

CERV Funding Journey: Reflections from the Deaconess Foundation's RomniMe Project



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Foundation

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Deaconess Foundation

The Deaconess Foundation works for human dignity. As a non-profit foundation group, we build a more just society. Profits from our operations go to supporting those in the most vulnerable situations. People are always at the center of everything we do. Read more: www.hdl.fi/en/

NON-PROFIT OPERATIONS

For those in the most vulnerable position, when distress and shame are strongest, and the experience of human dignity wavers.

158 Years



VALUES

Human dignity
Love for neighbour
Sustainability

VALUE-BASED BUSINESS

We provide effective social welfare and health services for people in need of special support.



Rinnekodeit

We train health and social care professionals at the Diakonia College of Finland and the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.



3400
employees

We operate nationally and internationally



We promote diversity

Staff wellbeing **4,1/5**

Customer satisfaction **NPS 58**



14

wellbeing services counties

Operating income **283** million



Investments in good **6,9** million





Deaconess
Foundation

Our vision:
A life of dignity
for all

Our values pledge:

We build welcoming communities that
strengthen trust, inclusion and agency.

**Strategic
priorities:**

Bold renewer

Expertise of special groups

Welcoming community

Our values:

Human dignity
Love for neighbour
Sustainability

**Strategy
2025–2027**



Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment (RomniMe) Project

15.5.2024-14.5.2026

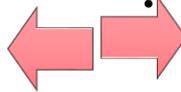
Call for proposals CERV-2023-EQUAL, Call for proposals to promote equality and to fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination

Project budget: 309,403



Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment (RomniMe) Project

- **Work package WP1 – Project management and coordination**
 - **Work package WP2 – Community**
 - **Work package WP3 – Mentors**
 - **Work package WP4 – Impact**
- The project "Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment" (RomniME) targets at improving lives of young Roma women. The project tests an innovative methodology for opening professional and life prospects to young Roma women.
 - By developing and testing models of mentorship, personal example, and community work together with young Roma girls and Roma organizations, their sense of capability, skills, and participation are strengthened.
 - Encounters between Roma and non-Roma mentors, along with the developed mentorship program, foster a culture of solidarity that helps combat anti-Roma attitudes.



Extracts from the Projects 'Evaluation Letter

Total score: 90.00 (Threshold: 70)

- *The proposal is closely aligned with the priorities of the Call by focusing on combating discrimination and other forms of intolerance, particularly anti-Roma sentiment. It has a strong gender perspective by focusing on supporting and helping young Roma women.*
- *Gender equality is the main objective of intervention and fundamental to its design and expected results. The intervention would not have been undertaken without this gender equality objective. The gender equality perspective is taken into account appropriately in the design of the intervention.*
- *Highly innovative and well-conceived proposal addressing a need documented by ample evidence. Despite the relatively small number of directly involved participants, the overall impact is much higher due to the well-designed multiplier effect, networks and dissemination.*
- *Experimental project work is sustained by internal on-going impacts evaluation.*
- *Budget size is appropriate.*
- *The needs assessment is robust, and detailed and includes relevant country-specific data, providing a solid background for the intervention.*
- *The target group are clearly defined in terms of background, age and gender as well as contexts and countries in which they are located in. The applicants provide a good explanation of how target groups will be selected to participate. The proposal demonstrates a solid way to engage the women who could benefit most from the intervention.*
- *The proposal presents a clear and innovative contribution to implementing relevant EU strategic and legislative context.*
- *The consortium is composed of organisations with a relevant track record and field experience. The consortium*
- *members and their staff clearly possess the relevant experience, skills and capacity to implement the project.*



Extracts from the Projects 'Evaluation Letter

- *The risk management approach is only partially developed. The proposal outlines only four risks, mostly related to project management, and does not account for other relevant risks. Monitoring and evaluation are less detailed and while it includes the main components of the approach (developing quality assurance tool, quantitative and qualitative evaluation) it is not sufficiently specific.*
- *The indicators are limited.*
- *Transnational dimension is present, but a stronger European scope and impact would be beneficial.*
- *Some deliverables are missing and/or descriptions are incomplete. Clarifications shall be asked before signing the grant agreement.*
- *The project demonstrates a good capacity to contribute towards the transfer of good practices. However, the cross-border element, due to the language barrier, is less visible and pronounced.*
- *The dissemination and communication strategy is not fully developed and lacks sufficient detail and key components. While the proposal includes a brief*
- *description of communication channels (social media, articles, videos), it does not specify the key messages, nor does it differentiate between different audiences for the communication. Limited information is provided on how the project can reach audiences, especially on the EU level, beyond the main partners and participants.*



Go ahead and apply—new organizations are always encouraged to participate in CERV and other EU programmes

We are happy to explore new partnerships 😊 please be in touch!



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Reflections on the Application Phase

Begin partner search well in advance

- *Ideally more than 3 months before the deadline to allow time for alignment and preparation.*
- *Umbrella organizations, the partners of partners.*
- *The partners should complement each other and have strengths which relate to the workpackages.*

It's important to acknowledge that partners may contribute at different levels during the application process, depending on their available resources and prior experience.

- *Some prefer a hands-on, participatory approach throughout.*
- *Others may rely more heavily on the coordinator, offering valuable content and context but participating less in review and feedback rounds.*
- *Recognizing and respecting these differences helps build a more realistic and collaborative workflow*

Establish regular communication during project preparation. Agree on communication routines and ensure transparency if plans change or delays occur.



Reflections on the Application Phase

Study the call document thoroughly

- *Ensure all partners understand the priorities—different organizations may interpret CERV programme goals differently.*

Clarify and negotiate the budget early

- *CERV programmes may use lump sum, real-cost, or mixed budget frameworks.*
- *Schedule individual budget meetings with each partner to ensure clarity and agreement.*
- *In terms of co-funding, there are various options. In many CERV calls, a fixed co-funding amount is not required—organizations can contribute what they are able to, including human resources. Volunteer work is also accepted as co-financing in many cases.*
- *The implementing environment can be quite different in partner countries, which means that e.g. the numbers of participants can vary (i.e. the size of Roma communities in Finland compared to partner countries)*



Reflections on the Application Phase

Review previously funded projects

- *Analyze past projects to understand relevance, scale, and budget expectations.*

Attend info sessions and consult National Contact Points.

The EU portal.

If possible, include a small-scale needs analysis survey during project preparation to support participatory planning.

Read the application together before submission

- *Arrange a joint review session with all partners to ensure consistency and shared ownership.*



Receiving the Funding Decisions

- The positive decision was received on 20.12. The grant agreement was signed on 28.5. The Commission required that we clarify and strengthen some of the indicators and the risk matrix. When we had received the decision of the granted project, the schedule from the EU was short in making the corrections the EU requested.

>Indicators used by European institutions > European Union Gender Equality Index. > “In developing and implementing the project's internal monitoring and evaluation system, we draw on EIGE’s recommendations and expertise.”

- Obtaining legal representative status in the EU portal took time. Partner contracts > It is important to have such ready templates.



The Implementation phase

- Funding vs. Workload: In EU-CERV projects, the level of funding sometimes does not align with the workload required of the consortium or coordinator. To secure funding, applicants must commit to ambitious goals, which can be challenging to implement. A clear and detailed implementation plan is essential for managing expectations and delivering results.
- Commission's Stance on Changes: The European Commission typically does not approve changes that reduce project targets or expected impact. Maintaining the original scope and ambition is crucial.
- Final Conferences: Attracting a large number of participants to final conferences can be difficult. Hybrid formats tend to be the most practical and inclusive solution.



The Implementation phase

- Collaboration Among Partners: It is vital that project partners support one another in achieving the overall objectives. Strong collaboration enhances the likelihood of success.
- The partners might have different ideas about the social posting frequency
- Overcommitting to frequent social media posts may not necessarily lead to greater impact. It's worth evaluating whether high-volume posting truly contributes to visibility and engagement.
- Platform Restrictions :Our organization does not allow the use of TikTok, although some partners consider it a key communication channel. This difference in platform policy should be addressed collaboratively to ensure consistent messaging.



**Thank you. We look
forward to staying in
contact.**

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**Boldly
working for
human
dignity**

