, or if a broader coalition of a set of CAGs and organisations was needed to provide for greater representation of the Roma community.

Based on the two case studies, the local authorities were open to effective dialogue and cooperation with the CAGs and supportive to the ROMED/ROMACT process. They established institutional working groups and the municipal contact points were effective and cooperative. In Tundzha especially we saw a committed team of local administration supported by the mayor and his deputy and involving all key departments of the administration. They all work towards a common vision organised around education as a key engine for the development of the communities and for the future of the municipality.

In all municipalities except for Varna, the proposals developed by the CAGs were considered and included in the local development plans for 2012-2020. This is a great success of the Programme.

At the same time, this overall positive development of the interaction between the CAGs and the local authorities faced challenges linked to the political context. Low involvement at the political level of municipalities (the local councils) was noted in the ROMED/ROMACT reports as an obstacle in a number of municipalities (Varna, Sliven and Shumen). Even in Tundzha, which has a good record in work for Roma inclusion over a number of years, the newly-elected local council has not approved the budget for the administration and is not so supportive of Roma-related initiatives.

A factor that negatively affected the local processes was the increasing anti-Roma discourse of the campaigns around the early parliamentary elections in October 2014, as well as the local elections in October 2015. Even in places where the local administration cooperated with local Roma communities, representatives had to “hide” this more positive attitude if they wanted to be re-elected by a majority of voters negatively motivated by anti-Roma slogans.

### *Efficiency of support and resources provided*

A main factor that led to reduced motivation of the CAGs and reduced effectiveness of the local processes was the frequent change of facilitators (for example, in Byala Slatina), as well as the interruption of the Programme in 2015 when, for more than six months, the national facilitators were not contracted and resources for travel and support for CAG meetings were absent.

The main shortfall of the Programme was the very limited support given to the local activities and meetings of the CAGs. As outlined by the NPOs, *“we had in the budget money for the rental of meeting rooms, of multimedia and computers in order to show slides and educate the CAGs. Instead we could have invested this resource in the group”*. A small amount of funding in support of community initiatives of the CAGs could have helped the process of empowerment and trust of the broader community.

## 1.3.3 Outcomes and impact

### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

The main impact of the Programme towards the empowerment of Roma communities was the creation of the CAGs. This contributed to the individual empowerment of their members and, in some cases (for example in Tudzha), CAG members decided to continue their education in order to assume their new positions of people responsible for dialogue with institutions. Involvement in the groups increased the self-esteem of the participating Roma community members, who could have a say in the future development of their localities.

For many CAG members, this was the first opportunity to directly participate in the preparation of the local development plans. The Programme contributed to increasing their capacity to interact with local authorities and institutions and to developing collective demands for key issues that need to be improved. The increased recognition by local authorities of the CAGs as a real partner for identifying the issues and resolving urgent problems in the community made the members of the CAG feel like important actors in the local processes. At the same time, the members of the CAG still do not feel confident enough that they are at the level of equal partnership with the municipality and, in the majority of locations, they need the support of the national facilitators and the National Support Team to effectively maintain this interaction.

The CAG members are also turning into role models for the local communities and, by resolving concrete issues through consultation with people, they are gaining trust and respect and are modelling a new type of active citizenship behaviour.

### *Concrete results and impacts in communities*

The local development plans follow the priorities of the strategies for Roma inclusion in the areas of education, healthcare, housing and employment. The priorities developed by most of the CAGs and adopted by the plans also follow these areas, outlining the most urgent problems to be resolved in the short term as well as long-term priorities for development. Some of the suggested initiatives have already started to bring visible results and changes in the Roma neighbourhoods, even though development plans were adopted only in 2014, and the actual possibility of applying for funding from

the Operational Programmes started later in 2015. Some examples of planned or implemented initiatives are listed below:

- **Byala Slatina:** *Resolved infrastructural problems:* cleaning of the neighbourhood, installed street bumps and street lights, installed electric meters and resolved problems with electric company. *In the area of education:* renovated building for primary school (project for early childhood development "Me and my family" supported by the MLPS).
- **Maglizh:** *Resolved infrastructural issues:* provision of street lights, refuse containers, cleaning of drainage ditches in the Roma neighbourhood. *In the area of access to education:* renovated building for primary school (project for early childhood development "Me and my family" supported by the MLPS). *In the area of access to healthcare,* one health mediator was employed.
- **Shumen:** *Resolved infrastructural issues:* an illegal dumpsite located between two of the neighbourhoods was removed, street lights were repaired. *In the area of education:* ensured control of the school inspectorate for the school attendance of children; project for educational attendance of children developed, but not funded.
- **Sliven:** *Resolved infrastructural issues:* the removal of the illegal dumpsite in one of the neighbourhoods and its replacement by a playground. *In the area of education:* ensured transport of Roma children from one of the neighbourhoods to another area as a measure for school desegregation of Roma children.
- **Tundzha:** *Resolved infrastructural problems:* renovated more than ten streets in the Roma neighbourhoods in eight villages; installed street lights, resolved the problem with access to running water in one of the villages; built a playground for children; started procedures for the legalisation of Roma houses in the neighbourhoods. *In the area of education:* consistent work following the long-term strategy in education; built a new kindergarten for 47 children, a new school in one of the villages to ensure access of children from surrounding villages; eight school mediators employed on a project basis; 77 elderly people joined second chance education courses and are graduating from secondary school.

### *Impacts on policies at the national level*

The main impact of the Programme is the changing of local policies by including the requests of Roma communities in the local development plans for 2014-2020. As these plans were the backbone of the development of the National Development Plan 2014-2020 and the national programmes, ROMED/ROMACT has influenced the regional and national policies indirectly from the bottom up.

The National Support Organisation, Integro, promoted the Programme at all national meetings and through its involvement in national bodies and committees. However, in spite of these efforts, institutions at national level like the NCEDII did not feel consulted and informed about the Programme.

### *Sustainability*

The timeframe of the actual implementation of the project is very short (less than two years) in order to ensure sustainability of the processes initiated. The CAGs are very promising but will need assistance in identifying the best way of sustaining their work. Some are discussing establishing NGOs, but they will need to develop capacities to keep the participatory approach and principles of their work and to grow as community-based organisations.

Local authorities have started to recognise the importance of the involvement of Roma communities, but further work will be needed to sustain the political will for cooperation in the long term. Risk factors will be elections and increasing negatively-motivated votes, anti-Roma rhetoric and further discriminatory attacks against Roma in the country.

## 1.4 Lessons and recommendations

### 1.4.1 ROMED1

- The main lesson from ROMED1 is that, if sustainable improvement of the employment conditions of mediators is desired, **a more consistent strategy and allocation of resources will be needed that link training activities with potential advocacy objectives**; otherwise the Programme risks remaining fragmented and with reduced impact at national level.
- Matching support to a short-term project that delivered several more training programmes to mediators is good for expanding the outreach of the Programme, but **more strategic partnerships with NGOs or other actors are needed to achieve longer-term and sustained impact**.
- To sustain the impact of the Programme, **ROMED1 should consider providing targeted support to the development of the networks of mediators** to increase their capacity for sharing of learning and peer support, as well as joint advocacy of both older and newly-established networks for consistent capacity-building of employed mediators.

### 1.4.2 ROMED2

- The main lesson from ROMED2 is that **empowerment of Roma communities is a long-term process and requires more time to bring sustainable results** than the timeframe of a project of less than two years' duration. Investment in empowerment will require several stages - initiation, growth and phasing out - with a clear definition of desired changes and indicators of success.
- **This process is diverse among communities and requires a diversified approach and more time for the formation of the CAGs**. Much more in-depth analysis of the diversity of local Roma communities is needed at the initial stage. Better representation of the different groups and neighbourhoods is critical for the success of the local process. The approach can be adapted by forming more than one CAG to better address their interests, especially in big cities/towns with a lack of communication between the different Roma communities. This will also require facilitation to stimulate the joint work among the different CAGs or community-based interest groups.
- **A clear strategy for phasing in and phasing out of communities is needed in order to guide the process more strategically**. At present, there is no clarity in terms of desired success and sustainability, who will take the responsibility for the continuation of the processes initiated and in what way. Transfer of the ROMED2 processes to the ROMACT Programme since 2015 completely shifted the focus from community empowerment to capacity development of institutions for project generation.
- **The investment in the Community Action groups in the first six municipalities of ROMED2 should continue for at least two more years** as, at present, the groups and the local processes are still not sustainable.
- **In the next phase, ROMED2 needs to continue to support the successful models already showing a visible impact**. This will help sustain these models and use relevant local stakeholders – the local administration and CAG – as partners in assisting other municipalities in starting or expanding local Roma inclusion processes.
- **Better involvement of the national CAHROM National Contact Point** can help the strategic coherence of the local efforts of ROMED2 with other national programmes.
- **There is a need to develop a process and impact monitoring system** that can assist in extracting lessons for use in disseminating the approach to other places.

- ***More resources need to be allocated at the local level in support of the CAGs, including a small seed fund*** for actions generated by the community that will increase its capacity and trust in the process, as well as serve as a basis for attracting other resources.
- ***Dissemination of ROMED2 to new localities needs to be carried out in a strategic way*** with clarity of the selection criteria and a strategy for the timescale and desired sustainability of the intervention. Strategic partnerships and alliances with networks of other Roma NGOs, as well as with the National Network of the Municipalities in Bulgaria, can help in this process.

## 2 ROMED in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

**Nikolay Kirilov, country expert “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”**

### 2.1 Introduction

According to the official census (2001/2002), the population of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is 2,057,000 people, of which 53,879 (2.7%) are Roma. According to unofficial estimates, the number of Roma is over 100,000 people. Roma mostly live in neighbourhoods isolated from the majority population and are struggling with poverty, high unemployment and low levels of education.

Most Roma live in segregated settlements with very poor infrastructure and face social exclusion in a number of areas<sup>9</sup>. One of the main problems outlined by research, as well as by institutions, is the low educational level of Roma. Especially alarming is the 30% rate of Roma children who drop out of primary schools. Based on the regional survey of UNDP, the World Bank and the EC from 2011, around 17% of adult Roma are illiterate. Segregation in education remains a serious issue with Roma children attending only Roma schools or Roma children being placed in separate classes in the same school. Roma children are also over-represented in special schools for children with disabilities. They constitute 42.5% of students in special schools and 52% in special classes in mainstream schools, even though less than 10% of the population are Roma according to reasonable estimates. The majority of street children are from the Roma population (95%).

In 2011, the unemployment rate amongst Roma was 73%, much higher than the rest of the population (31% amongst Macedonians and 27% amongst Albanians). Not being registered at the Employment Agency, most unemployed Roma do not benefit from social allowances. Another serious social exclusion marker is the vulnerable health situation of Roma children and women, especially the low level of immunisation of Roma children.

Ongoing ethnic tensions and the current political crisis add challenges to the situation of the Roma, a situation that is already very delicate since they find themselves in between the interests of the larger Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities.

To address the complexity of the multiple social exclusion problems of the Roma population, the Government has adopted a number of strategic documents. The guiding public policy document is the “Strategy for the Roma - 2014-2020” adopted in 2014. It envisages integrated strategies for raising the level of education, increasing the opportunities for employment, and improving the quality of housing and the health status of Roma in the country.

Based on the Strategy and its Action Plan, a number of national programmes have been initiated. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in partnership with the Roma Education Fund (REF) is implementing a programme for more than 500 Roma tutors working with Roma pre-school children. There is a high commitment from the Government to ensure equal chances for Roma children to be involved in the pre-

<sup>9</sup> The data provided in the introduction is based on several sources:

[https://www.ertf.org/images/Reports/The\\_situation\\_of\\_Roma\\_in\\_Macedonia\\_01092015.pdf](https://www.ertf.org/images/Reports/The_situation_of_Roma_in_Macedonia_01092015.pdf)

<http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/macedonia-factsheet-education-en-30-august-2012.pdf>

[http://ombudsman.mk/EN/annual\\_reports.aspx](http://ombudsman.mk/EN/annual_reports.aspx)

UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey: [The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance](#)



school system. Evidence of this is the fact that, in the beginning, 80% of funding was provided by the REF, whereas now the Government provides 80% of the support to the project. Another important large-scale initiative at local level is the establishment of Roma Information Centres to increase the access of Roma communities to various services. In 2013, a project for health mediators piloted their work at municipal level to increase access of Roma to healthcare. An exchange visit with the National Network for Health Mediators in Bulgaria has encouraged learning from their experience.

## 2.2 ROMED1 key findings

### 2.2.1 Relevance

Based on the interviews with all national and local stakeholders, the ROMED1 Training of Mediators is highly relevant to the needs of the country. It responds to the priorities of the national policies for Roma inclusion and is strategically linked to the implementation of planned measures of the NRIS in the areas of education, access to healthcare and community development.

ROMED came at a time of intensive design and implementation of national programmes for educational tutors in schools and Roma Information Centres based in communities. It brought a new approach for the country concept of intercultural mediation which responded to the needs of these programmes. From this perspective, ROMED was recognised as an important capacity-building instrument to develop the human resources needed for the implementation of national strategies at local level. As a consequence, the training sessions in ROMED1 were demand-driven and based on the commitment of the Government to employing the trained mediators in the relevant programmes.

According to all respondents, the main value of the Programme is that it provided a comprehensive overall approach and concrete methods related to intercultural mediation that could be used in a practical way to improve communication between Roma communities and local institutions. There is a shared recognition of the benefits of mediators' presence in different areas as a new human resource of the Roma community, knowing its specificities and able to translate its needs to the local institutions, as well as to educate the community about existing policies and regulations.

### 2.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

The ROMED1 Programme was launched in 2011. After the first few months of implementation, it was agreed with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to change the initial ROMED1 National Focal Point (NFP) to an organisation having closer contact to the reality of mediation. The newly-selected NFP was the representative of the Roma organisation "Sonce" which has a good record of years of work for Roma inclusion, as well as a high level of credibility with national and local institutions. This, together with the established strategic partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) as the CAHROM National Contact Point, were the key success factors for the effectiveness of the ROMED1 training in the country.

From the very beginning, the NFP and the MLSP decided to position ROMED1 in a way that ensured synergy among all key national programmes for the Roma community. The selection of participants was linked to the needs of the existing programmes in the country. It was decided to include in the training programmes young Roma who were involved in the different types of programmes and institutions - representatives of the Roma Information Centres, as well as pre-school educational tutors - and to prepare health mediators and Roma working in institutions. All these players are part of the local level implementation system of the national programmes.

Based on the data provided by the NFP, ROMED1 provided training to 128 mediators from 16 municipalities in the period 2011-2015. More than half of the trainees (56%) were women. In total, 12 training sessions were organised for six groups of mediators. Each mediator passed through two training sessions and a six-month period of practice in between. The profile of trainees was very diverse and included 27 high school students, 24 pre-school tutors, representatives of 21 Roma Information Centres, 16 health mediators, 24 educational mediators and 16 NGO activists.

Selection of the various mediators was organised through a broad information campaign to publicise the opportunity to participate in the ROMED Programme within the Roma Information Centres, Roma NGOs and through Roma working in various local institutions. Participants were selected jointly by the MLSP and the NFP (and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health for the selection of health mediators).

The training design and implementation of ROMED1 is highly regarded by all interviewed stakeholders. The local trainers consider the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook as a very comprehensive guide to a variety of important aspects of intercultural mediation in both theory and practice. The best part in the ROMED approach was the flexibility to adapt the training to each of the groups. Due to the diversity of the participants, the trainers developed concrete approaches to address the specificities of their work. Each training session was designed to meet the needs of the concrete group and type of mediators trained, with the active participation of the NFP and the trainers. Another positive aspect of the training methodology was that there was a clear internal system for the assessment of the quality of the training and the performance of the trainers, based on the feedback of all participants.

Based on the focus group with mediators, the training was viewed as innovative, very participatory and useful. The feedback concerning the trainers was very positive, as they succeeded in linking the theory of ROMED1 with concrete examples coming from local practices. Most beneficial for the participants was the introduction of the concept of mediation, which was very new for all of them, as well as concrete tools for communication with the institutions and with the community.

The six-month practice period, when the mediators had concrete tasks related to their specific job, was highly valued. The mediators received ongoing support and mentoring from the NFP and the trainers. They also received badges identifying them as ROMED1 mediators, which helped them to be accepted by the local institutions. However, some of the mediators explained that there are still a lot of difficulties related to the attitude of institutions, rooted in a sometimes narrow understanding of the role of mediators.

With the exception of the initial problem concerning the first NFP, the ROMED1 Programme was implemented in a very efficient and effective way. Nevertheless, a serious contextual challenge for the Programme was the ongoing political crisis in the country.

### 2.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

The ROMED1 Programme has made a direct contribution, not only to the capacity development of mediators, but also to their recognition by local institutions and to their employment. The main success factor for this was the strong support for the Programme shown by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the CAHROM National Contact Point.

Based on the data provided by the ROMED1 NFP, the working status of the 128 mediators who were trained by ROMED1 in the period of 2011-2015 is as follows:

- 27 received internships in local institutions;

- 31 mediators were employed on long-term contracts;
- 68 mediators were employed on short-term contracts;
- only two of the trained mediators chose to emigrate and are currently working abroad.

The Council of Europe certificates and the badges bearing the name of the Programme helped in the recognition of mediators by local institutions. For example, this was among the reasons as to why health mediators were accepted by healthcare institutions. The good cooperation established at national level led to support given to mediators by other national programmes. A direct effect of ROMED1 was the employment of 20 school mediators funded by the Ministry of Education, with an allocated budget of 50,000 EUR.

According to the representatives of national and local institutions interviewed, the ROMED1 Programme has provided the means to increase the quality of the work of the mediators which, in turn, has contributed to increased recognition of the mediators' profession by institutions.

### *Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

Based on the interviews with national institutions, the contribution of trained mediators to the increased access of Roma to basic services is perceived as valuable. However, there is no systematised data available on the direct impact of their work. Although some information was gathered during the period of practice between the training sessions, existing reports focused more on the activities performed by mediators, rather than on the results of these activities. A good database of results achieved in terms of increased access to services by Roma community members is lacking.

We received evidence on the effectiveness of the work of mediators in education and pre-school tutors from the case study locations (Prilep and Tetovo) where local authorities consider that mediators made an important contribution in reducing the dropout rate from 30% to 15% for primary school children.

### *Impact at the national level*

Due to the strong support provided by the CAHROM National Contact Point and the close cooperation with the NFP, Sonce, as well as the support of Roma experts working in different institutions at national level, ROMED1 became a programme of strategic importance for the implementation of the country's strategy for Roma inclusion, as well as a capacity-building resource in support of all existing local programmes implementing national policies at municipal level.

ROMED1 has contributed directly to starting the institutionalisation process of the position of mediators in the country. As outlined in the previous section, national institutions like the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education became interested in supporting mediators. Currently, concrete national standards for the position of mediators are in the process of development. A number of local institutions that participated in the training are also increasingly recognising the benefit of employing mediators. Based on the interview with the CAHROM representative, the Programme is also mentioned in the EC Progress Report on "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Both the ROMED1 and ROMED2 Programmes have benefited from the support of the Office of the EU Delegation in Skopje.

## 2.2.4 Sustainability

There is strong demand in the country for continued capacity development of mediators – both for training of new mediators and for upgrading the skills of those that are already employed. At this stage, there are expectations that ROMED will continue and will assist in the preparation of new mediators. The need for preparation of new mediators was outlined in the interviews with the

representatives of both the national and the local authorities, as well as by the NFP and other Roma NGOs.

There are visible preconditions for sustainability. The main one is the commitment of the Government to allocate funds to employ more mediators. Evidence for this commitment is the case of the aforementioned joint project of the Ministry of Education with the Roma Education Fund. Whilst in the beginning the REF was providing most of the funding (80%) and the national contribution was only 20%, now the Ministry is already providing 80% of the costs for the employment of tutors and educational mediators, with only 20% coming from the REF. Future continuation of the ROMED training can follow this example and stimulate the rise in the share of national contribution for investment in consistent capacity-building for mediators in the country.

## 2.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 2.3.1 Relevance

All stakeholders consider the ROMED2 Programme as a timely and relevant investment in an important priority for the country – to support the interactive capacity for participatory development and implementation of local policies for Roma inclusion, which will translate the National Strategy for Roma (2014-2020) into practice, with a direct impact on Roma communities. ROMED2 is viewed as a strategic continuation of ROMED1, going deeper into the processes at the local level by developing active groups within the community and developing the capacity of these groups and local authorities to work together.

Like ROMED1, the new phase of the Programme is accepted as a synergetic contribution, optimising the efforts of all other national programmes that are present at local level. The Programme creates the capacity within the Roma community that is needed for the adequate planning and implementation of the programmes of local authorities. It guarantees the participation of community representatives in shaping local policies that are relevant to the real needs of communities, which will contribute to a more effective allocation of resources from local budgets, as well as the use of designated funds of national programmes at local level.

Based on interviews with the national authorities, there is increased support from the Government's budget for the implementation of the Strategy for Roma (2014-2020). The share of this support is growing compared to previous periods, when the majority of the funding came from external donors.

Increasing the local capacities of local authorities and Roma communities to develop good project initiatives is critical for the effective allocation of envisaged funds. The ROMED2 approach for creating cooperative processes at the local level is viewed as very relevant in meeting this need.

### 2.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Selection of municipalities*

The search for optimal synergies and use of resources between ROMED2 and all national programmes implemented locally guided both the start-up of the new ROMED phase and its overall implementation. One of the main criteria for selection of municipalities was to have active Roma people in the community and local governments open to Roma inclusion policies. The selection process also looked to involve diverse municipalities in terms of level of economic development, size, share of the Roma

population, experience of cooperation between Roma communities and local authorities. A third important aspect for selection of the localities of ROMED2 was to include municipalities which are working on other national programmes of the Government.

The NFP and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, as CAHROM National Contact Point, decided to identify new circles of local active people, not only the mediators who were already trained. The established CAGs were cooperating with mediators but, in contrast to other countries, CAGs were not formed around the mediators. In doing this, the Programme wanted to expand the social capital into Roma communities and avoid narrowing its effect to the same people.

The six municipalities initially selected in 2013 were Tetovo, Gostivar, Prilep, Bitola, Vinica and Stip. They are very diverse in terms of type and characteristics. Some municipalities are in the western part of the country, with much better economic development; others are from the eastern part of the country where the municipalities are much more economically deprived but more open to new initiatives and cooperation, as they have much less access to such opportunities.

The strong support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was critical for the successful start of the Programme and its subsequent implementation. The CAHROM National Contact Point sent letters to the local authorities with requests for support before launching any significant initial or follow up steps at local level. This helped the recognition of the Programme by the municipality and increased their support throughout the process. The experience of the National Support Organisation, Sonce, with some of the municipalities (through the Roma Decade) was also of help in the process.

### *Development of the CAGs*

The Community Action Groups were organised around local active representatives of the Roma community, identified with the proactive assistance of the NFP through its countrywide network of contacts of Roma activists. Each CAG that was formed in the first six municipalities had about 15 members. The number of women involved in the groups differed depending on the community. Out of the 90 members in total for all six CAGs, 40 members were women. The members of the CAGs were very diverse in terms of age, varying from 18 to 70 years. All of the groups have been stable and there is no tendency for demotivation or dropping out of members.

The motivation of people to get involved in the CAGs was to change the situation in their communities. Based on the case studies, each group had different dynamics. In cases like Prilep, the elderly representatives in the CAG were motivated by a cause, to build a mosque in the neighbourhood. Their presence in the group and the initiative to build the mosque raised trust in the broader community. This was the entry point to starting discussions on other important issues like the priorities of infrastructure and education, suggested especially by the younger members in the group. In the case of Tetovo, the CAGs were mobilised and supported by Sonce, which is based there.

Among the strengths of most of the CAGs is that they represent the interests of bigger groups inside the communities. This helped with the mobilisation of support from other community members for suggested initiatives. In the case of Prilep, the CAG succeeded in raising 300,000 EUR for the construction of the mosque from members of families who are working abroad. This was a significant matching of funding to the 30,000 EUR initially provided by the municipality's local budget and the Ministry of Transport and Communications. A major challenge in organising the CAGs was the fact that most of the members were people without knowledge about the structure, functioning and process of decision-making of administration at local and national level. Some of the members needed more time in order to learn how to communicate and work with the representatives of the administration.

Another challenge was how to balance the interests among members in the CAGs coming from different age groups. For example, in Prilep, the CAG had two main interest groups: the elderly leaders were grouped around the cause of building the mosque; whereas the group of young and educated Roma, who were also working in some of the structures or projects of local administration, became the driver for initiatives concerning the future of young people in the community, namely education and professional development.

### *Interaction with local authorities*

ROMED2 had high legitimacy with local authorities in all municipalities due to the visible support provided by the MLSP and the high credibility of the National Support Organisation. In all localities, the Programme is accepted as an instrument for developing local capacities to put in practice the national strategies and programmes for Roma inclusion. Each municipality has appointed a contact person for communication with the CAGs, with the process of interaction clearly structured by at least monthly meetings to consult on and develop the Joint Action Plans. Only in one municipality were there some problems with the deputy mayor, who was less open to supporting the local process (in Bitola). All six municipalities provided premises for the meetings of the CAGs.

Based on interviews with the local authorities in the two case study locations (Prilep and Tetovo) before the Programme began, they relied mostly on individual contacts with active people in the Roma community. Now they have a reliable partner like the CAG to discuss the issues of the whole community. This has helped in identifying needs by consulting the whole community, not just individuals. The regular communication established between the local authorities and the CAGs has helped the development of more adequate local plans and the resolution of emerging concrete problems of importance to the Roma community.

The effective interaction between the CAGs and the local authorities resulted in developing Joint Action Plans that were adopted in all six municipalities. All municipalities decided to include funds from their own budgets in support of initiatives from the local plans. All six initial ROMED2 municipalities, together with the CAGs, are also working on a number of project applications to access opportunities for funding from existing national programmes, as well as from IPA funds. The main challenge outlined in the interviews with local stakeholders was the uncertainty resulting from the ongoing political crisis, which makes long-term planning difficult.

### *Efficiency of provided support and resources*

The evaluation was focused on the initial six municipalities covered by ROMED2. Based on discussions with national and local stakeholders, the Programme was implemented in a very efficient way. The National Support Team organised 60 meetings in total with the CAGs and local authorities in the initial six ROMED municipalities. Communication and coordination within the team and with municipalities was good and effective. All local visits were planned according to the needs of each locality. The support demonstrated by the MLSP helped to ensure the credibility of the Programme with local institutions, as well as to increase the interest and openness of other national institutions.

The feedback from the CAGs and local authorities in the case study locations was very positive. They received timely and consistent support from the National Support Organisation and had very good communication with the national facilitators.

The National Support Organisation reported that the communication between the national team and the ROMED management team was very efficient, with no reported delays of contracting and payments.

### 2.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

The main impact of the Programme was the development of the CAGs as groups of active citizens able to interact with local authorities and contribute to local policy development. The members of the groups are people who come directly from the Roma community with little or no capacity to work with the local administration. Based on the focus groups with the two CAGs in the case study locations, ROMED2 has contributed to both their individual and group development. It served as a school for knowledge, skills and practical capacity for active citizenship.

Prior to ROMED2, members of the CAGs did not have the capacity to formulate and communicate to local authorities collective requests on behalf of the whole community. Based on the assistance provided by the Programme, the CAGs have much greater self-reliance that they can influence the local policy development processes. The CAG members had a direct contribution in the formulation of local plans for development, which makes them feel important and consulted actors in their municipality.

Another outcome of the Programme is that it assisted with the practice of employment of Roma in the local administration within different projects as tutors and educational mediators. The Roma local councillors also actively participate in the meetings of the CAGs with the local administration. This has contributed to the increased political support from, and openness of, local authorities to the cooperative processes initiated.

#### *Concrete results and impacts in communities*

The main visible results emerging in the majority of the communities are in the area of education. With the support of national programmes of the Ministry of Education, the majority of the six municipalities have hired tutors to work with Roma children in pre-school facilities and in primary schools. With the exception of Bitola, the initiative of hiring tutors and educational mediators resulted in reducing the dropout rate of children in primary school (second to fourth grades) in all municipalities from 30% to 15%. This outcome was outlined by all representatives of local authorities as a serious achievement that will impact the educational level of Roma communities in the long term.

Based on the two case studies, there is increasing attention to not only keeping Roma children in school, but also to ensuring that they have access to quality education. Both in Prilep and Tetovo, the educational projects are part of a long-term strategy for investment in local development through the increased educational achievements of Roma children and youth.

Another group of visible results relates to improved infrastructure in the Roma neighbourhoods. Projects for asphaltting streets were present in all of the six municipalities. In Gostivar, the municipality invested in urban plans for the development of the Roma neighbourhood and the resolution of issues regarding illegal housing. In Tetovo, the whole infrastructure of the neighbourhood has been improved.

In all municipalities, projects are planned and applications to existing IPA programmes have been made which will bring concrete results for improving the situation in local communities.

#### *Impacts on changes of policies at the national level*

The ROMED Programmes have had a visible impact at national level. The main factor for this was the strategic partnership established with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which provided consistent support to the local processes throughout the implementation. In addition to supporting the legitimacy of the Programmes with local authorities, it also helped ROMED2 municipalities to access IPA

funds by ensuring that some of the local priorities identified in the framework of the ROMED2 process were included in the programming for Roma issues within other Ministries. Examples of this were the recent institutionalisation of school mediators under the Ministry of Education, or the process of legalisation of houses in some Roma neighbourhoods in agreement with the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

ROMED2 invested in the promotion and high visibility of the Programme. Its objectives and emerging results were presented to the President of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Mr Gjeorge Ivanov, as well as to the Delegation of the European Union to “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and a delegation of DG NEAR visiting the country.

The recognition of the importance of ROMED2 resulted in its expansion to four more municipalities which have started local processes and the development of Joint Action Plans.

Based on the interview with the CAHROM National Contact Point, an important factor in the national level support given to the ROMED Programme is the presence of Roma in different institutions at national level. There are six Roma experts in the Ministry of Education and 12 Roma experts in different positions at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. This is in addition to the appointment of an increasing number of Roma in local administration, as well as the presence of a comparatively high number of locally-elected Roma councillors.

### 2.3.4 Sustainability

The timeframe of ROMED2 is too short to provide for the sustainability of the local processes initiated. However, there are a number of promising indications for the potential of sustainability in the future.

There is increased local awareness of the direct benefit of the ROMED2 processes, expressed by both the members of the CAGs and local institutions:

- Local authorities have an interest in having the CAGs as local partners to provide for consultation on the real needs of the community. Effective consultation with the CAGs increases the potential for development of successful initiatives and projects that can attract funding from national programmes to the local budgets, and is bound to bring about a change in the situation.
- The local CAGs are committed to continuing their work. In some cases, for example in Prilep, they have established local civic associations. The members of the CAGs have increased their capacity to interact with the local administration and with the community. However, the groups will still need support from the national team in order to make the step to becoming sustainable community structures.

Another important sustainability factor is the recognition of the ROMED2 Programme by the Government as an important instrument for the practical implementation of the strategies for Roma inclusion at local level, as well as the existence of national programmes in different areas that are accessible to municipalities.

## 2.4 Lessons and recommendations

The main lesson from the successful implementation of the two ROMED programmes in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is ***the importance of a strategic partnership with national authorities and the search for optimal synergy between ROMED and the existing national programmes***, to ensure the development of human resources inside the Roma community for their



implementation. This has contributed to an increased credibility and impact of both Programmes at local and national levels.

A second important lesson coming from local level is that the CAG development process is more effective if it is done not as a parallel project but as a ***stimulus to align the resources and participation of all local structures and other projects and Roma NGOs.***

Last but not least, ***the presence of Roma experts and representatives in national institutions and local administration, together with locally-elected Roma councillors,*** as well as their effective cooperation with Roma NGOs, has been another success factor in building sustained support for the ROMED Programmes at the different decision-making levels.

Based on interviews with all stakeholders, there is a strong demand for the continuation of the Programmes, whether for training more mediators or for continued support to the local processes. Some of the main recommendations for the continuation of the Programmes include:

- ***The ROMED Programme needs to continue,*** both in providing support to finalising the institutionalisation of the profession of mediators and in increasing the sustainability of the local processes initiated.
- ***The new phase of support for capacity development of mediators needs to be based on investment in increased national ownership of the Programme.*** It needs to be based on a clear strategy for creating sustainable national mechanisms by providing capacity-building programmes for new and existing mechanisms. This can involve increased matching of funding contributions from national resources to the ROMED training programmes over time.
- ***Developing national guidelines for training of mediators*** will help mainstream ROMED into national training programmes.
- ***The support to the initial ROMED2 municipalities needs to continue, with a clear focus on developing the capacity of the local CAGs for sustainability.*** At this moment, none of the groups is completely autonomous and they need continued assistance from the national team. Plans for sustainability of the local processes need to be developed for each municipality, defining clear benchmarks of success and sustainability.
- ***In expanding the Programme to new municipalities, it will be good to use the emerging successful models*** of the first group of localities, as well as practices coming from other ROMED countries.

## 3 ROMED in Hungary

**Anasztazia Nagy, country expert Hungary**

### 3.1 Introduction

Roma people in Hungary are Hungarian citizens of Roma descent. According to the 2011 census<sup>10</sup>, they comprise 3.18% of the total population, which alone makes them the largest minority in the country, although various estimates have put the number of Roma people as high as five to ten percent of the total population. The current demographic tendencies in the country may also lead to an increased percentage of the Roma population. The counties with the highest concentration of Roma are Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (officially 45,525 and 25,612 people in 2001 respectively), but there are other regions with a traditionally high Roma population, for example, parts of Baranya and the middle reaches of the Tisza valley.

Although Roma have lived in Hungary for centuries, they are facing ongoing problems related to social exclusion, with the very subject of Roma being a heated and disputed topic in the country. The majority of the Roma population is quite poor. Fair and equal access to quality education is limited which results in high unemployment and a perpetual cycle of poverty that further excludes Roma from mainstream society. Currently around 90% of Roma children complete primary education<sup>11</sup> but, at every subsequent level of education, the number of Roma children reduces. According to a survey from 2012, 8% of Roma do not continue their education; approximately 60% enrol in vocational school, 30% in vocational secondary school and some in secondary school<sup>12</sup>. The dropout rate among Roma is still almost twice as high as among non-Roma.

As the majority of Roma communities live in segregated areas, especially in the countryside, the national and local Roma strategies and programmes need to combine both projects directly dedicated to the development of these areas and mainstream policy interventions for Roma inclusion. However, today there are fewer national programmes directly aimed at improving the conditions of Roma communities at local level.<sup>13</sup>

Very few programmes provide support at local level. In the area of education, the “Sure Start”<sup>14</sup> Programme was piloted in several municipalities, aiming to support the early education and pre-schooling of Roma children. The “Tanoda” after-school programme is still one of the core funding sources for NGOs and church organisations, the latter being the entities preferred by governmental programmes for working for Roma. In the area of housing, cities are required to prepare Local Equal Opportunity Plans as parts of the Integrated Urban Development Strategies. The Plans identify systemic interventions (relevant to the entire city) to stop or reduce segregation. Local Equal Opportunity Plans became a statutory requirement for local governments under the Equal Opportunity Act. ERDF funding supports integrated housing projects for Roma and other marginalised communities. Integrated programmes aimed at improving social, community, educational, healthcare, employment and housing conditions will be implemented using both ESF and ERDF resources. Alongside the establishment of community centres to provide hygienic and other services for Roma, their housing needs will be targeted as well, including social housing.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz\\_sajto\\_20130328.pdf](https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz_sajto_20130328.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://romagov.kormany.hu/hungarian-national-social-inclusion-strategy-deep-poverty-child-poverty-and-the-roma>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.tarsadalomkutatas.hu/kkk.php?TPUBL-A-821/publikaciok/tpubl\\_a\\_821.pdf](http://www.tarsadalomkutatas.hu/kkk.php?TPUBL-A-821/publikaciok/tpubl_a_821.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/hungary/national-strategy/national\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/hungary/national-strategy/national_en.htm)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=202](http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=202)

## 3.2 ROMED1 key findings

### 3.2.1 Relevance

**The ROMED1 Programme demonstrated a new approach of working with Roma communities and local institutions in Hungary.** Its relevance was confirmed by mayors, local public administrators, mediators and the Roma communities interviewed.

The Hungarian Roma communities face intercultural tension and a high level of anti-Roma attitudes at local and national level; therefore, effective intercultural mediation is very much needed. In Hungary, the Roma mediator is not recognised as a profession, but in the public administration system there are similar social professions which target families with social problems. However, they do not aim to mediate the relations between the affected communities and the respective municipalities. The lack of Roma mediators was a relevant reason for including the country in the Programme and placing intercultural mediation on the policy agenda of local and national government.

### 3.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

A total of 45 mediators were trained through ROMED1, the majority of them women. ROMED1 training reached two different target groups in Hungary. During the first training session in 2011, the Programme trained Roma practitioners who already had work experience related to community empowerment of Roma, mainly due to civil initiatives and NGO projects. The second session in 2012 trained Roma university students from Romaversitas, a development and scholarship programme. The aim was to prepare students for using intercultural mediation to support the empowerment process within their home communities. Both groups completed three days of initial training and then a period of six months' practice, followed by an additional three days of training. The selection criteria of the first group was developed in cooperation with the Government and included as basic conditions the following: the active working status of participants, Roma origin, support of the employee and work experience with the Roma community.

Based on the interviews with trainers and the focus group with trained mediators and students, the training was useful for both beginners and more experienced participants. It provided beginners with a good basic knowledge of mediation and conflict resolution, while for the more experienced ones, it helped to adjust and correct their practice. More specifically, the trainees reported increased self-esteem, improved communication and better negotiation skills. Furthermore, they gained knowledge on conflict resolution, as well as on the meaning of the role of the mediator as an impartial link between the community and the local institutions.

ROMED trainees also pointed out that the national training programmes and international meetings **improved their social capital** of links and collaboration with other civil organisations, which was a very important added value of the Programme for them.

When Romaversitas became the National Focal Point, ROMED targeted a completely new group of trainees who were Romaversitas students with different educational backgrounds. Few of them had previous experience in direct work with their Roma community. Not all of them applied the skills gained during the training in the six months' practice, because the majority of the students did not live in their home communities, as they were studying, mostly in Budapest.

During the six months' practice, the trainees mapped the local problems, introduced themselves as ROMED mediators to the Roma community and local institutions and collected letters of support. One of

the weaknesses of the practical component of the ROMED training was that, although the trainees introduced themselves as mediators, they did not really know if they would continue to work as mediators in the future. Some of them were already out of work and the ROMED training was not instrumental in helping ensure their employment. During these six months, they also lacked the professional support and opportunity for peer support or common meetings to share their experiences.

Most of the mediators started with high expectations and motivation when they applied, but reported dissatisfaction by the end of the Programme. Their employment status did not change and they did not receive any further support after the training. According to the trainees, being a mediator with a certificate from the Council of Europe and the European Union certainly provided prestige, but in practice it did not contribute to their career development.

Since the Government did not partner with the Programme after the selection of the first group of trainees, an additional challenge for ROMED1 was to ensure the participation of local institutions in the training. The ROMED national team managed to include some municipality representatives in the training thanks to their contacts. The municipalities which took part in the ROMED1 training recognised the importance of mediation and also became part of the ROMED2 phase (Nagyecsed and Nyirbator).

### 3.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Impacts on mediators and communities*

ROMED1 made a positive contribution in increasing the capacities of the 47 people trained as mediators, but had a very limited impact in terms of increasing their employment by the municipalities, institutions or NGOs.

Participants from the first group of trainees mapped the local needs and problems of their community and established cooperation with local institutions as part of the practice period, but they could not move onto direct mediation work due to lack of employment. Among the second group trained, only a few of the university students went through the six months of practice.

During this short six-month period, trained mediators could not generate change in communities. As the majority of trained mediators remained unemployed, this reduced the opportunity to apply the acquired skills and contribute to better services in the communities. The lack of officially-recognised Roma mediators blocked the potential impact of ROMED, therefore the direct benefit of ROMED was reduced to only improving capacities of the participating trainees and the two municipalities which continued to participate in ROMED2.

#### *Impact at the national level*

ROMED1 could not generate impact at national level for Roma, as it had limited influence on decision makers, due to the lack of governmental support.

At the beginning of the Programme, the Government took an active role in the development of the criteria system and the selection process. During the development of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion, it also recognised the importance of community workers and mediators to help Roma gain access to better services. However, this did not lead to any follow-up steps in the further official recognition of mediators as a profession.

The ROMED1 Programme ended without cooperation and support from the Government, as it was not under its control and management. In addition to that, the Government disliked the political affiliation of the ROMED National Focal Point which also contributed to unsuccessful cooperation.

As part of the implementation of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion, the Roma National Government, in partnership with the Hungarian Government, has trained more than 1,000 Roma in the field of social work and child protection in 2015 through EU Funds. The aim was to increase the employability of Roma in these fields, which are closely linked to working with Roma communities and families. Although the Programme targeted Roma participants, the aim was not to specifically train Roma mediators, but to place Roma in the field of social work and child protection, which differ from the objectives of the ROMED Programme.

Currently, the ROMED team, together with other civic organisations, is advocating for the recognition of the Roma or intercultural mediator as a profession. The current ROMED2 National Support Organisation, "Partners Hungary", is one of the only NGOs in Hungary working for the recognition and institutionalisation of Roma mediation as a profession. Partners Hungary has years of experience in intercultural mediation and is trying to support the adoption of this practice, not only through their involvement in ROMED but also through other programmes.

### 3.2.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of the results of ROMED1 depended on the structural, financial and political aspects.

The fact that ROMED1 was a Programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union mobilised different stakeholders: the Government at the initial stage followed by NGOs, Roma mediators and some local institutions. Municipalities were, and are, more open to working with Roma mediators, due to the official participation of EU institutions. This also ensured the recognition of the Programme by other donors and civil organisations but, unfortunately, ROMED1 did not succeed in becoming a national programme.

The national trainers of the Programme ensured collaboration with other initiatives in the country. One such initiative is the Public Health Focused Model Programme for Primary Care Development, implemented under the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme. The model is implemented in four disadvantaged micro-regions of Hungary with a high proportion of Roma people. As part of this programme, in 2013 the ROMED trainers of Partners Hungary trained 48 intercultural health mediators based on the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook.

## 3.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 3.3.1 Relevance

Based on the interviews with national teams and all local stakeholders, ROMED2 is very relevant and necessary in the Hungarian context due to the anti-Roma attitude of society, as well as central and local administration officials. Intercultural mediation and community empowerment are ways of solving tensions in society and providing for equal access of Roma to development. Due to the lack of an officially-recognised Roma mediator status financed by the state in Hungary, the ROMED1 Programme has also high relevance in responding to the need to put mediation among the priorities of the Government in the field of Roma inclusion.

### 3.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Selection of municipalities*

ROMED2 was launched in Hungary together with the ROMACT Programme in October 2013 in seven localities. The selection of localities was done by the Council of Europe and the European Union according to a developed criteria system, such as the share of Roma as part of the population within the locality, the commitment of the municipality towards Roma inclusion, and the presence of other programmes in the locality. Of the seven localities, two are bigger urban areas, two are rural areas and the rest are medium-sized towns with a relevant share of Roma inhabitants.

The majority of the selected municipalities had trained mediators under ROMED1; in only two were mediators trained afterwards by the ROMED1 trainers. In the course of implementation, two localities dropped out due to lack of political will of the local authorities (Bag, Szeged). Only five localities remained fully involved in the ROMED2/ROMACT Programme.

#### *Development of the CAGs*

In each location, a Community Action Group (CAG) was formed. It mapped the local problems, identified priorities and developed community action plans. The Programme ensured continuous education for the members of the CAGs through monthly training.

The national team had approximately four months to establish the groups. Participation in the CAGs was open to everyone and members were invited by the local mediators. In the beginning, the groups involved approximately 10-15 members. Later, the number of participants in the CAGs was reduced to a smaller core group. In most of the localities, the fluctuation of members was high. The dynamics of the groups varied during the implementation period depending on the motivation of the members, the identified or available funds in support of possible actions and the level of openness and cooperation of the municipality.

CAG members came directly from the Roma community and had differing educational backgrounds and previous experience. The dynamics in the groups can be characterised by high motivation and a fast learning process during the first part of the Programme. Later on, especially in 2015, the development of the CAGs slowed down or became dormant in some places due to the inability to move from problem mapping to local actions. A main reason for this as outlined in interviews with national teams and local stakeholders was the lack of financial resources in support of local action. In some locations, the national facilitator or local mediator managed to include the CAG in other programmes to ensure small-scale action implementation, which contributed to maintaining the motivation of the participants.

The members of the CAGs identified the main problems of their community and suggested possible solutions. There were some initiatives where the broader community was involved in the actions. However, based on the findings in the case study locations, the communication between the CAG and the broader community was more ad hoc than regular. The Programme did not ensure regular meetings with the community to provide information about the work of CAGs and mobilise broader support.

#### *Interaction with local authorities*

The ROMED2 Programme established a new communication channel in each locality between the Roma community and the local authorities in the form of joint meetings through an appointed municipal contact point. The main result was that important issues of the Roma community and the most segregated areas of the municipality caught the attention of the local decision makers. Furthermore, this communication ensured the exchange of information between the community and institutions,

which was a mutual learning process for both the Roma communities and the non-Roma institutional representatives.

However, the discussions and interactions between the CAGs and local authorities were mainly initiated and facilitated by the national ROMED team and the Programme has not yet managed to develop independent cooperation between the local community and the municipality through the CAGs. This was due to the lack of contractual status of the local mediators and local budgetary allocations resulting in high expectations towards the national facilitators.

### *Efficiency of provided support and resources*

Although the Programme was launched in October 2013, it faced many administrative, financial and contractual delays, which resulted in approximately one and a half years of actual contractual implementation. Delayed contracts with experts, together with interrupted payments for local level interventions in the framework of the overall contractual delays due to the transition to ROMACT, resulted in reduced consistency of implementation of the Programme.

The lack of clarity and consistency of both the strategic and operational flow of the Programme placed staff in an unstable situation with the risk of losing their credibility in the localities. This has been outlined in the NPO's trimestral reports and was confirmed by the interviews with all members of the National Support Team. Reduced trust and questioning the consistent commitment of the Programme to support real change in communities was indicated in the interviews and discussions with both local authorities and community representatives in the case study locations.

A second challenge in Hungary was that the local mediators were without a job or had only short-term contracts in NGO projects. Following on from a request of the national team, the ROMED2 Programme introduced symbolic remuneration for the mediators in 2014. The mediators were also facing administrative difficulties during their work in terms of access to printing and copying services, as well as a lack of working equipment such as laptops. The mediators interviewed in the case study locations highlighted the imbalance between the low budgetary allocation at local level and the high expectation of the Programme for achieving impact.

## 3.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

The Programme contributed a great deal to the **informal civic education of community members through regular training** of the CAGs in topics such as citizenship, structure of public administration, community work (door-to-door visits), needs assessment and problem identification. This knowledge was very much appreciated by the CAG members. Based on the focus groups with the CAGs in the two case study locations, the Programme increased motivation for continued involvement, self-esteem, communication and negotiation skills, and self- and community-representation. The Programme also contributed to improved community cohesion and representation of community interests.

In terms of recognition of the CAGs and adopting their suggestions at the political level of municipalities, the situation differed. The local specificities, relationships and political leadership seriously limited the opportunities of the Programme. Two localities dropped out during the implementation due to hostility towards the Programme (Szeged and Bag). In these locations, Joint Action Plans were not developed. In the rest of the localities (with the exception of Nagyecsed), the Joint Action Plans were developed with the involvement of the local institutions, CAG members, mediators, National ROMED team and other local actors.

In three locations, the Joint Action Plans were included in the local policy or programmes of the municipality, including budgetary allocation for some of the implementation expenses. In Gyulaj, the Local Council approved the Joint Action Plan. In Pecs, the Joint Action Plan is incorporated into the Local Equal Opportunity Plan of the municipality, which is an obligatory document for each municipality. In Nyirbator, the Joint Action Plan was not approved as a separate document by the municipality, but some of its components were integrated into the plan of the municipality (for example, the local scholarship programme).

Based on the case studies, the Programme managed to reach out to the whole community through local actions such as organising the refuse collection and transport in Nyirbator and Nagyecséd. These were common initiatives of the CAG and municipalities. The CAG took the responsibility of informing the community about the means of transportation and payment obligations. Another good example of community mobilisation here is the celebration of International Roma Day on 8 April, organised together by the two Roma communities.

### *Concrete results and impacts in communities*

The major challenge to implementing the developed plans and generating concrete results and impacts respectively concerns the limited resources for local action, namely limited national programmes accessible at local level and no provision of financial support for small initiatives from ROMED2. The search for synergy with other programmes became a focus of the national ROMED2 team in Hungary. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Partners Hungary ensured additional training for CAG members and a very small amount of financial resources for action implementation. The concrete results in the localities achieved by ROMED2 with the support of other local actors and programmes include:

- **Jaszfenyszaru:** The local municipality committed to renovating some houses in the Roma community from the local budget. A needs assessment and planning of costs is ongoing at the moment.
- **Nyirbator:** Following the request of the CAG, the municipality introduced a second school bus for the pupils from the segregated area. In addition, the local council approved a local scholarship programme for primary and secondary school students with multiple disadvantages, financed by the municipality and local companies. In collaboration with the municipality, the CAG also organised proper collection and transportation of refuse from one part of Roma settlement, an initiative financed by the National Democratic Institute.
- **Nagyecséd:** The Programme drew the focus of the municipality to the challenges faced by one of the most disadvantaged subgroups of the local Roma community (the Romungro community). The CAG successfully organised proper refuse collection and transportation in the Roma settlement and cancelled the illegitimate debts of the households to the refuse transportation company. The action was financed by the National Democratic Institute.
- **Pecs (Istvan –akna):** The Programme put into focus the problems of Istvan -akna, one of the most isolated and disadvantaged areas of Pecs. Due to the efforts of the ROMED2/ROMACT national team and other local actors, the municipality provided a community centre to be used by the local Roma community. Another achievement was the decision to have a bus stop near to Istvan –akna, which helps the community to access the services of the town. The team ensured the inclusion of this isolated area in the local settlement development plan, which also involves solid budgetary allocation for the development of the segregated area.
- **Bag:** The composition of local Roma self-government has been changed thanks to the mobilisation of Roma community members during the elections, with the support of the ROMED2/ROMACT team and other local actors.



All of the above initiatives are small but important successes of the local communities and the cooperation process with municipalities. However, there is still no considerable visible progress towards changing the local situation. The Programme had its main impact on the CAG members and representatives of institutions thanks to the training and the exchange of information, which contributed to raising awareness of the barriers facing the local Roma community and cooperative capacity-building on both sides. The Programme managed to include some priorities identified by the CAG into the local policies and programmes for Roma, which may bring an impact for the local Roma communities in the longer term; this however will depend on the consistent assistance of the national team in identifying resources for the implementation of planned initiatives.

### 3.3.4 Sustainability

Due to the lack of cooperation from the Government, there is no indication of sustainability or inclusion of the Programme in the planning of national programmes.

The five municipalities are open to collaboration and further continuity of the Programme. There is a clear demand for continuation of their participation in the Programme. The institutional meetings with the involvement of community members were considered to be useful, as they ensured the exchange of direct information and proposals from the community which were then reflected into the local action plans and programmes of the municipality.

Currently, the CAGs are not fully operational in most of the localities, but their core members are still active and motivated to continue. They need further support from the national facilitators to develop as independent community structures (informal or formal) and expand emerging good practices of community participation. Without such support, the investment of the past years will be lost.

## 3.4 Lessons and recommendations

In Hungary, the need for intercultural mediation is high due to the negative attitudes and rhetoric about Roma. The results achieved by the ROMED Programme in terms of community development and local advocacy are significant, taking into account the lack of both governmental support and formal mediator status. In terms of future continuation, some lessons and recommendation for both Programmes include:

### 3.4.1 Lessons from ROMED1

- Intercultural mediation could not become part of the governmental strategies or programmes due to the lack of commitment and proper communication among the national and international stakeholders regarding their objectives.
- Due to the lack of official recognition of the status of the Roma mediator, the ROMED1 training remained sporadic and fragmented with ad hoc or temporary presence of the mediators at local level. This reduced its direct and sustainable impact on the Roma community.
- There was no country-specific strategic plan, which would set the direction regarding advocacy for national recognition of the status of Roma mediator. Currently, the ROMED National Support Organisation, Partners Hungary, is advocating for the recognition of intercultural mediation and development of accredited training, but this work will need support.
- The experiment with university students was reasonable due to the lack of official Roma mediators in Hungary. However, it did not support the long-term objectives of the Programme, since they were not employed as mediators.

- Adequate financial and continuous professional support was not ensured for trained local mediators in order to realise the application of the training at local level.
- The delayed financial and administrative process of the Programme was highlighted by stakeholders, trainers and mediators. This included the delayed sending of the certificates for the trained mediators, as well as payments of trainers.
- Collaboration with municipality representatives was limited. Due to the lack of government support, their participation in the training was ensured only partially.

### 3.4.2 Lessons from ROMED2

- Community empowerment and development are processes which require a longer timescale to reach a sufficient level of sustained practice and influence of decision makers. The capacities of the CAGs were developed due to the training and support of the ROMED team, however most of the members have a low educational background and the information provided by the trainers was new for them. It takes more time to internalise it and to use it in practice.
- The lack of continuity and constant presence of the Programme at the local level seriously affected its results and sustainability. The local members reported high expectations but very low financial allocation at local level. The delays and interruption of the Programme in the transition between ROMED2 and ROMACT, as well as the problematic contractual issues, reduced its actual implementation period to a year and a half.
- The involvement of women in the CAGs contributed to having education as one of the main priorities. Most of the CAGs identified different priorities, some of which included educational issues. The educational file was prioritised in Nyirbator, where the majority of the members of the CAG were women. Education was the highest priority for them because of their children.
- ROMED2 was aimed at community empowerment, skills development and problem identification, but had no support for local action implementation. The Programme had to rely on the mobilisation of other resources, which supported practically small initiatives of local people, contributing to the increased self-esteem and trust of the community.
- Strategic clarity of focus and expectations for impact was missing. Proper information flow between the three levels (international, national and local) concerning the main goal and especially the strategic link between the different focuses of ROMED2 and ROMACT, was not ensured
- There was no country-based or international exchange of positive and negative experiences among the localities and countries. This would have been very useful for the ROMED National Support Team and the CAGs in terms of learning from each other about effective negotiations with local government, approaches to mobilising community participation and identification of resources.
- The lack of initial provision for payment for local mediators was one of the main weaknesses of the Programme, which slowed down and narrowed the role of local facilitators of the CAGs and their interaction with institutions. This made the local process dependent on the ROMED national facilitators who initiated and facilitated the discussions between the Roma community and municipality.

#### Recommendations

***The main recommendation is that the ROMED Programmes should continue but with a more strategic synergy*** between the support of mediators and support of local processes of Roma empowerment for participation in local decision-making.

- The support to mediators needs to be more strategically-focused on addressing the major problem of lack of official recognition of their profession. All possible follow-up interventions should be organised around the purpose of effective advocacy at national level. Potential approaches may include:

- Support to advocacy efforts of the ROMED team and building a broader coalition of local actors around the promotion of intercultural mediation and its inclusion in national strategies.
- Training for existing “semi-mediators” (social workers) employed in the social sphere, but not specifically as Roma mediators. The Programme can identify these people and train them according to the ROMED methodology.
- Introducing the remuneration of Roma mediators as local facilitators in the locations of ROMED2, with the aim that they will be paid by public administration in the long run with the success of targeted advocacy efforts for recognition of the profession of mediation.
- ROMED2 support needs to continue with a more strategic focus on developing good models and clarity on how they will be mainstreamed to other localities. Some important aspects include:
  - Ensured continuity and constant presence at the local level to increase the probability of success in the initially-selected localities.
  - Transparent communication regarding the expectations and objectives of the ROMED2 and ROMACT Programmes at the local level where they are implemented, as well as at the national level.
  - Future expansion of the ROMED2 Programme should be based on a more strategic selection of municipalities. It will be important to target the towns with the highest number of Roma. By introducing the community participation and cooperative approach to local policy development in places with a high share of the Roma population, the Programme can expand the scope of its impact towards changes in Roma communities. In cases where local governments are not open to such cooperation, the Programme should give more time and focus to changing the attitude of local decision makers and their understanding of the benefits of Roma participation, developing CAGs which are more representative for the communities and consistent building of capacity and skills in advocacy.
  - Ensuring knowledge-sharing among the municipalities and countries which can support the creation of a network of municipalities open to Roma inclusion in the country for exchange and learning, as well as advocacy for allocation of more resources to the implementation of Roma inclusion strategies at the local level.
  - Entrusting greater financial responsibility to the National Support Organisation can assist the efficiency of contracting and paying the local facilitators. Local facilitators were paid based on contracts with the Council of Europe. They had to follow the same procedure as national facilitators, including providing reports on time and in English. Due to lack of knowledge of the language, reports were late and this led to delays in payments. If local contracts were handled by the national team, the process could become more efficient.

### 3.4.3 Specific recommendations for ROMED2:

- **Introducing small seed resources for locally-based action:** ROMED aimed to ensure community empowerment, skills development and problem identification, but had no tool for actions. Introducing small seed resources can ensure sustained motivation and will stimulate the empowerment of local groups and trust in the community; it can also help as a stimulus for attracting other resources.
- **Increasing proactive communication and outreach:** Introducing regular public forums can ensure formal sharing of information between the CAG and the community. It will also increase the visibility of results among the non-Roma majority.
- **Expanding the community links and constituency of the CAGs:** The CAGs can form additional community interest groups specialised in different areas, for example, education, health, employment. This can also ensure higher involvement of different segments of the community. It can be perceived as a new development phase for the CAGs – from small groups of dedicated citizens to community-based structures representing the variety of interests in the community.

- ***Mediators acting as a focal point in the localities:*** The mediator can become the contact person for other actors to ensure the harmonisation of ongoing projects at community level. Organising regular meetings among the actors implementing initiatives locally can avoid overlapping and can ensure increased impact for the local community.
- ***Increasing local ownership of the process:*** More direct contact between the municipality and the CAGs through more common consultations and training to gradually grow shared understanding and planned actions.
- The developed and approved Joint Action Plans should be incorporated into the Equal Opportunity Plans, the official documents of each municipality which are required for being eligible to access EU or national funds for development.

## 4 ROMED in Portugal

**Fernando Santos, country expert Portugal**

### 4.1 Introduction

The Roma population in Portugal is estimated at between 40,000 and 60,000, being distributed all over the national territory. Despite some improvements in past decades, their situation is still quite vulnerable and many families lack adequate access to basic services, facing social exclusion, discrimination, prejudice, poverty, high unemployment, loss of economic resources due to the decline of traditional occupations and low attendance at school, all together forming a complex barrier to integration.

From a policy and institutional perspective, several initiatives and interventions have emerged over the last twenty years: public departments (Office for Roma Communities in 2007 at the former ACIDI - High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue, now known as the ACM – High Commission for Migrations), working groups, formal strategies, funded projects, training programmes, awareness-raising campaigns and the founding of Roma NGOs all represent a positive trend towards Roma empowerment and inclusion.

Previous to ROMED, there were other initiatives promoting the role and the capacities of the intercultural mediator, organised by different institutions. For example, in 2003, an institution related to the Catholic Church, *Obra Nacional para a Pastoral dos Ciganos*, promoted training sessions on intercultural mediation, delivering diplomas to mediators. In October 2009, ACIDI launched a pilot national programme directed at municipal mediation, engaging a group of 15 municipalities. In 2011, a second phase of the programme involved another group of seven municipalities. In 2013, ROMED1 was organised on a sequential and complementary perspective to the national programme, having a synergistic effect. ROMED2 followed and brought a more innovative approach based on participatory methods.

### 4.2 ROMED1 key findings

#### 4.2.1 Relevance

ROMED1 in Portugal represented a step forward in terms of intercultural mediation focused on Roma inclusion, adding new perspectives and more resources to the efforts previously put in place by national initiatives. The ROMED1 training process brought an upgrade in terms of tools for municipal intercultural mediation, giving added value to the national programme of municipal mediators. The advancements brought by ROMED were positively recognised from the perspective of the several institutions involved, including mediators, municipalities and national institutions.

The ROMED1 training was especially relevant and valuable in five dimensions:

- **Conceptual:** a clearer definition of the role of the mediator according to a more neutral positioning in relation to the Roma community, the municipality and the other institutions.
- **Collaborative:** the work in tandem between the mediator and the municipal coordinator (technician) was approached from a collaborative team perspective, looking for a stronger commitment and engagement from the municipality.

- **Orientation:** adoption of a human rights perspective underlying the work of the mediator, reinforcing their civic consciousness. The European Code of Ethics was especially relevant.
- **Methodological:** the work cycle framework was very useful and well systematised, facilitating the work on the ground and the approach to the various situations.
- **Practical:** role-playing dynamics allowed a practical and positive interactive discussion, with a strong contribution to learning and sharing of perspectives.

#### 4.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

**The ROMED1 Programme in Portugal trained two groups with a total of 26 mediators (23 men and three women):** Group 1 in 2011-12 with 17 mediators trained and Group 2 in 2012-2013 with nine mediators trained. The institutional and organisational context was already defined by the national programme. The municipalities engaged had to recruit the Roma mediators, looking for individuals with adequate characteristics (for example, interpersonal skills), connection to the local communities, formal education levels (where possible) and a professional interest in becoming mediators (in some cases, the recruited individuals already had experience in mediation).

The national programme co-funded the salary of the mediators (75% in the first two years, 50% in the last two years), assuming a perspective of on-the-job training. That incentive was crucial for having a high number of municipalities applying for participation. Each municipality had to provide institutional conditions to the mediator and designated internal coordinators from the social departments to work in tandem with them. In general, during four years of the national programme, the mediators had three and a half days of training per month, consisting of different modules and content, giving them a wide professional background. The training was provided to both Roma mediator and to the coordinator at certain moments (sometimes with training differentiation).

**ROMED1 was viewed as a supplementary high quality module, being more insightful and practical,** in relation to the national programme. The training was especially useful and valuable to the first group of trainees (2011/2012) from the national programme, coming after many months of training, helping to clarify and to consolidate concepts and instruments. The second group of trainees (2012/2013) received ROMED1 sessions at the beginning of the training period. They were less useful, sometimes even confusing, due to a lower level of preparation of the new mediators.

During the six-month period between training sessions, the mediators were engaged in the application of the concepts and instruments delivered by the ROMED1 training. In several cases there were significant difficulties in working in the field, due to insufficient employment conditions and lack of support at the municipal level.

**The mediators needed greater institutional support and more permanent mentoring and advising.** Several municipalities created adequate conditions for the mediator to be able to perform their role, but, in many other cases, the lack of support, resources and vision about Roma mediation contributed to poor results. During 2012, a number of complementary follow-up activities and coaching sessions of mediators were organised with the ROMED trainers and NGOs. The coaching model was considered as positive in increasing the confidence of the mediators, but still more intensive and proximal mentoring was required. The ROMED trainers also organised additional workshops for two large Roma communities using elements from ROMED, the pedagogical approach and its Trainer's Handbook, to make local stakeholders more aware of the mediation challenges.

**The level of women's participation was low (three women) due to cultural factors.** The number of men available for performing the role of mediator was significantly higher. Nevertheless, the performance and the capacity of the women involved in the training were highly recognised by all mediators, trainers and institutions.

***The international design of the ROMED1 training was sufficiently adapted to the local situations and needs*** of the Portuguese mediators, providing a conceptual but also practical framework, reinforcing the national content that was transmitted to the trainees. The international trainers also brought an outside-in perspective, giving examples from other countries and experiences.

### 4.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

***The ROMED1 training had a positive contribution in increasing the capacities of mediators, but a very limited impact in terms of their employment in the municipalities.*** The mediators recognise that the ROMED1 training and Council of Europe certificate were important in improving their knowledge and presenting formal evidence of their technical capacities as mediators, in theory granting more employment conditions. Yet in reality, ROMED1 had an insignificant impact on the employment of the majority of the trainees.

Of the 26 mediators trained under ROMED1, six maintained an activity related to mediation; of those, only three were working as municipal mediators and they were hired in the framework of the second phase of ROMED2. The specific reality in each municipality was very important for the results achieved. There were cases of mediators with a strong impact on their municipalities (for example, Barcelos, Beja and Moura), in part due to their skills, personalities and relations with the communities. Those municipalities understood the potential for having adequate intermediation and looked for solutions to maintain those human resources after the end of the national programme, although generally under precarious contracts (short-term, low wages and uncertain renewal). However, the majority of the municipalities did not have the conditions required to keep their mediators after the end of the national incentives (partial payment of salaries). The economic context explains part of the problem (for example, the recession had an impact on restraining municipal admissions), but there was also a lack of recognition about the relevance of adequate mediation.

***Nevertheless, the ROMED1 training was useful for the municipal social departments to gain more knowledge about the Roma communities,*** their problems and cultural differences, acquiring a better understanding about the concept of mediation. In the beginning, there were different visions concerning the role of the mediator. Several municipalities looked at the mediator with a short-term perspective as problem solvers, employed to perform difficult tasks (for example, collecting house rental payments or calming Roma individuals in conflict situations). This corresponded to a more submissive vision of mediation (“Trojan Horse”). The ROMED1 training had a significant impact on the clarification of the role of the mediator, putting more attention on a human rights perspective and a more neutral position of the mediator in the relationship between the community and the municipalities. According to several mediators, that vision was not in line with the political perspective of several municipalities, having a harmful impact on the hiring of mediators.

#### *Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

***In general, trained mediators had a positive but limited impact on their Roma communities.*** In the municipalities that were able to assume conditions for a stable and continued process of mediation, there are several examples of increased access of Roma to public services:

- **Employment:** the mediator collaborated in job search and building a CV, helping to identify and to recommend opportunities to community members.
- **Education:** the mediator contributed to improving relations between schools and families, to reducing conflicts, to keeping children in school (for example, when a child misses classes for

several days, the mediator looks for an explanation and tries to create conditions for return to school), to raising awareness about school attendance and to helping families with female children in order to keep them in class for longer.

- **Overcoming digital exclusion:** due to lack of computers and skills, the Roma have limited access to digital services. Mediators have an important role in the intermediation of the digital relationship between individuals and institutions (for example, digital forms, emails, fiscal issues, etc.).
- **Healthcare:** the mediator helped book appointments for specialised medical care.
- **Conflict prevention:** the mediator gave recommendations to municipalities when action was needed in complicated neighbourhoods (for example, housing interventions).
- **Culture:** the mediator promoted Roma identity and cultural values in collaboration with the municipality (for example, organisation of socio-cultural events).

### *Impact at the national level*

***As complementary training to the National Programme, ROMED1 had some influence at the level of policy and national institutions.*** The institutional learning (for example by ACIDI's team) and the wider recognition of mediation as a line of action for social integration and inclusion are all policy gains.

***Mediation is becoming more important from a policy perspective.*** The National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Communities (2013-2020)<sup>15</sup> assumes mediation as the seventh strategic dimension to be followed, with three priorities to be considered: Priority 12 – To promote the training of socio-cultural Roma mediators; Priority 13 – To mainstream the programme of municipal mediators on a mid-term perspective; Priority 14 – To raise the awareness of public institutions of the role of intercultural mediation as a strategy for more inclusive services. From a financial perspective, the National Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and Employment (POISE 2020) on the investment priority (9i)<sup>16</sup> focused on active inclusion, will allocate structural funds for projects on municipal mediation, in line with the national strategy.

***ROMED1 contributed to reinforcing the importance of intercultural mediation in Portugal,*** working also as a "programme certification" or as a "valuable brand", adding value to the national programme of municipal mediation and improving its potential for communication. ROMED1 was an international Programme, conducted in Portugal with the support of the Council of Europe, raising political and media awareness on the subject of intercultural mediation.

## 4.2.4 Sustainability

***The sustainability of the results from ROMED1 was limited,*** especially at municipal level, where just a few trained mediators maintained their professional roles. This relates to the overall sustainability of the national training programme of mediators which gave a strong incentive (payment of a substantial part of the salaries for four years) for municipal recruitment of mediators, but once it was over, very few municipalities kept their mediators.

Nevertheless, there are some positive developments that have high sustainability potential:

- ***Mediation is a priority from the political and institutional perspective.*** There are expressions of interest in organising new training programmes for mediators, in line with the

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.acm.gov.pt/-/estrategia-nacional-para-as-comunidades-ciganas-enicc-concig>

<sup>16</sup> Page 105 of the Programme  
<https://www.portugal2020.pt/Portal2020/Media/Default/Docs/Programas%20Operacionais/TEXTOS%20INTEGRAIS%20DOS%20P O/PO ISE 17Nov14.pdf>



national strategy for Roma inclusion. According to the High Commission for Migrations (ACM), the ROMED1 content was valuable and could be used and adapted to the new training formats.

- ***The status of the mediator is gaining greater recognition and visibility.*** ROMED1 contributed to the introduction of additional capacities and a new institutional vision based on a modern concept of mediation, different from an older institutional vision that saw mediators as problem-solvers in the short term.
- ***Several ROMED1 mediators became associative leaders and gained the respect of national and international organisations.*** Two Roma NGOs were created upon the initiative of ROMED participants. In 2013, the Association Letras Nómadas started to work for the empowerment of Roma communities through the implementation of several projects and initiatives, sometimes in partnerships, becoming an important institutional player. The Council of Europe and the High Commission for Migrations (ACM) recognised their relevance and trusted their capacities to become the National Support Organisation for ROMED2 in Portugal on the ground, supporting the process in close connection with the municipalities. In 2014, the Association of Portuguese Roma Mediators was created, representing an institutional step forward in the consolidation of the status of the mediator, defending their rights and responsibilities.

## 4.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 4.3.1 Relevance

ROMED2 represented a relevant pioneer effort in terms of inclusion, democratic participation and social engagement in seven Portuguese municipalities. The Programme can be seen as a bottom-up participative approach built on the constitution of volunteer Community Action Groups (CAGs) at municipal level, complementing the role performed by the mediators.

Participatory planning and decision-making with a community-based perspective are long-term processes of organisational and social learning. If we consider the challenge of having Roma citizens' groups coming from a context of social exclusion, affected by prejudice, having low levels of formal education and no experience in community planning, more time is needed to build trust, ownership and working dynamics.

Many municipalities in Portugal were engaged in the Local Agenda 21, as community-based planning processes. There are some common elements with the participatory planning approach brought by ROMED2: a bottom-up perspective, citizens' volunteer participation, participatory methodologies, results on a long-term basis, sometimes the process (for example, group dynamics) is more important than the operational results (for example, organisation of a specific event). ROMED2 is more about building social capital, considering that many Roma communities are excluded from the rest of the local communities and are totally disconnected from democratic processes. ROMED2 may have an important role to play in the regeneration of social relations among communities at local level, if sustained in the long term.

### 4.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Selection of municipalities*

Nine municipalities from different regions of the country and with very diverse Roma demographics initiated the ROMED2 approach: Abrantes, Barcelos, Beja, Coimbra, Elvas, Figueira da Foz, Moura,

Seixal and Torres Vedras. Two of those municipalities dropped out due to political changes after the municipal elections (Coimbra) and lack of conditions to sustain local mediation processes (Abrantes).

The Office for Roma Communities (Gabinete de apoio às Comunidades Ciganas - GACI within ACM) had a key role in the selection of the municipalities, in dialogue with local authorities and Letras Nómadas, considering the following criteria:

- Continuity of the investment made under ROMED1 (seven selected municipalities participated in ROMED1).
- Availability of experienced mediators with working contracts in the municipalities.
- Territorial diversity and country representation (municipalities from north and south; interior and coastal; rural and urban characteristics).

### *Development of the Community Action Groups*

The members of the CAGs and the facilitators went through a continued process of organisational and social learning, based on the training provided by the National Support Team, in order to gain perspectives, methods and tools for conducting their work as a group. Project management skills were transmitted and a work cycle approach was established, helping to drive and focus the dynamic of the group. The ROMED2 framework was gradually integrated by the CAGs and several factors contributed to the process:

- **Leadership and active engagement of the National Support Team at the local level** in several dimensions – motivation, training, organisation, mentoring, reporting, institutional relations and communication of activities. The three members of the Team from Letras Nómadas – Bruno Gonçalves (National Project Officer), Olga Mariano and Luis Romão – were very dynamic and proactive in the relationship with the CAGs.
- **The political commitment and the operational support provided by the municipalities.** Considering the different characteristics and circumstances, the political and technical commitment of municipalities to the process was crucial for sustaining the CAG's work, especially by providing a salary for the local facilitator.
- **The dedication, stability and experience of the facilitators.** In several municipalities, the mediators were also acting as facilitators, becoming important in considering their contractual relationship for granting greater sustainability to the processes. The institutional stability of the facilitator/mediator was a very important driver. In periods of unemployment or uncertainty, the group dynamic was negatively affected. It is also important to highlight that there were significant differences of experience when comparing the seven facilitators, but in general they all had the characteristics needed to perform the role.
- **The CAGs' profile, composition and dynamics.** There are significant differences between the seven CAGs but, in general, they are composed of: 10-14 members; stronger presence of young men (age 25-35); reduced female presence (and in several cases married to a group member); trend towards more female participation (in Figueira da Foz, women already outnumber men); and significant presence of members from the evangelical church.

### *Interaction with local authorities*

There were different degrees of effectiveness in the interaction between the CAGs and the local authorities, depending on the specificities of the relations established over time. Examples of successful interactions include:

- **Technical and organisational support:** most of the municipalities provided rooms for the meetings and/or allowed the use of public equipment for cultural events of the community.

- **Employment:** most of the municipalities provided local jobs to members of the community following the CAG's request; in seven municipalities, approximately 30 jobs were created over almost two years, generally on temporary contracts.
- **Municipal diagnosis of Roma community:** in Torres Vedras, the facilitator, with the support of the CAG, conducted a survey of the local community.
- **Conflict prevention:** the municipality of Elvas was planning an intervention in a complex neighbourhood and the mayor asked for advice from CAG members.
- **Housing improvement:** in Beja, several houses in a poor neighbourhood presented isolation problems; the CAG gathered materials for covering the ceilings and prepared the intervention with municipal support.
- **Local planning for Roma inclusion:** in Seixal, the municipality is preparing a local strategy for Roma inclusion, planning actions on several dimensions.
- **Institutional communication:** in Elvas, when a formal request from the CAG is made, there is always a formal answer with an explanation for accepting or refusing the proposal, representing good practice in terms of interaction.

#### *Efficiency of provided support and resources*

ROMED2 can be considered as a cost-effective process from the Portuguese perspective, meaning that, with reduced financial and human resources directly allocated, the results achieved in terms of community engagement were significantly positive. ROMED2 funded the work of the National Support Team, whose members were responsible for managing the process all over the country and for providing training, technical support and motivation to local facilitators. In some cases, municipalities covered the salary of the local mediators who worked as facilitators, as well as basic support (for example, meetings rooms) or other resources that were needed or solicited. The members of the CAGs were volunteers, working for the benefit of the community.

### 4.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

Over time, CAG members increased their individual and organisational skills, for example, becoming more capable of formulating problems and proposing adequate solutions, considering the existing institutional channels and procedures. They are more capable of writing letters and reports with complaints, demands or proposals; they are more prepared as a group to organise meetings and events (for example, cultural festival); they have greater knowledge of the people and the institutions in charge of different situations (such as the maintenance of local equipment). The empowerment and capacity-building that is occurring, sometimes with practical results, is bringing a stronger recognition from different departments and institutions, as well as from the side of their Roma communities. CAG members are therefore gaining greater self-esteem and more trust, feeling a greater sense of municipal belonging, maintaining their Roma pride and community values. Some members expressed those ideas saying that "*we feel important*". The CAGs also have an important role in terms of local democracy. Efforts were made to motivate the CAG members to vote, in some cases for the first time.

#### *Concrete results and impacts towards social inclusion of communities*

ROMED2 is achieving concrete impacts at local level but is still very symbolic and localised. There is a learning curve and a process of group development that takes time to produce more tangible results. A few rounds of proposals (three or four per CAG) have been pushed forward, in some cases with positive outcomes. For now, the direct benefits for the community, especially in terms of access to public services, are still very limited but they have value. The CAGs are becoming more skilled in the

preparation of proposals and are gaining the respect and the trust of the municipalities. There are also some differences between CAGs in terms of maturity, capacity to formulate proposals and results achieved, but in general the trend is positive and constructive. Some examples of concrete achievements include:

Employment – most of the municipalities created job opportunities for Roma individuals (an average of four or five per municipality) having an impact on the life and budget of their families, showing that they are trustworthy and that the municipality is willing to give them chances, representing an inclusive example. In total, about thirty jobs were created. It is still symbolic in the context of communities with high levels of unemployment, but it is very important as a sign and as a trend for active inclusion.

Health – CAGs discussed initiatives related to healthcare in the communities. For example, in Figueira da Foz, the CAG is preparing a campaign related to dental care.

Local democracy – several members of CAGs voted for the first time after the efforts made by facilitators, representing also a positive trend towards democratic inclusion.

Religion – proposals for improving the conditions of the evangelical church (for example, payment of debts related to energy), benefiting the general community.

Culture and identity – organisation of events (photographic exhibitions, gastronomy festivals) to promote Roma values and create more awareness in the local community.

Citizenship and solidarity - organisation of solidarity initiatives (collection of food to donate to social care institutions) with an important impact for the image and reputation of Roma communities, showing that they are also willing to give and to help, despite their own difficult circumstances.

Education – ROMED2 contributed to the creation of conditions that enabled a group of Roma students to gain access to university. From several CAGs there were active younger members that over time expressed their interest and motivation in accessing higher education, if they had the necessary economic support. Letras Nómadas identified several young men and women and prepared a project called "Opré Chavalé", obtaining funding for university-level Roma scholarships under "Programme Escolhas" (a national programme that receives applications for inclusion projects). This innovative project gave eight scholarships to students from Roma communities, helping to improve the levels of formal education, working as an example of social inclusion. The Portuguese Government recognised the merit of the initiative and approved the funding of 25 additional scholarships for 2016-2017.

From the local perspective, looking at the priorities and the proposals made by the several CAGs, education was addressed more indirectly. There isn't significant evidence of increased access to school of children in the ROMED2 localities; the impacts are more relevant in terms of awareness and consciousness of the importance of children attending school in order to improve their future, especially for girls, with the message transmitted to the rest of the community. In several of the initiatives mentioned, efforts were made for women to engage in the process or to benefit from it.

### *Impacts on changes of policies at local and national level*

ROMED2 had an impact on municipal awareness and action regarding the problems Roma face. The CAGs became a sign of change and brought a more positive vision about Roma individuals and communities. Municipalities reinforced their efforts in order to gain better knowledge of their problems (for example, organising surveys) and responded positively to several requests. ROMED2 can also be seen as a network of municipalities working under a common agenda for Roma inclusion.

Municipal communication instruments and initiatives (for example, webpages, press releases and local news) were important for the motivation and self-esteem of the CAG members, giving greater visibility and importance to their work. For example, the municipality of Torres Vedras sought out media attention for the project and used several instruments to promote ROMED2. The National Support Team also developed many positive efforts in terms of communication of the process and results achieved, using several instruments such as social media (Facebook), newsletters, production of a documentary, photographic exhibition, presence in the media, etc.

There was a significant effort made by the National Support Team to find synergies with other institutions and national initiatives. One example is the aforementioned project Opré Chavalé for education scholarships. Some municipalities also applied to national programmes (such as Programme Escolhas), collaborating with Letras Nómadas, in order to promote initiatives focused on Roma communities, with the idea being formulated in the context of ROMED (for example, Torres Vedras gained funding for a project related to the history of families living in the municipality).

### 4.3.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of the ROMED2 local participatory processes can be seen with moderate optimism, since there is a significant level of motivation and institutionalisation of the Community Action Groups. ROMED2 involved nine municipalities at the beginning of the Programme in 2014; two years later, in 2016, seven CAGs were still functioning, showing signs of maturity. Yet seven municipalities in the context of three hundred and eight Portuguese municipalities is still symbolic and pioneering from an institutional perspective, far from a mainstreaming perspective at national level. Nevertheless, they can be seen as a sign of change and social commitment towards Roma inclusion, complementing the efforts made in mediation.

In the future, the CAGs may assume a more institutionalised dimension, becoming local associations, with statutes and formal directions in charge. For example, in Elvas the CAG members established the association “Silaba Dinamica”, maintaining the ROMED2 orientation but assuming a stronger formal identity. In Figueira da Foz, the members of the CAG created the association “Ribaltambição” and are trying to grow and gain greater capacities and more projects. In the future, they can apply for projects and grants as associations, having a chance to sustain the group’s activities, even without ROMED2 support.

## 4.4 Lessons and recommendations

### 4.4.1 ROMED1

From an overall perspective, ROMED1 was a positive Programme in Portugal, adding new perspectives and more resources to the national initiatives, representing an evolution in terms of mediation concepts and capacities, despite the limited results for the hiring of mediators in the municipalities. Some of the lessons from ROMED1 that can be used in future applications in the country include:

- ***Better and more permanent monitoring and mentoring of the work of mediators during the process*** (on-the-job training), giving more advice and support to the mediators on the ground, but also reinforcing the connection and the capacities of the municipal team at the technical level. ROMED1 became considerably distant from what was happening at the local level and mediators often felt unsupported, sometimes in municipalities with little interest in effective mediation.

- **More formal commitment on behalf of municipalities** - also considering the hiring of the mediators, granting them stability to perform their tasks, on fair contracts.
- **Greater investment in the Programme's communication and partnerships** – a stronger effort in communication to promote the Programme, the role of mediation and the results achieved over time, would create greater political and social awareness. Partnerships with other institutions could also be important in generating new synergies and wider ownership of the Programme.
- **Programme innovation and international training** – it would be interesting to provide training modules abroad so that mediators could learn about the reality in different countries. A kind of "Roma Erasmus for Mediators" would be an interesting innovation for the Programme.

#### 4.4.2 ROMED2

**ROMED2 as a bottom-up participatory Programme has a relevant and encouraging impact on the empowerment of the Roma communities** involved, representing an evolution in terms of inclusion processes and local democracy. There is a high level of satisfaction and recognition from the perspective of the municipalities and they would consider the continuity of the initiatives, even with changes and improvements, in order to gain more impact, efficiency and sustainability. There is an incremental recognition of the role of the CAGs, some small victories are achieved and in general there are steady communication channels with the municipalities. Facilitators are well known and recognised for their work, gaining credibility and support, but with uncertain and unstable contractual relationships which impact the motivation of the facilitator and consequently the group dynamic.

In terms of future recommendations for the Programme, there are five dimensions to be addressed:

- **To maintain or to renew the ROMED2 support to the municipalities already involved**, giving more time and conditions to allow the CAGs to gain more maturity and sustainability.
- **To enlarge the number of municipalities involved** taking into consideration the capacities and the resources allocated to the National Support Team, granting them conditions for adequate operational support. The Programme achieves a relevant level of visibility and several other municipalities might be interested, allowing the creation of a ROMED network of municipalities.
- **To ensure the hiring of the facilitator in each participating municipality in order to grant stability and sustainability for the CAG's working dynamic.** In some cases, the municipalities have difficulties in hiring mediators and/or facilitators due to poor formal education levels. In other situations, there are budget limitations. It would be important to identify solutions (such as a ROMED incentive or a ROMED mandatory rule) to avoid unclear situations regarding the role and conditions of the facilitators.
- **To consider the formal transition of CAGs into local Roma NGOs** and to design incentives which enable them to apply and to look for solutions for their projects.
- **To innovate in terms of participatory instruments** - for example, a national participatory forum could be promoted annually, bringing the members of several CAGs to a location in order to share and to discuss perspectives about the Programme. The Local Agenda 21 framework and the diversity of processes conducted can be used for inspiration.

## 5 ROMED in Romania

**Adriana Crisan, country expert Romania**

### 5.1 Introduction

Romania is the country with the largest Roma population among EU member states.

According to the latest census, out of 20,121,641 inhabitants, 621,573 have identified themselves as Roma, the second largest ethnic minority in Romania (after the Hungarians). About 62% of Roma live in the rural areas of the country. Expert estimates place the number of Roma much higher: between 1,200,000 and 2,500,000 (i.e. between 6.5% and 13.5% of the total population)<sup>17</sup>. If these alternative estimates are correct, the Roma would form the largest ethnic minority in the country.

Romania was among the countries in Europe that initiated, tested and mainstreamed the practice of intercultural mediation. The following Roma and non-Roma organisations were among the first to test the effectiveness of the Roma school mediator in specific schooling projects of Roma in the period 1994-1999: Romani CRISS, the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, Open Society Foundation, Centre Education 2000+, Project for Ethnic Relations and the Resource Centre for Roma Communities.

Emerging from pilot projects of leading NGOs in the country, school mediators' and health mediators' programmes were further expanded by large-scale PHARE projects and became a model of effective partnership between government at national and local level with NGOs, international organisations and donors, as well as private companies. Such collaboration is still imperative because only with the diverse support of broad-based partnerships, can mediators be institutionally - and professionally - prepared to meet the needs of the communities they serve, and to contribute to increased Roma inclusion.

The position of school mediators was officially recognised in 2007. School mediators are a clear priority in the Romanian Government Strategy for Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to Roma Minority (2014-2020). According to the interviews with national stakeholders and the Ministry of Education, the estimated needs for Romania are 40 school mediators per county, or over 1,600 school mediators for the whole country. The Directorate on Minority Languages of the Ministry of Education has developed a list of localities with a Roma school population; in over 30% of them, there is an urgent need to employ school mediators.

At this moment, a total of 415 school mediators have contracts and an additional 515 mediators have been trained, still waiting to be employed.

Health mediation in communities in Romania officially started in 2002 when the Ministry of Health issued Order 619/2002 on "approving the profession of health mediator and technical rules regarding the organisation, operation and financing work of mediators in 2002". Health mediation is an important measure under Objective 2 of Intervention 12 of the NRIS 2014-2020 on "Promoting health of women and children at community level - programme of child and family health".

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma>

## 5.2 ROMED1 key findings

### 5.2.1 Relevance

Given that the poverty cycle in the Roma community remains very pronounced, education is one of the most important factors that can make a sustainable change in the long term. The priority investment of the ROMED1 Programme in support of school mediators was considered by all stakeholders as very relevant to the needs of the country in terms of sustainable Roma inclusion. The Programme addressed a concrete need of expanding the professional development of school mediators which are present as a priority policy measure of intervention in Roma communities.

Based on interviews with different stakeholders, they consider the ROMED approach as highly needed and relevant for improving the work and recognition of mediators:

- Prior to the ROMED1 Programme, mediators had a submissive attitude toward institutions, whilst institutions had a superior attitude to Roma mediators and the Roma community. The ROMED approach brought a new human fundamental rights-based perspective. As outlined in the interview with a member of the international pedagogical team, *"children have the right to education, and from this point of view everything that mediators do is because the society has the duty and obligation to ensure the access to this right. It is not out of mercy but in respect to human fundamental rights"*.
- Until ROMED1, training for hiring school mediators in Romania was only based on curricula consisting mainly of topics related to understanding the community, specific communication with the community, history and culture, and the Romani language.
- The ROMED1 approach came with a broad set of knowledge and interdisciplinary skills that mediators go through and have to acquire. It also addressed potential problems that mediators may encounter in their work and focused on developing capacities to identify solutions for solving these problems. The ROMED1 training also provided tools for mediation of conflicts or tensions that may occur among the community and the school with teachers and institutions.

Most of the mediators interviewed share the idea that the ROMED1 Programme came with a new concept with very practical tools which, in their view, is the most important added-value aspect of the training.

**According to the interviews with national stakeholders, Roma mediators play a very important role.** They can notify the Ministry of Education and NGO watchdogs about the forms of discrimination within the school system and segregation practices. They assist in preventing school dropouts and provide live connections between the school and community, helping improve the communication between them. However, Roma mediators also face a number of challenges. The Roma mediator's role is to facilitate access to rights and to improve communication between Roma communities and institutions. A major challenge is the lack of communication and trust between the two sides. In some cases, mediators are used to making the access of Roma to institutions more difficult. Mediators are given the task of solving the problems and taking the responsibility away from the institution, which in practice leads to reduced interaction between the community members and local institutions.

### 5.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training Process

The initial phase of ROMED1 involved an intensive consultation process with local stakeholders. There were four meetings for participatory development of the training design with the involvement of leading



people and experts in Roma inclusion and intercultural mediation, a number of them involved in the ROMED2 national team.

Another important factor for the design and successful implementation of the Programme was the active collaboration with representatives from the Ministry of Education, Mr Gheorghe Sarau and Mr Florin Fleican, as well as from the National Agency for Roma, which was serving as NFP for a while. This helped facilitate the outreach of the ROMED Programme countrywide. The Programme also had active collaboration with the Sastipen Association, which at that time was implementing a large-scale programme for training health mediators with the support of EU funds. It was agreed that the association would use some elements of the ROMED approach in the training of 100 women working as health mediators in all development regions.

ROMED1 training involved in total 347 mediators, mostly school and health mediators. The share of women trainees was high: women made up the majority of trained health mediators and 65% of the trained school mediators.

From 2011 to 2012, two groups of mediators were involved in the training in Romania: 20 school mediators and 22 health mediators. All of them already had rich work experience as mediators. They perceived that the ROMED1 training brought additional valuable elements, especially approaches to reducing the negative side effects encountered in practice, as well as stimulating more active involvement of the members of the Roma communities.

In the period 2012-2013, 237 school and community mediators (125 females and 112 males) from 37 counties of Romania were trained over four parallel sessions. The National Agency for Roma as NFP helped to organise the training and the Ministry of Education and Research took part in it. Sessions were also attended by 37 school inspectors and representatives from decision-making bodies at county level who listened to mediators' experiences. A very positive element was that the school mediators were accompanied by the school director or representatives of the school management. This generated very positive dynamics and provided a better likelihood that mediators would continue practicing their skills afterwards, both the principles specified in the Code of Ethics and the tools presented during the training.

The selection of school mediators was done by the Ministry of Education, which sent letters to the county inspectorates to identify participants for the training. Health mediators were selected by the National Agency for Roma in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The main criterion for participation in the ROMED1 training was that mediators were already employed, thus meeting the Programme's objective of increasing the effectiveness of mediators who were already employed. According to the participants in the ROMED1 training, the most relevant element for the work of mediators was the Code of Ethics, providing a clear definition and explanation of the responsibilities of a school mediator. The period of six months of practice with clear tasks of putting acquired skills into practice was also highly appreciated.

From the perspective of most of the trainers and national stakeholders interviewed, one challenge was that the Programme had no resources for real and tangible mentoring during the practice period. However, even though the trainers did not go into the field during the six-month period of practice, they kept in touch with trainees by phone and email, giving them support and advice. Some mediators contacted the trainers and asked for support.

The ROMED1 Programme has not replaced or duplicated the existing local or national training programmes, but instead complemented them by adding tools and methodologies, helping to develop the core skills of the mediators. The ROMED1 approach was appreciated by the participants as useful and comprehensive despite the complexity of knowledge and information received. The structure of the

training, especially the practical work between the two training sessions, was effective in stimulating participants to put into practice the principles, skills, methods and tools accumulated during the training.

However, it also faced major challenges in certain situations when mediators went back to their working environment. Based on the focus groups, some of the challenges faced relate to the nature of the work of the mediators. Prior to the ROMED1 Programme, the mediators' activity was focused on solving emergency and single cases (for example, one child and/or one family). The ROMED1 approach brought a focus on preventing issues and planning the work of mediators. This required more work to increase the same understanding of the local institutions employing mediators.

The negative perceptions and attitudes of teachers was another challenge, in cases portraying mediators as uneducated people, impure, with no dialogue, "who do not know things" and "who should not be allowed to look at the student's grades register". There were cases of more open or hidden discrimination of mediators due to their ethnicity. Based on the focus groups with mediators, they felt that they are still not fully accepted by teachers. In the locations where school directors participated in the training, this helped in changing such perceptions.

### 5.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

Based on the focus groups with mediators, the Programme has contributed to increasing their skills in multiple functional areas like communication, conflict resolution through mediation, planning, etc. This, together with the clarity on the role of mediators and increased knowledge about the link of mediation work with the fundamental human rights perspective, has contributed to their professional development.

All of the mediators trained by ROMED1 were already employed by different institutions. We could not find systematised data on how many of them still continue to be in this job. In terms of improvement of the employment conditions of mediators, the majority of the mediators participating in the focus groups consider that ROMED did not make any contribution to the improvement of their employment status or work conditions (better jobs and/or better salaries). The ROMED certificate is not recognised by any institution with responsibilities in education. The certificate has no date, signature or stamp and, from this point of view, has no value for the institutions. Despite this, all participants are proud to have a certificate issued by the Council of Europe and the European Union, as this increases their self-esteem and recognition of the importance of the work they do.

Another important contribution of the Programme relates to **networking and peer support**. As seen by the mediators, ROMED provided them with a very good opportunity to "support and to learn from each other". It is much easier to approach, ask for support and deal with an issue that occurs because they are in constant contact by phone and email with each other. The Congress of Mediators held in Brussels was very much appreciated by mediators as recognition of their work and a substantial Romanian delegation participated in it. The Programme also assisted with the establishment of a National Association of School Mediators in June 2013 to participate actively in the European Network of Mediators. However, we could not find much information on how active this Network is at the moment. Mediators from the focus groups referred to it as an attempt, rather than an ongoing active interaction.

### *Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

Before the ROMED1 Programme, mediators were focused on providing descriptions of their daily activity as a way of reporting. During the six-month practice period, mediators were asked by the Programme to change the focus of their reporting from a description of their activities to results of their interventions. Data gathered from the practice period is evidence that the work of mediators contributed to increasing the access of Roma to public services by providing information to the community about continuation of studies, disseminating information about the labour market or how to access other public services, working with parents and families to increase their awareness of the importance of education, and monitoring the attendance of children in schools. As the ROMED1 Programme does not have a monitoring system to track the performance and impact of trained mediators after completion of the training, we have no systematised data on the overall impact of the ROMED1 training on reducing school dropouts, increasing the success rate of school performance or the number of resolved problems related to school performance.

### *Impact at the national level*

School mediation is a clear priority foreseen in the Governmental Strategy for inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2014-2020, but unfortunately there are no funds allocated for further training or other activities specifically related to the professional development of school mediators.

In the interview with the representative of the Ministry of Education, from 2016 onwards, some of the methods and tools used in ROMED1 will form part of the training curricula of school mediators. Based on requests from school institutions, NGOs and private individuals, the Ministry of Education organises training courses for school mediators but, due to the lack of financial resources, all expenses have to be borne by the trainees with the training delivered on a voluntary basis.

## 5.2.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of a training process like ROMED1 lies not only in its credibility, but also in the extent to which conditions for similar capacity-building exist after the end of the direct ROMED1 interventions, generating mechanisms, structure and resources to multiply the positive effects of the initial investment. ROMED1's sustainability is extremely important but is difficult to measure in terms of investment in people.

Based on interviews with the national team of trainers, the sustainability of the Programme can be seen from different perspectives:

- Individual: the Programme has expanded the horizon for professional development of mediators, with positive effects in the long term.
- Social: ROMED1 seeks to ensure the principle of equity between genders, age groups, generations and of respect for human rights;
- Political: engaging the equally different actors involved such as local authorities (school directors, school inspectors with school mediators) stimulates the initiation of partnerships in order to solve the common problems of importance to community members;
- Cultural: school mediators contribute to a two-way cultural exchange between the community and larger society;
- Human resources: trainers that were trained in ROMED1 will use some of their knowledge obtained from ROMED1 to train other people.

A positive step is the establishment of the Association of Roma Mediators in 2013 with the hope that in the long term this structure will represent the mediators and sustain their activities in a concrete way. Turning this hope into reality will however require assistance to further develop its capacity to serve as a working forum, providing peer support and networking, as well as for advocacy for the interests of mediators.

There are a couple of challenges regarding sustainability. The first one concerns the fact, already mentioned above, that the Ministry of Education has no funds to organise other training programmes for upgrading the skills of mediators. The second is an institutional issue related to the role of school mediators: in the past, school mediators were employees of Local Public Authorities and School Inspectorates; currently, they are employed by the County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, which are specialised education units under the methodological coordination of the school.

## 5.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 5.3.1 Relevance

The ROMED2 Programme is viewed by the majority of the people interviewed as a logical follow up to the ROMED1 Training of Mediators. Compared to ROMED1, which targeted exclusively individuals involved in school mediation, ROMED2 was focused on empowering Roma communities and involving all relevant local stakeholders, especially local institutions, in this process. Previous experience of approaching the Roma community's issues in Romania shows very clearly that the best solutions for local problems can be defined locally. By directly engaging the community in public consultation and facilitating the process of its dialogue with local authorities, people from the community start to understand that there are social mechanisms designed to tune-up social life. In this regard, the bottom-up approach, mechanism and methodology used by ROMED2 was not new, but responded very well to the country's needs, especially in the area of Roma inclusion. Without exception, all of those interviewed appreciate very positively the ROMED2 approach.

As shared by the national team (NPO and NFP), one of the new elements introduced by ROMED2 was the involvement of *"all citizens having equal voices expressing real and common needs"*, taking into account the community as a whole, not only the voice of the leaders. The main value of ROMED2 is its focus on addressing one of the most critical issues of Roma inclusion, which is the empowerment of the Roma community in order to enable it to bring its issues onto the public agenda. ROMED2 approaches the community directly, not through its leaders.

### 5.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Selection of municipalities*

In total, 12 very diverse municipalities from different development regions, with different backgrounds, size of Roma communities and experience in approaching social inclusion, were selected to join the ROMED2 Programme:

- **Timisoara, Botosani, Buzau, Craiova and Sector 6 from Bucharest:** large urban conglomerates with specificities that are related to this type of local administration;
- **Calarasi, Aiud and Targu-Jiu:** medium to small-sized cities where Roma communities are significantly represented;

- **Valea-Seaca, Toflea, Cumpana and Budesti:** large communes where more than half of the inhabitants are ethnic Roma.

The main selection criteria were the local political will and the openness of the local authorities. A commitment letter signed by the mayor of the municipalities was required to join the Programme. The selection process involved local visits prior to the start of the Programme. Later on, based on the information gathered through the local visits, the interest of the community and local authorities was further assessed. The final pre-selection was made by the ROMED2 national team.

Based on the experience of national facilitators in facilitating the local processes, a general recommendation was to pay more attention and allocate more time to evaluating the social capital of the community, in order to avoid selection of communities where the process of empowerment may face difficulties.

#### *Development of the Community Action Groups*

The process of establishing and developing CAGs was different from one locality to another. In some localities, more visits and time were needed, whilst in others the process was running naturally by itself. Established CAGs in the 12 municipalities had different sizes, varying between five and 27 people. The number of members was also changing over time, with a tendency to decrease rather than increase the people directly involved in the local process. In most of the CAGs, the share of men was higher than that of women. In the beginning of the process, the presence of women was much higher but, due to their duties with the family and home, in time they dropped out.

There was not a specific and unified model for establishing the CAGs, the process being adapted to each locality to ensure flexibility to respond to the local context. It was left up to the national facilitator working with the community to choose the best approach in assisting the creation of the group. A specific challenge was how to approach the process in big cities like Craiova and Targu Jiu where there is more than one Roma community. The facilitators decided to involve representatives of all communities in the group. The process was again different in the two cities. In Craiova, due to existing conflicts among the communities for decades, the facilitator needed more than two months of separate discussions with each of the communities in order to get agreement to organise meetings with the representatives from all communities. In Targu Jiu, the process was based on organising meetings within each of the three communities, each of them electing nine representatives for the CAG.

The search for broader representation of the groups was characteristic in approaching other communities too. In principle, the process in all municipalities involved extended meetings with the broader Roma community to select or elect their representatives in the CAG. As ROMED2 was seeking to ensure representation of the whole community, a second main moment in the approach was to invite both Roma and non-Roma. Simultaneously, the national facilitators were interacting directly with the representatives of the public local authorities. In some of the localities, representatives of local authorities also became members of the CAGs.

Regarding the establishment and development of the CAGs in all municipalities, the process was very much influenced by the following factors:

- ***The engagement and the experience of the facilitators:*** all national facilitators had proven commitment and extensive experience in working directly with Roma communities in the field of social inclusion, building local capacities and empowerment.
- ***The commitment of the municipalities:*** most of the municipalities showed their commitment throughout the Programme by the continuous support provided by the municipal contact person or by the mayor of the municipality, but there were also municipalities that avoided taking

responsibilities by putting on hold, delaying or using bureaucratic techniques (for example, Timisoara, Bucharest Sector 6 and Craiova);

- **The CAG profile and its dynamic:** in the locations where CAG members were elected by the community and involved the right people, the whole process ran much more easily and smoothly (for example, Targu Jiu); in some cases, the dynamic of the CAG's development was influenced negatively by the migration of people (for example, Valea Seaca).
- **The length of facilitators' contracts:** most of the facilitators had contracts for three months which were subject to renewal. Even though some of the facilitators continued their work for the period of nine months in 2015 when they were out of contract, the lack of contractual continuity of the intervention had a negative influence on the process results and outcomes. In some communities, the absence of the regular presence of national facilitators created a lot of disappointment and reduced motivation of CAG members.

### *Interaction with local authorities*

In terms of effectiveness of the interaction between the CAGs and the local authorities, there is a wide range of situations, depending on the local specificity of the community, the size of the municipality, how well-organised the CAG was and the presence or absence of local political representation of Roma.

The letter of commitment was signed by the mayors of all participating municipalities and the Council of Europe at the start of the Programme. Only one municipality, Budila, dropped out of the Programme in the course of its implementation.<sup>18</sup> Each municipality nominated a contact person and Institutional Working groups were established. In one of the case study locations (Targu Jiu), the Institutional Working group was a platform involving the participation of all key local institutions, as well as the two leading Roma NGOs in the municipality.

Based on the reports of the Programme and interviews, one of the main challenges in the implementation of the Programme was the difficulty to reach all the decision-making levels that had a say in the proposals defined by the Community Action Groups. In addition to local authorities, the county councils are another decision-making level of importance for drafting and financing public policies for vulnerable groups of citizens. Decisions of the local councils for endorsing the proposals from the CAGs should always be backed up with financial allocation from both the local and the county budgets. In the case of education and health, the decentralised services of the central ministries also have responsibilities at local level which relate to the policies in their sector. To meet this challenge, the national facilitators addressed each situation individually, approaching the local decision-making level and, when needed, the county councils or structures as well.

***In general, the process of interaction was more successful in medium or small-sized cities and rural communes*** where Joint Action Plans were developed and endorsed by the local councils. However, they were not backed up by proper financial allocations from the local or country budgets.

The ROMED2/ROMACT Programme faced more challenges in stimulating the interaction of the CAGs with local authorities in some of the large cities like Bucharest, Timisoara or Craiova.

- In Timisoara, despite the fact that the municipality signed the letter of commitment twice, their involvement was more formal rather than a real engagement in the process. Based on the interview with the national facilitator, the attitude of the municipality has been reserved and cautious, most probably due to a big previous scandal broadcast on national television concerning allegations of corruption of the City Hall by a rich Roma family. Almost all the requests of the CAG during the

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<sup>18</sup> Work in Budila municipality had to be cancelled due to false reporting.

ROMED2/ROMACT Programme were put on hold or delayed by the municipality. There is no Joint Action Plan approved by the Local Council.

- The second exception is Bucharest Sector 6, Giulesti -Sarbi. The process had the support of the Vice Mayor, but was not backed up by institutional support. After he resigned, the CAG lost the support of City Hall of Sector 6 and no Joint Action Plan was approved by the Local Council.
- The third exception is Craiova. The interaction with local authorities remained problematic and there is no JAP approved by the Local Council.

Based on the case studies, the representatives of Valea Seaca and Targu Jiu that we met assessed ROMED2/ROMACT as a very good initiative because it involves people from the community. This improved the cooperation between Roma communities and municipalities. As outlined by some of the mayors, *"it was the first time that collaboration and negotiations of representatives of all Roma communities led to creating a document (local action plan) that was adopted by local authorities. From this perspective, it was very good that first, the Programme approached the community and after that the local authorities."*

Most of the local councils of the municipalities recognised the CAGs, despite there being no specific law on this matter. This was one of the difficulties that the Programme encountered, especially in large cities.

### *Efficiency of provided ROMED support and resources to local processes*

The Programme was implemented in an efficient way, in view of the large geographic coverage and diversity of the municipalities involved. Some challenges to the implementation of the Programme occurred with changes in the National Support Team. Three of the initially selected facilitators stopped working for the Programme mainly due to starting new jobs. They had to be replaced by new people.

Based on the interviews with the National Support Team and all facilitators, the main challenge to the effectiveness of ROMED2/ROMACT was **the disruption of its implementation in 2015, which had a negative influence** on the whole Programme, especially on the local processes. The facilitators and the national team had no contracts for nine months due to delays in the overall contractual situation between the Council of Europe and the European Union during the transition of the Programme to financing only under ROMACT in 2015. The disruption of the Programme affected its credibility especially at the local level, influencing the perception of both the communities and the local authorities that the Programme is not a serious one.

Being the Programme interface for direct relations between communities and local authorities, the national facilitators had to overcome this situation, but in time this generated some frustrations. Due to their commitment to the local processes, they continued to do their jobs and maintain close contacts with the community even though they were not contracted. However, all of them emphasised the fact that such a sensitive process of empowering and building local capacity cannot be done properly, efficiently and successfully if it is implemented in waves. This view is also shared by the coordination team of ROMED2/ROMACT.

A third challenge was the limited resources allocated at local level. A major gap was the lack of financial support for organising small activities inside the community and involving its members. Such small funding support would help the process of empowerment because the success of very small actions can contribute to increasing the self-esteem of communities and their trust that, if they take action, it is possible to make a difference.

In terms of synergy between ROMED2 and ROMACT, based on the interviews with stakeholders, if the connection between ROMED1 and ROMED2 was logical and made strategic sense, ROMACT is more like

“a deviation from the ROMED2 approach and methods”. Moving the focus from community empowerment to increasing the capacity of local authorities to develop projects requires different types of resources, expertise and approach, which a facilitator responsible for empowering the community does not have.

### 5.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Impacts on local level*

The main outcome of the Programme was the empowerment of the Roma community by creating core active groups able to communicate and interact with local authorities in order to suggest and obtain agreement on priority initiatives towards the improvement of the situation of their communities.

A second important outcome was the endorsement in a number of municipalities of the Joint Action Plans developed as a result of the collaborative efforts of the CAGs and local authorities. In some of the municipalities, the priorities identified by the CAGs were introduced as part of larger policy documents. In others, the plans were not endorsed due to the problematic commitment of the local authorities.

The concrete impact on the improvement of the situation of Roma communities depended on the level of implementation of the adopted plans, as well as the possibility of attracting external resources, as most of the plans did not have proper financial allocations from local or country budgets. In view of the short time since the plans were developed, it is not realistic to expect a considerable impact from their implementation.

Concrete results emerging from the successful interactions with local authorities and implementation of plans can be divided into the following categories:

**Community diagnosis:** In Targu Jiu between November 2015 and February 2016, a full survey in all three Roma communities was conducted, initiated by a few members of CAG, in order to obtain an accurate image of the community's needs. The result of this survey will be used to update the local action plan and to develop strategies for intervention and project proposals.

**Solving housing and IDs issues:** In almost all municipalities, based on a list of community needs identified and prioritised by CAG members, projects for cadastral measurements and the issuing of personal documents (IDs) were developed and implemented.

**Improvement of community infrastructure:** One example is Bucharest Sector 6, Giulesti –Sarbi, where, due to an effective community-based advocacy campaign, the metropolitan administration repaired the main road providing the connection to the city centre and restored the interrupted public transportation services. Initiatives for improving community infrastructure were implemented in a number of other municipalities.

**Increased access to education:** In a number of municipalities, there are initiatives planned or implemented in the area of education. Based on the case study locations, in Valea Seaca children could be enrolled in the first grade of school without a birth certificate thanks to the efforts of the national facilitator who managed to receive a personal identification code for the children<sup>19</sup>; in Targu Jiu, new school mediators were appointed. Based on the reports and examples from interviews, in a number of municipalities transport for school children was ensured, thus increasing their access to schools (Buzau,

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<sup>19</sup> Law 116/1996 stipulates the condition of issuing the documents (e.g. birth certificate). The law has been republished in 2012 and the main change is a shortened time for issuing of documents.



Aiud and Toflea). In Toflea, where 13 out of the 15 local councillors are Roma, a number of educational projects have been initiated.

According to the interview with the national facilitator, the majority of ideas about educational activities resulted from the consultation process organised by ROMED2. Later on, those ideas were further developed by local authorities who were also part of the process. They identified other active local stakeholders involved in education, like the Toflea Foundation, in order to be able to implement projects in the transition period from the ROMED2 to the ROMACT Programme. Some of the educational initiatives included improving teachers' qualifications, increased school attendance based on work with children and parents, new school buildings and second chance education of adults.

Especially in rural municipalities, the level of impact on communities depends on the capacity of municipalities to develop partnerships with other stakeholders, especially NGOs, in order to develop successful project applications for existing national programmes. Without external resources, planned initiatives cannot be implemented due to the lack of resources of local budgets.

### *Impact at national level*

Although the Programme was focused at local level, it also has an increasing influence at national level. An important success factor was that the previous National Programme Coordinator of ROMED2, Ciprian Necula, was nominated as Secretary of State at the Ministry of European Funds. This helped in relations between the Programme and the Ministry and increases the potential for future cooperation regarding the scale-up of the Programme at national level. The ROMACT team has started a discussion with the Romanian Government in order to take over and finance the support of integrated programmes in more municipalities based on local action plans developed by local authorities and CAGs.

The new application guide for project proposals at the Human Capital Programme already stipulates integrated measures for Roma communities, which is the original premise behind ROMED2. This application guide will produce effects until 2020.

### 5.3.4 Sustainability

Based on the three case studies carried out for this evaluation, the CAGs are still working even without the help or support of an external facilitator in two of the municipalities visited - Targu Jiu and Sector 6 Bucuresti Giulesti-Sarbi. ROMED2, through its approach and methodology, brought to the communities the concept of "help yourself". The support provided by national facilitators helped the members of communities to understand this concept better. The sustainability of ROMED2 can be seen from two points of view: continued communication, cooperation and dialogue between local authorities and the community, and sustained structure for community participation (the CAGs).

The main challenge to sustaining the CAGs is the presence of follow-up activities and maintaining the motivation of CAG members to continue to be involved. Based on the interviews with national facilitators, with very few exceptions (for example, Targu Jiu), in most of the municipalities there is a tendency of shrinking the size of the community action groups, rather than attracting new members to sustain the groups.

Forthcoming elections may be another risk factor for sustainability if the people from the administration change, especially for those Community Action Groups that are not so strong.

## 5.4 Lessons and recommendations

### 5.4.1 Key lessons and recommendations from ROMED I

- **More time and attention is needed at the initial stage of planning** with national institutions in order to ensure effectiveness. There was strong political pressure to show results in a few months, which reduced the phase for preparation.
- **More resources need to be allocated to the monitoring and mentoring process** of mediators, especially during the practice period. The available resources were allocated mostly for the direct costs of the training courses.
- **It is important to allocate resources for the meetings of mediators** as a follow-up after the training. This will help peer support and networking.
- The theory of mediation is good, but using examples of good practice in the training course contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of aspects and skills needed for effective intercultural mediation.
- **The involvement of national and local institutions in the training together with school mediators is needed** to make them more open and to enable further the role and work of mediators. Involvement of the Ministry of Education and participation in training courses would be beneficial
- **Much better visibility for the ROMED Programme is needed**, including the involvement of the media in publicising the Programme.

### 5.4.2 Key lessons and recommendations from ROMED2

ROMED2 is considered by all stakeholders consulted by this evaluation as a valuable method to involve the Roma community and local authorities in a process of local change, by opening communication and constructive dialogue between them. It is a process that facilitates the **transition from words to action**.

One of the lessons that ROMED2 brought is that the opinion of a community member has the same value as the opinion of someone who is working in institutions, even in the European Commission. People from the community know very well what is legal and what should be done, the only problem is that they are in a totally vicious circle of dependency and they cannot overcome this alone.

To overcome the vicious circle of dependency takes time, because for many communities being dependent is the only way of life they have experienced. Learning the democratic way to deal with problems also takes time. In the end, it comes down to a power issue - in most cases, disadvantaged communities feel powerless and local authorities have the power. The presence of a third neutral party, the national facilitator, as an external party is needed to balance this power issue.

Based on the interviews with national stakeholders, the main recommendations for further programmes of the Council of Europe and the European Union for stimulating community empowerment are:

- **Programmes for local empowerment must be implemented without disruption.** It is much better to not start an intervention, rather than have an intervention that is implemented in waves with periods of nine months of disruption.
- **Programmes must be implemented in a consistent way for at least two to three years** in a community, in order to build the basis for sustainable results in the long term.
- **The ROMED2 process needs to continue** in some of the initial municipalities in order to sustain the process, and exit from others in order to expand to other locations. Continuation or exit from

the Programme needs to be decided strategically, based on clear indicators for success, as well as clarity on the strategy for scaling up the Programme geographically.

- ***There is a need to develop clear indicators for assessing the social capital in new municipalities before joining the Programme*** - history of cooperation, quality of relations among people in the community, how easily people accept being involved in community actions and knowledge of past unresolved conflicts.
- ***It is important to ensure very small financial resources that will allow the community to have their own actions*** that can lead to a greater trust and solidarity in their own capacity, absolutely necessary to spark the process of empowerment;
- ***The Programme needs to be more visible*** and should be disseminated better to other municipalities and institutions in order to be more visible;
- ***CAGs should acquire a legal and formal status*** in order to formalise the partnership with local authorities, which is the only way to attract external funding.

## 6 ROMED in Slovakia

**Anna Ivanova, country expert Slovakia**

### 6.1 Introduction

During the 2011 census, 105,738 persons (or 2% of the population) self-identified as Roma.<sup>20</sup> This number is however underestimated because many Roma prefer not to declare their identity. The Atlas Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013 estimate the number of Roma at 402,840, which makes up 7.45% of the country's total population. Three quarters of them live in Eastern Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov Regions). Less than half (46.5%) live dispersed among the majority. As many as 68,540 Roma (or 17% of the total Roma population) live in segregated settlements.<sup>21</sup>

Both ROMED1 and ROMED2 were launched after more than 20 years of targeted activities by the state institutions, non-governmental sector, various donors and EU-funded programmes.<sup>22</sup> By 2012, according to the Slovak Government, 183,115,291 EUR had been provided in direct support for Roma integration. Other donors (OSI, EEA/N Grants, SDC, etc.) also implement interventions targeting and empowering Roma communities.

Most of the funding for Roma integration is channelled through national projects. One of the most important of these is the project on field social workers who have worked directly in the communities since 2002. Their core task is to know the community (even the individual families' problems) and help solve the problems they face. Since 2011, the approach is implemented under the "National Project Field Social Work" with an allocation of almost 30 million EUR. As of 2014, the programme had been implemented in 291 localities by 895 people working as field social workers.<sup>23</sup> Another intervention relevant to ROMED is the national project on "Community Centres" coordinated by the Office of the Plenipotentiary.

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

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

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

<sup>20</sup> The 2011 Population and Housing Census Facts about changes in the life of the Slovak population, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> Mušíňka, A. Škobla, D. Hurrle, J. Matlovičová, K. Kling, J. Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku 2013. Bratislava 2014: UNDP, pp. 22-43

<sup>22</sup> In 1995 the position of a "Plenipotentiary for Roma communities" was established; in 1999 the first "Strategy for addressing the problems of the Roma National Minority" was adopted and in 2002 a "Comprehensive Development Program for Roma integration" was launched. In 2004 the "Marginalized Roma Communities" (MRC) are set as a "horizontal priority" for the programming period 2007-2013.

<sup>23</sup> Škobla, D., Grill, J., Hurrle, J. Exploring field social work in Slovakia. Bratislava, 2016, p. 22

mediators were solving legal disputes (although not focusing on Roma inclusion issues). In addition, two other supportive professions that mediate the relationships between Roma and the institutions were facilitating access to social services (health and education assistants).

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

## 6.2 ROMED1 key findings

### 6.2.1 Relevance

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

### 6.2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of the ROMED1 training process

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

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

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

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

## 6.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

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

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

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

### *3.2. Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

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

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

### *Impact at the national level*

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

- **Low awareness of the local context and the ongoing interventions at national and local level** and, respectively, failure to identify strategic partnerships with national institutions and programmes. The Programme was useful in Slovakia to the extent to which it complemented the

skills of the already-existing system of field social workers, teaching assistants and health assistants. However with its modest scope (42 mediators trained compared to over 800 field social workers), ROMED1 could hardly have a national-level impact.

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

## 6.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 6.3.1 Relevance

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

### 6.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Launch of the programme and setting up the national team*

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

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

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

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

### *Selection of municipalities*

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

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

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

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

### *Development of the CAGs*

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

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

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

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



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

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

### *Interaction with local authorities*

The members of the CAG, who are community workers, social workers and health assistants, are in direct contact with the local authorities on a daily basis due to their professional responsibilities. In some localities, they are also the mediators trained under ROMED1 (Jarovnice, Cicava and Ziar nad Hronom). Thanks to these multiple roles, effective interaction with local authorities is achieved by default. In cases where the CAG members are municipal councillors, one can see clear synergy between the CAG, the priorities of the municipality and the real work in the community (for example, Jarovnice).<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, in Slovakia, the CAGs work in an environment in which the state is supportive and provides resources for Roma integration at local level through so-called national projects. The priorities of the Joint Action Plans of the CAGs coincide with the priorities envisaged in the state Roma integration strategy and its implementation plans, which is most logical since the funding for Roma integration at local level reflects the state policy for integration of MRC and is matched by funding from existing state-managed and EU-funded programmes.<sup>25</sup>

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

### *Efficiency of provided support and resources*

A major challenge outlined in the interviews was the insufficient volume of resources that reached the local level, since the Programme covers only costs of training, travel costs, coffee breaks etc. During the interviews, the members of the national team noted delays in payments, although ultimately all costs were covered. In one locality (Cicava), the facilitator left because he did not receive an extension of his contract for months and had to find another job.

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<sup>24</sup> This depends on the internal dynamics within the community. During the evaluation, a conflict within the local authority (the current councillors boycotting the mayor) was taking place in Cicava and, as a result, no CAG exists.

<sup>25</sup> The most significant are the three-year "subsidisation schemes" (implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary), the "Roma civic neighbourhood Guard" project (by the Ministry of Interior), "Field social Workers" (by the Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) and the funding schemes of the Ministry of Education.

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

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

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

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

### 6.3.3 Outcomes and impacts

#### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

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

The capacity of the CAGs to participate in the local decision-making process also depends on the existing potential and capacities of the local stakeholders prior to the establishment of the CAGs. The CAGs have achieved results in localities where a lot of field and social work has been done already and the communities are open to participation. In localities where this was not the case and Roma integration did not gain momentum before ROMED2, the CAGs did not achieve much. In Jarovnice, the community is strong and the CAG is active; there is synergy between the priorities of the local authority and the community, as well as a shared willingness to improve life in the municipality. Other localities lack such capacities however and need more regular support from an external facilitator to bring together the CAG and the local authorities.

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

### *Concrete results and impacts in communities*

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

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

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

## 6.3.4 Sustainability

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

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

## 6.4 Lessons and recommendations

### 6.4.1 Lessons from ROMED1

ROMED1 did not envisage activities that would provide the trained mediators with the opportunity of maintaining direct contact over a long period of time (such as an online platform or newsletters analysing cases and disseminating successful solutions, either locally or internationally). The trained mediators were left to themselves and they maintain contacts with their colleagues exclusively on an individual basis and upon their own initiative.

The national facilitators interviewed mention that it would be worth repeating the training in Slovakia. Many Roma have heard good reviews from the mediators trained and expect to receive a similar

opportunity. Those who were already trained share the need to deepen their knowledge, in particular with regard to legal aspects.

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

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

### 6.4.2 Lessons from ROMED2

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

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

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

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

### 6.4.3 Recommendations

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

Some mediators are studying (mainly social work or pedagogy) while working in the field, which makes them ineligible for scholarships from the Roma Education Fund. They can be a real asset for future Roma empowerment and integration and deserve support. Establishing a joint Council of Europe/Roma Education Fund scholarship scheme for supporting the trained mediators who continue their education would not just help the people working as mediators to grow professionally but would also be a modest reward for their devoted and low-paid work.

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

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

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

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

## 7 ROMED in Ukraine

### Orysia Lutsevych, country expert Ukraine

#### 7.1 Introduction

There is no recent official data on the Roma population in Ukraine. The last official census of 2001 lists around 42,000 Roma in Ukraine. Unofficial estimates vary between 120,000 and 400,000. They mostly live in Zakarpattia, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts. The key problems facing Roma communities include low levels of education, high unemployment rates, poor access to healthcare and social services, lack of registration documents, poor housing conditions and discriminatory attitudes both from authorities and the wider population. There are around 90 Roma NGOs in Ukraine addressing these key problems at various levels.

Recent political developments in Ukraine have further negatively affected the situation of Roma, in particularly those displaced from Crimea and eastern Ukraine. OSCE/ODIHR reports that Roma are victims of violence and notes an increasing number of displaced Roma.<sup>26</sup>

Roma mediators are a relatively new phenomenon in Ukraine. The National Focal Point (NFP) "Chiricli Roma Women's Foundation" started promoting the idea in 2010. Officially, the profession of mediator is not recognised by the state. The first breakthrough in institutionalising the state-funded education of mediators was only achieved in May 2016. The Institute of Social Work and Management (Kyiv) of the [National Pedagogical Dragomanov University](#) approved the inclusion of the course "Mediation as a form of social work with the Roma minority" in the official Bachelor Degree curriculum starting in the 2016–2017 academic year. The course was developed by ROMED1 trainers and a local team based on the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook. Further legislative changes are needed in order to institutionalise the mediator in the official chart of professions.

A new Strategy for the Protection and Integration of Roma until 2020 was adopted in Ukraine on 8 April 2013. However, the Strategy does not mention mediation as a tool to achieving Roma inclusion related to legal, social education, health, housing and cultural rights. The ROMED NFP was very active in creating an Inter-Agency Working Group for Roma at the level of the Cabinet of Ministers, which will oversee the implementation of the Strategy. The group was established on 25 November 2015.<sup>27</sup> At the local level, the Strategy provided impetus and a legal framework for municipalities to develop Roma inclusion action plans and allocate funding for solving Roma issues.

#### 7.2 ROMED1 key findings

##### 7.2.1 Relevance

ROMED1 was an innovative Programme with a special curriculum developed to fit best European practice of mediation. It was adapted to the Ukrainian legislative framework and cultural specificities. Mediators serve as an important link between the Roma community and the state (local and national levels). The main benefits of employing mediators are their knowledge of Roma community culture and trust among Roma communities. Mediators can gain access to communities and this helps to better

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/124494?download=true>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/cardnpd?docid=248677547>

serve their needs. They are also committed and passionate about helping Roma. Challenges arise from the insecurity of employment of mediators, lack of financial resources to cover costs related to solving Roma problems (medical diagnosis, treatment, administrative fees for courts and document processing) and a corrupt, inefficient bureaucracy.

### 7.2.2 Efficiency and Effectiveness of the ROMED1 Training Process

The key stage of the ROMED1 training took place in 2011-2013 when 54 mediators (37 women and 17 men) were trained. The NFP and social work professionals selected the mediators. The NFP was active in spreading the information via its network of Roma NGOs and Roma activists so as to recruit participants for the training. Of the 60 mediators who applied, 54 were selected and trained. They represented a wide geographic scope of localities, including Zakarpattia, Kirovograd, Zhytomyr, Kharkiv and Lviv oblasts.

The ROMED1 curriculum was evaluated as useful both by the mediators and local government officials, including social workers. The diversity of topics ranged from effective mediation and the Code of Ethics for Mediators, to confidence building in the community and peer support. At present there are three trainers in Ukraine who can deliver the ROMED1 curriculum.

In response to the emergency in Ukraine following the military conflict in the East, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a new programme to support health mediators. Over 40 people were trained with a particular focus on assisting with the prevention of polio, tuberculosis, general immunisation and tackling women's health problems. The backbone for this programme was the network of mediators developed by ROMED1.

ROMED1 trainers are often invited to conduct training in project management and strategic planning for young Roma activists, women, teachers, and social workers. Other NGOs, the International Renaissance Foundation, the Roma Education Fund, the Ministry of Social policy and local governments often commission such training.

Key challenges in the way of the effective development of mediators include:

- Lack of state programmes that support mediation. Capacity-building and employment of mediators is dependent on the non-state sector's ability to attract western funding to cover mediators' salaries;
- Widespread misunderstanding of why Roma should get special assistance from mediators and why this service should be provided by the state;
- Personalised approach: most of the progress in institutional development of mediation took place thanks to committed individuals, such as the NFP, trainers, and local government officials cooperating with the Programme;
- Political instability in Ukraine makes it difficult to build institutional partnerships, as government officials, especially at national level, often change;
- Increasing poverty: the World Bank estimates that the poverty rate has increased from 3.3 per cent in 2014 to 5.8 per cent in 2015, while moderate poverty increased from 15.2 to 22.2 per cent respectively.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/04/01/ukraine-economic-update-spring-2016>

## 7.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

### *Contribution to the professional development of mediators and their recognition*

A focus group with mediators in Kyiv confirmed that training programmes were beneficial. The participants mentioned that the training contributed to their professional development and provided: 1) the necessary skills in tackling Roma issues; 2) an improved standing of Roma issues with the local authorities; 3) a network of mediators that could provide peer support; and 4) improved communication skills vis-à-vis local authorities and Roma communities.

From the perspective of national authorities, mediators help reduce the gap between the state and the Roma community. Roma issues are diverse across Ukraine and mediators - often linked with Roma NGOs - can help communicate needs and problems, which is important for policy-making. At the national level, mediators are also helping to bring best European practices of gender inclusion into the Roma strategy. A seminar on this topic took place on 24 November 2015 and benefitted from the participation of the Deputy Minister of Social Policy and representatives from an additional ten Council of Europe member States.<sup>29</sup>

Local authorities perceive mediators as individuals who, first of all, are backed by the trust of Roma communities. In the framework of the case study of the Darnytsia administration of Kyiv, the local official who participated in the training stated that it helped her better understand the importance of mediators. They are indispensable in navigating both the hierarchy and the close-knit family relations in the Roma community.

Mediators are important entry points into Roma communities. International organisations and Ukrainian NGOs engage mediators in research on the status of Roma. For example, in 2015 the WHO and the Ukrainian Peacekeeping School engaged many mediators in the study of Roma communities in Ukraine.

However, the ROMED1 training only marginally improved the employment status of mediators. Mediation is a sector that depends on western donors. The Ukrainian state has no resources to support this service. After the training, most mediators are contracted by the National ROMED Support Organisation Chiricli to provide mediation services as self-employed consultants. From 2011-2014, all 54 mediators trained by ROMED1 were employed by Chiricli with the support of different donors. As of March 2016, of the 42 mediators who are still contracted by Chiricli, 17 also have their own Roma NGOs, with the rest working on an individual basis. Only six out of these 42 mediators have an additional source of income and are employed.

To encourage state social services to cooperate with mediators, the NFP, via its NGO, signed a cooperation agreement with the state's Centres of Social Services for Children, Families and Youth to engage mediators to provide social services to Roma communities. Eight such agreements were signed in the following locations: Zaporizhzhia municipal centre, Uzhgorod, Beregovo, Kirivograd, Kharkiv, Komintern region, Kyiv city centre and Pereyaslav-Khmelnyski centre.

### *Contribution to increased access to services in communities*

Mediators have substantially improved access to services in the areas where they work. The mediators are now working in seven out of 24 oblasts of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv. These are: Zakarpattia oblast (Uzhgorod, Mukachevo, Perechyn, village of Berezny), Zaporizhzhia oblast (city of Zaporizhzhia), Donetsk oblast (city of Dniprodzerzhynsk), city of Kyiv, Kyiv oblast (city of Pereyaslav-Khmelnyski),

<sup>29</sup> <http://chirikli.com.ua/index.php/ua/novini/item/74-ukraina-maie-shans-radykalno-zminyty-na-krashche-i-zhyttia-romiv>



Kirovograd oblast (cities of Kirovograd and Oleksandria), Odessa oblast (city of Odessa) and Kharkiv Oblast (city of Kharkiv and Merefa).

During the six months from October 2015 to March 2016, the NFP reports that the network of 40 mediators covered 34,683 Roma representatives, which includes 7,144 families, of which 11,125 are women, 7,890 men and 15,668 children. Each month, mediators provide services to around 200 to 300 Roma IDPs.

The most popular services include:

- Assistance with applications for identification documents;
- Residence registration;
- Court appeals;
- Access to local state financial subsistence and services (utility subsidies, pensions, disability payment);
- Information about social protection and basic rights;
- Assistance with social housing and employment;
- Educational support to improve school attendance;
- Medical assistance with access to diagnosis and access to hospitals.

Some positive structural results could be observed in Odessa with regards to the proposed pilot project of the Oblast Migration Service to introduce a simplified procedure for obtaining identification documents for Roma. Thanks to the active cooperation between the NFP, the Ministry of Social Policy and its Centres for Homeless, which provide registration for Roma in order to obtain passports, it became easier for Roma to apply for passports.

In terms of improving access to education, Uzhgorod is the key target of ROMED2 activities due to a high concentration of Roma. After the active work of Roma mediators identified 37 Roma children that did not attend school, in two months the mediators managed to bring 15 children back to school. Success could be attributed to the active cooperation between the Municipal Department of Education and the commitment of teachers to work with mediators.

ROMED2 established a strong partnership with the Deputy Governor of Zakarpattia oblast. As a follow-up to the working group's meeting (5 April 2016) in which mediators participated, the authorities decided to build a new pre-school in the village of Poroshkovo, which has a large Roma community.

Nationwide, mediators try to improve the access of Roma to medical services. To date, mediators have established cooperation with each of the Oblast Public Health Departments, notably when Roma face discrimination from local healthcare providers (ignoring emergency calls, refusal of admission in hospitals): mediators lodge complaints on malpractice and usually health departments react and help solve these problems.

### *Impact at the national level*

The National Support Team leads active advocacy work at national level for Roma inclusion and proactively pursues different avenues of cooperation in order to institutionalise the profession of the mediator. The NFP was very active in providing ideas for both the national Roma strategy and the subsequent National Action Plan on the Implementation of the Strategy. Active advocacy work of the NFP led to the creation of the Inter-Agency Group for the implementation of the Roma strategy in 2015.

There are also active working contacts with the Ministry of Culture which is in charge of the implementation of both the Roma strategy and the Strasbourg Declaration. Cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy led to the ***development and adoption of a new state standard for***

**mediation, officially called "standard for services of representation"**. The standard was piloted with Roma mediators and will be approved in 2016. One more standard on social mediation is pending approval by the Ministry. To further promote the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook, the State Institute of Family and Youth Policy offers training in Roma mediation for its social workers, who undergo regular professional development programmes.

The most positive development in terms of national impact is the agreement of the State Dragomanov University (Institute of Social Work) and the Association of Social Workers to launch a new course on "Mediation as a form of social work with the Roma minority", starting from September 2016 for Roma mediators. The course was developed by the NFP and Ms Larysa Kobelyanska, based on the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook. It will include 72 hours of lectures and practical work that will result in a state-recognised social work diploma. It will be based on a flexible methodology: distance-learning, evening courses and individual teaching to adapt to different levels of skills of existing mediators. After graduation, mediators could be employed by the state social agencies.

Finally, the NFP pursues active cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine.

## 7.2.4 Sustainability

Mediation remains a sector dependent on western donors. It is unlikely to continue at this stage without external support. With the exception of a small pool of social workers who could be trained by the Institute of Family and Youth and the future programme at the Institute of Social Work, there are no other state institutions that could deliver the training for mediators. Some limited resources could be obtained from the International Renaissance Foundation's Roma programme.

However, there are several strong stimuli that enable further development of Roma mediation in Ukraine. There is a strong commitment of the ROMED NFP Chiricli to integrate the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook into existing training for social workers. ROMED1 built an informal network of committed partners, including state training centres, that see its value. Training programmes receive good feedback from participants. There is a cohort of motivated local officials partnering with the Programme, who could try to use decentralisation reform to provide resources at the local level for such training. In cooperation with the active network of Roma NGOs, a coalition of experts could make the idea of mediation advance in Ukraine. Finally, Ukraine's EU integration obligations provide impetus for further Roma inclusion.

## 7.3 ROMED2 key findings

### 7.3.1 Relevance

All stakeholders assessed ROMED2 positively. Its value comes from the need to engage local authorities in Roma inclusion, as they are the key to creating sustainable structural changes for improving the status of Roma in their respective communities. ROMED2 opens a pathway for constructive inclusive cooperation between mediators, community and local authorities to improve access to services and address key problems.

For mediators, it was important to learn how to engage with local governments in order to improve access to services as they face on a daily basis inefficient bureaucracy and a corrupt political culture in

Ukraine. Building the “coalition of the willing” among local officials, mediators and the Roma community was exactly what ROMED2 delivered.

Another key added value of ROMED2 is the mobilisation of citizens into Community Action Groups (CAGs). The cooperation between the mediators, CAG and NFP/NPO was very effective. The ROMED2 approach puts Roma communities at the centre of it. It gives Roma a voice, starting with dialogue from inside the community about what their needs are. It helps deliver services, as well as institutionalise cooperation with the state. For example, Roma mediators were included in the Municipal Civil Society Councils in Kirovograd, Uzhgorod, Beregovo, Kyiv and Odessa.

There are no other programmes in Ukraine that operate on the lines of a formally-structured, cooperative triangle of community, mediators/facilitators and local government. Each participating municipality has formally assigned a partner for cooperation with the Programme. In most cases, the NFP/NPO, communities and mediators reported solid and productive cooperation.

### 7.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of assisted local processes

#### *Selection of municipalities*

ROMED2 is working with five different localities in Ukraine which are rather diverse. They were selected following two key criteria: 1) the presence of ROMED1 mediators and quality of cooperation with NFP and mediators; and 2) the commitment and willingness of local authorities to address Roma issues.

Zakarpattia oblast has the largest concentration of Roma in Ukraine. Roma comprise 3% of the total population, around 50,000. It is a largely rural area. It has three large settlements, with over 7,000 people in the settlement of Mukachevo alone. Roma often migrate to Kyiv for work or travel to Hungary in search of jobs. Odessa oblast has the second largest Roma population. Some 20,000 Roma live there in around seven settlements. Kirovograd oblast has a smaller Roma community dispersed around towns and villages. Often originating from the Republic of Moldova, they do not possess any documentation (passports and birth certificates).

Two other localities of ROMED2 have smaller Roma populations: Pereyaslav-Khmelytsky and the Darnytsia region of the city of Kyiv. Both have around 600 Roma inhabitants. In Pereyaslav, Roma are mostly scattered around the neighbouring villages. In Darnytsia, many Roma families live dispersed in permanent housing. There is also a Roma settlement (in the area of Teplovizorna) with between 100 and 200 people residing there, including children.

#### *Development of the CAGs*

CAGs were created with the assistance of mediators and NFP. The average size of the CAG is seven people with usually more than half being women. In some cases, like in the smaller city of Pereyaslav-Khmelnyski, five out of the eight CAG members are women. In locations where Roma activism has been developing for a longer period of time and where the concentration of the Roma population is higher, CAG representatives are more active. In Kyiv, due to the high seasonal migration of Roma from the Zakarpattia region, it was harder to organise the work with the Roma living in the settlement.

The key challenge is maintaining the active engagement of the members of the CAG. It takes time to build trust, as people do not understand the benefit of the process from the start. They are happy to come and meet on a permanent basis, but, as expressed by the NFP/NPO, communities also want to see “*immediate results, but in the cases of passport registration or creation of job opportunities, fast results cannot be achieved in a short time*”.

Mobilisation is difficult and requires a creative approach. For example, in Darnytsia, a Sunday Roma language course was started as part of ROMED2. It acts as a magnet for the community. In Pereyaslav-Khmelnytski region, in the village of Erkvitsi, CAG and local authorities helped to deliver food to three families where children had malnutrition problems. It helped to create trust with the municipality and demonstrate that the project could deliver tangible improvements to the community.

### *Interaction with local authorities*

The cooperation is structured around the Working Groups which are set up in each location. Each municipality assigns a person responsible for cooperation on Roma issues. The dialogue is supported by having regular (on average once per month) meetings of the Working Groups, where Roma issues are raised. In addition, action plans for cooperation define a set of activities, such as the celebration of International Roma Day, seminars dedicated to the Roma Holocaust, information and public awareness work among the Roma community and assistance to vulnerable groups. CAG members participate in all meetings of these Working Groups.

To encourage and recognise the growing commitment from local municipalities to addressing Roma issues, Chiricli initiated a Ukraine Roma Pride celebration in 2014. A special event was organised in October 2015 with the participation of CAGs, local authorities, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Social Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other NGOs. ROMED2 municipalities received awards for progress made in registering illegal Roma housing (Uzhgorod), providing better social services (Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskiy), facilitating registration of documents (Odessa) and providing assistance to the travelling Roma community (Darnytsia).

In an effort to facilitate cooperation, 147 social workers were trained by the state Institute of Family and Youth Policy. These training programmes helped social workers and government officials from key ROMED regions to understand Roma issues and learn more about the state strategy and ROMED2 approach, as well as to meet directly with Roma mediators. In terms of quality of the training, 68% of participants (mostly social workers) reported in the Institute's evaluation survey that they were happy with the quality.

Ukraine launched a major effort to reform its national police, starting with a new police patrol force. In cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, 34 newly-recruited police officers participated in the training on non-discrimination toward Roma. Representatives of ROMED2 participating municipalities from Kyiv, Kirovograd, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky, Berehovo and Cherkasy attended the training. It allowed Chiricli and its mediators to establish good working relations with the newly-recruited police officers.

Overall, cooperation with authorities developed well. Odessa demonstrated some slowdown due to political changes after the local elections and appointment of the new Governor. The previous contact person left and they have downsized personnel, but currently the cooperation is gradually advancing, as mediators try to work at all levels (municipal, oblast, regions). The activity of the Working Group was also interrupted, as there was no contact person from the local administration.

Some other minor challenges included: changing the composition of members of CAGs; political changes due to elections or reforms at local level (turnover of public officials is high); lack of resources from the state and local budgets; and limited number of donors who support such work in Ukraine.

### *Efficiency of provided support and resources*

The NFP/NPO expressed satisfaction with the level of financial support provided to carry out ROMED2 activities in Ukraine. Most resources covered training and external regional meetings at national and local levels, as well as the daily operational activities of the NFP and NPO. The ROMED management

team of the Council of Europe was very responsive and applied a tailored approach. Approvals of financial requests were timely and fast so funding could be received within two weeks.

One possible deficiency, as expressed by the NFP, is the lack of funding for community projects. At this stage, only small resources are allocated in local budgets for direct assistance to families in need or crisis. It is vital in order to build trust and show quick wins and results for people. Such funding could cover local mediators' work with children (like the purchase of colouring books or other tools to engage kids) or medium-sized infrastructural improvement in the settlements. This helps to "melt the ice" in relationships. Since ROMACT was not operating in Ukraine, larger funding for community projects was lacking.

### 7.3.3 Results and impacts towards stimulating change in Roma communities

#### *Impacts on empowerment of communities*

At this stage, the capacity of local CAGs is quite low. They are dependent both on mediators, facilitators and on the commitment of the NFP/NPO. The work of the CAG clearly improves the self-esteem and trust of the communities. Roma communities are proud to showcase their culture during International Roma Day or be part of helping other marginalised Roma, in particularly those living in settlements. When local authorities reach out to communities, for example, a visit of Santa Claus organised by Darnytsia local authority to the settlement in December 2015, it makes Roma feel part of the wider community.

Local authorities recognise CAGs as legitimate representatives of the Roma community. The NFP introduced all the mediators to local officials and they have since developed good working cooperation.

In the medium term, the issue of sustainability of these groups could be resolved either by connecting them to existing local NGOs, establishing a new association or registering local self-organised citizen groups. Local citizen groups could be established by the community to represent the needs and interests of citizens that reside in a certain territory according to the law on the "Creation of Citizen Self-organising Bodies". It is a more flexible instrument than an NGO. They would require mentoring, training and financial assistance to continue and scale up their activities.

#### *Concrete results and impacts in communities*

ROMED2 helped improve the following services in various sectors:

- **Condition in settlements:** waste collection in Bortnychi (Darnytsia Region). Cooperation between the NFP and local authorities led to an agreement with the local waste collection company to provide a service in the settlement once a month. The service is covered financially by Chiricli as National Support Organisation. Water and sewage systems were installed in the settlement, assistance was provided with construction materials and wood for winter in Uzhgorod, in cooperation with two charitable foundations, Blago and House of Charity.
- **Education:** new Sunday Roma language and cultural programme established (Darnytsia). Ten children attend classes on a regular basis. Two new young educational mediators were trained and succeeded, in just two months, to bring 15 Roma children back to school after long-term absence. A new pre-school will be built for Roma children in Zakarpattia oblast.
- **Documentation:** agreements with the State Centres for Homeless to register Roma, who need registration to apply for passports. Odessa Oblast Migration Service will pilot a simplified procedure for Roma registration. Mediators help citizens apply for passports, birth certificates, pension

certificates, disability documents or house registration books, often the first step to receiving any kind of social services from the state.

- **Healthcare:** over 5,000 Roma were registered for general health check-ups, over 2,000 children were vaccinated and over 2,000 underwent TB scans.<sup>30</sup>
- **Employment:** active work with the heads of municipal employment centres to increase awareness on Roma unemployment and promote the idea of special training programmes for Roma. In Uzhgorod, the idea of funding for social enterprises that could help address employment issues for Roma is being discussed.

In sporadic cases, cultural inclusion is improving. International Roma Day is getting more recognition from local authorities. In spring 2016, both Darnytsia region and Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky held cultural events to showcase Romani culture, build awareness and break down stereotypes about Roma in their communities.

### *Impacts on changes of policies at local and national level*

At national level, ROMED2 helped to promote the establishment of the National Inter-Agency Working Group for Roma and contributed to the development of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Roma Inclusion Strategy. The Programme also helped raise awareness on Roma issues and on national media during International Roma Day. Most importantly, ROMED2, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy, contributed to the development of national standards on mediation.

To address youth issues, a national seminar on Roma youth was organised between ROMED and the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. Participants discussed the national strategy on activism for young people with the Ukrainian Ministry of Youth and Sport. This strategy includes a training course for Roma youth NGOs and activists and an international training course for Roma youth organisations, to be held in Kharkiv. The event will be co-organised by ROMED and the Youth Department of the Council of Europe in autumn 2016.

At local level, the Programme contributed to the development of Action Plans to implement the strategy. As a result, two municipalities, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky and Zakarpattia, have included in the local budget funding for Roma inclusion. The shortcoming of improving cooperation in Darnytsia region is that Kyiv has no municipal action plan for Roma, and thus assigns no funding citywide for Roma issues.

### 7.3.4 Sustainability

At this stage, the sustainability of the local processes initiated is weak. Cooperation at some level will continue, but a lot depends on the facilitators, activism of local NGOs and on the National Support Organisation, Chiricli.

There are several factors that positively contribute to sustainability, among them:

- Strong, well-trained cohorts of Roma mediators, as they become pillars of support to develop CAGs;
- Development of Action Plans for the Implementation of the Roma National Strategy, as they require local authorities to deliver;
- An Inter-Agency Working group could facilitate the process and monitor the implementation of the Roma inclusion strategy;
- The trust that the ROMED NFP/NPO and facilitators have managed to build with local government authorities;

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<sup>30</sup> Chiricli rationale provided to the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour in support of mediators in Ukraine, 2016

- The positive image that civil society can be a partner in solving social issues of the Roma minority;
- Allocation of resources in the local budgets of Uzhorod and Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky to the implementation of the Roma strategy;
- Roma representatives elected in local councils (in Zakarpattia), who can advance the Roma agenda at the policy-making level (one MP from the Roma community in Uzhgorod). Ten mediators ran as candidates in local elections, amongst them one woman.
- Roma mediators were employed by the state after completing the new social services programme for Roma mediators mentioned in ROMED1, as they could reach out to the communities.
- The decentralised fiscal process launched in December 2015 provides more resources at local level. Further decentralisation could create more autonomy for local governments to set priorities and assign funding based on local needs of Roma communities.
- The NFP's initiative to reinforce the ROMED2 network by establishing the Ukrainian Alliance of Cities for Roma Inclusion. Such an alliance would invite cities interested in addressing Roma issues to become members. Current ROMED2 municipalities could become founding members of such an alliance. This would help disseminate the ROMED model nationwide.

It is important to consider the following risks and constraints to sustainability:

- Personality-driven approach, where it often depends on leadership in local authorities. If leadership changes, the work often has to start again from scratch;
- The NFP risk of burnout or change of work. She is really committed and highly-respected, both at national and regional levels, as a highly-qualified professional who could represent Ukraine also at international level;
- High turnover of CAG members due to the migration of Roma;
- Weak governance institutions in Ukraine often impede implementation of policies, where government bureaucracy is inefficient, corrupt and lacks accountability;
- Resistance of local authorities to make a formal commitment and to approve action plans.

## 7.4 Lessons and recommendations

The programme on Roma inclusion needs to continue, as more work is required to sustain existing achievements and reinforce impact. There are several avenues of support that are needed for the programme:

- Provision of financial support to sustain the network of the mediators and provide further capacity development;
- Increased engagement of emerging Roma youth networks (such as the one being built by Chiricli and the fellowship network of the International Renaissance Foundation);
- Support in creation of local Roma associations/NGOs around CAG leaders to allow access to financial resources at the local level, either via sub-contracting from Chiricli or state social contracting/local grants, when such programmes will be announced.

### 7.4.1 Specific recommendations for ROMED1:

*For the Council of Europe and the European Union:*

- In Ukraine, external conditionality helps advance change. Use external pressure and conditionality from the EU Association Agreement, Council of Europe and the OSCE to advance the implementation of state commitments declared in the national Roma strategy, new strategy for

support of civil society<sup>31</sup> and new human rights strategy<sup>32</sup>. Voice the issues of Roma mediators at the level of the Special OSCE Commissioner for National Minorities to advance the institutionalisation of their profession. Use international reports, such as the report of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>33</sup>

- Continue training of mediators to keep up with the speed of legislative changes in Ukraine that take place as part of a wider reform process and decentralisation;
- Develop more networking opportunities inside Ukraine and within the ROMED European network. Some of the regional models could be scaled up to national level. More exchanges of experience can enhance the transfer of ideas and good practices across countries.
- Increase financial resources for mediators to be able to afford some basic materials. Develop small grants for social services that mediators could apply for to help deliver medical services, access to water, gas, additional training for children to improve school performance and cover transportation costs. This could require co-funding from local sources, such as local NGOs or budgets.
- Use the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to encourage local authorities in Ukraine to become active participants.
- Improve understanding of Roma problems in Ukraine by funding more research and effective communication of its results.

*For the National Focal Point/National Project Officer:*

- Build the capacity of mediators, especially on the psychological aspects of communication; develop skills in educational mediation, techniques of positive motivation of communities for action, knowledge of international conventions on human rights and Roma inclusion. Provide skills in local budgeting and train mediators on ways to feed community needs into policy-making processes, focus on gender-based budgeting and train mediators on how this approach could be applied to national minorities.
- Conduct long-term training for mediators in partnership with social workers, perhaps develop an annual curriculum with several sessions rather than one-off training sessions.
- Develop links between mediators and other local and national NGOs working on Roma and general human rights issues. Connect them to groups that are members of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform<sup>34</sup> established as part of the new EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.
- Expand the inclusion of mediators into the state system of social services by intensifying the work with the Centres of Social Services to promote mediation and new standards of mediation services.
- Encourage Roma NGOs and mediators to apply for funding as part of the state social contracting, then train them to apply for this funding.
- Engage more Roma youth to be future mediators and active in Roma issues. Use such avenues as sports and arts to engage young people. Elaborate a strategy for Roma youth. Train them in project management. Develop a youth social worker training programme. The youth wing of Chiricli could be a good start, as well as the participants of the Roma educational fellowship of the International Renaissance Foundation.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/682016-19805>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/5012015-19364>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org.ua/eng/publications/559.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.news.35487>



### 7.4.2 Specific recommendations for ROMED2:

- Include organisational development and capacity-building components for CAGs and participating Roma NGOs. Organise fellowships or twinning exchanges among similar groups within the ROMED2 network to share best practices among peers.
- Encourage more networking between participating municipalities and also use conditionality. For example, if a city would like to be part of the Programme, they should employ at least one mediator as part of social services.
- Raise the Programme's profile by holding regular meetings of the ROMED Management Team from Strasbourg with high-level government officials in Ukraine.
- Closely monitor domestic dynamics: see if new opportunities could open up. Ukraine is in transition and structural reforms are under way. Consider engaging with the National Reform Council within the Administration of the President.
- Decentralisation offers new opportunities but also poses new challenges. Capacity development is needed for mediators, local government and local members of councils in how to evaluate community needs, how to prepare budget proposals, and how to do participatory budgeting.
- Encourage Roma to engage in political life: run for local councils, national parliaments. Provide training on how to run campaigns.
- See if synergies could be built around other European Union and Council of Europe projects on local governance, decentralisation and human rights. Roma debate should also be included in a general discourse on these issues. Engage Roma representatives in other programme conferences. For example, the European Union has launched a new decentralisation programme to support local development, and it is important that ROMED2 municipalities engage with it: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-6263\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-6263_en.htm)
- Consider opening a Council of Europe special Roma project office in Kyiv to monitor and assist national authorities to implement the Roma inclusion programme and its national strategy. This could raise the status of the ROMED2 Programme and help put more pressure of national authorities.