



Table of contents

☉ Focus of the issue:

✓ New Framework Programme for Roma Integration in Bulgaria:

☉ facts and analysis

☉ Khere (At home):

✓ Center Amalipe participated in sports and educational games in the ksilifor area, dedicated to the world day of sympathy with people affected by HIV/AIDS

✓ Center Amalipe joined the commemoration of the International day for sympathy with the victims of HIV/AIDS

✓ Roma activists discussed campaigns for preventing early marriages

✓ Research on attitudes of social workers to early marriages in the Roma community

✓ Volunteers take part in a workshop in the mountain, organized by Center "Amalipe"

☉ Observer:

✓ Inclusion of Roma population in the labor market will be supported through "Human Resources Development" Operational Program

✓ "Bulgarian Roma - integration and migration"

✓ The Roma Education Fund presented a draft strategy for work in Bulgaria

✓ Tulip Foundation and Vivacom start a joint initiative for providing technical support for civil organisations working in social sphere

☉ School:

✓ Visits in pilot schools in the districts of Sofia, Dobrich and Silistra

✓ 130th anniversary of the school in the village Botevo

✓ The school of village Streltsi is presented with an exhibition in Museum of Education

☉ Roma health:

✓ Impact of health reform in Bulgaria on the situation of vulnerable groups

☉ Bright rug:

✓ St. George's day - the biggest feast for Roma in Bulgaria

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE :

NEW FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA: FACTS AND ANALYSIS

At its meeting on 12 May 2010 the Council of Ministers adopted the Framework Programme for Integration of Roma into Bulgarian Society (2010-2020). It updates the existing from 1999 to 2009 Framework program for equal integration of Roma into Bulgarian society. The process of preparing new Framework program started in 2008. Initially it was guided by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues. Center "Amalipe" and dozens of Roma organizations were actively involved in this process. In the beginning of 2009 the chair of the NCCEDI sent the process in „impasse" eliminating the participation of Roma organizations that led to failure. Following the structural changes in the Council of Ministers since September 2009 the preparation of the new Framework program was delegated to the National coordinator of the Decade of Roma inclusion (situated in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) and to the Council for integration of Roma within the MLSP who finished successfully the process.

Certain facts: The approved version contains many of the proposals made by a wide range of Roma organizations and independent experts. These suggestions have been submitted to the previous government several times in 2008 and 2009 and were approved during the National meeting of Roma NGOs organized by Center Amalipe on December 9, 2009 in Sofia. Later they were included in the program of GERB party for Roma integration.

Key strategic objective of the Framework Program is to create conditions for equal integration of Roma in public and political life by achieving equal opportunities and equal access to rights, benefits, goods and services, participation in all public areas and improving quality of life while respecting the principles of equality and non discrimination. The Programme continues and further develops the spirit of the previous Framework program (1999 – 2009) setting new actions and tasks with respect to the new conditions after Bulgaria joint European Union. The document sets out priority areas and lines of action - education, health, housing, employment, culture, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities. Special attention is paid to the optimization model for allocation of management responsibilities between the executive bodies, improving mechanisms for coordination with the civil society, including municipalities in the implementation of policies for Roma integration, providing financial back-up of integration policies and programs with funds from the state budget, EU funds and others. Special chapter is dedicated to the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Short analysis:

It is recognized by many Roma activists that the previous Framework program was good but was not implemented (at least – not at significant degree). Four main reasons defined this not-implementation: low normative status (Decision of the Council of Ministers, i.e. the lowest possible status), lack of state funds for the Program implementation, lack of proper administrative structure/s for implementing the Program, lack of mechanisms for engaging municipalities, civil society and Roma community.

The present Program is also a good document. There are certain problems with it, of course. For example, serious problem is that the final preparations were done only by administrators, without NGO participation. Although the Program is based on

continues on page 2

CENTER AMALIPE JOINED THE COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR SYMPATHY WITH THE VICTIMS OF HIV/AIDS



Red ribbons, condoms and health education materials distributed the volunteers from the youth club for reproductive health "Sex, security and freedom," the club for the Prevention of Drug Addiction "SOS Friends" and volunteers of Center Amalipe on May 15 in front of Veliko Turnovo Municipality. The initiative is part of the campaign implemented in Veliko Turnovo in connection with International Day of sympathy with the victims of AIDS. Despite the bad weather and the strong wind, the volunteers managed to distribute 600 condoms and health education materials and arranged a ribbon (symbol of the campaign) by lighted candles. The Campaign was organized by the Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe, the Regional Health Center in Veliko Tarnovo, Veliko Tarnovo Municipality, the youth club for reproductive health "Sex, security and freedom," and the club for the Prevention of Drug Addiction "SOS Friends". The event was followed by a number of other initiatives:

continues on page 2



ROMA ACTIVISTS DISCUSSED CAMPAIGNS FOR PREVENTING EARLY MARRIAGES

Center Amalipe organized a workshop for local Roma leaders who would run community campaigns to address the problem of early marriages. The workshop took place from May 31 to June 2 in Veliko Turnovo within the project "Preventing early marriages". The meeting was attended by more than 30 representatives of the Roma community from selected places after a competition and



continues on page 7

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE :

NEW FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA: FACTS AND ANALYSIS

continues from page 1

suggestions proposed by many Roma and non-Roma organizations, the final “edition” was done without the civil society. Another problem is that most of its thematic fields contain too many “Priority axes”: 19 axes for the field of education, 21 for health care, etc. If fact these are not “priority axes” but rather possible activities; the real directions for action are missing or at least are not clear. The Program envisages too many things as priorities that dissolve the real priorities. May be priorities do exist but they are not clear or the real prioritization is left for the Action plan. Certain other problems also exist. Nevertheless, in its essence and in most of its parts the document is good. It is even richer and better than the previous one because it reflects a richer and better picture of Roma NGO movement and of institutions scope of activity: for ten years many new streams were developed. (For example, if the Education chapter in 1999 was centered only on desegregation, the present chapter continues the commitment for desegregation and enriches it with intercultural education, early school education, etc.).

The main question is: whether this good document will be implemented? The first basic precondition is missing: the Program was approved with the same low normative status. It is again “Decision of the Council of Ministers” and not Decision of the Parliament (that was the desire of Roma NGOs) or at least Decree of the Council of Ministers. This low status could not require financial engagement or engagement of the other institutions (of municipalities, for example). Something should be done for raising the status! – and could be done.

Regarding the other basic preconditions: the Program provides certain promises and engagements. In fact, this is the strongest asset. In its final parts, the new Framework program contains paragraphs that were missing in the previous one: “Mechanisms for implementation of the integration policy” and “Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation”. Certain important engagements are included in them: for combining mainstreaming and targeting approaches in integration policy; optimizing the administrative infrastructure of Roma integration; improving the mechanisms for coordination with the civil society; engaging the municipalities; financial back up for the integration policy (through the state budget and the structural funds); preparing communication plan.

In fact, the final parts of the document bring together the Framework Program and the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion: the Decade Action Plan will be the operative document for implementing the Framework program. That is why the National Coordinator of the Decade and the Ministry of Labour (in which the National coordinator is situated) will play rather important role. The Program envisages “building mechanism for inter-institutional coordination” in preparing and implementing integration policy and Ministry of Labour will play the leading role in this mechanism. In this way, the new Program does not change completely the existing administrative model (until now it relied also on the efforts of different ministries and on “coordinating role” of Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate) and does not envisage stronger administrative structure with executive competences – state agency or ministry. Nevertheless, the attempt to go further to a stronger coordinating structure is clear. It is disputable whether this “soft” attempt will work and whether the approach to make a particular ministry responsible for the horizontal integration policy is efficient; most probably the model will be changed if serious process of integration begins – the reality will require executive structure at national level or full decentralization of the integration policy.

The Program provides good engagements for financial back up. It tries to engage the state budget: through defining special money for implementing the integration policy in the budget of every key ministry, through establishing special “Multi-sectoral national program for implementing the Decade Action Plan”, and through dedicating financing for implementation of Municipal strategies for integration. In addition the Program requires further binding the Roma integration and Structural funds absorption: something that exists now owing to the advocacy efforts of Roma NGOs.

If all of these engagements are implemented, the Program would provoke a difference! Certain steps should be undertaken and they are drafted in the final parts of the Program. The question is how to guarantee that they will be implemented. Obviously strong advocacy efforts by the side of Roma NGOs and the civil society are necessary and they are the best possible guarantee at present. Civil society could and should cooperate with the responsible state institutions for implementing the Program: there are good preconditions and concrete actions should follow.

Larger information and analysis as well as the text of the new Framework program you could find at: <http://amalipe.com/en/?nav=news&id=290>

CENTER AMALIPE JOINED THE COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR SYMPATHY WITH THE VICTIMS OF HIV/AIDS



continues from page 1



-educational games on Sexual and reproductive health which involved 14 teams from schools in Veliko Tarnovo were organized in the park of Ksilifor near Veliko Turnovo on May 29, 2010
-interactive training in schools on the subjects of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, drugs by the volunteers of the clubs mentioned above and experts from the Directorate of Public Health Protection in Veliko Turnovo;
-other media events.

This year the International Day of sympathy with those affected by HIV / AIDS was on May 16. It marked the beginning of the third stage of the national AIDS information campaign "Be up to date!" organized by the Ministry of Health, the Program "Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in partnership with the regional directorates of the Public Health protection, municipalities and NGOs.

In early April Center Amalipe was selected to implement the activities under Component 7 "Reducing vulnerability to HIV among young people at greatest risk (15-24 years old)" for Veliko Turnovo territory within the program HIV / AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and managed by the Ministry of Health.



www.amalipe.com

RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO EARLY MARRIAGES IN THE ROMA COMMUNITY

Center Amalipe implemented survey among social workers throughout the country, including representatives of the Directorate of Social Assistance and the departments of Child Protection. Over 230 of them completed the questionnaire form with an "open" type of answers. The questions were formulated using the following methodology:

1. Identifying existing State policy towards the problem of early / forced marriages:

Research regulations, policies and strategies, taking into account their implementation on the ground; To determine how the policies related to the problem are implemented and what are the specific functions of respondents in terms of implementation, what is their practical experience and what specific

activities they perform.

2. Establishing of quality and quantity of the activities of practitioners, employees of the institutions related to the problem: Questions are directed to the activities of practitioners (field workers) related to the issue of early / forced marriages: how often they confronting the problem and what are the outcomes from their actions, respectively divided into two general categories - preventive and punitive.

3. What is the attitude of practitioners of the institutions concerned to the problem?

The questions are aimed at clarifying the existing attitude to the issue and to establish which approach is more successful, according to their practical experience - preventive or punitive.

4. Opportunities for Cooperation:

The questions are aimed to explore opportunities for collaboration with other institutions, with the Roma community and non-governmental organizations on early / forced marriages, presented as an interdisciplinary problem - related to education, social protection, health, cultural practices and traditions, poverty, participation in public life and personal development.

The main conclusions arising from the survey are that field workers do not use the existing legal basis in criminal law. Over 85% of respondents indicated that the law should be changed and cohabitation between minor and full aged person (the basic practice of Roma "marriages") must be criminalized, i.e. - declared as a crime.

Several provisions in the Penal Code of the Republic of Bulgaria declared marital cohabitation (according to our law a person under the age of 16 can not conclude legally recognized marriage) between minor and adult as a criminal offense. Unfortunately, if there is no information regarding the offense submitted to the prosecutors' office, they can not begin pre-trial proceedings. Administrative structures representatives that have a direct connection with this problem often do not refer to the police and prosecutors. Teachers and doctors do not indicate the problem because "humanity" considerations attributed early marriages to the specifics of the Roma community and do not want to intervene, as a signal submitted to the prosecutor's office would engage them as witnesses, which is associated with additional costs of funds and time. Social workers, on the other hand, perceive early marriages as a problem which must be answered with the power of state coercion, but are not sufficiently aware of the existing



legislation.

Overall, the system of child protection in the Republic of Bulgaria undertook an approach of diffusion of responsibility among many actors: public authorities that do not work in synergy with each other, do not exchange information and often don't know and respect their powers and the civil society to monitor development and situation of children as a major civic duty of everyone. Thus, signals regarding the early marriages rarely reach the competent authorities, received signals are not forwarded to the responsible institutions, and real-time monitoring to prevent future incidents is not implemented.

Discriminatory attitude among the representatives of social institutions occurs to often to ensure proper development and protection of Roma children from any harm. Over 50% of social workers have identified the problem of early marriages as "typical for the Roma community" lead by "tribal chiefs" in which "Roma women give birth as they go to the toilet". It is almost impossible to expect of a person with such attitudes to perform work in the community aimed at prevention of the early and forced marriages.

On the other hand, although 90% of respondents indicating their powers as a "preventive" (another possible answer - "punitive"), there is no specific programs, action plans and activities existing aimed at prevention of early and forced marriages. The most frequent answer from representatives of social institutions is that they get acquaintance with the issue when early marriage is already a fact and most often a Roma minor mother that have gave birth to a child come to seek social security benefits or child allowances from the Directorate of Social Assistance.

The lack of direct monitoring and work with the community determines the low number of early and forced marriages, faced by staff in institutions - many of the respondents indicate 5-6 cases per year, although they've answered that have been working in the field for about ten years.

On the other hand, those social workers who are active and refer the appropriate authorities - police, prosecutors and courts of justice with information on cases of early marriages, indicated that the judicial system does not adequately address specific cases and they are not punished. This additional discourages those who want to use the existing system of child protection, and creates a sense of impunity among the persons committed crimes against youths. Social workers often do not challenge the Roma tradition and do not seek further action or liability of the institutions called upon to punish those

committed the violation and to protect the victims.

As a promising trend can be accounted the expressed positive attitude towards cooperation with local NGOs and community leaders to raise awareness among Roma girls about their rights and how to protect themselves, in organizing trainings for responsible parenthood and building a sense of responsibility in adults as well as in the children, improving education and general "civic culture", raising public sensitivity to the problem and engagement of the whole society with the protection of children, their development and welfare.

VISITS IN PILOT SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICTS OF SOFIA, DOBRICH AND SILISTRA

In the beginning of May, Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe met with pilot schools in the districts of Sofia, Dobrich and Silistra in relation with the Program for prevention of drop-outs of Roma children from school. Representative of Center Amalipe and expert teacher visited the six pilot schools „Kliment Ohridski" in Smolnitsa, "Dobri Vojnikov" in Pobeda, "St. Cyril and St. Methodious" in the village of Kalipetrovo, "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the village of Professor Ishirkovo, "Vassil Levski" in the village of Vidrare, and „Dimcho Debeljanov" in Ihtiman .

Discussions with teaching teams of the pilot schools were held during the meetings, whose objective is to identify problems they encounter in the educational process and to outline the guidelines in which to work with each of the schools. Teachers shared with pain the decreased motivation to study, also lower achievement of the pupils in school and that students drop out of school due to financial difficulties .As a major problem teachers identified migration caused by socio-economic conditions in the country. Those migrations lead to lack of parental control in the age in which the presence of parents is crucial to personal development of students. Reasons for the lack of interest in learning teachers find also in the school, which is unable to offer interesting activities for children because of outdated material and



technical basis and the lack of innovation.

Teachers expressed their wish to be included in various courses and trainings, so they can create learning environment that attract and retain pupils in school. According to them, the most important for their work with Roma pupils is education for work in a multicultural environment that will help them get acquainted with the culture of the largest ethnocultural community in Europe.



INCLUSION OF ROMA POPULATION IN THE LABOR MARKET WILL BE SUPPORTED THROUGH "HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT" OPERATIONAL PROGRAM



The sixth regular session of the Monitoring Committee of Human Resources Development Operational Program took place on 18th and 19th of May in the town of Sandanski. Representatives of Directorate Generale "Employment, equal opportunities and antidiscrimination" of the European Commission, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (Managing authority of HRD OP), other ministries and institutions, observers from five groups non-governmental organizations took part in the Sixth session. Roma organizations were represented by Deyan Kolev.

In his opening speech to the participants the Chairman of the Monitoring Committee and Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy Krasimir Popov remarked that measures for overcoming the delay of the payments on the Program are being taken: not only to negotiate higher percent of the resources but to practically transfer the resources to the beneficiaries and invest them in activities. Our ambition is to program the whole resource before the end of the year in order to avoid the possibility for not using the resources from the Operational Program, said Mr. Popov.

Phillip Busz, Head of Unit for Bulgaria, Hungary, Netherlands and Croatia of Directorate General "Employment" of the European Commission stated that for the past six months Bulgaria achieved progress in negotiating resources from the Program but still the transfer of funds to the beneficiaries remains a serious challenge. Barely 5% of the resources have been transferred to the beneficiaries.

To face this challenge an Action Plan for accelerating of the absorption of the European funds is needed. The idea of the recently appointed Minister of the European affairs Tomislav Donchev for simplifying the procedures is very well accepted by the European Commission, asserted Mr. Bush. He emphasized that the Commission will strictly monitor the added value of the European Social Fund financed projects. The impact on the integration of vulnerable groups will be one of the main accents in this monitoring.

13 new procedures for financial aid within the Program with a budget of 271 million BGN were approved at the session. The frame of the approved new actions includes support for paid internships for 13 500 educated youths, hiring of personal assistants for 9000 persons with disabilities, integration in the labor market of 5000 long-term unemployed Roma, opening of new and supporting the existing social factories for disabled people, improving the qualification of 42 000 teachers and development of the system for professional orientation and career development in the system of secondary education, hiring of 250 labor mediators from vulnerable groups. In response to the high interest from citizens to the opportunities for education of employed persons by means of voucher of "I Can" Program, the Monitoring

Committee decided to provide additional 25 million BGN.

The Committee approved the suggestion of Deyan Kolev, observer from the group of Roma organizations, for announcing grant scheme for projects aimed at inclusion in the labor market of non-active persons and un-motivated persons. The scheme is called "Take your life in your hands". It includes field actions in marginalized communities for identification of non-active permanently unemployed persons; motivation activities; professional qualification; provision of three-month internships and mediation for job search. The whole spectrum of activities will be covered by funds from HRD OP. 5000 permanently unemployed and non-active persons are expected to be included in the program and respectively to be brought to work. NGOs that work in marginalized communities, training organizations or employers are welcomed to participate with projects. The budget frame of the Program is 11 million BGN.

The Committee also approved program "Improving the quality of service of the State Employment Agency with focus on vulnerable groups", initiated by the National coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Milen Milanov. This program develops the previous positive experience in hiring Roma mediators and includes hiring of 250 labor mediators from vulnerable groups (Roma, people with disabilities, etc.) to the Bureau of Labor for 42 months. Specialized labor markets will be organized as well as training for 1200 labor agents from the State Labor Agency to fight vulnerability of groups on the labor market. The budget frame of the program is 6 million BGN.

The delay of the payments within HRD OP was discussed during the session. Deyan Kolev said that the delay imposes threat of bankruptcy for the beneficiaries and they prefer not to apply for new projects. The reasons for the delayed payments and the highly complicated technical documentation for the accountability are not in the European Commission, but in the Bulgarian institutions, remarked Kolev. He suggested increase of advanced payments up to 40% of the approved amount on a project and requiring verification of the expenditures only at the stage of final report. That will limit the intermediate payments to one and will shorten the time terms to reasonable extend. Deputy Minister Popov agreed on the proposals and added that such procedure would facilitate the not only beneficiaries but also the Managing authorities. At the present moment simplifying of the procedures is being discussed on national level and that will happen in the months to come, stated to the participants Mr. Popov.

"BULGARIAN ROMA - INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION"

Roundtable "Bulgarian Roma integration and migration brought together four ambassadors – those of France, Italy, Hungary and Finland and none Bulgarian statesman. The event was held on May 12 at the French Institute in Sofia and was organized by the Embassy of France. At the event also present representatives of the Council of Europe, the French office of Immigration and Integration, Ministry of Labour in Hungary, activists of Roma NGOs. Bulgaria was represented by the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Milen Milanov, experts at the Ministry of Education Lilyana Stefanova and chairman of the Center Amalipe Deyan Kolev.

In his welcoming words Ambassador of France HE. de Poncins stressed that the roundtable is part of a cycle of events that the embassies of France and Italy organized to promote Roma culture and to address the situation of Roma. Ambassador de Poncins said that he visited the suburb "Nadezhda" in Sliven, and that the conditions in which Roma live there are unsuitable for the territory of the European Union. "We will seek assistance from our governments to be given humanitarian aid to these areas and will help the Bulgarian government to resolve the problems there, as we can not imagine that the EU citizens can live like people in Somalia!" said Mr de Poncins. In this direction was the speech of the Ambassador of Italy Hon. Stefano Benazzo.

The first panel of the roundtable was devoted to possible ways to improve the education of Roma children. Participants were Vuolastranta Miranda (Finnish Forum Roma), Diana Kirilova (PhD student at the Sorbonne), Lilyana Stefanova (MOMN) and Deyan Kolev (Center Amalipe). They have talked about the existing segregation in education and the need to overcome it, and the need for multicultural education that preserves the

identity of Roma children and tolerance among all pupils. The discussion involved many of the guests - Dr. Joseph Nunev, Gancho Iliev, Stella Kostova, Yuksel Yasharov. The main disputes were on the way of implementation of desegregation policy: the State or municipalities must guide the process and it is necessary to invest in the quality of education in the Roma neighborhood schools.

continues on page 9



THE ROMA EDUCATION FUND PRESENTED A DRAFT STRATEGY FOR WORK IN BULGARIA



Draft strategy for work by the Roma Education Fund in Bulgaria for 2010 - 2012 was presented on May 27 in Grand Hotel Sofia from Tobias Linden (Director of the REF), Dimitar Dimitrov (facilitator of the REF for Bulgaria), Beata Olahova (Expert REF), Zoe Gray (author of the draft Strategy). The event was attended by the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Milen Milanov, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Center for Educational Integration of Children and students from ethnic minorities, and activists of NGOs working for the educational integration of Roma children.

The draft strategy REF analyzes the impact of the Fund in recent years in Bulgaria as well as the overall development of education policies and their effect on the Roma community. It showed that during the last three years the political will for targeted educational activities for Roma integration was low, so that in practice such activities were not implemented by public institutions, but rather by NGOs instead. Overall development of education reform (introduction of delegated budgets, uniform standards and cost optimization of school network) has led to further deterioration of some of the most acute problems related to education of Roma children. Despite the successful desegregation projects undertaken by Roma organizations generally desegregation has not become governmental policy and reported success in this direction are rather dubious. As a positive development mentioned in this direction was allocating funds from the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" for the needs of Roma educational integration.

The draft Strategy sets out priorities for Bulgaria for the next three years. Its main focus is the continuing commitment to desegregation, but also incorporating new priorities: support for multicultural education, investment in pre-school education, initiatives to continue the development of Roma youth in higher educational degrees and the

formation of a new generation of Roma with university education. In the process of desegregation the Strategy shifts its support from the NGOs to the the Centre for Educational Integration. In addition the strategy set as a priority the capacity building among Roma advocacy organizations to educational institutions, participation in planning for the next programming period of Structural Funds and others.

The document is based on a wide range of reports and analysis prepared by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Center Amalipe, Open Society Institute - Sofia and so on.

During the discussion that took place most of the participants supported the findings and conclusions. Deyan Kolev (Center Amalipe) stressed that investing in advocacy activities (especially participation in the next programming period for the Stuctural funds), and supplementing the desegregation process with the introduction of multicultural education has all chances to give new impetus to educational integration. Kamen Makaveev (Association Integro) stressed that the mobilization of local communities is key to educational integration and it can be achieved mainly by Roma organizations working on the grassroot level.

Tashko Tanov (Naangle) and Rumyan Rusinov (Centre for public policy and advocacy) described the many difficulties faced by the organizations implementing desegregation projects. In response, Tobias Linden stressed that the REF will continue its commitment to the process of desegregation.

Another topic discussed was that of the scholarship programs of the REF. More than 1000 Roma students have been supported by the REF in recent years.

At the end of the discussion Dimitar Dimitrov appealed to participants to submit their written comments and suggestions to the draft Strategy by June 4 when the document will be finalized.

VOLUNTEERS TAKE PART IN A WORKSHOP IN THE MOUNTAIN, ORGANIZED BY CENTER "AMALIPE"



Group of 15 volunteers and representatives of Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance "Amalipe" - Momchil Baev and Radost Zaharieva highlighting organized a march to Holiday and vacation area "The Monastery" nearby the town of Lyaskovets on May 25th. The youths are members of the Volunteers group who are going to work in the field on Component 7 "Decreasing vulnerability to HIV of young people at highest risk (age 15-24) as part of "Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS" Program of the Ministry of Health of Republic of Bulgaria, funded by The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The march and workshop in the field were part of the concomitant initiatives in organizing the only National Roma Children Festival, which turned into a tradition for the city of Veliko Tarnovo and is held for seven years in a row. The main goal of the march was youths of different age to work together in an environment different than the formal one. The mountain appears to be a suitable one. In the holiday area the students

played role games promoting team work and then, divided into groups, they worked on hand-made posters, representing the activities of Center "Amalipe" and its partner organizations and institutions such as the Regional Inspectorate for Protection and Control of Public Health. The posters present campaigns, devoted to the fight of HIV/AIDS and young people's acquaintance, as well as Roma customs and of course one the biggest events by Center "Amalipe" - The National Roma Children Festival "Open Heart". The posters, hand-made by the volunteers in the mountain workshop are rich in images and will be presented during the Spring school camp "Peers training peers", May 30th to June 3rd in the village of Dolni Lozen. The School camp is part of the activities on "Decreasing vulnerability to HIV of young people at highest risk (age 15-24)" Project as part of "Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS" Program of the Ministry of Health of Republic of Bulgaria.



IMPACT OF HEALTH REFORM IN BULGARIA ON THE SITUATION OF VULNARABLE GROUPS



The changes in the health care system continue. A number of reforms that are already taken still have unclear consequences. The initiative of the Bulgarian Government to raise the time period in which one should have been paid his health contributions prior using medical services, from one to three years, led to decrease in health insurance revenues rather than the expected increase. The health insurance reserves decreased by 60 million compared to December last year. Those decreases in the budget revenues led as a result issuance of an order from the Ministry of Health sent to all emergency centers and hospitals funded directly from the budget of the Ministry, in which they were advised to cut 29.4 percent of their costs. This measure is supposed to lead to the reduce of approximately 160 million BGN for health care. State budget allocations remain unchanged for emergency centers, psychiatric hospitals, dialysis centers and homes for medical care for children. According to the Bulgarian Medical Union (BMU) the quality of the health care in Bulgaria already puts the life of the patients at risk and each month it declines more and more. In all European countries expenditures on health are larger than in Bulgaria, for example - in Greece 2733 dollars per capita, in Portugal - 1830, Slovakia - 718 Romania - 315, and in Bulgaria only 283 dollars. The numbers are according to the data announced by the World Health Organization in 2009. According to the BMU in 2010 the State have paid for each patient from the category of persons who receive their health insurance from the budget: retired people, children, socially disadvantaged, etc only about 20 leva or 2 leva per month. Again according to the WHO in all European countries the crisis has risen sharply the percentage of GDP on health. Only in Bulgaria it has been reduced. These comparative data clearly shows the differences in social and health care systems between Bulgaria and other EU member states.

It may be noted as a positive fact that the investigation ordered by the newly appointed Minister of Health within the State hospital system is underway. Based on gathered data it will be decided which hospitals could be converted into centers for post-hospital state, offering medical services for rehabilitation and recovery. It is expected to increase the effectiveness of services and hospitals that have the capacity to provide quality hospital care, so they take the majority of cases. Other hospitals will be converted to medical centers of other type offering post-hospital care. To achieve this in practice clinical pathways will be revised regarding their quantity and the amount of budget allocations per pathway. It is expected that next year the course of actions will be set for the introduction of diagnostic-related groups and differential payment based on qualifications, complexity of

work and workload. Those measures are expected to cover some of the most aching problems at present - insufficient salaries of the medical personnel and insufficient budget allocations for medical services.

All of the problems within the health care system were clearly showed by the outbreak of measles. Since the beginning of 2010 the total number of measles cases in the country is 14,470 and the epidemic covered the whole country. The epidemic process has a high intensity still in Haskovo, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Sofia, Montana, Vidin, Vratsa and Kardjali regions, mainly in places with large Roma neighborhoods. Vaccination is the most effective means to prevent measles infection. Since 1992 the immunization with mono-vaccine for infants at the age of one year has been changed to a combined vaccine against measles-mumps-rubella, applied at the age of 13 months and 12 years. The requirement for the application of combined vaccine is set for as a legal obligation. Epidemic primarily covers children and young people of Roma origin (average 93 % of cases; in some areas to 98%), living in compact urban neighborhoods with very close contact with each other and living in poor sanitary conditions. The established low immunization coverage throughout the Roma community is insufficient for the development of collective immunity and stopping the local spread of the virus. The presence of compact masses non-immuned Roma determines the scale of the epidemic. The main reason for low immunization coverage of children is the absence of regularly visits to the GP for vaccinations and medical check-ups.

Moreover, a more terrifying disease can start after the measles epidemic in our country- the poliomyelitis. The danger lies again in missed immunizations mostly among the Roma minority. Tajikistan has already announced an outbreak of poliomyelitis and there is registered single case in Russia. For example, Turkey already starts actions for prevention the polio; they deny entry in the country for those suffering from measles. In order not to repeat the case for the epidemic of measles, parents should ensure that their children have all required immunizations. A similar threat exists regarding the viral hepatitis B which could spread among a large number of Roma. The reason is that during the 1990s most of the parents of newborn babies were reluctant to vaccinate them against the disease. Failure to immunize their infants was provoked by the rumors spread among Roma that vaccines have dangerous side effects.



ST. GEORGE'S DAY - THE BIGGEST FEAST FOR ROMA IN BULGARIA

St. George's Day is the biggest feast for Roma in Bulgaria. It is celebrated by all Roma groups. The celebration of St. George's Day is connected with the belief that St. George is Roma's savior (as well as St. Basil) and with the legend that the dragon of an evil king started to eat Roma, but St. George killed him. Beside this, it is celebrated also as the beginning of the spring, of the real warm weather. Therefore, the whole ritual is full of spring symbolic. This spring our team was warmly received at a traditional celebration by the Kalderash Roma from the village of Kardam.





ROMA ACTIVISTS DISCUSSED CAMPAIGNS FOR PREVENTING EARLY MARRIAGES

continues from page 1

in accordance with the results of a representative national study on early marriage: Vratza, Vidin, Peshtera, Kuklen, Omurtag, Rakovski, Rakitovo, Yambol, villages Kardam and Vodolej.

The first day of the seminar began with a presentation and getting to know each other. All participants briefly described the situation in their localities. Divided into small groups, participants specified the size of the problem of early marriages in the communities represented by them, described the reasons for the existence of the phenomenon in specific areas and shared vision for how could influence the direction of preventing early marriages considering the specifics of each individual pilot community. In different parts of Bulgaria in different types of settlements, especially in the various Roma groups and subgroups early marriages are due to various reasons and discussion of those features and details of the traditions and rituals associated with them have proved to be particularly interesting for all participants; they sparked a number of spontaneous discussion. The main types of reasons defined by the participants were family traditions and community reluctance to break stereotypes; early dropping out of school and inadequate school environment to the needs of Roma children; poverty, lack of an alternative other than getting married at an early age; the obligation to preserve virginity until marriage in many communities; unawareness on issues related to reproductive health, early puberty; and last but not least - lack of enough good examples (or at least not visible enough). The discussions were followed by a presentation and comment on the legal framework regarding the problems of early and forced marriages by Angel of Getzov from Center Amalipe.

The second day of the meeting began with a presentation entitled "Roma in Bulgaria: group specifics," presented by Deyan Kolev, Chair of Center Amalipe. Participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with the various Roma groups and subgroups, as well as to receive answers to exciting issues related to the differences and similarities between Roma in Bulgaria.

All groups of participants prepared and presented ideas for project activities for preventing early marriages in their communities. The preparation and dissemination of information materials - leaflets, posters and films, organizing meetings, discussions and lectures in the community, persuasion through presentation of successful models of professional and educated young Roma, presenting the different alternatives, work in the field of education, desegregation and integration, work with families and community in the direction of change of attitudes and break down stereotypes were among the most common models proposed by the participants.

Ivelina Ivanova, expert at the Municipality of Gabrovo present the method of family-group conference as an alternative to resolve problematic situations within the family unit without external interference to which many Roma families are painfully sensitive. Examples of situations were the focus of a role play. At the end of the day the participants had the opportunity to become familiar with several film material devoted to the traditions of various Roma communities.

The campaigns discussed during the workshop will take place from June 15th to July 30th. All participants had left the meeting full of enthusiasm and enriched with new ideas, knowledge and friendship.



A SPRING COURSE FOR PEER EDUCATORS ABOUT HIV PREVENTION WAS HELD IN THE VILLAGE OF DOLNI LOZEN



A spring course for peer educators was held on the 30th of May up till the 3rd of June in the National education and logistics centre with the Bulgarian Red Cross in the village of Dolni Lozen near Sofia. The course was intended for the teams working on the 7th Component, "Reducing vulnerability to HIV of youth at highest risk (age 15 to 24 years old) by increasing the range of the services and programs aimed at young people" as part of the Ministry of health's Program "HIV/AIDS prevention and control" funded by the Global Fund against AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The specific actions of the program have to do with developing a national and regional policy on the sexual and reproductive health of young people. The national policy is part of the national program for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. What the Ministry of health is trying to do within the framework of the 7th Component of the National Program has to do with some basic interventions.

The first one has to do with the development of regional policy, which starts in 14 pilot municipalities, where regional teams have developed the main strategic components. The second step is to assure health education in schools. Right now such education can be provided and young people have access to it in way of classes out side of the compulsory curriculum. Another key intervention has to do with national campaigns, organized by the Ministry of health every year, including condom use promotion. One of the most important interventions is work with young people outside of the schools. We are talking about those young people that for some reason or other no longer attend school, or who have a low attendance record. They are at a larger risk than the average youth in high school.

The goal of the spring course in Dolni Lozen was to increase the capacity of the teams working on the "Peers educating peers" approach for HIV/AIDS prevention amongst young people in risk situations. Another goal of the course was for the young people working with the target groups to learn various techniques for field work and outreach. The complex matter was interactively presented by experienced trainers, specialists in the fields of psychology, medicine, social workers, in way of playing off examples from real life field work. In this regard, besides the theory aspect of it, the training focused on practical elements and discussions on various possible scenarios. Over 100 people from 14 districts gathered to take part in the program, with the introduction of NGOs from the cities of Blagoevgrad, Varna, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Pernik, Plovdiv, Pleven, Shoumen, Pazardjik, Burgas, Gabrovo and Dobrich. As part of the 5 day training course the representatives of all 14 participating NGOs had prepared brief presentations about their organization and activities. Adrian Jordanov from Shumen hosted the event and charmed everyone with his smile and good spirits. Artists from Blagoevgrad painted a colorful array of activities with which they presented the "Global initiatives in psychiatry" Foundation. The foundation works actively with the Regional institutions for

continues on page 8



A SPRING COURSE FOR PEER EDUCATORS ABOUT HIV PREVENTION WAS HELD IN THE VILLAGE OF DOLNI LOZEN

continues from page 7

protection and control of public health, the Clinic for anonymous and free consultation and testing for AIDS, as well as formal and non-formal organizations. After that the representatives from Varna spread the wings of joy and activity by presenting the "Centre for social and ecological practices" Foundation. Followed by the young people of Stara Zagora with their enthusiasm and efforts towards making every day a day without AIDS. They presented the "Zaraza"(Disease) club with the "Samaritan" coalition. The old capital Veliko Tarnovo persuaded us that "Unification equals power", the motto that represents the alliance of volunteers from 3 different organizations - the Centre for interethnic dialog and tolerance "Amalipe", the Bulgarian Red cross youth, and the "Sex, Safety and Freedom" organization. All of them united in the "K7" organization of Veliko Tarnovo have been working for the common cause of fighting the vulnerability of young people to HIV. The "Centre Nadia" foundation from Ruse came to show us that help is like the Domino effect (volunteers, educating, motivating, informing, guiding, organizing)- if you have helped one, you have helped others, too. The young people from Ruse share the idea that the domino effect is valid both in HIV infection and HIV prevention. Activists from the "P.U.L.S" Foundation from Pernik offered that, young people still have little to say about Component 7, but on the other hand have worked for a speedier integration of the person to the social life. Their youth organization "Let's be friends" speaks towards joining each other in this century against aggression and violence and all of them believe that people, flowers, birds and animals must live and be happy together. The Plovdiv group presented the National alliance of volunteers that has 24 organizations through out the country. The "Peers educating peers" club from Pleven presented their activities by saying "We can not change the world just in a few minutes, but we can be helpful to someone who is different". The club 7 group from Shoumen gathered people around

in the centre of the town with their "big paper heart". The young people from Pazardzhik who founded their club called "Peers educating peers" told us they hold events together with the Bulgarian Red cross youth, the Clinic for anonymous and free consultation and testing for AIDS and the Roma community. They presented the "Fund for crime prevention" Foundation. People from the Bourgas alliance "Ravnovesie" (equilibrium) told us all about their concerts, protests and street performances which grab the attention of both locals and tourists. The group from Gabrovo professed that "love is more powerful than any disease and any addiction". They work with a group of volunteers anywhere from 5 to 95 years old, and they say that they bring luck to people. The K7 club from Dobrich say that they are good artists, but besides that they can sing and play and with that reach more and more people. The multitude of youth that presented their activities did in fact show that opposites do attract, and not only that, they can also compliment each other and united under a common cause- the cause that brought over a hundred people together from all over the country, to join effort and direction and attest to the fact there is more to be done for the fight against HIV and AIDS.



www.amalipe.com

CENTER AMALIPE PARTICIPATED IN IN SPORTS AND EDUCATIONAL GAMES IN THE KSILIFOR AREA, DEDICATED TO THE WORLD DAY OF SYMPATHY WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS



Center for
Interethnic
dialogue and
tolerance
Amalipe
participated in the
organization of
sports and
educational
games in the
tourist area of
Ksilifor on May
29th, dedicated to
the World Day of
sympathy with
people affected
by HIV/AIDS,

which is always commemorated on the third Sunday of May. For the first time this day is commemorated in 1983 in San Francisco and New York. Since then on that day hundreds of thousands of people from over 1200 organizations in 115 countries participate in the largest and oldest event related to HIV/AIDS. Today about 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV, and every 12 seconds a person becomes infected with HIV and every 16 seconds - one dies of AIDS ...

During the event in Ksilifor young people from all schools in the city were involved in sports games, which mandatory are with an educational element. This year the games were dedicated to sexual and reproductive health. Experts from the Regional Inspectorate for Protection and Control of Public Health (RIPCPh) had prepared a variety of issues with which to examine sexual culture of the students and provided condoms for everyone, because they are one of the most important issues in sexual education for young people. The games were competitive in nature, in

which two people were carrying their teammate from one point to another, where they answered question. In the theoretical part they all coped very well.

Another interesting task that students had was to designate the different elements of male and female reproductive system on a large board. They all demonstrated good knowledge of the biology and reproductive health. It turned out that more young people faced difficulty in the practical part, which had to demonstrate putting a condom on a banana. At times, we even had two people to help in this difficult task, in which the result was crushed banana.

This development of our practical activity suggest that the need for sex and reproductive health education is still very necessary and in this respect should be made much more effort. In this regard, in April 2010 Center Amalipe was elected an organization to realize and implement the activities under Component 7 "Reducing vulnerability to HIV among young people at greatest risk (15-24)" within the program of the Ministry of health for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The International Day is not only a day to honor the memory of the deceased and sympathy with people living with HIV/AIDS, but also a call for public awareness and tolerance and for reduction of stigma and discrimination.



130TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SCHOOL IN THE VILLAGE BOTEVO



Graduates of the school "Hristo Botev" in the village of Botevo proudly celebrated its 130th anniversary. Pupils from the after-school classes for Folklore of ethnic groups took part in the festive program. They sang four songs and delighted guests with their beautiful performance.



TULIP FOUNDATION AND VIVACOM START A JOINT INITIATIVE FOR PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR CIVIL ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN SOCIAL SPHERE

Tulip Foundation and Vivacom start a long term joint initiative for providing technical support for civil organisations in the whole of the country that are working in social sphere. Organisations that have needs and ideas for concrete activities in benefit for the local community will be provided with second hand computer equipment in excellent technical condition in the frame of the programme. The initiative is targeted at civil organisations working directly with people to meet and overcome various social problems and provide sustainable services and projects. The interested organisations are invited to fill in an application form that is available on Tulip foundation web site www.tulipfoundation.net and should be send to the organization at rnikolova@tulipfoundation.net. Application process is opened permanently.



THE SCHOOL OF VILLAGE STRELTSI IS PRESENTED WITH AN EXHIBITION IN MUSEUM OF EDUCATION

Exhibition of Primary School "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" in the village of Streltsi, Brezovo municipality, visits the National Museum of Education.

Exhibition was in conjunction with the "Panorama of the schools in Bulgaria", which is dedicated to 175th anniversary of the education in new Bulgaria. The collection of promotional materials includes paintings, essays and applications for students, certificates of participation in competitions, methodological materials and pictures of school life. The exhibition presents the current state and success of a small school with a 130 - year history . In school in the village of Streltsi there are children from three ethnic groups - Bulgarians, Roma and Turks.



"BULGARIAN ROMA - INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION"

continues from page 4

The second panel was devoted to the migration of Roma from Bulgaria to Western Europe. There were Milen Milanov (National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion), Michelle Ge (Council of Europe), Martha Briyz (French Office for Immigration and Integration), Monica Roshan (Ministry of Labour - Hungary) and Olivier Adam (Doctors Without Borders). They discussed the effects of migration of large groups of Roma on the Roma community on Bulgaria and host countries.

The main messages were that not all migrant Roma creating criminal problems in host countries and that migration changed the Roma community, helping its modernization. Attempts by host countries to establish programs for remittances to date fail precisely because of the lack of real alternative to a decent existence in Bulgaria, Roma migration will continue until it achieved real integration in Bulgaria.

In the evening Ambassador of France HE de Poncins present a reception at the residence of France. The reception took place in the very same room in which two decades ago President Mitterrand welcomed Bulgarian dissidents, Ambassador de Poncins welcomes fellow ambassadors of Italy, Hungary and Finland, as twenty Roma intellectuals and activists. They talked about how the embassies of EU countries can assist the Bulgarian government and civil society in efforts to integrate Roma.

AMALIPE CENTER FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE

Veliko Tarnovo 5000, 24 Bulgaria Blvd p.o box 113

Tel:/Fax: (062) 600 – 224, center_amalipe@yahoo.com, www.amalipe.com