



GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA
NATIONAL AGENCY FOR ROMA

I. GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ENFORCEMENT OF PUBLIC POLICIES FOR ROMA

1997 saw the establishment of the Department for the Protection of National Minorities, headed by a Delegated Minister to the Prime Minister of Romania. This department included the National Office for the Roma, as an institution representing Roma interests and problems.

In the year 2000 the Department for the Protection of National Minorities was dissolved, and its tasks were taken over by the Ministry of Public Information.

Up to mid-2004, the role and the position of the National Office for the Roma in the hierarchy of institutions changed. At the end of 2004, the staff and responsibilities of the Office were transferred to the National Agency for Roma, established under Law 7/2005.

According with the regulations of GD nr. 1703/2004, modified by GD nr. 1.124/2005, regarding the structure and function of National Agency for Roma, NAR is a specialized body of central public administration, juridical person, under the coordination of General Secretary of Government, which's main responsibility is the coordination of public policies for roma, especially, apply, coordinate, monitor and asses the measures from sector-based domains of social intervention stated in the National Strategy for Roma approved by GD no. 430/2001.

II. MISSION

Nowadays, NAR is involved in various activities dedicated to promote social inclusion of Roma in the mainstream society in collaboration with central and local authorities, but also with Roma civil society in different fields, such as education, economic, social and political. These actions are carried out on the basis of the new vision that agency embraced, namely:

- valuable partnerships,
- pragmatic approach by developing the ownership of the process,
- credibility and social responsibility,
- openness and transparency in order to stimulate dialogue and networking among organizations and institutions that deal with Roma integration and social inclusion.
- the correlation and harmonization of national and European public policies which are regarding Roma minority from Romania, namely National Strategy for Roma, Decade for Roma Inclusion, OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti and Lisbon Strategy.

Thus, NAR is the key player both for the Government and the Roma community, in developing policies and strategies for addressing Roma problems and in improving the targeting of social inclusion programs, because of its central role in overseeing this process and in coordinating activities with ministries, regional and local authorities.

II. PUBLIC POLICIES FOR ROMA IN ROMANIA

The Government Strategy for Improving the Condition of the Roma (the Government Strategy, due for implementation between 2001 and 2010)

The Government Strategy is a political commitment undertaken by the Romanian Government as part of the negotiation process regarding Romania's EU accession, in keeping with the 2001 Accession Partnership.

Pursuant to numerous references to the social and economic status of the Roma and to the necessity for its improvement, against the background of accession preparations, the Roma issue has become one of the political criteria for accession, and

putting this criterion into practice became a matter for state institutions, which have to act in partnership with the organisations of this minority.

In early 2001 the executive proposed the debate and adoption of a comprehensive document based on the 2000 Strategic Framework, of the 2000 Agenda and of other national and international acts providing for measures meant to improve the condition of the Roma.

Governmental Decision H.G. 430 / 2001 on the Government Strategy for Improving the Condition of the Roma spans 10 years and includes a Master Plan of medium-term measures, covering 10 major sector areas.

According to the principle of sector-based division and decentralised execution, the Government Strategy provides for an organisation, co-ordination and control structure, as well as specific tasks for the institutions, public authorities, and non-governmental organisations involved in the implementation of the Master Plan of Measures.

The aim of the Strategy is to enhance Roma participation in the economic, social, educational, cultural and political life of society, by their involvement in sector-based community development and assistance programs.

The duration of the implementation of the Strategy is 10 years (2001 – 2010) and involves a medium-term Plan of Measures (2001-2005).

The sectors covered by the Strategy are the following: administration and community development, housing, social security, health, economic, justice and public order, children's welfare, education, culture and religious affairs, communication and civic involvement.

Since 2002, the implementation of the Strategy focused more intensely on five areas: education, health, employment, housing, administration and community development. The fight against discrimination and poverty is also included as one of the underlying objectives of the Strategy.

The implementing agency is the Romanian Government, through the National Agency for Roma, which acts as the executive body of the Joint Committee for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Strategy.

The National Plan for Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion (the Anti-Poverty Plan, due for implementation between 2002 and 2012)

Right after the Government Strategy was adopted, between 2001 and 2004 there was a shift in the focus of social policies, both in Romania and in the European Union: stress shifted from a unilateral approach to the fight against poverty towards a wider process of social inclusion and development. This new orientation led to the establishment in 2001 of the *Committee for Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion* (Romanian CASPIS), approved through a 2002 governmental decision. The main tool for co-ordinating social inclusion policies was the *National Plan for Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion* (the Anti-Poverty Plan), passed under Governmental Decision H.G. 829 / 2002.

The Anti-Poverty Plan was elaborated according to the model provided by the European Council of 2000 for national plans of the Member States; it puts forth a set of principles underlying anti-poverty policies, a set of strategic objectives on the medium and long term (2002 – 2012), and a series of short-term objectives, for the 2002-2004 (remainder of the) term of office.

In order to measure social inclusion from the perspective of Romania's EU accession and of the review of the Anti-Poverty Plan scheduled for 2007, CASPIS started the process of preparing a methodology for computing the social inclusion indicators shared by EU Member States and those that are specific to Romania.

The Anti-Poverty Plan was approved by the Government in 2002; The plan aims to strengthen the involvement of Roma communities in the economic, social, educational, and political life of Romanian society, and to improve their access to healthcare. As in the case of the Government Strategy, the philosophy of the Anti-Poverty Plan is based on the activation and accountability of Roma community members.

The Anti-Poverty Plan proposed a series of principles which to constitute the basis for an anti-poverty policy, a set of short-term strategic objectives (2002-2004), and a distinct set of medium/long-term objectives (2002-2012).

The scope of the Anti-Poverty Plan is to improve the condition of the Roma population, the Anti-Poverty Plan provides for 8 strategic objectives. One priority in approaching these objectives is to settle the status of ID papers and title to housing and ownership, followed by measures in the fields of education, healthcare, economy, housing (land for building sites and agricultural land). Rehabilitating the collective self-image and the public image of the Roma population, fighting all forms of discrimination against the Roma, and promoting a supportive collective attitude are cross-sector fields of action.

The duration of implementation of the Anti-Poverty Plan is 2002-2012.

The implementing agency. The national co-ordinator for the Anti-Poverty Plan is CASPIS, and the National Agency for Roma is in charge of implementing and/or co-ordinating measures contained in the plan.

The Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM, due for implementation between 2005 – 2010)

The fight against social exclusion and poverty is a new approach to poverty, combining joint objectives and national action plans with an action plan of the European Commission meant to encourage co-operation in this field.

JIM outlines the strategic lines and the major objectives for which measures are to be designed within the National Plan for Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion, due for a review in the context of Romania's EU accession.

According to the Accession Partnership, the Romanian Government and the EU Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs prepared the Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum, which prepares Romania's full post-accession participation in the open method for co-ordinating social inclusion.

This document outlines the main challenges to the approach of poverty and social exclusion and presents the main measures taken by Romania on the basis of the agreement in order to start transposing the joint objectives of the European Union into national policies; it also identifies the main methods to be used for the future monitoring and review of the policy.

The participation model is integrated in the process of elaborating and implementing policies, plans, and strategies for action; the very preparation of the Anti-Poverty Plan is founded on extensive social dialogue with various public institutions, management and labour, non-governmental associations and organisations.

In order to implement JIM objectives, the European Commission and Romania agreed that investment in the administrative capacity of national, regional and local authorities constitutes a priority. Also, it is important that dialogue and co-operation should be improved between public structures, as well as between public structures and the civil society, social partners, and NGOs.

Progress in the implementation of these policies will be evaluated in the context of the EU process of social inclusion, whose goal is to have a significant impact on the eradication of poverty in Europe by 2010.

As far as the Roma are concerned, JIM provisions refer to completing the implementation of the Government Strategy for Improving the Condition of the Roma, in particular to the elimination of problems such as the lack of identity papers, support to professional training and employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure and housing development programs, all meant to contribute to the social inclusion of Roma ethnics and to continue the fight against discrimination.

The overall aim of the JIM is the sustained promotion of a cohesive and inclusive society, and increasing the well-being of the population while rapidly reducing the serious issues of extreme poverty and social exclusion generated by the crises of the last decades.

The goal of the JIM is to promote social inclusion and to fight poverty so as to achieve the Lisbon objectives.

The duration of implementation is 2005 – 2010.

The scope of the JIM

JIM will mainly contribute to the following:

- capacity-building for government institutions;
- improving the living conditions of the Roma, by developing economic opportunities and providing employment;

- improving access to all levels of education and providing the younger generations with access to the minimal level of education;
- identifying and granting agricultural land to the inhabitants of rural areas; providing land for traditional or modern housing;
- providing full access to primary healthcare.

The implementing agency. The Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family acts as national co-ordinator for the JIM, and the National Agency for Roma is in charge of implementing those measures whose main focus is the Roma population.

On 20 June 2005, the European Commission and the Romanian Government signed the Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum, whose goal is to prepare Romania for participation in the European Social Inclusion Strategy.

Roma Inclusion Decade 2005 - 2015

The Decade is primarily conceived of as an international political commitment undertaken by the governments of nine states in the region. In 2003, Romania joined eight other Central and Eastern-European countries in the international initiative known as the *2005-2015 Decade of Roma Inclusion*

After 2004, the year when the national plans for the Decade were drafted, the nine governments reasserted their commitment and undertook to promote active policies for the social inclusion of the Roma, focusing on four priority areas: education, healthcare, employment and housing, based on the underlying concept of fighting poverty, discrimination, and gender inequality.

The aim of the Decade is to significantly reduce the social and economic gaps separating the Roma population from other citizens (over a 10-year period).

The action plans for the Decade were significantly enhanced during 2005: result and impact indicators were elaborated, financial estimations for each measure/field, were specified each institution that have responsibilities in implementation of measures and monitoring, and more important are the result of consultations organised with experts from ministries and civil society. Subsequently NAR will prepare the adoption of Action plans by Romanian Government.

Between July 2005 – July 2006 Romania, through National Agency for Roma assured the presidency for the Roma Inclusion Decade. According to the “Memorandum regarding the establishing Romania’s priorities during the period when it assures the presidency of Roma Inclusion Decade”, and The Programme of International activities, Romania proposed itself to clarify the some of the concept with which to operate in all the countries that are members of the Decade, at national and international level.

III. PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES OF NAR DURING 2007-2008.

In its efforts of integration into the European Union (EU), Romania throughout NAR targeted social inclusion and poverty reduction of Roma communities. In this view, the Romanian Government promotes measures meant to contribute to the country's increasing stability and social cohesion, as well as to involve community members into solving their common problems at the local level. There are several initiatives developed and implemented by National Agency for Roma, namely:

Social Inclusion Project (SIP)

Social Inclusion Project seeks to improve the living conditions and to increase the social inclusion in the most disadvantaged/ vulnerable categories of the Romanian society, by:

- Improving the living conditions and promoting social inclusion of the Roma people living in the poorest communities;
- Increasing the inclusiveness of the child care (ECE) services addressing 0-6-year old children in targeted areas;
- Improving the quality of services for persons with disabilities (PWD), youth at risk and victims of domestic violence.

SIP is financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the Bank) and correspondingly co-financed by the Romanian Government, in consideration of the Loan Agreement no. 4825-RO /4.07.2006, ratified through the Law No. 40/2007 published in The Official Journal no 172/12.03.2007.

The SIP has four components, respectively:

1. Priority Interventions Program (PIP), implemented by the Romanian Social Development Fund (RSDF);
2. Inclusive Early Childhood Education Program, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research (MER);
3. Social Assistance Programs, addressed to persons with disabilities, youth over 18 coming out of the residential care system, and victims of domestic violence, implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family (MLSSF);
4. Capacity Building for Roma Social Inclusion Program, implemented by the National Agency for Roma (NAR).

At the present within the first component of the project there were selected 48 Roma communities and other 40 will be selected in the very near future in order to develop and improve their infrastructure (roads, electricity, sewage and drinking water system). Furthermore, within the second component 120 of Roma communities were selected in which kindergartens will be built or rehabilitated in order to ensure a good quality early education for Romani children.

Capacity Building for Roma Inclusion Programs in Romania

The objective of the grant is to support capacity building for the NAR, governmental agencies and regional and local authorities to address Roma issues in inclusive programs, better manage public expenditures and ensure financial accountability and public oversight.

The activities supported by this grant are to:

(1) Build capacity of

(a) The NAR and line ministries to formulate inclusive policies, programs, plans and financing frameworks, to allocate and manage public resources for Roma, ensuring the necessary implementation capacity; and of

(b) Regional and (selected) local authorities to develop and implement local and regional development plans;

(2) Promote the effective functioning of the NAR as a coordinating, results oriented monitoring institution;

(3) Develop the capacity to inform the public on Roma issues and needed remedial interventions.

The three sets of activities are entirely complementary which is essential for achieving capacity building both at central and local levels, in parallel with necessary well targeted public information interventions. Activities are implemented with the support of technical assistance including international experts that would bring in the experience from countries having already been through similar processes and local consultants ensuring the process facilitation and continuity. The impact of this grant would be the following:

- Links established, trust built between Roma and non-Roma stakeholders, NGOs, consensus reached on strategies addressing Roma issues, necessary resources and their management.
- NAR and line ministries have the capacity to mainstream Roma issues into national poverty alleviation and social inclusion programs for disadvantaged groups, prepare and implement activity plans and financing frameworks, manage resources and pursue results oriented monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Regional and local authorities have the capacity to develop inclusive plans and access EU funds, manage such funds and be accountable. Roma education needs are also addressed through resources and intellectual support from the Roma education Fund.

At the moment NAR already finalized the draft on the inclusive public policy on housing. This draft was presented during a meeting with Mr. Laszlo Borbely, the Minister of Housing. In correlation, in February 2008 NAR signed the Framework Agreement on Housing with the Ministry of Housing in order to implement draft on the inclusive public policy on housing. According to this agreement on short term NAR and the ministry will implement from 2008 a pilot project which has as objective to build social houses for Roma people in 16 localities from 8 regions of Romania. Moreover, the second policy draft, namely in education field, would be finalized in the very near future and the system of evaluation and monitoring of the program was finalized.

Community Development Programmes

Based on GD no. 1124/2005, NAR initiates and takes part, together with other institutions and non-governmental organisations in elaboration of programmes and projects.

During 2007 National Agency for Roma initiated partnerships with institutions and NGO's regarding community development programmes in 8 following communities: **Cetatea de Balta**, Alba Iulia county , **Brăhăsesti**, Galati county, **Pitesti**, Arges county, **Cuza Voda**, Constanta county, **Nistru**, Tautii Magherus, Maramures county, **Chitila** district from Bucharest, **Sector 4** from Bucharest and **Lipscani** area from Sector 1, Bucharest. Thus, on 12th July 2007 NAR hold a press conference for launching the 8 community development programmes regarding the improvement of infrastructure, such as housing, drinking water and sewage system, electricity and gas access.

Hădăreni Project

Government adopted in 19.04.2006 the GD nr. 533/2006 regarding the approval of Community Development programme in Hădăreni, Mures County, and commitments of the Romanian Government at CEDO.

National Agency for Roma organized the facilitation process, consultancy, elaboration, adoption, and implementation of programme, in partnership with Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Tourism, National agency for Labour, NGO's and local institutions. A community development programme was elaborated, for the next 3 years (2006-2008), in value of 3.487.000 RON. Coordination of the programme is realised by Government General Secretariat, National Agency for Roma and al the ministries involved in implementing. NAR have the financial responsibility for the programme
The NAR has made Roma inclusion a priority for the use of European Union (EU) funds.

Thus, Structural Funds are the main core of all NAR activities because we understand the importance of this tool in achieving the goals of National Strategy on Roma and also

of the Lisbon Strategy which has as aim social inclusion. Thus, this aim represents the foundation for Structural Funds for reducing the economic and social disparities between Roma and mainstream society. Therefore, in April 2008 European Social Fund approved to fund 6 strategically projects elaborated by the National Agency for Roma in the area of social inclusion of Roma people.

Structural Funds

1. TOGETHER ON LABOUR MARKET

The project is a pilot and trans-national project and it will be implemented in 8 localities in partnership with Fundacion Secretariado Gitano from Spain during the period 2008-2010. In the following period 2010-2013 the project would be multiplied at national level. The target group are 6770 Roma people between 16-64 years old and Roma young people between 14 and 16 years old.

The main object of this project is to promote social inclusion of Roma people in the employment area at national level by implementation of ACCEDER model in Romania, which was a best practice program funded by European Social Fund and implemented in Spain during 2000-2006.

The goal of the project would be achieved through vocational trainings for Roma men and women, trainings that would be adapted to the demand of the Romanian labour market. Another activity of the project would be the stimulation of Romani children between 14 and 16 years to attend the school in order to increase their chances on the labour market.

The project was developed taking in consideration several factors that contribute to the high unemployment of Roma people in Romania, namely racial discrimination, lack of professional qualification, low vocational preparation and non-correlation of the work needs of Roma with labour market.

The expected outcomes of the project are the following:

- To increase the life standard of the Roma employed and their families due to the vocational training courses and prevention of the school abandon

- To create a network among institutions, agencies and civil society that will implement this project
- To establish the premises of Roma participation to the improvement of the economic situation of mainstream society
- To improve the image, perception and self esteem of Roma people
- To prioritise equality of gender for Romani women
- To develop the managerial partnership model in Romania

2. EDUCATION OF ROMANI CHILDREN- THE WAY TO A GUARANTEED EMPLOYMENT

It is a trans-national project which it would be implemented during 2008-2011 by NAR in partnership with Roma Education Fund, Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Resources Centre for Roma Communities and Pakiv Association from Romania.

The main objective of this project is to increase the level of education of Romani children in the rural and urban area for developing human resources, which later will participate on the flexible and modern labour market as the result of the improved quality of education and reduction of the school abandon.

The target group are Roma pupils from rural and urban area.

Specifically, the expected results of the project are the following:

- Equal access to education of 1200 Roma pupils from VII and VIII grade which are most exposed to the early abandon of school. The result will be achieved by offering additional education preparation for passing the national tests.
- 600 Roma students from grade VII will continue their studies in the secondary stage as the result of the mentorship, personnel development, orientation and guidance activities
- Retention of 750 Roma students in the 9th grade in the secondary school by facilitating their adaptation to the new educational environment.
- Preparation of 450 students of Arts and Crafts School to gain access to labour market throughout scholarships programs for excellence in studies.

- Preparation of 2400 Roma adults who early abandoned school to benefit of programs such as “Second Chance” which have as aim to support Roma adults to gain access to labour market by ensuring them basic education.

3. THE PARTICIPATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS TO THE SOCIAL ECONOMY.

This project would be implemented during 2008-2011 by NAR in collaboration with 8 partners¹, namely several governmental bodies and NGOs which have expertise on the situation of vulnerable groups. The main goal of the project is to develop the capacity of the local communities to realize a durable local development with the participation of vulnerable groups. This goal would be achieved through the empowerment of the vulnerable groups to be included on the labour market by developing their professional, vocational and antreprenoriale skills.

The target groups of this project are the following vulnerable groups:

- 9800 of Roma people which suffer social exclusion from all social services, such as education, health care and housing
- 7000 detained people or who recently were released from detention
- 1200 drug addictive people who
- 1000 women who suffered domestic violence
- 1000 young people which left the institutional system for child protection

The expected outcome would be the following:

- To increase the social inclusion of vulnerable groups throughout participation on the labour market.
- To insert and reinsert members of vulnerable groups on the labour market
- To prepare experts on social inclusion

¹ National Anti-Drugs Agency, National Agency for Family Protection, National Administration of Penitentiaries, The Foundation of Penal Justice Reform, Association of Romanian Group for Defending Human Rights, Association Towards Europe Targoviste, Foundation for Social Development of Roma-Ramses and Transcena Association.

4. NATIONAL NETWORK OF LOCAL ROMA EXPERTS AS MECHANISM OF SUPPORT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION ACTIONS FOR ROMA, A VULNERABLE GROUP EXPOSED TO SOCIAL INCLUSION.

Throughout this project NAR in collaboration with National Institute of Administration is targeting to improve the relations between Roma people and public institutions at local, regional and national level by means of development of a national network of Roma local experts in order to enhance the social integration of Roma in Romania. The target groups are Roma people and local public authorities.

The rationale of the elaboration of this project is that the objectives of the Government Strategy are to make central and local public authorities accountable for the enforcement of concrete measures for improving the condition of the Roma in five sector areas: community development and public administration, education, healthcare, employment and housing. The goal would be achieved through preparation of Roma human resources and including Roma human resources in decision-making processes; all of these should be based on the principles of antidiscrimination and gender mainstreaming. However, NAR in the implementation of the abovementioned objective encountered several difficulties in order to convince the local authorities (mayors, local councils etc.) to formulate courses of action in favor of Roma in accordance with their duty to act in order to improve the situation of all citizens.

Therefore, this lack of political motivation of local authorities to allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of social inclusion programs for Roma at regional and local level creates a vicious circle of social marginalisation, specifically:

- Weak participation of Roma to public and civic life
- Lack of promotion of Roma interests on the local agenda of local authorities
- Increased gap between the mainstream groups and Roma and thus of dependence of Roma for social aid

Therefore NAR throughout the implementation of this project will prepare Roma local experts to work within local public institutions targeted and Roma Local Councilors by

developing their lobby and communication skills necessary to establish an effective and real relationship between different public institutions, Roma and majority communities.

The expected outcome is to contribute to a much efficient representation of Roma communities' interest at local level and thus to determine them to implement different actions for creating real chances for breaking the vicious circle of social exclusion of Roma from social services, such education, health care and housing.

5. SCHOOL A CHANCE FOR EVERYONE

The project proposes several measures to prevent the early abandon of school of vulnerable groups in 20 counties of Romania. This trans-national project would be implemented in partnership with International Association Step by Step and also Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, the Centre for Education and Personal Development- Step by Step and Agency for Community Development "Together". The activities implemented during 2008-2011 would contribute:

- To improve participation of Roma children, poor and disabled children at primary and secondary level.
- To diminish school abandon
- To realise a collaboration and networking mechanisms among the actors implicated in educational issues

6. FOR A BETTER LIFE

The main objective is to increase the participation of vulnerable groups on the labour market and to promote the social inclusion of Roma by developing the structures and specific activities of the social economy by means of Regional Centres of Human Resources for Social Economy. This project would be implemented during 2008-2011 in partnership with Fondazione Brodolini and Conform S.R.L. from Italy and National Organization for Disabled People from Romania

The project would target the professional and personal development of vulnerable groups throughout vocational training in order to facilitate their insertion on the labour market. At the same time their self-esteem would be enhanced as the result of mentorship actions.

The target groups are 1000 of Roma people, 800 persons with minimum income and 200 disabled people. Moreover, 50% of the target groups are representing women and 15% people between 55-64 years old.

The insertion of these vulnerable groups on the labor market would be ensured through 8 Regional Centres of Human Resources for Social Economy created in the 8 developed regions and the partnerships developed between the above mentioned and the local authorities, who together will elaborated 80 small grants regarding social economy.

EVENTS

European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma Communities

The objective of this European network is to promote the use of Structural Funds to enhance the effectiveness of policies focusing on the social inclusion of the Roma community and it is important for the Network to operate within the framework of the Structural Funds because this is what will give our work added value and will differentiate us from the many other initiatives targeting the Roma population.

The members of this network are representatives of European Commission bodies which are dealing with Roma issues and Structural Funds and several EU Members States such as: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Finland, Poland, Portugal Romania, Spain and Sweden and.

The Network has been organised around two main operational pillars which are the Management Committee (MC), where Network members exchange information and take decisions on the development of the Network, and the Working Groups (WG).

At the first Management Committee meeting in Seville in January 2008 there were taken to create three Working Groups regarding:

- Social Inclusion which would be coordinated by **Romania**,

- Employment coordinated by *Czech Republic*
- Education coordinated by *Hungary*.

During 6-7 May 2008 it was held an extraordinary meeting in Romania organized by Romanian Government throughout National Agency for Roma and ESF Managing Authority Romania in collaboration with Fundacion Secretariado Gitano in order to advance and detail the operation of the WG.

Social Inclusion Roma Forum

The Social Inclusion Roma Forum was established in September 2007 at the initiative of National Agency for Roma in order to create a permanent and effective mechanism of collaboration, consultation with Roma civil society in order to improve the implementation of Roma public policies.

The aim of this forum is to identify the priorities at regional level in the four areas: education, employment, housing and health care. The members are 200 representatives of Roma civil society and of regional and local bodies of NAR from all regional areas. The objective of this forum is to raise the awareness about social inclusion and to offer tools for implementation of this concept, namely how to use Structural Funds for improving Roma situation.

The forum has four working groups in the following prioritized areas: education, employment, housing and health care. In January 2008 it took place the third meeting of the forum during which it was discussed the best methods of implementation of the National Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma, such the use of Structural Funds.

National Conference of Health Mediators

Many international reports are mentioning the Romanian Roma Health Mediation Program as a best practice which improved the access of Romani people to health care services. Thus, National Agency for Roma in collaboration with Public Health Ministry organized two

national conferences which were attended by 350 health mediators in order to create an institutional framework for changing information and expertise in the Roma health care area.

Specifically, between 12th and 13th November 2007 at the first National Conference of Health Mediators there were discussed the role of health mediators in monitoring cases of discrimination in hospitals, such segregation of Romani women in hospitals, and methods of institutional intervention in cases of discrimination in health area. In February 2008, the second meeting of National Conference of Health Mediators had as main theme the Impact of Public Policies in the Health Area on Roma Communities.

National Conference of Roma Women.

Between 16th -18th March 2008 took place the first national event organized by Romanian governmental institution for Romani women, namely *National Conference of Romani Women*. At this event more than 80 Romani women participated. They were from various fields of activity and of different age. Throughout this event NAR created an open forum for Romani women to analyze the impact of the existent public policies and additional programs developed and implemented in the area of gender equality and within the National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma adopted by G.D. 520/2004 and Roma Decade, instruments that have an important impact of Romani women situation.

This conference it was a real success as it created an opportunity for Romani women to express their needs and also at the same time to identify the best solutions which would be included in various programs in all four prioritised areas in which NAR is operating.

Moreover, Romani women expressed their interest to participate to the decisional process by getting involved in the political arena in order to achieve a real empowerment of Romani women.

National Conference of Roma Youth

The conference was the first national event concerning Romani Youth organised by institutions in Romania, namely National Agency for Roma and National Authority for Young People and took place at Hotel Mara, Sinaia, Romania on 18th -20th March 2008.

This event represented the effort of the Romanian Government through the National Agency for Roma to promote and implement the subsidiarity principle and right of every citizen, inclusive Romani youth, to take part in the decision making process at national, regional and local levels. This conference illustrated the need of Romani youth to be involved as equal partners in the implementation public policies for Roma. Thus, as the result of this conference, National Agency for Roma decided to develop several future programs to empower Roma youth to become active within Roma communities and mainstream society.