



## ***SECOND TRANSNATIONAL MEETING OF THE PROJECT***

***Network of cities which use CLLD principles and cultural activities to promote inclusion of the Roma in Europe***

***Torino, Italy, 31 of January – 3 of February 2018***

### ***International conference***

#### ***Presentation of good practices on inclusion from local level***

##### **1. Title of the project**

ROMACT IN BULGARIA – A GOOD PRACTICE FOR RAISING LOCAL AUTHORITIES' COMMITMENT TO ROMA SOCIAL INCLUSION

##### **2. Context:**

ROMACT programme is a joint initiative of EC and CoE started in 2013 initially as ROMED-ROMACT programme in six Bulgarian municipalities.

Since 2015 the programme has been implemented in Bulgaria as ROMACT programme.

So far 4 cycles of the programme has fulfilled in 30 municipalities.

The size of the municipalities included in ROMACT – Bulgaria is:

- 1 large municipality with a population over 350 000 of whom about 25 000 are Roma people;
- 6 medium-sized municipalities with a population of 30 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants and a total number of Roma there about 20 000;
- 16 small municipalities with a population of 10 thousand to 30 thousand inhabitants and over 15 000 Roma people;
- 7 very small municipalities with a population of less than 10 thousand and total number of Roma there about 5000 people.

The ROMACT programme is a response to the need of acting at local level where Roma realities continues to be facing discrimination, exclusion and denial of basic rights.

Despite the available National Roma Integration Strategy<sup>1</sup> and municipal action plans, in many cases adopted by the Municipal Councils, concerted actions are missing at all levels in Bulgaria to address the multiple causes of Roma exclusion. Besides, the active work for Roma integration requires political courage and commitment, adequate administrative capacity, consistent and lasting efforts and a strategic approach that goes beyond the electoral cycles. Furthermore, many local authorities are prevented from fulfilling their role because they are severely limited by human and financial resource constraints, political circumstances and language barriers, among others.

<sup>1</sup>The National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020 was adopted by the National Assembly of Bulgaria in 2012 in response to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies



The ROMACT programme is seeking to assist mayors and municipal authorities in working cooperatively with local Roma communities to develop policies and public services that are inclusive of all, including Roma.

### 3. Objectives:

The general goal of ROMACT is to improve the responsiveness and accountability of local authorities, particularly the elected officials and senior civil servants, to their marginalised Roma communities. The key approach of the programme is to provide expert support and assist the mayors and municipal authorities in working cooperatively with the local Roma communities to develop inclusive policies and public services for all, including Roma.

### 4. Target group:

By the beginning of 2018 the ROMACT approach has been applied in 30 municipalities of Bulgaria: Varna, Shumen, Sliven, Maglizh, Tundzha, Byala Slatina, Ispereh, Aytos, Sredets, Novi Pazar, Nikola Kozlevo, Peshtera, Tvarditsa, Vetovo, Septemvri, Sopot, Borovan, Boychinovtsi, Slivo Pole, Dobrich, Botevgrad, Samokov, Cherven Bryag, Lukovit, Shabla, Zavet, Dryanovo, Sungurlare, Bratsigovo, Kaolinovo.

The target group of the programme in these municipalities includes:

- Local authorities (LA) of the 30 municipalities: 30 municipal mayors, 30 deputy mayors, dozens of municipal councillors, village mayors, municipal administrations;
- Local Roma communities – over 65 000 Roma people, of which over 350 involved in Community Action Groups (CAG) established within these communities;
- Representatives of the local institutions, involved together with the CAGs and LAs in municipal taskforces for Roma social inclusion: teachers, social workers, employment officers, mediators, police officers, health professionals, etc.

### 5. Activities

The activities implemented in the Bulgarian ROMACT municipalities follow the ROMACT 4 methodological steps<sup>2</sup> as follows:

#### STEP 1: Becoming committed

ACT 1 Understand need to tackle marginalisation

ACT 2 Appoint Coordinator

ACT 3 Contract Facilitator

ACT 4 Map stakeholders

ACT 5 Set up Municipal Taskforce for Roma Inclusion

ACT 6 Supporting setup of Community Action Group (CAG)

#### STEP 2: Agreeing on needs & plans

ACT 7 Decide on where to intervene

ACT 8 Assess capacities of municipality

ACT 9 Carry out Community Needs Assessment

---

<sup>2</sup> More about the ROMACT approach can be found at: <http://coe-romact.org/about-romact>



ACT 10 Draft Community Priorities List

STEP 3: Translating plans into concrete measures & projects

ACT 11 Develop & adopt Joint Action Plan for Roma inclusion

ACT 12 Implement short & medium term actions

ACT 13 rather “Local Development Strategy” than segregated in separate “Roma strategy”

ACT 14 Prepare concrete actions

STEP 4: Funding, implementing & monitoring

ACT 15 Fund actions

ACT 16 Implement actions

ACT 17 Monitor & evaluate implementation of actions with CAG

It is important to know that the average duration of the program in each municipality is between 18-22 months depending on the speed of:

- establishing the different program Steps and Actions (ACTs) elements;
- build-up of the relationships between the different parties involved and
- implementation of the programme

It is also important to share that there are some difficulties to apply the approach of ROMACT in the large municipalities:

- They are hard for community organization;
- Often with the presence of parallel state structures that hold people in different dependencies: political dealers; speculators, money-lenders, pimps, drug dealers, etc.
- The local authorities and municipal administration have resources for easy access to the EU OPs and not interested in the offered expert support to elaborate project proposals

An important aspect is to pay a special attention to the establishment and functions of the community action group (CAG). Some points of this are:

- Target all members of the community when constitute the CAG – it is an open, civil group, usually not formalised but with rules for interaction and decision making decided by the founders of the CAG;
- Good to have at least 8-10 core members that attend the meetings of the CAG on a regular base;
- In the case of traditional communities, special attention to Roma women and Roma youths is needed – separate meetings to organise with them if needed;
- Carry out initiatives to overcome the community distrust: addressing short-term issues by LA or organizing a community event by the community can contribute for overcoming the distrust of the community;



An important action from the ROMACT approach is the community needs assessment and prioritization. The hallmark of the activity in Bulgaria is the implementation of a community survey for data collection, facts finding as well as for involving of the community.

The facilitator assist the CAG at 3-4 meetings to analyse the identified needs and find the interrelated factors and causes of the problems. Then, a priority list is elaborated and officially submitted to the mayor. Finally, before starting the elaboration of the joint action plan, the Taskforce discusses and provides feedback on the CAG's priority list.

In the case of the work with the Local authorities (LA), there are also some specific points as:

- targeting mainly the mayor but also involving the Local Council as it is the main decision making body;
- ROMACT coordinator is a high level staff member of the municipality – deputy mayor, who can take decisions independently;
- The municipality is requested also to appoint 1-2 contact persons that are easily reached by the facilitator;
- The mayor issues orders for appointment of the coordinator and municipal taskforce (MTF)
- The role of the Municipal Taskforce (MTF) is to discuss & consults the proposed joint action plans (JAP), project concepts, other topics related to social inclusion of Roma. It also provides an input for the monitoring and assessment of the JAP.
- The taskforce consists of municipal staff + representatives of the institutions + at least 1/3 Roma and its work is arranged by a Regulations approved by the mayor or Municipal Council

Last but not least, should be mentioned the established capacity building trajectory designed by the national support team of the programme based on the identified training needs of the different stakeholders involved – LAs, CAG, local professionals. The training trajectory is composed by:

- Interactive trainings aimed at personal transformation of LAs, CAGs and professionals work with Roma people;
- Onsite coaching of CAG members by the facilitator;
- Onsite expert consultations for LAs on different topics

## 6. Results:

Out of 30 involved municipalities, 2 were excluded because of impossibility to meet the programme principles and requirements.

In general, the following results have been achieved so far:

- 12 of the municipalities finalized all 4 steps
- 5 municipalities are at step 4
- 11 municipalities are in steps 1-2
- 16 jointly elaborated local action plans for Roma were adopted by the Local Councils;
- 23 projects elaborated with support of ROMACT experts;
- 15 projects were approved for about 8 million Euro;
- 4 projects are waiting assessment;





- 4 projects were rejected;
- Numerous of conflict resolution, prevention of evictions, allocated plots for housing; addressed many short-term needs of the communities;

#### **7. Changes generated in the local community:**

- Increased commitment of the local authorities
- Raised capacities of the municipal administrations to plan & implement local inclusive policies;
- Increased competences of municipal officers and local professionals for intercultural communication;
- Increased self-organisation of Roma communities and ability to identify and define community priority needs and issues;
- Raised ability of Roma communities for negotiation and equal dialog with the LAs
- Enhanced networks of Roma people out of the Roma community, cooperation of the citizens at local level
- Improved skills of CAGs and LAs for empathetic communication

#### **8. Innovation in social inclusion**

- ✓ *Process-Orientation:* oriented to the process that generate social changes instead only in counting the number of implemented activities;
- ✓ *Active participation of the Roma community:* Roma know better what they need, why, what are the barriers, what can be done, what is affordable & sustainable. Roma participation means sharing the responsibility for the decisions made and activities implemented to improve the lives of both the Roma and non Roma citizens;
- ✓ *Attention to poor and socially excluded Roma:* ethnicity disadvantages poor people in a greater degree than the other people but targeting Roma only because they are Roma increases the stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma as well as the passiveness among the Roma themselves; focus on the poor Roma helps to avoid the negative perceptions "Roma receive more than their share";
- ✓ *Integrated approach:* taking into consideration the interrelated issues, causes & solutions; avoiding shopping list of activities without strategy;
- ✓ *Planning actions to address specific local needs:* adapt strategy to municipality; same need in 2 different municipalities would have different causes and solutions
- ✓ *Addressing barriers to access public services:* the sentence "if you build it, people will come" not always works. In some cases people do not know what the services offer really to them and then it is needed to increase the awareness of the people about the usefulness of the services. In other cases people have bad experience or cannot afford the services, so that is important to investigate the affordability beforehand.

**Elaborated by: Liliya Makaveeva  
Director of Integro Association**