Intercultural Mediation for Roma Communities

A joint Council of Europe/European Commission action

Starting points: facts and challenges

Mediation is one of the measures used across Europe to tackle the inequalities Roma face in terms of access to employment, healthcare services and quality education. It consists of involving people with a Roma background, from local Roma communities, or with a good knowledge of Roma issues, to act as mediators between the Roma and the public institutions.

► A diversity of situations and tasks

Many differences exist between countries, both in the situation and work of the Roma communities, in the terminology used, and in the extent to which mediators are professionally employed and trained with job profiles varying. Another new challenge is posed by Roma migrating to other countries.

► A pragmatic approach to target group identification

This programme will use mediators with a Roma background who speak the language of the Roma community they are working with, if needed. Their tasks and responsibilities include facilitating communication between Roma and a public institution.

Challenges in the practice of mediation

Mediation has often led to significant improvements, but its effectiveness is frequently challenged by situations such as the low status of mediators and professional employment, dependency of the head of the institution, political influence, to continue working on the payment of addition minor tasks, sometimes not listed in the job profile. In addition, mediators might be seen as an excuse to avoid direct contact with the community, or are expected to shoulder full responsibility for solving problems. Their work is day to day, equal, with little or no planning, inconsistent evaluation and lack of support in performing the job. Such factors mean that success is strongly dependent on the mediator’s personal qualities and on personal attitudes of the staff of the institution or the mediators themselves.

Mediators

• establish a relationship of trust and open communication with the parties involved;
• seek to understand the situation in which the parties find themselves;
• establish contact between parties and the public institutions (education, health and employment);
• facilitate and/or reinforce the parties’ representatives;
• support the mediators to carry their responsibilities;
• provide input to the pool of mediators;
• hold training sessions;
• train and open communication with the mediators;
• provide feedback on the national activities during the evaluation conference.

Focal points (in most cases a Roma organisation, a public structure in charge with Roma issues, (school/health/employment office, local Roma NGO, local authorities, etc.)

Local stakeholders

Council of Europe

National authorities

National Fiscal Point

• supports the mediator to carry their responsibilities for the six-month period between the last training session;
• supports the Council of Europe in the training process;
• provides input to the pool of mediators on the online platform, to help in organisation of the second training session;
• provides feedback on the national activities during the evaluation conference.

Mediation Practice (6 months) Training 1 Training 2 Evaluation conference.

Local stakeholders

Council of Europe

National Fiscal Point

Training 1

Training 2

The ROMED programme receives the generous financial support from the following:

Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues

Aurora Ailincai

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Focal points (Local stakeholders)
The mission defined in the Strasbourg Declaration: In the Strasbourg Declaration, adopted in Strasbourg 2010, at the High Level Meeting on Roma, representatives of Member States agreed that the Council of Europe would implement a European Training Programme for Roma Mediators in order to consolidate the existing training programmes and more effectively train mediating staff, methodological networks and infrastructure, in close operation with national and local authorities.

General aim of the ROMED programme: To improve the quality and effectiveness of the work of school/hospital/employment mediation, and to harmonise training programmes at local or national levels, but is complementing them, providing additional training in the field of Roma mediation and cooperation between Roma and public institutions (rehabilitation, healthcare providers etc.)

Objectives of the ROMED programme:
- to promote real and effective intercultural mediation;
- to ensure the implementation of a rights-based approach;
- to promote the work of mediators by providing tools for planning and implementation of those activities which encourage democratic participation while preventing perpetuation of Roma stereotypes and increased vulnerability of public institutions.

TheROMED programme is not replacing or duplicating the existing training programmes at local or national level, but is complementing them, providing tools, methodology and technologies, and contributing to the development of the core competencies of mediators. The ROMED programme will also assist some countries in setting up training programmes. The ROMED training will rely on a curriculum with a strong focus on practice and adapting tools and methodologies used in the field.

A framework curriculum: The training will rely on a curriculum with a strong focus on practice and adaptable to specific training needs of mediators working in different contexts and with different institutions and Roma communities.

A European Code of Ethics for Mediators: A set of core principles and norms to guide the work of mediators has been identified as a key tool for protecting the mediator against abuse and for enhancing the quality of the services provided. A first draft, inspired by experience in various countries, has been drawn up and will be submitted for feedback to relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

A pool of trainers and European networking: A first group of trainers, selected on the basis of an open call, was trained in Strasbourg from 24 to 28 January 2011. The first round of training for the second group of countries is planned for 2012. The first group of countries who will be involved is expected to provide a platform.

First group of beneficiary countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine. The Programme will be expanded to other countries, and additional training delivered in the second group of countries. Additional countries in the third group will become available.

Implementation of training (March - December 2011):
- First round of training: 4 days. During the first training period, the Rome training (4 days). During the last day: joint activities with local stakeholders and training exercises. In the relationship, both parties are mediators in a training facility model. This capacity training is based on the methods of the national and local authorities.
- Second round of training: 3 days. During the second round of training, the methodologies used in the field (including the training into group work). Local stakeholders and international Roma mobility is a key tool for the development of the programme, as well as transnational bilateral or multilateral cooperation between countries and local authorities. A training manual will be a useful tool for support and sustainability.

Which bodies play which roles?
Council of Europe
- The Council of Europe ensures the overall coordination of the programme through the work of the support team of the Secretariat of the Convention for Rome. Other Council of Europe actions, such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, provide support. A network of Roma experts has been selected and trained together with the experts in the field. Through this network, the Council of Europe monitors close cooperation with Roma organisations active at European level, and with other European and international organisations. The programme can only be successful if a variety of stakeholders contribute.

Relevant institutions (health, education, employment) at local level:
- The national and local authorities
- identify the mediators who will be involved in the training programmes
- ensure that representatives from local institutions participate during the training day of the first training group (4 days) in Rome, together with the representatives from local institutions from the last day of the training and the representatives from local authorities
- support mediators to carry out additional training activities based on the approach promoted by the training programme
- provide feedback to the focal points in cooperation
- Roma organisations
- support the implementation of the programme at local level;
- provide feedback and support to the programme
- contribute to the evaluation process and to the identification of suggestions for policy adjust-ments.