



DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005 – 2015 PROGRESS REPORT 2011

SLOVAKIA

1. BASIC INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION OF THE ROMA MINORITY

Please indicate whether in 2011 the government acquired new data concerning:

- *Estimated total number of the Roma population in the country*
 - *Number of Roma living under the poverty line*
 - *Total number of population living under the poverty line*
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- The Slovak census of July 2011 counted 5 397 036 inhabitants, census data are all based on self identification of respondents.
 - The census indicates the size of Slovakia's Romani population to be 105 793, which is 2% of the total population based on ethnic self – identification. Based on mother tongue 122 518 inhabitants identified themselves as Roma; whereas 128 242 inhabitants indicated the most often used language at home to be Romani. Field studies and statistical projections yield a range of 320 to 435 000;
 - On the basis of preliminary results from EU SILC 2010 there were 12% of population in Slovakia at risk of poverty (more than 650 thousand persons) At-risk-poverty threshold (defined as 60% of the median equalized disposable income) was in the case of one person household 306 EUR per month according to data EU SILC 2010. Year-on-year increase of at-risk-poverty threshold was 7,7% (in absolute values 22 EUR per month)¹

1. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR ROMA INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION

- *(For EU enlargement countries): Is your government planning to prepare a National Roma Integration Strategy as called for in the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020?*
- The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma communities prepared the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the integration of Roma up to 2020. It was approved by the Slovak government 11th January 2012 by the Government decree no.1/2012. Subsequently it was submitted to the European Commission. (hereafter the National Strategy)

¹ Source: <http://portal.statistics.sk/files/trendy2011.pdf>

- *Is there a structure on local (municipality) level responsible for the implementation of the Decade National Action Plan / National Roma Integration Strategy?*

Implementation structure of Decade National Action Plans which constitute the implantation plans for the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the integration of Roma up to 2020. The Association of Towns and Municipalities in Slovakia (hereinafter “ZMOS“) is considered as one of the key partners in implementing the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Roma integration up to 2020. ZMOS represents the interest of local governments in Slovakia.

- *Please, describe any planning for the use of EU funds in the 2014-2020 to address Roma inclusion/integration. Please, describe how experts and Roma NGOs are involved in the planning of the use of EU funds in the 2014-2020.*
- *What are the main institutional and procedural supports envisioned to ensure that EU funds will be used effectively for Roma inclusion (e.g. equal opportunities unit, simplification of funding procedures, technical assistance for beneficiaries)?*

In October 2011, the European Commission adopted a legislative package² for Cohesion Policy for the period from 2014 until 2020 designed to boost growth and jobs across Europe by targeting EU investment in the Europe 2020 agenda. The focus on fewer investment priorities in line with these objectives will be at the heart of the new Partnership Contracts, which Member States will agree upon with the European Commission. The impact of the funds is expected be strengthened by simplifying and harmonizing the rules of different funds

Of great relevance to Roma inclusion are also the provisions on increased participation of social partners and the civil society in the implementation of the ESF through capacity building, promotion of community-led local development strategies and the simplification of its delivery system. Rules governing the reimbursement of projects by the ESF will be simplified, in particular for "small" beneficiaries, who make up at least 50% of recipients of ESF funding, e.g. NGOs and SMEs.

The ESF can finance interventions in most of the areas outlined in the National Strategy. The areas most relevant for ESF financing are: education, including early childhood education, training, coaching, development of community centers, work of community workers and health and education assistants, public awareness campaigns, community led initiatives, innovative social services, activities of NGOs.

The key investment priorities of the ERDF are infrastructure, energy efficiency and renewable energies, R&D and innovation, including direct aid to enterprises, financial engineering instruments and local development, including urban and rural development. Roma inclusion may thus be supported through integrated urban development, rural development, Roma self-employment through actions enhancing SME competitiveness, or infrastructure development, including housing and social infrastructure.

² Press Release: "Commission lays foundations to boost impact of cohesion investments after 2013." The new legislative package is a Commission proposal that is subject to approval by the European Council and the European Parliament.

2. EDUCATION

- *Please identify the key barriers that limit educational chances and access to quality education for Roma,*

The vast majority of the Roma population therefore attends Slovak schools, which do not provide lectures on Romani language and literature. In educating these students it is necessary to bear in mind that they constitute a part of socially weakest and most disadvantaged sections of the population – to describe them, the term students from “marginalized Roma communities” (hereinafter “MRK“), is used, and/or pupils from “socially disadvantaged environment“ (hereinafter “SZP“)³. The remaining problem is the equivocal usage of such definition in everyday life. The definition of the SZP child or student serves the purpose of diagnosing his/her special education needs. The allowance for improving conditions for education and upbringing of SZP students is granted to the school founders under § 107 paragraph 4 of the Act in question for students from families, the average income of which in the preceding six consequent was maximum the sum of subsistence minimum as specified by a separate legislation. The Notice of the Ministry of Education⁴ enabled using the allowance even for the purpose of covering the fee of a tutor. Originally this institute was intended to provide students from MRK with a Roma teacher’s assistant, ideally from the given community, fluent in Romani and the local dialect. Currently out of the total number of more than 700 teacher’s assistants (tutors) only a minimum are fluent in Romani. Qualifications required are set rather high. A person applying for such a position must be a graduate of a high school and must have either a pedagogical minimum or a completed first level of university education. One of the reasons is that members of Roma communities do not meet the required qualifications set by the Decree of the Ministry of Education⁵. In 2008 there were 791 teacher’s assistants active in elementary schools, in 2010 their number dropped to 717.⁶

Another important institution that ought to assist SZP students is the so called “zero year”⁷. The minimum number of students per class in a zero year is 8, while maximum is 16. Per each child enrolled in the zero year the school will receive 200 % of the regular

³ Definition under the School Act No. 245/2008 seeks to define this marginalized group as precisely as possible: *„Child from a socially disadvantaged environment or student from a socially disadvantaged environment is such child or student who lives in an environment that due to social, family, economic and cultural conditions insufficiently encourages the development of mental, volitional, emotional characteristics of a child or student, fails to support his socialization and does not provide sufficient incentives for the development of his personality.“*

⁴ Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 649/2008 Coll. on allowance for SZP student enables covering the costs of wages and contributions of teacher’s assistants (from January 1, 2012 for the fees of teacher’s assistants), who participate - in accordance with teacher’s request – in the implementation of a school educational program, in particular by securing equal opportunities in education and upbringing for conquering architectonic, informational, language, health or cultural barriers.

⁵ Decree of the Ministry of Education No. 437/2009 Coll., which sets qualification requirements and prerogatives for individual categories of pedagogical staff and specialists as detailed in Decree No. 366/2010 Coll.:

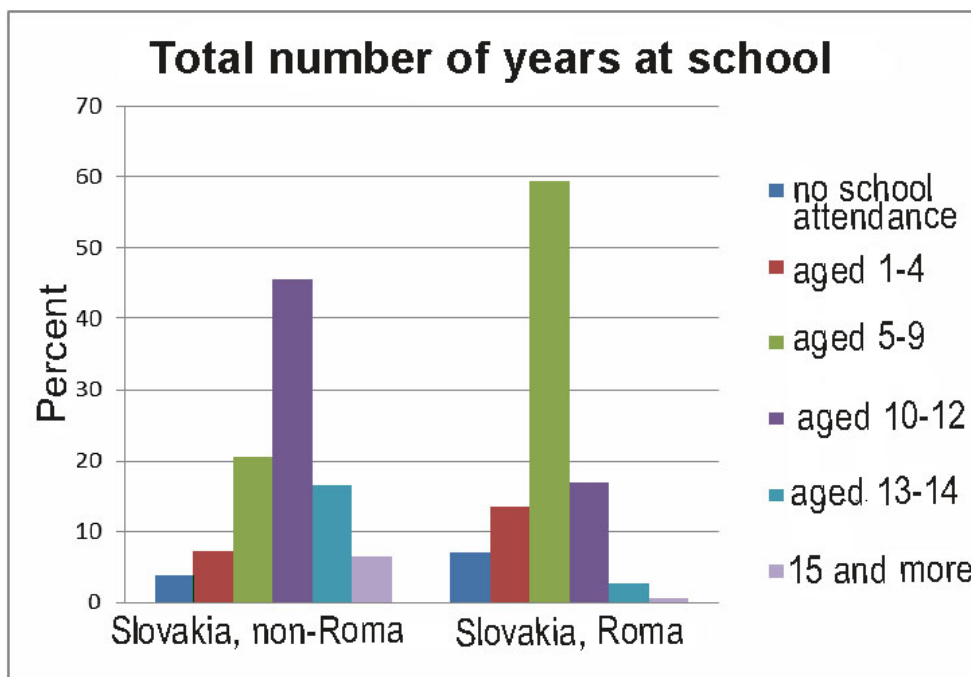
- University education of the first degree in the study programs “pre-school and elementary pedagogy”, “teaching academic courses”, “teaching vocational subjects”, and “teaching art and educational courses”, in the study program “pedagogy”, “special pedagogy” referring to teachers, tutors or non-teachers, study program aimed at tutorage in non-teaching curricula and in supplementing pedagogical qualification;

- secondary vocational education specializing in teaching and tutoring, secondary education and a supplementary pedagogical qualification, secondary education and a specialized qualification course for teacher’s assistants in a pedagogical center completed latest by August 31, 2010.

⁶ Source: Statistical Almanacs of Institute for School Information and Prognosis

⁷ School Act No. 245/2008 says: *„Zero grade of the elementary school is reserved for children who have reached the physical age of six years as of September 1, have not reached a schooling capacity, come from socially disadvantaged environment and due to the social environment are not expected to cope with the syllabus of the first grade of the elementary school.“*

normative. For many teachers this is an important and meaningful tool for SZP students to catch up in social and cognitive area with children who are raised in normal environment so that they could eventually move into the “education mainstream”. Due to the fact that curriculum of the zero year is often created by dividing the curriculum of the first year into two school years (thus allowing for a more leisurely speed of tutoring), the students of the zero year usually form a homogenous class also in the first year and remain in the same class throughout their elementary school studies.⁸ SZP students are eligible for an allowance from MoLSAF which takes the form of school lunches, school supplies, and also a motivation allowance for the child’s regular school attendance.



Source: Regional survey of marginalized Roma, 2011, UNDP/WB

It is necessary to continue to support linking the courses to the true situation on the labor market. High school MRK students need to be motivated by a scholarship that would be higher than the activation allowance, and would cover all their expenses associated with their high school studies, such as dormitory housing, food, travel expenses. Another useful tool to increase the number of high school graduates from the marginalized Roma communities is to create allocated classes of vocational schools in the place of residence of MRK students.

Despite increased financial interventions in the education of Roma students, it needs to be pointed out here that MRK/SZP students fail within the Slovak educational system. The gap in the formal educational level of Roma (especially marginalized) population compared to the majority population is tremendous⁹. This has disastrous consequences when Roma enter the labor market. The vicious circle of social exclusion is further reinforced by the fact that Roma students from the marginalized communities often fail at the elementary schools because they are unable to socialize in the current system of schooling (the process of

⁸ Ed. Rafael, Vlado. Responses to Questions of (de)segregation of Roma students within the Schooling System of Slovakia. OSF, Bratislava 2011, pg. 77.

⁹ According to the 2010 household survey conducted by the UNDP, 40.5 % of marginalized Roma population has not completed full elementary education (ISCED 2). As a comparison, according to the 2001 Census 80 % of the Slovak republic citizens has higher than full elementary education. With respect to secondary education, the 2010 UNDP survey shows that only 17 % of marginalized Roma population members has completed education at levels ISCED 3C (no GCSE) and ISCED 3A (with GCSE).

socialization is too short). Thus the Slovak schooling system may contribute to the reproduction of social differences, since children from low-income families are more likely to achieve lower education, which in turn increases the likelihood of the next generation of children being raised in poverty. Thus the vicious circle closes again.

A study conducted by the Roma Education Fund (hereinafter “REF“) in 2009¹⁰ highlighted the fact that up to 60 % of all students in special schools are Roma from MRK, and in special classes in regular elementary schools more than 86 % of all students come from MRK. According to the Institute for Information and Prognosis of the Schooling System (hereinafter “UIPS“) in the school year 2010/2011 the number of SZP students in special schools represented approximately one third of all students. Even though SZP does not 100% overlap MRK, this data is alarming in itself. It highlights the complexity of the problem, which must be addressed by reforming the content *and* the form of psychological-diagnostic tests, by an institutional reform of the system of pedagogical-psychological consulting, prevention, but mainly funding and functioning of the special schools as a phenomenon. The problems that remain are: creating purely Roma classes at the elementary schools, teaching Roma students in separated school pavilions, and dissolving school districts in municipalities with a high representation of MRK students.

The Slovak system of education needs a comprehensive reform relying mainly on:

- a massive increase in the schooling of MRK children aged 3 years and over in pre-school facilities – a significant investment into pre-primary education of MRK children along with supporting early childhood care programs¹¹;
 - developing and implementing desegregation standards in schooling (along with indicators and subsequent monitoring of segregation), which should respect the principle of social interaction of Roma and non-Roma children while maintaining the highest possible quality of education and achieving best results, with the exception of Roma national schools and locations with a majority representation of Roma population (but the condition of maintaining highest possible quality of education and achieving best results remains);
 - developing specific models of school integration (inclusion) for a whole portfolio of situations and target groups, with an ambition to establish a general model of an inclusive school (to both the internal and external assessment of the quality of the school a so called “school inclusive index” would be added as one of the motivation tools for implementing programs of inclusive education). In creating an inclusive educational environment a priority must be placed on the specifics of students coming from the environment of marginalized Roma communities, physically handicapped persons, members of national minorities, foreigners and immigrants.
- *Please list the policies and programs that were designed and implemented to support Roma education in 2011 with a special focus on the goals and implementation of the Decade National Action Plan/National Roma Integration Strategy (if applicable).*

Open Society Foundation funded by the grant from the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities administered stipend program for Roma students in the school year 2011/2012. The distributed stipends were as follows:

¹⁰ <http://www.diskriminacia.sk/?q=node/959>

¹¹ According to the study published by the Lancet scientific magazine (September 2011), the investment in the pre-primary education and programs of early care of a child may be in the mid-term and long-term approx. 6 – 17-times less costly than having to cope with consequences as a result of its absence.

High schools stipends- overall number of students 77

University stipends – overall number of students 43

- *What were the outcomes of the policies and programs that your government implemented in 2011?*

In 2011 there were 711 pedagogical assistants, in comparison with previous year 2009/2010 that is a stagnant number. According to regional survey conducted by regional offices of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities the number of pedagogic assistants who could speak Romani actually decreased.

- *Please identify the most important mainstream and targeted EU funded schemes launched in last year that will contribute to Roma inclusion in education. Please, specify the activity, the funding source (ESF, ERDF, etc.), the operational programme, the amount allocated, the goals to be reached, and the indicative number and share of Roma beneficiaries.*

Based on the negotiations with section director of EU structural funds of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak republic to the issues of project implementation of the Operational Program relevant to Local Strategies of Complex Approach (LSKxP) through measure no 3.1 *The increase of education level of members of Marginalised Roma communities*. In connection with the realization of LSKxP as well as the national project “*Eduaction of pedagogic employees towards inclusion of marginalized communities*” code of written call: OPV/K/NP/2011-1, where the eligible applicant was the *Methodological-pedagogic Centre*. The call for the national project was declared on 23rd May 2011. The preliminary call for applications for non- returnable grants was declared on 20th May 2011 in accordance with measure no 3.1, code of proposal OPV-2011/3.1/03-SORO. In connection with this the Agency of Ministry of Education for EU structural funds (ASFEU) as intermediary body for the managing authority for the Operational programme *Education* prepared an information seminar to this call, that took place on 27th June 2011 in Žilina, 28th June 2011 in Košice in Košice and 29th June 2011 in Zvolen. The deadline of the first round of applications was 1st August 2011.

3. EMPLOYMENT

- *Please provide the average unemployment rate on national level, and unemployment rate of the Roma population.*

According to the Slovak Statistical Office average unemployment rate in 2011 was 367,9 thousand persons. The rate of unemployment was 13,5%. There are no Roma specific data. Indirectly by deduction from regional breakdown of unemployment rate and overlapping this with territorial concentration of Roma communities; it is apparent that Banskobystrický (17,5%), Prešovský (17,8%) and Košický (19,6%) Kraj; that is regions with large Roma communities also have above national average unemployment rates.

- *Please evaluate the position of Roma in the labor market - access to regular jobs, and barriers preventing the Roma employees from successful integration in the labor market.*

Roma discrimination on the labor market is but one of the problems that Roma face when searching for a job. Low level of education and skills constitutes a serious deficiency to their competitiveness on the labor market. Employer attitudes towards employing Roma are negative and have a negative impact on the employment rate of this minority.

The most numerous of all the disadvantaged jobseekers are the long-term unemployed registered as jobseekers for at least 12 months out of the last 16 months. They are hard pressed to find a job on the labor market due to the fact that by being long-term unemployed they gradually lose their work-related knowledge, skills and habits. This category includes hard-to-serve individuals with low education and virtually no qualifications.

Exact statistics on Roma unemployment do not exist, only estimates may be made based on the assessment of situation in problematic and marginalized regions of Slovakia. It is in the counties with a high number of Roma citizens where the unemployment rate is highest. Unofficial data on Roma unemployment from the previous period make it clear that the number of unemployed Roma in the Slovak Republic grows systematically; and that the Roma population represents a significant chunk of the long-term unemployed in the Slovak Republic. The main problems influencing the high unemployment of Roma include low qualifications of Roma, lack of employer interest for such employees due to a lack of job opportunities, low work morale of certain Roma and a lack of job opportunities in general, mainly in counties with large Roma population. ¹²

- *Please list the policies or program that were designed and implemented to support Roma employment in 2011 with a special focus on the goals and implementation of the Decade National Action Plans or the National Roma Integration Strategy (if applicable).*

One of programs to help lift Roma out of poverty are community centers, the role of which is to provide complex social and community services and thus contribute to social integration. These centers are created in order to create spatial and material conditions for community development, community rehabilitation and community work, providing social services and performing of socio-legal protection and social protection, as well as for mutual interaction and common activities of members of marginalized Roma communities and majority population. The support of these centers have not been systematic in recent years, despite this many work on the principle of resource accumulation. Intended project under the auspices of Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (defined in the

¹² Čačipen pal o Roma – Global Report on Roma in Slovakia. Edit. Vašečka, M.. IVO. Bratislava 2002. pg. 565

Employment Action Plan) would mark an important qualitative change. There are currently 143 community centers.

4. HOUSING

- *Please list the policies or programs that were designed and implemented to support housing for Roma (or the housing of marginalized people, including Roma) in 2011 with a special focus on the goals and implementation of the Decade National Action Plans and the National Roma Integration Strategy (if applicable),*

In response to the changed article 7 of the recommendation of European Parliament and Council (EU) no. 437/2010 from May 2010 a project the preparatory body of which was the Ministry of Agriculture and regional development as well as deputy prime-minister and Minister of transport, construction and regional development. This project was approved by the government on 15th June 2011 by decree no 392/2011. It consisted of two part, part B was relevant of the pilot project of constructing rental housing for marginalized groups, office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities has also participated. This project was halted in second half of 2011.

The continuation of the program of construction of municipal rental houses of lower standard continued in 2011. It saw the building of 169 new houses in 16 municipalities.

- *Please describe the housing situation of the Roma population, especially in excluded communities (e.g. quality and price of housing, accessibility in general, development of a concept for social housing on the local level for disadvantaged families) and identification of obstacles that prevent access to acceptable housing conditions,*

Housing is undoubtedly one of the areas in which the gap between Roma on one hand and the majority population on the other is ever deepening. Despite the fact that the majority population encompasses groups disadvantaged in one way or another and commonly designated as vulnerable, whether due to their economic status or ethnicity, only Roma communities in Slovakia establish settlements and within such various types of non-standard dwellings that fail to comply with either technical or hygienic standards. Such non-standard dwellings are more often than not built on land with uncertain land title, without a planning permission. Non-standard are also construction materials used, such as wood, tin, clay. Another serious problem is the lack of base infrastructure, such as electricity, access to drinking water, access roads and sidewalks with public lighting, gas, sewage. An extreme problem in this regard is the waste removal and disposal. The necessity to realize a housing intervention is accentuated by the rising demography and resulting overcrowding of Roma families and deterioration of current housing units in both rural and urban settings.

Inability of municipalities as well as inhabitants themselves to settle land titles, mainly for financial reasons, is one of the greatest hindrances in attempts to improve the housing situation. It prevents investment in utilities infrastructure, as well as the inability to use EU structural funds.

In 2011 159 780 € were spent on technical infrastructure, wich includes roads street lighting water and electricity connections. In the same time period som € 2 862 680 were used to construct municipal houses of lower standard. This meant the construction of some 169 new housing units.

6. HEALTH

- Please describe the health situation of the Roma population and identification of major obstacles that the Roma are facing in access to quality health care services.

Several reports on the state of Roma population in Slovakia indicate that lately (or rather after 1989) the overall health status of the Roma population has been deteriorating. There are but a few exact findings in this area, nevertheless it seems clear that the difference in the overall health status of Roma compared to that of general population is reflected both in reality and in the emotional evaluation.

Experts¹³ blame the deteriorated health status on the following main determinants: insufficient level of healthcare and social awareness; low standard of personal hygiene; low standard of communal hygiene; housing and ecological riskiness of environment (insufficient access to drinking water, infrastructure). The deteriorated health status in Roma communities is also due to malnutrition as a consequence of poverty and an impaired fair access to healthcare due to lack of financial resources for traveling to see a doctor. The rate of alcohol and tobacco products consumption is on the rise and hand in hand with it the increased addiction and other associated risks. According to several sources¹⁴ in certain Roma communities the genetic load related to high incidence of congenital (hereditary) illnesses is rather high.

Poor living conditions in segregated Roma settlements and in regions with a high concentration of Roma population, as well as the very low health awareness contribute to a frequent occurrence of infectious diseases. Certain indications suggest that illnesses such as hepatitis and bacillary dysentery present a serious problem for many Roma communities. These are the so-called “dirty hands” illnesses that are spread by contaminated water and food. ¹⁵ Serious problems affecting Roma are also infections of the respiratory apparatus. Lack of hygiene gives birth to illnesses such as scabies and pediculosis (lice).

In preventing infectious diseases the problem is the lower vaccination of Roma population, including children, compared to the majority population.

In the recent years, due to social dependency, a new fact has emerged with rising frequency – that families have real experience with shortage of sustenance. In surveys, respondents have quoted that for several days within a given month they suffer from hunger.

Also suspected is a higher consumption of alcohol and subsequent diseases associated with it (liver cirrhosis, diseases of the intestinal tract, etc.) as well as far-reaching social and economic consequences of alcoholism (pathological effects, violence, family breakdown, etc.). Indications suggesting an increased level of various addictions in Roma population are more frequent (smoking even by children and pregnant women, taking drugs, gambling, etc.). Causes are to be found not only in the poor social situation but also in low education and poor health awareness. ¹⁶

Roma communities lack information on proper protection of health, reproduction health, sexual conduct, childcare and personal hygiene. Especially reports prepared by NGOs point out the fact that Roma may be discriminated also in the provision of healthcare, e.g. by

¹³ Čačipen pal o Roma – Global Report on Roma in Slovakia. Edit. Vašečka, M.. Institute for Public Affairs. Bratislava 2002. pg. 658

¹⁴ Bernasovský, I., Bernasovská. J. : Anthropology of Romanies (Gypsies). Brno, Nauma 1999. 197 s..... Šereš, I. :

¹⁵ According to Report on the Health Condition of Population 2006-2008 in 2008 out of the total number of 730 reported cases of virus hepatitis of a type A, 573 cases were in the Prešov region. More than 80 % of cases were reported in 13 epidemics. In the largest of those, in the Lomnička municipality (Stará Ľubovňa county), from August through November 300 persons were infected (out of total 730 reported cases for the whole year), out of which 299 were Roma.

¹⁶ Čačipen pal o Roma – Global Report on Roma in Slovakia. Edit. Vašečka, M.. Institute for Public Affairs. Bratislava 2002.

separate hospital rooms. Since 2003 Slovakia has been facing lawsuits claiming the forced sterilization of Roma women. 17

- *Please list the policies and programs that were designed and implemented to support the improvement of health care services for the Roma population in 2011 with a special focus on the goals and implementation of the Decade National Action Plan/National Roma Integration Strategy (if applicable)*

The program for the support of health for members of disadvantaged communities implemented by the Office of Public Health Authority was widely discussed at a roundtable meeting in march 2011 attended by the Ministry of Health, Public Health Authority, community workers in the area of health education and representatives from the NGO sector. The goal of the meeting was to find steps to improve the program. Policy recommendations on institutional reorganization as well as better preparation for workers implementing the program in the form of education seminars were mentioned. One of the most important recommendation was to increase the number of community workers in the area of health education, from the current number 30 as well as stabilize their work contracts. The recommendations have not yet been fully implemented.

The program of pest control was not restarted even after several rounds of negotiations with representatives from Ministry of Health, the funds allocated and withheld were not released. The centres of personal hygiene built in the past from grants by Ministry of Health continue providing increased levels of hygiene in many municipalities.

¹⁷ Zoon, I. : Minority report 2001. Budapest, Open society Institute 2001, also Bukovská, B and Co.. Body and Mind, Košice 2003