

TOGETHER 4 BETTER HEALTH - a pan European partnership to improve the health of Roma people living in isolated communities in Europe.

With the support from the GSK community partnership program, a (now) 6 year program was initiated in 2012 with the aim of improving the health of those living in socially excluded and isolated Roma communities in Europe by bringing together four distinct NGOs from Bulgaria (The National Network of Health Mediators), Hungary (Partners Hungary), Romania (OvidiuRo) and Slovakia (The Association for Culture, Education and Communication).

These NGO partners all had previous experience in working with Roma communities across health and education, and bringing all four together as a coalition under the banner 'Together 4 Better Health' has helped to leverage their joint expertise in order to drive impact.

The partners in the Together for Better Health (TG4BH) have developed a high-impact approach to improve health infrastructure and access to healthcare within Roma communities. All four organisations share a common approach in developing solutions with and for the communities they serve. Each organisation also shares complementary skills and approaches to maximise impact across countries. The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), has been closely involved and is supporting the project aligned to its mission and specific emphasis on Roma integration and Health.

Key to this program are 'health or cultural mediators', individuals from Roma communities who receive training in basic preventative and curative health care, and act as a link between the communities and the primary health system. This, together with the development of pragmatic and supportive policies has and should continue to deliver sustainable impact.

The profession of "Health Mediator" addresses problems related to poor health information, culture, existing myths for certain diseases and their treatment in the isolated communities, and lacking or the irregular immunizations among vulnerable groups. One of the key factors for Health Mediators' success is the fact that they belong to the community they work for. They help people to overcome their prejudices and fears, gain their trust and contribute for community development.

Specific program objectives are to:

- Support and embed the role of Health and Cultural Mediators to improve the health of Roma, especially children, through education and medical interventions within Roma communities;
- Ensure that Health and Cultural Mediators, mostly people from the Roma community, are acknowledged and embedded in the national legal frameworks;
- Speed up sustainable access to available national and European funds.

In the first three years great progress has been made by this program in what remains an extremely challenging social issue. The approach taken has shown impact in reaching nearly 300,000 Roma people with better health and sanitation, and demonstrated the power of leveraging four experienced NGOs to deliver impact and advocacy. Importantly, solutions have been developed from within the community, with health and cultural mediators, healthcare professionals and education of children playing a pivotal role in linking the community with the public health system.



Association for Culture, Education and Communication is a non-governmental organization, the aims of which are to create understanding, support international cultural exchanges, deepen education and create space for the future continuation of mutual communication. Our projects focus on current happenings in society and elaborate, secure and improve communication in Slovakia, in international contexts, and in areas and regions deemed risky from the international perspective.

ACEC, via its projects, has always applied new effective forms of communication in its projects – and since 1999 has implemented numerous projects deemed unique from an international point of view; in New York, Washington D.C., Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Wien, Warsaw, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Minsk and Bratislava. The non-traditional approach has – via means of culture and education – enabled the creation of new communication networks applied in national and international contexts. The Association's projects assist in the deepening of existing relations as well as in the creation of new ones.

In 2002, ACEC received the Slovak Foreign Ministry award for its contribution to the resolution of the Balkan conflict. ACEC implemented complex programs focusing on specific targets related to Slovak foreign policy.

As a part of our educational activities, we focus on the preparation and implementation of educational programs and communication strategies for socially challenged groups (education and tutorial programs and projects focused on the Roma minority in Slovakia).

Healthy Communities

Our largest, longest and still ongoing activity has been the Healthy Communities project since 2003. Its main objective is health awareness for the inhabitants of Roma settlements. The project builds on the existing situation and needs of various locations, as well as on education and communication skills of settlements' residents. We identified education support and healthcare improvement as the most searing issues. Unequivocal indicators were alarming: 100% unemployment, low levels of education, different levels of illiteracy, poor personal and communal hygiene, infectious, parasitic, and venereal disease, drug addiction, a lack of sex education and the associated low standard of living, apathy and demotivation.

Having discovered what the situation was, we responded by starting a project aimed at disseminating health education improving the health situation as well as the level of education. The main objective was to systematize the health education program in Roma communities throughout Slovakia, highlight the potential uses of human resources directly from segregated settlements and at the same time implement activities beneficial to the community. Our activities were aimed at promoting and strengthening the position of a Roma Health Mediator as a regular job, as well as to acquire more partners from other non-governmental organizations and responsible bodies for the active promotion of this goal. This initiative has generated the formation of other interest groups: Platform for Support of Health of Disadvantaged Groups (PSHDG) and a civic association – Association of Health Field Workers (ATZA).

The Platform brings together representatives of the Association for Culture, Education and Communication (ACEC), the Association of Health Field Workers (ATZA), the Slovak General Practitioners Group, The World Health Organization Office in Slovakia, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MPSVaR), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior, the operational centers of the National Emergency Service, Union Health Insurance, GlaxoSmithKline, and others.

Thanks to the joint effort of the members of the Platform and the financial support from various sources (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family), the first system solution focused on the long-term National Program for Health Mediators in segregated Roma communities (until 2022) and started with its implementation in the form of nationwide Healthy Communities Project (since October 2013).

Currently there are two parallel programs focusing on improvement of health in Roma communities that complement each other. National Program – Healthy Communities, an NPO under the Ministry of Health, is employing 280 Roma Health Mediators in 258 localities and is still expanding. Healthy Communities project running under ACEC with 27 Roma Health Mediators is working in 17 localities – this project mainly covers the localities not included in the National Program. Common direct impact of these two projects is over 250 000 people living in segregated communities. Our common goal is to build on existing activities with practical results, develop them further, and support the implementation and expansion of health educational programs also by proving the necessity of the position of a Health Mediator in Roma communities.

acec Association for
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Asociatia OvidiuRo

OvidiuRo was founded by Maria Gheorghiu and Leslie Hawke in 2004, after working with the poorest children in Bacau. The odds are stacked against these children from birth so **our goal has always been to help them beat the odds so they have a chance of reaching their potential in life.**

The **Every Child in Preschool (FCG) program** was launched in partnership with the Ministry of Education in 2010. Since then over 11,000 children in 43 rural and semi-rural communities have benefited from early education and better nutrition through FCG. Currently 2.500 children in 43 communities from 11 counties are included in the **Every Child in Preschool** program.

Every Child in Preschool has doubled the preschool daily attendance rates of severely impoverished children from 43% to 82% through the food coupons. Parents receive €12 in food coupons at the end of the month if they take their child to preschool every day. In Romania, the monthly child allowance (which is unconditional) is €10, so this is a significant increase for families surviving on their children's allowance. **Food coupons**, conditional on children's attendance in preschool, have proven to be a **highly effective and efficient tool to stimulate destitute, functionally illiterate parents** (with an average of four years of schooling) **to bring their young children to gradinita every day.**

Targets the poorest children – those living in overcrowded, inadequate housing in isolated areas with sorely limited access to potable water and standard health care. In the winter, the unemployment rate is close to 100% due to the low education level of the adults combined with a low demand for unskilled labor.

Goal To turn this program into a public policy, supported by authorities and available for all 120,000 poor children in Romania.

FCG (Every Child in Preschool) prevents school abandonment by:

- Helping communities prioritize early education and
- incentivizing the community's poorest parents to send their 3 to 5-year-old children to gradinita.

How FCG works:

- A local team (composed of the school director, preschool teachers, a social worker, and a school mediator) implements FCG under the auspices of the Mayor and Local Council. To participate in FCG, the local administration is required to convene a "Local Action Group" to approve the program and customize the implementation plan according to the local situation.
- The Local Council must allocate at least €35 per year per child for clothes and shoes for the children in the program.
- In addition to providing food coupons for children's regular attendance, OvR allocates €15 per child per year so teachers can purchase school materials of their own choosing.
- OvR also provides training and on-site consultation to the Local Action Group and implementation team and organizes teacher training workshops in modern teaching methods.

Program elements:

- Taking Root in the Community & Building a Professional Local Team;
- Tracking Registration & Attendance of High-Risk Children;
- Forging Relationships with the Poorest Parents;
- Improving the Health of Vulnerable Children (supported by GlaxoSmithKline).
- An award-winning program that has been cited as a model by both The Economist and the World Bank, FCG has also been endorsed by the Romanian Ministries of Education and Labour. To date, FCG has been funded largely by the Romanian corporate sector and an American non-profit organization, the Alex Fund.



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National Network of Health Mediators

The National Network of Health Mediators is an association founded in 2007 that developed and is successfully implementing the model of Health Mediation in Bulgaria. The Network has national coverage and is the biggest public benefit organization in Bulgaria whose members are daily in the field, helping the most vulnerable groups of the population. The Network has more than 170 members – Health Mediators, medical specialists, sociologists, psychologists, experts in the field of ethnic minorities' integration, public figures united by one mission – improving the access and the quality of health services for the people from vulnerable communities.

In 2001, the team of Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation introduced the model of Health Mediation in Bulgaria as part of a pilot project. Within its framework, the first five Health Mediators were trained and started to work in Kiustendil. Since 2007, the profession of "Health Mediator" has been included in the Bulgarian National Classificatory of Professions. 170 Health Mediators are currently working in more than 90 municipalities in Bulgaria and are financed through the state budget.

The Health Mediators are both women and men of different age, they originate from the communities in which they work and speak the community language. They have graduated secondary education as a minimum requirement and are communicative, dynamic and creative persons. The training of Health Mediators takes place in licensed educational institutions – Medical University-Sofia and the Medical College in Plovdiv. Each year the National Network of Health Mediators, based on the internal surveys and assessment of the development of the program, proposes expanding of the territory covered by the Network, and organizes and participates in the training of new Health Mediators.

Main objectives

- Facilitating the access to health and social services for everyone in disadvantaged position;
- Improving the quality of health and social services in Bulgaria;
- Increasing the health culture of vulnerable groups and the level of information with regard to health system;
- Strengthening the European practices and approaches for facilitating the access to health services for vulnerable groups;
- Creating and developing of new, more qualitative services in the field of mediation and provision of health services;
- Increasing the capacity and skills of Health Mediators;
- Carrying out of civil initiatives and collaboration with state institutions, local and regional authorities;
- Strengthening of the Health Mediator's position on local and national level as well as in international context as a key figure in integration policies.

We work

- To increase the level of immunizations among vulnerable communities, participation in national campaigns for supplementary immunizations;
- To improve the access to health and social services through the active facilitation of the Health Mediator;
- To improve the relationship between doctors and patients from vulnerable communities;
- To increase the health culture and the information level of the population on many important topics through work on individual cases and group work (health-information campaigns with health specialists, health institutions, Regional Health Inspectorates);
- Advocacy activities for ensuring free of charge examinations for pregnant women and young mothers without health insurance;
- Advocacy activities in cases of illegal collection of fees for check-ups;
- To ensure coordination of prophylactic check-ups with mobile units – preliminary informing and motivating of the population to participate.

Development of Health Mediator's program

Each year the number of municipalities willing to include Health Mediators in their teams is increasing. In order to guarantee the sustainability and further development of the Program, the National Network of Health Mediators aims to:

- Expand the network of Health Mediators in new settlements and municipalities with compact Roma community and identified health problems and needs;
- Increase the capacity of the working Health Mediators through continuous education, trainings and exchange of experience;
- Elaborate national standard for the work of the Health Mediators;
- Popularize the profession of "Health Mediator".

Resources

Developed training programs that are carried out by multi-disciplinary team and their target groups are the medical staff from the Roma quarters. There was also established a system for Exchange of information- Health Mediators and members of the network communicate through their professional forum on the website www.zdravenmediator.net



**NATIONAL NETWORK
OF HEALTH MEDIATORS**

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Partners Hungary Foundation

Partners Hungary Foundation's goal is a diverse, accepting, open society that is able to integrate the values of different cultures, on the individual (personal) and at social level- the society in which equality of opportunity for creating situations for personal fulfillment are present. Partners aims at creating a culture of collaboration and dissemination, as well as the prevention and solutions to conflicts. Target groups of the Foundation are: civil society, business community, and especially groups and individuals who suffer from discrimination. Partners has initiated several projects to support integration of Roma communities and to improve their health condition through mediation.

Partners Hungary Foundation has been the Hungarian focal point for the ROMED-ROMACT Program - the Roma Mediation initiative of the European Council. In the framework of the ROMED project, 15 countries participated, including Hungary, and Roma Mediators were trained by using the European Roma Mediators' training program.

Based on the ROMED training program and on our 20 years of experience in mediation, we trained 20 Roma Mediators in the TG4BH program. The main objective of the project is to support better access to health services for the Roma, the development of their health awareness through the training, and employment of Roma Mediators. Another aim is to establish the profession of Roma Intercultural Mediators in Hungary.

At local level, Partners work with participatory democratic methods - such as cooperative planning - and based on this method are implementing the micro projects. Community roundtable planning leads to the execution of a micro-project in each settlement. Micro project reflects the most pressing health related issues raised by the community. The target groups of the micro projects are the local disadvantaged communities and Roma and population, together with local health care service providers (nurses, GPs) and Local Council leaders. In the framework of the TG4BH program, 12 Mediators were employed for minimum duration of one year and more than 20 health care activities / micro projects were implemented, such as health days in the settlements, building of more than 100 outdoor wooden toilets, a salt-room in a Kindergarden, providing access to contraceptive devices and raising awareness about it, coacroach clearing, painting of the houses by involving the members of the communities. Due to the work of Roma Mediators and the program TG4BH we reached more the 1500 Roma people whose living conditions were improved.



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SABRINA CECCONI PREDEL MAHALA



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European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

EPHA is an international non-profit association registered in Belgium. Its membership is composed of not-for-profit organizations working on all aspects of public health. EPHA is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. Its mission is to bring together the public health community to provide thought leadership and facilitate change; to build public health capacity to deliver equitable solutions to European public health challenges, to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

EPHA attaches importance to Roma integration as a public health issue and priority and puts Roma health into the heart of its advocacy activities. It regularly takes the lead in projects and activities in relation to improving Roma health, while emphasizing dialogue and a participatory approach to EU governance and policy making. EPHA's achievements include but are not limited to participation in roundtable discussion with Commissioners, contributing to the Roma Platform and to the Roma Summit, training Roma health advocates, publishing analyses of the Health dimension in National Roma Integration Strategies and issuing policy recommendations on how to promote meaningful Roma integration in Europe.

www.eph.org

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)

GSK is a science-led global healthcare company of more than 100,000 employees working in 115 countries with a mission to help people do more, feel better, live longer. GSK's vaccines, consumer healthcare products and medicines touch the lives of millions of people. GSK has topped the Access to Medicine Index since it was launched in 2008. In 2013 GSK embarked on an ambitious long-term global partnership with Save the Children to deliver lasting change for the world's most vulnerable children. Through the Global Community Partnerships GSK provides money, medicines, time and equipment to bring sustainable improvements in the health and education of our communities, including the TG4BH initiative. Moreover, 500 employee volunteers (Pulse) have worked full-time for a period of 3-6 months with 94 non-profit organisations since 2009, of which 4 with the TG4BH initiative by 2015.

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