

Romalitico

ROMA POLICY ANALYSIS

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023

#TrustTheProcess

JANUARY 2024

FOREWORD BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends, colleagues, and partners,

The year 2023 has been a transformative period for Romalitico. We continued to walk the path of commitment, guided by the voices, challenges, and aspirations of the Roma community. It is with great pride and humility that I present this annual narrative report, reflecting the dedication of our team and the strength of our partnerships.

This year was defined by dynamic engagement on multiple levels—from the streets of local communities to the halls of national policy-making. We influenced strategic reforms, enhanced participation in governance, and delivered impactful services to thousands of Roma individuals. Our legal aid team resolved complex cases of documentation and housing, our facilitators connected people to jobs, and our advocacy team ensured Roma perspectives shaped municipal planning.

Romalitico's capacity to create structural change lies in its rootedness. We don't speak on behalf of the Roma community—we support them to speak, lead, and co-create a more equitable society. With tools like the Romalitico Barometer, the Roma Index, and our podcast platform, we are redefining how Roma voices are heard.

In 2024, we aim to regionalize our impact. We will stand firm on our mission: to advance participation, equity, and Roma-led solutions.

To everyone who shared this journey—thank you. Let's continue to build, challenge, and inspire.

Sincerely,
Elvis Shakjiri
Executive Director

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- 2,855 legal interventions: These included support for civil documentation, housing disputes, and access to social services. Romalitico's legal monitors ensured timely response and resolution for vulnerable Roma individuals and families.
- 169 Roma employed: Through partnerships with private companies and active job-matching, these placements were achieved in sectors such as services, construction, and caregiving.
- 116 microgrants awarded: Grants supported Roma entrepreneurs in starting or expanding businesses in retail, agriculture, crafts, and services.
- 98 education completions: This number includes youth who completed secondary school and adults who graduated from primary education programs supported by Romalitico.
- 25 community actions: Local initiatives addressed infrastructure, lighting, road paving, and water access, directly improving daily life in Roma neighborhoods.
- 36 budget proposals adopted: Developed jointly with community members and submitted to municipalities, these proposals led to 20.3 million MKD in budgeted Roma-related programs.
- 9 Roma Index issues: These editions featured Roma success stories, advocacy campaigns, and analysis on discrimination and policy gaps.
- 1.8M+ media views: Achieved across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TV, and print media, increasing Roma visibility and countering stereotypes.
- 80+ events: Including community forums, public campaigns, exhibitions, and roundtables with national and international stakeholders.
- 13 self-led actions: Initiatives led by local coordinators and community groups—crowdfunded and supported by diaspora and alumni networks.
- 97 adults completed primary school: Enabling them to pursue further education or employment, breaking intergenerational cycles of exclusion.

Introduction

Romalitico worked in over twenty municipalities, combining grassroots mobilization and policy advocacy to tackle exclusion in areas such as documentation, housing, education, and employment. Our approach prioritized systemic change, equity, and local leadership.

Mission and Vision

Romalitico's mission is to promote a dynamic society through analysis, evidence-based research, and advocacy to influence public policies, power relations, and the allocation of resources for Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia and Europe.

Romalitico's vision is to challenge the status quo and advance the position of Roma in Europe.



Legal Aid and Documentation

Romalitico resolved 2,855 legal cases, supporting undocumented Roma, resolving housing legality, and facilitating access to public services. Amendments to laws on residence and personal ID were secured, directly benefiting over 400 individuals.

Romalitico's legal support remained a cornerstone of its 2023 interventions. Beyond resolving 2,855 individual cases, legal monitors provided in-depth support to Roma families without personal documentation, ensuring access to education, healthcare, and social protection. The work also included strategic litigation in housing and anti-discrimination cases. The team conducted legal education workshops in 10 municipalities and published a legal guidance toolkit distributed to community centers and CSOs

Economic Empowerment and Employment

116 Roma entrepreneurs received microgrants and 169 individuals gained employment with private companies. Over 500 Roma were informed about job measures, while 267 completed education programs, and 65 joined vocational training.

The economic empowerment portfolio was designed to address the structural barriers Roma face in accessing the labor market. In addition to the 116 microgrants provided, Romalitico delivered financial literacy and business development training to over 80 Roma entrepreneurs. The employment facilitators maintained active partnerships with over 30 companies, organizing four local job fairs and employer roundtables in Kumanovo, Bitola, Tetovo, and Shuto Orizari. A mentorship program for women-led businesses was also piloted, pairing 12 entrepreneurs with professional mentors from the diaspora.

Community-Led Local Actions

In 2023, a total of 25 infrastructure projects were implemented across 17 municipalities, significantly improving public lighting, road access, and water supply systems. These interventions directly enhanced the living conditions of more than 10,000 residents in Roma communities. Notably, 13 of these local actions were successfully executed independently by local coordinators, demonstrating a strong model of community-led development. These efforts were supported through innovative resource mobilization strategies, including diaspora engagement, collaboration with socially responsible businesses, and volunteerism from Roma alumni. Crowdfunding mechanisms also played a key role, reflecting increased ownership and sustainability of community initiatives.

ROMACTED II and Local Governance

Through 15 working groups, Romalitico promoted inclusive governance. 14 Local Action Plans were adopted, focusing on housing, health, education, and sanitation. Roma youth and women played key roles in decision-making at the municipal level.

The ROMACTED II program, co-implemented with the Council of Europe and the EU, provided the structural framework for Roma civic participation in municipal planning. Each of the 15 municipalities supported under this program established Institutional Working Groups (IWGs) and Community Action Groups (CAGs), comprising over 300 active members. These groups held more than 80 coordination meetings throughout 2023, where priorities such as street lighting, health access, returnee reintegration, and education enrollment were identified and translated into municipal plans. Thanks to Romalitico's facilitation, 14 Local Action Plans were revised to reflect Roma community needs, while five municipalities adopted Roma-sensitive budget lines. Capacity-building sessions for public officials were held in Bitola, Veles, and Shuto Orizari to improve inclusive governance practices. Additionally, Roma youth participated as observers in local council sessions, helping shape participatory models of democracy.

Public Campaigns and Events

Key campaigns were held for April 8, August 2, and the International Day of the Girl. Exhibitions, forums, and protests raised awareness and celebrated Roma identity. Notable campaigns promoted girls' leadership and women's safety.

Romalitico organized over 25 highly visible events in 2023. In addition to symbolic dates, campaigns like 'Voices of Roma Girls' and 'Roma Women Lead' gained significant traction. These campaigns combined storytelling with advocacy and community organizing, and featured short films, digital profiles, and interactive workshops. A traveling exhibition highlighted Roma culture and was hosted in Skopje, Shtip, and Veles. The International Day of the Girl involved partnerships with schools and women-led CSOs to engage over 200 students in leadership and equality discussions.

Media Engagement and Roma Index

In 2023, Romalitico significantly enhanced its public visibility and media presence across North Macedonia. Three editions of the Roma Index magazine were published, providing in-depth insights into Roma issues and initiatives. The organization conducted 12 impactful interviews, amplifying Roma voices and perspectives. Romalitico's activities reached a broad audience online, garnering over 1.6 million views on social media platforms.

Additionally, their work was featured on 72 different web portals, further increasing awareness and engagement. Romalitico representatives were also invited as guests on 12 national television programs, solidifying the organization's role as a leading voice in Roma advocacy and public discourse.

Women's Empowerment and Roma Girls

Through workshops, forums, and leadership questionnaires, 20 Roma women became mentors. Campaigns engaged 11 Roma girls, and infographics raised awareness on gender-based violence. 80 women joined the international Roma conference in Skopje.

The organization made significant strides in centering the leadership of Roma women and girls. In addition to mentorship sessions and school-based campaigns, Romalitico developed a Roma Women Leadership Toolkit to help women advocate in local policy spaces. The toolkit was piloted in five municipalities, reaching over 150 women. In Shuto Orizari and Kichevo, Roma women lobbied successfully for inclusion of women's health services in municipal budgets. A social media campaign for March 8 featured video profiles of 10 Roma women leaders, generating over 45,000 views. Furthermore, Romalitico hosted a roundtable on gender-based violence prevention, in partnership with local crisis centers and the Ombudsman's Office.

Policy Advocacy and Influence

Romalitico submitted 86 proposals to municipalities and achieved 36 adoptions worth 20.3 million MKD. Key laws on documentation and civil registration were reformed, thanks to sustained advocacy with MPs and media pressure.

Through its advocacy work, Romalitico continued to influence national and municipal-level reform. Its participation in the working groups for the new Law on Civil Registration and amendments to the Law on Local Government Budgeting helped integrate Roma-specific provisions. In addition, Romalitico collaborated with MPs and journalists to raise awareness on statelessness and unequal access to social programs. The organization also published policy briefs and analyses used by EU delegations and development agencies to guide Roma inclusion programming.

Partnerships

Collaborations expanded with UNHCR, OSCE, Ombudsman, and civil society groups. Roma legal cases were addressed with All for Fair Trials, and strategic links were strengthened with ministries and journalists for accountability and visibility.

Capacity Building and Trainings

Over 37 field coordinators were trained in policy, activism, and community organizing. Trainings supported project staff and CSOs in areas like fundraising, legal frameworks, and gender-responsive leadership.

Green Initiatives and Environmental Focus

Roma Green Mahalas promoted clean-ups, green spaces, and sustainability. Four self-led actions tackled environmental hazards, demonstrating growing capacity for community-led green transitions.

With increasing attention on environmental justice, Romalitico expanded its support to Roma communities facing ecological degradation. The Roma Green Mahalas initiative mobilized community members in four municipalities to conduct waste clean-ups, plant trees, and advocate for municipal waste management plans. Over 300 individuals participated in clean-up actions, and workshops were held on environmental health and the Roma right to a clean and safe living environment. In Tetovo and Kumanovo, youth volunteers created environmental murals and educational signage in public spaces. These efforts were linked to Romalitico's broader advocacy on green transition inclusion, which now forms a key part of the organization's regional focus for 2024.

> 2023 proved Romalitico's strength in delivering inclusive solutions and empowering Roma voices. With a growing regional vision, the organization is set to expand its footprint while staying deeply rooted in community needs.

QUESTIONS?
CONTACT US.

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