

COPASAH EUROPE NEWSLETTER

NO. 1



COPASAH Europe Network

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ABOUT COPASAH EUROPE

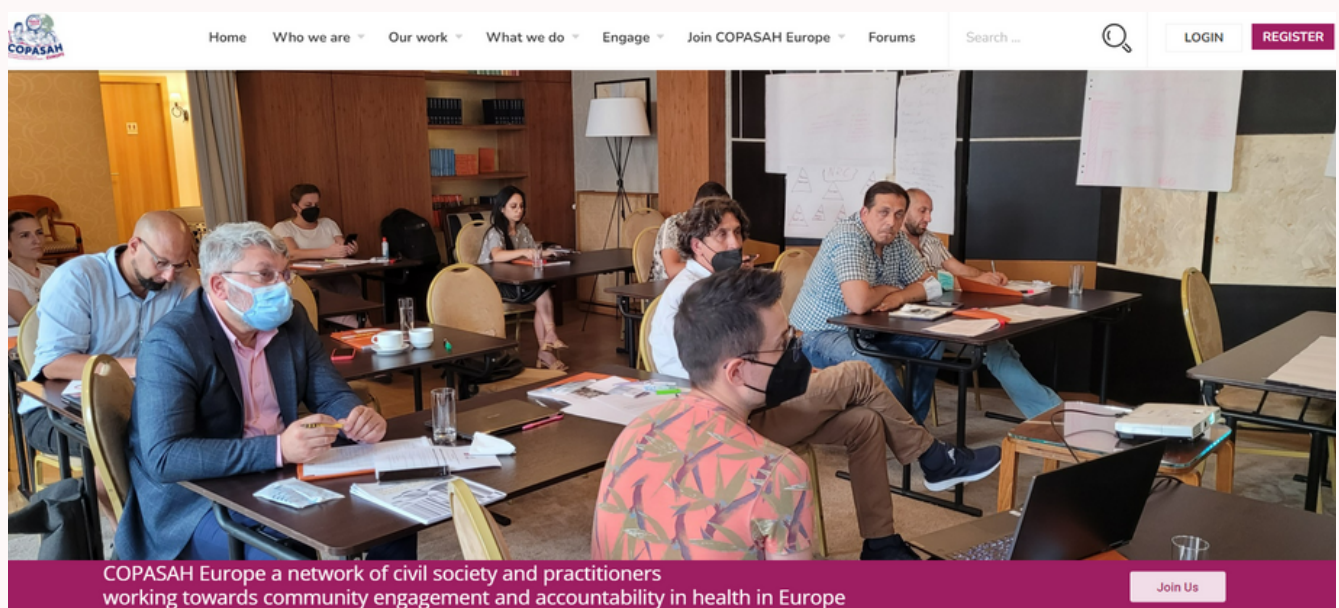
COPASAH Europe was established in 2021 and represents the regional sub-network to the Global COPASAH network established in 2011. The Global COPASAH network in addition to Europe unites practitioners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

COPASAH Europe is a community where practitioners who share an interest and passion for the field of community monitoring for accountability in health interact

regularly and engage in exchanging experiences and lessons; sharing resources, capacities and methods; in the production and dissemination of conceptual, methodological and practical outputs towards strengthening the field; in networking and capacity building among member organizations; and joint advocacy.

OUR RESOURCE PLATFORM

In September 2021 we officially published COPASAH Europe's official resource and communication platform and provided channels for learning and support among members.



The screenshot displays the COPASAH Europe website interface. At the top left is the COPASAH logo. The navigation menu includes: Home, Who we are, Our work, What we do, Engage, Join COPASAH Europe, and Forums. On the right side of the menu, there is a search bar, a magnifying glass icon, and buttons for LOGIN and REGISTER. Below the menu is a large photograph of a group of people sitting around tables in a meeting room, engaged in discussion. Some individuals are wearing face masks. At the bottom of the image, there is a purple banner with white text that reads: "COPASAH Europe a network of civil society and practitioners working towards community engagement and accountability in health in Europe". To the right of this banner is a "Join Us" button.

OUR VISION

Communities are actively engaged in promoting accountability and transforming health systems towards the realization of social justice.

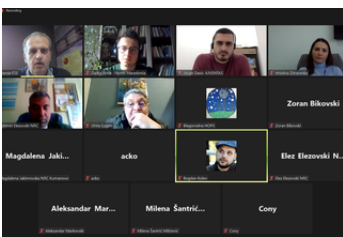
OUR MISSION

Our mission is to nurture, strengthen and promote collective knowledge, skills and capacity of community-oriented organisations and health activists in Europe who are- working in the field of accountability and social action in health, promoting active citizenship to make health systems responsive, equitable and people-centred.

PAST EVENT PHOTOS



Workshop for finalization of the strategic plan for COPASAH Europe for Albania, Romania, Montenegro, and Serbia (November, 2021)



Training on Social Accountability within the COPASAH network - Europe (February,, 2022)



Strategy planning workshop (July, 2021)

OUR STRATEGY

The strategic plan of the Hub covers the period of five years (2022 – 2026, not including the year of Hub establishment). The strategic plan was developed through a participatory process involving all organizations involved in the Hub establishment. Development of the strategic plan was based on inputs collected from the organizations on the following topics: issues organizations are currently working on regarding the right to health and access to health care; groups of the population organizations are working with; experience in the implementation of social accountability methodologies; organizations' experience and needs in general; advocacy capacities and needs. Based on the inputs provided by the organizations, the following conclusions were arrived at: need for further development of organizations' capacities and skills on the specific issues identified through the assessment; need for continued communication and experience sharing among organizations;

and joint advocacy on national, regional and international level.

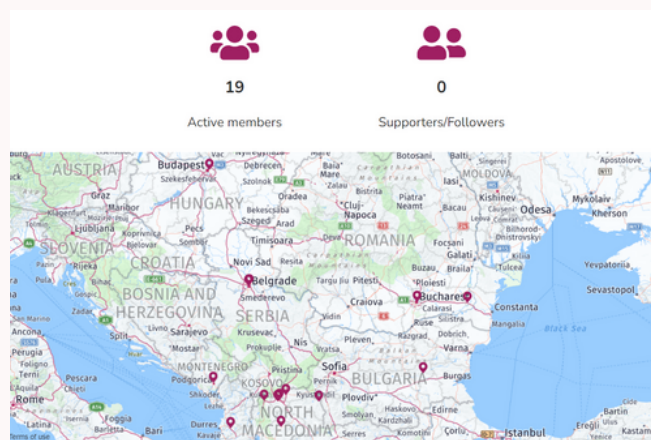
Based on the guidelines derived from the assessment, the strategic plan was developed through a process that included a three-day strategic planning workshop, adaptation of the strategic plan priorities to the national contexts of the participating organizations, and individual meetings at country level.

Link: bit.ly/3GGE7zA

MEET OUR MEMBERS

Our members are civil society organizations, experts, and professional institutions from Europe, united for joint capacity development and action.

After one year COPASAH Europe has 19 active members coming from eight countries.



OUR STEERING COMMITTEE

04



Darko Antik MA, Association ESE, North Macedonia
Deputy of the Executive Director on Financial Matters
and Budget Monitoring and Advocacy Coordinator



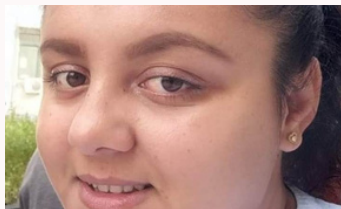
Milena Santric Milicevic MD, MSc, PhD,
Faculty of Medicine University of Belgrade, Institute of
Social Medicine, Professor – representing the Media
Education Center



Gergely Papp, PAD Foundation, Hungary
Lead researcher and project manager



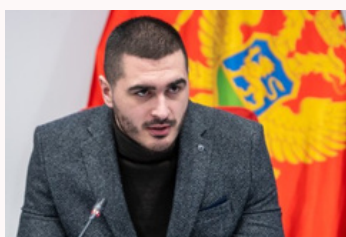
**Eugen Ghita, RomaJust – Roma Lawyers Association,
Romania**
Executive Director



Romina Sefa, Center for Social Advocacy, Albania
Executive Director



Stefan Stefanov MD, Thirst for Life, Bulgaria
Executive Director



Jovan Dasic, Juventas, Montenegro
Public Health and Policy Advisor

OUR STORIES



Roma Lawyers Association - ROMAJUST

author: Eugen Ghita



ROMAJUST is the first organization dedicated to Roma lawyers in Romania. ROMAJUST Association was founded in 2016 by young Roma lawyers and aims to increase the number of Roma legal professionals in Romania.

We develop **legal incubators** in partnership with law universities in order to facilitate the access of Roma young students and law graduates to legal professions. The Legal incubators collaborate with students, teachers, lawyers, volunteers, and members of the Association. We have established two legal incubators in Constanta and Bucharest where students and graduates of law schools, Roma, provide legal services to community members to empower them to solve their problems alone or with the network of Human Rights Monitors. The general aim of the work of ROMAJUST is the professional development of young Roma lawyers in Romania and to facilitate their access to legal professions. The main goals of ROMAJUST, or what we are striving to achieve are the following: we strive to create a generation of lawyers that will promote and defend the rights of the Roma people; we are combating discrimination and we encourage citizenship; we support the disadvantaged population and we are empowering vulnerable groups; we are promoting the equality of the principles of the rule of law and non-discrimination.

ROMAJUST is monitoring and defending human rights, moreover, we are the main defenders of human rights of victims of discrimination and abuses in Romania. We have developed a network of lawyers who are engaged in lawsuits in which fundamental human rights were violated at the individual or group level.

We are helping people in 10 cities, where the local authorities have forcibly evacuated more than 500 families. We had over 50 cases and in 2022 there are 35 active lawsuits. Out of these cases, 2 cases are about women who didn't have access to health services, discrimination cases and cases where women were refused the right to housing and access to social houses, women involved in forced evictions and forced demolitions, one hate speech case, labor discrimination in the case of a young woman and police abuse.

We have won two lawsuits at the National Council for Combating discrimination, in which we have demonstrated the abuses of the authorities but also of individuals.

One of our main projects is **The Legal Caravan**, which represents an innovative tool that ensures Access to Justice for Women from communities.



The Legal Caravan started within a project in the framework of the Right to Health Legal Caravan for Women from Vulnerable Communities, a project run by the Romanian Roma Lawyers Association - ROMAJUST alongside two partner organizations and it was funded by Kaufland Romania and implemented by the Civil Society Development Foundation. The project aimed the communities in Valea Seaca (Bacau), Fetesti (Ialomita), Slobozia Bradului, Timboesti (Vrancea), Barcea (Galati) during 2019 and 2020 and to provide legal services for more than 200 people.

In April 2019, ROMAJUST Association organized the Legal Caravan, during which 57 women received legal advice. The centralization and evaluation of the legal advice files show that the most common problems addressed by women were those related to paternity papers, denial of paternity, inheritance, and divorce. ROMAJUST returned to each community to start the process of solving the problems of the beneficiaries. The team of lawyers was working on finding simple procedures to solve all problems.

Women in rural communities, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups or the Roma minority, face a lack of access to health services and justice, as well as discrimination at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class.

The lack of information about women's rights and their rights under the law makes them vulnerable to abuse by the authorities. The majority of women in the villages concerned do not go to the doctor for check-ups during pregnancy, nor are they aware of their rights during pregnancy. At the same time, they do not know the dangers they are exposed to during pregnancy and after giving birth or the signs that should send them urgently to the doctor. Among women with a low level of education, there is a greater difficulty in accessing information about safety in pregnancy or about their health (prevention of cervical cancer, breast cancer).

These women do not know the legislation and the rights they can benefit from, nor do they know what they can do when faced with violence against women and girls. Lack of awareness of rights and internalization of oppression means they do not identify abuse or take action against it, and when they understand they are being abused, their lack of power and resources causes them to give up.

At the same time, the problems of these women are invisible in the public space, especially in the discourse based on gender or racial stereotypes. The high number of teenage births, as well as the high number of births at short intervals in the targeted communities, affect and endanger women's health.

While some women from vulnerable groups and Roma women face various obstacles in accessing services or respecting their rights, the general public and some representatives of the authorities promote hate speech and have a perception based on stereotypes and prejudices which leads to discrimination and violation of women's rights. In addition, many women in the targeted communities are unable to access basic services due to unresolved legal issues (identity documents, property deeds, divorce, paternity tags) or face other problems in accessing justice (e.g. difficulties in obtaining a protection order).

ROMAJUST organized visits to the communities with a mobile legal caravan, which included Roma law students, law graduates and lawyers. The Legal Caravan was present in each community for four days to provide legal advice to women in need of support

(e.g. obtaining protection order, establishing paternity, establishing guardianship, deeds on the house, obtaining identity documents, referral to the National Council for Combating Discrimination) and it returned to the local level whenever necessary to interact with women and local institutions to solve the cases we took up.



In cases of discrimination and hate speech, ROMAJUST provided legal representation in court even after the end of the project. To carry out this activity, ROMAJUST purchased an 8+1 van with removable passenger seats. This van underwent a radical transformation and became a mobile law office. The van has a desk with two chairs inside, a laptop, a printer, and a filing cabinet, and there are posters and flyers on the walls with messages that help create the atmosphere of a law office. The outside has advertising materials with the logos of the project and the implementing organizations, as well as messages referring to the beneficiaries' right to justice.

As a result of this first project, 57 women received legal advice and we improved their awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

ROMAJUST organized a workshop on legislation for women based on the needs identified by FILIA and O Del Amencia in the communities and discussed with women about their rights and how they can defend their rights. On the 4th of December 2019, we held an event in the community of Sinești to discuss the right to health with women in the community and parents of students in the school.

We discussed with the students in grades VII-VIII about the children's rights in general and children's rights to health in particular. We also had a dialogue with students at a difficult age, 13-14 years old, about bullying and the legal professions.

Other events within this project:

- The regional conference within the project the Right to Health Legal Caravan for Women in Vulnerable Communities took place in Iasi from 31 January to 2 February 2020. The participants were students and graduates of the Faculty of Law who learned more about legal incubators, careers in law, and how they can bring their contribution to the communities they are part of.
- On the 4th of March 2020, ROMAJUST and Ovidius University in Constanta, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences organized a Legal Incubator attended by over 40 participants (People's Advocate, professors, Roma graduates and lawyers, law students, local police students, etc.) Discussions were held about legal incubators and their role in the current social framework, careers in the legal field, and how you can get more involved in society while developing your career.

Our working strategy in the Legal Caravan project

The Legal Caravan is an on-going project that continued after the Initial project was implemented and in 2021 we went to communities



in Mangalia, Eforie, Constanța, Tulcea – Comuna Baia, Focșani, Comocea, Adjud, Iași, București, Fetești, Bolintin-Vale, Călărași, Reghin, Cluj, Zalău, Timișoara, Tecuci, Alba-Iulia, Târgu-Mureș, Giurgiu

There are two approaches we use. The first approach is to go to vulnerable communities where we know what the situation is we stay in the community for several days and there we approach the whole community. We do multi-level counseling aimed at access to quality public services. We discuss their rights and give them tools to get involved in accountability and ask for reports of the local council, check the budget, attend local council meetings, etc.

Another approach is when an organization or a collaborating member of our network of local facilitators learns about abuse or discrimination and asks us for support. We travel to that community urgently, often the same day we are notified, do the information work, documentation, and analysis and decide whether to get involved in the case or not. If we do get involved, we continue the documentation in the smallest detail, continue with the referral of the case to the competent authorities, monitor the work of the authorities, and provide legal representation for the victim(s) in the national phase of the court trial, but also in the international phase.

Another way in which the Legal Caravan works is that we pick up cases of abuse and discrimination from social media or the media, travel to the locality/community, find a contact person, make contact with the victim and follow the steps in the process described above.

The Legal Caravan mainly serves the Legal Incubator, in the sense that all cases taken up during the visits to the communities get to be analyzed and subjected to legal procedures, and our teams of law professors, lawyers, students, and volunteers have the opportunity to have contact with real cases in the professional training we provide within the Legal Incubator.





NGO KHAM

author: Zoran Bikovski



The NGO KHAM is a civil society organization which through information, education, empowerment and provision of services helps Roma people and representatives from marginalized groups to proactively engage in exercising their health rights. Through the approach of “Legal empowerment and Social accountability” we involve Roma community members in the process of detecting the gaps of the policies and service delivery, and we do active monitoring of implementation of governmental programs and policies related to Roma or other marginalized groups. We started with this work since 2011 through community monitoring work on provisions foreseen in the “Program for active health protection of Mothers and Children” aimed for increased immunization coverage of Roma children. Through our joint work with Roma community, and with Institutions on local and national level throughout the years we have identified and addressed the main challenges for regular immunization of Roma children.

Through our community monitoring work we have empowered Roma communities to be aware regarding their rights deriving from this Program and other related policies and for them to proactively demand their rights. With involvement of Roma communities and local health institutions we have identified main gaps and obstacles regarding coverage of Roma children with immunization and coverage with services from patronage nurses. This work resulted with joint advocacy efforts undertaken by KHAM and Roma community members, with support from local level health providers. Our joint advocacy work resulted with improved access and quality of immunization and preventive health services for Roma children. Namely, our advocacy work resulted with opening of an immunization post in the rural area of village Crnik, also the Primary health centre received car for Patronage nurses from the Ministry of health and specialization for Pediatrician was approved by the Ministry of health for one doctor in Primary health centre in Delchevo. These achievements and continuous work resulted in increased immunization coverage of Roma children in Bregalnica region from 75% at the beginning of the work to 96 % in course of three years.

During the Pandemic with COVID 19, marginalized Roma community faced great obstacles in access to health services. In this regard during the pandemic we conducted a household research and together with community we have identified the main challenges in fulfilling the reproductive health of women and health of mothers and children. According to the testimonies by the Roma community members since the beginning of the pandemic, not a single Roma woman has received an invitation for mammography, also women with lesserr intensity visit their family doctors and their gynecologists, compared to the period before the pandemic. Roma community has serious challenges in access to health services for children's health, primarily in scheduling appointments for orthopedists, pediatricians and other services from doctors specialist. In order to address the identified challenges in the past two years we have undertaken several activities with active involvement of the community. Namely we were working together with Roma women in order for them to continue to perform preventive gynecological examinations, despite the situation caused by the pandemic. Since for many women the distance of the gynecologists represent great obstacle in access to these services, we have arranged Mobile Gynecologic Ambulance to visit remote rural areas so that every women will have equal access. As a result of our advocacy work, together with the community the Primary Health Centre started to organize free ultrasound examination of women, once per week. In cooperation with the NGO "HERA" we advocated for equipment of a cabinet for family doctors was provided, which will improve women's health and the health of the entire population.

Roma community also face obstacles in access to services related to Covid-19, since testing and immunization was not available in their place of living. Thus, together with community we conducted advocacy activities for the testing for COVID 19 and immunization to be done in their place of living according to Law for patient rights and the right to access to services.

The situations related with the pandemic also disproportionately affected Roma people in their ability to work and generate income. Especially having in consideration that many of the Roma people depend on the income from informal work, which was difficult to conduct in the periods of lockdown and other measures imposed by the Government during the pandemic. Moreover not being officially employed, hindered Roma people's access to certain Governmental measures aimed to assist the population in the period of crisis. All of these resulted in many Roma families to face financial hardship during this period. In order to improve economic condition to Roma families in social risk in this period we have organized many humanitarian actions. Also we informed and empowered the community how to use active measures for employment from Agency for Employment and how to apply for Social welfare and subventions for people with low income.

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In order to further support the people living under poverty line we created a campaign to protect these people from financial executors, and through video campaign the community members themselves asked for fulfillment of their rights and demanded responsibility from Institutions. We conducted this campaign for three months, exerting pressure on the Government We do the pressure, and after three months campaign we was invited in Government on the road table and after this meeting situation is much better.

We are constantly adapting and improving our work for continuous empowerment and support of Roma communities in access to health services, based on the emerging challenges and community needs. In this regard in the last two years, we have used different tactics and methods, including empowering community in digitalization and how to use digital tools properly, which was became increasingly important in the course of the pandemic. Also we work with the community members on combat against misinformation and disinformation, mostly regarding the pandemic with Covid-19 and vaccination against this disease.

The NGO "KHAM" is an organization that does not implement projects, but KHAM is the voice of the community that leads to a better life for all people who are actively fighting for a more dignified life.



PAD Foundation for Environmental Justice

author: Gergely Papp



PAD Foundation conducts research, policy analysis, advocacy, education support, and awareness-raising campaigns to promote and advance intersectional approaches to combat environmental degradation and social injustice in Central Eastern Europe. PAD aims to tackle inequalities in access, affordability, and quality of the environment and public space, as well as to change the narrative of communicating and representing the causes of social inequalities. It was established in Budapest, Hungary in 2016.

Our goal is to provide non-discriminatory access to affordable, sufficient, and quality public services for all kinds of settlements and social groups, let it be daily energy use, predictable and reliable housing, a healthy environment, clean water, air, soil, stimulating public spaces, and accessible public transport. In addition, we believe that special attention should be given to vulnerable communities and excluded neighborhoods when it comes to tackling the consequences of climate change.

In Hungary – as in many European countries – Roma experiences significantly worse health outcomes than the general population. Limited access to health care services does not fully explain this gap in the Roma health status. Social and environmental determinants, such as bad housing conditions, limited public infrastructure, environmental harms, and geographic and social exclusion, are very much related to the health condition of Roma in East-Central-Europe. When it comes to closing the health gap between Roma and non-Roma, evidence suggests that social determinants of health — social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental factors — play a more significant role than their limited access to health care services.

Our Neighbourhoods and Public Health initiative's main objective is to collect relevant evidence on social and environmental determinants of Roma health in a Hungarian town's segregated neighborhoods to strengthen the need for research-based evidence in policy-making as well as for the mobilization of local Roma communities in advocacy for the improvement of health indicators. The research outcomes could underpin and foster the adequacy and effectiveness of the further mediation process between local stakeholders and community advocacy efforts.

The ongoing selected location is a former mining town with a heavy industrial heritage. Nowadays the town has tight functional connections with the capital, Budapest, and an important and prosperous economic sub-center of the metropolitan area, however, the socio-spatial polarisation is quite extreme in the town. There are two officially segregated neighborhoods with app. 1800 residents on the outskirts of the town, where the unemployment rate is more than 50% and the percentage of residents with an education level of maximum primary school is more than 50%. Approximately three-quarters of the residents identify themselves as Roma. The neighborhoods' separation is visible also by physical barriers (highway, railway) from the town center, the inefficient and time-consuming possibilities of public transport, the close proximity of the town's industrial park and the external mining area, the insufficiency of the built environment, and the high proportion of households with the lack of public services. The two neighborhoods are situated next to each other on the opposite sides of the main road passing through this area.

Our first research phase was focusing on the stakeholder analysis. We started this process by identifying and interviewing relevant municipality associates (housing department, electoral district representative, deputy mayor, etc.), educational institutions (local primary schools, kindergartens), local charity organizations, child- and family care institutions, health (midwives-health visitors, general practitioner) and public service providers (electricity supplier, waste management) who are directly or indirectly involved in and somehow responsible for the neighborhood's public health.

Stakeholder analysis – beyond the mapping of stakeholders' power, interests, and needs – investigates and challenges the inadequacy of the local majority's public opinion and the local stakeholders' official narratives about the social causes of environmental hazards.

The research reflects on the neighborhood- and household-scale public services, local residents' practices, circumstances, and relationships with service providers and local professionals connected to their everyday health, reveal the hidden, most of the time unconscious or misinterpreted factors affecting their wellbeing. From the first phase of the research process, undertaking fieldwork - participatory observation, and interviews within the local community - is a core principle to unfold these narratives.



Photo: Neighbourhoods and Public Health / PAD

PAD also takes the neighborhood-specific environmental harms into consideration, such as the probability of increased soil contamination, air pollution by industrial (brown- or greenfield) and/or municipal sources, inadequate municipal waste management, and proximity to landfill sites, reflecting the contrast between the findings and the existing local narratives.

The research activities and findings underpin and support the adequacy and effectiveness of the ongoing mediation process regarding public services, possible further of the neighborhood and its residents' social housing development opportunities, implemented with Partners Hungary Foundation.

Our Water Inclusion initiative, based on research, advocacy, stakeholder facilitation, and awareness-raising activities and campaigns examine the social, environmental, and technical circumstances of water accessibility and quality in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

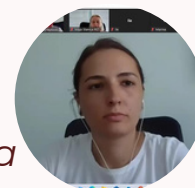


Photo: WaterInclusion / PAD / Kovács Zoltán



Association for Legal Education and Transparency - LET STATION

author: Hristina Zdraveska



Association for Legal Education and Transparency LET STATION Prilep is a voluntary, nonprofit association formed pursuant to the freedom of association for the purpose of attainment, protection, and alignment of its interests in regard to fulfilling the legal needs of citizens, by encouraging openness and cooperation with the institutions, in compliance with the Constitution and Laws. Association for Legal Education and Transparency LET STATION was established and started with active work in 2018. The term “station” itself is a place where people can always turn to, and the word “LET” is an acronym, meaning legal education and transparency. This means that this association is a place where all citizens can be legally educated and seek help, but also transparency and accountability from institutions. Our target groups are marginalized communities in Prilep and the region such as Roma and other minority communities, people from rural areas, families and children on the street or in other social risks, former prisoners, and others.

Our vision is for access to justice to be provided for every citizen. And our mission is to meet the legal needs of the citizens by encouraging openness and cooperation of the institutions.





With our activities, we strive to achieve the following main goals. We strive to provide education and assistance to citizens in exercising their rights, by means of free legal aid and preliminary legal assistance, with a primary focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially the Roma population, in the area of health and social rights.

We encourage system institutions to demonstrate transparency and accountability in their operations, tailored to the needs of citizens; We promote equality of citizens on all grounds, by taking activities aimed at prevention and protection against discrimination; We encourage natural persons and legal entities to join humanitarian actions aimed at reducing and alleviating poverty; We strive to ensure conditions for multi-ethnic and social cohesion and operation, by involving persons of the different ethnic,

geographic and social profile, thus allowing them opportunity to make an actual and effective contribution for positive changes in the society; We strive to contribute towards the attainment of gender equality and address existing inequalities between men and women, with a view to advance women's inclusion in societal processes.

The key stakeholder groups in our work are citizens of the Municipality of Prilep and the Pelagonia region, particularly from marginalized communities, local state and public institutions, and local and national government bodies.

Through our main activities we are providing legal and administrative aid to citizens for the realization of their rights through legal advice and referral, filling the documentation, and mediation in communication with the relevant institutions; We are monitoring legal and administrative changes and their promotion through social networks and distribution of promotional materials; We apply protective mechanisms to ensure the realization of rights; We are monitoring and contributing to the implementation of the new Laws. We are organizing creative workshops, public debates, and informative sessions with citizens; We are building capacity among activists from marginalized communities to involve those communities in activities for advocacy of health and social rights, housing and property rights, education, and environmental justice. As a grassroots organization, we are working on community-based legal aid approaches which are most effective and deliver high results in ensuring access to justice for all. Community-based legal aid combines professional legal services with community activism. This combination has shown extremely positive results as it includes expertise and field activities, which create a comprehensive approach to resolving the issue directly and effectively.



Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women - ESE

author: Borjan Pavlovski



Social accountability for improvement of the right to health for Roma women, mothers and children

The Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women - ESE is a civil organization, founded in 1994. We are working to improve the implementation of the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups of citizens. We are striving to fulfil this goal through engagement of citizens in the processes on planning, implementation and evaluation of legal regulations, budgets and services in the field of social and economic rights.

In this regard we are strengthening capacities of local and national level CSOs to implement the social accountability and legal empowerment methodologies, including Roma CSOs, CSOs working in the health area, CSOs working on gender equality and employment, and CSOs working with different marginalized groups. Further on these CSOs empower and mobilize the communities with which they work in,

thus strengthening the participation of CSOs and citizens in demanding accountability from the Governmental institutions. This work strengthens capacities of CSOs and citizens for participation in the decision-making processes and in the processes of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of relevant policies and budgets with focus on right to health, right to employment and right to social protection. At the same time, we are strengthening capacities of the Governmental and public institutions from the health sector in order for them to increase the citizen's participation in the processes of decision making and oversight of the implementation of the relevant policies and budgets.

We are meticulously gathering evidence on the implementation of the relevant policies and budgets and the scope of coverage of the direct beneficiaries and the impact that

these policies are meant to achieve including – level of access, status and outcomes of the beneficiaries. We are gathering data related to different social and economic rights such as health of Roma, women's reproductive health and health of mothers and children; affirmative employment measures and policies with emphasis on women; unpaid care work in the households and implementation of the policies and budgets relevant to these issues.

ESE is continuously demanding accountability from State institutions for improvement of the health status and health outcomes of the vulnerable groups of the population, status of employment and status of the families and individuals providing the care, through improved access to social and health protection.

ESEs approach – Social accountability work

ESE started applying social accountability in its work for improved health of Roma since 2009. We are using the approach on two main issues: 1) improved access for Roma mothers and children to preventive health care services, with emphasis on – antenatal care, patronage (outreach) nurse services, immunization and preventive health care for infants. 2) Improved access of Roma women to reproductive health care services, with emphasis on access to gynecological care on primary level and access to screening programs for cervical and breast cancer prevention.

We work in Roma communities, i.e. locations where our Roma partner organizations[1] are based in municipalities of Shuto Orizar, Vinica, Delchevo and Pehcevo. It must be noted that mobilization and coverage of Roma population was pursued according to the principle of mapping particular locations, including identification of potential beneficiaries of preventive health services that are subject of monitoring. In bigger settlements, for example, the Municipality of Shuto Orizari, we targeted underdeveloped locations that are inhabited by Roma people which are at most in need of assistance and support.

The approach includes implementation of several social accountability methodologies, those being: budget monitoring and analysis, community monitoring and social audit. In spite of different level related to implementation of social accountability methodologies, results are triangulated and used to define measures and activities aimed to improve the fulfillment of the health and social rights of the people at local level in locations where we work, but also at national level. Hence, every year results are used to develop local advocacy strategies for each municipality where we work and one joint national advocacy strategy. Local strategies are aimed towards adoption

of changes at local and municipal level, while the national strategy aims to promote state of-affairs at national level. For the purpose of this article we will in details elaborate only the community monitoring work.

We use the community monitoring to verify whether what has been legally guaranteed and anticipated under different health policies is actually delivered and more importantly, to share their opinion about how they are implemented. In this work we are led by the premise that people are entitled to the foreseen public health services. Another important component of this work is informing local Roma population about their rights and obligations related to preventive health services for mothers and children, as well as early detection of malignant diseases among women (cervical cancer and breast cancer). We conduct this work in cooperation with local Roma partner organizations in all municipalities where they operate.

We regularly conduct mapping of the communities in locations where we work. This process helps us to identify especially vulnerable groups of the population, but also to identify groups of the Roma communities which are entitled to the services which are subject of our work i.e. identified Roma mothers and children at, as well as women that should benefit from preventive health services related to Screening programs for cervical and breast cancer.

Through this work we continuously empower Roma people. In this regard we provide information and education on the rights, entitlements and obligations related to preventive health care for mothers and children (antenatal care, immunization etc.) and preventive health care services for the reproductive health of women with main emphasis on screening programs for malignant diseases pursuant to needs and by means of one-day educational workshops.

Education and information dissemination are pursued in order to enable Roma population to exercise their health rights and later, during implementation of the social accountability methodology, to be able to assess utilization of preventive health services. After being introduced to their rights and obligations, communities are engaged in implementation of surveys whereby parents of children aged 0 to 15 years, pregnant women and women aged 24 to 60 years are asked whether they have accessed these health services and about quality of service delivery. Special emphasis is given on exploring the potential barriers in access to these services.

Community-based surveys are conducted by means of completing survey questionnaires at households, as well as organization of focus group discussions.

Furthermore, research activities include interviews with health professionals responsible to provide relevant health services. Interviews target outreach (patronage) nurses, medical doctors from immunization departments, managers of Primary health centers and polyclinics, as well as gynecologists in the primary health care.

Interviews with health professionals are organized in order to obtain information on implemented activities, as well as to identify problems and difficulties they are facing when implementing activities anticipated under relevant programs of the Ministry of Health.

For the purpose of presentation and verification of these findings to the broader community, the findings are presented in a manner easily understandable for the community i.e. as a Community score cards. Initial findings are presented in front of the community on a validation meetings, on which findings are discussed with community members and additional information are gathered.

Validation meetings are also important to familiarize communities with identified problems, whereby community members are able to create their own perception that problems are not only individual, but are shared by number of people in their communities.

This procedure is important because it enables greater community mobilization in advocacy processes for changes and improvements.

After validation, score card findings are presented and discussed at local meetings or forums attended by community members and representatives of local health facilities, in order to find joint solutions to identified problems. These meetings are attended by Roma people, health professionals providing relevant health services and other relevant local decision makers (medical doctors and nurses from immunization wards and preventive health teams, outreach nurses, managers of health centers and polyclinics, registered gynecologists, representatives of local governments, representatives of the Health Insurance Fund, etc.).

At these meetings, Roma community members had an opportunity to inform health professionals and other relevant local level decision makers about issues they are facing when accessing health services and to directly demand improvements related to service coverage and quality. This process is repeated every year, thus enabling monitoring of progress in implementation of public health services in the course of time.

ACHIEVEMENTS: RESULTS OF OUR WORK...

Findings obtained under all social accountability approaches are used to identify problems faced by Roma population when accessing preventive health services, but are also used to determine reasons behind identified problems at all levels, from local to national. Findings are used to demand changes from decision makers that would result in improved coverage of Roma population with these health services.

By implementing activities at local level, we strive for most changes to be effectuated at this level.

However, in cases where identified problems and difficulties faced by Roma population at local level, need resolution on national level, together with Roma partner organizations and Roma communities we advocate before competent state institutions at national level.

In doing so, we also address specific local needs of Roma communities in relation to exercise of their health-related rights, while striving to bring about systemic changes at national level that would improve the status of Roma people in general on issues pertaining to our scope of work.

At the same time, where needed, we coordinate advocacy efforts at local and at national level. One example of this coordinated action is the work in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari which allowed us to learn that women are not adequately covered with outreach visits during their pregnancy and after giving birth.

Main reason for this problem was insufficient number of outreach nurses working in the municipality, as well as lack of vehicle for the outreach department, whereby nurses are forced to cover big geographic terrain on foot or by public transportation, which results in losing significant part of their working hours. In order to improve performance and efficiency of the outreach department, competent institutions were addressed with demands to employ adequate number of outreach nurses and to secure vehicle for this department. In that, we undertook coordinated activities at local and national level.

Namely, through the management at the Polyclinic "Chair", local partner organizations succeeded to persuade the Health Centre Skopje to request the Ministry of Health to provide health vehicle for the outreach department in Shuto Orizari. At the same time, ESE informed the public at national level about the problem related to insufficient number of outreach visits and requested the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance to approve employment of outreach nurses and to finance procurement of vehicle for this department in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari. After implementation of these activities, the Ministry of Health secured a vehicle for the outreach department in Shuto Orizari.

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At national level, our efforts resulted in introduction of activities specifically targeting Roma women under the Program for Active Health Protection of Mothers and Children.

Recognized for its work in the field of promoting health of mothers and children, since 2017 ESE participate in the work group tasked for development of the Program for Active Health Protection of Mothers and Children, under the Ministry of health.

At the same time, based on our demands, Roma women are enlisted as especially vulnerable groups under several activities in the program's narrative and budget section, including separate activities targeting Roma communities. Moreover, based on our demands in 2018 the budget for the program witnessed almost double increase, from 10.5 million MKD in 2017 to 17 million in 2018.

Yet we emphasize that the most significant achievement of ESEs social accountability work is involvement of citizens, especially vulnerable groups in the policy making process. Thus in cooperation with our partner Roma CSOs, in the past years we have actively engaged Roma communities in the process of monitoring of the Governmental policies aimed for health of women and mothers and children. Moreover through our work we included Roma representatives in drafting recommendations for improved coverage of Roma with health services and in the process of advocating in front of the Governmental institutions.

Thus the most valuable asset of this work is empowered Roma communities which are aware of their rights and entitlements and are proactively demanding improvement of their health and access to health services.





Thirst for Life Association

author: Stefan Stefanov



The organization works to build a modern network of health, social and legal protection for one of the most vulnerable risk groups in our society - mothers and children from the Roma community. The main activities of the Association are aimed at developing and promoting effective practices for child care; informing, involving and empowering families; reduction of violence and addressing insufficient care to children and families by institutions.

At the end of 2019 Thirst for life with three other organizations (list is given below) joined forces in the campaign Every Baby is Priceless that calls on the public to pay attention to the problem of unattended pregnancies, and institutions - to find a solution and provide prenatal examinations for all pregnant women in Bulgaria, regardless of their health insurance status.

In Bulgaria about 7,000 babies are born annually from pregnancies not followed by a medical specialist. The reason is that uninsured women in Bulgaria are entitled to only one examination and a package of laboratory tests for the entire pregnancy. Very few women actually reach this single examination - due to lack of information that they are entitled to it, but also due to the reluctance of doctors to accept uninsured women. According to the data in 2017 only 31.2% of uninsured pregnant women had access to the only examination, which is paid by Ministry of Health, for 2018 - 47.1%; for 2019 - 37.7%

In addition, one examination is extremely insufficient to identify and treat a number of preventable problems and treatable infections that are a risk to the health of the baby and his mother. According to WHO standards there should be not less than 8 check-ups during a pregnancy. One of the main risks of the lack of access to medical care is the birth of premature babies who need additional specialized hospital care - in our country these are about 6,500 babies (or about 10% of live births in the country).

The most affected by this problem are young babies - at a time when all the vital systems of the body are created and developed, there is no opportunity to detect problems and timely intervention to eliminate them by medical professionals. An unattended pregnancy for the mother means an inability to manage a number of health risks. Obstetricians and gynecologists are also affected - when they give birth to untrained pregnant women, they face uncertainty about their condition and are forced to work "blindly". For society and the state, unattended pregnancy often means dealing with much more serious health problems, which respectively have a significantly higher economic and social cost (prematurity, treatment and rehabilitation of children with problems in physical and / or mental development, etc.).

In 2021, as part of our initiative, the report "The Price of Indifference" was prepared by Dr. Venelin Stoychev (sociologist) and with the assistance of a consulting team of medical doctors and a lawyer. The report is an analysis of the economic dimensions of the problem of unattended pregnancies. The main conclusion is that if only 26 premature babies avoid preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth, this will cover the cost of monitoring the pregnancy of all women without health insurance. This can only be done by ensuring adequate monthly follow-up of the pregnancy, regardless of the mother's health insurance status.

In our work we are actively including Roma community members. Thus part of our work within the Initiative is related to the organization of self-help groups for Roma women, within which to discuss topics related to early childhood development and the health of mothers and babies. Self-help groups are led by health mediators who raise the health awareness of local Roma communities and conduct a number of information campaigns on key topics.

The Initiative Every Baby is Priceless is currently in process of gathering public and institutional support. Roma people are engaged in signing a petition, which is to be submitted to the Ministry of Health with a request to grant access of all uninsured pregnant women to prenatal check-ups.

We are convinced that good policies and good governance are inevitably based on economic facts and analysis and on the concept of human rights with active involvement of the citizens in policy processes. Bulgarian institutions and society should give a better start for all babies, regardless of the socio-economic situation of their parents. Our organizations will continue to advocate for solving this problem that makes Bulgaria unique on the European map and also – among our neighboring countries.



The Initiative Every Baby is Priceless is part of the Project for Improving Maternal and Child Health among the Roma Community "With care from 0 to 3", which is implemented with the financial support of the Trust for Social Alternative Foundation, Open Society and Porticus. Project website: <https://we-care.bg>



Association of Citizens "Initiative for Development and Inclusion of Communities"

author: Fadilj Dzemail



The Association of Citizens "Initiative for Development and Inclusion of Communities" - IRIZ, Skopje, works on the territory of the municipality of Shuto Orizari in Skopje on improving the access of persons from the most vulnerable categories to their health, social and educational rights by providing legal aid and support, conducting community level accountability, providing information and education for the realization of their health rights and rights as patients, and involving community in decision making processes.

During its work, IRIZ has implemented a series of projects aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the Roma community. One of the most important projects we have been working on for six years is the project entitled "Social Accountability and Legal Empowerment of the Citizens of Suto Orizari". Through this project we strive to empower Roma community members to know their rights and entitlements, for them to be able to identify violation of their rights and to be able to proactively demand fulfillment of their health and social rights. We also provide direct paralegal assistance to individuals in order for them to protect or fulfill their rights.

During 2021, as part of the activities implemented under the project for Social Accountability and Legal Empowerment of the Citizens of Suto Orizari, IRIZ monitored the programs of the Ministry of health, the Program for Active health care of mothers and children and the Program for early detection of malignant diseases. The monitoring work is regarding the coverage of Roma women and children with the activities foreseen in these programs. Findings from our monitoring work showed extremely low coverage of Roma communities with the activities foreseen in these programs. In addition to monitoring these programs, IRIZ through paralegal assistance educates and strengthens citizens regarding their rights in the areas of health and social protection, housing, education, etc.

IRIZ together with Roma communities identifies the emerging issues that affects the community and advocates for improvement. One such example of advocacy is the problem of lack of family doctors in the municipality. Another issue is that the Polyclinic in Shuto Orizari, does not meets the criteria for providing all health services which are designated for a Polyclinic. This is a result of the fact that for years the Government has not invested in human resources, medical equipment and capacities in the Polyclinic, so the building is not even refurbished; neither meets any criteria to be named a Polyclinic. In the so called Polyclinic in Shuto Orizari there are no health services from pediatrician or other doctor's specialists, there is neither radiology cabinet nor laboratory. In the same time all these services are available in the Polyclinics in other municipalities in Skopje. Even several family doctors who have remained working for many years in the Polyclinic left, dueto retirement or other reasons. There is no willingness for other doctors to come and replace them to work in a Roma environment. Therefore, in such a situation, after two doctors retired, a large number of patients were left without a family doctor or about 3.000 adult patients and 1.200 children. And all of this happened in the middle of the pandemic with Covid-19. IRIZ together with the partner organizations, supported by FOSM, and with involvement of the Roma community advocated for the Ministry of health and Health Insurance Fund to publish announcement for concessionaires for a general practitioner at the Polyclinic Suto Orizari. In order for this problem to gain momentum and become more visible, together with the community we organized other additional activities such as creative activism. The event was well covered by journalists and there were positive feedbacks after the activity. . At the same time, guest appearances were organized on national media shows, recorded reports on the condition of the Suto Orizari Polyclinic, etc. The necessary information reached the Minister of Health, where after all these actions, potential concessionaires applied on the next announcement to work in the Polyclinic of Shuto Orizari.

In addition to all this, IRIZ together with FOSM and ESE prepared a Request for urgent procedure for employment of a pediatrician in the Department of Preventive Health Care for preschool children in the Polyclinic in Suto Orizari; urgent procedure for appointing a pediatrician for the needs of primary health care of at least 1,200 children who, due to the retirement of a doctor who performed this activity, were left without basic health care; Urgent submission of forms for Elected Doctor (IL) to the existing family doctors working in the municipality in order to ensure enrollment of some of these 3,000 citizens which were left without family doctor, providing minimum conditions for the functioning of immunization departments and emergency service. The request was sent to the Ministry of Health and the Health Insurance Fund of Macedonia as responsible institutions for the Polyclinic in Shuto Orizari.

IRIZ always strives to respond to the needs of the Roma communities. Thus in the period of pandemic with COVID-19, as an Association of Citizens supported by the Foundation Open Society Macedonia - FOSM, we have worked on information of the Roma community members for the measures for prevention from COVID-19, for the measures introduced for prevention, as well as for the adopted measures for support of the citizens in the course of the pandemic, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

Moreover, IRIZ conducted monitoring of economic measures that the Government of R. North Macedonia adopted as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic in order to tackle poverty. The Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia adopted a package of economic measures that were implemented on several occasions during 2021 and coverage of different categories of citizens in order to meet the largest possible percentage of the population that are directly affected by the new imposed conditions that brought by the pandemic with Covid-19. In order to have a transparent and fair coverage of the population with the packages of economic measures, especially of the socially endangered families, IRIZ monitored the process of their implementation by the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia. In this work we realized that there is lack of information for the people on the process how to obtain their rights deriving from the newly introduced packages of economic measures. To improve access of Roma people to these measures, IRIZ undertook activities for mass distribution of brochures with informative content related to the implementation of economic measures aimed for citizens. For each measure announced by the government, IRIZ has distributed 100 to 150 information brochures.

The work of IRIZ is always guided by the needs of Roma communities where we work. With our work we tackle issues which persist for years, but also we identify and address newly emerging problems and needs of the communities. Which is most important we continuously empower communities for the to be able to proactively demand their rights and all of our activities are conducted with active involvement of Roma community members.



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