

Albania: Lobbying coalition success

A coalition between HDPC, local NGOs, representatives of the Roma community and the coordinator of the Roma Community Center in Elbasan has successfully lobbied the Mayor and Municipal Council in Elbasan to provide funds that will enable the Roma Community Centre to continue its invaluable work in Albanian language teaching for children, after other funding ended.

The Roma Community Daily Center was established in 2002, with funding from the Soros Foundation, to provide language training in Albanian for Roma children in Elbasan after it had been established that the enrolment rate of Roma children in primary school was almost half that of the rest of the population. Lack of knowledge of Albanian was (and remains) the principal reason for this. This is the direct result of parents temporarily emigrating or working elsewhere because of the high rate of unemployment in Elbasan, an old industrial town in the centre of Albania. Children consequently live with their grandparents, where only the Roma language is spoken. The Centre was not only much appreciated by the Roma community, it had an immediate and tangible effect: school enrolment increased from 48% to 72% between 2002 and 2005.

When funding from the Soros Foundation ended in December 2005, the Center was closed. HDPC, two local NGOs (In Family, For the Family and Public Health), representatives of the Roma community and the coordinator of the Roma Community Center in Elbasan, decided to work together and individually to lobby the local authority for funds to continue the work of the Center. In an area where financial resources are limited and the priorities more likely to be about improving basic infrastructure, this would not be easy.

Experts in the lobby group prepared a feasibility study for the Center and representatives of the coalition contacted opinion leaders in key departments (education, finance and social services) as well as members of the local council. HDPC commissioned market research to support the request for funding and, with the support of a local TV station, much patience and understanding, the coalition achieved their objective. The Mayor and the Council reacted positively and the Municipal Council allocated a one-year fund to finance the Center, which re-opened in March 2006. The budget was re-approved for 2007 and the Center is currently continuing its work.

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