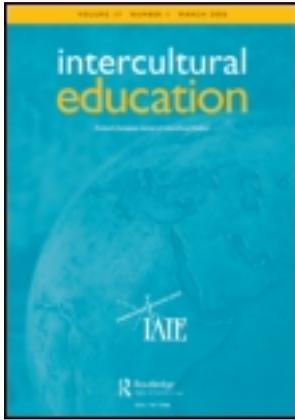


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EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

Roma mediators in Europe: a new Council of Europe programme

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In several European countries the number of the Roma represents approximately 10% of the total population. Due to the global economic crisis, the rise of the far right in places like Hungary, and failed policies of the past, their present social and economic situation continues to become more vulnerable. In attempts to address the precarious situation of many Roma communities, various European institutions have adopted measures and attempted to assist national and local governments, as well as Roma communities themselves. The Council of Europe is one of those institutions. Following the ‘Romani language education’ project which took place between 2005 and 2009, the Council of Europe has now come up with a new idea focusing on the training of Roma mediators. Individuals with a Roma background, from local Roma communities or with a good knowledge of Roma issues, are trained and hired to act as mediators between the Roma and public institutions. Mediation is one of the measures used across Europe to tackle the inequalities that Roma face in terms of access to employment, healthcare services and quality education.

The Council of Europe has experience in training mediators. In 2006, the Council of Europe published a *Guide for Roma School Mediators/Assistants* (written by C. Rus and M. Zatreanu) that presents an innovative philosophy of mediation. Many differences exist between countries relating to issues such as the situation and needs of the Roma communities, the terminology used and the extent to which mediators are professionally employed and trained with varying job profiles. Another new challenge is raised by Roma migrating to other countries.

The so-called ROMED programme started in 2011 in 15 countries and is presently (2012) being implemented in 20 countries. The programme manager is Aurora Ailincăi, Administrator within the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues. Mediators are people with a Roma background who speak the language of the Roma community they are working with, if needed. Mediation has often led to significant improvements, but its effectiveness is frequently challenged by issues such as the low status of mediators and precarious employment conditions, dependency (on the head of the institution, political influence or community leaders) or the assignment of additional minor tasks, which are sometimes not included in the job profile. In addition, mediators might be used as an excuse to avoid direct contact with the community, or they are expected to shoulder full responsibility for solving problems. Their work can be day to day, reactive, with little or no planning, inconsistent evaluation and lack of support in performing their job. Such factors mean that success is strongly dependent on the

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mediator's personal qualities and on the personal attitudes of the staff of the institutions the mediator works with.

In the work of the mediators, three approaches have been identified:

- the 'Trojan Horse' (an instrument of the institution, with a mission to reach out to the community with the aim of changing its attitudes and behaviours);
- the community activist (a representative of the community, fighting against the institution for the rights of the Roma); and
- the real intercultural mediator (has good knowledge of the 'cultural codes' of the community and of the institution, is impartial and focused on improving communication and cooperation, and on stimulating both parties to take responsibilities and to become actively involved in a change process).

The ROMED programme focuses on the promotion of the third approach: *real and effective intercultural mediation*. In the Strasbourg Declaration, adopted in October 2010 at the High Level Meeting on Roma, representatives of Member States agreed that the Council of Europe should implement a European training programme for Roma Mediators (ROMED) in order to consolidate the existing training programmes and more effectively use existing Council of Europe resources, standards, methodology, networks and infrastructure, in close cooperation with national and local authorities.

The general aim of the training programme is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the work being conducted by school/health/employment mediators, with a view to supporting better communication and cooperation between Roma and public institutions (school/healthcare providers/employment offices).

The objectives of the programme are:

- to promote real and effective intercultural mediation;
- to ensure the integration of a *rights-based approach*; and
- to support the work of mediators by providing *tools* for planning and implementation of their activities, which *encourage democratic participation* while generating *empowerment* of Roma communities and increased *accountability* of public institutions.

ROMED does not replace or duplicate existing training programmes at the local or national levels, but complements them instead, providing additional tools and methodologies, and contributing to the development of the core competencies needed by all mediators. ROMED will also assist some countries in setting up training programmes. The training itself relies on a curriculum with a strong focus on practice, which is adaptable to the specific training needs of mediators working in different contexts and with different institutions and Roma communities.

Together with the curriculum, a European Code of Ethics for mediators has been developed and adapted. This set of core principles and norms to guide the work of mediators has been identified as a key tool for protecting the mediator against abuse and for enhancing the quality of the services provided. A first draft, inspired by experiences in various countries, has been drawn up and will be submitted for feedback to mediators attending the training sessions. The first group of beneficiary countries are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, 'the former Yugoslav Republic

of Macedonia', Turkey and Ukraine. The programme is being expanded to other countries in the coming years. Additional training will be delivered in the first group of countries, if additional resources become available.

Which bodies play which roles in the programme?

1. Council of Europe

The Council of Europe ensures the overall coordination of the programme through the work of the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues. Other Council of Europe structures, such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, provide support. A training curriculum has been drawn up and a group of trainers has been selected and trained following consultation with experts in the field. Throughout the process, the Council of Europe maintains close communication with Roma organisations active at the European level, as well as with other European and international organisations, to ensure coordination and support for the programme. The programme can only be successful if a variety of stakeholders contribute towards it.

2. National and local authorities

- identify and select the mediators who will be trained;
- ensure that representatives from local institutions participate during the last day of the first training session and encourage them to provide support for mediators at the local level;
- attend the final evaluation conference and reflect on possible policy responses; and

International Roma mobility is a key issue in the work of mediators, therefore transnational bilateral or multilateral cooperation between structures in both countries of origin and destination countries is a useful tool for ensuring support and sustainability.

3. Relevant institutions (health, school and employment) at local level

- attend the last day of the first training together with the mediators;
- support mediators to carry out practical activities based on the approach promoted by the Council of Europe; and
- provide feedback to the National Focal Points on cooperation.

4. Mediators

- establish a relationship of trust and open communication with the parties' representatives;
- seek to understand the situation in order to reflect the respective viewpoints and the basis for opinions, feelings, attitudes and actions;
- establish contact between parties by ensuring effective communication; and
- facilitate and/or reinforce the communication and relations between Roma communities and public institutions (education, health and employment).

5. National Focal Point

- supports the mediators in carrying out practical activities in the six month interval between the two training sessions;
- supports the Council of Europe in the monitoring process;
- provides input to the pool of trainers on the online platform to help in the organisation of the second training session; and
- provides feedback on the national activities during the final conference.

6. Roma organisations

- support the implementation of the programme at local level;
- provide feedback and suggestions to the National Focal Point; and
- contribute to the evaluation process and to the identification of suggestions for policy adjustments.

For more information, please contact:

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Reference

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