



CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATE SUCCESS SO FAR OF THE ROMED PROGRAMME

SLOVAKIA

Changing attitudes to clean up a settlement

Children in one of the Roma settlements were being bitten by rats – but the local authorities refused to send in pest controllers because they claimed it was the Roma's own fault for creating the dirty conditions that the rats loved, despite the fact that the Roma community lived in city housing and were entitled to help.

Mediator Zoltan Batka looked carefully at the situation and saw how each side could do their bit to help. He spoke to the men in the settlement, who were respected and able to bring about change, and showed how they could take precautions to protect the children by spreading good personal hygiene and creating a clean environment. At the same time, he talked to the deputy mayor, who agreed to act, and the two sides parted with a smile.

ROMANIA

Proud to be Roma in school.

A young Roma girl wanted to leave school because of bullying, but mediator Elena Radu was able to get her a place on an innovative programme aimed at building self esteem. She went on to compete in the Romany Language and Literature Olympiad, and overcame prejudice to get into one of the most prestigious high schools in Bucharest.

FRANCE

Mediation can pose a great challenge, as we can see from an example in France. Several Roma women in need of health care became discouraged when they saw too many people waiting in line for treatment. At first the mediator was not welcomed by some health care workers, who did not appreciate the need for translation: in certain cases, exams were conducted by nurses who were impatient with the Roma women. But the mediator took the time to explain the needs of each patient and, over time, was able to resolve the communication problems: giving confidence to the Roma women and understanding to the health care providers.

In October 2010 Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland called a high level meeting to see how Europe could respond to the plight of the Roma. It had been a difficult year, with controversy over returns of Roma from France and growing evidence of discrimination Europe-wide. The meeting brought together national governments, the European Union, the Council of Europe and, of course, the Roma, to see what could be done to bring about change.

The immediate effect of the meeting was the launch of new working methods at the heart of the Council of Europe, with the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues, Jeroen Schokkenbroek. New projects were launched and existing ones strengthened to ensure that progress was made both in how laws are made and implemented and in changing attitudes amongst Roma and non-Roma alike.

The ROMED project came out of evidence showing that mediation can be one of the best ways of creating better relationships between Roma and non-Roma. Mediators – mostly from the Roma community, but also occasionally from the majority population – know the community well and have its trust, giving them the possibility to act as impartial helpers in dealings with public institutions and services.

Launched in early 2011, the Council of Europe's ROMED programme aims to embed mediation in communities throughout Europe, giving Roma a chance to get help with issues such as, health care, school attendance, employment. Training sessions have taken place in fifteen countries, giving skills to more than 500 mediators, with an initial session leading to work experience, and a second training session at six month intervals. The Romed scheme benefits from financial partnership with the European Commission, and it is hoped to extend the scheme even further in the future.

As the Council of Europe begins its stock-taking exercise, it is clear that mediation is making a difference, despite obstacles such as differing national situations, the communities' varied needs and the working situation for the mediators. Case studies from different countries are showing how individual Roma have benefited, and many national and local authorities are developing better practice in this domain.

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A year into the ROMED programme there are many positive signs that the mediation approach is beginning to change lives for the better throughout Europe.

Mediators have intervened to help Roma communities on many occasions in many countries.

Here are some of the success stories:



UKRAINE

Life-saving action for Roma women

One mediator's action helped to save the life of a woman by finding the right specialist and getting her an operation for advanced breast cancer. Mediator Valentyna Zolotarenko says: "Roma people never discuss delicate problems because they think it indecent. Very often they don't know which doctors to address. In these cases, Roma people can ask mediators for help, rather than relatives or friends."

Mediator Maksym Dzhuma was also able to step in to help Christina, a young girl suffering from cancer, and her mother Angela: "I was deeply impressed with Angela's natural optimism," says Maksym, "There was a smile on her face and a belief in her daughter's recovery. I saw no reason for her smile, as her house had burned down, her sons were in a foster home and her daughter was sick. But despite all that, she kept on smiling. She was a source of optimism for other women."

"In a couple of weeks, Christina is supposed to undergo the next medical examination. Let them be healthy, happy and hopeful."

Just try and stop me!

A young Roma gets his documents...at last.

Mediators Natalia Varakuta and Luiza Sukhomlyn helped 20 year old Vanya make a life-changing step. Vanya and his parents had been born in Russia and he dreamed of getting a passport, but being illiterate could not understand the long and complicated procedure.

The Roma mediators found a way through the red tape and obtained a passport for Vanya. He joked to local television: "I walk along the street and dream about being stopped by a police officer who wants to check my documents!"

TURKEY

The lunch box that guarantees a good education

Roma children in the Sulukele neighbourhood of Istanbul were doing well in their studies until they had to bring their lunch to school. Parents could not provide it, and the children were so embarrassed that they stopped going to school.

Volunteers got together, collected money from their friends and started a service to give a lunch box daily to each child, with sandwiches, juice or a yoghurt drink. All of them went back to school and successfully finished the year.

School means a new life

A caring mediator can turn a life around. Take the story of DG. Eleven years old, living with a very ill grandmother, illiterate but smart, he was already abusing alcohol and drugs and getting involved in petty crime before he met with a mediator.

The mediator spent time with him, working on the ABCs. Within three months, he could read and write, and then started a special catch-up programme, covering the first five years of lessons in one educational year and starting the next year in a class with children of his own age. Now he attends school regularly and his behaviour has turned around.

PORTUGAL

Social contracts bring peace to a troubled community

Roma in Beja, a town in southern Portugal, were in conflict with the local authority. They hated their houses, many of which were badly damaged, and did not pay rent or money for amenities.

With the help of mediation, a social responsibility contract was drawn up. The Roma families agreed to pay their debts and send their children to school in return for repair work by the local authorities.