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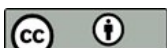
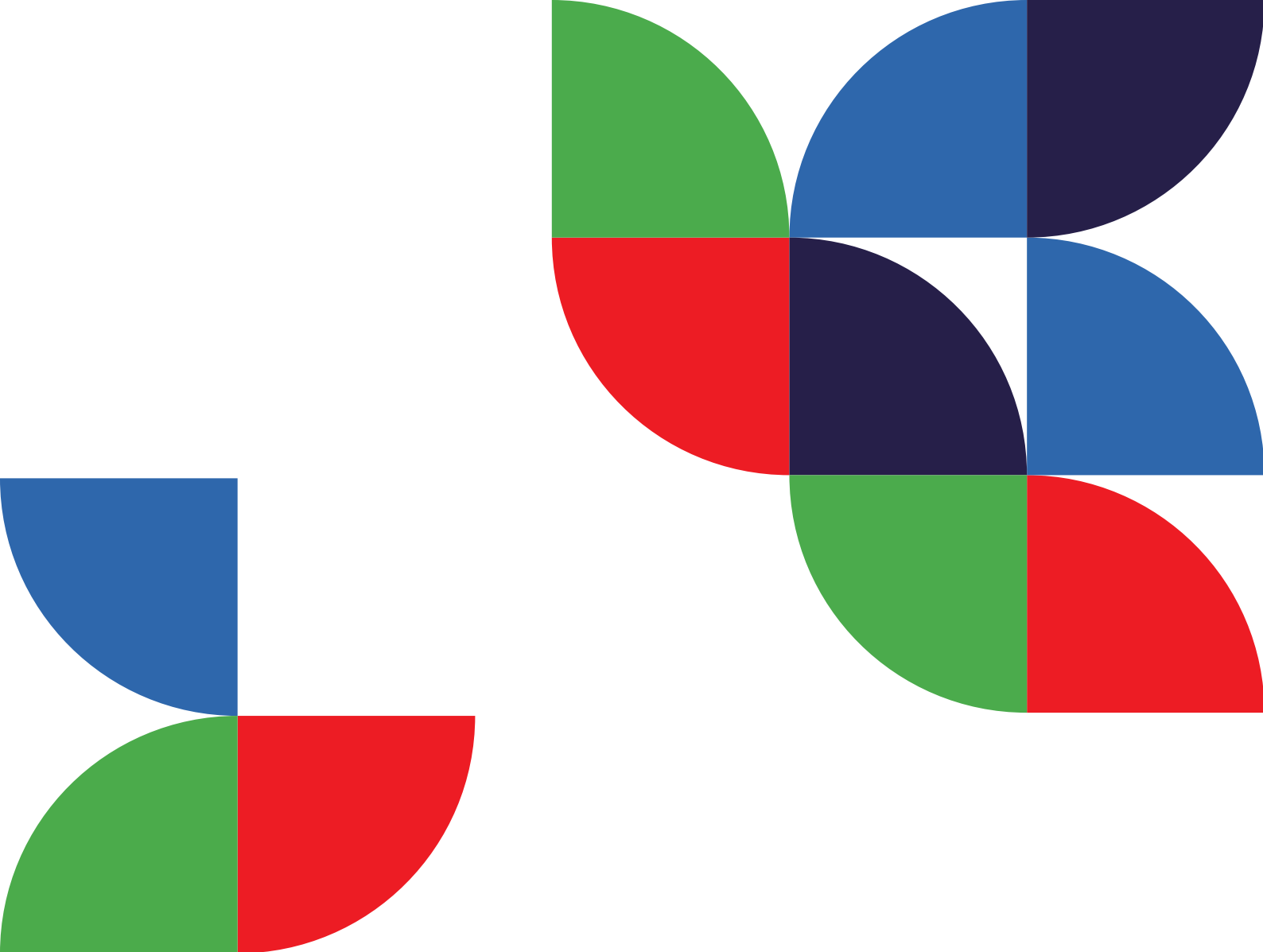


2023
EU award for

ROMA INTEGRATION

in the Western
Balkans
and Türkiye





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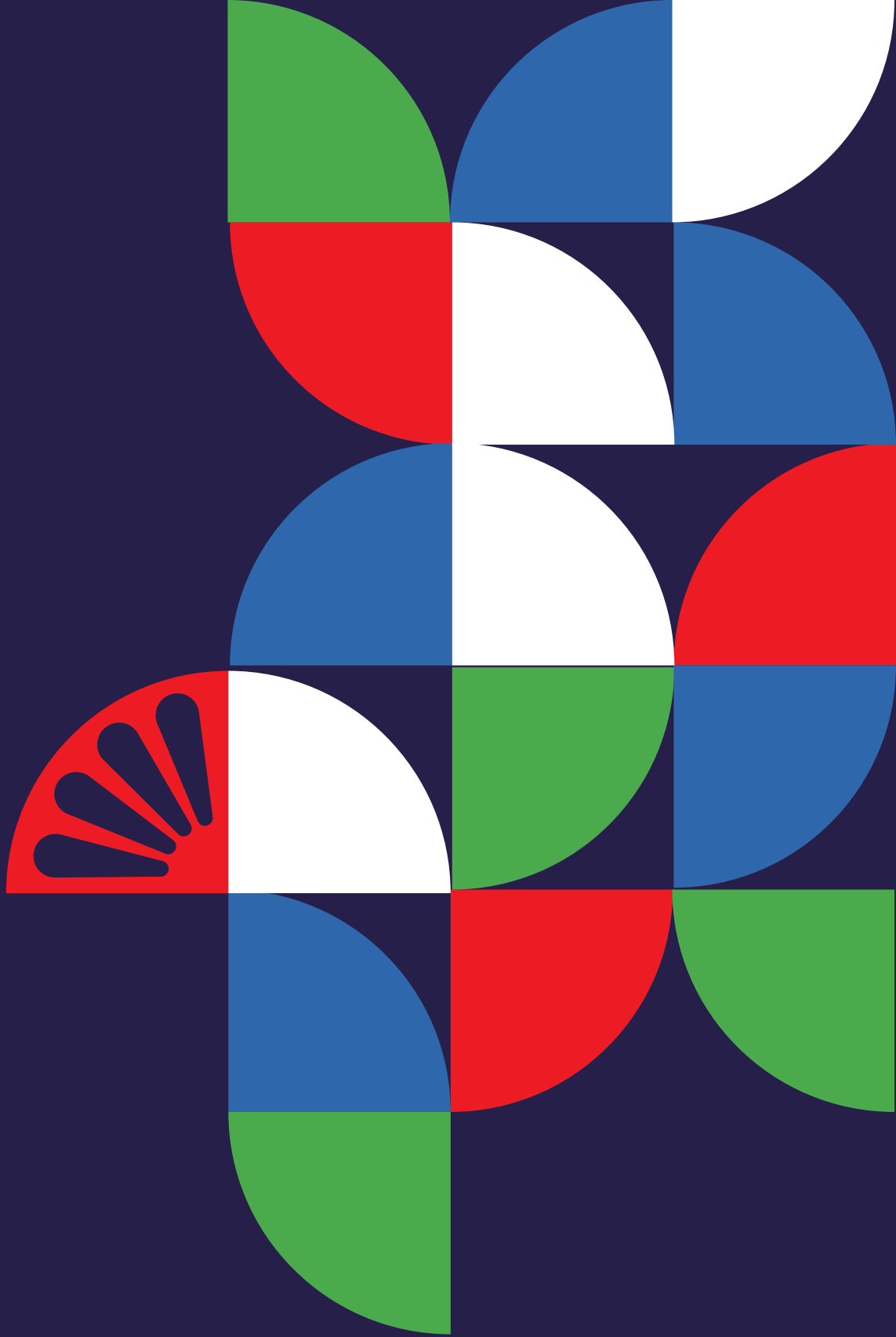
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Contents

Foreword	5
Roma Gate for Integration	6
Roma Versitas Albania	8
College of Tourism and Management Konjic	10
Nedžad Jusić	12
Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination, Office of the Prime Minister	14
Organisation for Socio-Economic Stability	16
Help	18
Walk with us – Phiren Amenca	20
REDI Recycling	22
Romalitico	24
Forum Roma Serbia	26
REDI Serbia	28
Hemra Nida Köse	30
Roma Youth Education Culture and Solidarity Association	32





Foreword

Olivér Várhelyi

European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations



The European Union is going through a significant green and digital transformation. However, this transition will only be effective, just, and fair when it involves all members of our society, especially minorities. With a substantial 10-12 million population, Europe's largest ethnic minority community, the Roma people, must be integral part to the rapidly evolving green and digital economy transition.

The European Commission has been supporting the Roma community for a long time, making significant strides in improving their general situation. In the Western Balkans and Türkiye alone, the EU invested €162 million under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II to fund Roma inclusion, and we are committed to continuing our support under IPA III, where a substantial amount of assistance, both regional and bilateral, is foreseen. However, our journey is far from over. While we still support the Roma community to provide them equal access to education, employment, healthcare, housing, and civil documentation, we also need to help them adopting to new technologies

such as green and digital. To succeed in both objectives, we must work together on all levels with the Roma civil society, governments, and international organizations to ensure that no Roma is left behind.

I am honoured to present the winners of this year's "EU Award for Roma integration in the Western Balkans and Türkiye promoting the Roma inclusion dimension in the Digital Agenda and Green Economy." Your perseverance and dedication to lifting your communities have been genuinely inspiring. Your actions and achievements show that Roma people can be valuable in transitioning to a green and digital economy. This year's winners send a powerful message that people from all backgrounds can contribute to real and lasting change; that is a lesson we can all take.

Congratulations to all the winners for your excellent work!



Roma Gate for Integration

Albania

Roma Gate for Integration has been actively working with vulnerable Roma communities in Fushë-Krujë, supporting them to achieve integration in the social, cultural, economic and educational aspects of Albanian life. This includes helping Roma people to increase their digital capacities and empowering Roma women to enter the job market.

Through one of its projects, the organisation increased the digital skills of 60 Roma people from the ages of 17 to 50. The training was combined with information about the government portal e-Albania and how to use it.

Roma women and girls are especially vulnerable and marginalised in Albania. This is why, Roma Gate for Integration organised vocational training programmes to empower women to find work. As a result, several Roma women found jobs in tailoring, hairdressing and selling second hand clothes, while others received help with business plans and materials to support them in their career goals. Social protection schemes provided women and girls advice on family decision-making, domestic violence, mother-daughter relationships, early marriages and school dropout.

Looking ahead, Roma Gate for Integration will continue to support Roma people through its initiatives, protecting their rights and freedoms, ensuring equal opportunities for employment, and empowering Roma women.

Find out more at portaromeperintegrim.wordpress.com



"Our main achievement is to see Roma children integrated into public schools, as opposed to when we started, when they were part of a ghetto school."

Fatmira DAJLANI





Roma Versitas Albania

Albania

In 2016, Roma Versitas Albania (RVA) was founded to provide Roma students educational opportunities through scholarships, mentoring, tutoring, and soft skills and digital literacy development. RVA's mission is to empower Roma students to combat online hate speech and increase their digital competencies in today's growing digital age.

RVA has supported 450 Roma and Egyptian students with non-formal education programmes – of which over 70 students were supported during the COVID-19 pandemic through equipment and internet subscription.

From 2018 to 2023, RVA regularly offered training to Roma students from vocational schools to increase digital competencies. It provided over 80 young Roma with training on job search, job application and soft-skill development.

Over the last year, RVA has encouraged entrepreneurship in the green economy space, organising a series of study visits to Roma and non-Roma start-ups. Overall, 30 young Roma were interested in self-employment because of these visits. RVA hopes that these activities motivate and empower young Roma to embrace a green economy perspective in their future career goals.

Going forward, the organisation has plans to support small initiatives undertaken by young Roma. It also wants to establish a digital hub that offers tutorials and lectures on digital skills and online marketing.

Find out more at romaversitasalbania.org





"Seeing an increased number of graduates in Albania, former students engaged in Roma Versitas Albania, into job positions in other organisations, local institutions, international organisations, including management positions, is our greatest achievement and pleasure."

Emiliano ALIU

College of Tourism and Management Konjic

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Only a small percentage of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Roma women in particular) graduate from higher education. The reason for this is often lack of funds and low awareness about the benefits of higher education.

To address this issue, in 2021 the College of Tourism and Management in Konjic became the first higher education institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina to offer free education to Roma people with a special focus on women. The College removes barriers by providing free books, classes and mentoring.

The College uses digital education so that Roma students can follow education from home. Through this method, they develop their academic skills and expand their digital competencies, which makes them even more competitive on the labour market. The digital skills they acquire give them more confidence to apply for a wider variety of jobs, including non-governmental organisations and administrative bodies. The College has already had two cohorts of women (Roma and non-Roma) enrol in 2021 and 2022.

The College plans to create a database on the educational, social and age structure of Roma women to further expand its activities. By continuing to make education accessible in these marginalised communities, the College hopes to break stereotypes about them.

Find out more at vstim-konjic.ba



"The first step was to approach the Roma people, we reached out to them, and explained to them why it is important to get an education. Today, they speak in public, they transfer the knowledge they acquire at the university to their communities."

Marijana ŠEĆIBOVIĆ





Nedžad Jusić

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Nedžad Jusic has been working for many years to improve the access of Roma people to education and employment. He has been a prolific political and social activist, fighting against systemic unemployment of Roma people lacking equal access to education.

Much of his work has been with the Association of Roma 'Euro Rom', a non-governmental organisation in Tuzla, which works to improve Roma people's living standards and help them integrate into the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2004, the association's activities have benefited around 50 000 people.

In particular, Nedžad has created local and state-level policies for Roma employment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his initiatives facilitated access to online education and remote learning technologies for 375 students. They helped improve digital skills among students and their parents, and even contributed to the development of business plans.

Nedžad has also helped organise workshops for cities and municipalities to address discrimination against Roma and promote sensitive budgeting. Some 235 participants attended the workshops, including over 100 Roma.

Thanks in no small part to Nedžad's actions, school graduation rates among Roma pupils have reached 100%, and his efforts to bring Roma people into formal education have laid strong, long-term foundations for Roma employment.

Find out more on Facebook: [Udruženje Roma 'Euro Rom' Tuzla](#)





"I mediated the employment of about 150 Roma, both in the private and public sectors. I provided support for 37 Roma throughout the creation of business plans, so now we have 18 Roma who are actively engaged in this business."

Nedžad JUSIĆ

Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination, Office of the Prime Minister

Kosovo*

The Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination within the Office of the Prime Minister in Kosovo is focused on advocating for human rights and equality, with a specific emphasis on the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. It encourages the participation of these groups in the green agenda of Kosovo, especially young people and women.

The Office has contributed to various government policies, including the new Action Plan for the Inclusion of the Roma and Ashkali Communities, a mechanism to promote employment of these communities, and a recommendatory policy for their employment in education. In 2022, it launched a digital platform for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian citizens to report discrimination and antigypsyism. In just seven months, the platform had over 503 views, and 14 cases were reported.

In the future, the Office will work on joint digital projects and develop IT academies with the participation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian youth. It also plans to further engage Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian women in greening areas where their communities live, helping to increase their awareness of the benefits of a healthy environment.

Find out more at raportodiskriminimin.org

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999n and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



"We created a Romani language library. It is the first of its kind in Europe and Balkan countries, a library build within the Government Building, all in Romani language."

Habit HAJREDINI



Organisation for Socio-Economic Stability

Kosovo

The Organisation for Socio-Economic Stability (OSES) in Kosovo is an organisation that supports the integration of marginalised communities through entrepreneurship. One of OSES's projects, CIRCLE, provides training and grants for young female entrepreneurs aged 18 to 35 from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

The project has so far trained 31 women in business development, digital skills and social media marketing. In addition, they received equipment for the digitalisation of their business, so they could offer services remotely and access the international market. CIRCLE collaborates with local organisations such as the Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, and the Network of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women's Organizations of Kosovo.

Furthermore, CIRCLE conducts outreach activities in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, distributing flyers with information on the training and grants available under the project, and answering questions in-person.

To ensure the sustainability of CIRCLE, OSES plans to further collaborate with local and international organisations to support the growth of businesses in these communities. OSES also recognises the importance of supporting existing Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian-led businesses, and intends to collaborate with them to provide resources, such as marketing support and access to new markets.

Find out more at <https://www.facebook.com/organizataosse/>





"Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities have great talents, they have fantastic idea, and what inspired us the most was an effort to bring their potentials, their work, to the surface, by developing a sense of competition."

Andrra MUSTAFA

Help

Montenegro

Help is an organisation that has implemented 43 projects to improve living conditions for Roma citizens in Montenegro, including providing training sessions on skills to help them access better employment and self-employment opportunities.

Through one of its projects, Help trained 34 Roma mediators to work in social protection, healthcare and employment services in Montenegro. The mediators undertook various activities aimed at empowering Roma youth. This included enhancing their digital skills, hosting workshops to combat online hate speech against the Roma community, facilitating access to digital education, equipping youth with digital devices, connecting them with employment and training opportunities, organising workshops to boost inclusion and employment among Roma women, and offering vocational training. As a result, 21 of these mediators were employed in local services.

In addition, Help provides capacity-building, monitoring, and mentoring of Montenegrin non-governmental organisations. It works with Roma mediators, schools, and local municipalities to promote waste management and recycling, and to empower young Roma citizens with digital skills and better access to higher education. Current Help initiatives include training in green economy and IT skills, and literacy programmes for children and adults.

Going forward, Help will continue to implement projects focused on social and economic empowerment of the Western Balkans region, including the Roma population.

Find out more at help-montenegro.org



"We want to change the narrative that Roma people can only do lower paid jobs. Through all our activities we managed to prove that young Roma people are actually doing great jobs, like all other people."

Biljana JOVIĆEVIĆ





Walk with us – Phiren Amenca

Montenegro

The Roma youth organisation ‘Walk with us – Phiren Amenca’ aims to improve the lives of Roma in Montenegro on all fronts – from housing and education to employment and health. The organisation has acknowledged that digitalisation plays an important role in almost every one of these aspects.

That is why, between December 2020 and May 2022, it ran ‘E-centre Digital Classroom’ – a project co-financed by the EU and the Metamorphosis Foundation. Located in Konik, Montenegro’s biggest Roma community, the digital centre was open for all people – men, women, Roma and non-Roma – raising their employability and further fostering a sense of togetherness and equality.

Over the course of one year, 15 students gained skills in various digital fields not covered by the school curriculum. The digital centre also has an info point where the wider Roma community can learn to access and use e-services. The centre continues to be open, guaranteeing the project’s sustainability.

Going forward, ‘Walk with us – Phiren Amenca’ wants to provide Roma communities across Montenegro with free internet access and equipment. Another one of their goals is to set up permanent courses related to the digital agenda, both for adults and children, focusing on e-services.

Find out more at phirenamenca.me





"Forming Roma people to work digitally at a young age is an advantage that will propel their social inclusion."

Elvis BERISA

REDI Recycling

North Macedonia

There are between 3 000 and 5 000 informal waste collectors in North Macedonia, most of whom are from the Roma community. These people are exposed to health risks and their labour is often exploited. Although they play an essential role in environmental care, they are not recognised and valued as part of the green economy.

The main aim of REDI Recycling is to organise and formalise the activities of informal waste collectors and create a system for waste separation and collection across North Macedonia. As part of its efforts, between 2022 and 2023, the company hired around 20 Roma people, training them to collect and transport non-hazardous waste – the first training of this kind in North Macedonia.

Upskilling and reskilling informal waste collectors is a priority for REDI Recycling. The company has placed 15 waste collectors in internships in green companies (seven of whom were offered employment) and helped 10 others attend driving classes to further expand their job opportunities. REDI Recycling has also made policy recommendations to improve the socio-economic integration of informal waste collectors.

REDI Recycling wants to develop a recycling centre run by Roma waste collectors. Their aim is for the centre to also operate in the neighbouring countries of Serbia and Albania.

Find out more at redi-ngo.eu/recycling



"The participation of the Roma in the EU Green Agenda is a declaration of their decade's contribution to the environment issues and green economy."

Lejla ZEKIROVSKA



Romalitico

North Macedonia

The Institute for Research and Policy Analysis, Romalitico, has worked together with the Agency for Employment of North Macedonia to design employment programmes and measures for 2022 and 2023. One of the main goals of these actions has been to help integrate Roma into the green and digital economy.

So far, Romalitico has informed over 220 Roma about the programmes offered by the Agency of Employment. It has helped 24 Roma entrepreneurs receive a total of €160 000 in grants and trained 12 entrepreneurs in digital marketing. The institute has also helped nearly 100 Roma attend courses for completing their primary education.

In 2022, Romalitico held eight workshops to inform Roma communities about several important web portals – those of the national electricity and water service providers, and the government portal for e-services. It also set up a website where Roma can report human rights violations and have their cases reviewed by grassroots activists. In addition, Romalitico implemented environmental and infrastructure projects, allocating over €24 000 for the Roma communities in nine towns in North Macedonia.

In 2023, Romalitico is planning to train 30 Roma in computer literacy and pilot a programme for training Roma to install solar collectors.

Find out more on Facebook:

[Romalitico - Institute for Research and Policy Analysis](#)





"Altogether we decide whether we embrace the future or we give up on the European dream and the European dream starts from the Roma communities."

Elvis SHAKJIRI

Forum Roma Serbia

Serbia

Forum Roma Serbia (FRS) aims to fill in the digital skill gaps of the Roma community by facilitating access to education and employment. This includes providing training and assistance to Roma families in an online and digital age and supporting Roma employment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of the challenging shift to schooling from home, FRS offered training on how to navigate the online environment and provided families with tablets. This support continued after schools reopened, showing FRS's commitment to empowering Roma families to succeed in the digital era.

In 2022, FRS implemented the 'Education for All' programme to improve access to education and promote digital literacy among the Roma community. The programme was implemented in collaboration with schools., Teaching aids and digital boards were provided. FRS also implemented a programme with secondary raw materials collectors, which aimed to improve the working conditions of Roma employees and reaffirm their role in the green sector.

Moving forward, FRS plans to enhance the role of the Roma community in implementing and benefiting the green economy and digital agenda especially in the areas of employment and education. FRS will continue running employment and training services in the community centres to change the lives of Roma people.

Find out more at frs.org.rs



"Our idea was to address issues of Roma who work, in order to fight against the stereotype that Roma are lazy."

Robert KASUMOVIĆ



REDI Serbia

Serbia

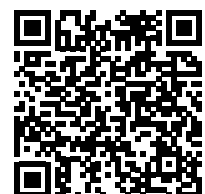
Many Roma-owned businesses went bankrupt during the COVID-19 pandemic because they were unable to sell their products in physical stores. In 2020, the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative Serbia (REDI Serbia) was set up to empower Roma people to upskill and adapt to new business practices. To date, they have assisted over 400 Roma entrepreneurs, leading to growth, sustainability and job preservation.

Last year, REDI Serbia introduced the Roma Digital Boost programme, which developed the entrepreneurial skills of 25 Roma people in digitalisation and green business development. The top 15 were provided with technical equipment and brand identity development. The programme helped formalise Roma business activity in the green and recycling sectors.

They offered over 100 individual mentorship and coaching sessions to support Roma people develop and improve their digital and business skills. Thanks to REDI support, 180 entrepreneurs have registered their businesses and 30 Roma people were employed in various companies and industries.

REDI Serbia will continue promoting Roma entrepreneurship by connecting entrepreneurs with local and national institutions through networking hubs. Moving forward, REDI Serbia plans to help Roma entrepreneurs become familiar with modern technology and green practices to transform into modern, innovative and competitive businesses.

Find out more at redi-ngo.eu





"We developed this project that made it easier for entrepreneurs to transition from the traditional way of doing business to digital online business. That is how they managed to maintain their businesses during COVID-19 pandemic."

Jelena KASUMOVIĆ

Hemra Nida Köse

Türkiye

Hemra Nida Köse is a journalist and civil society advocate. She focuses on promoting accurate representation of Roma civil society in the media and establishing communication channels between Roma and non-Roma people to promote social inclusion.

The journalist uses various channels to report on Roma rights violations, increase the visibility of Roma in the media, and promote the rights and inclusion of Roma women. She also leads communication, visibility and media training, including social media, for Roma grassroots organisations in Türkiye. During the pandemic, she provided digital training for the Roma community in, among other things, using tools like Zoom and the e-government platform.

Hemra Nida has undertaken film and photography work for the Roma Dialogue Network, and implemented communication campaigns for World Roma Day, International Women's Day and the Istanbul Convention. She helped to reform Google's algorithm, which promoted exclusion and stereotyping of Roma people, by implementing image and reputation management.

While continuing to provide media literacy trainings, Hemra Nida plans to create a stock photo website providing realistic and rights-based photographs related to Romani rights and issues, which can be used free of charge. Furthermore, she is planning a programme called Roma Women in the Square, which will encourage Roma women to speak out and participate in local decision-making processes.



"I'm working to make the unseen visible, the voices of the unheard heard, and create an environment for those who don't have a platform to talk about the violations of their rights and the discrimination they are being subjected to through the press."

Hemra NIDA KÖSE





Roma Youth Education Culture and Solidarity Association

Türkiye

The Roma Youth Education Culture and Solidarity Association has helped many local Roma organisations and Roma individuals improve their digital literacy.

One such project is the Digital Education Booklet. As part of this project, the association held training sessions on basic human rights education for Roma youth. The outputs from the sessions were compiled into a booklet that aimed to teach young Roma about their rights, especially in the digital field. These training sessions helped increase participants' self-confidence, improved their ability to defend their rights and, most importantly, widened their perspectives on life.

Another example is the Digital Literacy Training project. In its correspondence with local Roma organisations, the association noticed that many of them lacked the necessary digital literacy to communicate efficiently online and prepare digital documents like reports and petitions. To address this, the association held training sessions for the presidents of 16 local Roma organisations in Izmir. As a result, these organisations now have better communication and collaboration with the municipality.

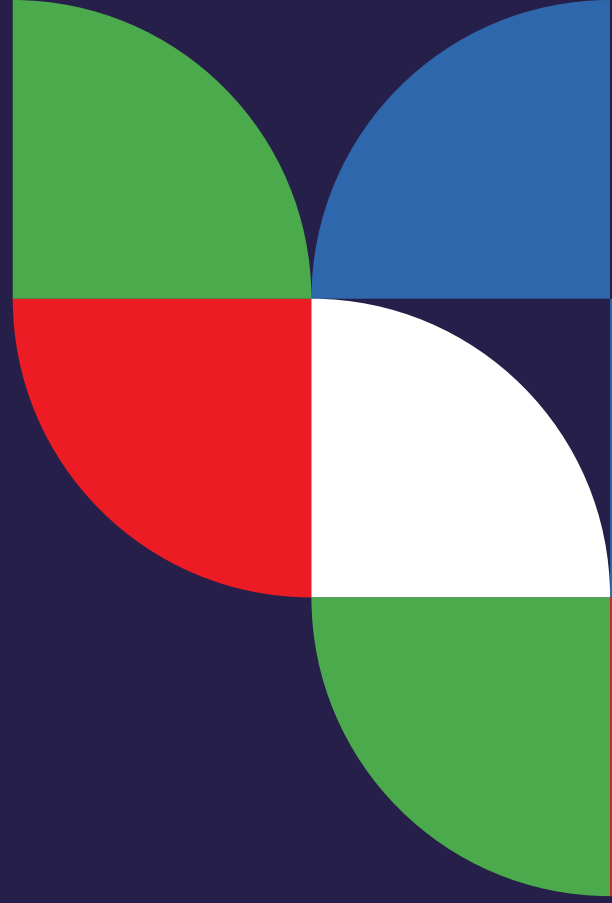
The future plans of the association include a variety of projects, such as a campaign against digital racism and a digital guide for social services for disadvantaged communities.

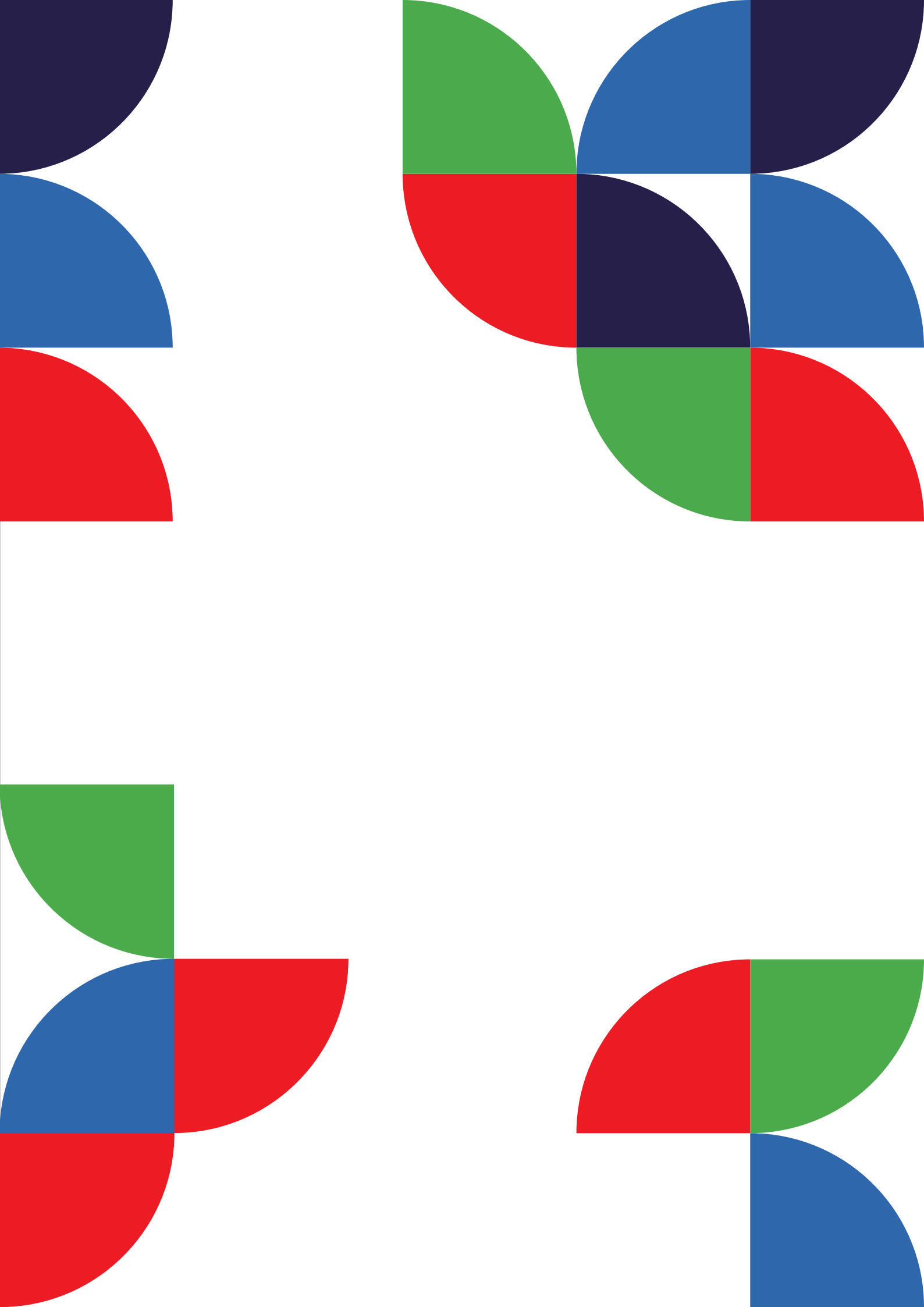


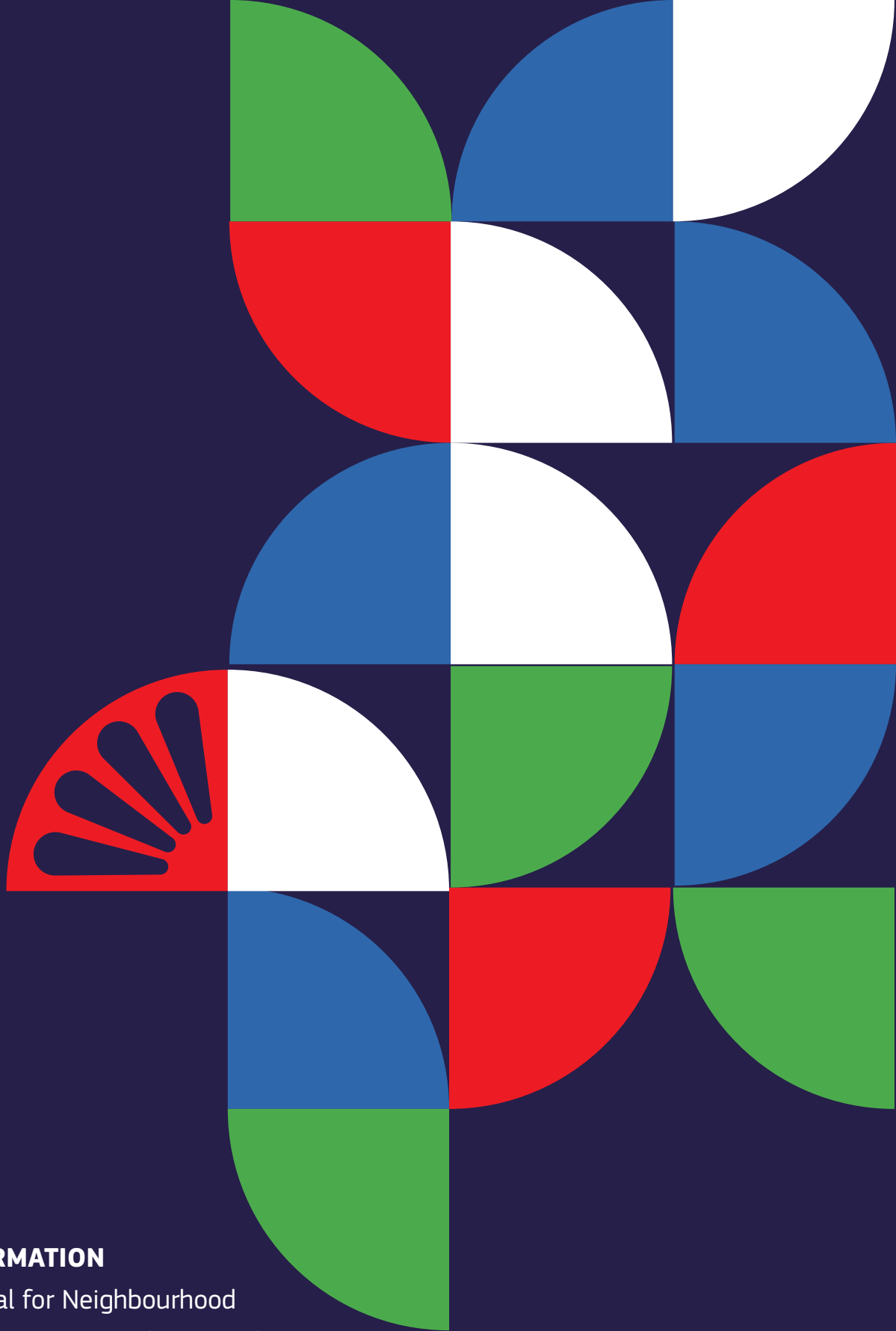


"The first and foremost priority in our work has always been to make sure that the Roma people are able to use the digital tools themselves. Our digital campaigns have given a voice to the Roma people, who otherwise wouldn't have one."

Cem PEKBALIKÇI







FOR MORE INFORMATION

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