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ROMA YOUTH ACADEMY

Supporting the emergence of a new generation of Roma youth leaders and for strengthening Roma youth participation and the sustainability of Roma youth organisations

CONSULTATIVE MEETING

European Youth Centre Budapest

21-22 November 2016

REPORT



About the Consultative Meeting

The Consultative Meeting for the development of the Roma Youth Academy was held in the European Youth Centre Budapest with the aim to review the opportunity, the need and the modalities for the implementation of the Academy and to associate other stakeholders, namely Roma youth organisations to this process. Its specific objectives were:

- To consult partners and stakeholders about the relevance and role of the Roma Youth Academy to support Roma youth participation and inclusion, and specifically the sustainability of Roma youth organisations
- To review and adjust the concept of the Roma Youth Academy and to collect ideas regarding its future development and implementation
- To identify processes, resources and partners interested in cooperating to the setting up of the Roma Youth Academy, especially its pilot phase (2017-2018).

The meeting brought together a diverse expertise and professional background of experts and organisations in order to consult with them on the draft concept and to make an effort to develop a realistic and tangible project that will aim to support Roma youth. It has gathered 22 people who represented international, national and local institutions, organisations and networks, Roma youth activists, youth workers and trainers, and representatives of the statutory bodies in the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

The concept of Roma Youth Academy and its relevance

Roma Youth Academy is a consolidated project to support the challenges and needs of Roma youth and organisations and is based on the experiences drawn from the [Roma Youth Action Plan](#) (RYAP) project of the Youth Department. The Academy is initiated by the Youth Department within the framework of the RYAP and is foreseen that the pilot phase of the project takes place during 2017-2018.

The main idea of the [Roma Youth Academy](#) is set to enhance the role of Roma youth leaders in democratic leadership processes, self-organisation of communities and to support the next generation of youth leaders to be more confident and in tune with their cultural, linguistic and historical backgrounds. As presented in the draft concept note, it will consist of several educational and practice (or activity based) elements including: multidisciplinary training programme, residential seminars, mentoring, internships, job shadowing, project development and implementation, etc.

Rui Gomes, the Head of Education and Training Division in the Youth Department who presented the concept and provided the rationale for the project underlined that the academy is more practice oriented and experienced based. It is about various people supporting one another and learning together, both individuals and institutions/organisations, with a strong involvement of the communities participants come from.

Reflections on the draft concept

Yael Ohana, who is currently working on a feasibility study for the Roma Youth Academy, provided a critical reflection related to the relevance and conditions for the project based on the documents available on issues related to Roma youth. In her presentation she focused on four issues: the field of capacity building for Roma youth leadership (individual and organisational), Roma youth participation – situation and concerns, Roma youth organisations – the problem of sustainability, and conditions for Roma Youth Academy. She specifically reflected on the concept for the Academy and concluded that it should:

- Try to avoid another donor driven approach to needs for capacity building that is condemned to do what the institution promoting it envisages rather than what the field needs

- Be an initiative that takes explicitly into account the special conditions of Roma youth participation
- Not place unrealistic expectations on Roma youth organisations and initiatives and leaders about what they can change in their communities nor demands of them that they do what 25 years of adult engagement has not managed to achieve
- Put value on ideas like 'paying it forward' rather than 'giving back' - in other words which incentivises and supports young Roma to do something positive, whatever and wherever that might be

The feasibility study shall be finalized by February 2017 and is expected to present proposals on the desired role and the potential impact of the Roma Youth Academy as a project.

Valeriu Nicolae, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues has made an intervention during the meeting and engaged in a dialogue with the participants on the possibilities and future orientations of the Academy as a project. He introduced his work plan which focuses on the priority areas of the [Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers](#).

Regarding the Academy he reflected that the project take into account the work and previous experiences of other organisations and institutions and their strategic approaches in supporting Roma youth such as the EEA Norway Grants, the European Commission, OSF related education and youth programmes and other stakeholders. There has been a lot of investment in the field with very little accountability and therefore a bigger coordination among stakeholders will increase the accountability and impact of all programmes. The sustainability of the project and its community impact together with the personal responsibility and involvement of the beneficiaries should be very clearly articulated in the project of the Academy. He is also interested in a long term and comprehensive project support focusing at local community impact rather than short term investments.

He concluded with the note that Roma children and youth are in the core of the activities in his work and interest, and offered to continue the dialogue with the Youth Department on the draft concept of the Academy.

Learning from the experience of similar projects

This session of the meeting aimed to explore and learn from the experiences of other Roma and/or youth programmes with the intention of sharing some of the key lessons, challenges and opportunities of working with and for Roma youth.

Nenad Belvevic from the National Democratic Institute presented the Roma Regional Initiative, a project that launched in 2004 operating in Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. The Institute has worked with more than 1,000 Roma activists providing training and guidance in civic education, political activism and election campaigning. As a result, Roma are entering politics by joining mainstream political parties and undertaking grassroots and national advocacy campaigns to secure their human rights and change public attitudes. Among the main instruments for support as part of NDI's work are training, consultation, mentoring, micro funding or funding of local/community actions and networking. Language barriers and keeping high level of motivation of Roma young people has been identified among the challenges they have been facing when working with the community.

Alexandra Raykova from the Forum of European Roma Young People, presented ROMED's educational and operational structure of the Council of Europe's programme that aims in training Roma mediators across Europe where more than 1200 mediators in 22 countries were trained and certified.

Based on shared experiences from NDI and Romed projects and in light of the aim of the Academy, participants proposed the following issues to be considered while developing and implementing the Roma Youth Academy:

- Language competence of participants – very often there are great local activists/leaders which are perfect candidates for engaging in activities such as RYA, but because they cannot speak English, they stay out of the process
- Question of motivation: How to keep the momentum high during and after the project?
- Profile of participants – the profile and required qualifications of the Academy participants needs to be specified. This to consider: class, gender and diversity of the Roma community
- The project of the Academy should build links with local communities and stakeholders and support initiatives on local level
- Should RYA engage experienced or new (less experienced) participants?
- What could be a practical dimension of RYA, what could be potential follow up activities?
- The approach used should be non-colonial, include peer support and develop concrete skills for democratic participation.

Yael Ohana, reflected on the ongoing discussion and the feasibility of the Academy, stating:

- Building identity needs to be much more clearly articulated: for example, mentoring should be very close to the etymological sense of the term and build self-awareness, identity and belonging and be value based.
- The practice dimension of the Academy - the practices work of the academy can take place in communities where some inspiring work is already being done. The activities can also take place in communities outside of the Roma field and in relation to the main purpose of the Academy
- Developing skills for classical youth work to support youth participation, activism, citizenship and activities engaging young people in positive and non-paternalistic ways, developing their autonomy are crucial
- The project should build partnership with other institutions and stakeholders
- It should provide small grants to participants' initiatives
- It should help participants to make better use of existing offers and other stakeholders' resources

The exploration of other experiences and practices in working with and for Roma youth will continue as part of the consultation processes for the Academy with other organisations and programmes.

Existing plans for supporting Roma youth participation and organisations

Dora Husz from the European Commission (DG Justice, Nondiscrimination and Roma Coordination unit) – briefly joined the consultative meeting and made remarks regarding the Commission's assessment of the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies in the area of youth participation and empowerment: Ensuring Roma (and in particular youth) participation and empowerment remain among the weaker areas of implementation, therefore more work needs to be done in that regard. To address the challenges in this area the European Commission in cooperation with the Slovak presidency organised a high level event in October 2016 on Roma youth as the driving force of integration. Also in cooperation with the Slovak presidency the Commission worked to highlight the importance of Roma youth in the [Council Conclusions of 8 December 2016 on accelerating the process of Roma integration](#). Under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme the Commission supports projects in the area of Roma integration, with the [currently open call](#)

prioritizing the promotion of the empowerment of Roma youth and their active involvement in the process of Roma integration. The Commission is also supporting the setting up or development of National Roma Platforms (currently operating in 15 Member States with Commission support) which aim to ensure the inclusive and transparent involvement of all stakeholders, prioritizing the empowerment of Roma women and youth in particular.

Nadir Redzepe from Roma Education Fund gave an overview of the mandate and operations of the organisation working to close the gaps in educational outcomes among Roma and non Roma. During his session intervention, the Director of REF reflected on the past experiences and results of the organisation in working and supporting young Roma through formal education. For example, the organisation has supported around 7000 individuals by providing around 20 000 scholarships. The organisation is currently reflecting on the impact it had and re-evaluating its future approach and focus as part of its strategic development process. Children and youth will remain a focus as this is part of their core target group but they are hoping to develop better mechanisms for supporting the future Roma intellectual leadership. Non – formal education could be an addition to their programme that could possibly strengthen the individual competence building of Roma young people. The REF Director remains interested in the Academy and are willing to continue the discussion on the possibly co-operation and coordination.

Cristi Mihalache from OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights presented the work of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues in relation to Roma, such as training on advocacy, professional development scheme, small grants scheme, mainstreaming youth participation in activities, promoting teaching and commemorating Roma and Sinti genocide, etc. He expressed his support to the Roma Youth Academy project and offered developing synergies in the future, possibly by involving the Academy participants in the activities and available opportunities of the OSCE/ODIHR, including the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings.

Implementation modalities of the Roma Youth Academy – what, how and what for?

The participants reflected on how Roma Youth Academy can make a difference to Roma youth participation and the sustainability of Roma youth organisations:

- It can create a new generation of activists who will bring new ideas
- Roma youth can be strengthened on national and local levels through the development of Roma youth initiatives and development of competences of Roma youth workers
- The mentoring process within the project and even after it should contribute to the sustainability of Roma youth organisations
- It should address the needs of all community, not only Roma young people; therefore, non-Roma youth organisations should be also involved in the project implementation
- The project should include a strong capacity building element on the topic of advocacy initiatives
- It should include the mix of methods and tools and be practice and impact oriented
- The involvement of different partners (authorities, organisations and institutions) should be at the core of the project
- Although a European project, a strong emphasis to be placed on the situation and role of Roma youth at national and local level context
- The project should also clearly articulate or address the needs of the local Roma communities

On the basis of the draft concept participants proposed different “prototypes” or “modalities” for the Academy and discussed the practical issues related to the structure of the project and its approaches. The proposals should inform the secretariat of the Youth Department in further

developing the concept of the Academy, particularly the pilot phase of the project envisaged for 2017-2018.

The three proposals for the Roma Youth Academy developed during the consultative meeting are presented as an addition to this report.

Potential partnerships and roles under the Roma Youth

Participants, in their capacity as representatives of organisations, trainers and activists provided insight on the potential role of their organisations and themselves into the further development and implementation of the Academy. Some of the potential support measures:

- Help in the promotion of the project and recruitment of the participants;
- Propose consultants, experts, trainers to support and contribute to the Academy
- Support in local actions organised by the participants
- Institutional and/or educational support and expanding the scope of the activities of their organisations
- Most of the participants would like to contribute to the project with their experiences, competences and networks they are involved in
- Openness to host study visits in their organisations
- Advocate for the Academy on local/national/European levels.
- Involving participants of the Roma Youth Academy in the training activities of partners and supporters of the Academy.

The general conclusion was that such large scale project is needed for the support of Roma youth and the many organisations and individuals are interested in further contributing or supporting its development and realisation.

The working process for the Roma Youth Academy

The Youth Department of the Council of Europe has created a consultation and working process for the development of the Roma Youth Academy as a project. The organisation of the consultative meeting with various stakeholders was the kick-off event. A feasibility study is in preparation with the aim of developing proposals of the potential scope and desired impact of the project. It is expected during the first trimester of 2017 the Council of Europe to define the main concept of the project based on the inputs gained in the process.

During 2017 preparatory activities will be organised in order to set-up the Academy as a multi-year project and its expected that during 2018-2019 the pilot phase to be rolled out.

ANNEX 1 – Proposal for the implementation of the Roma youth academy

This proposal follows the initial idea of the Roma Youth Academy as presented in the concept note with the following additions, suggestions and questions raised:

Where we want to get?

- Roma youth representatives/organisations should be able to feed in into related youth policies
- Different learning paths for different participants in the 2nd year of the project

Institutional cooperation:

- Timely communication and presentation of ideas and needs (e.g. for SALTO in early spring 2017)
- Start promoting the RYA as something important and positive
 - o Clear vision, idea on all aspects of the project
 - o Simple format, 3-4 pages report + webpage, links to be added later on
 - o Why is the project useful/relevant for the stakeholder?
 - o Funding needed OR not? What else is needed?
 - o PPT presentation of the concept
- Experts and list of resources are needed first
- High level policy dialogue is needed on it on national level (HU)
- Differentiate between the involvement on international and local/national level to find NGOs that have commitment and willingness to support the process without financial support
- It must be complemented by local NGOs and by cooperation with Roma youth networks

Missing elements in the concept note:

- What would be the support on/to the local level?
- Contacts and synergies with local national youth structures / councils
- Preparation phase before the first seminar – first reach out phase (work with community, families)
- Structured long term support process to participants- secure check-in sessions between the residential seminars, possibly for shorter periods in between training and practice activities
- Language (ENG) – language training as a first step in the process of selection
- Pool of possible resource persons

Challenge:

- E-learning: should be structured and planned - video and combination of small tasks
- Overall coordination of the academy and projects
- Proper and careful selection of participants

Ideas:

- Age: primarily 18-30
- Participants apply in tandems for mutual (peer) support and learning
- Support by a local coach / how they are involved?
- Map links with other stakeholders and programmes, especially with ROMED and ROMACT
- Recruit a group of support persons to follow the participants

- To involve or not non-Roma in the Academy? – The project is dedicated mainly for Roma youth, but the follow-up process should be integrated and involve non-Roma beneficiaries and stakeholders to broaden up the scope and impact
- Do all participants have to go through the same path?
 - o e.g. in the 2nd interim phase they can have different individual learning goals and specific support (which could be longer) – with predefined themes?

Main questions:

- What would be the expected impact on local level?
- How will be the project financed?
 - o crowd funding for local projects
 - o CSR involvement, companies, etc.?
- English: mentor speaks English and supports local youth in local language, support national or regional networking

Possible content:

Preparatory phase:

- Reaching out to local organizations that provide mentoring and coaching
 - o To add a meeting of educators and coaches
- Identifying resources on local level
- Needs analysis, the landscape in the community (needs tree)
- Learning English
- Starting the blended learning process

Training 1.

- Identity
- Cross-cutting thematic areas of RYAP and principles (identity, etc.)
- Basic project management and intervention
- Social skills, Education for democratic citizenship
- Introduction to the E-learning and support system of the project
- Action plan for next steps under the project

Local actions:

- Simple resources can help, e.g. access to space, materials

Training 2.

- Evaluation of local actions
- Next steps - learning goals

ANNEX 2 - Proposal for the implementation of the Roma youth academy

The group of participants worked on the initial ideas of the project as presented in the concept note. It came up with the following ideas for the development and implementation of the Roma Youth Academy:

- Learning in the project should be directed toward the action of the participants, which is central to the project. The initial seminar should prepare participants to implement actions in their local community. It should address the concrete needs both of young people and the Roma community
- Participants should develop a critical understanding of their reality. They should also work on the vision of change they want to bring to their communities. Possible questions to be discussed: where am I in relation to power? Why Roma youth participation is important?
- Participants should learn how to build relations with their peers and how to inspire and motivate young people
- Competences to be developed: project development and management, fundraising, advocacy, peer-to-peer work, organising groups, linking to different stakeholders, communication skills, how to inspire other young people, understanding politics
- Participants should get an understanding of the nature and role of youth work and different approaches to youth work
- Council of Europe should make sure that participants' actions are properly funded
- Mentoring and coaching: local Roma youth organisations could take the role of mentoring and coaching participants while they develop their actions
- E-learning should be replaced by multi-blogs that are run by the participants, where they could share what they do and get inspired by the other participants. The project should promote an open attitude to sharing
- Regional training meetings for the participants from neighbouring countries could be organised
- Internships should be inspiring for young people
- Proposed languages to be used: English, Romani and Spanish (possibly Russian)

ANNEX 3 - proposal for the implementation of the Roma youth academy

This proposal from the participants of the group in the meeting considers 2 different groups of participants of the project: local youth workers and youth leaders. It consists of the following phases:

- Introductory phase to take place 1 month before the initial seminar, during which the participants will have a chance to get to know each other
- Initial seminar for 30 local youth workers: it should focus on the definition of shared values and define the methodology of the educational process and practice as well as tackle the issue of motivation. The youth workers will learn how to identify youth leaders in their communities and how to develop their commitment
- After the seminar, the youth workers come back to their realities and start meeting local groups identifying youth leaders to be involved in the process
- 2nd seminar for 60 people (30 youth workers and 30 youth leaders identified by the youth workers): It should focus on empowering youth leaders by providing competences related to developing and organising local actions and projects. Separate parallel working spaces may be organised for youth workers and youth leaders
- Networking and mentoring for youth leaders by youth workers. During this phase the youth leaders plan their local actions and work with local youth groups
- 3rd seminar for 30 youth leaders: developing competences on advocacy and networking. Meetings with local stakeholders in Strasbourg.
- After the seminar, the youth leaders implement their initiatives with the support of local stakeholders and youth workers
- Evaluation seminar
- Transfer of activism in the community

The group suggested that the seminars could be run in English, with interpretation if needed. E-learning should not be given the priority and should not be considered as the main communication tool. It can be introduced later in the process and some modules could be developed by the youth workers.

ANNEX 4: List of participants

Name	Organisation	Contact
Vicente Rodriguez Fernandez	ternYpe - International Roma Youth Network	dealfafar_@hotmail.com
Anna Daróczi	Phiren Amenca – network of Roma and non Roma volunteers and voluntary service organizations	anna.daroczi@phirenamenca.eu
Jonathan Mack	Central Council of German Sinti and Roma	jonathan.mack@sintiundroma.de
Mustafa Jakupov	Trainer, youth activist;	muce10@yahoo.com
Alexandra Raykova	Trainers Pool of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe	alex_raykova@yahoo.co.uk
Laure De Witte	Trainers Pool of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe	lauredw@yahoo.fr
Emilija Koleva	Youth worker, Youth Center Stara Zagora	eims_13@abv.bg
Monika Todorova	Roma mediator, Youth Center Stara Zagora	monika_stz90@abv.bg
Aikaterini Papadaki	Young Roma; mediator; community leader	katerina2805@hotmail.com
Maria Demeova	Community organiser;	komunitnecentrumhnusta@gmail.com
Dragana Jovanovska	Center for Intercultural Dialogue – Macedonia	dragana@cid.mk
Marin Bodrožić	Youth of European nationalities	marin.bodrozic@yeni.org
Dora Husz	EC DG Justice	Dora.HUSZ@ec.europa.eu
Marek Szilvasi	European Roma Rights Center	marek.szilvasi@errc.org
Nadir Redzepe	Roma Education Fund	nadirr@romaeducationfund.org
Iulius Rostas	Roma Access Programs, Central European University	rostasi@ceu.edu
Cristi Mihalache	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights	Cristi.Mihalache@odihr.pl

Marija Kljajic	SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre	Marija.Kljajic@jint.be
Dariusz Grzemny	Facilitator of the meeting	darek.grzemny@gmail.com
Yael Ohana	Consultant of the Roma Youth Academy study	yael@frankly-speaking.org

Statutory bodies of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe

Cristina Marian	Advisory Council on Youth	cristina.feryp@gmail.com
Paczk Péter Csaba	European Steering Committee on Youth	peter.paczuk@emmi.gov.hu

Apologised

Stanko Baluh	Youth Rapporteur, Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues	stane.baluh@gov.si
Eva Masarova	Roma Rapporteur, Join Council on Youth	eva.masarova@minedu.sk
George – Konstantinos Charoni	European Youth Forum	george-konstantinos.charonis@youthforum.org
Agota Kovacs	EEA and Norway Grants	Agota.KOVACS@efta.int

Council of Europe

NICOLAE Valeriu	Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues	Valeriu.NICOLAE@coe.int
GOMES Rui	Head of the Education and Training Division, Youth	Rui.GOMES@coe.int

	Department	
MILUTINOVITS Laszlo	Educational Advisor, Youth Department	Laszlo.MILUTINOVITS@coe.int
DURMIS Denis	Roma Youth Action Plan Project Officer	Denis.DURMIS@coe.int