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# CASE STUDY KAKANJ

## **“BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA”, Kakanj**

### **The Context: problems and opportunities**

Kakanj is a municipality with a large Roma community located in the central part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This municipality is more urbanized than the other municipalities targeted by ROMED in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Officially, there are 43,406 inhabitants, out of whom 2,490 are estimated to be of Roma ethnicity (according to the data of the local Roma Information Centre). There are several Roma neighbourhoods: Varda, Željeznička Stanica, Papratnica, Malješ, Autobuska stanica and Cementara. Issues of concern facing the Roma communities include unemployment, low levels of education, a lack of, or poor, healthcare and inadequate housing conditions. In addition, many Roma families live in illegal settlements and lack property documents. Some of these issues are often inter-linked: for example, Roma persons are not usually aware of registration deadlines in the employment agency and thus lose the right to claim health insurance.

Another problematic issue in Kakanj is undoubtedly the large number of Roma returnees originating from the deportations, initiated by some EU member states, of persons from ex-Yugoslav countries without refugee or asylum status, among whom many were Roma. These people are faced with numerous issues: children do not have complete school records so they are obliged to repeat the school year; families lose their health insurance due to non-respected registration deadlines; many lack identity documents once they return to the municipality; and families do not have a place to stay as they sold their properties before leaving the country.

The municipality of Kakanj has a good record of Roma inclusion-related projects. It was the first municipality in BiH with designated budget funding for Roma inclusion, mostly for housing projects. In 2015, the municipality allocated 100,000 BAM (50,000 Euros) from state funds and programmes of other donors. Moreover, the local administration in Kakanj shows great interest in investing its own funds in new initiatives and projects.

Prior to the implementation of ROMED2, although there was a National Action Plan for Roma inclusion, Kakanj did not have a specific Local Action Plan. However, such a plan was adopted in the period January-March 2015 with the support and lobbying of the ROMED National Support Team and World Vision BiH. Many projects implemented up until now are in the area of housing (either funded by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees or other donors such as Hilfswerk and Caritas). In addition, there have been small infrastructure projects (CARE International) and others focused on education.

### **The Community Action Group (CAG)**

The Community Action (CAG) was established with the facilitation of the National Support Team in February 2015. The group is composed of Roma mediators and more prominent members of the Roma community who have been previously active in solving communal issues. All CAG members are of Roma origin, but participation in the group is open to non-Roma participants. Sometimes, CAG meetings are attended by representatives of the non-Roma community who have experience in resolving issues under the competence of the local administration, such as the installation of street lightning and other infrastructure projects, etc. Since the two phases of the Programme (ROMED1 – Training of Mediators and ROMED2) were implemented in parallel, mediators have had an essential role to play in mobilizing the group. In most cases, they initiate the CAG meetings when certain problems are identified in the community or in cases when individuals raise a certain issue requiring discussion. The group meets regularly and brings together 13 members on average, including the National Project Officer (NPO) and National Focal Point (NFP). The participation of women in the CAG has been balanced, with an average of six women per meeting. The age range in the group is from 20

to 45. Whilst the diversity in Kakanj resides in all of these aspects, the difference in status of returnees and permanent residents also contributes to it. The priorities of the CAG reflect all of these interests.

From the beginning, the CAG listed a set of short-term and long-term priorities. The short-term priorities went in line with awareness-raising workshops on the importance of education, healthcare, etc. The NST organised a set of workshops related to the education of returnees' children. In these cases, Roma parents are often less aware of the implications that this kind of life brings. They are not aware about the administrative procedures in such cases, which subsequently leads to the situation whereby children cannot continue their formal education. The CAG has also prioritized the employment of mediators within local structures. In the course of 2016, Kakanj managed to find employment<sup>1</sup> for one Roma mediator as a coordinator in the pedagogical institution "Mladost" Kakanj. The NST is currently advocating for the employment of one Roma mediator in the Center for Social Work or in the municipal administration.

One of the important long-term priorities of the CAG is to increase the level of education and employment of the Roma from Kakanj. However, once the group started discussions with the representatives of local authorities, many other important priorities were identified in addition to the initial leading priorities. One of these is certainly to raise awareness of gender equality, especially in the planning of initiatives to reduce levels of violence against women in Roma communities.

Furthermore, prior to the ROMED Programme, it was hard to obtain reliable data from the field. The formation of the CAG has significantly facilitated the process of inquiring into the real needs and priorities of the people concerned. In addition, the group has developed very good relationships and achieved visibility within the Roma community.

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

ROMED's implementation in Kakanj could serve as an example in terms of support from the mayor's office, where good collaboration has been previously established with the NPO, Mr Mujo Fafulic (who is also a local councillor). According to the National Support Team, there isn't any mistrust between the two sides which significantly facilitates the implementation of the Programme. As well as that of the mayor, support was also given by World Vision BiH and CARE International. In addition, in 2016 Kakanj municipality and World Vision donated around 7000 BAM (approximately 3,500 EUR) to a Roma family to help them start their family business.

The interaction and communication with representatives of local authorities in the municipality of Kakanj was very effective. The local administration consults with the CAG on the identification of priorities and development of local policies and works together with the CAG to design concrete programmes and projects. There are monthly consultations held between the CAG and representatives from the local administration, as well as daily communication if needed. The topics of the joint meetings are often in line with the needs raised by CAG members and local institutions, such as capacity-building workshops for writing project proposals. These meetings/workshops are led by the two ROMED trainers who are also involved in partner organisations (World Vision and CARE International). The third trainer worked previously for the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR). These joint meetings have brought the participants closer together, facilitating their communication even more.

The municipality has adopted a local development strategy including the priorities which were identified in consultation with the CAG. From the perspective of the municipality, the main long-term priorities for the development of the Roma community are solving the housing problem, increasing the

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<sup>1</sup> The mediator was employed on a part-time basis from 1 September 2016 until 28 February 2017.

access of Roma children to quality education and developing new opportunities for employment (setting the ground for agricultural business).

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

### **Results and impact in the communities**

Good cooperation between the representatives of the Roma community and representatives of local authorities has resulted in commitment and a concrete Joint Action Plan for the improvement of the situation of Roma in Kakanj. A local development strategy has been adopted which includes measures for improving housing conditions, health and education for the children of returnees, as well as quality education for Roma children in general.

The municipality has allocated special funds for minorities in the amount of 10,000 BAM (5,000 EUR), as well as emergency funds to deal with high-level priorities regarding the Roma (emergency treatment, hospitalization, medical supplies, death, etc.) in the amount of 50,000 BAM (25,000 EUR). The municipality also gives small amounts of funding to Roma pupils and students (with no particular ranking). This means that every Roma child has the opportunity to receive such a stipend. Hot meals are also provided for all Roma children during the school year. In terms of housing, the construction of five buildings is nearing completion. Currently, the NST is a partner in negotiating between the municipality and Caritas Switzerland and MHRR on the construction of an additional building for Roma.

### **Conclusions and lessons forward**

The implementation of the ROMED2 phase was successful in Kakanj, underlining some lessons which are also valid after the closure of the Programme:

- ***Political will and support from the local authorities is of pivotal importance for the successful implementation of the Programme:*** The mayor's office in Kakanj has always been very positive towards the method that ROMED brings which leads to real, positive impact in Roma communities. The good collaboration between the NPO and the mayor resulted in opening the way for new solutions, facilitating the process in general. Thanks to the demonstrated support (also in financial means) from the municipality, the NST can plan more tangible action in approaching the short-term and long-term priorities.
- ***As a general conclusion on the ROMED2 process, it is important to identify the common needs of the CAG and LAG.*** In this manner, communication between the two sides will be even easier and the veil of mistrust lifted faster.
- ***Diverse representation of Roma community members in the Community Action Group*** in terms of age, vocation, level of education and personal motivation is the guarantee for keeping the process open to the broader issues affecting the community, not only confined to a specific interest group. This can help with the understanding and consolidation of the community around the long-term vision for the empowerment and inclusion of Roma, which will be the engine to work on specific causes.
- ***One of the main factors for the success of the process lies in the synergies between the ROMED2 Programme and other available programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*** World Vision BiH and CARE International have contributed by various means to the ROMED2 process: logistics, content-wise, training session, finance, etc. These synergies are of great importance for the future sustainability of the process.

There is high potential for the sustainability of the local processes initiated in Kakanj. Both the CAG and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. However, there is a visible need to invest in increasing the capacity of local authorities and CAG representatives to absorb the national funds allocated for Roma inclusion, in order to address the broader problem of under-spending of the allocated funds from the national budget for Roma.