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COUNTRY ASSESSMENT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ROMED in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Disclaimer: The present document was elaborated based on the "Annex 4 - Questions Guide" of the External Evaluation Report of the ROMED Programme. It is neither part, nor a product, of the external evaluation conducted by Blomeyer & Sanz s.a.

1.1 Introduction

The last official census¹ (2013) in Bosnia and Herzegovina states that the country has 3,053,000 inhabitants, 2.73 % of whom have been categorized as "others"². Based on the National Population Census from 1991, 8,864 individuals claimed to be of Roma origin. The unofficial number of Roma however increases to 35,000 in the Federation BiH, over 3,000 in Republika Srpska and around 2,000-2,500 in Brčko District.

Among the 17 national minorities present in the country, Roma are the largest in number, as well as the most discriminated against. Because of the complex state structure and rotation of power between the three constituent nations, neither Roma nor other minorities are eligible to run in presidential elections or for seats in the House of Peoples. However, they can run for local elections. The lack of personal documents has led to the exclusion of many Roma from practicing basic political and social rights, such as the right to vote, social welfare, education, access to healthcare, etc. This has also created additional barriers in the exercise of property rights. The inability to obtain documents is associated with poverty and low social status.

As in other neighbouring countries, the low educational level of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is also alarming. According to research³ conducted by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) and the BiH Agency for Statistics (2013), as well as the final report by UNICEF BiH, the rate of primary school attendance by Roma children is 69.3% in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Key barriers that restrict opportunities and access to quality education are extreme poverty, change of residence, poor understanding of the importance of education by parents etc., as well as insufficient financial resources at national level to implement all of the measures included within the Action Plan on Roma education.

A complex economic situation and the negative impact of the global economic crisis, coupled with low levels of education and job qualifications, are the primary causes of the difficult state of affairs in the employment of Roma. Not being registered at the Employment Agency leads to the situation whereby unemployed Roma do not benefit from social allowances and healthcare.

A total⁴ of 4,406 Roma households in need of housing interventions were registered in BiH. Many Roma continue to live in informal settlements, often deprived from access to basic utilities (electricity, sewage treatment, waste disposal, drinking water etc.). This was also the reason why so many Roma could not benefit from any of the state programmes designed for the returnees and reconstruction of their property.

¹ Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013 Final Results, census report available at: <http://www.popis2013.ba/popis2013/doc/Popis2013prvoIzdanje.pdf>

² The official term for national minorities and individuals who do not identify with any of the three constitutive nations (Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs).

³ "Research of multiple indicators – MICS – on Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2011–2012", generated on: November 12, 2013. Document available at: <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/1774/datafile/F3/V506>

⁴ More information available at : https://www.ertf.org/images/Reports/The_situation_of_Roma_in_BH_16102015.pdf

According to the Constitution⁵ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following institutions have key roles in ensuring Roma rights: **the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR), the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Justice, the Directorate for European Integration, the Gender Equality Agency, the Government of the Federation BiH, the Government of the RS and the Government of Brčko District of BiH.** The Sector for the Protection of Human Rights was established within the MHRR with funds allocated from the state budget and appropriate donors. A more active policy for improving the situation of the most vulnerable Roma was initiated in 2002 with the appointment of the **Roma Board** within the BiH Council of Ministers as an advisory and co-coordinating body.

A guiding document⁶ addressing the complexity of the multiple social exclusion problems of the Roma population has been produced within the framework of the project "Support to the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees on the Revision of Roma Action Plans in the field of Employment, Housing and Health Care" supported by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UN RCO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); International Labour Organization (ILO); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Bosnia and Herzegovina also joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) in 2008, marking an important commitment of the Government to providing financial resources for the implementation of the Action Plan for Roma (activities aimed at addressing housing, employment, healthcare and education). The Roma Board has the authority to monitor, initiate and propose activities aimed at more effective implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, the activities of which continued after 2015 within the framework of the new initiative "Roma Integration 2020", jointly funded by the European Commission and Open Society Foundations.

1.2 ROMED1 key findings

Unlike other countries in which the ROMED1 and ROMED2 Programmes were implemented and where ROMED1 was first introduced over several years of implementation, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the two programmes were launched simultaneously. While ROMED1 trainings were being organised, the freshly trained mediators would return to their municipalities and help initiate the ROMED2 Community Action Groups, as explained further below.

According to national facilitators and the BiH support team, the implementation of the ROMED Programme (both ROMED1 and ROMED2) made communities more open to dialogue with authorities. This meant that priorities could be identified more easily and that barriers in communication between the community and local authorities were substantially lessened.

The ROMED1 Training of Mediators (ToM) was beneficial for the trainees, as they were given the opportunity to learn more about the available tools for mediation and thus use them in their work. ToMs were mostly attended by young Roma mediators (males and females) who already had a profound understanding of community issues.

From the beginning, the Programme was supported by the MHRR and World Vision BiH. The Council of Europe established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with "World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina" in the field of mediation in Roma communities and the effective implementation of the Programme. The MOU aimed to exercise advocacy at local and national level, as well as to promote the institutionalization and employability of mediators. This cooperation was expected to show most results

⁵ Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina available at: https://advokat-prnjavorac.com/legislation/constitution_fbih.pdf

⁶ The content of the document is available at: <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/hrv-rom-eng.pdf>

in addressing the four pillars: housing, health, education and employment. As a result, World Vision mobilized funds to support the work of 22 mediators in 10 municipalities. Unfortunately, the mediators have not yet reached their full usage as a valuable resource, nor has their potential become entirely visible throughout the country. However, it is important to mention that three mediators still managed to find employment in public institutions.

After the official launching event on 18 November 2013, two sessions of Trainings of Mediators took place in Sarajevo: the first being organised from 10-13 December 2013 and the second from 10-13 April 2014. The period of practice, which according to the methodology should extend to six months, was reduced to four months in light of the need for trained mediators in the municipalities in which ROMED2 was being initiated.

Because of the proven past collaboration between the Roma Resource Centre "Romalen Kakanj" and other Roma NGOs in BiH such as CARE International and World Vision, a National Support Team was identified comprising very qualified and experienced experts and trainers. The process of identification, selection and coordination of active Roma youth to participate as trainees in the ROMED1 training was also done very efficiently. It was important to recognize young people who were ready to work on their capacity-building and assist the members of their communities.

The 1st ROMED ToM was attended by 46 Roma mediators (23 male and 23 female). All 46 participants had a minimum of secondary education, with some of them currently enrolled in university and with an extensive experience in Roma issues in their municipalities. These mediators' fields of work ranged from education, pre-school education and health, to administrative assistance in obtaining personal documents (birth certificates, health insurance). Representatives of public institutions (e.g. the Roma Inclusion Officer of the Municipality of Kakanj/the Public Relations Officer of the Municipality of Visoko) participated and have been actively cooperating in the follow-up.

The 2nd ROMED ToM was attended by 53 Roma mediators (34 male and 19 female) from nine municipalities (four in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, four in the Republika of Srpska and one from Brčko District). Gender and age balance played an essential role during the selection process of the participants. All mediators were previously active in their respective NGOs, covering a wide range of different activities in their work: educational assistance for children in and out of the school system, outreach activities in Roma communities regarding health issues, administrative assistance, cooperation with local governments and municipal officials, liaison with local stakeholders, housing issues etc. The training was also attended by national and local stakeholders: representatives from the MHRR, the Roma Inclusion Officer of the Municipality of Kakanj, the Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Tuzla and Pašić, Brčko District, the Technical Advisor in the Ministry of Education and the Roma Inclusion Officer in the Government of Brčko district.

The second training session gave participants the chance to exchange their experiences and knowledge gained during the previous training session and in the period of practice. The participatory planning technique was used to address concrete problems in the local community, as well as to develop the action plans according to the resources of the municipalities included in the ROMED Programme. The most relevant elements for improving the work of the mediators from the ROMED1 curricula were the innovative, comprehensive and adjusted approaches to particular situations and needs of mediators and their communities.

According to the National Project Officer, the practice period between the ToM sessions was highly valued by the mediators because of the concrete tasks assigned to them. At least half of the identified mediators became active volunteers, providing assistance and support to all members of the communities. After the training, the work of 22 mediators was financially supported by World Vision

BiH. Needless to mention, the mediators have been constantly advised and mentored by the ROMED Programme's National Support Team. The Council of Europe certifies the mediators and grants them with badges upon request to facilitate better recognition by local institutions. This also serves as accreditation and gives an important leverage in the process of assistance to Roma communities.

Altogether, there were 53 mediators trained in at least one of the training sessions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 46 mediators certified by the Council of Europe and European Union. The remaining seven mediators received certificates of attendance.

In terms of education, in the municipalities where trained mediators were active, it was reported that Roma children started to be more present in pre-school and primary education, with drop-out rates reduced. ROMED significantly assisted in this by encouraging and coaching mediators to assist Roma parents in the process of enrolment into schools. Particular attention was paid to improving the quality of education. Educational mediators constantly followed the success-rate of Roma children. In particular, schools used the capacity of mediators to monitor both the presence and reasons for absence of children in schools. In this way, the parents had a greater obligation to follow the educational process of their children, whilst the children were also aware of the mediators' presence and thus could not skip any classes. This system greatly reduced the drop-out rates of Roma children. There were also several initiatives for providing small financial contributions (stipends) for Roma children, as well as proposals for cost-free education.

According to the ROMED National Focal Point for BiH, the mediators positively contributed to accessing services in the communities. Community members were informed in a timely manner about the ways of obtaining IDs and health insurance and enrolling children in pre-school and school. Thanks to the mediators' active commitment, the rate of Roma children registered in the birth register increased. Particular attention was placed on prenatal development in pregnancies. It is also important to note the drop in the percentage of people without IDs (from 40% to 30%). In addition, the active participation of mediators helped to reduce mistrust between the municipal authorities and communities, thereby facilitating the process for Roma to obtain their basic rights.

The importance of the mediators could also be drawn from the fact that in practice their responsibilities are much higher than those given by default. More specifically, the communities expect constant support from the mediators in finding solutions to their daily struggles. This applies also to situations in which there are no legal procedures available to resolve certain problems. That is why the mediators need to be additionally stimulated to give their best and continue helping their communities. Needless to say, mediators cannot work for free and thus more permanent financial allocations are more than necessary.

Besides capacity development, the Programme has also been working towards achieving better recognition and employment of mediators by local institutions. The representatives of institutions maintain personal contacts with local mediators and so can easily get in touch with them, either when there is a need for action or when the authorities feel they have less capacity to approach specific issues.

According to the National Support Team, even though the Programme received strong institutional support from the MHRR (also CAHROM Representative and National Contact Point for the Strategy for Roma Inclusion), as well as Roma experts working in different institutions at national level, the ROMED1 Programme as a resource still demonstrated limited outreach towards other state institutions. This lack of information leads to a certain fear of accepting mediators as part of institutional settings. This is a priority because the Programme needs to be incorporated better within state structures to become sustainable. To this end, visibility could be enhanced by stronger pressure from the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues of the Council of Europe on the key institutions dealing with Roma issues in BiH. Moreover, in this way ROMED could become of crucial importance for

the implementation of the Strategy for Roma inclusion, as well as a capacity-building resource for all existing local programmes dealing with national policies. An example of the insufficient recognition of the Programme is the fact that only three mediators were employed by the state institution during the entire duration of the Programme in BiH (2013-2015). A significant percentage of mediators received financial support from other stakeholders (World Vision, Care International), which is indeed positive but not enough in the long term. Thus, genuine sustainability can only be guaranteed if the Programme becomes more present and recognized within the state system, with mediators financially supported and employed by national and local authorities.

One example of the Programme's good practices is certainly the recent organization of the 1st Roma Political Academy in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which ROMED1 mediators played a crucial role. The event was organized in the framework of the ROMED1 Programme, with financial support from the Alliance for Roma Inclusion and the Unit of Electoral Assistance and Census of the Council of Europe. The mediators were actively involved in all the phases, starting with the identification of candidates, going into communities and leading awareness-raising workshops and even participating themselves in the training. The Academy was implemented in four modules with the aim of preparing 20 Roma for the local elections (held on 2 October 2016). The first module consisted of two training sessions which took place on 13 and 27 August. In the second module, the ROMED NST, together with the mediators, organised 10 awareness-raising workshops in Roma communities to draw attention to the importance of voting. The last two modules were held after the elections and targeted the Roma who had obtained seats in the local councils. The end result of the Academy was that 10 out of 20 candidates were elected in local councils in nine municipalities, many of whom were mediators, including the election of a young Roma woman, also a ROMED mediator, for the first time ever. This was an extremely important step, since these newly-elected councillors now have the power to impact the local budgets and include Roma in important initiatives.

1.3 ROMED2 key findings

The National Support Team in BiH considers that the ROMED2 Programme is real, feasible and adjustable to the needs of all actors in terms of understanding necessities and capacities. According to national sources, prior to ROMED no programmes similar to either of its phases (ROMED1 and ROMED2) had been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a similar scale. The Programme uses a specific methodology to foster new initiatives, especially when it comes to the active political participation of Roma at local level.

In other countries participating in the Programme and subject to the external evaluation conducted in 2016, ROMED2 was viewed as a strategic continuation of ROMED1, going deeper into the processes at local level by developing Community Action Groups (hereinafter referred to as CAGs) and working on their capacity, as well as that of local authorities, to operate jointly. The process in BiH however went in a different direction prioritizing the role of mediators and community participation in both phases of the Programme. Here the mediators are the ones who communicate the priorities identified by CAGs during the meetings of the Local Action Groups (composed of representatives of local authorities and CAG members). In this manner, Roma citizens involved in the CAGs contribute to the tailoring of measures and policies to needs, whilst at the same time combating the general opinion/truism that all Roma communities share the same issues.

The ROMED1 and ROMED2 processes in BiH were initiated simultaneously, which was much more challenging and intensive than in other countries. The official launching took place on 18 November 2013 in five municipalities: Bijeljina, Brčko, Donji Vakuf, Kakanj and Visoko. At a later stage, three additional municipalities joined the Programme: Prnjavor in February 2014, Tuzla in March 2014 and

Vukosavlje in April 2014. This ambitious plan to implement two phases in a common timeline was feasible only thanks to the commitment of the aforementioned national partners: the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, the NGO "Romalen Kakanj" and World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The municipalities where ROMED2 was implemented requested to join because they either recognized the importance of the Programme or had previously faced difficulties in approaching community issues and thus needed more efficient mechanisms in order to enter into dialogue with the Roma. One important selection criteria was whether the municipality had at least one active Roma NGO, which could then partner with the NST. Needless to say, the number of Roma residents as well as the presence of trained Roma mediators also played an important role in the selection.

In the first quarter of 2014, the National Support Team identified the CAG members. The CAGs bring together mediators, Roma community leaders/members, and Roma NGO representatives. Unlike in other ROMED2 countries, meetings were often attended by representatives of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR). In fact, the CAG were formed around the mediators who played a pivotal role in identifying members. They suggested potential members to the National Programme Officer (NPO) who then became proactively involved in the mobilization process.

The complex state organization and various administrative levels also represented a challenge for a given CAG to cover all the appropriate channels of public administration. In addition, a high level of mistrust and frustration accumulated towards any Roma-related project was a factor that hampered the effectiveness of the process. It required a great effort from the mediators to convince the communities that the ROMED Programme had a different methodology to any other past project when Roma were often misused but almost never helped. In line with this, the mediators helped the establishment of the CAGs in every municipality participating in the Programme.

ROMED2 enjoys legitimacy with local authorities due to the high credibility of the National Support Organisation, especially the NPO, Mr Mujo Fafulic. Visits to all municipalities were conducted with the specific purposes of negotiating with the local authorities on the implementation of the ROMED Programme and obtaining signatures of municipal mayors for the commitment letters. In all localities, the Programme was accepted as an instrument for developing local capacity in order to put into practice the national strategies and programmes for Roma inclusion. Specific needs included communication skills, enhancing participation when dealing with specific issues and targeting new initiatives in local communities.

The municipalities created Local Action Groups (LAGs), composed of representatives of the local authorities and CAG members. The meetings of LAGs and CAGs provided a platform for effective dialogue and negotiation on finding solutions for the pre-identified priorities. The process of interaction was clearly structured through at least one monthly meeting, during which participants consulted on and developed the Joint Action Plans.

Municipal authorities planned the allocation of resources for the implementation of Local Action Plans within the different budget lines concerning the Roma and national minorities in general. In most cases, resources are insufficient to cover the wide-range of issues, however there is a will to increase the contribution in the future. Currently, adopted Local Action Plans and allocated resources could be obtained in Bijeljina, Kakanj, Donji Vakuf and Prnjavor. The municipality of Visoko is in the phase of adoption of the Plan. With the help of the ROMED2 facilitators, a number of project proposals were drawn from the LAG meetings. These proposals were then also sent to different donors for allocation of financial resources.

Prior to ROMED2, members of the CAGs had little or no capacity to adequately formulate and communicate collective needs to local authorities on behalf of the whole community. Thanks to the

intervention of ROMED2, Roma communities managed to take charge of identifying priorities, with the assistance of mediators. Moreover, the CAG members started to actively interact with local authorities and become more present in those places where local policies and measures were designed. The ROMED2 Programme significantly increased the visibility of the Roma communities in the country and served as a school for gaining knowledge, skills and practical capacity for active citizenship. This was also beneficial for local authorities to become more sensitive to the issue and thus effectively respond to the requests of the communities. Important to note is that administrative issues were dealt with by the mediators, whereas more tangible needs (in the field of education and infrastructure) were negotiated during the CAG and LAG meetings.

Some visible results of ROMED2 relate to improved infrastructure in Roma neighbourhoods. Initiatives were launched to improve telecommunications, street lights, access to facilities, etc. Kakanj municipality, for example, launched an initiative to build a day care centre in the Roma settlement for Roma children and youth.

In November 2015, the ROMED National Support Team and Romalen Kakanj (National Support Organisation) organised a National Workshop and donors meeting for national and international organisations, as well as embassies in BiH. The idea was to present and highlight the importance of the ROMED Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, a great number of organisations recognised the importance of ROMED and thus initiated partnerships with Romalen Kakanj. One such organisation is Minority Rights Group, which planned a partnership with the ROMED NST in order to promote Roma mediators at international level.

There is still much to be done on the visibility and recognition of the Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The timeframe of ROMED2 is too short to provide more sustainable ground for the initiated local processes, especially having in mind that a stronger accent was placed on the role of mediators. This is why all stakeholders of the Programme were pleased to hear that a future joint programme between the Council of Europe and European Union will include BiH as a beneficiary country and follow up the work initiated by ROMED.

There is however increased local awareness of the direct benefits of the ROMED2 phase, expressed both by members of the CAGs and local institutions as follows:

- Local authorities recognised CAGs as local partners in bringing closer the real needs of the community. Effective consultation at LAG meetings increases the potential for development of successful initiatives and projects that can attract funding from other stakeholders;
- The members of the CAGs have an increased capacity to interact with the local administration and community. However, the groups will still need support from the NST in order to make steps towards becoming sustainable community structures.
- The complex state organization in the country with various administrative levels also represents a challenge for the CAG to cover all the appropriate channels of relationships with administration.

1.4 Lessons and recommendations

The main lesson to retain from the implementation of the two ROMED phases in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that **Roma mediators are an important resource for approaching Roma issues and finding solutions at local level**. Even though the ROMED2 phase shifts the focus from the mediator to the Community Action Groups, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the mediator is a pivotal pillar of the overall process of community participation. This is significant since one of **the issues concerning CAGs and LAGs in BiH is that they are less sustainable as structures, becoming fragile around electoral periods and being subject to changes according to power shifts**. In contrast

to that, **mediators have the advantage of remaining individuals who are continuously accountable to their local communities**, regardless of the political context at local and national levels.

Secondly, the **inclusion of CAG members into local public structures is important for the process in general**. One example supporting this claim is the present situation of the newly-elected local councillors who now have the possibility to influence the allocation of funds for Roma issues in their municipalities.

Last but not least, good cooperation with other stakeholders, as well as effective collaboration between the Roma NGOs with the NST, has been another success factor in building sustained support for the ROMED Programmes at the different decision-making levels.

There is a strong demand for the continuation of the Programme, both by training and supporting new mediators, as well as by continuing to support the processes of community participation and dialogue at local level. Some of the main recommendations for the continuation of the Programmes include:

- ***The ROMED Programme needs to continue***, both in providing support to finalising the institutionalisation of the profession of mediators and in increasing the sustainability of the local processes initiated;
- ***The new phase of support for capacity development of mediators needs to be based on investment in increased national ownership of the Programme***. The Programme needs to achieve better visibility and recognition at national level in order to become more sustainable in the long run. Further on, this means the allocation of various funds from different stakeholders and other contributions from national resources to the ROMED training programmes over time;
- ***The support to the initial ROMED2 municipalities needs to continue, with a clear focus on developing the capacity of the local CAGs for sustainability***. Plans for sustainability of the local processes need to be developed for each municipality, defining clear benchmarks of success and sustainability;
- ***New municipalities have made requests to join the Programme. In expanding the Programme/methodology to new municipalities, it is of the utmost importance to use the emerging successful models*** of the first group of localities, as well as practices proven successful coming from other ROMED countries.