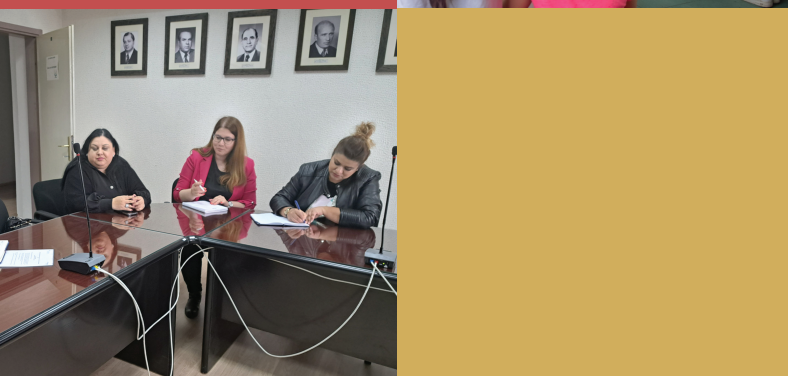




FINAL REPORT



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Introduction

The following Final Report examines the activities implemented during the ROMACTED Phase II Programme in the Republic of North Macedonia, entitled *Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at Local Level*, which is a joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe, implemented by the Council of Europe and the Institute for Policy Research and Analysis *Romalitico*. The activities evaluated herein were implemented in **15 municipalities** in North Macedonia: Berovo, Delchevo, Prilep, Bitola, Strumica, Kochani, Shtip, Veles, Vinica, Shuto Orizari, Gostivar, Tetovo, Debar, Kichevo, and Kriva Palanka. The Report examines the results that were achieved, the overall process of activity implementation, as well as the satisfaction on the part of the beneficiaries and the local community.

In terms of **methodology**, the evaluation relies mainly on primary and secondary qualitative data. Primary qualitative data were collected from individual, in-depth interviews with respondents, as well as from focus groups (FGs). In both the individual interviews and in focus groups, the respondents were selected in a way that mirrors their diversity, including men and women from different municipalities, both rural and urban ones, from different intersecting identities, etc.

The Consultant also examined secondary qualitative data, such as the documents produced in the course of project, including publications, Local Action Plans or other documentation produced, such as the Community Needs Assessment¹, internal reports, activity reports, awareness raising leaflets (COVID-19 leaflet), etc.

The Consultant considered secondary quantitative data as well. Such data come from project documentation, such as internal reports and related documents, as well as from generated publications during the project implementation.

¹ Romalitico, *Community Needs Assessment, North Macedonia 2021*

Background information

The main project actions tackled infrastructure, education, health, capacity building and employment. In the process of determining the community needs in the specific municipalities, needs assessments were conducted in each community. These assessments were performed in the period of September-November 2021 in the above-mentioned 15 municipalities in North Macedonia. A **Community Needs Assessment**² document was produced, enumerating the most pressing priorities of Roma people.

The assessment was performed in line with the ROMACTED methodology, i.e. by including the **Community Action Groups (CAGs)**, with the help of facilitators, **Institutional Working Groups (IWGs)** and **Municipal Taskforce Groups (MTGs)**.

Community Action Groups are groups set up in every municipality, comprised of Roma individuals committed to improving the quality of life of the Roma population. The Institutional Working Groups gather local stakeholders, for e.g. from municipal departments and institutions whose area of work is relevant to Roma priorities. Municipal Taskforce Groups bring together members of CAGs and IWGs to discuss priorities, issues, to plan actions accordingly, etc.

Jointly they produced the above-stated Community Needs Assessment document which identifies the needs, resources and demands of the Roma community, as well as the barriers that prevent the communities from accessing resources to meet those needs. The Community Needs Assessment is a well-written document, providing data in terms of intersecting vulnerabilities of Roma people (for example, it includes a section on gender, provides information about vulnerabilities specifically affecting Roma children or Roma without IDs, etc.). It also provides clear guidelines for further development of **Local Action Plans (LAPs)**. The Community Action Groups were included in the preparation of LAPs, which were subsequently adopted by the respective municipality. The LAPs are also well-developed and show a clear connection to the Community Needs Assessment. They identify several issues of

² Ibid

Roma in the specific municipality and propose concrete actions on how to tackle them. The Joint Action Plans were developed in June 2022. The Joint Action Plans are targeting actions in housing (infrastructure), employment and education. The Joint Action Plans that were developed in all 15 municipalities within the ROMACTED Programme were adopted as part of the Local Action Plans for Roma of the Municipality for the period 2023-2026. The inclusion of JAP's activities within the LAPs of the municipalities was coordinated through the synergy made with USAID's project for Roma Inclusion in order to have one plan adopted per municipality and in order to avoid overlapping of activities. Only the Municipalities of Strumica and Shtip have not adopted Local Action Plans for Roma. 43% of the activities of the Local Action Plans were implemented with ROMACTED Programme support.

Local Structures established in North Macedonia according to ROMACTED Programme methodology

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS (CAGs)

- 15 CAGs set up and operational
- A total of 195 members in CAGs
- 103 Roma female members in CAGs

MUNICIPAL TASKFORCE GROUPS (MTGs)

- 14 MTGs set up and operational
- A total of 102 members in MTGs
- 51 female members in MTGs
- 21 Roma members, representatives of the local Roma community in MTGs
- 12 Roma female members, representatives of the local Roma community in MTGs

INSTITUTIONAL WORKING GROUPS (IWGs)

- 13 IWGs set up and operational
- A total of 140 members in IWGs
- 76 female members in IWGs

Education

Tutoring pupils

Tutoring was determined as one of the most pressing priorities during the Community Needs Assessment³ and LAPs in the above-mentioned municipalities. Tutoring was aimed as learning support to Roma students in 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades of primary education⁴, who show the lowest educational outcomes, in particular as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results⁵

- in Berovo, 28 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (13 boys and 15 girls);
- in Bitola, 89 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (33 boys and 56 girls);
- in Debar, 30 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (12 girls and 18 boys);
- in Gostivar, 30 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (15 boys and 15 girls);
- in Kichevo, 68 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (25 girls and 43 boys);
- in Kochani, 65 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (33 girls and 32 boys);
- in Kriva Palanka, 17 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (12 girls and 5 boys);
- in Strumica, 16 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (6 girls and 10 boys);
- in Shtip, 104 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (54 girls and 50 boys);
- in Tetovo, 46 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (19 girls and 27 boys);
- in Vinica, 55 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme (25 girls and 30 boys).

³ Ibid

⁵ Internal project reports

achieved through tutoring are as follows:

Tutoring was perceived as a **crucial** intervention by most respondents due to the fact that many Roma children were disproportionately affected by the pandemic in terms of their right to education. In early 2020, the Government of North Macedonia passed a decree with force of law on the application of the Laws on Primary⁶ and Secondary⁷ Education, whereby distance learning was put into force. The introduction of distance learning required having access to electricity, stable internet as well as having the necessary electronic devices that would allow students to actively participate in classes. Yet, in light of the fact that 3% of Roma households do not have access to electricity, 38% do not have access to the Internet and 51% do not have a computer⁸ – learning remotely proved to be rather challenging for many Roma students. Although there were some activities undertaken by the state and some non-governmental organizations to provide electronic devices and conditions for this kind of learning, there was not enough coverage among Roma families, given their socio-economic situation.

Bearing this in mind, tutoring was of paramount importance in the post-COVID context among Roma children, as highlighted by respondents:

*“...tutoring because it's about children after all and investing in the future. Those children... in the COVID period had online classes; however, we know that in the Roma community, some of the children did not have Internet so they could not attend classes and they were **rather behind** in that part of the educational process...” [my emphasis]*

⁶ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 'Decree with force of law on the application of the Law on Primary Education', 2020: <https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=3207>

⁷ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 'Decree with force of law on the application of the Law on Secondary Education', 2020: <https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=3208>

⁸ AECOM International Development Europe SL, 'Social Mapping Report', 2019: https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2019/Social%20mapping%20report%20final_Macedonian.pdf

Moreover, the cramped living conditions of the majority of Roma households were another hindrance for distance learning for Roma students. Namely, overcrowding in houses is a common issue among Roma and many Roma families live in houses with less than 5 square meters per person. For example, in Kichevo, there are 6.83 people in one household; in Gostivar 5.79 and in Shuto Orizari 5.46 people in one household⁹. Under such conditions, attending online classes even for Roma families that have access to the Internet or electronic devices is no easy feat.

Therefore, there was a dire need to provide support to students who fell behind school during the pandemic, which was a gap that the tutors filled in. Tutoring was arguably the **most successful** activity according to the majority of the respondents. A few respondents even pointed out that the number of students included in the tutoring sessions greatly exceeded the number of students initially envisioned to be targeted:

*"There was a lot of interest. **We had 15 applicants for 5 spots.**" [my emphasis]*

Similarly, exceeding the foreseen student target was also observed in other municipalities. For instance, in Vinica, which was the only municipality that requested meals for students - which were approved - our respondents stressed out that the interest among students was so high that ultimately the allocated budget for meals was redirected to cover materials for students so as to allow *all* interested students to partake in the tutoring activities:

"...at the beginning there was no interest... but after the parents saw the effect, the target was 30 and at one point we reached 97 [students] ...they didn't get a meal. Only materials... We had 1,500 euros for materials..."

⁹ Albert Memeti, 'Social Mapping of Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia, Regional Conference: Regional Methodology for Mapping Housing of Roma, 2019: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/download/docs/Social%20Mapping%20of%20Roma%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20North%20Macedonia%20-%20Albert%20Memeti.pptx/46f84d690374e861bbb459148fdc6d0d.pptx>

A simple comparison between the Local Action Plans in municipalities and the reports of the implemented activity can easily illustrate this. For instance, in Bitola, the LAP¹⁰ envisaged that tutoring would reach 30 Roma students with poor outcomes, 50% of whom would be girls; whereas in the end, 89 Roma children were included in the tutoring programme, out of whom 33 boys and 56 girls. In other words, not only was the student target greatly exceeded, but also, the gender quota was exceeded as well. In Shtip, the LAP¹¹ also envisaged that tutoring would reach 30 Roma students with poor outcomes, 50% out of whom would be girls. Nevertheless, the final results exceeded these numbers and 104 Roma children were part of the summer school and tutoring activities (54 girls and 50 boys). Moreover, in Kochani the LAP¹² also made the same tutoring plans with a target of 30 Roma students and eventually reached 68 Roma children with its tutoring programme, whereby 25 girls and 43 boys received support in English language, Macedonian language and mathematics.

Some respondents even stressed that parents and tutors themselves have been asking whether this activity would continue, as they realized it was very beneficial for their children. In the words of one of our respondents:

"The second measure - tutoring children from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades in two primary schools in Kochani... 5 tutors were selected for Macedonian language and Mathematics and 65 children were trained. That measure was quite successful. Just before I came, the tutors called me to ask if it would continue. The parents asked. Parents, children and teachers were also satisfied..."

The same sentiment is echoed in several other municipalities as well, where facilitators were asked by parents, tutors and children whether tutoring sessions would continue in the

¹⁰ Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Bitola and the Roma Community (n.d.)

¹¹ Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Shtip and the Roma Community (n.d.)

¹² Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Kochani and the Roma Community (n.d.)

upcoming period. Facilitators themselves also emphasized that they really hoped that the activity would continue:

"...I come from the Municipality of Debar, it's the first time we are in this phase, Phase Two. I had a very good experience with my colleagues and ROMACTED, we had a lot of success with the two activities, the most important thing was with the tutoring. The children were very satisfied and I really had questions from everyone, whether it [tutoring] would continue, from the teachers, parents and children, so I really hope it continues. We had a lot of success and we want it to take place again."

In some municipalities, tutoring was regarded so beneficial that the local stakeholders decided to finance this activity themselves and continue providing tutoring support to Roma students:

*"...tutoring brought the most positive results this year, we continued to finance it independently from the municipality because **the principal herself** asked to continue with the same tutors with the same children, 60 children". [my emphasis]*

In a similar vein, respondents in other municipalities also pointed out that tutoring was so successful that the municipality itself decided to proceed financing this activity in the future. This illustrates how the project 'planted the seeds,' and the local community, after witnessing the outcome, decided to take ownership of the intervention and continue implementing the measure:

"I would especially like to highlight tutoring, that was carried out by 5 tutors in Macedonian and mathematics in two elementary schools for 65 Roma students and we did it over three

semesters. A great positive effect was pointed out both on the part of the tutors and on the part of students and their parents that they expressed their desire to continue. Hence, since this September, the municipality has been funding tutors, but only for first graders to better learn the Macedonian language since we know that when Roma children enter the first grade they do not speak Macedonian, so we considered that this would be a priority. First, they should learn to speak Macedonian and since that is a benefit, the municipality has decided to finance this extension of the project."

As to the process of implementing the tutoring sessions, facilitators explained that they were in touch with the principals of local schools and they asked the principals for a list of students who have the worst grades and are in need of tutoring support for diverse courses, such as mathematics, Macedonian language, etc. Then they published a Call for Tutors, after which tutors were selected and tutoring sessions were arranged.

Even though tutoring was a major success in all municipalities, some respondents saw room for further improvement. For example, one respondent explained that including children from other ethnicities who also come from socially vulnerable families might be beneficial in terms of fostering social inclusion instead of targeting only one ethnicity:

"For example, let it be a measure for Roma, but why not include other vulnerable categories, for example, some 5-10 children plus from some vulnerable categories. We don't have to target them on an ethnic basis. Maybe they are socially disadvantaged, families have certain problems. Why not include 5-10 more children in the group and we make an inclusion-combination, let's say from several ethnic groups from rural areas, so that the children from rural areas can come and see how things are done here. By doing that we will also make a connection...in more schools in the future. It does not have to be only where the Roma population gravitates."

Taking into account the great results that the activity yielded and at the low fiscal implications, all municipalities decided to proceed with tutoring within the municipal

budgets, which ensured sustainability of the programme well beyond the programme completion.

Adult education

This activity aimed to help adult Roma people complete the fourth level of formal secondary education or primary education, obtain their diplomas and thus improve their employability.

- In Bitola, 12 Roma adults (6 women and 6 men) obtained diplomas for completed primary education and 6 Roma (all women) adults obtained certificates for completing a make-up course;
- In Shtip, 5 Roma adults completed secondary education (3 men and 2 women);
- In Strumica, 3 Roma adults completed secondary education (2 men and 1 woman);
- In Kochani, 5 Roma people completed secondary education (3 men and 2 women);
- In Prilep, 3 Roma adults enrolled, out of whom 1 has only one course of the final matriculation exam left to graduate and 2 have just a few courses left of the final matriculation exam;
- In Shuto Orizari, 3 Roma adults (2 men and 1 woman) completed secondary education.
- In Tetovo, 17 Roma (9 women and 8 men) completed primary education.
- In Gostivar 1 Roma man completed secondary education.

The necessity for actions targeting adult education was pinpointed among the priorities in the Community Needs Assessment, as well as the LAPs. Education for adults was also

successfully implemented. Roma students who enrolled in the adult education programme are to obtain their diplomas. The results¹³ achieved with this activity are as follows:

Overall, the respondents emphasized the benefit of this measure and the need for Roma adults to obtain education and gain new skills. According to some respondents, some of the challenges encountered during the implementation of this activity concern the availability of Roma adults to attend school and work at the same time. The Roma community is one of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in North Macedonia, and Roma adults who wish to attend school usually cannot afford to quit work or work reduced hours, especially since they often have to support a large family. Moreover, most of the job sectors where Roma work, are rather precarious and do not allow for flexible hours that could be helpful when studying and working in parallel. Therefore, it is worthwhile considering allocating a budget for adult scholarships in combination with educational programmes for adult Roma. By doing so, adult Roma would be able to afford studying and have income to support their families at the same time.

It is especially important to note that in cases where Roma people did not show interest via mainstream channels of communication, the project adapted the approach and used other channels to reach the target group, for example by engaging the facilitator to reach out to the Roma community directly. As already explained above, not all Roma households have internet access or even electricity, so a digital public call might not always be the best approach to target the Roma community. The example below illustrates that, by adapting the approach, the facilitator was able to find people who were interested in participating in the activity. These kinds of adjustments show that facilitators were able to think 'outside of the box' and thus complete the project activities with success:

"When we published the Call, only 3 people applied, and we had more budget, and when we didn't get applications, we involved Fatma (facilitator)...and she found them...and because

¹³ Internal project reports

there was money left and we also introduced a make-up course....(there was interest in that)...and we were looking for them from the community....they can't follow the calls that are online..."[my emphasis]

In addition, within the ROMACTED II Programme activities, an ***Analysis of Good Practices in Adult Education from EU and non-EU countries*** was conducted.

The analysis examines the legal framework and current state of adult education, highlighting various types and objectives within the system, as well as its institutional structure and financing. It places particular emphasis on the needs of marginalized groups, including the Roma community, and assesses existing measures to support students, such as validation of non-formal and informal learning and services provided by the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Furthermore, the Report explores adult education practices both within and outside the European Union, showcasing positive examples from Balkan countries. It aligns its findings with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the principle of '*Leave No One Behind*'. The Analysis concludes with recommendations for North Macedonia, focusing on adapting successful models, leveraging existing resources, building capacities, engaging stakeholders, and implementing targeted support measures for specific populations.

The recommendations from this Analysis are as follows:

Adapting successful models:

- **Community-based centers:** Establishment of adult education centers in local communities, similar to German Volkshochschulen (VHS), will enable courses tailored to local needs. These centers will offer a wide range of programmes, including literacy, vocational training and personal development programmes to improve the skills and capabilities of adult learners.
- **Non-formal education:** By expanding non-formal education based on the liberal adult education model in Finland, personal development, civic participation and

flexible learning opportunities will be emphasized. Denmark's public schools can serve as a model for fostering critical thinking, creativity and community participation through experiential learning.

Utilization of existing resources:

- **Strengthening existing institutions:** By providing the necessary resources and support from the authorities, existing educational institutions will be able to offer quality adult education programmes. Developing a blended funding model that includes government support, stakeholder participation and partnerships with the private sector will ensure sustainability.
- **Utilization of existing infrastructure:** By utilizing the infrastructure of existing institutions, capacity for adult education will be expanded. It is necessary to ensure that facilities are equipped with appropriate technology to support different learning modalities.

Building capacities:

- **Professional development for educators:** With a focus on continuous professional development for educators, their adult education skills will be enhanced. There is a need to offer trainings and workshops to improve teaching techniques and share best practices.
- **Improving facilities and technology:** Investments in improving facilities and technology infrastructure will improve the learning experience for adults and support different forms of learning, such as online and hybrid programmes.

Strategic planning and stakeholder engagement:

- **Development of a comprehensive strategy:** By creating a comprehensive strategy for adult education that will be aligned with the national development goals and the labor market demands, effectiveness of the programmes will be ensured. Involving

employers, community organizations and students in the planning process will provide for the relevance of educational programmes.

- **Establishing partnerships:** Fostering partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses will secure practical training and employment opportunities. This in turn will ensure that the programmes are aligned with the labor market demands.

Support measures for specific target groups:

- **Targeted programmes for marginalized groups:** By developing and implementing targeted programmes for the Roma community, migrants and adults with disabilities, their inclusion in the education system will be guaranteed. Literacy and vocational training programmes should be tailored to their specific needs, accompanied by financial support and awareness campaigns.
- **Establishing support networks:** Creating support networks to help students overcome barriers to education. These networks can offer mentoring, counseling and career guidance thus enabling students to achieve successful educational results.

Infrastructure

A large number of Roma settlements in North Macedonia have precarious housing and inadequate infrastructure. In fact, Roma have the worst housing conditions in the country, with approximately 28% of Roma living in poor neighborhoods¹⁴. Roma often live in poorly constructed and rundown houses, lacking formal legalization due to lack of municipal urban plans, lack of information on the legalization process or inability to cover the financial costs pertaining to legalization and registration of housing. Only 75% of Roma have access to a toilet inside the dwelling, and only 84% have access to public sewerage or waste water tanks¹⁵. Around 12% of Roma households do not have access to paved roads¹⁶. Therefore,

¹⁴ Minority Rights, 'Roma in North Macedonia', 2020: <https://minorityrights.org/communities/roma-10/>

¹⁵ World Bank, 'Roma Briefs, Europe and Central Asia', 2017: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/372571554413509160/pdf/Regional-Roma-Survey-Briefs.pdf>

poor housing and poor infrastructure in terms of quality of roads, atmospheric sewage, access to water and electricity were also determined as a priority area in the afore-stated Community Needs Assessment document, as well as in the LAPs in all municipalities. Infrastructure-wise, different activities¹⁷ were implemented, depending on the established need in the given municipality:

¹⁶ European Policy Institute, 'Challenges Facing Roma During the Crisis Caused by COVID-19', 2020: <https://epi.org.mk/post/15076?lang=en>

¹⁷ Internal project reports

- In Berovo, three classrooms were reconstructed in the Secondary School *Aco Ruskovski* and the sewage network in the same school was replaced;
- in Bitola, the ceiling of the hall for events and other festivities in the Primary School *Gjorgi Sugarev* was reconstructed and equipped with necessary equipment for children's events;
- in Debar, a protective fence in Tanas Topalovski St. in Namazjar settlement was set up and the fecal sewage in Tanas Topalovski St. in Namazjar settlement was reconstructed;
- in the village of Trbotovishte in Delchevo, three classrooms and toilets for students with disabilities in the Primary School *St. Clement of Ohrid* were constructed;
- in Kichevo, two sections with paving bricks with a length of 175m were arranged in Vlashki Pat Street;
- in Kochani, a park and recreational grounds were constructed, at the place called Kolerski Grobishta, where a garbage dump had been identified and the illegal landfill at Kolerski cemetery was partly cleared (550m cleared);
- in Kriva Palanka, a children's playground in the Roma settlement *Edinstvo* was designed, and a children's corner in the kindergarten *Detelinka* was constructed, including introduction of hygiene and health protection learning activities from an early age;
- in Prilep, there was marking of crosswalks, installation of speed barriers or speed bumps and traffic signs at the places of most traffic in Trizla 2 neighbourhoods;
- in Strumica, a playground for children was reconstructed in a Roma settlement;
- in Shuto Orizari, fecal sewage on *Pelagonija* Street and *Brsjachka Buna* Street was constructed, each street in the length of about 100m, or 200m in total;
- in Shtip, ASNOM Street in the settlement of Sveta Nedela was paved;
- in Tetovo, *Prohor Pchinski* Street was paved in the length of 100m;
- in Veles, an access path on *Jordan Dzurinov* Street in the length of about 135m and fecal sewerage on *Jordan Dzurinov* Street was constructed in the length of about 135m;
- in Vinica, a sports children's playground in a Roma settlement in Vinica was reconstructed and equipped and lighting was set up, too. Additionally, a media library in the primary school, where children can use different IT services. was constructed.

Hence, different needs were addressed in different municipalities. As to the approach of establishing the needs in each municipality, respondents explained that they had close meetings with the Roma community and maintained personal contact with them. They paid special attention to hearing the standpoints of the local Roma people and setting the infrastructure priorities based on this. They pointed out that it was particularly helpful that meetings were held with the Institutional Working Group because this allowed for people from the municipality and the Roma community to sit together and discuss local needs but also to jointly determine what is feasible. In the long run, such joint exchanges could also reinforce the trust relationships between local authorities and the Roma people:

"...it is invaluable that the institutional group that consisted of people from the municipality and from the Roma community could jointly share the needs and wishes - [and share] the real situation. It is also meaningful to me because if there is ever a real need for something to happen in the community, but if it is not feasible in the timeframe or if it is not in accordance with the General Urban Plan or the detailed Urban Plan or if it is almost impossible in the foreseen period, then it will have to go back and work on another plan."

According to respondents, interventions in infrastructure were very successful. They perceived them as **essential** when it comes to improving safety and even saving Roma lives. Such was the case in Prilep, where there was marking of crosswalks, installation of appropriate technical means, speed barriers or speed bumps and road signs at the places of most traffic in Trizla 2 neighborhoods. The respondents emphasized how this contributed to increased safety of the Roma neighborhood:

"We put the traffic signs and speed bumps because this really arose as a need for the community because actually people drove very fast there with disastrous consequences for the population, there was also an accident with a fatality, so I think that this [the signs and speed barriers] was set up at the right time and in the right place."

Furthermore, safety of Roma people was also enhanced in Debar, where a protective fence in Tanas Topalovski St. in Namazjar settlement was set up. Namazjar settlement is a settlement exclusively populated by Roma people. The Roma settlement is located near a forest from which wild animals come down in the evenings, jeopardizing the safety of the population. By installing such a protective fence, not only was the safety of Roma inhabitants enhanced, but also, their freedom of movement was improved as well.

Respondents from other municipalities were also unanimous that the interventions in infrastructure were of great benefit to Roma people and that overall the activities were a major success. Further proof of the afore-stated is the statement of a respondent who explained how asphaltting the street Sveta Nedela in Shtip had a positive impact on the local Roma living or working in the vicinity of Sveta Nedela:

"...one action was where the family, that is, the settlement, does not have paved streets, it was outside the General Urban Plan, and through the preparation of project documentation, we managed to asphalt one section of Sveta Nedela Street near us, so the students and children and people who work in that part of the city no longer have to walk in mud and change their shoes from home to work or school and vice versa."

Moreover, respondents highlighted that the interventions in the area of infrastructure would not only be beneficial to the Roma community in the given municipality. Actually, the whole local community sees them as beneficial and salutes the project. Namely, the respondents explained how turning a landfill into a park was seen as positive by the entire local community:

"We got positive points from the community, because stuff was really done in the community, we already have a positive change, I'll say it here in Kochani where a landfill was completely cleaned and converted into a park that looks nice for everyone who passes by."

Similarly, respondents from other municipalities also point out that what was done in infrastructure would be of benefit to both Roma and non-Roma people. Such are the examples with reconstruction of classrooms, even in places where Roma students are predominant. The positive effect of such interventions was recognized by the non-Roma population in that community as the example below illustrates where Roma and Macedonians came together to celebrate the positive outcome:

"...we worked in a school in a village where we have a greater concentration of Roma population and we improved the conditions of three classrooms thus enhancing the learning conditions for the Roma and Macedonian students. I was really pleased when the Macedonian and Roma mothers participated in the joint event and prepared together meals for all the guests who were participants in the event itself."

Overall, respondents agree that the interventions in infrastructure are indeed a contribution to the whole community:

"...the reconstruction of the hall, which is quite good for the students and for the school, will be used by the community and for other activities at the school... I think that we all contributed to our municipality to create something that will remain for the municipality and something that will be known to have been done by ROMACTED Programme Phase Two."

Health

In its Fifth Monitoring Report¹⁸, ECRI highlights the fact that the life expectancy of Roma is approximately 10 years shorter compared to the national life expectancy in the Republic of North Macedonia, and the infant mortality rate is almost double compared to that of the general population. To a large extent, such grim statistics is due to the above-mentioned poor socio-economic and overall living conditions of the Roma community. Nevertheless, reports¹⁹ also point to discriminatory practices when accessing health services, and overall unequal access to health services.²⁰ Around 27% of Roma people are 2 kilometers away from the nearest hospital, and around 12% of Roma households do not have access to paved roads²¹. Lack of information about the health system or available health services are yet another factor conducive to poor health outcomes among Roma.

The pandemic further compounded the already frail health conditions of Roma in North Macedonia. As mentioned earlier, many Roma live in overcrowded spaces where maintaining social distancing is challenging. Poor infrastructure, poor hygienic conditions and lack of access to clean water made it very difficult to practice preventive COVID-19 measures. For instance, about 10% of Roma households in the country do not have drinking water inside their homes, while 18% of households do not have access to a sewage system²².

Bearing this in mind, the Community Needs Assessment and later the LAPs, pinpoint health as a critical domain of intervention for the Roma community. The following activities²³ were performed in terms of health:

¹⁸ European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 'ECRI Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', 2016: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-/16808b590b>

¹⁹ European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), 'The Ministry of Health Discriminated Against Roma Children with Drug Addictions', 2022: https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/5427_file1_ministerstvoto-za-zdravstvo-storilo-diskriminacija-na-romski-deca-koi-imaat-problem-so-zavisnost-od-drogi.pdf

²⁰ European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 'ECRI Report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', 2016: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-/16808b590b>

²¹ European Policy Institute, 'Challenges Facing Roma During the Crisis Caused by COVID-19', 2020: <https://epi.org.mk/post/15076?lang=en>

²² European Policy Institute, 'Challenges Facing Roma During the Crisis Caused by COVID-19', 2020: https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/rom-a_kovid-19.pdf

²³ Internal project reports

- regular free of charge health examinations for socially vulnerable Roma;
- informative sessions about free health examinations;
- information workshops were held with Roma people, aimed at raising their awareness about the importance of vaccination against COVID-19 in North Macedonia, where an expert Roma doctor also participated and informational materials were disseminated to the Roma community with expert answers to common COVID-19 and vaccination questions;
- vaccination was also administered on the field;
- workshop on sexual reproductive health for Roma women in Berovo and Debar, a ROMACTED activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo and Debar;
- training on *Regular Check-Ups to Good Health* for the Youth Club in Bitola;
- Mental Health Awareness Training in Debar.

Free health examinations were provided for Roma citizens in several municipalities, and comprised of taking blood pressure, blood sugar and ECG, giving preventive health advice, etc. These health examinations were administered in different ways, depending on the municipality. For instance, in Prilep, there was an *Open Day for Preventive Examinations and Advice in the Roma community*, whereas in Bitola, within the framework of the Strategic partnership *Roma Health Care II* funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU in partnership with the Municipality of Bitola, a Roma Health Education Center was established, offering educational and preventive health measures for the Roma. Apart from the educational activities in the field of health, the Center also performed free health examinations for Roma

people. Results-wise, the following numbers²⁴ illustrate that the free health examinations were largely popular in the municipalities where they were offered:

Municipality	Number of Roma people examined
Kichevo	176
Bitola	200
Prilep	53

As regards **vaccination**, according to the statistics of the Final Report on Conducting the Activity on Increasing the Awareness about the Importance of Vaccination against COVID-19 and the Conditions among Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia²⁵, the attained outcomes were very positive, as illustrated in the table below:

Municipality	Baseline number of vaccinated Roma	Number of vaccinated Roma post-project intervention
Shuto Orizari	7030	8100
Prilep	300	321
Veles	31	66
Kochani	270	300
Berovo	31	35
Bitola	270	~600-700
Kichevo	260	560
Debar	250	313
Shtip	~250-300	~400-450
Vinica	127	217

²⁴ Internal project reports

²⁵ Romalitico, 'Final Report on Conducting the Activity on Increasing the Awareness about the Importance of Vaccination against COVID-19 and the Conditions among Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia', 2021

Namely, in Shuto Orizari, 7030 persons were initially vaccinated, and following the awareness-raising activities within the framework of the project, the number rose to 8100; in Prilep, the baseline number was 300 persons and it increased to 321; in Veles the numbers increased from 31 to 66; in Kochani from 270 to 300; in Berovo from 31 to 35; in Bitola from 270 to approximately 600-700; in Kichevo from 260 to 560; in Debar from 250 to 313; in Shtip from approximately 250-300 to approximately 400-450; and in Vinica from 127 to 217. In other words, in all municipalities where the awareness-raising activities took place, an increase in the number of vaccinated Roma persons could be observed. In total, circa 2163 Roma persons got vaccinated due to the informational workshops held during the project implementation²⁶.

Furthermore, the statistics of the above-cited report²⁷ indicate a decrease in the number of people who refused to get vaccinated. The reasons why Roma refused vaccination were similar across the municipalities and included low awareness about vaccination, lack of relevant information about vaccination, fake news and disinformation, fear of side effects (such as infertility or genetic mutations), lack of trust in the health system etc. Following the informational workshops, the number of Roma persons who refused vaccination was reduced by 411.

Municipality	Baseline number of Roma refusing vaccination	Number of Roma refusing vaccination post-project intervention
Shuto Orizari	34	10
Prilep	~25% of the Roma population	~20% of the Roma population
Veles	70	50
Kochani	>50% of the Roma population	~50% of the Roma population
Berovo	100	50

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

Bitola	/	/
Kichevo	100	40
Debar	607	530
Strumica	10%	8%
Shtip	1100-1300	950-1150
Vinica	67	37

In terms of the free health examinations, a number of informative sessions were held across municipalities (**Informative sessions at local level targeting Roma women and girls for free health services and support to access and use of these services (2024)**), during which Roma women in particular were informed about health examinations that are available and free of charge, as well as about the benefits of health examinations and support to access these services. The table below shows the number²⁸ of Roma people reached with the informative sessions:

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	24 (24 women)
Veles	11 (10 women)
Delchevo	12 (12 women)
Berovo	20 (13 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	8 (8 women)
Strumica	11 (6 women)
Shtip	10 (5 women)
Gostivar	11 (5 women)
Kichevo	21 (15 women)
Bitola	20 (17 women)
Debar	14 (14 women)

²⁸ Internal project reports

Prilep	13 (13 women)
Shuto Orizari	12 (12 women)
Vinica	10 (10 women)

The respondents pointed out that Roma beneficiaries were very satisfied with the project health-related activities, in particular, the free health examinations. It is **particularly** important to note that the project relied on representatives from within the Roma community to reach the beneficiaries, since, as stated earlier, Roma/marginalized groups do not always use/have access to the same communication channels as the dominant population, or might have insufficient trust in certain communication channels. Therefore, having a representative from within the community makes people more likely to partake in an activity. This point is highlighted by the respondents as well:

*“...if there is no representative from the community it is difficult to convince people to come for an examination, [even] **if it’s free**. So, the first day they canceled, the second day more people came, the third even more... etc.” [my emphasis]*

“...and Genghis would call people, 3-4 persons per health examination....they said that such activities are needed...”

Another important factor that the project considered was the time at which the health examinations were performed. Since many Roma people are engaged in agricultural work, and the precariousness of their work does not usually allow leaving work, the free health examinations were provided at times when people convene for prayers so as to reach as many Roma beneficiaries as possible:

“...there are many people who work with tobacco, and they can't go to the doctor....blood sugar, blood pressure was taken...the doctor wrote for each person....that they should take

care of themselves because there were many people with hypertension...they gathered near the mosque, and they said that it was nice...blood was taken for sugar [test] and they were afraid...we took it from their finger...and they spread the word among themselves...and many more people came for a health examination; we planned the time of the examination to coincide with prayer time so that more people could come..."

Additionally, youths were targeted in Bitola, via training **on Regular Examinations to Good Health for the Youth Club in Bitola**, so as to raise the awareness of young Roma people about the importance of regular examinations in maintaining good health. The table below shows the numbers²⁹ of beneficiaries reached through this activity:

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Bitola	16 (8 women)

As regards mental health, a **Mental Health Awareness Training** was held in Debar, targeting local Roma, where participants gained insights into the importance of mental health and related challenges. The table below shows the numbers³⁰ of beneficiaries reached through this training:

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Debar	15 (11 women)

Moreover, the project activities incorporated a strong **gendered dimension** in terms of health, where Roma women were informed during the above-mentioned informative sessions about existing free gynecological examinations, including PAP smear tests, as well as the possibilities of early detection of malign conditions, such as breast cancer or cervical cancer. Free gynecological examinations were also performed. For instance, in Vinica, 77 women³¹ had free gynecological examinations. In the Municipality of Prilep in a period of 5 days, more

²⁹ Internal project reports

³⁰ Internal project reports

³¹ Internal project reports

than 50 Roma women were examined, and over 10 women were provided counseling according to prior medical documentation, mostly women from rural areas, unemployed women and women with disabilities. This action was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Macedonian Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians.

Gynecological examinations are a particularly important area to be addressed for Roma women in North Macedonia, as many of them lack access to regular gynecological care or as they oftentimes live in remote settlements without any public transport. Even when they try to access gynecological care, they are faced with institutional discrimination such as being charged for services which are free of charge in the country, as stated in the Minority Rights Group Report³². This point is also voiced by some of our respondents:

"...when we had free gynecological examinations....it was an additional activity that entered the programme. The women were satisfied. There were women who had not been to the gynecologist for a long time. Family gynecologists charge, but they shouldn't. They take 1,200-1,500 [MKD] each. Many women were satisfied. Some just took advice, they were afraid to do an ultrasound... they carried an ultrasound machine in the van, a mobile outpatients' clinic..."

Respondents praised the ROMACTED-led activities in women's health and highlighted that prior to these activities, women were not even aware that such free examinations existed:

"We implemented the women's workshops on free examinations with gynecological examinations...they absolutely did not know that such free examinations existed during that period. They were informed and we even made an appointment for them to be able to use that method of examination. We already have a large number of women who have spread the

³² Minority Rights Group, 'Roma in North Macedonia', 2020: <https://minorityrights.org/communities/roma-10/#:~:text=Roma%20were%20particularly%20badly%20affected,vulnerable%20to%20the%20new%20system>

word among themselves and you know...they talk to other women they know, so that this spreads enough and can be used further."

Respondents were very pleased with how the examinations went about and pointed out that it was important that these interventions in women's health as well as in other areas continued in the future because they perceived them as still necessary:

"Normally, women's health always calls for attention and we should pay attention to them [women]...indeed we have given a lot of support throughout the project to everyone who needs that support and in the upcoming period it would be nice to be able to continue, to find a mechanism. People still need us; they need to be motivated so that they can be active."

Finally, in the municipalities of Berovo and Debar, a **Workshop on Sexual Reproductive Health for Roma Women** was held, as a ROMACTED-led activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo (2022) and with the aim of raising their awareness about women's sexual and reproductive health. The numbers³³ of Roma women reached through this activity are illustrated in the table below:

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Berovo	16 (16 women)
Debar	20 (20 women)

Capacity building of local authorities

A number of activities were implemented in the area of capacity building of municipalities, including workshops, trainings, informative sessions, etc. Additionally, documents were published such as guidelines, plans, etc., all of which aiming to reinforce the capacities of local

³³ Internal project reports

authorities to better understand, identify and respond to the needs of the Roma community in their municipalities, as well as to create possibilities for Roma people to be better included in the Roma needs identification and response. The activities³⁴ are presented in the chart below:

³⁴ Internal project reports

- Roma Responsive Budgeting at Local Level in North Macedonia, Guidelines for Municipalities
- Plan for Managing Risks at Local Level Directed at the Roma Community and their Vulnerability;
- Training for Roma Identity and Fighting against Antigypsyism;
- Local administration capacity building - Roma identity and problems faced at the local level;
- Informative sessions for free legal aid held with municipal administration (and Roma community representatives) in cooperation with the EU/CoE *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey* Phase II and its action on Supporting Enhanced Access to Higher Quality Free Legal Aid Services in North Macedonia
- Training for the Municipal Administration on Using the National Mechanism in Local Budget Planning – in cooperation with the Regional Cooperation Council – Roma Integration Programme 2020
- Training for the Municipal Administration on Roma Gender Responsive Budgeting in cooperation with the Regional Cooperation Council – Roma Integration Programme 2020 and UN Women Office in Skopje
- Training for the Municipal Administration on European Funds and Opportunities for Financing Projects Intended for Local Self-Government in cooperation with the Secretariat for European Integration
- Handbook for Access to Social Services at Local Level for Roma Practitioners and the Roma Community

Diverse topics were addressed during the trainings and workshops. For instance, during the **Workshop on Antigypsyism**, local authorities were equipped with tools to recognize and monitor Antigypsyism; during the **Training on Roma Identity and Issues Faced at Local Level** participants gained a better understanding of the interesting Roma identities and the issues they are faced with in the local municipality; and during the **Informative sessions on free legal aid** participants learnt about the possibilities of obtaining free legal aid available to Roma citizens.

The Guidelines³⁵ for Roma Responsive Budgeting at Local Level in North Macedonia was developed as a publication within the ROMACTED Phase II Programme for the local authorities. It builds on the Poznań Declaration³⁶, endorsed by the Western Balkan Governments in 2019, thereby pledging to further strengthen their attempts to achieve equality and full integration of Roma as part of the regional cooperation and EU accession process. The Declaration *inter alia* envisages adopting regional standards for public budgeting related to Roma integration.

The focus in the Guidelines was put on the local level in view of the fact that a large segment of the issues that Roma people face falls into the category of communal issues, such as access to drinking water, paved streets, sewerage, sidewalks, street lighting, urban plans and legalization of homes. As such, they are part of the mandate of municipalities, that is, they represent areas under the jurisdiction of municipalities. Consequently, it is necessary that municipalities plan their budgets in a way that takes into account the needs and issues of Roma people, also known as **Roma Responsive Budgeting**. The Guidelines were drafted to this end, and aim at increasing the capacities of municipalities in creating Roma-responsive budgets.

³⁵ Karajkov, R. & Nestorovska, G., *Roma Responsive Budgeting at Local Level in North Macedonia, Guidelines for Municipalities*, 2023

³⁶ Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), *Declaration of the Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process*, 2019: <https://www.rcc.int/docs/464/declaration-of-western-balkans-partners-on-roma-integration-within-the-eu-enlargement-process>

The Guidelines enumerate several steps to be applied by local authorities in the process of creating Roma Responsive Budgeting. Namely:

- ❖ Assessing the key needs of the Roma community at the local level;
- ❖ Needs prioritization;
- ❖ Defining specific measures;
- ❖ Analysis of the real possibilities of the municipality;
- ❖ Connecting the needs of the Roma community with the budget;
- ❖ Monitoring the budget execution.

The Guidelines highlight that the Roma community should be actively engaged in the implementation of these steps. The first step, assessing the needs of the Roma community at the local level, refers to an assessment of the most urgent and pressing needs of Roma people in the municipality, such that hinder some segments of community life. The second step, needs prioritization, involves prioritizing of needs and providing needs prioritization models to help the decision making process. The third step, defining specific measures, is simply the process of setting measures which will bring about realization of the previously defined needs. The fourth step, analysis of the real possibilities of the municipality means analyzing which of the defined needs can actually be covered by the municipal budget, which includes a budget analysis but also close coordination with municipal representatives. The fifth step, connecting the needs of the Roma community with the budget, aims to identify the budget programmes/lines where the defined measures could be integrated. This also includes categorization of budget programmes, based on their relevance to Roma needs, i.e. whether a programme is directly, indirectly or not at all relevant to Roma needs. A comparison between the goals, results and measures, as foreseen in the strategic document or policy for the needs of the Roma community, and the specific budget programme is also included, as well as assessing to what extent Roma needs are part of the budget programme and incorporating measures into a line budget³⁷. Finally, the sixth step, monitoring the budget execution, involves monitoring whether the planned funds have been adequately spent.

³⁷North Macedonia still has a line budget which is represented by expense categories; however, a new Budget Law has been enacted, envisioning programme budgets, i.e. budgets with defined goals, results and measures.

Additionally, the Guidelines contain draft programmes for Roma Responsive Budgeting at local level, serving as useful examples of what a Roma responsive municipal budget looks like in practice. To cite one example, the Draft Education Programme of the Municipality of Bitola envisages one-time financial aid for first-graders. This is a one-time financial aid in the amount of 3000 denars per child and is applicable to families that have a child enrolled in the first grade in the state primary schools in Bitola. The Draft Programme lists the following indicator for measuring the success of the activity implementation – “number of persons that received one-time financial aid”; “number of single-parent families that received aid” and “number of Roma families that received aid” as well. The fact that the beneficiary data contains ethnically segregated data is a clear example of Roma Responsive Budgeting as it allows considering the number of Roma that benefited from this activity.

Another example is courses for functionally illiterate adult Roma envisaged in the Draft Programme for Bitola, aiming to decrease the percentage of functionally illiterate Roma and offering accredited adult education programmes. The activity itself is clearly directly targeting the Roma community, and as such is a clear example of Roma Responsive Budgeting at local level. It is also worthwhile mentioning that the indicator, i.e. number of Roma that became literate, is disaggregated by sex and age as well, which allows for Roma Responsive Budgeting from an intersectional perspective. Overall, the Guidelines are well-developed and **highly practical** owing to the Draft Programmes for Roma Responsive Budgeting at local level.

The Guidelines offer templates for Roma Responsive Budgeting, along with case studies of three well-developed local programmes designed to be both Roma-sensitive and responsive. These resources aim to assist municipalities in effectively incorporating the needs and priorities of Roma communities into their budgeting processes. By providing practical examples and structured templates, the Guidelines facilitate the development of inclusive financial strategies that promote equity and enhance the well-being of Roma.

As mentioned above, in addition to the Guidelines on Roma Responsive Budgeting, a **Plan for Managing Risks at Local Level with Focus on the Roma community and their**

Vulnerability³⁸ was also drawn up and published. The Plan builds upon studies whereby certain societal groups are much more prone to be affected by health, economic and social crises, due to different reasons, such as belonging to a certain ethnicity³⁹. For instance, as a socially vulnerable and marginalized ethnic group, Roma were much more adversely affected by COVID-19 in comparison to the general population. This was due to several factors: discrimination in accessing healthcare⁴⁰; the substandard housing of Roma, such as living in overcrowded spaces as discussed previously, where maintaining social distance is challenging; lack of access to clean water, which makes maintaining personal hygiene difficult, etc.

Hence, the necessity for developing a Plan focusing on Roma particularly in crisis situations, such as the pandemic. The Plan is directed at local authorities and aims to equip them with guidelines on how to better manage risks within their municipalities with regard to the Roma community. The Plan is well-developed and provides clear and comprehensible guidelines for local stakeholders.

To begin with, the necessity to recognize the **expertise and positive attitudes of Roma** in the local community is pointed out. This is based on the premise that local Roma already possess a plethora of knowledge about the local context and needs that can be tapped into in times of crises. Specifically, in the initial phases of needs assessments, the Plan emphasizes that the thorough understanding of the local community, details of the terrain, risk factors and demographics in the community facilitate mapping the different needs and are vital for ensuring that funds are directed where they are most needed, such as single-parent households, elderly people, pregnant women or persons with disabilities. Expertise in the area and expertise of the community is hence pointed out as crucial in crisis prevention and response.

³⁸ Rajkovchevski, R., *Plan for Managing Risks at Local Level with Focus on the Roma Community and Their Vulnerability*, 2023

³⁹ Platt, L. & Warwick, R., *Are Some Ethnic Groups More Vulnerable to COVID-19 than Others?*, 2020: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-COVID-19-than-others-V2-IFS-Briefing-Note.pdf>

⁴⁰ Minority Rights Group International, *Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia*, 2020. Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11>

The Plan further highlights that the knowledge of the Roma population should be integrated in **designing and implementing measures and activities in emergency management**, by means of an inclusive and participatory approach conducive to comprehensive activities for prevention, preparedness, response and treatment, which concern the specific challenges of the Roma population. Several ways are put forward so as to mobilize Roma in the different phases of emergency risk management, some of which are listed below:

- ❖ Establishing communication and cooperation channels between formal representatives and informal leaders within the Roma community, as well as representatives from municipalities, NGOs, Crisis Management Center, Protection and Rescue Directorate, etc.;
- ❖ Actively engaging Roma representatives by including them in the ad-hoc protection and rescue bodies within the municipality, by including Roma in the protection and rescue headquarters and in the universal unit (composed of the municipal fire department, public enterprises and administration staff);
- ❖ Facilitating the inclusion of Roma in the activities and support provided by other key local units for civil protection, by motivating and guaranteeing adequate representation of Roma in such units, namely: volunteer-based firefighter associations, Crisis Management Center, Protection and Rescue Directorate, etc.;
- ❖ Integrating Roma representatives in the processes of planning and monitoring of the municipal budget;
- ❖ Conducting assessments and exercises to confirm efficiency pertaining to information sharing on emergency management among the Roma population in order to assess the extent to which individuals receive and understand received information, taking into account that Roma might use different channels and might not understand the official languages, hence the need for information sharing in the languages of minority populations, etc.

Overall, the Plan is a well-developed and concise document, and provides contextualized and localized guidelines to local authorities on risk and emergency management locally in terms of Roma people. The guidelines are simple and applicable in the local context, and the examples are practical and relatable. Most importantly, it rests on a **highly participative approach**, as it emphasizes Roma inclusion throughout the risk management phases, including the preparatory phases as well. Not only are Roma to be involved in all phases, but also, guidelines are provided for involving Roma who do not have legal documents, i.e. stateless Roma.

Another very important document that was developed within the implementation of the Programme was the **Handbook for Access to Social Services at Local Level for Roma Practitioners and the Roma Community**. The Handbook represents a comprehensive guide on accessing social services at local level for Roma practitioners and the Roma community in North Macedonia. It begins with an overview of the Roma population, highlighting key findings from the EU Enlargement Review 2023 and the National Roma Inclusion Strategy (2022-2030), along with relevant international frameworks such as the Poznań Declaration and the European Child Guarantee. The document addresses the current state of social services in depth, including housing, healthcare, financial services and employment, while examining government initiatives, challenges and best practices from other countries.

In addition, the Handbook outlines the rights to financial aid under various social protection laws and offers specific recommendations for improving access to services for the Roma community. It emphasizes the importance of personal documentation, access to education and addressing housing challenges. With in-depth annexes, the Handbook serves as a vital resource for enhancing the effectiveness of social services and ensuring better integration and support for the Roma population in North Macedonia.

Capacity building of Roma people

A number of trainings and workshops were held across municipalities aimed at building the capacities of Roma, as part of the overarching goal of strengthening the Roma community at

local level. The trainings and workshops were conducted in diverse areas, ranging from equipping Roma with skills on understanding the structures and mechanisms of decision making processes within municipalities, thereby improving their active participation locally; supporting Roma in legalization of persons who do not possess any documents; training the Community Action Group (CAG) members in recognizing and monitoring discrimination and the type of legal tools they can have recourse to in cases of discrimination, for instance, how to file a complaint to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

- Training regarding the structures, power relations and decision making mechanisms at local level;
- Training on Strategic Planning with CAG;
- Training on free legal aid;
- Training on non-discrimination rights and legal tools;
- Workshop for legalization of persons without IDs;
- Informative sessions for Roma youths for Youth Guarantee Measures and scholarship possibilities for Roma youths and Roma girls at local level;
- *Training on Roma Identity and Fighting against Antigypsism* in all 15 municipalities;
- Training for Community Actions Groups on non-discrimination procedures, how to file a complaint to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman's Office.

and the Ombudsman's Office; conducting an Analysis of the needs and problems faced by young Roma people in Bitola and Kochani for capacity building of Roma youths on different

- Workshop for youths *My Future My Challenge* for the Youth Club in Kochani;
- Workshop for youths *Clean Environment Is a Challenge for Good Living* for the Youth Club in Kochani;
- Workshop for youths *Writing CV and Motivation Letter* for the Youth Club in Kochani;
- Informative sessions with Roma community members in Kochani for the legalization process started in the Roma settlements within the Municipality of Kochani;
- Workshop on Domestic Violence Measures for Roma Women in Berovo and Debar, ROMACTED-led activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo;
- Workshop on Equal Opportunities for Roma Women in Berovo and Debar, ROMACTED-led activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo;
- Training on Career Development in Young Roma for the Youth Club in Bitola;
- Training on *Erasmus+ Opportunities for Roma People* for the Youth Club in Bitola;
- Multicultural Inclusive Workshop with Roma Youths in the Municipality of Bitola;
- Young Roma Clubs in Bitola and Kochani and Women's Clubs in Berovo and Debar within CAG were established.

issues such as: raising the environmental awareness of young Roma, regular check-ups to good health, career development in young Roma, informative sessions on Erasmus+ opportunities for Roma people, etc. The activities implemented in the area of capacity building of Roma at local level are summarized in the chart below:

Furthermore, there were targeted capacity building activities that took place only in specific municipalities, based on determined needs, such as Kochani, Berovo, Debar and Bitola. Namely,:

Our respondents praised the capacity building workshops and activities and emphasized their relevance particularly in terms of learning how to actively participate in the local community, voice their concerns and needs thus becoming empowered and active citizens. For instance, the respondent below elaborated on how Roma victims were empowered to bring forward issues within their municipalities which were not even discussed by institutions previously:

*"... we trained the community through many trainings. In the Municipality of Debar, people do not have access to many trainings and not many opportunities for people to participate or express a problem or address it **directly** to the institutions – and we did that with ROMACTED. We talked about some topics that have not even been raised in the municipality so far or are hidden. For example, we talked about domestic violence which is a very current topic and people really saw that here we can sit at the table with the institutions and say this, this and this. We had situations where people who were victims of domestic violence actually sat with us and saw how it was going, where it was going, where the failure was, why it was not reported so far. We had different situations."* [my emphasis]

Similarly, other respondents stressed that the capacity building activities and the ROMACTED programme empowered Roma people to be more actively involved at the local level within their municipalities:

"...the ROMACTED programme is recognized by everyone and that says everything about the positive results of the experience that we have gained from municipalities for the Roma

community that they have the right and opportunities to decide and prioritize problems by themselves, they can be actively involved in the work of the municipality.”

Respondents explained that due to the capacity-building activities, participants gained insight into the specific procedures and processes of preparing documentation, dealing with bureaucratic processes of submitting requests and proposals to the local authorities on their own:

“Then we gave them practical advice, directions, how to organize, how to prepare documents, to see the whole process; many people, even we, did not know when documents should be submitted, when the documents should pass in the municipality, how they should pass in the commission, all so that finally they can comply...we taught people for example... if we want to pave a street when they should do this, how to address their problems to the municipality itself.”

In a similar vein, other respondents explained the usefulness of the training activities for Roma youth from a practical aspect, during which youth gained a set of practical skills to prepare documentation needed for different application processes:

“I focused more on young people, we held many high-quality trainings where they had the opportunity to hear what they don't even say in school, let's say they didn't know how to fill out a request or a form, they didn't know how to fill out ordinary scholarships [applications], they didn't know where or how to apply and some of those things for which it is really good that now they can apply themselves etc.”

Moreover, respondents pointed out that the capacity-building activities were in fact a process throughout the ROMACTED programme that went beyond teaching people how to prepare documentation or submit requests, but also, helped boost the confidence of the Roma community and made them leaders in their community:

*“I believe that the ROMACTED project opened the doors to the citizens of the Roma community because for the first time many people entered the municipalities to see what they look like, because they thought that they **didn't belong there**...As a facilitator, I can say that my personal experience included direct work with the Roma community, helping them empower themselves in terms of decision-making.*

*Moreover, this was very important in developing self-confidence because we actually invested in them and their knowledge and I think that developing self-confidence is a key element for successful cooperation. Then over the course of the activities we've encouraged the leaders, actually **made them leaders** in the community, to take on leadership roles which are an essential part of the programme.” [my emphasis]*

Numbers-wise, the capacity-building activities had an excellent scope of reach, as illustrated in the tables below, where the number⁴¹ of participants is listed per activity.

Activity: Training for the Structures, Power Relations and Decision-Making Mechanisms at Local Level (2021)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	40 (16 women)
Veles	30 (16 women)
Berovo	62 (27 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	40 (20 women)
Strumica	40 (16 women)

⁴¹ Internal project reports

Shtip	35 (15 women)
Gostivar	20 (7 women)
Kichevo	20 (11 women)
Bitola	62 (27 women)
Debar	62 (27 women)
Prilep	95 (45 women)
Shuto Orizari	8 (7 women)
Vinica	8 (3 women)

Activity: Training on Strategic Planning with CAG (2021)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	10 (2 women)
Veles	30 (16 women)
Berovo	60 (29 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	40 (20 women)
Strumica	40 (16 women)
Shtip	45 (19 women)
Gostivar	26 (7 women)
Kichevo	27 (11 women)
Bitola	60 (29 women)
Debar	60 (29 women)
Prilep	96 (46 women)
Shuto Orizari	8 (7 women)
Vinica	7 (0 women)

Activity: Training for Roma Identity and Fight against Antigypsism (2021)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	50 (20 women)
Veles	72 (35 women)
Delchevo	10 (5 women)
Berovo	55 (26 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	40 (20 women)
Strumica	41 (19 women)
Shtip	40 (15 women)
Gostivar	20 (10 women)
Kichevo	20 (10 women)
Bitola	55 (28 women)
Debar	55 (28 women)
Prilep	55 (28 women)
Shuto Orizari	7 (6 women)
Vinica	8 (3 women)

Activity: Training for Free Legal Aid (2022)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	72 (23 women)
Veles	10 (2 women)
Delchevo	72 (30 women)
Berovo	72 (13 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	60 (25 women)
Strumica	22 (5 women)
Shtip	5 (2 women)

Kichevo	70 (29 women)
Bitola	11 (7 women)
Debar	7 (3 women)
Prilep	72 (13 women)
Shuto Orizari	11 (9 women)
Vinica	25 (12 women)

Activity: Workshop for Youths *My Future, My Challenge* (2022) in Kochani for the Youth Club in Kochani

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	33 (12 women)

Activity: Workshop for Youths *Clean Environment is a Challenge for Good Living* (2022) in Kochani for the Youth Club in Kochani

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	33 (12 women)

Activity: Workshop for Youths *Writing CV and Motivation Letter* (2022) in Kochani for the Youth Club in Kochani

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	33 (12 women)

Activity: Training on Non-Discrimination Rights and Legal Tools (2022)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	17 (4 women)
Veles	10 (2 women)
Delchevo	12 (6 women)
Berovo	24 (16 women)
Strumica	10 (5 women)
Shtip	10 (4 women)
Kichevo	13 (6 women)
Bitola	12 (9 women)
Debar	8 (5 women)
Prilep	10 (2 women)
Shuto Orizari	9 (6 women)
Vinica	18 (6 women)

Activity: *Workshop for Legalization of Persons without IDs* (2022)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	17 (4 women)
Veles	10 (2 women)
Delchevo	10 (6 women)
Berovo	21 (16 women)
Strumica	10 (4 women)
Shtip	10 (4 women)
Kichevo	13 (6 women)
Bitola	13 (10 women)
Debar	7 (4 women)

Prilep	10 (3 women)
Shuto Orizari	14 (14 women)
Vinica	18 (5 women)

Activity: Informative Sessions for Roma Youths for Youth Guarantee Measures and Scholarship Possibilities for Roma Youths and Roma Girls at Local Level (2024)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	17 (10 women)
Veles	15 (4 women)
Delchevo	23 (12 women)
Berovo	25 (15 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	8 (3 women)
Strumica	11 (6 women)
Shtip	10 (6 women)
Gostivar	11 (6 women)
Kichevo	20 (13 women)
Bitola	21 (15 women)
Debar	20 (12 women)
Prilep	52 (22 women)
Shuto Orizari	33 (24 women)
Vinica	20 (12 women)

Activity: Trainings for Community Actions Groups at local level for nondiscrimination procedures, how to file a complaint to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman's Office at local level (2024)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	18 (3 women)
Veles	15 (3 women)
Delchevo	25 (15 women)
Berovo	25 (16 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	8 (3 women)
Strumica	11 (6 women)
Shtip	12 (6 women)
Gostivar	11 (6 women)
Kichevo	21 (12 women)
Bitola	21 (15 women)
Debar	20 (12 women)
Prilep	12 (7 women)
Shuto Orizari	13 (11 women)
Vinica	20 (12 women)

Activity: Informative sessions with Roma community members in Kochani for the legalization process started in the Municipality of Kochani for Roma settlements (2024 only for Kochani)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	18 (2 women)

Activity: Workshop on Domestic Violence Measures for Roma Women in Berovo and Debar, ROMACTED-led activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo (2022)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Berovo	16 (16 women)
Debar	20 (20 women)

Activity: Workshop on Equal Opportunities for Roma Women in Berovo and Debar, ROMACTED-led activity within the established Women's Club in Berovo (2022)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Berovo	16 (16 women)
Debar	20 (20 women)

Activity: Training on Career Development in Young Roma for the Youth Club in Bitola

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Bitola	16 (8 women)

Activity: Training on Erasmus+ Opportunities for Roma People for the Youth Club in Bitola

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Bitola	16 (8 women)

Direct support to the Community

Activity: Provision of Legal Aid and Support (2024)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	29 (25 women)
Veles	14 (8 women)
Delchevo	12 (11 women)
Berovo	20 (15 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	9 (3 women)
Strumica	12 (n/a to women)
Shtip	14 (n/a to women)
Gostivar	11 (6 women)
Kichevo	20 (n/a to women)
Bitola	20 (n/a to women)
Debar	15 (5 women)
Prilep	24 (12 women)
Shuto Orizari	24 (n/a to women)
Vinica	15 (9 women)

Activity: Support for the Educational Process of Roma Children at Local Level and Roma Returnee Children (organized Inclusive Educational Workshop with children and parents, both Roma and non-Roma) 2024

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	18 (12 women)
Veles	16 (14 women)
Delchevo	12 (n/a to women)
Berovo	20 (0 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	4 (3 women)
Strumica	15 (n/a to women)
Shtip	14 (n/a to women)

Kichevo	20 (n/a to women)
Bitola	22 (n/a to women)
Debar	40 (n/a to women)
Prilep	30 (n/a to women)
Shuto Orizari	10 (2 women)
Vinica	15 (9 women)

Employment

The employment rate of Roma is 23%, almost twice less than the national average, whereas the unemployment rate of Roma is at a record high of 67%⁴². When employed, a sizeable part of the Roma population holds jobs in the informal sector often doing precarious jobs as undeclared workers (for e.g., waste collectors, seasonal work, cleaning, construction, agriculture, performing seasonal jobs, etc.). COVID-19 further exacerbated the unemployment

- Informative sessions for Roma on active employment measures
- Support activities for employment of Roma in local companies
- Informative sessions for Roma youths on Youth Guarantee Measures and scholarship possibilities for Roma youths and Roma girls at local level (2024) – elaborated on in the previous section on capacity building
- Training on *Career Development in Young Roma* for the Youth Club in Bitola – elaborated on in the previous section on capacity building
- Workshop for youths *Writing CV and Motivation Letter* (2022) for the Youth Club in Kochani – elaborated on in the previous section on capacity building

of Roma people in the country, as a lot of Roma who were formally employed were fired or received part-time contracts, and many Roma entrepreneurs closed their businesses. Informal

⁴² Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, *Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022-2030*, (n.d.): <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategy%20for%20inclusion%20of%20Roma%202022-2030%20final%20version.pdf>

traders were unable to sell due to a large number of restrictions. Many Roma who worked in cleaning services also lost their jobs and informal collectors of secondary raw materials experienced difficulties in selling the raw materials.⁴³

In light of this, employment was also determined as a priority area in the Community Needs Assessment and later in the LAPs. There were several activities implemented as regards employment.

The informative sessions for Roma on active employment measures were held across different municipalities and reached both Roma men and women, as shown in the table⁴⁴ below. During these sessions, a range of active employment measures were presented by representatives from the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, which are designed to reduce long-term unemployment and lessen dependence on guaranteed minimum assistance. These measures aim to effectively integrate vulnerable groups—particularly those receiving guaranteed minimum assistance—into the labor market through specialized skills development programmes and services.

Activity: Informative sessions for Roma on active employment measures (2023)

Municipality	Total Roma participants
Kochani	16 (7 women)
Veles	12 (5 women)
Delchevo	15 (10 women)
Berovo	15 (7 women)
Kriva Palanka & Tetovo	9 (6 women)
Shtip	14 (4 women)
Gostivar	11 (5 women)
Kichevo	21 (9 women)

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Internal project reports

Bitola	15 (12 women)
Debar	13 (5 women)
Prilep	18 (12 women)
Shuto Orizari	83 (45 women)
Vinica	25 (12 women)

In addition, different support activities for employment of Roma in local companies were implemented. The focus was on facilitating employment for Roma individuals in the given local community by engaging with local companies. Facilitators first mapped potential companies of interest, then reached out and held meetings with representatives from these companies to present the project and discuss the benefits and importance of employing Roma people. Thus, potential vacancies and possibilities for employing Roma people were identified. These meetings yielded positive results as can be seen from the table⁴⁵ below, which illustrates the number of Roma that got employed following the meetings per municipality. The services in which Roma people obtained employment included hygiene and cleaning, construction, service industry, but also accounting, and there were even cases when Roma people set up their own enterprise, as was the case in Berovo, where a young married couple opened a playhouse with a self-employment grant by the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Municipality	Number of Roma employed
Bitola	14
Debar	5
Berovo	6
Kichevo	9
Kochani	16
Veles	7
Prilep	22

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Overall, employment activities were implemented with huge success. A simple comparison between the Local Action Plans and achieved outcomes can illustrate this. For instance, in Bitola, the LAP⁴⁶ contains an employment activity 'employment of 5 young and adult unemployed Roma in private companies at the local level'; and the result was almost triple, i.e. in Bitola a total of 14 persons were employed. Similarly, in the LAP⁴⁷ for Prilep, the same employment activity is contained, whereby 5 Roma people were to have been employed in local, private companies, and in practice, the numbers greatly exceeded these expectations, as a total of 22 Roma people obtained employment.

OTHER SINERGYES WITH DIFFERENT PROJECTS /PROGRAMMES

1. Seventy CAG members and thirteen facilitators participated in the Training on Gender Sensitive Protection Measures. The training was organized within the Action Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking in North Macedonia, part of the Horizontal Facility II Programme. Resocialization programmes and proper implementation of the Law on Protection from Gender-Based Violence are necessary to ensure protection of victims of trafficking and gender-based violence.
2. In cooperation with the EU-CoE *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey* Phase II and its action on *Supporting Enhanced Access to Higher Quality **Free Legal Aid Services** in North Macedonia*, three informative sessions were organized on the topic of free legal aid. The sessions covered essential aspects to help Roma people in resolving their statutory issues, such as housing, social protection rights, employment issues, family issues, gender-based violence, legalization, education, etc. The purpose of this joint activity was to strengthen the capacity of local structures in the process of

⁴⁶ Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Bitola and the Roma Community (n.d.)

⁴⁷ Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Prilep and the Roma Community (n.d.)

informing and providing free legal aid for the needs of the Roma community, as well as providing direct information to the Roma community at local level as to how they can use their right to free legal aid.

3. Two **Trainings on Antidiscrimination and Combating Hate Speech** were organized for the facilitators and municipal administration. A total of 35 participants were trained. These trainings were a joint activity of the ROMACTED Programme Phase 2 in cooperation with the EU/CoE Joint Programme *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022*, the action *Promotion of Diversity and Equality in North Macedonia* and the Resource Center for Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The focus of these trainings was to familiarize participants with the rights and legal tools to prevent and protect against discrimination by defining stereotypes and prejudices as the roots of discrimination, as well as the line between the freedom of expression and hate speech as a common occurrence in society. The participants had the opportunity to discuss all these issues through real examples.
4. **Forty students and teachers from the Primary School Sande Sterjoski** and the Secondary Schools *Mirko Mileski* and *Drita* from Kichevo participated in a workshop on non-discrimination and **hate speech, including peer violence** in schools. The workshop in Kichevo was organized in cooperation with the EU/CoE Joint Programme *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022*, the project *Promotion of Diversity and Equality in North Macedonia* and the Municipality of Kichevo.
5. In cooperation with the action *Promotion of Diversity and Equality in North Macedonia* within the framework of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022*, ROMACTED partner municipalities were featured in a **promotional video as part of the campaign *Block the Hatred. Share the Love.***
6. In cooperation with the actions *Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking in North Macedonia* and *Promotion of Diversity and Equality in North Macedonia* within the framework of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme *Horizontal*

Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022, Phase II, four training sessions were delivered in June and October 2022 for the **labour inspectors in North Macedonia** (Skopje, Bitola and Gevgelija). Forty-six labour inspectors enhanced their knowledge on protection from discrimination at the workplace with a focus on the public sector and vulnerable groups, particularly Roma persons. They also learnt about differences between human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, forced labour and discrimination at the workplace and **Antigypsyism** as a specific form of racism and discrimination against the Roma people.

7. **A Youth Summer Seminar** for Roma, Macedonian and Albanian students, as well as for LGBTI students and students with disabilities on *Combating Discrimination and Hate Speech* was jointly organized by the actions on *Combating Hatred and Intolerance in North Macedonia*, part of the joint EU and Council of Europe Programme *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey*, and the joint EU and Council of Europe ROMACTED Phase II Programme on *Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at Local Level*. The young boys and girls were also provided with various tools which would help them recognize and challenge these concepts. In the course of the activities they learned how to submit a complaint to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, how to recognize different forms of discrimination, how to detect hate speech and how to take a stand against hate speech using the available Council of Europe mechanisms. In the course of the seminar, by means of concrete exercises and best European practices in the field, the participants discussed how to identify and address cases of discrimination and hate speech.
8. In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (now Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth), UNDP and the World Bank, a **Non-Governmental Platform on Roma Returnees** was established in December 2022.
9. Informative sessions were conducted for Roma high school students and university students as well as for the Roma community regarding their interest to participate in **Trainings for Construction Machinery Management** in cooperation with the World

Bank project for local roads in North Macedonia leading to their engagement (3-6 months) in infrastructure.

10. With the support of the ROMACTED Phase II Programme, 10 municipalities joined the global campaign for 16 days activism against gender-based violence under the slogan *UnITE! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls!*. The workshops' goal was to raise awareness on gender-based violence against women and girls, to learn how to identify, prevent and react to this violence. The workshops that took place in the municipalities of Shuto Orizari, Tetovo and Kochani were organized in cooperation with the joint EU/CoE Horizontal Facility III Programme *Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Action in North Macedonia*. More than 150 girls and boys were involved in these three youth targeted workshops. In the municipalities of Prilep, Bitola, Berovo, Delchevo, Vinica, Kriva Palanka and Debar, the workshops were organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the members of the institutional working groups such as the Centers for Social Work, the Ministry of Internal Affairs at local level, the local courts, the coordinators for equal opportunities and the Commission for Equal Opportunities. More than 600 citizens, women and men attended these workshops.
11. The Second Advisory Group Meeting also hosted a **side-event during which a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the ROMACTED partner municipalities for free enrollment of 430 Roma children in preschool education**. Further actions in this regard will be supported under the municipal budget and UNICEF.
12. Two capacity building sessions were organized as a joint initiative of the EU and the Council of Europe Programme *Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey*, and its respective Action *Combating Hatred and Intolerance in North Macedonia* together with ROMACTED Programme Phase II and its support organization ROMALITICO, as well as the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors and the European Center for Roma Rights. Antidiscrimination and the fight against Antigypsyism (specific form of racism and discrimination against Roma men and women) are essential principles in upholding human rights and promoting equality in

Europe. In this context the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) plays a crucial role in advancing such principles. A capacity building activity took place in Skopje with 30 serving judges and public prosecutors as support to public authorities in North Macedonia in their efforts to fight discrimination and Antigypsyism in accordance with the European standards and best practices. They had the opportunity to enhance their skills on antidiscrimination, Antigypsyism and European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR) related case-law. By means of several tailor-made sessions, the participants learned more about specific judgements of the ECtHR regarding the prohibition of discrimination and Article 14 of the European Convention for Human Rights, as well as the specifics of Antigypsyism as a specific form of discrimination and racism towards Roma persons.

13. Joint Training with the USAID Roma Inclusion project (implemented by Romalitico) for Participative Budgeting at Local Level was conducted for ROMACTED facilitators.
14. Asphaltting of Jadranska Street in the Municipality of Tetovo in a total length of 120 meters through joint financial support from the Joint Programme of the EU and the Council of Europe - ROMACTED II and the USAID project *Together for a Prosperous Community* (implemented by Romalitico) and reconstruction of a concrete pipe for storm water on Prohor Pchinski St. in a total length of 100 meters
15. Fecal sewage was designed on Jordan Dzurinov St. in the Municipality of Veles and the entire 135-meter access path was completely reconstructed through the *Together for a Prosperous Community* project in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the ROMACTED Phase II Programme.
16. Local Actions Plans for the 15 ROMACTED partner municipalities were developed in cooperation with the USAID *Roma Inclusion Programme* (implemented by Romalitico).
17. A Workshop on *Strategic Financing and Inclusion of Roma Community* for the local authorities will be organized in the period between November 4th and November 6th 2024 in Ohrid in cooperation with USAID project *Together for a Prosperous Community* (implemented by Romalitico).

Additional project activities

Additional project activities⁴⁸ that were implemented during the ROMACTED Phase II are listed hereunder. Namely,:

- ❖ Analysis on Roma returnees in 15 municipalities in North Macedonia by Ismail Kamberi
- ❖ Analysis on the Healthcare Services for Roma in Shuto Orizari by Salija Bekir Halim
- ❖ Analysis on the impact of private companies and job offer over young Roma people in Kochani, Shtip and Vinica as an obstacle to their further education by Jalchin Nexhipov
- ❖ Conducting situational testing of access to public goods and services in Prilep by Jengis Berish
- ❖ Developed local reports mapping the situation of Roma people in different fields for all 15 municipalities.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sustainability of the Programme will be secured through a multi-faceted approach designed to ensure continued support for Roma children and marginalized communities beyond the Programme's conclusion. Key components include:

1. **Integration into Local Budgets:** The local governments, through the support of the mayors, have committed to including the Tutoring Programme in their future budgets. This will ensure that the educational support to Roma children continues at the local level even after the Programme has ended.
2. **Policy and Legislative Advocacy:** The Programme contributed to the development of best practices in adult education, with a specific focus on marginalized groups such as the Roma community. The insights gathered through the Programme can be used to advocate for amendments to the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education, with the goal of providing free adult education for marginalized groups. This legislative change will create long-term, systemic support to adult learners.
3. **Roma Responsive Budgeting:** Through the development of Roma Responsive Budgeting Guidelines at the local level, coupled with training provided to municipal administrations, the Programme is to ensure that local budgets are more sensitive to

⁴⁸ Internal project reports

the needs of Roma communities. This will foster more targeted and effective resource allocation for Roma issues, ensuring that local governments remain committed to addressing the educational and social challenges faced by the Roma population.

4. **Developed local structures should remain even after the Programme has ended.** These structures are designed to facilitate ongoing, constructive dialogue between the Roma community and local authorities, promoting good governance and development of policies that effectively address the needs of the Roma population at local level.

By embedding these initiatives into local governance structures and national policy frameworks, the Programme will create a lasting impact by promoting continued educational support to Roma children and adults in the years to come.

ROMACTED phase II “Promoting good governance and empowerment of Roma at local level” is a Joint Programme between the European Union (DG NEAR) and the Council of Europe.

ROMACTED Programme phase II is implemented in the period January 2021 and December 2024.

The Programme is designed to build up political will and sustained policy engagement of local authorities, to enhance democratic local governance and to build up capacity and stimulate the empowerment of local Roma communities to contribute to the design, implementation and monitoring of plans and projects concerning them through the following outcomes:

1. empowering Roma community - on the individual level (assisting people to practice their basic rights and to expand their capacity and skills), as well as on the community level (assisting people to get organised to voice out their interests around community problem solving, and;
2. improving and expanding the institutions’ commitment, capacities, knowledge and skills in working for Roma inclusion, putting in practice the concepts of good governance;
3. contributing to preparation of the local development actions that aim to improve the quality of life for Roma and to reduce the gap between Roma and non-Roma, including in relation to mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

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