

Mobile Drop-in Centre for Migrants from South East Europe and Roma (MOBI)

Germany 2012-present (EU funded from January 2016 until the end of 2018)

Moving forward with MOBI

Summary

The project is a mobile drop-in centre for newly arrived South Eastern European and Roma migrant families. It offers counselling and information services in the areas of education, health, language class access, employment and living situations. It provides street work services in deprived areas within Berlin's districts. Some of the project workers canvass social hot spots in search of those in need, following requests of the municipal district offices, neighbours or landlords. Three days a week there are open walk-in office hours. The project cooperates with Berlin social services offices, such as social services for youth, the children's health department, the school department, schools and centres for sexual health. The project also cooperates with neighbourhood centres, counselling institutions and language schools.

In 2015, the project served around 500 families with about 3,300 activities in counselling and services. The institutional framework for gender equality within the project first concentrates on supporting families to secure the essentials. This inevitably, in a context of gender inequality, draws the focus to women. Women participants are often mothers with two to six children. The project workers assist them to find childcare and school places for their children. This makes it possible for the women to secure the time they need to learn German and eventually to learn skills needed for an occupation

The project was first headed by Amaro Foro, a Roma not-for-profit organisation in cooperation with the South East European Culture Association, a not-for-profit cultural and community centre. Since 2015, it has been directed by the Caritas Catholic Charities. As of January 2016 to the end of 2018 it is EU funded.

Poverty and homelessness among Roma in Berlin: Integration is needed immediately

The European Commission adopted the Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in 2011 to encourage Member States to develop national strategies with specific policies and measures to secure Roman integration. With the Plan for Action, Berlin was one of the first Lands in Germany to implement this EU Framework. The Plan for Action aims to support community building within the Roma population and to sensitise the general public to antiziganism (discrimination against the Roma people). Community projects, which were already in place in Berlin, were financially and institutionally built up and reinforced.

Roma people have been one of the largest groups settling in Berlin. Difficulties in their integration have become evident in the high numbers experiencing poverty and homelessness. Homelessness is particularly difficult in Germany because most social services are provided on the basis of having a residential address. Roma people cannot receive the support they need if they do not have housing. Roma women face extreme deprivation in terms of poverty and gender inequality, both within their community and in the community at large. This means that their needs for resources are high and required over a long time period. Changes in gender equality take time because social exclusion and discrimination have to be addressed at many levels.

Taking action on a multitude of issues

The project “Mobile Drop-in Centre for Migrants from South East Europe and Roma” (MOBI) was first run by the Roma organisation Amaro Foro and the South East European Cultural Association and funded by the Berlin Land. In 2015, the project was funded 100% by Berlin Land and run by the Caritas Catholic Charities. As of January 2016 to the end of 2018 it is EU funded. As the project has grown and developed, it has enjoyed support from a range of not-for-profit associations. It has built up a good working relationship with the local municipal offices.

The MOBI project is a mobile drop-in project for newly arrived migrants, particularly from Romania and Bulgaria. It assists them to orient themselves in Berlin. The project emphasises self-help, anti-discrimination, education on rights, intercultural dialogue and acceptance, as well as basic language and individual problem-solving skills. Project workers are well-trained in intercultural dialogue, and the Romanian and Bulgarian languages.

The project workers offer counselling and support in relation to diverse problems. They assist in resolving situations of friction. In this, there is a particular focus on resolving housing difficulties. The project compliments the measures in the Plan for Action of the Berlin Land which concentrate more on language and cultural development for people who have been settled in Germany for longer.

The beneficiaries often come from very difficult situations. They grapple with issues such as poverty, multiple discrimination, problems of access to health care or housing, loss of child support and domestic exploitation and violence. MOBI supports them in securing a living, obtaining healthcare insurance, dealing with debt, finding employment and educational opportunities, as well as learning about green cards and family law. The project focuses first on families and, using a gender lens, has a particular commitment to addressing the needs of Roma women.

First the essentials. Then, planning for the future is possible

The institutional framework for gender equality within the project first concentrates on the essentials. It seeks to support families experiencing poverty in their struggle to obtain basic essentials. This starting point inevitably, in a context of gender inequality, draws the focus to Roma women. Women participants on the MOBI programme are often mothers with two to six children, struggling to meet the basic needs of their families. Their lives are particularly difficult because they are completely taken up with this struggle as well as carrying out familial responsibilities in the most difficult circumstances.

The women among beneficiaries have a cultural background with a strong tradition, which gives great value to extended families. This limits the space women have to think about themselves as individual women as well with the emphasis placed on their roles as mothers and wives. They rarely have free time from their children. Education is not seen as a possible priority. The project has a multiplier-effect on women and enables them to address these issues.

The project workers assist these women to find childcare and school places for their children. This makes it possible for the women to secure the time they need to learn German and eventually to learn skills needed for an occupation. Once the essentials are met, the women are freer to reflect on their own needs and their own situation of gender inequality and to identify and seek the supports they themselves require.

A significant and particular problem for Roma women has been access to health insurance which is at issue when giving birth. The women face problems when German hospitals do not accept their foreign health insurance due to the difficulties in receiving reimbursement. As a result, they were being charged high private-rate medical bills that they could not afford. This was having a significantly negative impact. MOBI’s advocacy and counselling has supported Roma women in navigating the German health care system. Counselling has helped the women find the resources they need in these difficult situations.

The project fosters independence for Roma women by improving their access to education, housing, health insurance, financial security and support for basic rights. It facilitates the reconciliation of work and family by supporting families in the search for public, affordable and quality childcare and schools for their children. The project supports women in taking an active role in decision-making and when necessary, counsellors address issues around violence against women.

Women who are in the programme over a longer time often deepen a desire for more education. They also express their wish for their children to do better than they have done, realising that low levels of education, for example, the inability to read or write, has inhibited their advancement. They can begin to re-think cultural gender-roles. This is a process that takes time and needs support.

Over 500 families assisted in 2015

The MOBI project has developed in recent years from a grass roots movement to help newly arrived Roma families in Berlin to become an established and organised EU funded program with more developed structures. The project is an integral part of the larger Berlin framework that facilitates the integration of Roma migrants. It has integrated various counselling supports and connected Berlin municipality responsibilities together to better address poverty issues. There has been more dialogue between the separate entities of the sections of Berlin government to better assist these migrant families. This has been a slow process of rights advocacy and integration of support for families who have very basic needs.

The project has become well-known in the community, so that the project is often an initial orientation point for migrant families. Over 500 families were assisted in 2015, mostly families with children. This involved about 3,300 activities in counselling and services.

The core achievement in terms of gender equality has been the provision of support for Roma women who have recently arrived in Berlin. The support has been in the form of information about housing, health, education, visas and family law. Project workers have been instrumental in finding schools, and kindergarten and nursery school places for the children. They have counselled women in developing longer term education goals for themselves and in exploring employment opportunities. The opportunity to build their own career and to secure economic independence has been opened up. Women participants not only benefit from integration but also from social inclusion.

A number of very practical outcomes can be noted. Many women participants who never went to school and were illiterate have got the chance to start courses, offered from cooperation partners of the project, where they can learn how to read and write. The project has assisted women to have healthcare and support during maternity. The project cooperation partners also give them support, when required, helping them taking care of their children (*Familienhilfe*).

Making it all work

The main obstacles to success for the project were fighting institutional and structural discrimination. Achievements in gender equality take time and require specific support within the Roma community.

It was often difficult to streamline services so that all those seeking to provide assistance were also working together. The social services of the different municipalities might not be working together or communicating with each other about their goals and procedures. Competition for funding between not-for-profit organisations also inhibited communication and cooperation. With many actors involved, there are different goals and approaches, so that uneven and inconsistent counselling can often be the result.

The outstanding success factors for the project have been the political support it has received from sides, the strong networks it has been part of, the cooperation partners it has secured, the well-trained and skilled staff it has available, and the structural and financial security achieved. The explicit institutional gender

equality framework it was able to deploy was central in achieving outcomes for women from the work.

Project structure and transparency have been important. It has allowed all those involved in the services to be consistent and to provide standard counselling and information for participants. Intercultural competence of staff has been extremely important.

A young woman looks ahead to her future

Camelia moved to Berlin in 2014 with her son. Her father helped her get an apartment and register at the state offices. However, the health insurance company and the employment offices did not accept her applications and a middleman did not forward her rent payments to her landlord. After the birth of her daughter in 2015, Camelia discovered the mobile drop-in centre project through the local Berlin health service offices.

The project was able to assist Camelia by making calls to the health insurance company and insisted on Camelia's rights. Eventually the company accepted her application. The project workers intervened at the employment office and helped her to gather the paperwork she needed to get her cleaning job approved. With the help of a lawyer, she was able to stay in her apartment for another three months, so she had time to find a place at a homeless shelter. Project workers plans to accompany Camelia as she looks for an apartment, a kindergarten place for her children and language classes.

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<http://www.caritas-berlin.de/beratungundhilfe/berlin/migration/beratung-und-bildung-fuer-roma>

2015 statistical summary of the project in German

http://www.caritas-berlin.de/cms/contents/dicvberlin.caritas.d/bilder-pdf-medien/pdf-dateien/report-mobile-anlauf/report_mobile_anlaufstelle.pdf?d=a&f=pdf

Informational brochure in Romanian and Bulgarian

http://www.caritas-berlin.de/cms/contents/dicvberlin.caritas.d/bilder-pdf-medien/pdf-dateien/mobile-anlaufstelle/mobi.berlin_klientenflyer1.pdf?d=a&f=pdf

General informational brochure in German

http://www.caritas-berlin.de/cms/contents/dicvberlin.caritas.d/bilder-pdf-medien/pdf-dateien/mobile-anlaufstelle1/mobi.berlin_behoerdenflyerweg.pdf?d=a&f=pdf