



CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR A RESEARCH PARTNER

Assessment of inequities in government service provision to Roma and opportunities for political participation of Roma communities in Bulgaria

For the purposes of contributing to the implementation of a program to increase Roma civic and political engagement in Bulgaria, the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) is requesting bids from interested research partners. See below for detailed information. Proposals should be submitted electronically by 15 December 2023, to Diana Yovcheva at dyovcheva@ndi.org.

BACKGROUND

NDI's hypothesis is that government services in Bulgaria, as across the region, are not provided equally to members of Roma communities. The Institute therefore proposes to conduct thorough, gender-informed assessments of a specific section of government services provided to Roma and the power dynamics that allow these discrepancies to exist.

Throughout the CEE region, NDI has been addressing the systematic discrimination and socio-economic exclusion that Roma people face. The capacity of the Roma to use democratic political processes to combat discrimination and seek equal treatment as citizens is growing, even as the forces arrayed against Roma equality—in particular the political mainstreaming of xenophobia, nationalism, and racial prejudice—continue their march. Longstanding obstacles to inclusion and equality have been deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic and its long-term impact, which has aggravated already low rates of labor participation and attendant poverty rates, particularly among Romani women, and unequal access to social services in healthcare and education. The level of domestic violence and gender-based violence has also increased the level of risk and vulnerability for Roma women. Intersectional discrimination is prevalent amongst the community given their gender and Roma identities, among others, as well as external discrimination towards Roma community and internal gender roles and expectations.

In Bulgaria, Roma are underrepresented in official counts, with the 2021 census claiming 4.4 percent (under 300,000 persons) whereas non-governmental sources claim the actual population is between 700,000-800,000 persons. Roma are not a homogenous group, with many different cultural characteristics, community identities, and religions. However, they face common systemic problems and mainstream community biases, including poverty, high levels of unemployment, educational segregation, and social stigmatization and widespread negative stereotypes. Experiencing such problems, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Roma in Bulgaria have become even more isolated and focused on their own survival, having a poor awareness of their rights and of what constitutes discrimination.

Roma women in Bulgaria are even more vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion within society compared to other women and Roma men. Roma women in Bulgaria are at higher risk of experiencing intersectional vulnerabilities, such as domestic violence and gender-based violence entrenched in gender norms, values, traditions, and practices; higher risks to human trafficking, exploitation, and forced labor

due to poverty; and low education, literacy, and poor information rates. The overall political representation of women in the country is low with only 27.1 percent of seats in parliament held by women (as of February 2021) with no Roma women currently elected. At the same time, hate-speech, anti-Gypsyism, and discrimination are on the rise and often used as rhetoric by political figures leading to additional intolerance, social isolation, and discrimination.

Taking note of these immediate and long-term obstacles but also witnessing the progress in Roma political enfranchisement, NDI expanded the already active program that addresses the issues related to Roma social exclusion in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to Bulgaria to work effectively with civic and state partners, elected Roma leaders, and mainstream political parties to strengthen advocacy, election, and government oversight skills and knowledge, create evidence-based platforms for citizen equality, and diversify the range of Roma leaders running for elected office, in particular Romanian women.

Given that Roma women and girls are typically most affected by discriminatory and degrading access to such services, the research is expected to apply a gender-responsive lens in examining government services such as primary healthcare, education, and whether and how governments consider the diverse needs of Roma citizens in service provision. Another focus should be paid to young Roma persons, persons with disabilities, etc.

NDI will use results from the research to inform Roma CSOs, with a focus on women's rights groups, in building advocacy campaigns to seek an improvement in government services, and help aspiring Roma political candidates shape their campaigns around tangible evidence to improve the quality of life of their constituents. The selected research partner will be expected to map out active CSOs in Bulgaria addressing Roma issues. This would be useful in working with CSOs and Roma community members to cooperatively address the challenges of the findings. The research will focus on such topics as education, healthcare, or housing for Roma citizens to identify the existing structural gaps and to provide recommendations for improving the overall access of the Roma community to the mainstream services in Bulgaria. Finally, depending on the results of the research in the four countries, NDI would create a database with the findings of inequities in government services, which could be used to inform future policy between Roma partners across the region.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

NDI seeks a research partner that will produce and manage quantitative and qualitative research from the date of selection until 15 April 2024 that includes the following aims:

- 1) **To assess the government services provided to Roma** as compared to non-Roma population to provide a better understanding of their lived experience in regards to the quality of services compared to their non-Roma counterparts.
- 2) **To assess the perception of importance of active political participation among the Roma population** and to help identify key topics of interest to better target future advocacy and political activities of Roma and pro-Roma citizens including civil society organizations (CSOs) and political candidates.

NDI seeks a three-stage research approach consisting of the following (specific dates for each component of the research will be determined in communication with NDI):

- 1) **Desk research** (approximately one month) – The research partner will outline and analyze existing data from governmental and non-governmental databases and similar research related to the provision of government services such as healthcare, education, housing, social services available to Roma communities as well as the potential and capacity of the Roma communities to advocate

for access to quality services. The desk research will include recommendations and specific actions needed to improve the access to quality services for Roma communities.

- 2) **Field research** (approximately six weeks) – The research partner will identify, in collaboration with NDI, up to five (5) communities across Bulgaria to gather data on the impact of governmental policies; assess local policies fostering or decreasing unequal practices in access to services; and foster political participation based on a short-term field research in the communities. The field research will use qualitative research methodologies to include the diverse voices of Roma in research results and strengthen the research findings to better reflect the needs of diverse Roma communities in the country.
- 3) **Focus group research** (approximately six weeks) – The research partner will be asked to conduct a series of 2 focus group discussions (in person or online) within each of the identified communities with persons of different gender and age to identify specific gaps in service provision, including which services are the most salient and which ones are missing, and to provide recommendations that concern Roma communities. The focus groups will also touch upon the topic of political participation to assess the interest of Roma citizens and particularly, of Roma women, in taking active part at various levels of politics and to identify key problem areas, allowing to focus the future political campaigns more successfully on Roma voters.

The selected research partner will be responsible for conducting and supervising all research. Specifically, the vendor will be responsible for the following:

- Developing detailed methodology and questionnaires in English and Bulgarian with final approval from NDI;
- Select the sample and demographic conditions in collaboration with and with approval from NDI;
- Field the inquiry throughout the country; and
- Provide NDI, in English and Bulgarian, with survey analysis and electronic files of the raw data, methodological report, top-line results, and key charts based on instructions received by NDI.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

The research partner should detail in their proposal how they plan to reach the groups in question, and prepare to collaborate with NDI in refining the research methodology, including questionnaires, target communities, and research scope.

The selected research partner must provide adequate human resources to successfully implement the project, which would include:

- Senior lead researcher to coordinate with NDI and ensure the successful implementation of the
- research plan;
- If relevant, appropriate partnerships and links with NGOs or members of the Roma community who can serve as research assistants;
- Experienced research specialist to design and implement the focus group discussions; and
- Means to measure and report on the reach and impact of the research.

Research partners should ensure informed consent is received from participants in line with European regulations and NDI standards, and that data is kept confidential. NDI reserves the right to review and request modification to informed consent language.

The selected vendor will be expected to provide NDI with all datasets created or obtained throughout the performance of this research. Datasets must be scrubbed of any personally identifiable information and submitted to NDI in a machine-readable, non-proprietary format.

Proposals should outline the specific methodology, as well as the time and resources for the desk research, the focus groups, and an initial proposal for the field research. The research proposal should be broken down by the specific groups and issues it proposes to target, on the understanding that this can change considering the desk research and FGR. All proposals should demonstrate their ability to measurably increase knowledge about (government) services provided to Roma communities in Bulgaria.

The proposal should include the following:

- General information about the research partners' experience and background;
- Details of the methodology to be used, including the methods the research partner plans to recruit, train and conduct quality control of research assistants;
- Expected research plan for proposed work;
- Expected timeline;
- A list of previous clients; and
- Statement of previous experience in conducting similar research, especially in region.

The final research should include the following deliverables:

- Full methodology;
- Raw research data to be shared confidentially with NDI;
- Presentations of the research in English and Bulgarian; and
- Full research report in English and Bulgarian (up to 10 pages), with a one-page executive summary.

Proposals should include a detailed budget containing **ALL COSTS IN US DOLLARS (USD)**, including staff time and projected communication and travel expenses. **The deadline for submitting proposals is 15 December 2023 at dyovcheva@ndi.org.** Questions may be submitted by email to dyovcheva@ndi.org.

NDI will evaluate proposals based on the vendor's ability to meet the description of product needed, experience and price.

Companies submitting a proposal must provide disclosure of any known past, present or future relationships with any parties associated with NDI, or with any political actors operating in Bulgaria. For example, applicants should disclose if a member of their Board is also a member of NDI's Board currently or in the past. By submitting a proposal, the company also certifies that the prices offered were arrived at independently and without the purpose of restricting competition with other offers including, but not limited to, subsidiaries, and that prices have not been and will not be knowingly disclosed to any other offerer unless required by law. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in NDI having to re-evaluate the selection of a potential proposal.

ABOUT NDI

[NDI](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. NDI works to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. Since its founding in 1983, NDI has worked with local partners in 156 countries, bringing together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. In Bulgaria, NDI has begun working with reform-minded groups and organizations since 1990. Throughout its presence, NDI has supported political parties, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to deliver for the people and engage in civic and political processes.