



DECADE OF
ROMA
INCLUSION
2005 - 2015

PROGRESS REPORT 2010

GOVERNMENT OF BULGARIA

June 2011



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1. BASIC INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION OF THE ROMA MINORITY

Roma are legal citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria. According to this, their status is determined by the Constitution of Bulgaria, the country's laws and commitments made by the Bulgarian government as a member of the European Union. The Roma have rights equal to the ones of every Bulgarian citizen. According to Article 6.(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria "All human beings are born free and equal under the protection of our laws.(2) All citizens are equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination of rights or privileges based on race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, education, beliefs, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status. In addition, their rights are guaranteed by the Law on Prevention of Discrimination and others. The Republic of Bulgaria has ratified numerous international treaties that ensure these rights are being upheld in a democratic way which contrasts the values and norms of a state member of the European Union.

The Bulgarian educational, health, labor market system and housing have no legal ground to collect data on ethnical basis. These are only collected on basis of voluntary participation. This data has only a certain number of participants in specific projects and programs that are collected on a voluntary basis. Moreover, the collection of information on ethnic lines is hampered by the fact that the Roma themselves often do not identify themselves as such. When the issue of education comes up, a total number of dropouts can be given for the period (15.09.2009 - 31.01.2010) a total of 2953 students. Total dropouts for the period 01.02.2010 until the last school day of 2010 - amounts to 3727 students and total dropouts for the entire school year are 6,680 students.

Data on ethnic and religious composition of the population for 2011 are not yet available although it would be of great importance to our activities in current and following years. The National Institute of Statistics collects data on the ethnic composition of the population only during the censuses of population and housing. The collection of this information is conducted and regulated by the Law on Census of Population and Housing in Bulgaria of 2011, article 6. (1). After processing the

data and the results, NSI will provide ethno-demographic information. Official statistics from population censuses in Bulgaria in 2011 will be considered in redoing the analytical parts and priority directions of the Framework Programme for Integration of Roma into Bulgarian society (2010 to 2020).

In order for the strategic integration of Roma into Bulgarian society to occur the institute relies on the identification of the most segregated communities among ethnic minorities in 2011. This will be done through the project "Development of Complex Measures for the Integration of the most segregated communities among ethnic minorities with a focus on Roma" by The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The project is financed under the Operational Program "Human Resources" and aims to present the problems of the Roma community in Bulgaria and to assess the ongoing present public policies. It also calls for the integration of disadvantaged ethnic minorities in terms of their effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, economy and sustainability. The project concept will be prepared to implement a set of measures for their identification, determination of location and integration In the Republic of

Bulgaria, according to National Statistical Institute data from the 2001 population census, 370,908 persons have identified themselves as belonging to the Roma. Data on ethnicity are collected only on the principle of voluntary self-determination and in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Personal Data Protection Act and the Protection from Discrimination Act, which are synchronized with European legislation.

2. INSTITUTIONAL PROVISION AND EVALUATION OF ROMA INTEGRATION POLICY

Equal integration of the Roma into Bulgarian society is a priority and long-term task for the Bulgarian Government. The first strategic document in this field was the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of the Roma into Bulgarian Society of 1999, and the first national action plan was drawn up in 2003.

The political commitment of the state to work toward eliminating discrimination and removing the unacceptable gap between the Roma and the rest of society was taken with the signing of the Founding Declaration of February 2, 2005 in Sofia, which launched the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015" Initiative. Bulgaria's integration policy for the Roma is based on two main strategic documents: the Framework Programme for Integration of the Roma into Bulgarian Society 2010-2020, adopted in May 2010 and the National Action Plan for the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015", and also on a number of sector-specific strategic and operational documents, or parts thereof, relating to the integration of the Roma. The state has defined six priorities: education, health, housing, employment, culture, protection from discrimination and creation of conditions for equal opportunities. The activities and measures planned with respect to these priorities are consistent with the fundamental aims of the initiative: accelerating the progress on improving the welfare of the Roma by including them in the process of decision-making and performing transparent and quantifiable reviews of progress achieved.

Special attention is being paid to improving the model for distribution of management responsibilities between executive authorities; improvement of coordination

mechanisms with civil society structures; including municipalities in the implementation of policies for Roma integration; funding of integration policies and programmes from the state budget, EU funds and other sources. Implementation of activities under the National Action Plan /NAP/ on the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” Initiative is ensured with funds from the budgets of individual ministries and organizations for 2010, from the Operative Programmes, from other European and international programmes and projects. Progress on implementing the NAP is recorded in annual monitoring reports of the administration. In 2010, the Council of Ministers approved the fifth consecutive report, prepared in coordination with 21 institutions involved in the implementation of activities.

In 2010 an Indicative Plan was also implemented for the provision of activities to promote the objectives of the Decade, activities for support of initiatives and events of major importance for society and the Roma community, and activities for support of initiatives of civil society organizations related to Roma inclusion. These include: training for journalists to overcome prejudice towards the Roma (of the MLSP, together with the Council of Europe and the DOSTA! Campaign, with the financial support of the Government of Slovenia); the National Campaign “Give me your hand, be a man”; the “World of Roma” TV show; the “The World is Colorful” Initiative and more.

3. SITUATION OF ROMA IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION

At present the Ministry of Education in Bulgaria drafts a new Public Education Act (draft name “Law for School Education”) that will be approved by Council of Ministers and adopted by Bulgarian Parliament. This law will define the main streams in Bulgarian education as well as the developments of Bulgarian educational (school) system in the following years. In this way the Act will have certain connections with the efforts for educational integration of Roma students and children: it is of crucial importance for the entire Roma integration process to have Public Education Act that explicitly legitimizes and supports the efforts for Roma educational integration.

In Bulgaria, access to education is free. No limitations or privileges based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, etc. are allowed. It is the responsibility of every parent to exercise the right to education of their child in a school chosen by the parents and type of education according to their personal preferences and capabilities.

In April 2010, the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities was updated. Activities in consultation with schools for drawing up annual plans for implementation of the Strategy were initiated and supported. The state subsidizes free textbooks for children up to grade 7 and free breakfast for children up to grade 4. Priority “education” includes actions and measures aimed at: educational integration of children and pupils of Roma origin by ensuring equal access to quality education; preservation and development of cultural identity; creating conditions for socialization, support for the process of making cultural diversity a source and a factor for mutual understanding and moral development of children and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. In 2010, opportunities provided by programme budgets and funding under the Operational Programme “Human Resources” were used. Under National Programme

“School – Students’ Territory”, the Module “Full-day Organization of Elementary Training” is implemented. 94 proposals for a total of BGN 800,000 were funded. The number of submitted projects clearly shows that the system needs a full-day organization of elementary training, which is especially useful for students from minority backgrounds, providing solutions not only in this respect, but also including mandatory coverage of children in preschool groups of five year-olds. The number of persons involved in measures aimed at preventing early school leaving has totaled around 27,222 participants, of whom 11,323 men and 15,359 women.

Despite efforts in this direction, the problems of school dropouts and the integration of Roma children are not yet solved and the process of educational integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities will continue in coming years, along with improving the quality of education in schools with prevailing number of Roma students and multicultural education in a Bulgarian-speaking environment. Under the measure “Support for children lagging behind the study material”, the total number of participants from among the Roma is 1,561, or 27,2% of all involved. In 2010, an increased interest in the implementation of projects involving Roma youths was observed under the “Youth in Action” Programme. Eight projects were funded, totaling EUR 139,545, for the active involvement of young people to improve their personal and social skills, among which are 41 youths as direct beneficiaries from the Roma.

The Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities was created to support the implementation of government policy on educational needs of children and pupils from ethnic minorities. Its activity is based on a set of specific strategic measures, forming the policy for educational integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities, as specified in the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities. The Center develops, finances and supports projects aimed at promoting equal access to quality education and improving the outcome of education of children and pupils from ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. For 2010, the Center has financed two competitive procedures aimed at achieving efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation stage and has ensured the proper focus and concentration of funding. Promoting partnerships between local authorities and NGOs is important to support municipalities in implementing integration processes aimed at creating conditions for equal access to quality education for Roma children and students. A total of 79 projects worth BGN 576,148.96 were funded under the four priority programmes: “Ensuring equal access to quality education for children and students from ethnic minorities”, “Preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and pupils from ethnic minorities”, “Creating conditions for successful socialization of children and young people from ethnic minorities” and “Supporting the process of turning cultural diversity into a source and a factor for mutual understanding and moral development of children and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding”.

Attention to Roma children and students is focused in 11 projects of Bulgarian municipalities worth BGN 215,000 for the “Supporting the institutionalization of the desegregation process in Bulgaria” with the financial support of EUR 200,000 from the Roma Education Fund and co-funding of EUR 100,000 from the state budget. A qualitatively new approach for achieving the deinstitutionalization of child care was adopted. In February 2010, a major policy document was adopted - the National

Strategy “Vision for the deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria”. The Action Plan sets out measures aimed primarily at regulating the input of institutions via family support and development of services for prevention of child abandonment, such as services for the prevention of risks in the family, early intervention and support of the child, family planning services and family mediation. A project of a coordination mechanism for identifying school drop-outs and non-attendants was developed and is to be adopted. Control has been exercised and checks were performed to monitoring, guidance and admission to special schools of children, including Roma children, in order to provide them with equal chance to study according to their individual needs and opportunities in the elementary education environment of kindergartens and schools, together with their peers and with the support of resource teachers and other professionals.

In university education, under the Scholarship Programme for Roma Students, the Roma Education Fund is providing scholarships in a number of fields for bachelor, master or doctoral degrees. In order to overcome the lack of Roma professionals in medicine, scholarships for students attending medical courses in universities and colleges are provided by the Roma Education Fund and the Open Society Institute.

4. SITUATION OF ROMA IN THE AREA OF HEALTH

Healthcare reform in Bulgaria brought to light some very alarming tendencies in Roma health: high morbidity, high mortality, low life expectancy. These tendencies have been observed for more than a decade due to overwhelming poverty, poor nutrition, permanently poor living conditions and lack of proper sanitary conditions. Infectious diseases have become a particularly serious problem for the Roma in Bulgaria.

The most common among them are tuberculosis and viral hepatitis. According to the data presented by the St. Sofia Pulmonary hospital in 2010 30% of the patients treated there are from Roma origin. A study on common health problems among the Roma in the town of Kyustendil, Senovo and Tulovo (conducted by Prof. Turnev) demonstrates the high percentage of tuberculoses of the Roma population where approximately 25% of the cases involve children. According to data from the specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Pulmonary Diseases in Sliven (submitted by Dr. M. Dimitrova), 60% of the tuberculosis patients are Roma. Viral hepatitis is also a serious problem for Roma neighborhoods where incidents of Hepatitis A and B are very high. The number of physically and mentally disabled Roma is six times higher than the rest of the Bulgarian. The relations between the medical staff and the Roma communities is hampered due to the fact that many general practitioners (GPs) who work in Roma neighborhoods are not familiar with the cultural differences and traditions of their patients. Poor Bulgarian language skills of many Roma people only aggravate the problem. The main risk factors for Roma health have been identified as:

Mass unemployment, the consequence of which is that only a small part of the Roma population is health insured;

Poverty and thus inability to pay health insurance contributions and to buy medicines;

Poor nutrition;

Lack of basic sanitary conditions;

Bureaucracy of the medical system and direct or indirect discrimination;

Lack of medical/ health prevention activities;

Low educational level, including health education.

The Ministry of Health is actively working to fulfill the tasks and activities set out in the National Action Plan for the international initiative “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” through the implementation of specific activities within the framework of a number of strategic and programming documents. Each year, the Ministry of Health provides funds from its budget for implementing the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons from Ethnic Minorities”. Persons from the Roma community are included as one of the target groups of the “Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS” Programme and “Improving the Control of Tuberculosis in Bulgaria”, implemented by the Ministry of Health with grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The project “Informed and Healthy” is also being implemented under Operational Programme “Human Resources”, targeting persons with specific health risks and vulnerable persons from different ethnic groups.

The main activities in 2010 were focused on prevention among the Roma population, screening and early diagnosis of cancer, cardiovascular and hereditary diseases, conducting free medical examinations, performing laboratory tests etc., including using mobile offices delivered under Phare projects Advocacy training for Roma students in medical universities- the project is part of the program for supporting the education of Roma in Medical Universities in Eastern Europe “Roma Leadership in Health”: A generation of health professionals” of Open Society Institute – Budapest. In Bulgaria the program is managed by OSI – Sofia. It contains 3 components:

1. Advocacy training: it aims at providing information, raising awareness, empowerment and stimulation of participants to get involved in the process of improving the Roma health care system. Thus the goal is to create a network of Roma experts in health area which would become valuable partners in the development and implementation of public policies and overall in the social inclusion process. Additional aim is to strengthen Roma identity of the students involved and to motivate them to take part in advocacy campaigns.
2. Mentorship: professors from Medical Universities are engaged as mentors to help the students to achieve higher academic results.
3. Media component: It aims at developing and carrying out the media campaign for the promotion of the project during the various stages.

In 2010, with the available 4 mobile obstetrics-gynecology offices a total of 6070 examinations of Roma women were held, of whom 1222 were diagnosed with diseases. The continued successful operation of 106 health mediators of Roma origin from 57 municipalities was observed. With the invaluable help of health mediators, various activities under the National Action Plan for the Decade were implemented, including: seminars with adolescents and young people and their parents about ways of preventing unwanted and early pregnancy, about the dangers of early pregnancy for both the mother and the baby, and the dangers of consanguineous and early marriage; about the importance of and motivation for regular immunization; about ways of preventing common infectious and non-infectious diseases, etc. The mediators' activities have led to searching for children without a family doctor and explaining to parents the importance of registration. They have also supported immunization campaigns, particularly for children with incomplete immunization status. In 2010, the activity was directed towards conducting emergency immunization in relation to the epidemic of measles. According to data provided by the "Improving the Control of Tuberculosis in Bulgaria" Programme, for the period 01.01.-12.31.2010, NGOs have achieved good results in field work in 12 regions with compact Roma population (Burgas, Varna, Vidin, Dobrich, Kyustendil, Montana, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Sofia, Stara Zagora, Haskovo).

During the project "Initiative of Health and Vaccination", 9 meetings were held in: Plovdiv, Sofia, Blagoevgrad, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Golden Sands, Aheloy. During these meetings, the speakers emphasized the importance of timely execution of immunization on the extension of immunization and work among vulnerable groups, among which the most commonly spread gaps are found. Scientifically proven facts and statistics presented introduced sufficient number of arguments to support the need for immunization of the population. New multivalent vaccines and a new vaccination calendar have been discussed also. The letter ranks Bulgaria among the best European practices for increasing vaccination among the target group. During some of the meetings specific questions relating to the work of mediators were asked. Part of GPs heard for the first time about the profession of "health mediator" and had the opportunity to acquaint with the experiences of their counterparts in similar partnerships.

A successful approach in working with the Roma community was the creation of eight health and social services in the community, capable to provide health education and increased access of vulnerable persons from the Roma community to existing health and social services. This approach was successfully approved and validated, and for the last 7 years has been disseminated as a good practice for implementing activities under the "Prevention of HIV/AIDS in the Roma Community" Programme among the 10 largest Roma communities in Bulgaria.

5. SITUATION OF ROMA IN THE AREA OF HOUSING

The policy on improving the quality of living environment of Bulgarian citizens via the development of settlements is implemented by the Ministry of Regional Development. This policy includes the "Improving the Living Conditions of the Roma in Bulgaria" Programme. Its strategic goal is the social integration of socially disadvantaged persons from the Roma community, including by improving their housing conditions. The Programme targets the successful integration of the Roma

through: zoning of areas with compact Roma population; construction, reconstruction, major repair and renovation of houses; completing the technical infrastructure in existing areas to improve existing systems or provide new or expanded systems; designation of new land for housing /incl. social housing/ and building the surrounding technical infrastructure.

In 2010, funds amounting to BGN 7,600 were provided for improving the current and building new technical infrastructure, which were used to improve sewage networks, rehabilitate street water mains, build household sanitation, etc. Within the framework of Operational Programme “Regional Development 2007-2013”, a number of projects under the grant schemes “Support for the provision of appropriate and cost-effective educational, social and cultural infrastructure, contributing to the development of sustainable urban areas” and “Support to ensure adequate and cost-effective educational infrastructure, contributing to sustainable local development” were implemented in 2010. A key criterion for project approval was regard for the needs of disadvantaged groups, including the Roma. Projects of 86 municipalities of urban areas and 178 smaller municipalities were supported.

6. SITUATION OF ROMA IN THE AREA OF EMPLOYMENT

One of the most important priorities of the Government relating to the integration of the Roma in society is the policy of employment, as implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. 5,767 persons were included in activities on raising the employability and skills of unemployed Roma population. 17,958 persons were covered in the implementation of the measure on increasing the competitiveness of the Roma in the labour market. Employment has been provided to 12,159 people through their involvement in various programmes, employment measures and the primary labour market. BGN 325,000 euro were spent to provide employment to unemployed persons of Roma origin under National Programme “Activate the Inactive”, and about BGN 908,000 were spent under National Programme “From Social Assistance to Employment”. At the end of 2010, under National Programme “Activate the Inactive”, 91 labour mediators of Roma origin were working at 69 local Labour Directorates. As a result of the successful operation of labour mediators, 10,098 inactive persons were motivated and have registered as job seekers in the Labour Offices. Apart from activities planned under the Decade, the Employment Agency has organized special job fairs aimed at the Roma with the aim of facilitating their access to information and supporting the employment of unemployed Roma population. Dozens of special job fairs were held in many settlements of the Roma. They have been attended by 1,104 jobseekers and 71 employers, who have announced 460 job vacancies; the number of persons employed at these events is 411. It should be emphasized that representatives of the Roma ethnic group have been provided not only equal access to the labour market, but also special efforts have been made to inform these individuals about the benefits of their inclusion in training or retraining activities.

In response to layoffs of workers as a result of the global economic crisis, training for acquisition or improving the professional qualifications of the unemployed has been provided. 357 unemployed persons who have identified themselves as belonging to the Roma were included in such training. The result shows a positive trend in the

efforts towards equal Roma inclusion in all measures implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Employment Agency.

In 2010, the scheme “Take Your Life into Your Own Hands” was approved. It has a budget of BGN 11 million and its beneficiaries are unemployed persons without education, low education, and no specialty or profession, long-term unemployed and inactive persons, and representatives of vulnerable ethnic groups. In most vulnerable groups, individual programmes are more often and are of longer duration than normal and require more intensive support. The intent is to identify and motivate discouraged and inactive persons, and to carry out vocational training and acquisition of key competences.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF ROMA CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

In 2010, as in previous years, opportunities were provided for the development and promotion of Roma culture and identity, by supporting the celebration of important cultural events and the organization of ethnic festivals. Joint projects of municipalities and community centers were implemented, aimed at including the Roma in the overall cultural life of the respective areas. Efforts to restore the Roma Theatre continue.

8. SITUATION OF ROMA IN THE AREA OF SECURITY

PRIORITY “PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION AND CREATION OF EQUAL CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES”

Based on the National Action Plan for the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” Initiative, a sustainable level of qualification of police officers to work in multicultural environment is maintained at the structural units of the Ministry of Interior, with training on: “Human rights and ability to work with representatives of Roma communities”, “Identifying public order and security problems in local Roma communities”, “Traditions, customs and culture of Roma communities”, “Use of a problem-oriented approach to ensure order and security in Roma communities”, etc. The study of topics involves solving specific cases of practical aspect relevant to work in a multicultural environment. The Commission on Protection from Discrimination has reported a number of decisions on legal proceedings relating to alleged discriminatory practices along ethnic lines, which confirms the sustainability of incentive measures and equality policies.

Social inclusion of disadvantaged persons from ethnic communities, protection and integration of persons from vulnerable groups are topics on the training programmes of social workers from the Regional Offices of the Social Assistance Agency. For the seventh consecutive year, a football tournament was held involving some 240 children from different ethnic groups, aimed at promoting tolerant inter-ethnic relations through sport. Free movement and migration of Bulgarian citizens, including citizens of Roma origin are moderate in nature. Returnees of Roma origin who have failed to integrate on the labor market in other countries of the European Union and are unable to meet their basic living needs in the country receive support under the Social Assistance Act in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Government implements a targeted policy for the integration of the Roma and is concerned about the situation of the Roma in the country. Cooperation

with the European Commission and other Member States is gladly accepted, in fields such as the co-introduction of a new type of management and control over spending of EU and national funds for integration of the Roma and persons from other disadvantaged groups. To emphasize the importance attributed to making progress in integrating the Roma, by Decree No. 92 of April 7, 2011 the functions on administrating the international initiative “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” were redirected to the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers, and the position of National Coordinator for the Decade was assumed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, who is also the Chair of this Council.

Migration of Roma

Bulgaria does not generate statistics on migration of Roma from Bulgaria by ethnic principle, but by unofficial data, there is an increased presence of our citizen’s in the following countries: Greece, Spain, Germany, Great Britain, to a lesser extent France, Italy, Belgium and Scandinavia.