

ROMA

I. Background

The Council of Europe first became involved in Roma issues back in 1969, in an effort to ensure education for all, including minorities. The Council of Europe has continued down this path by creating various activities, including training for Roma teachers, since 1983. In 1993, for the first time, the Roma community was recognised as a “true European minority”.

When it was set up in September 1995, the Group of Specialists on Roma/Gypsies (known as MG-S-ROM) was the first European body existing on a long-term basis to monitor the situation of Roma in Europe. Made up of permanent and non-permanent members appointed by the member states, it advises the Committee of Ministers, through the European Committee on Migration (CDMG), about issues relating to Roma. In 2002, the MG-S-ROM expanded its areas of responsibility to include Travellers (nomadic Roma and Sinti, as well as other groups such as Irish Travellers, Swiss Yenish or Sicilian Camminanti).

2011 saw a renewed focus on issues concerning Roma issues at the Council of Europe with the creation of a dedicated transversal team led by a Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues. This structure acts as a hub bringing together the different projects on Roma being undertaken at the Council of Europe following the high level meeting on Roma (October 2010). It also builds on the work carried out and results achieved by the Council of Europe in this field, in particular over the past 15 years.

CAHROM

Following the High-Level meeting, intergovernmental work on Roma issues has been upgraded: on 16 February 2011 the Ministers Deputies adopted terms of reference for a new Committee of Experts (CAHROM) to be

answerable directly to the Committee of Ministers. The terms of reference place emphasis on the analysis and evaluation of the implementation of national policies and thematic exchanges of experience and good practices. International organisations, the European Roma and Travellers Forum and other relevant (Roma) organisations are associated as observers to the CAHROM.

European Alliance for Roma inclusion

Representatives from Europe’s cities and regions gather in Strasbourg on September 25th as they continue work to build a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. An initiative of the first ever Summit of Mayors on Roma, organised in September 2011 by the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe with the support of the Special Representative of Secretary General for Roma issues, the Alliance has so far been backed by around one hundred municipalities and regions.

Its mission is to provide a hub for grassroots work on the Roma, allowing its members to share good practice, find joint solutions to common problems, seek funding opportunities, and replicate successful projects in their own constituency. Working methods include training sessions, workshops, twinning, study visits and day to day contacts between Alliance members, allowing positive developments in local strategies and improved capacity building of local and regional authorities throughout Europe.

ROMED programme

Mediators build a bridge between Roma communities and the outside world. Their job is to act as “ambassadors of trust” between Roma communities and local public institutions – for example, getting Roma children into local schools, making sure that families get proper health care, helping Roma secure decent housing and find jobs that will bring them out of long term unemployment and back into salaried work. In the

Strasbourg Declaration, adopted in October 2010 at the High Level Meeting on Roma, representatives of Member States agreed that the Council of Europe should implement a European Training Programme for Mediators in order to consolidate the existing training programmes and more effectively use existing Council of Europe resources, standards, methodology, networks and infrastructure, in close co-operation with national and local authorities. ROMED project is a joint Council of Europe/European Commission action which is also supported at local level by Open Society Institute and local or regional networks, non-governmental organisations and associations. General aim of the ROMED: To improve the quality and effectiveness of the work of school/health/employment mediators, with a view to supporting better communication and cooperation between Roma and public institutions (school / healthcare providers / employment offices).

Campaigning to overcome prejudice – Dosta!

Dosta means enough in the Romani language, and is the slogan of the Council of Europe's campaign to change attitudes and get people to discover the true potential of the Roma people. It was launched in the framework of a joint programme with the European Commission and it is now expanded to every interested country.

II. Comparative advantages and added value

The Council of Europe has always played a role in setting standards and judgments from the Court of Human Rights have helped make advances in Roma rights.

A range of Recommendation and Resolutions have been adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly (see at http://hub.coe.int/web/coe-portal/roma_reference-texts).

The activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Roma are guided by the priorities settled in the Strasbourg Declaration (October 2010) and the bi-annual Programme of Activities (which has direct link to the legal framework in which the activities take place). It is also supervised by the CAHROM (Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues) a committee under the direct responsibility of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE.

The Council of Europe staff working under the supervision of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues is an experienced staff. Each activity is developed in close cooperation with the steering board of the specific projects. The participation of Roma in the design and implementation of activities concerning their communities is an essential feature of CoE co-operation programmes.

III. Geographic contextualisation

The **ROMED programme** is a joint EU/CoE programme implemented in 20 countries. The programme has benefited from financial support from the European Commission; 1.000.000€ par year have been allocated by both organisations as 50%-50% matching funds. The programme aims at improving the situation of Roma, but also at promoting professionalization of Roma mediators (recognition, formal qualifications, etc).

The countries so far involved are: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Turkey, UK and Ukraine, with others to follow.

Main achievements of the programme are:

- design and elaboration of a new training curriculum for mediators (available in 20 languages);
- elaboration of the 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;
- creation of a European pool of ROMED trainers (65 trainers out of which 40 are of Roma origin).
- creation of a European Database on Mediators, a valuable resource with up-to-date information on various aspects of Roma mediation in a number of countries. This tool is already available online and needs constant updating. www.coe-romed.org
- over 1000 mediators trained in 20 countries and Kosovo*. A very large majority of mediators are Roma, the others have a very good knowledge of the Roma community. There is a balanced gender participation in the training sessions.
- around 800 representatives from national and local institutions have attended training sessions on cooperation between mediators and public institutions and authorities;
- creation of a European network for mediators which allows professional exchanges between mediators and their peers in other regions or countries.
- adoption of the **CM/Rec(2012)9 Recommendation on mediation as an effective tool for promoting respect for human rights and social inclusion of Roma.**

The ROMED Programme provides groups of national trainers with the substantive knowledge and methodological skills to train independently, without the need for continuous support from international experts. These national trainers will act as multipliers to their peers in subsequent cascade training sessions and to the mediators. This approach produces further dissemination of knowledge, provides

the sustainability of the ROMED Programme results and contributes to local ownership. The role of municipalities and local institutions is very important: local authorities are involved in the process and expected to provide support for the continuation of the Programme. Parallel initiatives such as the Council of Europe's Alliance of Cities and Regions will promote the role of mediators at local level and contribute to the continuation of the actions launched in the framework of ROMED through local concrete actions and projects.

As part of the national curricula for the training of mediators, the ROMED curricula should ensure a sustainable, positive climate of confidence and cooperation between the institutions and the Roma community. A relationship based on participation will help prevent frustrations and conflicts and will also increase the effectiveness of the work of the institutions with the Roma and thus the continuity of the ROMED approach in mediation. Several countries have included the ROMED curricula in the national or local programmes: Germany, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. In some countries, the ROMED curricula are used informally by trainers, associations and NGOs for the preparation and training of mediators.

IV. Contacts

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