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EUROCITIES Peer Review Report

Roma School Mediation

EUROCITIES

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This report was produced by Christoph Leucht in cooperation with members of the EUROCITIES task force on Roma inclusion and Dirk Gebhardt from EUROCITIES' Brussels office. It is a 2012 update of the peer review that took place on 24-26 October 2011 in Berlin.

We want to thank the Berlin Senate and RAA for hosting and co-organising this meeting and the Freudenberg Foundation for providing the funding to invite mediators from outside the EU to contribute to this peer review.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe's Strasbourg declaration on Roma in October 2010 recognised the importance of Roma mediators in schools, health services and on the labour market as an effective approach to improve the access of the Roma population to public services. Education has a key role as it can positively affect other areas of exclusion and as it can empower people to improve their situation themselves.

This report presents the findings of a peer review on Roma school mediator schemes in Berlin. The review looked at policies and projects in Berlin to improve Roma inclusion and the access of Roma families to public education services. In addressing this question, the peer review focused on Roma people working as mediators between schools and Roma families in the inner-city district of Mitte. This work is coordinated by the non-governmental organisation RAA Berlin¹ in cooperation with the Berlin Senate, districts and schools. One of the founders and supporters of RAA Berlin is the Freudenberg Foundation, which via the Roma Integration Forum of the European Foundation Centre, is a partner of EUROCITIES in the Roma inclusion taskforce.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

2.1 About peer reviews and benchmarks

Peer reviews are an analytical tool that have been used in several EUROCITIES projects. Their logic is simple: colleagues working on similar subjects but in different cities or contexts meet and evaluate each other's projects or policies. In doing so, they learn about how others are tackling the situation and can see their own work in a new light. Peer reviewing is common practice in research and public policy (e.g. OECD, EU).

EUROCITIES peer reviews use a benchmark as a reference to evaluate a policy under review. The benchmark consists of several elements or key factors that describe what a successful policy should look like, without being too prescriptive about how exactly it should be done. As the benchmark sets the norm that guides the evaluation, it is essential that all colleagues participating in a peer review define it.

The benchmark used as assessment guideline for this peer review followed the structure of others developed for EUROCITIES projects in the field of migrant integration and non-discrimination².

The benchmark is based on a variety of policy guidelines from the Council of Europe and the new EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and EUROCITIES. Its core elements stem from the ROMED code of ethics³, which describe the ten elements of the ROMED intercultural mediation approach⁴. The benchmark also drew on an evaluation conducted on the first Roma mediator project in Berlin (2003-2005), within the Equal programme (institutional support and on-going training).

¹ Regionale Arbeitsstellen für Bildung, Integration und Demokratie – Regional Centres for education, integration and democracy.

² See www.integratingcities.eu.

³ www.coe-romed.org/sites/default/files/code%20ethicEN.pdf. The ROMED project is a joint effort from the European Commission and the Council of Europe to improve the work of 1,000 mediators all over Europe through a training programme. Rather than seeing the mediators as autonomous problem solvers the project builds on a participatory planning approach to increase the responsibility of parents in education and to foster cooperation with institutions.

⁴ These elements include shared responsibility of all stakeholders, participatory planning of action plans, work cycle approach with initial introduction of mediator schemes, parents and NGO involvement, legal framework conditions, intercultural sensibility of mediators.

2.2 The peer review visit in Berlin

The peer review visit took place on 25-26 October 2011 in Berlin. The team of peers included around 20 representatives from members of the EUROCITIES task force on Roma inclusion (Belfast, Gent, Gothenburg, Grenoble, Lille, Munich, Nantes, Newcastle, Vantaa), the EUROCITIES secretariat, the European Foundation Centre, the Belgian national government and mediators from Kiev, Novi Sad and Odessa.

The programme consisted of:

- visits to three schools in Mitte (a primary school, a support school and a secondary school) including interviews with headmasters, teachers and mediators
- interviews with representatives of the Berlin public administration (the Senate for Social Affairs and Integration, the Senate for Education, representatives from the district of Mitte and the Office for Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination), and
- a visit to RAA, the NGO running the mediator schemes, with presentations on the work of mediators and the support structure available.

The programme ended with a workshop in which the preliminary results of the different groups were collected and discussed, and a presentation of these preliminary results to Mr Robin Schneider as representative of the Berlin Senate.

The ROMED expert Christoph Leucht drafted a background report in advance in cooperation with the stakeholders from the city of Berlin, the districts, schools and NGOs, which in Berlin presented their key policy elements in reaction to the draft benchmark.

3. THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT OF ROMA IN BERLIN

It is difficult to estimate the number of Roma living in Berlin as ethnicity is not registered in Germany. According to estimates from the Senate of Berlin, there are between 15 and 20 000 Roma living in Berlin. They can be divided into Roma migrants from the former Yugoslavia (around 12 000) and from new EU member states (5-7 000).

Roma from the former Yugoslavia came in a first wave as civil war refugees in the early 1990s and in a second wave after the abolition of visa restrictions for Serbia and Montenegro (in December 2009) and for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania (in December 2010). Many Roma from these countries claimed their right to asylum. The Roma from EU member states mainly originate from Romania and Bulgaria, but there are also smaller groups from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the other countries from the 2004 EU enlargement round.

The Berlin Roma population is concentrated in some districts, in particular in parts of Mitte and Neukölln on the outer limits of the centre of Berlin. These districts are among the poorest in Berlin, but they provide the informal accommodation structures for newcomers that are typical for such neighbourhoods.

According to reports from schools, the number of schools with more than 50 pupils of Roma origin is constantly growing. The district of Neukölln reported more than 500 Romanian and Bulgarian children at school in early 2011, many of which were Roma. Within the first half of 2011, another 87 had registered.

As a response to the growing number of Roma coming to Berlin, the Senate set up working groups on Roma inclusion together with the districts and NGOs to prepare a citywide strategy for Roma inclusion. Districts have also started running decentralised inclusion projects themselves. While

the peer review was going on, the new coalition government of Berlin agreed to continue these efforts over the coming years.

NGOs are important actors in developing policies for Roma inclusion, as will be shown in the next chapter.

4. BACKGROUND OF THE ROMA MEDIATOR SCHEME

When the Roma mediators project was developed (2000-2001) the Roma population in the city was significantly lower than it is now. Roma children had severe problems with school attendance and performance. Conventional measures of homework support and consultations with parents did not have much impact on success in improving this. RAA Berlin decided to build on a model for school mediation that was originally developed by a Sinti association in 1993. This initial project developed when Sinti mothers regularly accompanied their children to school to provide support against discrimination. After a while, the teachers started to invite the parents of non-Roma children⁵ to build a relationship and create trust between the school and families.

After explorative interventions in two primary schools between 2000 and 2002, RAA Berlin set up a three-year training program for Roma school mediators between 2003 and 2005 through the EQUAL Program. Three of the twelve original participants followed the training until the final exam with experts and representatives of the Berlin Education Senate and the integration commissioner to become Roma school mediators. The training included an intensive German language course, the use of office IT, communication skills, elements of education legislation and supported work practice in primary schools.

From 2006, the mediator schemes were supported mainly through the European Refugee Fund and the European Integration Fund, which gave more or less stable employment to three mediators working for the RAA Berlin. They worked in two primary and one secondary school. Since 2008, another 22 school mediators, this time including trainees with either a Roma or an Arabic background, were trained for three years. This allowed for working with an additional primary school and a special school (for children with specific needs) in the district of Mitte.

While the RAA Berlin's mediator scheme focuses on the district of Mitte, and works mainly with Roma children and parents from Serbia and Bosnia, other initiatives complement this work elsewhere in the city. The Roma self-organisations Amaro Drom and the Roma Parents Association began working in Neukölln's schools in 2006. Another NGO - südost Europa Kultur - started its work to support Roma newcomers from Romania and Bulgaria in 2009.

The Berlin peer review therefore took place at an interesting moment and capitalised on the available experience from several phases of project-financed work with mediator schemes. In addition, the Senate of Berlin is considering developing a more integrated and coherent approach to Roma integration through a dedicated strategy.

⁵ Rüdiger Wurr ; Sylvia Träbing-Butzmann: Schattenkämpfe: Widerstände und Perspektiven der schulischen Emanzipation deutscher Sinti/Rüdiger Wurr ; Sylvia Träbing-Butzmann, Kiel 1998.

5. BENCHMARKING MEDIATOR SCHEMES FOR ROMA PUPILS IN MITTE

This chapter presents the benchmark consisting of 13 key factors for a successful approach to Roma mediator schemes in schools within the city's wider policy context. The benchmark helped to structure the peer review and the feedback given to the city of Berlin.

In this version of the report, the results of the peer review are summarised in chapters 6 and 7. The idea behind the benchmark is to be a tool which other cities can use to assess or inspire their own policy on mediators at school. The peer review and feedback from other expert has helped to refine the original benchmark.

5.1 The wider political framework for Roma inclusion

1. Political leadership

The political level shows leadership and demonstrates the need for explicit but not exclusive targeting of Roma in inclusion policies in the administration, external partners and the wider public.

2. Strategic approach to Roma inclusion

The city administration addresses Roma exclusion through a dedicated strategy that is shared across all relevant departments (education, anti-discrimination, migrant integration). This includes Roma mediators.

3. Implementation of strategy

The city administration has dedicated staff and a budget to coordinate and/or support the implementation of the strategy between partners inside and outside the municipality.

4. Roma integration as an element of the city's wider diversity approach

Within a broader diversity strategy, the city administration will employ Roma in the public service and have a specific strategy in place for reducing gaps in formal education leading to better access to employment for Roma people.

5.2 The setup of the mediator scheme

5. Mediator scheme as shared responsibility

The relevant partners (the department for education, social inclusion/integration, equal opportunities etc.) share responsibility for developing the mediator scheme.

6. Stakeholder and user involvement/participatory planning

The stakeholders and service users are partners in a shared and participatory planning process of the mediator scheme. This includes setting goals, designing and implementing the service

together and evaluating it jointly. The scheme is recognised by stakeholders including parents and the wider community.

7. Raising awareness about mediator schemes

Potential users of the mediator scheme, both the service providers and parents, are aware of its existence.

8. The commitment of schools

The schools with Roma pupils see the potential of mediator schemes to improve their work and are willing to use it.

9. The legal framework

Roma mediators work in a clear and sustainable legal framework, which defines their position and role and values their contribution to education (formal professional status and recognition, contract, pay, supervision).

10. Intercultural skills

In line with the general diversity approach of the municipality, intercultural skills to understand both public institutions and the target group are a key element of the profile for mediator positions.

11. Institutional support, training and further qualification

The mediator schemes are linked to a resource centre that can support mediators in the institutional and professional environment they operate in. They can improve their performance through on-going training processes to learn new skills, leading to further qualification and better communication skills.

12. Backing up the mediator approach with employment and qualification opportunities for Roma pupils

The city administration is actively working to demonstrate to Roma families that there are many opportunities for inclusion in the labour market for young people, especially if their children go through formal education.

5.3 Evaluation and monitoring

13. Evaluation and monitoring of the mediator scheme

The city administration knows how the mediator scheme works, can identify deficits and make improvements if needed.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The wider approach to Roma inclusion

The team of peers considered the political commitment of the Berlin Senate in the field of Roma inclusion as a success. Various pilot projects and coordination structures for Roma inclusion were created and are now going to be made more permanent.

Peers also welcomed the leadership the Berlin Senate demonstrated by developing, probably as the first German, and one of the first Western European cities, a comprehensive Roma inclusion strategy. Berlin's efforts to influence the federal level to work into the same direction and to support the local level were also positively acknowledged. Peers recommend continuing to forge alliances with other German and European cities and regions to raise awareness for the new and emerging challenges regarding the inclusion of Roma.

The peer review showed that the coordinated approach to Roma inclusion in Berlin does not yet fully embrace all relevant departments and policy fields, such as education and non-discrimination, although there are steps in this direction, and awareness is growing among all relevant actors. The peers were confident that developing a strategy will tackle most of these issues.

The peers underlined that the administrative strategy on Roma inclusion needs to be complemented by a communication strategy. Roma inclusion policy is a highly sensitive communication issue due strong stereotypes, racism, scape-goating and mistrust that have burdened relations with the Roma communities for centuries. Pillars of such a communication strategy towards wider society could be:

- to define, as a result of a shared vision, a common language between the Senate, the districts and the NGOs to communicate the joint efforts,
- to communicate the approach of the explicit but not exclusive targeting of Roma in inclusion policy measures (see the EU's Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion),
- to communicate explicit targeting (e.g. Roma mediators) as benefits, and not as stigma for the institutions,
- to find a common approach to avoiding ethnic labelling whenever possible, i.e. to distinguish the ethnic dimension of problems from the legal and social dimension.

The team of peers recommend that the Senate, when developing the strategy, pays particular attention to newcomers from Bulgaria and Romania, and to extend the projects and policy measures that were developed for the first wave of migration from Yugoslavia to this group. This would include a mid-term scenario of further migration of Roma from EU member states to Berlin, and the impact it will have on neighbourhoods as well as schools and other institutions. Without such a long-term vision there is a risk that all efforts by the Berlin Senate to foster Roma inclusion will be cancelled out by a further inflow.

6.2 The mediator pilot schemes

Peers found evidence that the Roma mediator schemes in Mitte's schools succeed in increasing school attendance within the Roma community. In the context of primary schools, the mediators have managed to improve communication between Roma families and school, to foster enrolment, to reduce the drop out rate and to partly improve the performance of Roma students after transition to secondary schools.

Apart from the idea of building bridges to mainstream education, the mediator scheme also has the potential to get committed Roma people into work and to serve as role models for formal education and employment, which is not necessarily a norm for all community members.

Peers noted some problems in involving parents and the need to strengthen parents' involvement. It would be interesting to include how to increase parents' involvement in their children's education as part of the mediator training and to look at how schools in the rest of the city attempt to increase parental involvement.

Peers also noticed that the mediators are often integrated into the school team to different degrees. One step to increasing this would be to develop a simple set of guidelines from the Senate for headmasters, including the requirement for a work place in the teacher's working room, keys for the school, participation in school meetings etc.

Building trust around the mediators on behalf of both the parents and schools is still important, but might come with the schemes running longer and becoming more widespread.

Related to this, peers identified the need to continue raising awareness of existing mediator schemes in different sectors of the administrations, schools, NGOs and parents.

Given that the experience so far took place under relatively difficult conditions (no clear professional framework, no long-term funding and no model for cooperation with the school staff) the peers considered it as a successful pilot and recommend the authorities to think about consolidating the scheme.

6.3 Conditions for developing the mediator approach

Developing the mediator approach would imply extending it to other target groups (e.g. Roma-families from Romania and Bulgaria) and other schools, for which there seems to be a clear demand. It would also mean developing the mediator approach from the current pilots towards a mainstream policy instrument.

At present, there are different views within the administration on the use and the development of mediator schemes. The district of Mitte seems to be positive about further developing the mediator approach whereas representatives of the Senate for Integration are sceptical. Peers would consider it important, within the efforts in developing a Roma inclusion strategy, also to exchange views and find a common approach to mediators, in particular in the educational sector, taking into account qualification, resourcing, further training and a role within the intercultural strategy of the Senate.

Peers see several pre-conditions for the further roll-out and consolidation of the existing mediator schemes:

- addressing a lack of evidence on the outcomes of the mediator pilots, e.g. through a evaluation of the benefits of mediation;
- addressing the lack of recognition of mediators as a formal qualification.

In order to tackle the first problem, the costs and benefits of the existing experiences with mediators should be evaluated in order to allow the public administration to make an informed choice (e.g. based on a social return on investment assessment).

To address the second problem, peers suggest an approach which, on the one hand, formalises the training, and, on the other, avoids the de facto exclusion of Roma with few or low formal qualifications from it. A training scheme therefore should have a low threshold in terms of prior formal qualifications, allow mediators to get practical experience relatively early and offer further training on the job.

The development of a training scheme would need to be accompanied by efforts to tackle the currently lacking official recognition of the mediator profession at national level by designing a formal qualification trajectory within the occupational field of school social work. The qualification would define the role of mediators within the school system and lead towards other qualifications such as social work.

Both steps can draw on the experience made by NGOs in Berlin and in the wider context, e.g. within the Council of Europe's ROMED Programme.

While mediators can successfully facilitate access to services over a certain time, they cannot substitute full integration and participation. Mediators will always run a risk of being seen as agents of social integration, instead of facilitators. Therefore, mediator schemes need to be built on the involvement of all stakeholders as part of the goal of empowering Roma and improving their access to mainstream society and its services.

6.4 Roma mediators within wider diversity policies

The integration of Roma mediators in the educational sector should be linked with the wider diversity policies. Mediators can provide role models for Roma and help to reach the Senate's diversity targets. For this, it is important to define the necessary intercultural skills of mediators, including language skills. These would typically include a thorough understanding of Berlin and its institutional context and of the particular context of Roma migrants.

7. LESSONS LEARNED: WHAT CAN OTHER CITIES DO WITH THE RESULTS OF THIS PEER REVIEW?

Apart from evaluating the Berlin experience, the peer review was designed to actively inspire peers dealing with Roma inclusion in other European cities. Looking at Berlin's policies through the benchmark helped to identify the key factors for mediator schemes and to understand how it is embedded in a wider policy strategy.

The peer review highlighted several crucial points for cities envisaging running a mediator scheme:

- The mediator approach does not only have the potential to improve access for Roma families to services and public institutions. Coming from the community the mediators can also serve as role models who demonstrate that there are pathways for Roma into formal employment situations.
- Mediators should not be seen as substitutes for integration, but as temporary bridges to mainstream services for individuals on their way to full empowerment and participation in local policy.
- The profession of mediators should be defined within an official qualification framework including training, further qualification as well as relations and pathways to other qualifications.
- Mediator schemes should be embedded in a wider policy framework defining Roma inclusion as shared task between different parts of the administration and partners such as Roma organisations.

- Furthermore, they should also go beyond a Roma policy framework and link with mainstream policies regarding diversity and non-discrimination, education and employment etc.
- As well as a strategy for coordination, a strategy on communication which is needed to define a common language for all partners and which is based on the principle of explicit but not exclusive targeting, avoiding ethnic stereotyping.
- It is important that both individual schools and the responsible administration are committed to having mediators. This ensures that there is a well-defined place and job description for mediators within school teams.
- When designing a mediator scheme, a trajectory from pilot to mainstream policy elements should be traced from the start, including all relevant parties (integration administration, education administration, Roma organisations, NGOs etc) and funding.
- This should include an evaluation framework for analysing the baseline situation and monitoring the outcomes of mediator schemes. This does not have to be narrowly focused on economic cost-benefit analysis, but can also look at soft outcomes and long-term benefits (e.g. the social return on investment approach).



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