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



COUNTRY FINDINGS THE "FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA"



ROMED in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

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1.1 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 areas¹. 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-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.

¹ 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

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

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](#)

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.

1.2 ROMED1 key findings

1.2.1 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.

1.2.2 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.

1.2.3 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.

1.2.4 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.

1.3 ROMED2 key findings

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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.

1.3.3 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.

1.3.4 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.

1.4 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.