

Roma Rights and Access to Justice in Europe

## **THE RrAJE PROGRAMME IN BOTOSANI, ROMANIA**

### **A Summary**

***“BUILDING AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR ROMA INCLUSION  
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL”***

#### **Principal Partners**

**European Dialogue (UK)  
Romani CRISS (Romania)  
Municipality of Botosani  
Divano-Romano Association (Botosani)**

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## **THE RrAJE PROGRAMME IN BOTOSANI, ROMANIA**

### **THE RrAJE PROGRAMME**

The RrAJE Programme (Roma Rights and Access to Justice in Europe) is a three-year transnational programme whose aim is to develop models of good practice for the promotion of social inclusion of Roma at the local level in Central and Eastern Europe. The programme is managed by the UK-based NGO European Dialogue, and draws on UK and wider European experience of methods for tackling racism and integrating ethnic minorities at the local level. The RrAJE Programme receives core funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and its initial phase runs from February 2001 to January 2004.

Six local projects have been established in four countries: in Brno and Pardubice in the Czech Republic; in Lom and the Fakulteta District of Sofia in Bulgaria; in Botosani in Romania; and in Kezmarok in Slovakia. Each project is carried out by UK consultants working in partnership with Roma NGOs and local municipal authorities. Each project also has three basic aims: to empower the local Roma community; to establish formal partnerships between the Roma community and the public authorities; and, within this framework, to develop and implement an integrated strategy for the social inclusion of Roma at the local level.

### **THE RrAJE PROGRAMME IN ROMANIA**

In Romania, the principal partner for the RrAJE Programme is the Bucharest-based Roma NGO, Romani CRISS. Romani CRISS is a well-established and internationally-recognised Roma NGO, which has played a leading role in the development of the National Strategy for Roma in Romania.

As well as operating at national level, Romani CRISS has extensive experience of working at local level, in partnership with local Roma NGOs and public authorities. Since 1997 Romani CRISS has implemented a project to train 'Roma health mediators' in six localities, and as a result of this project, the Ministry of Health and Family has now adopted a policy of introducing health mediators throughout Public Health Directorates. One of the initial localities for the health mediator project was Botosani, in north-east Romania. In the light of the very positive support given by the public authorities to the health mediator project in Botosani, Romani CRISS recommended Botosani as a suitable location for the RrAJE Programme in Romania. With the support of the local Mayor, work in Botosani began at the end of 2001, and this initial phase of cooperation will continue until the end of 2003.

Botosani is the principal town of Botosani County in Moldavia, in north-east Romania. It has approximately 150,000 inhabitants, of whom an estimated 10,000 are Roma. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Botosani became a thriving commercial and cultural centre. Since the collapse of the Ceausescu regime in 1989, Botosani has suffered economically with the closure of many of its factories, and the county is officially one of the poorest in Romania. However, there are currently a number of economic development programmes operating in the region, and future prospects look increasingly favourable.

Within the municipality, Romani CRISS and UK RrAJE consultants have worked jointly with representatives of the local Roma community and the public authorities on the three objectives identified above: (a) Roma empowerment, (b) the establishment of partnership structures, and (c) the development and implementation of an integrated local strategy for the inclusion of the Roma community.

UK experience has been contributed partly through regular visits to Botosani by several UK consultants working with the RrAJE Programme who have experience in these fields, and partly by means of a study visit to the UK by a delegation from Botosani. The delegation from Botosani visited the town of Reading, where close links were established with the municipality and with the local NGO - Reading Council for Racial Equality. This UK visit was undertaken in October 2002, and the participants included the Mayor, the Vice-Mayor, and representatives of local public authorities and of Roma NGOs. The Mayor has stated that several of the initiatives that he has taken subsequently have been based on ideas he obtained during his visit to the UK.

From a national perspective, the aim has been to develop a 'good practice' model for the implementation of the Romanian Government's National Strategy for Roma at the local level. A national conference to disseminate the results of RrAJE program in Romania is being held in the autumn of 2003 with the participation of representatives of Government and other relevant national bodies. Other municipalities and NGOs working along similar lines will also be invited to contribute their experience to this conference.

## **INITIATIVES IN BOTOSANI**

### **(a) Roma empowerment**

#### NGO Capacity-Building

Romani CRISS and UK RrAJE consultants have worked jointly to support a recently-formed local Roma NGO in Botosani, Divano-Romano Association, so that it can work in partnership with the municipal authorities to develop an integrated strategy for Roma inclusion in Botosani. This NGO was established in 2000 in order to promote Roma interests and dialogue between the Roma community and the authorities. The Mayor of the locality provided premises for the local NGO, and the RrAJE Programme provided financial support for their renovation and for office equipment. The RrAJE Programme has also provided funding for members of the organisation to undertake part-time work in fields such as health, education and child protection.

The President of Divano-Romano Association spent one month in the office of Romani CRISS in Bucharest, to study methods of office and financial administration. Training has been provided directly by UK consultants and CRISS for the staff and volunteers working with the NGO. Divano-Romano staff have also attended a variety of skills-development training courses within Romania, covering such areas as IT skills, project development, and making funding applications, as well as their own fields of expertise.

#### Roma Consultative Forum

Divano-Romano is currently working in partnership with the local branch of the national Roma Party to develop joint activities in the municipality. Due to the fields of activity of both organisations (Romano Divano as an NGO for the local development of Roma community, and Roma Party-Botosani branch as an electoral organisation represented within the Romanian Parliament), it was agreed to establish a Roma consultancy framework at local level. This led to the establishment in Botosani of a local Roma Commission, which acts as a

forum for the local Roma community, with the status of a consultative body for the local authorities. Romani CRISS has been facilitating this process, and UK consultants have contributed UK experience of establishing consultative forums of this kind. The meetings of the Roma Commission are being held at the offices of the local Roma Party. The Botosani Mayor and the RrAJE Programme are jointly providing funding support for the project of renovation and equipment for the Roma Party-Botosani branch premises to assist it to undertake this role.

### Participation of Women & Young People

During 2003, Divano-Romano is implementing a project to strengthen the voice of Roma women in the Roma community, and to increase their participation in the local strategy for Roma and in civil society generally. A team of 11 women volunteers (both Roma and non-Roma) has been formed, and they are receiving training to support their work in the local community. Activities will also be undertaken to increase the participation of young Roma people in the development processes.

### **(b) Partnership Building**

#### Local Joint Commission for Roma

In 2002, a Local Joint Commission for Roma was established and it brings together the Mayor's office and other public authorities (including health, education, child protection and police), together with Roma NGOs and other relevant bodies. This initiative builds on prior experience of multi-agency cooperation on Roma issues in the municipality, arising from the health mediator project.

The terms of reference for the Joint Commission are derived directly from those of the National Inter-Ministerial Commission on Roma, as adapted to the local needs and circumstances of Botosani municipality. Romani CRISS and UK RrAJE consultants worked with the members of the Joint Commission to formulate its terms of reference and to agree its mode of operation, including providing guidance on building successful partnerships between public authorities and community groups.

The Mayor's office provides the secretariat for the Joint Commission, which meets in the Town Hall. The Vice-Mayor acts also as Chair of the Joint Commission. The regular meetings of the Joint Commission are open to all representatives of the Roma community and also to the press.

### **(c) Strategy Development and Implementation**

#### Local Strategy for Roma

The main initial task of the Roma Joint Commission – CMR has been to develop a local-level strategy for Roma in the municipality. This local strategy has been designed to implement the principles of the National Strategy at municipal level in Botosani. It is an integrated strategy in the sense that the needs and problems of Roma in different fields such as health, education and housing are inter-related, and require sustained and coordinated action by the various agencies (both public authorities and civil society) for their solution.

Romani CRISS has assisted the Joint Commission to formulate an approach that is in line with the National Strategy for Roma, while UK RrAJE consultants have provided guidance on strategy formulation and implementation based on UK experience. The main stages for the formulation of the strategy have been as follows:

- I. Adoption of 'Vision Statement'. This sets out the agreed vision of the municipality as a successful multi-ethnic community that the strategy aims to achieve.
- II. Needs Analysis. Thematic working groups set up by the Joint Commission have identified the main needs and challenges relating to the Roma community, and the priority areas to address.
- III. Action Plan. This elaborates a programme of actions to be undertaken to meet these needs during the period 2002-2004.

### Strategy Implementation

The implementation of the Action Plan is being supervised and monitored by the Roma Local Joint Commission. In practice, progress in implementing projects is influenced by a number of factors. One of the most important is the availability of resources. While the resources required for many initiatives are modest and available locally (or funding has been provided by the RrAJE Programme), some projects require external funding. Applications are therefore being prepared for submission to relevant funding programmes at national and international levels.

Progress to date in implementing projects is indicated by the list of projects set out below. However, this current set of projects does not reflect the scope of the strategy, as it represents only those that have been identified as urgent priorities, and/or for which there has been an early opportunity for implementation. It is intended that, in accordance with the strategic plan, a wider range of projects will be able to be implemented in the near future, including in fields such as policing, education, employment and small business development.

### Training Programme for Public Authorities

Once the local strategy had been elaborated, an urgent need was identified to ensure that staff of public authorities were aware of the strategy and its implications for their work. It is important that Roma-related issues are 'mainstreamed' in the activities of the public authorities, and not 'marginalised' by being left to a small number of individuals or to the Roma NGOs to deal with. A training programme was therefore introduced for managers, professionals and others working with the Roma community from the various agencies participating in the Joint Commission.

This training programme was delivered by experienced trainers from Romani CRISS, working in partnership with staff of Divano-Romano Association. UK consultants assisted with the design for the training (drawing on UK experience), and the training was funded by the RrAJE Programme. During the planning stage, the Training Coordinator from Romani CRISS visited Sofia in Bulgaria to observe a similar RrAJE training programme in action. A key feature of the training was the active involvement of members of the Roma community, who were able to share their perceptions and experiences with the participants from the public authorities, and work together with them to plan future cooperation.

In addition to this 'strategic' training programme, several of the public authorities have introduced their own training courses or seminars on Roma and related issues. As well as the training for health workers (see below), local training has been provided for teachers and other seminars have been organised for the local police.

## **(d) Specific Projects**

### Health Mediator Project

The Health Mediator Project in Botosani was initiated by Romani CRISS and predates the RrAJE Programme. However, the activities of health mediators in Botosani have now been extended, partly as a result of the adoption of this approach as national government policy, partly due to the activities of the paid workers and volunteers working in the NGO Divano-Romano, and partly due to the strong support from the Public Health Directorate. In late 2002, the Public Health Directorate and Divano-Romano jointly ran a training programme to increase the awareness of health practitioners about Roma issues and the role of health mediators. A follow-up project is being planned to further 'mainstream' Roma issues in public health services, and to extend the health-mediator model transnationally to other partners in the RrAJE Programme.

### ID Card Project

A project to ensure that Roma living in the municipality possess proper identity cards was identified as an urgent priority at the outset of the RrAJE Programme, as without such cards Roma are unable to obtain access to benefits and services. The design for the project was based on a project run previously by Romani CRISS in 2002 in Bucharest. The project in Botosani was carried out jointly by the municipality, Divano-Romano, and the local police, with funding from the RrAJE Programme.

### Social Advice and Welfare Office

The municipality has renovated a building formerly used as a Commercial Bank, so that it now provides good quality premises for the Social Advice and Welfare Department for the citizens. It is located close to where the majority of the Roma population reside, and has been designed to include a reception desk, advice booths, meeting rooms, and improved offices for staff. The Mayor has indicated that the idea for establishing this facility arose directly from his visit to Reading in the UK.

### Meeting Facilities for NGOs

The municipality is in process of renovating a set of large ground floor rooms in a building on the central market square, which will be used for meetings by NGOs and community groups. Kitchen facilities are available. The Mayor has stated that it will also be used for exhibitions to celebrate the multi-cultural heritage of the city, including that of the Roma community.

### Human Rights Monitor Project

Romani CRISS has recently developed a national network of ten specially-trained human rights monitors across the various regions of Romania. The purpose is to monitor cases of breach of human rights involving Roma, and to provide assistance to victims to obtain access to justice. One of the Romani CRISS' local monitors is based at the NGO Divano-Romano in Botosani, and has already been successful in documenting discrimination against Roma in access to discotheques in Botosani.

The RrAJE Programme will help to maintain this function in Botosani until the end of 2003, after which it is hoped that a national Human Rights Centre will be established in Bucharest by Romani CRISS, as part of the follow-up to the RrAJE Programme. Local work on identifying and combating discrimination or other forms of human rights abuse against Roma would be able to continue within this framework. In June 2002, with funding from Charity

Know-How (UK), the Executive Director and the Legal Coordinator of Romani CRISS made a study visit to examine UK anti-discrimination legislation and mechanisms for its implementation at the local level, so that appropriate models can be developed for Romania. A report resulting from this visit, "Good Practices: Specialised Mechanisms for Combating Discrimination", has recently been published by Romani CRISS.

### Neighbourhood Regeneration Project

An urgent priority identified by the municipality was the renovation of several housing blocks, occupied predominantly by Roma, in the Youth Park District of the city. On the advice of UK RRAJE consultants, this will not be tackled in isolation but within the context of a broader neighbourhood regeneration project for the District. The project will address not only housing and infrastructural issues, but also community development, employment opportunities and service provision in the neighbourhood as a whole. The specific needs of Roma will still be targeted, but will be addressed within the framework of initiatives designed to improve opportunities and quality of life for all residents in the local area. The intention is to develop a strategy, together with supporting institutional structures and processes, that will replicate at neighbourhood level what has already been established for the municipality as a whole.

With funding from the RRAJE Programme, an initial survey of the situation of Roma in the District has been carried out by Romani CRISS, and two UK experts on neighbourhood regeneration (an architect, and an urban planner specialising in community participation) have visited Botosani and helped to draw up an outline proposal for the project and its developmental stage. This proposal draws directly on experience of neighbourhood renewal and community development in the UK, and envisages a close partnership at all stages between public authorities and local residents.

The initial phase will involve a more detailed needs analysis and audit of the situation in the local area, together with some immediate small-scale interventions designed to tackle urgent problems and to build a framework for community awareness and participation. Romani CRISS has appointed a Project Coordinator to work with the municipality and to make a one-month study visit to the UK and the Czech Republic to examine similar types of initiative/local development (with funding from the Roma Participation Program of the OSI).

The neighbourhood regeneration project in Botosani will be a complex project, with several stages and a range of interconnected sub-projects. Discussions are currently taking place with a variety of external funding bodies regarding this proposal, including with the British Government's DFID Regional Programme in north-east Romania, regarding future funding possibilities. It is hoped that in due course the project will establish a good-practice model for neighbourhood regeneration in other municipalities in Romania, both in localities where Roma are living and also more generally.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information about the activities of the RRAJE Programme in Romania can be obtained from any of the main partners, whose contact details are provided on the attached sheet.

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## **RrAJE PROGRAMME IN ROMANIA**

### **CONTACT DETAILS OF MAIN PARTNERS**

#### **RrAJE Programme**

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