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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

This report provides the results of the external evaluation of the ROMED1 and ROMED2 Joint Programmes of the Council of Europe (CoE) and European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). The objectives of the evaluation were to (1) assess the effectiveness of the two programmes in contributing to improvements in the situation of the target groups, (2) analyse their impact on policies at local, national and European levels, and (3) identify lessons from their implementation and provide recommendations for the future.

The evaluation covered seven focus countries – Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The methodology comprised:

- Desk research;
- Semi-structured interviews with international, national and local stakeholders;
- A written survey and 10 focus groups with mediators trained by ROMED1;
- 15 case studies in municipalities covered by ROMED2 including interviews with local authorities and with the established Community Action Group (CAG).

The evaluation was implemented between 15 February and 30 June 2016 by an international team consisting of six country-based experts, and a regional senior evaluation team. In total 363 stakeholders were consulted through interviews and focus groups, the majority of whom (348) were national stakeholders in the focus countries. Over 55% of them (194) were representatives of Roma communities – mediators or members of the ROMED2 CAGs. In addition, 138 mediators responded to the survey.

ROMED1 'European Training Programme on intercultural mediation for Roma Communities'

ROMED1 emerged from the earlier extensive work of the CoE to promote intercultural mediation, highlighted in the Strasbourg Declaration, signed by the representatives of the member states in October 2010. It established ROMED1 as a *European Training Programme*, implemented in co-operation with national and local authorities with the aim of enhancing the quality of the work of Roma mediators in order to improve Roma access to local services.

ROMED1 was implemented in 22 European countries from July 2011 to March 2013. It was financed through two CoE-European Union (EU) joint programme agreements amounting to €2,000,000, of which 50% was provided by DG EAC and 50% by the CoE. ROMED1 continued in some countries from 2014 to 2016 in response to demand from national institutions to train or provide refresher training to specific groups of Mediators.

ROMED1 developed and spread a new vision for the role of Roma mediators at European, national and local levels. It was initiated as a complex capacity building effort aimed at systemic change. The methodology was systematised in the ROMED1 Trainer's Handbook¹ which was continuously improved on the basis of feedback from trainers and participants. From 2011 to 2016 ROMED1 trained 1,479 mediators from 500 municipalities in 22 countries. Approximately 90% of the trained mediators are Roma, and more than 50% are women. Over 700 representatives of local institutions took part in training

¹ Handbook available for download in English: <http://coe-romed.org/sites/default/files/documentation/ROMED1%20Trainers%20Handbook.pdf>

sessions which increased their understanding of the role of mediators. Representatives of national institutions with relevant responsibilities in Roma inclusion were also present at some training sessions.

The ROMED1 training programme was considered by local stakeholders to be highly relevant to the needs of local Roma inclusion processes. In particular, mediators valued it for its human rights based approach and empowerment orientation, and for its focus on the clarity of the role of mediators and the practical aspects of their work.

The programme's main impact was to increase the functional capacities of participating mediators. However, it had little impact on the employment status of mediators, especially in countries where the mediator's profession is not recognised. The programme had variable impact across the evaluation focus countries on national policies relating to mediators.

The overall effectiveness of ROMED1 was constrained by the rapid expansion of the programme to 22 countries in response to a political pressure to quickly demonstrate success.

ROMED2 'Democratic Governance and Community Participation through Mediation'

ROMED2 emerged from the learning of ROMED1. It invested in local processes aimed at enhancing the participation of Roma in local decision making. It stimulated the self-organisation of Roma communities into community action groups (CAGs). Through a structured process of dialogue and cooperation with local authorities, the CAGs identified community priorities and suggested initiatives for addressing them.

ROMED2 was financed through three joint programme grant agreements amounting to €3,100,000. Again, 50% of the funding was provided by DG EAC, and 50% by the CoE. Implementation commenced in April 2013 and is presently expected to end in February 2017. It has been active in 54 municipalities in 11 countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, the Slovak Republic, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM), and Ukraine.

ROMED2 led to the establishment of 54 CAGs (each with between six and 27 members) in the 11 countries. It also led to the establishment of local authority working groups to work together with the CAGs. National facilitators supported both the CAGs and the local authorities in their interaction and with the participatory development of local plans.

Evidence from the 15 case studies in ROMED2 municipalities indicates that the programme is considered very relevant, as it revolves around Roma community empowerment. The CAGs are viewed as practical schools for active citizenship that have increased the participatory skills and the self-esteem of their members so that they are now able to influence local policies. The ROMED2 process is highly acknowledged by local authorities as it has enabled them to learn directly from Roma communities about their needs, and they value the CAGs as new partners for solving urgent problems.

The main impact of ROMED2 has been the empowerment of Roma communities through the CAGs, and the opening of local authorities to cooperation with them. This has resulted in the incorporation of CAG suggestions into municipal plans in many locations. Although very recent, the plans have led to the resolution of urgent problems in Roma communities, and they have led to new initiatives in the areas of infrastructure, education, employment and services.

The main challenges related to the need of more time to build trust and empower marginalised communities. Unstable political support from local councils was also sometimes problematic. There were

insufficient resources to support the CAGs, and support to local processes was interrupted by slow negotiations between the CoE and the European Commission in 2015. The most affected by this were the four countries transferred to ROMACT in 2015, as the CoE contribution was only 20% and could not bridge the gap created by the missing European Commission resources. There was a lack of clarity regarding the strategic synergies expected between ROMED2 and ROMACT and this caused confusion and limited effectiveness in the four countries.

Recommendations

It is recommended that support to the ROMED programme be continued, but with a clear focus on sustainability and national and local ownership.

Future ROMED mediator training should focus on sustainability by developing in-country systems for formal recognition of mediation as profession, and continuing professional development. More concretely, the ROMED1 programme should:

- Ensure alignment with existing national programmes and require clear commitment from national authorities that mediators will continue their employment or will be formally employed, and that financial resources are allocated to support their training and continuing professional development.
- Focus support on developing the capacities of established mediator networks as new actors promoting intercultural mediation.
- Allocate resources to assist national advocacy efforts for: recognition of the profession of mediator; allocation of government support for mediator training programmes; official certification of training for mediators and incentives for their professional development.
- Support more systemic monitoring of the implementation of the Strasbourg Declaration signed by national governments. Civil society and networks of mediators can contribute by developing annual shadow reports on the situation of mediators in each country.

For ROMED2 it is recommended to

- Foster the focus on education as an engine for (1) the empowerment of communities and (2) the development of long term municipal vision for sustained impact on Roma inclusion.
- Develop strategic partnerships with actors with specific expertise in different approaches to improved Roma access to formal education, such as the Roma Education Fund (REF).
- Maintain the combination of non-formal education (active citizenship and empowerment) and formal education (access to quality education, reduced drop out, pre-school education), etc.
- Ensure that CAGs include members with a genuine interest in education. Alternatively develop a set of interest groups (parents, mothers, youth, women etc.) around education that work together with the CAGs on concrete educational initiatives.
- Facilitate consultations and meetings with diverse local stakeholders to ensure broad support for educational initiatives in municipalities.