

**Publishable Summary of the Project**

Roma social inclusion is of utmost importance for Romanian society. Although there are no reliable figures regarding the percentage of Roma people, it can be estimated that this group amounts to more than 10% of the population of the country, and due to the demographic developments, this quota will increase considerably. The current situation is the result of a long history of exclusion that even includes slavery. This history and practice of exclusion is hard to perceive and has not been properly dealt with yet by most of the Romanian population, even if it still has a strong impact on the relationship between the majority population and the minority Roma groups. The Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth: ROC) has played and continues to play an important role in this context. Up to mid-19th century, slavery was accepted as normal in society, including in ecclesiastical context. Orthodox monasteries owned, received and sold Roma families who worked on their land. While the ROC has yet to deal with this legacy, it is, at the same time, endowed with a huge potential for social change. Religious attitudes, beliefs and traditions play an important role in Romanian society. More than 80% of the population declare themselves orthodox believers. As the church represents a huge majority of the population and has a considerable influence on beliefs and practices, the ROC is a potentially major actor in Romanian civil society. In Norway, migration of people from Romania, including Roma people, is a visible phenomenon with a permanent potential for conflicts. On this backdrop, several Norwegian and Nordic research and social projects have already focused on the situation of Romanian migrants, who are visible in the streets of Nordic cities. Most projects focus on socio-economic conditions, but the role of the ROC in Roma in/exclusion has so far not been addressed. The project will initiate, stimulate and sustain Romanian and Norwegian research about the inclusion of the Roma population by focusing on the potential role of the ROC in relation to the in/exclusion of Roma people. To date, the role of the ROC regarding the exclusion of the Roma people throughout history has not yet been sufficiently studied. The project will contribute to the study of a presumably difficult history, contributing thus to a historical reappraisal of the Roma community in its relation to ROC that has a potential to encourage new good practices. The project will also focus on local case studies of interaction between Roma and the ROC, which will be addressed through participatory approach, both in research methodology and through initiating new practices locally, in concrete contexts. This methodology is known in social work in Romania, but not yet applied and studied in the context of church-related initiatives. Common training seminars in participatory research together with the Norwegian partner institution are a decisive part of the project. The project will thus develop Romanian and Norwegian expertise in methodology with a potential to impact research in social sciences and theology, but also local level inclusion work of Roma people, both in the religious and the secular field. As main religious actor in Romania, the ROC is essential in understanding the mindset of the Romanian majority population with regards to the Roma. By using this role more consciously the ROC has also a huge potential to contribute to the establishment of inclusive practices in the everyday life of people in Romania. The third major contribution of the project is thus to strengthen the theological reflection about the social role of the ROC in general, and for Roma social inclusion in particular. The theological reflections include seminars with orthodox priest, as key persons for changes in the ROC, and development work with local orthodox parishes. The aim is hence to start processes that will continue after the end of the project.