

# Sustainable Space for Participation and Engagement Report of the first phase “Preparing the grounds”

Project partners:

Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment  
Geschäftsstelle mine e.V.  
c/o EKIZ Ludwigstr. 41-43  
D-70176 Stuttgart, Germany  
www.mine.cc info@mine.cc



INTEGRO ASSOCIATION BULGARIA  
Str. OSAM 4, Office 220  
Razgrad 7200 Bulgaria  
phone/fax: +359/ 84/ 661 026  
www.Integrobg.org info@integrobg.org



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State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg  
Richard-Wagner-Straße 15  
D-70184 Stuttgart, Germany  
www.stm.baden-wuerttemberg.de



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## “Sustainable Space for Participation and Engagement” in a nutshell:

At first, we will be studying existing Roma Mother Centers as well as those that disappeared in order to formulate adaptations to the Mother Center model. Those recommendations will be implemented through different activities in Bulgaria, Serbia and in Germany. Our goal is to revitalise the Mother Centers in Bulgaria, support the cooperation and networking between the Roma movement and the Mother Center movement and to provide support in the start-up of Mother Centers in Serbia.

Mainly, we will be working with local Roma activists and their partners in order to establish good relationships from the beginning. They will get training and support for making an action plan and for their work. They will also get a working budget to organise activities and start their own center.

During the process we reflect on our collaboration in order to extract lessons learned. We want to consolidate the partnership to enhance sustainability. In the end we want to establish three functioning Mother Centers in Bulgaria and re-establish the connection with key partners in Serbia by the end of the project.

Concrete objectives for the project

1. Discovering lessons learnt to improve the Mother Center model in Roma communities
2. Revival and starting up of Mother Centers in Roma communities
3. Strengthening the partnership

## 1) Recapitulation of first project activities:

### 1. Preparing the grounds

In the start-up phase of the project, existing contacts with key activists in Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia are renewed. From them, background data about the situation of the mother centers are gathered and logistical preparations for the other activities are made.

With all project partners, the administrative procedures are established, including criteria for monitoring and evaluation. In order to start right away, ad-hoc administrative tools are installed. These include an online project drop-box, a review and supervision panel of board members and an email list of primary and secondary groups to keep them informed of the project progress. More public information and communication tools such as a project website or a project Facebook page can be installed at this stage as well.

Together we will work out principles of work, communication and participation. This initially work is done in regular skype meetings and during a first trip to Bulgaria, where a day-long working meeting on process and work-culture will be organized.

Outputs from this activity and indicators:

- Created list of clear administrative procedures and monitoring & assessment criteria
- Created list of basic working principles
- Set up mailing list, email group of the partners, drop box, project face book page
- Described background information about the situation with the Roma Mother Centers in Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary
- Carried out number of Skype team meetings and drafted minutes
- Carried out a day long working meeting and clarified the process and work culture

### 2. Analysis and Adaptation of the Mother Center's concept consist of two phases:

2.1. Carrying out a profound **desktop analysis** of the old Mother Centers projects, narrative reports, monitoring & assessment reports, organisational structures, statutes and other relevant records. The analysis will include getting in touch with the Roma Mother Centers in the region and include them in the second phase of the research.

2.2. **Field research** to Serbia and Bulgaria. In this phase key stakeholders and activists in the different Mother Centers will be interviewed in depth. The results will be documented and lessons learnt will be taken out of it.

3. Introductory training of activists and their partners (planned for first half of October)
4. Action plan for Roma Mother Center Sandanski
5. Start up support for two new Roma Mother Centers
6. Preparations of the grounds in Serbia for the establishment of a new Roma Mother Center
7. Meeting in Stuttgart
8. Reporting evaluating defining follow up steps

The first project activities were to take place in June and July. This was delayed because of the late approval. As a result and because of vacations the activities 3 - 6 are shifted in time as well. Planning of activities 7 and 8 remain unchanged. The Stuttgart meeting will be from 11-13/01/16.

Planned days of staff time, mine and Integro combined (this is the minimal input to which partners commit. In practice it is about double; the rest is voluntary work)	Jun. 15	Jul. 15	Aug. 15	Sep. 15	Okt. 15	Nov. 15	Dez. 15	Jan. 16	Feb. 16	Mrz. 16	Apr. 16	Mai. 16	Jun. 16	Jul. 16	Total
1. Preparing the grounds	4	4													8
2. Analysis and Adaptation			2	6	3	2	2	3							18
3. Training of activists and their partners					17										17
4. Action plan for Roma Mother Center Sandanski					9	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21
5. Start up support for two new Roma Mother Centers						12	12	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	46
6. Prepare the grounds in Serbia			8												8
7. Meeting in Stuttgart								10							10
8. Reporting evaluating defining follow up steps									2	5	5	5	5		22
Totals of staff time per month in work days	4	6	14	20	11	18	16	15	7	10	9	9	8	3	150

## 2) Progress report of first project activity : Preparing the grounds

The following contains the summary of the outcomes of the first activity sorted by the performance indicators as were defined in the project proposal. Each partner did their own preparation and in addition there was a five day start-up mission of the mine team to Bulgaria.

### • Clear administrative procedures and monitoring & assessment criteria

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During the start up meeting we defined the roles in the project:

- the Integro team will do all work in Bulgaria and Serbia: identify mediators, provide support to the groups and the municipality, organise the training.
  - Mine does reporting, the bulk of the background analysis and communication to the State Ministry.
- The minutes of the meeting contain all details on work agreements.

The project proposal and its criteria is used to monitor progress.

Content wise the renewed Mother Center concept is the point of reference for monitoring progress and assessing success.

### • Set up mailing list, email group of partners, drop box, project face book page

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- A dropbox was set up, containing both project management information as well as content.
- The project team is small and we can include the whole team on all communication.
- Integro manages the communication with the Centers and their partners in national language.
- We decided against a website or facebook page at this stage, because it puts the focus on the wrong place: it should be on the women, not on the intermediary project team.
- Instead we want to make short video in the style of "breaking the myth"
- We assigned tasks to approach different people for a "supportive partners circle"

#### Quotes from our notes: (our thoughts, dilemma's and discussions)

To sustain a Mother Center is difficult. The general rhetoric says that "you should not stay long (more than year) with a community". That is impossible. It relates to trust that needs to be build up and the behaviour of people need to be changed. That takes time. The resources in this project are enough, but the time is not. Integro wants to support a really good management for the Mother Centers, taking into consideration of what we have developed here.

Also we need to assure that municipal and state authorities provide support beyond providing a space. The groups need support in providing security in funding, there are policy implications. They should be part of policy making. In order to bring about changes on a more structural level, we need the support of powerful people who can be advocate for the interests of the Centers at a higher level.

### • Background information about the situation with the Roma Mother Centers

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Information on the individual Centers has been gathered and reviewed during the start up meeting. In addition appointments were made to "fill up the blanks". Folders were created in the project dropbox that contain background reading, reports, articles and materials of the old project. Content is in the report of the second activity.

#### Fitting the project in the larger picture :

There are elections in October. In Sandanski the political situation is difficult because of the mix of business interest with politics. The politicians buy votes. They are interested in getting Roma votes, but they do not have interest for a small structure such as the Mother Center. They are not interested in civil society structures in general and certainly not in Roma NGO's. There is nothing in it for them. They say at best "*it is good idea, make it, you have our support*" (whatever that means). The best to hope for from authorities is to not get obstacles from them.

This kind of issues are for partners at a higher level to identify and take action upon. It is like tending to a small garden, which has a large plot next door full of aggressive weeds. We cannot spent all our time pulling out weeds that come growing underneath the fence. Instead we should concentrate on just watering plants in our little garden and giving clear information on the entire situation. The landlord is being informed to work with the neighbours to support them to curb their plants and show them the interest they have as well in having the total area flourish.

- **Team meetings and drafted minutes**

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Communication was held mainly over email. Minutes are available of the 10-15 meeting in Razgrad.

**Our basic Agreements for meetings:**

1. Full attention
2. I-Statements
3. Full participation
4. No-Put downs
5. No Advice
6. Personal Confidentiality
7. Culture and Spirit: We are careful to welcome different approaches, not letting one culture or view dominate
8. Personal responsibility
9. Stay with the groups task
10. Time Limits
11. Appreciation and Leadership Support Process.

- **Day long working meeting and clarified the process and work culture**

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During the start-up gathering we included a day long working meeting to discuss Who are we, what is our hope for being together and how we want to do things. The following are some impressions:

**Andrea** tells about the Argentinean Mother Center and its problems. This is recognised: a center of marginalised people, who lack support from the national context. Also in Bulgaria there is an example of people from the community who robbed their own community center.



**Kadrin** has worked with Integro since 2006: *"I have lots of experience with local groups, men, women and youth. We have some experience with Mother Centers. Since few years they are not so active any more. I am here to give them a new opportunity to live, survive. They are important, because the level of emancipation in Roma communities is so bad and the Mother Centers can change that. In Razgrad I see Roma women who cannot connect to others. When they go to the Mother Centers, they find there is possibilities to connect. As a result they change and develop. The problem with the Mother Centers was that they had too little resources. And also the activism disappeared, when the most active women left to work elsewhere. Bad management of the Mother Center was also part of it. I want to make good model to implement that can be multiplied, that is universal, that can be applied in other situations."*

**Children as an entrance**

**Birgül:** *"I work now one year as coordinator of the program in this region that provides additional support to the kindergarten. What I see is that the mothers are behind their computer so much of the time. They are on facebook and they watch Turkish TV series (soaps). They don't do anything else. The mothers should be encouraged to be engaged more socially, sit together and discuss on their children. They are interested in their children's needs, but they stick to the practicalities, food, health, cloths, electronics. They are not so much aware of the emotional needs of the children and they do not take much interest in their school results."*



When we talk about Roma mothers and creating model for engaging them, we should look at mothers in relation to their children. Mothers should be involved more with the education of the children. They bring them to school and when they pick them up they ask them what they ate. That is what they call being involved. They do not ask the children what they learned in school. For example in a village nearby, the mothers were also interested in the physical wellbeing of the children and not more. We organised meetings with the mothers and presented what the children learn, the books that are used, the pictures the children draw. We did an exercise to involve the mothers, by asking them to recognise the drawing of their own child. They got introduced to the curricula and after the 5 meetings, they were able to summarize the curriculum. They were encouraged to deepen the learning at home and go further.

Not all of the mothers were at the same level though. Of the 20 mothers, three had a good understanding, some understand some, but would require more coaching. The majority understood close to nothing because of language problems. Birgül knows Turkish well, but she is not allowed to use it because of Bulgarian law. Only the Bulgarian culture is portrayed in schools and there is no permission to use any other language than Bulgarian. The existing language diversity is simply denied and most teachers lack support to do intercultural teaching.

#### **Ideas for how we can use this in our project or further activities:**

It is good to have meetings with teachers and parents. If you want to influence and change you need people who are prepared. Besides of such meetings, personal support is also needed, in the form of mentors who support the women on a personal level. That would be nice to develop as a project.

#### **Countering prejudice**

For such a project not just Roma mothers would be the target group but also the teachers. They are not aware how racist they sometimes are. This is not their fault because they are not trained in dealing with diversity. They will deny racism, which they are simply not aware of, it is a big revelation to find out how things work. During a training one of the teachers who realised the mechanisms at work exclaimed: "Ms Makaveeva, I am actually racist!"

#### **Lilia:**

*"This comment came during a project to reintegrate the dropouts in school. I used curricula of council of Europe, that are flexible in use; for teachers you need concepts. Some of them were full of racism, so at first I did not reveal my identity. After a while when they had experienced me as erudite and developed, I told I am Roma too. That was an eye opener for them."*

In working with such officials who are prejudiced it is important to recognise all the efforts they do and to acknowledge the challenges because Roma are not perfect. Look at that objective from the perspective of the context of social factors involved. Slowly they become owners of knowledge. If problems are denied, there is no solution. Second case is when difficulties are acknowledged as existing, but "I cannot do anything about it". Imagine children not going to school, the teachers recognise Roma mothers and children are a problem. They said it is the women's problem, but when they are asked to think about it further they do come up with good first steps such as inviting the women in their office. Such dialogues are important.



*My expectation is to bring in new knowledge on empowerment of local level. We should strengthen our partnership. In the past we never got into close relationship and there was little recognition of the expertise Integro brought in. In fact there was little knowledge about Roma issues in mine network, as well as an unconscious bias. We should try now to go into contacting and collaborating also beyond our meetings and improve that.*

*Bagryan: "I am the program manager of Integro and I deal with the finances and I do the administration. The Mother Centers are important because they bring people together. Roma live in the circle of their families. Many such circles form the neighbourhood together. There are families with good education and other families do not see the value of education. In the Mother Center such different circles come together. They move beyond a superficial "hello" and become influenced with other ideas."*

*Marieke "I worked for the UN, but resigned, disappointed about the distance that often exists between development workers and grassroots people they serve. Professionals in the development field need to feed their family and as a result compete with the grassroots population they serve for the donor dollar. They win because they are in the middle. Content wise there is a similar mechanism at work: professionals expropriating grassroots knowledge. The idea of Nest! foundation and the "Talk the Walk" proposal, is to turn such mechanisms around.*

*My role in the project is to put things on paper and to make structural processes visible, so we can go beyond "just" doing the project and really learn how things function and could be better."*

- **List of basic working principles**

Leadership Support values and principles are the basis of our work. We prepared and adopted a list of working standards and agreements. In dropbox is a background reading, as well as the complete manuals of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. This USA network developed the method in the 80'ies and 90'ies. These are good background materials to (re-)read and standards to work by.

**Summary Of Leadership Support Process (LSP) Elements**

- A. We start with values and vision.
- B. We set group standards together. We make basic agreements.
- C. We support each other as leaders.
- D. We become allies and principled partners by honoring diversity.
- E. We use appreciation and participatory meeting methods.

**Basic Agreements and Working Principles**

- ✓ Basic Agreements should be flexible and able to change, keeping constant with our aims.
- ✓ Agreements should be sensitive to diversity and oppression issues.
- ✓ Our Agreements and Working Principals should take a stand and not compromise Integro or mine principles. They should reflect and support personal and group values.
- ✓ Our agreements are the ways we live in a meeting and how we communicate in our project. They are promises we make to each other about standards we hold on to, no matter what happens.
- ✓ The issue of the forced eviction that came up during the meeting is important. Therefore somebody can be excused to leave the meeting. That is an example of using the basic agreements: We can give priority to other issues when they are more important The others have the trust that when somebody do not answer that is because there is something urgent.
- ✓ Communication is better by skype than by email (during Integro office hours 9.00-16.30/17.00) The initiator of the Skype makes a summery and writes down agreements. More formal things are done in writing. Viber - works for messages, this functions better than Whatsapp in Bulgaria.
- ✓ Budget and financial principles: We have the same amounts per hour in Bulgaria as in Germany and the Netherlands as a way to generate co-financing. We have the ethical code to work with transparency and we want to live it. We document the time we spent and report on it even if it is not all paid. In the West the amounts budgeted are small to ensure that as much of budget as possible goes to Mother Centers.
- ✓ Language principle: we use our own language when possible and English when needed. This is an effort for everybody and will require considerable resources for translating. Everybody does their own work in their own language: Integro works with the groups in Bulgarian and mine with the ministry in German. However, everything that is shared should be in English for all to understand. That is why the proposal was in English. It was an effort for the German administration to accept such an English document and we appreciate that.

**Working Principles**

1. We speak English and we are aware that this is not our mother language
2. We start working with Visions and Values.  
We write them down and put them up when we meet, to remain us why we are together and what unites us.
3. We agree on communication principles.  
Answering within 3 days, we use skype to avoid misunderstandings...
4. We share all information
5. There are no hidden Agendas
6. We are completely transparent on the budget and financial matters
7. We make our work visible
8. We agree on conflict resolution process.
9. We give each other a mandate to speak on behalf of the project.  
That could mean that non Roma speak on behalf of Roma, non-grassroots speak on behalf of Grassroots, men speak on behalf of women...
10. We will reflect our experience and share
11. We document our working process
12. We agree that at each meeting one person will take the lead to keep us on our Basic agreements and working Principles