

Developments in mediation, current challenges and the role of ROMED

Training programme for Roma mediators

Jean-Pierre Liégeois

French edition:

L'évolution de la médiation, les défis actuels et le rôle de ROMED

ISBN 978-92-871-7364-5

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Cover design: Documents and Publications Production Department (SPDP),
Council of Europe

Layout: Jouve, Paris

Council of Europe Publishing

F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

<http://book.coe.int>

ISBN 978-92-871-7374-4

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Printed at the Council of Europe

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1. The issues at stake

The training programme for Roma mediators, launched by the Council of Europe in 2011, has certain features which make it unique for a project of this scale, in terms of real value, duration and key outcomes, both in Europe as a whole and in individual member states.¹

Its exemplary character extends beyond the situation of Roma, and should be a source of inspiration for the development of the intercultural policies needed to manage present-day societies, where diversity and pluralism are the hallmarks.

The strategy adopted must respond to needs and expectations, starting with those of Roma communities themselves, since opportunities of this kind have rarely come their way in the past. Implementing it is a complex business and there is still a high risk of error, which is why there must be a parallel process of reflection.

This document sets out to contextualise the initiatives taken, to highlight their usefulness and also evaluate them. It is intended to provide guidance for the programme leaders, to enable active participants – trainers, mediators, employers and others – to see their efforts as part of an overall scheme, to help policy makers to make the right decisions, and to describe and explain the operation to a broader audience.

Contextualisation is important, since it identifies the factors which determine the conditions for mediator training, traces the history of the concept of mediation and analyses its antecedents. This makes it possible to select realistic approaches, build on past work, extend knowledge and adapt action more effectively within an organised whole.

By bridging gaps and creating a space for dialogue, contextualisation also makes it possible to decartmentalise Roma-related issues and initiatives, which means that they can and must find inspiration in, and themselves inspire, action in other areas.

Constant evaluation throughout the programme is vital to ensure that the observations made, as part of a comprehensive approach, highlight elements which can lead to ongoing improvement of the actions taken. In this way, the form and content of the programme can be refined while it is running, and this pilot project can prompt action at European and national levels.

This also maximises our chances of progressing towards the European “label” for training which the various partners aspire to. This will not be easy, but monitoring the project, and adjusting it in consequence, will help to define that label in

1. The originality and importance of the programme become clear when seen against the background of over 40 years' work in this area: see Liégeois 2012.

practical terms. Here again, the programme is paradigmatic, since the Roma can – reversing the usual stereotypes – be seen as a reference source and model for positive action. It also has positive effects on European co-operation (of which the Roma provide a good example), on action to combat discrimination and marginalisation, and on the search for ways to improve difficult situations. Used in this way, the programme makes a significant contribution to the Council of Europe's general work on themes such as action to "protect and promote the right to quality education". As well as giving us a theoretical and political framework for action, mediator training is one practical way of identifying criteria and processes which will maximise our chances of securing high-quality education.