



Giving space to potential of young Roma

**Investment in the capacity
of young Roma matters!**

Responsibility Empowerment
Activism Citizenship Transparency

REACT

**Make Europe an
equal place for Roma**

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ERGO Network, Belgium

Final year BA student Finance & Insurance in Brussels. Finished his secondary school in Shumen, Bulgaria and lives currently in Brussels.

Languages: French, Dutch, English, Turkish and Bulgarian

Assignment/Achievements:

Mapping of the organizations that have Roma as a target, work with Roma or are representative Roma organizations in Belgium.



Introduction

From October 2010 to November 2011, ERGO Network and its members Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (Romania), Integro Association (Bulgaria) and Roma Active Albania, conducted the campaign **REACT - Make Europe and equal place for Roma**. With this campaign, we reached out to citizens – Roma and non-Roma – media and governments.

We developed the campaign from the understanding that – against the background of widespread anti-Roma sentiment and ingrained negative stereotypes of Roma – we had to explore and develop approaches fit to this condition. REACT gave a central role to Roma themselves – youngsters, children, parents, activists, communities – to tell their own stories and show how they are part of society.

This booklet gives an insight in the work with and achievements of Young Roma Professionals. This component of the REACT campaign aimed to create a model for investment in Roma human resources as role models within their environment.

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The Young Roma Professionals Program of ERGO Network gave young Roma the possibility to work and gain experience within the partner organizations Roma Active Albania, Integro Association and Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, which created positions in their teams for more than fifteen young people during the 18 months duration of the project. The project comprised an integrated capacity building component to reinforce capacity at implementing partners with the focus on offering coaching, training, and professional development opportunities.

The objectives of the program were following:

- To equip a group of potential young Roma (YRPs) with a skill set relevant to different aspects of Roma inclusion and knowledge of both their national institutional and political environments and EU institutions and policies.
- To support and help implement the work of the partner organizations conducting the different components of the project.
- To strengthen the capacity of the YRPs to understand the key concepts of the ERGO mission and working philosophy.

Context

Active participation of Roma in policy design, monitoring and implementation is recognized as a key success factor for Roma Inclusion policies. But the low organizational level and a lack of relevant expertise and skills among Roma is an obstacle to their involvement. ERGO Network member organizations have over a decade of experience in capacity building and grassroots empowerment of Roma, including a clear view of the difficulties related to attracting, training and retaining Roma professionals. The civil society faces a strong need of young active citizens which are able to express the needs and challenges of their communities, to understand the mechanisms of social exclusion (stigmatization, marginalization and antigypsyism) and to address them in the wider society.

There are few young Roma with tertiary education or comparable level of training, experience or potential, who are active in the civil society. Many of the most promising young Roma, including those that were earlier involved in NGO or CBO activities, move to other fields that offer higher material awards. Although such social mobility is a positive development, and nevertheless contributes to the development of strong and active citizens, there is a great need of a continuous effort to attract and train a next generation of active young Roma as a basis of sustainable and growing human capacity in the Roma movement.

Challenging the frames and stereotypes of society

The existing concepts about Roma in the society are based on framed stereotypes which also form the public opinion for the incapability of Roma to integrate (the romantic image, or the image seen on the streets – beggars and thieves). With this program we aimed to strengthen the active citizenship position of the young people in order to bring a new dynamic in the perception of the majority.

The approach

In the host organization the young people developed together with their supervisors and coaches individual development plans, which defined their learning trajectory. It included trainings on specific topics, engagement in teams for implementing certain activities, development of individual projects and researches. **The key element was that the young people received responsibility within the team, direct experience and were prepared to work in the field, e.g. in the Roma community, with media and intercultural campaigns.** Additionally, they had common trainings and attended meetings at EU level in order to become aware of the current developments in the Roma policy level.



Adrian-Nicolae Furtuna (27)

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities,
Romania

Sociologist with occupations in the field of Roma culture and social representation of the Roma in society. He worked for Roma Center “Amare Rromentza” for three years and realized a documentary film about the Deportation of the Roma from Romania in Transnistria during Second World War.

Languages: Romanian, Romani, English, French

Assignment/Achievements: He has worked on the building up the Alternative Education Club in Ferentari Bucharest. He has prepared his first book for publication on the Roma Holocaust in Romania.

Learning process

The YRP program put a strong focus on the learning process of the young professionals based on the on-job learning, on mentoring and coaching, trainings, workshops and conferences, as well as internships on national and international level.

The learning component focused on three specific fields:

1. **Professional working skills:** To develop professional skills to conduct the work in the national partner organizations and related to their and the YRP's needs and interests.
2. **ERGO mission and concepts:** To understand the mission and concepts of ERGO and to be able to relate the local/national work to the conceptual understanding of the mission of ERGO. Focus on: Empowerment and grassroots mobilization, active citizenship, stigmatization and social exclusion.
3. **Policy Level:** To understand the current policy discussions on Roma inclusion in Europe and to gain knowledge of both their national institutional and political environments and EU institutions and policies.



Ognyan Isaev (25)

Integro Association Bulgaria

In 2009 he graduated in Journalism at Shumen University. Ognyan was national coordinator for Bulgaria of the international campaign – “Typical Roma...?”.

He wrote for the Roma newspaper “Drom Dromendar”, for the weekly “Shumensky Pokazatel” and for Prague-based Transitions Online magazine. Some of his articles were published in national newspaper “Novinar” in Bulgaria. Ognyan publishes his own blog.

Languages: English, Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian

Assignment/Achievements:

He organized a group of students that have conducted public debates in three of the biggest Universities in Bulgaria. He worked out a Media monitoring report.

Kadrin Hasanov (25)

Integro Association, Bulgaria

He has graduated from the University of Shumen in 2005 and holds Bachelor Degree in History.

Languages: English, Turkish, Romani and Bulgarian

Assignment/Achievements:

Works at Integro Association since 2006. His role as Young Roma was to support and facilitate Integro advocacy activities at local level.

Conclusions and key elements of success

1. Selection and profile

The selection should mainly be focused on the commitment of young people, who have an open attitude to learn and to develop themselves. Although the Young Roma Professionals had specific tasks and responsibilities to contribute to the work of the host organization, they had to have the awareness that this was a unique learning opportunity for themselves to gain experience and skills from the NGOs. The profile of the program does not have to be limited to university students, but the approach could be valuable for youngsters on local level as well.

2. Individual assessment and learning trajectory

Assessing and mapping the personal skills, needs, interests and talents of the young people, proved to be a key initial step in order to develop a meaningful and individual learning trajectory. The Young Roma Professionals developed together with their supervisors and coaches personal development plans, taking into consideration their personal interests and motivation for their future career, as well as the needs to fulfill the responsibilities and assignments in the team and organization. The personal learning trajectories included a basic set of professional skills, the capacity-building component in a specific interest area, the development of an individual assignment and research project, as well as a clear plan of coaching, reflection and evaluation of the learning process in order to analyze the



Silvia Constantin (27)

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Romania

Graduated in 2008 from the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest with a BA degree in International Relations and European Studies. Currently she is MA student Communication and Public Relations. She worked from 2007-2009 as Human Resources Assistant at the Ministry of Transport in Bucharest. She also is a trainer on Civic Education and Electoral Participation.

Languages: French, English, Romanian

Assignment/Achievements:

Contribution to the creation of the Alternative Education Club in Ferentari. She is trainer within Aflatoun Educational Program.



Erion Xhaibra (23)

Roma Active Albania

Born in Dures. Student at the European University of Tirana in Political science. He has been volunteering at Roma Active Albania for several years and attended several trainings in Leadership and Advocacy. He is one of the active members of the ternYpe - International Youth Network.

Languages: English, Italian, Romani and Albanian

Assignment/Achievements:

As young Roma professional contributed to the development of the campaign activities, such as street actions and debates, and he supported the implementation of the youth activities. He is editor of the Youth magazine, published by Roma Active Albania.



Ilvia Bajrami (21)

Roma Active Albania

She graduated in International Relations from the European University of Tirana. She is interested in developing public speech and debating skills, and is strongly engaged in ternYpe – International Roma Youth Network.

Languages: English, Italian, Romani and Albanian

Assignment/Achievements:

She has organized the debates in several schools in Tirana and took part in TV broadcast in Albania promoting the active citizenship of the young Roma.

progress and the necessary adjustments and support during the project.

3. Capacity-building through coaching and on-job learning and training

The learning process was mainly facilitated through the continuous on-job learning, coaching and reflection on the personal development. Facing serious responsibilities and challenges within their teams strengthened the competences of the Young Roma Professionals regarding critical thinking and the problem and conflict resolution. While the supervisor defined the monthly, weekly, daily work agenda of the Young Roma Professionals and gave them a critical feedback, their coach engaged to strengthen and to reflect on their personal development and learning process, e.g. through mapping of skills and knowledge, monthly reflections, provisions of specific trainings and internships. In conclusion, the real capacity-building takes place through coaching and on-job learning and training. Seminars and training-course were additionally provided to raise the awareness on specific issues complementary to their learning trajectories.

4. Professionalization and conceptualization

Within the organizations the Young Roma Professionals had the possibility to participate in the development of concepts for awareness-raising campaigns, shaping the methods for working with the target groups. Moreover, they acquired complementary skills to work, which could be defined as:

Executive

- implementation of the planned activities – practical work with the communities and the target group (students group, community activists, youth group, local stakeholders)
- organizational and reporting skills for the work they have done, meetings organized, campaigns implemented, discussions initiated, debates organized
- office administration, financial reporting, accountability
- English language training

Campaign design & management

- assessment of local issues to be addressed in the localities of the campaign activities
- focus on analytical, creative and organizational aspects of the activities

Policy

- investigation & mapping: desk researches, conducting interviews, writing statements and analysis
- addressing the issues, advocacy skills

Research

- analyzing media articles, monitoring media for a certain period of time
- focus on analytical and methodological skills
- report writing skills

5. Networking

Social stakeholders' network at local/national level: Each of the YRP has developed its own network within the domain they have worked at national or local level with local authorities, NGOs, media, experts, and celebrities. This helped them to clarify the outputs of their work and to bring the messages of the campaign further.

Peer learning aspect of the Young Roma Professionals component was mostly done through the ternYpe Network where the young people got the possibility to exchange, learn from the experience of others, to influence and present the outcomes of their work.

6. Responsibility and practical expertise

A crucial element of the program was the assigning and delegating responsibilities to the Young Roma Professionals within the organizations; thus, they were not just observers of the process and passive learners. Making them accountable towards the organizations and the opposite strengthened the mutual responsibility between the organization and the young person. After eighteen months experience at the local level the participants of the program are well equipped with knowledge about the processes of exclusion and mechanisms of change that should take place in order that the mechanisms of integration can function accordingly. The experience gained in the organization helped the young people additionally to learn how to work in a team and take responsibilities not only concerning the work done, but also towards the colleagues.



Elena Radu (32)

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities,
Romania

Born in Bucharest, Romania. She has graduated from the University of Bucharest in a Program of Psycho-pedagogic in 2008 and Romani language in 2010. Currently she is working as a teacher.

Languages: Romanian, Romani and English

Assignment/Achievements:

She was took part of the team that manages the Alternative Education Club as school mediator. She is in charge of the program “The second chance” – developed by the Romanian Ministry of Education – that offers a second chance to young people and adults that did not finish their primary education.



Want to know more:

Find more information on the REACT campaign and the youth activities of ERGO can be found on: www.ergonetwork.org/REACT

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“Skills development should be one of the targets of the EU Programs targeting Roma, because only this way investment of Human resources can have impact on the entire community.”



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