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

COUNTRY FINDINGS ROMANIA

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European value(s)



ROMED
Médiation pour les Roms
Mediation for Roma

ROMED in Romania

Adriana Crisan, country expert in Romania

1.1 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)¹. 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".

¹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma>

1.2 ROMED1 key findings

1.2.1 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.

1.2.2 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.

1.2.3 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.

1.2.4 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.

1.3 ROMED2 key findings

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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, Cumpăna and Budești:** 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.² 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

² Work in Budila municipality had to be cancelled due to false reporting.

allegations of corruption of the City Hall by a rich Roma family. Almost all the requests of the CAG during the 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.

1.3.3 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 children³; in Targu Jiu, new school mediators were appointed. Based on the reports and examples from interviews, in a

³ 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.

number of municipalities transport for school children was ensured, thus increasing their access to schools (Buzau, 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.

1.3.4 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.

1.4 Lessons and recommendations

1.4.1 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.

1.4.2 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.