

Advocacy and Empowerment

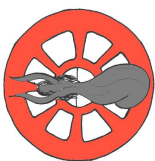
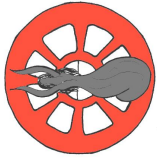
THE PROBLEM

Although Roma are the biggest minority in Bulgaria that compose more than 10 % of the population (or more than 800,000 p.) Roma are underrepresented in the institutions, government and political parties. The latter do not perceive Roma integration as a priority and hardly initiate Roma integration activities. That is why advocacy campaigns organized by civil society organizations are the main way for achieving implementation of Roma integration activities and for empowerment of Roma community in Bulgaria nowadays.

OUR ACTIVITIES

At present Center Amalipe is the most active Roma advocacy organization that organizes the following activities for advocacy and empowerment:

- **Civil society mobilization:** Amalipe has initiated actions for establishing a network of Roma advocacy organizations and for preparing common advocacy agenda. More than 90 Roma NGOs, CBOs (community-based organizations) and informal groups have been reached and included in civil society mobilization actions that compose nearly all working Roma organizations. This forms the basis for common successful advocacy campaigns;
- **Organizing advocacy campaigns:** Several successful advocacy campaigns were carried out: campaign for binding European funds with Roma integration, health advocacy campaign, campaign for including Roma observers in the Monitoring Committees of European funds structures in Bulgaria, education advocacy campaign, and so on. They have achieved significant results for the entire Roma community: for example, all necessary conditions for assigning resources from European funds for Roma integration have been established, and so on. They also made the advocacy perspective viable and powerful for Roma civil society;
- **Establishing advocacy structures:** Center Amalipe has initiated advocacy structures within Roma movement: Roma NGO observers in the Monitoring committees of National Strategic Reference Framework, Human Resources Development OP, Phare Program were elected after an official procedure and achieved official status. In addition, the practice for using the existing consultative structures (such as the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues) for advocacy purposes was also promoted. Establishing advocacy structures made the advocacy perspective sustainable;
- **Sharing experience:** Through trainings and workshops Center Amalipe shares its advocacy experience with the other organizations. Providing technical assistance for organizing advocacy campaigns is part of Amalipe support for the partnering organizations within Roma movement



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THE RESULTS

Due to these efforts the following results have been achieved:

✓ **informal network of Roma NGOs and CBOs all over the country and preconditions for establishing strong Roma advocacy coalition:** more than 50 independent Roma organizations took part in several common advocacy campaigns managed by Center Amalipe and formed the basis of a strong advocacy coalition;

✓ **significant results for the entire Roma community achieved due to the advocacy campaigns:** European funds absorption was binded with Roma integration and significant financial amounts were dedicated for Roma integration activities (for first time in Bulgarian); Roma observers were included in the Monitoring Committees of 4 Operational Programs, National Strategic Reference Framework and Phare program; Consultative Council for Roma Health Integration was established; the position of Roma health mediators was financed by the state budget for 2009; and so on.

✓ **Roma advocacy structures** have been established: the position “observer elected by Roma organizations” was legitimized within the Monitoring Committees of Human Resources Development OP, Phare program and National Strategic Reference Framework; working group of the Roma NGO experts included in the Monitoring committees of European fund structures was established; and so on.

✓ Roma organizations **has begun permanent advocacy “pressure” on and dialogue with state institutions** for fostering Roma integration: Roma NGOs started to use the official consultative bodies for influencing and requiring state institutions to implement Roma integration activities. Although this process is not completed it seems to provide significant outcomes;

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