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EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND EUROPEAN UNION JOINT PROGRAMME 'ROMED'

CASE STUDY TETOVO

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ROMED
Médiation pour les Roms
Mediation for Roma

“THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”, Tetovo

Tetovo municipality is a very good model of strategic synergy of matching existing local resources to develop and implement strategies for Roma inclusion to policy and funding opportunities provided by national programmes. The local administration's openness and commitment to Roma inclusive policies, together with the capacity of the ROMED National Support Organisation (Roma NGO "Sonce") to develop and host the Community Action Group, have been the two main factors for the success of the ROMED2 process. The initiatives launched are not fragmented but guided by a consistent vision and strategy of the municipality. It was developed in consultation with civil society and is organised around the core priority of increased access to education for Roma children and youth as an investment in the sustainability of Roma inclusion in Tetovo.

The Context: problems and opportunities

Tetovo municipality is one of the oldest and biggest municipalities in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, located in the north-western part of the country. Tetovo, the municipal centre, is considered as one of the most developed cities in the country with a developed private sector and two universities - the Tetovo State University, teaching in both Albanian and Macedonian languages, and the South East European University.

According to the last census in 2002, Tetovo has 86,580 inhabitants of multiple ethnicities, the majority of whom are ethnic Albanians. Roma residents in the municipality number 2,357. Based on interviews with the local administration and the representatives of Sonce, the population of the city is currently estimated to be much higher at over 100,000, with an estimated 4,000-5,000 of this number being Roma.

Roma live in six different neighbourhoods of Tetovo. Five of these neighbourhoods have mixed inhabitants from different ethnicities – mainly Roma, Macedonians, Albanians and Turks. Only Roma live in the Krasniki settlement. About 50 people live there in poor conditions, with no water or sewage supply and non-asphalted streets.

According to the interviews with local Roma representatives, the main income of Roma in Tetovo comes from relatives living and working in western Europe. The majority of Roma have been working in the local textile factories, although many of them are currently unemployed due to the downsizing of these industries as a result of past conflicts. During the crisis of 2001, there was a wave of immigration of Roma to Tetovo from other parts of the country. These Roma were well-accepted by both Macedonians and Albanians, as they were not viewed as taking sides in the conflict.

The local administration in Tetovo is very open to working with Roma NGOs and active citizens in the community. The Mayor himself has worked as part of the NGO community in the past. There are consistent efforts to develop strategic interventions in the area of Roma inclusion based on a consultative process with Roma. This is also supported by national policy in support of Roma inclusion priorities, as well as the mobilisation of significant funding allocated for that.

There are several Roma NGOs based in Tetovo. The Roma association Sonce, the National Support Organisation for the implementation of the ROMED2 Programme, is the most visible one with a history of working for Roma inclusion in the municipality with recognition from

both the local authorities and the Roma community. The Roma community in Tetovo has formed a football team composed mostly of Roma players. There is a football team from each settlement and several tournaments per year are organised, notably on 8 April for the International Roma Day celebrations.

[The Community Action Group \(CAG\)](#)

The Community Action Group (CAG) was established as part of the ROMED2 Programme at the end of 2013. The group consists of 14 people out of which only three are women. The core group that gathers more often numbers about eight people. Most of the members of the CAG have been working on various initiatives organised by Sonce for many years and the group has been receiving outstanding support from this NGO and its leaders respectively. The CAG uses the office of the organisation for meetings, as well as any other resources it can provide for the group's activities.

The strategic and operational embedding of the CAG in the overall work of Sonce is a key factor in the development and sustainability of the CAG. The organisation has many years of experience, a well-developed structure and a very good reputation among the Roma community and local authorities. This has opened many doors to the CAG and the ROMED2 process and has also helped to grow the capacity of the group.

The group is very active and informed about the available options for resolving specific problems of the Roma community. Its members have very good relationships with representatives of local authorities and a good image within the Roma community. The main motivation of members for joining the CAG is that the group provides a platform to communicate directly with the representatives of local institutions and plan together local programmes and projects.

[Interaction between the CAG and the Local Government](#)

The Mayor of Tetovo has extensive past experience of working in the NGO sector and is very familiar with Sonce, due to years of cooperation with them. From this perspective, ROMED2 was launched in an environment which was open and ready for the process suggested by the Programme.

The municipality regards the CAG and the ROMED National Support Organisation as equal partners and relies on regular meetings with them for formulating problems and looking together for solutions. The CAG, Sonce and the local administration meet on a monthly basis. There is also ongoing communication between the contact person in the municipality with the CAG and Sonce. This helps achieve an effective cooperative process and adaptation of priorities according to both long-term and emerging short-term needs.

One of the main results of this fruitful cooperation is that the municipality has appointed Roma in the local administration, as well as Roma to work on various projects and programmes. This was a response to the priority identified by the CAG in the Joint Plan.

One of the main long-term priorities of the municipality is the education of Roma. The municipality has a long-term education strategy which was developed in consultation with the CAG and the ROMED National Support Organisation. Through this strategy, the municipality has developed educational programmes for children from fourth up to eighth

grade, for high school students, as well as for increasing adult literacy and vocational training. These programmes are supported by funding from the Ministry of Education. One of the main achievements is that 150 stipends were paid to Roma students upon completion of secondary education with a particular vocational specification which, in turn, secured employment. In addition, eligibility criteria have been adapted to increase the enrolment of Roma children and youth into schools.

The municipality and CAG representatives are also actively working together to reduce the number of children begging on the street.

The city budget has allocated funds for cultural and educational activities of the Roma community, which are spent in consultation with representatives of the CAG and Sonce. Activities promoting cultural interaction between different ethnic groups are also planned. On 8 April, the municipality allowed the representatives of the Roma community and CAG representatives to raise the Romani flag in front of the municipality.

Results and impact in the communities

Good cooperation between the representatives of the Roma community and representatives of local authorities has resulted in visible achievements in the process of inclusion of Roma. One of the main results is the long-term education strategy developed in consultation with the CAG and Sonce, with a special focus on secondary and vocational education supported by concrete allocations provided from the local budget and projects for the implementation of the envisaged measures. The local administration, CAG and Sonce consider together the improvement of education as an important investment in the sustainability of the Roma inclusion process in the municipality.

Launched by the municipality, educational activities such as appointed educational tutors in schools and kindergartens, as well as the aforementioned stipends for Roma students in secondary schools with a specific vocation orientation and amended entrance criteria, have already achieved a drastic reduction in the number of dropouts from school. Whilst the overall rate for the country is 30%, it is situated between 12% and 15% in this municipality

Another success with visible impact on the Roma community in Tetovo is the support for cultural and social activities. Funding provided for cultural activities gives the opportunity to energise community involvement by organising events that bring people together around cultural issues and celebrations. An agreement has been reached to transform the former cultural centre in the centre of Tetovo into a Roma cultural and educational centre. Once the old cultural centre is moved to its new building, the old building will be available to the ROMED National Support Organisation and the CAG to carry out cultural, educational and social activities with different groups from the Roma community. This Roma cultural centre will also accommodate other structures working on Roma issues, like the Roma Information Office.

Lessons forward

The ROMED2 process was very successful in the Municipality of Tetovo. The main success factors are the openness of the local authority and the availability of a skilled Mayor, as well

as the well-developed Roma organisation “Sonce” around which the CAG was formed. Some of the emerging lessons and needs for the future include:

- ***For each location, it is extremely important to have a local administration which is open to work and consult with Roma organisations and groups and has a clear vision and long-term strategy for working with the Roma community.*** The development of such a long-term vision and commitment requires a strong local civil society – local Roma NGOs in a partnership with the CAGs functioning in strategic synergy, rather than parallel structures.
- ***The presence of active and well-educated Roma and local Roma organisations working on specific causes can serve as a strong support network for organising and developing the CAGs.*** They can increase the legitimacy of these groups due to their previous good work record with local authorities. Creating Community Action Groups around various issues or for the overall planning process can increase the constituency of these organisations within the Roma communities and a more adequate presentation of their needs and interests. The existence of organised groups within the Roma community working as a network guarantees the successful implementation of policies and programmes aimed at resolving the specific problems of the Roma community.
- ***Another important factor of success was the search for synergies between ROMED2 and other available programmes in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.*** The existence of national programmes served as an impetus to allocating funding from local budgets. Matching funds from national programmes with funds from local budgets is a clear indicator of the political will to solve the problems of the Roma community.

There is high potential for the sustainability of the local processes initiated in Tetovo. Both the CAG and the local administration are committed to continuing to work together. A guarantee for this sustainability will be Sonce with its well-developed structure and position in the municipality. However, there is a visible need to support the sustainability of this process in several directions:

- The CAG needs additional support to become a full partner to local institutions. These are people coming directly from the Roma community and their capacity to be able to work actively for the development of local policies and programmes for Roma needs to be enhanced.
- The expected handing over of the building in the city centre to the CAG and Sonce will provide the opportunity to develop social, educational, cultural and other activities. The CAG will need support from the facilitators and the ROMED National Support Organisation to develop a long-term strategy for the use of this centre, which will be done in close consultation with the various interest groups in the community.
- The inclusion of women in the initiatives in Tetovo was less visible. It will not happen by itself due to the specificities of the local Roma communities. It will be important to have a targeted strategy and initiatives to stimulate the participation of women in the activities in Tetovo.
- There is a need to invest in increasing the capacity of local authorities and the representatives of the CAG to develop initiatives and projects that can effectively absorb the funds allocated under the national programmes and budget. As outlined in the interviews with national institutions, the serious issue in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is not so much the lack of funding, but rather the lack of local capacity to attract and spend allocated funds from the national budget for programmes for Roma.