

ANNUAL REPORT
ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA
2007 – 2008

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ACTAPTA

Plovdiv, 2010

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In Lieu of Preface: Opportunities Missed

On 1 January 2007 Bulgaria became a member of the EU. In this way the efforts of a whole generation – citizens, public persons, politicians – reached to a successful end and Bulgaria became a member of the “club” of prosperous countries with proven devotion to democratic values, human rights and solidarity to the vulnerable and excluded members of society.

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania – countries with numerous Roma communities – additionally catalyzed the European level of awareness of the fact that straightforward activities are needed for the Roma integration. The Resolution of the European Parliament of 31 January 2008 appealing to the elaboration of a Roma strategy was an expression of this awareness. The initiated processes lead to the (first ever in EU history) European Roma Summit held in Brussels on 16 September, to wide discussions, which towards the end of the subject period gradually crystallized into the 10 basic principles of the Roma inclusion approved by the European Council on 8 June 2009 – the Council Conclusions on Inclusion of Roma. It was evident, even for the unbiased observer, that the EU made clear political implications to its members referring to the necessity of straightforward („explicit but not exclusive”) targeted actions towards Roma integration.

Although the effect of the European Structural Funds was not (and could not be) tangible immediately upon accession to the EU, in 2007 and 2008 Bulgaria was in an economic advance, had considerable budget excess availability, and the word ‘crisis’ sounded abstract and unrealistic.

In other words, 2007 and 2008 were years during which large-scale social and economic programmes could be implemented, and in particular – programmes for inclusion/integration of the most vulnerable and excluded groups. There was an exceptionally

favourable economic environment for such interventions, as well as clear political signals at EU level.

Nevertheless, 2007 and 2008 did not mark a considerable improvement with respect to Roma integration in Bulgaria. The institutional frame in the process of integration was not changed. What is more – the efforts for its optimization and better utilization (mostly by active representatives of non-governmental organizations and by politicians) completely failed and indicated serious “structural defects” in the existing institutional frame. It came out that by default, it obstructed, rather than accelerated the process of integration. The legislation frame was not changed either. Notwithstanding the efforts for higher legislative status of the so called „Roma strategies” (initiated again by the representatives of civil organizations), nothing of the kind ever happened. On the contrary, the update of the Framework Programme for Roma Integration and the National Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion became an arena of acute contradictions and at the end of the subject period these two key documents were not updated, which to a great extent devaluated the whole normative frame of the integration process. The budget excess in 2007 and 2008 did not contribute to state budget allocations for integration policy: a clear signal that integration was not among the priorities in the agenda.

At the same time it would be a mistake to say that nothing positive happened in 2007 and 2008 with respect to Roma integration. These years were full of events and efforts leading to certain results. Despite the fears that upon EU accession the Bulgarian government would withdraw its commitments to Roma integration, such a „collapse” did not happen. The efforts of the Roma non-governmental organizations continued. Various initiatives and events went on which indicated that the topic ‘Roma integration’ was not cancelled in the agenda.

In other words, in 2007 and 2008 there was no considerable change with respect to Roma integration. There was no step back, but also no step forth. Most of the opportunities that these years provided for the implementation of a whole integration policy, have been missed.

This report covers the years 2007 and 2008, as well as the first months of 2009. The report analyzes and evaluates the implementation and achievements in four key areas of Roma integration: education, healthcare, housing conditions, employment/social services. We have considered the whole normative, administrative and financial frame of the integration process. The report is a result of a daily observation of the processes in the said areas, as well as of the activities of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Healthcare, the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues under the Council of Ministers, Directorate “Ethnic and Demographic Issues”¹ and other institutions at the national, regional and local level. The report does not cover one of the important areas connected with Roma integration – the absorption of the European funds and the mechanisms for support of the integration policy. This is the area of real advance in 2007 – 2008 and probably its role will be more and more important for the years to come. It is not included in this report for two reasons. First, the EU funds are means of implementation of specific policies, and not of their formulation. As this report is mostly focused on the formulation of policies for integration, the topic of the EU funds was left aside. Second, the first three years of the implementation of three key programmes financed with money from the European Union (Human Resources Development Operational Programme, Regional Development Operational Programme, and the Programme for Development of Rural Areas) have been a subject of a special research organized by Center Amalipe and Open Society Institute – Sofia. The conclusions of this research will be published in a special report entitled European Structural Funds and the Roma Integration in Bulgaria 2007 – 2009.²

The present report is a result of a research performed at the national and local levels in 12 municipalities from the 6 planning regions in Bulgaria. The research was organized by Center for In-

¹ DEDI was functioning during the analysed period and was closed down in September 2009.

² The report is available on:

<http://amalipe.com/en/index.php?nav=publications>

terethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe with the participation of 16 representatives of Roma non-governmental organizations and experts from the country. The findings and the conclusions were discussed with a wide circle of Roma organizations and with the major interested institutions. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science sent written statements on the first draft and their comments and suggestions were taken into consideration.

This report presents findings, evaluations and conclusions. The findings have been checked and confirmed by the various actors in the integration process, including the main competent institutions. The evaluation of the findings and especially the conclusions referring to such a complicate and manifold process as Roma integration cannot claim to be definite. This research assumes the original pluralism of possible assessments of the implementation of every single public policy and does not claim to present the only and definitive truth about Roma integration in 2007 and 2008. It does claim, however, that it included a wide and various range of representatives of the Roma community (informal leaders, representatives of Roma NGO, Roma experts working in the public administration, etc.), and its methodology emphasized on the discovery of the opinion of the local Roma communities for which the programmes and policies have been implemented. Therefore the research claims to present the viewpoint and the evaluation of wide circles of the Roma community. Reporting this viewpoint is definitely necessary in order to understand what has happened to the Roma integration in Bulgaria during 2007 and 2008.

This report is a sequel of the analogous report Roma Integration in Bulgaria – 2006 and it was prepared following the same methodology – confirmed and with proven reliability.³ The ambi-

³ For a detailed description of the methodology, see: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation of Policies directed towards Roma Integration in Bulgaria – 2006*. Veliko Tarnovo: Astarta, 2007, p. 15–17. Available at: <http://amalipe.com/files/file/publications/eng/Doklad-eng.pdf>

tion of Center Amalipe is to proceed with the permanent monitoring of the integration process and the publication of annual progress reports. Gathering facts and provision of findings, as well as the discussions on evaluations and conclusions are necessary steps towards effective and efficient implementation of every single public policy, whereas for the real happening of the Roma integration these steps are imperatively necessary!

Roma Integration in 2007 and 2008: Institutional, Legislative and Financial Framework

Context

During the past decade, marked by active discussions on Roma integration, a model integration policy was gradually introduced followed by all the governments. In the normative aspect, this model relied on the approval of specific integration documents with relatively low normative status. During the period 1999 – 2006 a few documents were approved, defining the integration policy development, all of them enacted by the Council of Ministers: resolution by the respective Minister, resolution by the Council of Ministers, Government Decree. None of these documents was enacted by the Parliament and the efforts of Roma organizations in this direction met the reluctance of the ruling politicians of all parties.

Specific documents formulating the normative framework of the process of Roma integration have been approved during the period 1999 – 2006. Two of them – the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society and the Action Plan for the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion initiative - claim to define the general trends on Roma integration as a whole. The other three, and namely: the Strategy on Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (approved in June 2004), the Health Strategy concerning People in Disadvantaged Position belonging to Ethnic Minorities (approved in September 2005) and the National Programme for Improving the Living Conditions of Roma (approved in March 2006) were conceived in order to regulate the integration process in the respective area. To date there are no similar documents only in the spheres of employment and culture.

As to the financial aspect, the model integration policy relied mainly on the funding from various European and international financial instruments (like the PHARE programme), partially on co-financing of various activities from the budgets of the respective institutions, but did not foresee target financing for the implementation of the integration policy from the state budget. This feature of the model was preserved besides some exceptions that actually confirmed the rule but did not lead to its abolition. Even during the years of economic upsurge and with the considerable budget surplus available (the subject period in the report includes such years), the state budget did not make a commitment to the Roma integration. The efforts of Roma organizations in this direction were unsuccessful.

As an example, by Government Decree 4/11.01.2005 a Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students of Ethnic Minorities was founded and in March 2006 the National Programme for Improvement of the Living Conditions of Roma was approved. Financing from the state budget was foreseen for both initiatives, however, it was named „supplement financing”, i.e. the presumption being that there would be other source of financing – European programmes, international donors, municipal co-financing, etc. In both cases state financing was limited to the minimum (considerable state financing was foreseen for the National Programme for Improvement of the Living Conditions of Roma. During the years following its approval however the actual allocations were very small, even before the economic recession. The implementation of the three-year Programme of the Center for Educational Integration for the period 2007–2009 was financed by the state budget with BGN 4,5 million, which was much less than needed).

Another important feature of the integration model was the lack of a distinct institutional center. The main principle of the institutional framework on the national level was not to create new specialized institutions (with main obligations referring to minority integrations), but to utilize the existing institutional system of the executive power. The existing institutions were expected to implement the integration policy in the respective sphere (e.g. the Ministry of Education was expected to formulate and imple-

ment policies for educational integration, and so on), although their administrative capacity was not increased to that effect. Coordination mechanisms were also created in order to coordinate the efforts of various institutions. Until the beginning of the subject period this was the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI) and Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate under the Council of Ministers (DEDI). The National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion was institutionalized in 2006 as a coordination mechanism situated at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. This led to additional coordination deficiency of the already loose integration efforts.

Below is a progress report about the described model during the subject period. The analysis is focused on the main trends of the formulation and the implementation of the whole (horizontal) Roma integration policy. The analysis of the sector policies (concerning educational integration, healthcare integration, employment integration and improvement of living conditions) is attached to the next chapters of the report.

Institutional Framework

In 2007 and 2008 there was no revision in the institutional model for Roma integration; only the executive authorities had real power to implement integration policy, while the NCCEDI and the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion had coordinating and consulting power. The subject period was marked by a serious crisis in the functions of NCCEDI. Although the Council was formally operational and had regular sessions (as opposing to the period 2003–2005), it did not effectively perform its coordinating and consulting functions. The attempts to turn it into an efficient institution failed and disclosed „recurrent problems” in the Council. At the end of the subject period NCCEDI (and DEDI) were in a deep crisis including serious doubts about the future of this structure. In 2007 and 2008 the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (NCDRI) gained ground as an institution duplicating some of the functions of NCCEDI. Despite the activeness of the National Coordinator (contrasting with the behavior of NCCEDI) this institution was not developed and

empowered administratively and did not manage to give the integration process a boost. What is more, the permanent opposition between NCCEDI and NCDRI additionally weakened the coordination in the accomplishment of the integration policy.

Chronologically, the conception of NCCEDI in the late 2004 and its predecessor, the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues in 1997, was in response to the requirements of the European Commission, Roma non-governmental organizations and two objective necessities. First, it was crucial to find an institutional center to coordinate various institutions of the executive power in their efforts for minority - and especially Roma - integration. As already mentioned above, Bulgaria adopted a model which did not create a special institution to implement integration policies (a ministry or state agency, like Romania, for example), but the existing ministries were authorized to initiate actions for integration in their own main area. This model required the creation of a coordinating center to encourage the separate ministries, to support them, to coordinate their efforts and to supervise them in the accomplishment of the integration activities. NCCEDI was conceived as such a coordination center.

During the period 2001–2003 a substitution of the institutional model was actively under preparation and the foundation of an institution with executive (and not coordinating) authorities – a State Agency for the Minorities. This was promised in the pre-electoral campaign in 2001 by both parties that consequently formed the Government – the newly-created National Movement Simeon the Second and the party representing the interests of the Turkish minority, Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Towards the end of 2003 this idea was abandoned for reasons that were never made known to the public. Thus in the late 2004 the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues was transformed into a National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, and as a „secretariat” of the Council, a Directorate „Ethnic and Demographic Issues” was created by a Government Decree 333/10.12.2004¹.

¹ See more in: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation of Policies directed towards Roma Integration In Bulgaria – 2006*. Veliko Tarnovo: Astarta, 2007, p. 21-23.

Second, it was necessary to find a mechanism to include citizen's organizations and the Roma community in the process of formulating and implementing the integration policies. In the 1990-s as to date the citizen's organizations (especially Roma ones) were the active driving force of the efforts for integration and often the institutions lagged behind them. Therefore, it was necessary that the non-governmental organizations be included in an institutionalized way into the decision-making process. This was also a requirement of the European Commission following the principle of active citizen participation in the formulation of public policies. On the other hand, the Roma community was not politically represented and had no participants in the institutions. This situation has not changed nowadays. Unlike the Turkish minority, which managed to consolidate its own party, to enter the government and to participate directly in decision making, the Roma population remained without representation and needed mechanisms for participation. NCCEDI was conceived as such a mechanism.

These two functions – coordination and consultation – were underlying in the philosophy of the Council foundation (by Government Decree 333/10.12.2004) and in its Statutes (approved and amended also by Government Decree 351/20.12.2006). The functions of NCCEDI, its structure and contents were described in details in the previous monitoring report². During the subject period they were not changed radically but only complemented (amendments by Government Decree 351/20.12.2006, promulgated in State Gazette dated 4 May 2007).

Following the Regulations on the Constitution and the Activity of the NCCEDI, the council members are the deputy-ministers of almost all institutions of the executive power and representatives of the non-governmental organizations (art. 5, paragraph 6 of the Statutes of NCCEDI). Chairperson of NCCEDI is a Vice-Prime Minister (art. 5, para.2), one of the deputy chairs is appointed by the Prime Minister, the other one is elected by the NGO-s (art. 5, para. 4). NCCEDI may participate in the so called “co-ordination procedure” before enactments by the Council of Ministers in the sphere of ethnic and demographic issues (art. 1, para. 3).

² Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation...*, 21-24.

At first glance the powers of NCCEDI allow the Council to accomplish its consulting and coordinating functions and to stimulate the performance of tangible integration policy. Nevertheless, throughout the subject period, as before, the Council did not efficiently perform its inherent function, which fact to a great extent weakened its reputation.

During the subject period NCCEDI did not perform its function to consult important decisions on ethnic and demographic issues with the leading non-governmental minority organizations. On the contrary, the Council often obstructed consultations with NGO. Although the number of NGO members in the NCCEDI increased every year (from 13 in 2006 to 57 in 2009), they did not take part in the important decision making.

For instance, NGO not only did not participate, but also did not receive information on the formation of the NCCEDI budget and its expenditure. The attempts of the Vice Chair from the civil society quota to propose the draft budget of NCCEDI for discussion and approval at a meeting of the Council were constantly impeded by the Directorate on Ethnic and Demographic Issues throughout the year 2008. The member organizations learned from the media what projects “their” Council was preparing and implementing; the DEDI staff drafted projects on behalf of NCCEDI and implemented them without passing approval procedures whatsoever and without even informing the member organizations. The two annual reports entered by NCCEDI at the Council of Ministers as per its Regulations – on the activities of the Council and on the status of interethnic relations – were not prepared jointly with NGO but were only “announced for information” to the organizations.

The Annual Report on the Condition of Interethnic Relations – 2007 is very indicative. The Report contained conclusions unacceptable for the great majority, including the rather disputable argument that “the longer the Movement for Rights and Freedoms is on power, the lesser the prejudice against the Turkish minority”. Leading organizations objected against major statements in this report at the NCCEDI meeting on 4 April 2008, but nevertheless it was not corrected. Then it was made clear that the report

was only announced for information and had already been entered at the Council of Ministers!

Many times the most active organizations participating at the NCCEDI warned that they were exposed to inadmissible political and administrative pressure by the management of DEDI and NCCEDI. This provoked declarations signed by dozens of organizations (November 2007, February 2009). Things often went as far as high-rank officials trying to manipulate the elections of representatives of the most active and criticizing organizations to impose “convenient” candidates and a number of other deeds that were considered unacceptable and atrocious in the countries with developed democracy.

The Vice Chair of NCCEDI elected by the civil society quota was practically left without authority. Not only that he himself was not allowed to take a decision, but also he could not propose it to the Council without passing through the censorship of the Director of DEDI, who actually was supposed to be acting only in the capacity of a Council Secretary.

An indicative example is the meeting of NCCEDI on 23.07.2008. The Vice Chair from the civil society quota in 2008 Mr. Deyan Kolev proposed for the Agenda 4 issues having importance for the development of the integration policy at that moment: to defend the position of a District Expert on Ethnic and Demographic Issues from the current dismissals in the administration, the impact of the introduction of the delegated school budgets on the educational integration, the financial provision for the position of Health Mediator and the approval of a Plan for a more efficient participation of NGO in the activities of NCCEDI. By means of administrative “tricks” (including premature closure of the meeting because of „logistic problems”) the Director of DEDI did not allow placing these issues at the meeting and eventually prevented consideration of these issues by a written procedure.

As a result the bigger part of the minority NGO completely lost interest in the capacities and mostly in the good will of the Council to consult the integration policy with the citizen sector. Towards the end of 2008 and especially in the beginning of 2009 (NCCEDI actually failed the attempts of the citizen organizations

to take an active part in the preparation of a new Framework Programme for Roma integration) the citizen sector's trust in NCCEDI reached extremely low levels.

„This is a dummy and a harmful body. It only imitates consultations with Roma organizations in order to be able to state in front of Europe: „We do this with the Roma consent”. In reality everything is decided by the empowered persons and it is up to the conscience of Roma organizations that they agree to be used just as a cover. From time to time some organizations make noise, speak up and say what is happening, but why do they stay? What do they hope for? It would be better if all of them leave the Council and it be closed down...”

Roma leader not participating at the NCCEDI

„We have participated at the NCCEDI from the very beginning, hoping that the Council will start functioning. In 2008 that hope was very strong – we elected a Vice Chairman, we actively participated in the preparation of a new Framework Programme... And all that – voluntarily. We shared time and expertise hoping that something better might happen for the Roma integration. But it did not happen. Obviously, there is no political will...”

Chairperson of a Roma NGO, member of the NCCEDI

During the subject period NCCEDI did not perform another important inherent function – to coordinate the efforts of the various institutions. The institutions in reality did not take part in the Council activities. Instead of Vice Ministers (who ARE members of the NCCEDI) the meetings were attended by experts from the lowest administrative levels. For example, the meeting of 23.07.2008 was attended by one Vice Minister, the meeting of 24.11.2008 – by none, and the meeting of 20.12.2008 – by two Vice Ministers. It was clear that the delegated experts could not take important political decisions and these never happened. In fact, NCCEDI did not make an attempt to pass political decisions. The Agenda of the meetings of NCCEDI rarely included issues concerning the various ministries, and when this happened, no decisions were taken.

„The Council does not wish to take serious decisions whatsoever. I do not know whether this is an order by the Chairperson or

officiousness by the Secretary, but obviously, the idea is that it is better not to take any decisions and not to recommend anything to the ministries: maybe in order to avoid contradictions between the various institutions; or simply because there is no real will to work for the Roma integration. If occasional decision is taken, this is so generic that it is difficult to understand what is meant. Something like “NCCEDI recommends that the Earth should rotate around the Sun”.”

Chairperson of Roma NGO, member of NCCEDI

It was indicative that the NCCEDI did not react at all to important events concerning the Roma integration in 2007 and 2008: a great number of the experts on ethnic and demographic issues were dismissed, the delegated school budgets were introduced in a way that seriously impeded the access to education for Roma children from the smaller places, the National Health Strategy was accepted, permanent problems accompanied the introduction and the financial provision for the position of a Health Mediator, and so on. On all these issues, active NGO, as well as the Vice Chair of the civil sector quota entered proposals for decisions, however decisions were not taken at all.

NCCEDI did not efficiently participate also in the consultative procedure for enactments of the Council of Ministers. Although the Regulations of NCCEDI allowed (and what is more – required) this, annually only 2 documents on average were consulted (the draft National Employment Action Plan and the Implementation Report of the National Programme for Improvement of Roma Living Conditions). That was predestined by the passive behaviour of NCCEDI. The Chairperson of the Council (the Vice Premier Emel Etem) had the opportunity to request that all draft normative acts referring to ethnic issues be agreed with NCCEDI, but did not do so.³ What is more – with Order No B-11/19.03.2008 the Vice Premier and Chairperson of NCCEDI, assigned the consultations on

³ The only exception was at the end of the subject period. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers, the Vice Premier Emel Etem suspended (for a week) the approval of the draft Law on School Education with the motive that it was not coordinated with NCCEDI. The next week the draft law was approved by the Council of Ministers, although it was not considered by NCCEDI

draft normative acts as a task to the Vice Ministers of the various ministries participating in the Council. This in reality meant re-issuance of the coordination procedure for NCCEDI: the said Vice Ministers would coordinate draft normative acts within their ministries and in this way the “external evaluation” on behalf of NCCEDI would be abolished. The final result of all this was that during the subject period the Council was an incapacitated authority that did not perform the objectives for which it was founded. To the opinion of many – active members of NGO and independent experts – NCCEDI became a political creature justifying and concealing the inertness of the government on Roma integration. Moreover, the Council and especially DEDI were involved in a number of public scandals related to the inefficient implementation of projects under the PHARE Programme, suspicions for malpractices and fraud. This tendency, which had already started in 2004⁴, reached its peak in 2008. The suspicions for corruption or at least inefficiency in the implementation of the PHARE projects by DEDI became a recurrent topic of some of the most popular national newspapers and DEDI was defined as the “Directorate with brain deficiency”. All that additionally undermined NCCEDI’s reputation during the subject period.

The reasons for this situation with NCCEDI are complex. They originate both in the management’s style of work during the reported period and in the very way the Council is structured and functions, i.e. there are constant systematic problems. During the subject period NCCEDI’s activity was strongly political replacing the idea of expert nature. Besides the Chairperson of the Council, who by presumption is a politician (during the past 4 years it was the Vice Premier Etem), as Vice Chairs and Secretary of the Council (which means also a Director of DEDI) were appointed again politicians – Miroslav Popov (Bulgarian Socialist Party) and Maya Cholakova (Movement for Rights and Freedoms). The Council

⁴ Kolev, D., Teodora Krumova and Boyan Zahariev „Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the PHARE Project BG 0104.01 „Integration of Roma Population”.

turned out to be a hostage of the competition between MRF and BSP, which often locked any decision taking.

A significant feature of the style of work imposed by the management of NCCEDI was the drive to ignore the work and participation of non-governmental organizations in the Council and to place them in the passive status of approving audience. There were many examples to that effect during the analysed period, the strongest being the rejection of the proposals of Roma NPO for a new Framework Programme for Roma Integration and their exclusion from the process of its elaboration (see below). Another important characteristics of the imposed style of work was the reluctance to initiate active and straightforward efforts towards Roma integration. The management did not allow the Council to make recommendations to any institution on the valid issues connected with Roma integration in the respective spheres. The acceptance of a new Framework Programme for Roma Integration was cleverly hindered, although it was a task assigned to NCCEDI by the Government. Every attempt to turn the Council into a body proposing on the issues of Roma integration was halted. This may be explained with the strive to keep the balance between the institutions, with the complex relations inside the coalition on power at the time, and so on and so forth, but this tendency can hardly be denied.

In addition, NCCEDI lost some of its main activity fields. In 2006 the Council of Ministers appointed a Vice Minister at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as a National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. From that moment to the end of the analysed period the lean (and almost missing) integration policy came out with two centers – NCCEDI and MLSP, controlled by different parties (MRF and BSP), caught by a scarcely concealed antagonism. The management of NCCEDI did not even try to make the Council and the supporting Directorate EDI an interim unit or at least a specific beneficiary under some of the operational programmes, although NCCEDI was an implementation unit under PHARE projects. This made most of the DEDI staff useless when PHARE programme expired. If all that was caused only by the incompetence or reluctance of the previous management to work, the problem would have been temporary and relatively easy to

overcome. However, the described style of work found its grounds in a number of fundamental features regulating the structure, the contents and the functions of NCCEDI. During the analysed period some “system errors” were evidenced that would hinder the efficient accomplishment of the Council’s main functions with every other management.

One of the main “system errors” of NCCEDI proved to be the excessive powers of the Chairperson. He could take decisions alone and nothing could be decided without him. The functions of the Vice Chairs are more or less symbolic. The Vice Chair elected from the civil society quota has a short mandate (one year) – a prerequisite not to do much. All these are provisions in the Statute of NCCEDI.

The lack of operational unit to prepare proposals for decisions of the Council proved to be one of the significant weaknesses of NCCEDI – a precondition preventing decision-making. Such a unit was not foreseen in the Statutes of the Council and the proposals to create one (coming mostly from the NGO and the Vice Chair from the civil sector quota) remained unanswered.

Another important “system error” of NCCEDI was the complete domination of DEDI over the Council. The Directorate supervised NCCEDI instead of supporting it, as was the idea of its inception. This, to a great extent, was dictated by the conjuncture during the analysed period – the Director of DEDI was a politician (and not an expert) from MRF, the party to which also the Chairperson Emel Etem belonged. Nevertheless, things were not only about political situation, but also about the Regulations of NCCEDI leaving an opportunity for DEDI to prepare the decisions of the Council, its budget, and also to expend it.

The procedures for selection and participation of NGO as per the Regulations of NCCEDI proved to be another considerable weakness. According to the provisions, NGOs apply but the decision which organization should participate in the Council are taken by a committee appointed by the Chairperson. This leaves ground for two opposing and equally negative tendencies: political pressure (to approve „convenient” organizations and to reject the „inconvenient” ones) or washing away the NGO participation by

means of allowing dozens of organizations in the Council, even though they do not comply with the membership criteria⁵. The latter happened during the analysed period.

In 2007 and 2008 the institution of the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (NCDRI) gained ground. It was situated at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. During that period the National Coordinator was Baki Husseinov, a Roma activist, former mayor of a village in Shoumen District, nominated by the Roma party – a coalition partner of the Bulgarian Socialist Party. He enjoyed the confidence of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. Until the end of April 2008 he was a Vice Minister at the MLSP, and after that a councilor of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. Administrative support to the National Coordinator was provided by a Directorate at the MLSP and in fact by two experts.

During the analysed period NCDRI gradually started to perform coordinating and consulting functions, analogous to those of NCCEDI. The National Coordinator organized administrative monitoring of the implementation of the initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion and published annual reports.

The administrative monitoring was performed in a way that can be criticized by many. Following an administrative procedure, information was collected by the institutions responsible for the implementation of the initiative: i.e. the same institutions performed and evaluated the activities. This can hardly present the real picture. Non-governmental organizations were completely excluded from the process. As per the opinion of many experts, the results of the administrative monitoring are partial, may represent only the point of view of the institutions and cannot show the real picture of the implementation of the initiative.

Since 2006 a consultative body has been operational under the NCDRI with the participation of Roma NGO-s and experts –

⁵ Art. 5, paragraph 6, point 5 of the Regulations for the Structure and the Activities of NCCEDI imposes certain (relatively easy) requirements to the organizations – members of NCCEDI, and namely „three-year active public activity of national importance”.

the Council on Roma Integration. It has been meeting twice a year to discuss issues referring to the implementation of the initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion. Unlike the NCCEDI, the Council on Roma Integration did not include representatives of key institutions engaged with integration policy, which made the dialogue between Roma organizations and the respective ministries practically impossible.

The Council on Roma Integration (CRI) encountered problems analogous to the ones concomitant to the activity of NCCEDI. The decisions taken by CRI rarely referred to heavy current issues. Such problems were discussed, but the decision taking (even in the form of recommendations) was practically impossible because of the absence of the respective ministries. CRI did not have the authority for preliminary consultation of draft normative acts or decisions in the sphere of integration policy, not even those coming out of the MLSP. (E.g. CRI did not even consult the National Action Plan on Employment that was consulted by NCCEDI). The lack of clear-cut membership criteria lead to „diluting” the participation of Roma organizations. In reality CRI was attended by rather versatile organizations (actively functioning and suspended, etc.), which made it difficult to reach to a consensus.

An important role for the NCDRI to win recognition played the fact that during the analysed period the National Coordinator had an active behaviour on current problems concerning Roma integration – an attitude contracting to the passive NCCEDI. At the interviews for this research with NGO activists, they pointed out the important role of the intervention of the National Coordinator during the establishment of the position of a Health Mediator, for overcoming Roma discrimination in different places in the country, etc. The interviewed activists were positive that in the person of Baki Husseinov they found support to their efforts.

At the same time there were some problems in the establishment of the institution NCDRI. A serious obstacle was created by the lack of a clear-cut authority. The resolution by the Council of Ministers of May 2006, which actually endorsed the position of a National Coordinator, did not define authorities but only regulated that NCDRI should be a Vice Minister at the MLSP (initially

it was Yavor Dimitrov and subsequently – Baki Husseinov). The definition of ostensible authorities happened only in July 2008 with Resolution by the Council of Ministers dated 24.07.2008. This act endorsed a number of authorities to the National Coordinator, such as: to coordinate the activities of the institutions of the executive power on the implementation of the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, to guarantee participation of the civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan, to organize events to strengthen the capacity of Roma organizations, to steer the process of preparation of an updated Action Plan, etc. The weak point of this resolution, however, was that it did not specify the mechanisms to apply these authorities. It was not made clear how the National Coordinator, situated at MLSP on the vague position of a Councilor to the Minister, was going to apply his coordinating and supervising functions to the other ministries.

The administrative support to NCDRI also faced certain problems. No secretariat to the NCDRI was created; an attempt to do so was made by the MLSP in 2007, however it was blocked during the so called „coordination procedure” of the enactments of the Council of Ministers by the Ministry of Emergency Situations⁶. The lack of a Secretariat in reality “tied up the hands” of NCDRI to perform activities on a larger scale.

A serious problem created also the downgrading of the National Coordinator Baki Husseinov from the position of a Vice Minister to a Councilor of the Minister. This happened in April 2008 when the government made some redundancy dismissals in the administration and reduced the number of Vice Ministers. Until April 2008 the National Coordinator was a Vice Minister, which allowed him to perform his functions much more efficiently. The downgrading of the institutional importance of the NCDRI placed serious problems in front of the overall implementation of the initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion and to a great extent predestined the impossibility to further strengthen the position of the National Coordinator as a coordinating factor in the efforts for Roma integration.

⁶ During the subject period the Ministry of Emergency Situations was lead by Emel Etem, Chairperson of NCCEDI

Roma organizations reacted immediately to that change and stood for the National Coordinator requesting that he be kept as a Vice Minister. Forty-three Roma organizations signed in two days a declaration initiated by Center Amalipe insisting that the decision to dismiss Baki Husseinov from the position of a Vice Minister be reconsidered, that the position of a NCDRI be preserved and that a Secretariat of the Decade be provided with relevant personnel including specialists from the Roma community. The declaration was sent to the Prime Minister Stanishev.

Twenty-four organizations signed and sent a letter to the Prime Minister with analogous requests prepared by Tony Tashev, representative of the Roma Educational Fund for Bulgaria. Dozens of other organizations spontaneously sent separate letters to the Prime Minister.⁷

Notwithstanding this reaction, the decision for the dismissal of Baki Husseinov from the position of Vice Minister was not reconsidered, and the organizations did not receive a formal reply by the Prime Minister. The position of a National Coordinator was preserved and two months later the Council of Ministers specified the authorities of the NCDRI.

Another serious problem to the strengthening of the position of NCDRI was the hardly concealed opposition with NCCEDI and DEDI. The reasons for these contradictions had different nature – both political (NCDRI was a representative of the BSP, while DEDI was ruled by the MRF), and institutional: the two institutions in fact doubled most of their activities. The few persons committed to Roma integration at the various ministries and the NGO-s never understood why the integration policy should have two coordination centers. In all cases, the repetition of the functions, accompanied by contradictions and internal conflicts, had a negative impact on the overall implementation of the Roma integration policy.

„We have to send the same reports to DEDI and to the National Coordinator. That is to say, we report one and the same thing first as implementation of the Framework Programme, and then

⁷ *Bulletin of Center Amalipe, issue No 5/2008, p. 1-2.*

as a completion of the Action Plan of the Decade. Excessive paperwork and imitation of a big job...”

Employee at a sector ministry

In the long run, although his efforts were the active party in the process of Roma integration and accelerated it, the National Coordinator did not change much the status-quo. This throws a shade of doubt whether the institutional model of integration policy may be efficient at all and how much it can stimulate and govern a real integration process.

Financial Framework

During the subject period there were no changes in financing of Roma integration policies. The implementation of the strategic and operational documents for Roma integration (Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society and the National Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion) was not backed up with relevant financial support from the state budget. Notwithstanding the budget surplus that would have allowed financing of programmes targeting vulnerable groups and programmes for social cohesion and social inclusion, the state budget did not make a financial commitment for Roma integration policies. Proposals to that effect were made at many occasions by Roma organizations and by the Vice Chair of NCCEDI from the civil society quota, but were not supported by the Bulgarian Government.

Small amounts were allocated by the budget for the implementation of the National Programme for Improvement of the Roma Living Conditions and for the activities of the Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities, as analysed in the chapters referring to the progress in educational integration and living conditions.

The major source of financing during the subject period continued to be the various European programmes: PHARE, OP Human Resources Development, etc., as analysed in the chapters referring to the progress in educational integration and living conditions. As a whole, these funds were limited and were not able to compensate the want of financing from the state budget.

Commitment from the state budget to Roma integration may be found in the following directions:

- NCCEDI allocates annual amounts from its budget, distributed by projects among Municipalities, NGO-s and other institutions to perform events directed towards preservation of the cultural identity of ethnic minorities. In view of the small NCCEDI budget (not exceeding BGN 200 000 per year), the amounts distributed are also small (around BGN 40 000), the allocations on “Roma” project being only a part of them;

- Since 2008 the state budget has been financing the appointments of Roma Health Mediators as delegated amounts to the municipal budgets. This process is described in the chapter representing the health integration;

- During the last years the Ministry of Health provides budget for servicing mobile equipment obtained under a PHARE programme for medical examinations in the Roma community. 36 000 examinations have been performed during 2007–08. The allocated budget was in connection with the implementation of the PHARE programme. It was significantly smaller than foreseen and there was a delay in its transfer which threatened to fail one of the PHARE projects, but in the end the said examinations were performed anyhow;

- Since 2008 Roma labor mediators have been appointed with money from the state budget. This is part of the programme Activating Non-Active Persons, financed through the National Action Plan for Employment. 40 mediators were appointed in 2008, and in 2009 their number was increased to 103 (although 200 were foreseen);

- Throughout the whole period of action of the National PHARE Programme, financed by the EU, there has been a 25% co-financing from the state budget.

This continuous tendency from previous periods, and namely the insufficient commitment of the state budget to the implementation of integration policies, has been criticized on many occasions by representatives of the Roma organizations and by independent experts. Nevertheless, during the analysed period there was no change in the financial framework.

Normative Framework

During the analysed period the normative framework of Roma integration process has not been changed. Nevertheless, attempts were made to change two of the documents regulating the implementation of the national horizontal (multisectoral) Roma integration policy – the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society and the National Action Plan on the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Updating the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society was necessary for three important reasons. Firstly, in its reports on Bulgaria's progress in the process of EU accession, the European Commission kept on criticizing the failure to implement Roma integration policy and recommended creation of the necessary conditions for Roma integration (including improvement of the normative background). This recommendation did not specify on the preparation of a new Framework Programme, but could be interpreted also in this sense. Secondly, the vision of important political figures from the Government (especially in the biggest party on power – BSP) was that a new programme was necessary. That was clearly stated on the highest level by the Prime Minister Stanishev at a meeting of the International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma Inclusion held in Sofia in June 2007. In his speech the Prime Minister defined the existing Framework Programme as outdated and invalid. A strong protagonist of the idea for a new programme was also Miroslav Popov, Vice Chair of the NCCEDI appointed by the Prime Minister. Thirdly, in the preamble of the FPEIRBS it was written that its validity was 10 years, after which it was going to be updated. That period expired at the end of 2008.

The idea to prepare a new FPEIRBS was proposed at a meeting of Roma activists with the Chairperson of the National Assembly G. Pirinsky on 4 May 2007. The activists requested that the new programme be enacted by the Parliament (by, for instance, a Resolution of the National Assembly), and to define target financing from the state budget for its implementation⁸. The idea was

⁸ *Drom Dromendar* Newspaper, issue 8 /2007.

also discussed at a meeting of the Committee for Roma Integration at the NCCEDI on 23 May, repeating the main parameters as mentioned at the meeting with the Chairman of the Parliament and a decision was taken to gather small workgroups of representatives of Roma NGO and the respective institutions.

Nevertheless, till the end of 2007 no real process of updating the FPEIRBS had started. The Roma organizations reacted negatively to the tendency only politicians and employees of DEDI to prepare the initial draft of the Programme. These attempts lead to a harsh declaration signed by dozens of organizations and a press-conference on 30 November 2007.

In 2008 the process of updating the Framework Programme was much more intensive and became an indicator for rather contradictory relations between the institutions of the executive power (the NCCEDI in particular) and Roma organizations.

The history of the updating process of FPEIRBS in 2008 can be summarized with the following events:

In the Action Plan for 2008, approved by the Council of Ministers, together with the measures resulting from the membership of Bulgaria in the EU, it was foreseen that a new FPEIRBS should be prepared and an Action Plan (Measure 122) with a deadline 27 November 2008.

In his programme the Roma activist Deyan Kolev, Vice Chair of NCCEDI, elected on 4 April 2008, defined the leading place of the preparation of an updated Framework Programme and the active participation of the Roma community and the citizen organizations in this process.

On 23 April 2008 the Committee on Roma Integration under the NCCEDI appointed 5 representatives of the Roma community, members of NCCEDI, and 11 distinguished Roma social figures outside NCCEDI, to participate in the inter-office workgroup for the preparation of the FP.

On 20 June 2008 the Vice Premier and Chairperson of NCCEDI Emel Etem signed Order No P-48 for the preparation of an updated Framework Programme for Equal Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society. The order created an inter-office workgroup with the participation of representatives from the main institutions of the executive power, Roma NGO, University representa-

tives and independent experts. 16 representatives of Roma organizations and Roma-oriented donor programmes were included in the workgroup. It was prescribed that up to 31 October the drafts of the Framework Programme and the Action Plan for 2009 should be discussed at a meeting of the NCCEDI and up to 15 November – submitted for approval at the Council of Ministers.

The first meeting of the inter-office workgroup for the preparation of the updated Framework Programme was held on 2 July 2008. On 15 and 16 July 2008 there was a second meeting of the inter-office workgroup and meetings within the five subgroups to define the main priority measures in the separate sectors.

From 6 to 11 October 2008 regional discussions on the main principles and positions in the Framework Program for Equal Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society were held in the six Bulgarian districts. They were organized by the Directorate on Ethnic and Demographic Issues on the request of Roma NGO-s and the Vice Chair of NCCEDI from the civil organizations quota Deyan Kolev. Over 200 persons – representatives of district/municipal administrations and Roma non-governmental organizations – took part in the discussions.

On 9 December 2008 in Sofia a national meeting was held with the organizations involved in Roma integration under the motto “Strategies for Our Common Future”. The forum gathered 120 participants from the whole country, which made it the biggest gathering of the kind for the last 10 years. It was initiated by a large group of Roma activists and organized by Center Amalipe. 88 organizations signed a joint declaration on the main principles to be underlying in the updated version of the Framework Program.

On 20 December 2008 the third meeting of NCCEDI for the year 2008 was held. It was decided that the Framework Program and the Action Plan would be finalized in February and passed at the Council of Ministers in March 2009.

In January 2009 the representatives of the Roma NGO-s participating in the inter-office workgroup prepared and submitted for discussion the whole draft FPEIRBS summarizing the suggestions made by NGO and institutions in 2008.

Immediately after the entry of the draft prepared by the Roma organizations, the Vice Premier and Chairperson of NCCEDI Emel Etem appointed new members of the inter-office workgroup for

Roma integration, as well as new deadlines for entry and approval of the document (Order No P-13 of 23 January 2009). Most of the experts of the inter-office workgroup from Roma organizations were dismissed: They were 16 in the old membership, and 4 in the new one (Deyan Kolev, Nikolay Kirilov, Dr. Stefan Panayotov and Assen Kolev); Excluded were Baki Husseinov – National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Dr. Yosif Nunev – an expert in the sphere of educational integration in the Ministry of Education and Science and imminent public person of Roma origin – was replaced by Assen Petrov, director at the same ministry. The new deadline for entry of the Framework Program at the Council of Ministers was set for the 2 April, and for the Action Plan – 30 April.

The Roma organizations reacted harshly to the new order of the Vice Premier Etem, defining it as an attempt to bring the process back to its very beginning, to minimize the participation of the Roma community and the civil society and to politicize the new document. They boycotted the new workgroup and did not attend its meetings.

Until the end of the analysed period a new FPEIRBS was not accepted.

The reasons for the absolute fiasco of the attempts to update the Framework Program can be evaluated in different ways by the different participants in the process. The Roma organizations, the institutions and the politicians entered with different ideas and expectations and could not find common ground to meet.

The Roma organizations as a whole had discrepant attitude towards the process, at least at the beginning. For part of the organizations (mostly the organizations financed by the Roma Educational Fund) the Framework Program was a document that did not need re-wording. For the rest (Center Amalipe, Association Integro, and dozens of others) it needed an update but not a new composition: just including new topics and principles (e.g. the principle of Roma participation, the inter-cultural exchange, the binding of the EU funds for Bulgaria with the Roma participation, etc.) without breaking with the previous version. These organizations defined with clear parameters their participation in the process of updating the Framework Program: updating, not re-writing; enactment of the document with a Resolution of the Na-

tional Assembly; financial allocation from the state budget for the implementation of the document; defining a new administrative framework for the integration process; providing mechanisms to involve the local government in the process; consideration of the Roma issue not as social but as exclusion of an ethnic group⁹. Gradually, this position attracted a wide range of Roma organizations and at the end of 2008 the majority Roma NGO-s actively participated in the process, as evidenced at the National Meeting of Roma Organizations of 9 December 2009.

Some of the politicians participating in the process (most of all the Vice Chair of NCCEDI Miroslav Popov) also defended their positions: re-writing a new Programme, breaking with the rights defending approach of the old one; considering the Roma problem as social; inclusion of the topic of order and security in the Roma quarters, etc. Other important political figures (like the Vice Premier Etem) never stated their position.¹⁰ They obviously disagreed on the enactment of the Framework Program by the National Assembly and on the budget allocations for its financing.¹¹

Many of the institutions of the executive power were passive during the preparation of the FPEIRBS. Till the end of 2008 only the Ministry of Education had sent their proposals which overlapped with the proposals by the Roma organizations and were included in their first draft of January 2009. The other institutions took part in the work of the inter-office workgroup and in the process at a low administrative level (through experts, not political figures) and did not express clear, straightforward positions.

Although attempts were made to find a common position uniting the points of view of the Roma NGO and the politicians, engaging also the institutions of the executive power, these attempts

⁹ *Bulletin of Center Amalipe, issue No 4*, p. 1, 6; *Bulletin of Center Amalipe, issue No, issue 7-8*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Although the Vice Premier and Chairperson of NCCEDI Emel Etem appointed herself as a Chairperson of the Inter-Office Workgroup on preparation of the Framework Program, she did not attend a meeting.

¹¹ Similar suggestions were made and more than once entered by Deyan Kolev, Vice Chair of NCCEDI from the civil society quota, but were rejected by the Chairperson Etem.

failed. Most probably the main reason is the insufficient political will for straightforward actions for Roma integration, provided with funds, administration and mechanisms for Roma participation and involvement of the local government.

In 2008 a process was initiated to update the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Integration. The main reason was that the Plan approved in 2005 contained specific measures only for 2005 and 2006. At the request of the National Coordinator Baki Husseinov, suggestions by Roma organizations (Association Integro, Center Amalipe) were sent; other organizations shared their ideas during the meeting of the Council for Roma Integration in November 2008. Nevertheless, until the end of the analysed period no update of the Action Plan of the Decade was available.

Main Conclusions

During the analysed period the Roma integration policies have been implemented within the models – institutional, normative, financial – as inherited from previous years. Attempts were made to improve the institutional and normative framework of the Roma integration process. There have been efforts to change the model of financing the integration policy.

As to the institutional provision, the main efforts were directed towards better coordination between the institutions. Roma non-governmental organizations attempted to considerably improve the work of NCCEDI: to include it as an active participant in the integration process, to let the Council exercise in reality its coordinative and consulting functions, to guarantee equal participation of the civil sector in its activities. In spite of the efforts, these attempts did not enjoy the collaboration of the political management of the Council, encountered serious opposition from the administration supporting the Council (DEDI) and did not lead to tangible results. At the end of the subject period NCCEDI (and its Secretariat – DEDI) was not efficiently functioning and had exhausted the confidence of the rest of the participants in the integration process and, most of all, of the Roma community.

The National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion gained ground as an institution to a great extent duplicating the

functions of NCCEDI. Attempts were made that he played an active coordination role but they did not lead to the expected result. NCDRI's administrative capacity remained small: no secretariat was employed, in 2008 the position of the NC was considerably downgraded (from Vice Minister to Councilor of the Minister). Problems resulted from the fact that the institution was situated in a sector ministry (MLSP), and yet, it was expected to coordinate horizontal policy (including many other ministries). At the end of the subject period NCDRI was not efficiently functioning as a coordinating and consulting body, notwithstanding the efforts and attempts to that effect.

As to the normative framework, attempts were made to update it (especially the Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society) and strenuous efforts were made in that direction (especially by the Roma organizations and some of the politicians involved in the process). Nevertheless, the attempts failed, disclosing very serious discrepancies in the positions of the different participants in the integration process, as well as weak political will for straightforward actions towards Roma integration.

As to the model of financing the integration policy, some efforts were made by the non-governmental organizations to involve the state budget in the Roma integration but these efforts were inefficient, they did not enjoy collaboration from the institutions of the executive power and did not lead to the expected result. Much more efficient were the efforts (again initiated by NGO) for allocation of financial resources from the European Funds for the process of Roma integration, and especially from the Operational Programme Human Resources Development. Yet these could not compensate the lack of financing from the state budget necessary for a large-scale multiple process like the Roma integration.

The analysed period indicated the exhausted capacities of the institutional and normative models for implementation of Roma integration policies, as well as the groundlessness / insufficiency of the model for financing these policies. The options for improvement of these models were exhausted and the attempts in this direction failed. At the end of the period the need to change the models was clearly evident.

Roma Educational Integration in 2007 and 2008

In 2007 and 2008 the educational system in Bulgaria underwent through dynamic and stormy changes. The system for financing of the school network was radically changed through the introduction of the delegated budgets in all schools, the definition of unified expenditure standards for the allowance per student and the decreased opportunities for municipalities to re-distribute money among various schools. Hundreds of schools were closed down, this process expanding unprecedentedly in Bulgarian history. Part of the measures foreseen in the National Programme for the Development of School Education and Pre-School Training were gradually introduced: differentiated remuneration for teachers, application of external evaluation system, introduction of state maturity exams, etc. All these measures to the opinion of most educational experts were absolutely imperative and have positive nature. A complete Law on School Training was prepared. The social tension in the educational sphere – characteristic for every system undergoing changes – grew into a grand national strike which went on for more than a month (October 2007).

These serious reforms went on in the conditions of an overall economic upsurge and were generally well provided for. Although the percentage for education in the gross national product was not increased considerably and remained one of the lowest in EU, the Ministry of Education and Science managed to spare a serious budget for the implementation of national programmes in support of the planned reforms: BGN 171 million in 2007 and 221 million in 2008. Another important factor supporting the reform in the Bulgarian education was the approval and initiation of the Operational Programme Human Resources Development.

The programme distributed a solid financial resource from the European Social Fund in the spheres of employment, social ser-

vices and education, and the Ministry of Education and Science was identified as an Intermediate Body on two priority axes (Resolution of the Council of Ministers 965/16.12.2005). This allowed the Ministry to allocate Euro 437 million for the period 2007 – 2013 under various priority measures related to the improvement of the quality of education and access to education. In July 2007 the first schemes started to finance projects under this programme, 4 of them in the sphere of education.

At the same time these two years did not end up with serious changes and considerable progress in the process of educational integration of Roma children. What was mentioned in the previous monitoring report is still valid: low level of political will for straightforward actions for Roma educational intervention; attitude towards the minority integration as a supplementary (and insignificant) task aside of the whole process of modernization of the Bulgarian society; perfunctory implementation (in fact, almost complete lack of straightforward implementation) of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities.¹ Indicative is the fact that none of the national programmes through which the Ministry of Education and Science allocated funds for the planned reforms targeted educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities. The implementation of the SEICSEM and the whole process of Roma educational integration was directed mainly to the resources of OP Human Resources Development and to the rather limited resources of the Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities. All that contrasted with the efforts for educational integration of another vulnerable group – the children with physical and/or mental deficiency (the so called „children with special educational needs (SEN)“): the presence of real political will for integration of children with SEN in the public schools was evident and resulted in explicit actions supported by financial and human resource, which lead to achieving more or less doubtless positive results.

¹ See: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report about the Implementation of the Policies for Roma Integration in Bulgaria, 2006*. V. Tarnovo: Astarta, 2007, p. 78-108.

Context

The Roma population in Bulgaria has an extremely poor educational status, considerably worse than the country's average.² This fact has been officially recognized by the Bulgarian institutions. For instance, it is mentioned under OP Human Resources Development that „Educational disproportions have strong ethnic features... As an example, pre-school training covers 54% of the Bulgarian children, 38% of the Turkish children, and 12% of the Roma children. 22.6% of the Bulgarians, 55% of the Turks and 46.2% of the Roma population have completed only primary education. The Bulgarians with secondary education are 54%, Turks – 24%, while Roma – 7.8% out of the total number of the respective groups.... The data on higher education is quite indicative. About 23.5% of the Bulgarians have graduated universities, compared to 2.7% of the Turks and about 0.2 to 0.4% of the Roma. The share of those who have not passed even the earliest grade of the primary education is disturbing: for the Bulgarians it is close to the zero, for the Turks – 5.6%, whereas for the Roma it is 20.5%. The majority of these people is completely illiterate.”³

Although the Roma population in Bulgaria is – by official statistics – 4,8 % of the whole population (based on the data from census 2001, but many researchers state that the percentage corresponding to the real situation is twice as much), the Roma children in the Bulgarian educational system represent a considerably smaller group of students, both in number and per cent. According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science, the general distribution by ethnic appurtenance of the students from 1st to 13th grade in the country is the following:

² Center Amalipe, *Annual Report about the Implementation of the Policies for Roma Integration in Bulgaria, 2006*. Veliko Tarnovo: Astarta, 2007, p. 79–80.

³ *Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007*, p. 25–26. Available at: <http://eufunds.bg/en/page/11>

*Table 1***Distribution of students by ethnic background**

75,48 %	Bulgarian students
13,53 %	Roma students
9,53 %	Turkish students
1,44 %	other

The fact that this proportion varies considerably between the different educational levels is indicative and rather disturbing. For instance, as per the data of the Regional Education Inspectorates, in almost all the administrative districts the share of the Roma pupils in first grade is about 20% of all children of mandatory school age⁴. In some districts like Montana, Haskovo and Sliven the Roma pupils are over 40%, and in districts like Vidin, Vratsa, Pazardzhik and Yambol they exceed 30%. This percentage reduces drastically, the higher the stages and the degrees of education. The number of the students of Roma origin drops down in every subsequent level and thus in the secondary school it is seven times lower than that of the primary school. This is not due to increased birth rate during the last years but to the high percentage of Roma drop-outs: of every one hundred Roma pupils in their first year at the elementary, only 14 get through to the secondary school and there not many of them stay until graduation. On the other hand, according to the data from the Ministry of Education and Science, practically every Bulgarian and Turkish first-year pupil reaches to the secondary school level.

*Table 2***Distribution of students by educational level and ethnic appurtenance**

Educational Level	Ethnic Appurtenance			
	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Other
Elementary	65,3	9,95	22,6	2,16
Junior High School	69,7	11,01	16,8	2,45
High School	88,0	8,2	3,41	0,78

⁴ This term refers to children from 7 to 16 years of age who – under the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – should obligatorily be trained at the schools within the system of public education

The numbers described above clearly point out one of the main problems encountered by the educational integration of Roma children – the high rate of dropouts and not included in the school system. This problem deepened considerably in 2008. During the previous years the so called ‘net coefficient of enrolment’ in primary school was near 100%⁵ – i.e. practically all children from 1st to 4th grade were enrolled in school, whereas in 2008 – as per the data of the National Statistics – this coefficient went down to the unprecedented value of 94,6%. That is to say nearly 15 000 children happened to be out of school even at the lowest level! The coefficient is markedly lower in the junior high school – only 81%. Such small coefficients Bulgaria has not had even during the mid 1990-s (the heaviest years of the transition period). Most probably this deep crisis in the inclusion of pupils is due to the intensive top-speed close down of hundreds of schools in the rural regions – a hypothesis stated by competent educational experts⁶ which we are going to explain below.

Other serious problems encountered by the educational integration of Roma children are the practical lack of intercultural education, the segregation of a huge percentage of Roma students in *de facto* “Roma” schools or classes, the low quality of education in the rural schools with predominant Roma students (as well as in the segregated schools), the enrolment of normally developed Roma children in Auxiliary Schools, etc. These problems were described in details in the previous monitoring report⁷, the only tangible change now refers to the enrolment of normally developed Roma children in Auxiliary Schools. In 2008 this practice was considerably reduced (although not completely eradicated) as a result of changed procedure of directing children to Auxiliary Schools. As mentioned above, with reference to the integration of

⁵ *Operational Programme Human Resources Development*, 2007, p. 26.

⁶ Boyan Zahariev, “Otpadashtite uchenitzi – visokata tzena na reformata” (“The dropout students – the high price of the reform”). In: *Sega* newspaper, 20.07. 2009. Available at:

<http://www.segabg.com/online/new/articlenew.asp?issueid=3898§ionId=28&id=0001301>

⁷ Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation of Policies...*, p. 79–80.

children from the so called ‘auxiliary schools’ the Ministry of Education and Science took successful steps and this had a beneficial effect to reduce the “influx” of Roma children enrolled in auxiliary schools for social reasons. The remaining problems have been valid, acute and pressing, during the period in question.

Institutional Framework

The Ministry of Education and Science was the main institution at the national level expected to work for the improved access to education and for the quality of education as a whole. In particular, MES was the main institution whose authorities covered the educational integration of Roma children. During the subject period 19 Directorates were functioning in the Ministry. One of them – Educational Environment and Integration – had the authority on the integration of Roma children. It included 3 departments. One of them – Integration through Intercultural Education and Upbringing – was responsible for the educational integration of children from the minorities. It was the smallest department – only two experts and a chief officer worked there, which was absolutely insufficient for the needs of the integration process. Despite the expectations for employment of new specialists of Roma origin in the department, this did not happen (since 2001 one of the most imminent Roma educational experts has been working there).

MES has its regional structures – the Regional Education Inspectorates – in every district and in the city of Sofia. Their administrative capacity for implementation of integration policies for Roma students during the subject period remained relatively low. No REI had an expert working mainly on the integration of children from the minorities. The experts on educational integration appointed in 2006 had the authority only to support the integration of children with SEN and did not work on the implementation of SEICSEM. Formally, in every REI there was an expert whose obligations included also integration of children from the minorities (April 2006), but as mentioned in the previous monitoring report „the effectiveness of this measure could not be overestimated. All of them were experts whose main responsibilities remained different from the issue of Roma educational integration –

elementary education, arts, history, mother tongue, integrated education (i.e. integration of children with special needs), etc. The implementation of SEI was an additional (“extra”) task for them. Most of them were overburdened with different responsibilities and it was hardly to expect that they would leave a lot of time and efforts for SEI implementation.”⁸

Government Decree No 4/11.01.2005 made provisions for the creation of a Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (CEICSEM) under MES, as a second level spending unit for the implementation of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (SEICSEM). During the subject period CEICSEM started its activity, analysed below. This strengthened the administrative infrastructure to implement the integration policy. The Center is a very specific administrative unit between the ordinary state administration and the donor structure, which gives it limited opportunities for definition of policies and real role in their implementation.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the institutional frame at national and local levels was insufficient for the implementation of a profound integration policy: small department at the national level and lack of experts in the regional structures. The missing political will for straightforward integration actions predefined the impossibility for change of the situation. The establishment of the CEICSEM, as well as with the commencement of measure 4.1 under OP Human Resources Development placed the beginning of an alternative model for integration policy realization. Within this model, the application of SEICSEM, as well as the implementation of policies for Roma educational integration as a whole, is not assigned to the MES and its structures but to the municipalities. MES’s role in this model is to allocate financial stimuli for the implementation of the integration policy and to supervise the quality of this implementation. It is difficult to judge whether this model was implemented consciously or its application happened because of the low/missing political will to engage MES with the integra-

⁸ Center Amalipe, *Annual Report about the Implementation of the Policies...*, p. 91.

tion policy and the need to start executing OP HRD and CEICSEM. Nevertheless, the described new model is a fact – at least partially – and will be analysed below.

During the subject period two other institutions managed activities related to the Roma educational integration. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy continued implementing the National Programme for Literacy and Qualification of Roma People within the National Action Plan on Employment. Notwithstanding the weaknesses of this programme (connected mostly with the fact that those who have completed the „literacy” module do not obtain a certificate for finished school level, which makes it impossible to include them in module „vocational qualification”⁹), it was the only initiative to overcome illiteracy among nearly 20% of the Roma. MES did not fulfill activities in this direction during the subject period.

MLSP managed the biggest component of the National Programme for Fuller Enrolment of Pupils in Mandatory School Age. This programme, approved by the Bulgarian Parliament in 2005, contained most of all social and administrative measures directed towards dropout prevention and bringing pupils back to school. MLSP managed the biggest element in the Programme: giveaway breakfast for pupils from first to fourth grade. During the analysed period this component – rather debatable from the point of view of its efficiency – was implemented through greater decentralization.

Although the said quasi educational activities, directed or implemented by the MLSP, did not claim to formulate Roma educational integration policy, their scope contributed to an alarming tendency: shifting the emphasis from educational to social and administrative measures. MES’s passive behavior to a great extent facilitated this shift.

Another institution managing educational integration actions during the subject period was the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues and its Secretariat – the Directorate on Ethnic and Demographic Issues. NCCEDI was a Project Implementation Unit on three projects under the PHARE

⁹ See analysis of the programme in: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report about the Implementation of the Policies...*, p.50-60.

programme, aiming to support the implementation of SEICSEM. NCCEDI's and DEDI's role in these projects was mostly technical. The political priorities of the said projects were defined before 2006 by the MES, while NCCEDI and DEDI were supposed to provide technical assistance and to monitor their implementation.

Normative Frame

During the subject period the normative frame for execution of the integration policy was not changed and did not differ from the one described in the previous monitoring report. Main documents in it were the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (SEICSEM) and the National Programme for the Development of School Education and Pre-school Upbringing and Preparation (2006 – 2015). During the subject period the Operational Programme Human Resources Development was approved, also containing important texts related to the educational integration of Roma children.

SEICSEM was enacted by a Resolution of the Minister of Education and Science of 11.06.2004. It defines common objectives referring to education and integration of children and students of ethnic minorities, and namely: to guarantee the right for equal access to quality education; to preserve and develop the cultural identity of children and students of ethnic minorities; to create conditions for successful socialization of children and youth from the ethnic minorities; to transform the cultural diversity into a source of and a factor for mutual knowledge and spiritual development of the young; to provide appropriate social and psychological climate for the accomplishment of the strategy. The document contains also priority objectives concerning each of the big minorities in Bulgaria. As to Roma, these objectives concern the desegregation of the Roma quarter schools, introduction of intercultural education and guaranteed access to quality education. In June 2005 the Minister of Education and Science signed a five-year Action Plan for the Strategy implementation.

The Action Plan (as well as the Strategy itself) was based on the idea that the financing needed for the implementation of the Strategy was not going to be provided by the republican budget through

a special subsidy but was going to be supplied by a specially established Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities that would accumulate funds from external donors with some “supplementary funding from the Republican Budget.”¹⁰ In compliance, the Council of Ministers approved Decree No 4/11.01.2005 for the establishment of CEICSEM.

During the reported period the SEICSEM was not annulled but the actions for its implementation were very limited. Nothing of the Strategy was included in the draft Law on School Education prepared by the MES. A national programme on the implementation of the SEICSEM was not adopted, like the national programmes through which many of the educational reforms proposed in 2007 and 2008 were realized. SEICSEM was the basis of the three-year programme of CEICSEM and its performance was assigned only to the Center.

The National Programme for the Development of School Education and Pre-school Upbringing and Preparation (2006 – 2015) was approved with Resolution of the National Assembly dated 7 June 2006, the text of the programme was not prepared by the MES. The programme itself was a strategic document trying to formulate the development of the Bulgarian education for a relatively extensive period. In 2007 and 2008 it regulated the main actions of the MES. The document placed two main objectives: quality education and access to education. In compliance, a number of specific measures were foreseen in order to achieve each objective.

As to the Roma educational integration, the Programme represented a serious retreat from the SEICSEM. In fact, the National Programme did not create a reliable base for straightforward integration policy and did not in any way acknowledge the existence of SEICSEM. None of the measures in the Programme to increase the quality of education can be related to the Roma educational integration. Roma children were partially included in some of the

¹⁰ Initially the idea in 2003–2004 when the Strategy was under preparation, provided for the establishment of an Educational Integration Fund as an independent legal entity. The draft law on the establishment of such a fund was rejected immediately at the first hearing by the National Assembly on 6 October 2004.

measures directed towards guaranteed equal access to education, but this was done in a very unbalanced way: „children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian”.¹¹ Specifying the measures addressing children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, the Programme points out, above all, the additional education in Bulgarian language, as well as pre-school training and placing these children in ethnically mixed environment.¹² These measures are only outlined without going into details. It seems that the Programme pays no attention to the ethnical and cultural peculiarities of the children and pupils, or that these peculiarities are not considered to be important for the Bulgarian education. Roma educational integration is not mentioned at all in the document.¹³

Human Resources Development Programme (HRD OP) regulates the absorption of money from the European Social Fund on priorities and measures agreed by the Bulgarian Government and the European Commission. The Programme was signed in September 2007, while its elaboration went for more than a couple of years. Roma organizations played an active role in this process and managed to pass most of their suggestions.

The educational section of HRD OP follows the National Programme for Development of School Education, including also – thanks to the efforts of Roma organization – much more texts connected with the educational integration of Roma children. The Programme includes a special intervention area (measure) „4.1. Access to education and training of disadvantaged groups”, directed towards vulnerable minority groups (with focus on the Roma people), children with SEN and dropouts or likely to drop out. Suggested were a wide range of activities to facilitate the access to education and to increase the motivation for inclusion in the educational process for Roma children, to continue the process of desegregation, to introduce intercultural education, to work with Roma parents, etc.¹⁴ All this was developed in a special chapter of

¹¹ Same as f.n.10 above, p. 18.

¹² Same as f.n.10 above, p. 23.

¹³ For a more detailed analysis of the National Programme, see: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation of the Policies...*, p. 82–84.

¹⁴ *Operational Programme Human Resources Development*, p. 103–104.

the programme „Areas of assistance with regard to Roma community”¹⁵ Indicators are foreseen to measure the effect of HRD OP on Roma integration¹⁶ – a fact of exceptional importance considering that these indicators will give regular information on the Programme implementation. To recapitulate, the educational part of HRD OP and chapter „Areas of assistance with regard to Roma community” provide the necessary prerequisites to link the absorption of European funds with the process of Roma educational integration. This cannot fill in the gaps in the National Programme for the Development of School Education, the more so – in the possible new Law on Public Education, however, it definitely gives a boost to the process of educational integration – by means of allocating financial resource and making commitments (the implementation HRD OP is part of Bulgaria’s commitments as a member state of EU).

During the subject period a new draft law was elaborated, regulating the development of Bulgarian education (named „Law on School Education”), but it was not approved and did not become a part of the legal and normative base of the process of educational integration. Analyses of the draft law is attached below.

Partnership with NGO

Throughout the transition period the non-governmental organizations were and still are a “good player” on the ground of Roma educational integration. Most of the processes in that area were initiated and tested by the structures of civil society. Foundations and NGO-s with extensive experience and proven expertise are: Open Society Institute, Roma Educational Fund, C.E.G.A. Foundation, Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe, the organizations implementing projects on desegregation, etc. In order to institutionalize the relations with the civil sector, MES established in 2003 a Consultative Council on Educational Integration for Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities. In that period MES supported (financially, too) initiatives of

¹⁵ Same as above, p. 132–138.

¹⁶ Same as above, p. 137–138.

various non-governmental organizations: for instance, introducing the optional subject “Folklore of the Ethnos – Roma Folklore”, etc.

In 2007 and 2008 the relations between MES and NGO-s worsened – a disturbing tendency which started as early as 2006. All activists from Roma NGO-s interviewed within the present research shared that the attitude towards the citizens’ organizations on behalf of high-rank political persons from the MES was as to rivals who had „expropriated the original functions of the state”, and not as partners. Similar suggestions were implied at meetings of experts at the Regional Inspectorates on Education. NGO-s were not welcomed as potential leading organizations to the bids organized by the CEICSEM expending state budget funds, the only exception being in May 2008 when the absorbed money came from the Roma Educational Fund. NGO-s were not going to be eligible for potential main beneficiaries under projects after the bids announced in 2007 under the HRD OP: the operation criteria proposed by the MES at the first meeting of the Monitoring Committee under HRD OP on 18.06.2007 suggested that NGO-s should only be partners and not leading organizations. The intervention of the observer from the group of the Roma NGO-s Deyan Kolev resulted in the inclusion of NGO-s as potential leading beneficiaries under both schemes announced at the said meeting – „Creating Favorable Multicultural Environment...” and „Let’s Make School Attractive to Young People”.

The Consultative Council on Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities did not function in 2007 and 2008. The requests by many organizations and experts for restoration of the Council did not meet with understanding at the MES. The CEICSEM could not fill in the gap of the lacking consultations process. Although NGO-s participated at the Steering Committee of the Center, they were appointed by the Minister of Education without a public procedure and were not obliged to consult their positions with other civil organizations.

Major educational trends and the Roma educational integration

As already mentioned, 2007 and 2008 were years of deep reform in the Bulgarian education. Generally speaking, they were realized regardless of their effect on the education of Roma children and without introducing appropriate buffer mechanisms to prevent worsening the already poor educational level of the Roma community. The reforms affected also other vulnerable groups, for instance the students in smaller places, the students likely to drop out, etc. and the buffer mechanisms applied (such as the statute of „focal”-point schools and „protected” schools) only partially compensated the unfavourable impact.

As a whole, most of the reforms had negative effect on the educational level of the Roma community and impeded the efforts for educational integration. It was due not to the nature of the reforms themselves, but to the way they were realized, and namely, to the lack of appropriate mechanisms to buffer the negative impact on the most vulnerable – in terms of education – groups.

The delegated budgets and the Roma educational integration

The tendency to introduce the delegated budget as a main form of school financing started before the subject period. The system was applied in 45 municipalities before 2007. In 2007 also Plovdiv, Varna and Nova Zagora joined, and in January 2008 the delegated budgets were initiated in all municipalities. With Resolution of the Council of Ministers 20/21.01.2008 accompanied by instructions from the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Finance on 8 February the system defining the delegated budgets for all schools in Bulgaria was finally enacted. It was regulated in the Law on State Budget of 2008 (art. 70 of the Transitory and Final Regulations), in sub-laws issued in 2007 and in the National Programme for the Development of School Education.

The delegated budgets are a common practice in many EU countries. An important characteristics of their initiation in Bulgaria was that it happened in the form of „reform three in one” – i.e. the same acts attempted to introduce simultaneously three dif-

ferent aspects of the educational reform. The initiation of the delegated school budgets happened alongside with the actual start of financing through the so called „Unified Expense Standards”¹⁷ and with the strong pressure from the MES towards optimization of the school network. The delegated budget of each school was defined on the basis of the so called “unified expense standard” – annual allowance for the education of one student, including all major expenses and not divided in types. That is to say, the defined annual allowance is meant to cover the teachers’ salaries, the maintenance of the school building, heating, half-day groups (day-care study rooms), classes in additional selected subjects, salaries to support staff, etc. without definition of the percentage relations between these types of expenses. The budget of each separate school in 2008 was based on the number of students multiplied by the “unified expense standard”. In this way the opportunities for municipalities to support schools with small number of students (where the allowance per student is higher) were drastically reduced¹⁸. Besides, the unified expense standards were initially defined to unusually low amounts, which was a clear evidence of the pressure on the municipalities to close down the biggest possible number of schools and to „optimize” the school network. (When in mid 2008 most of the municipal councils had taken decisions to close down over 300 schools – a number without analogue in the Bulgarian history – the unified expense standards were increased, and at the end of 2008 there was another rise). The problem with these three (combined in one) reforms was the lack of serious buffer mechanisms to alleviate the negative effect on the most vulnerable groups.

The initiation of the delegated budgets was the real commencement of the long delayed structural reforms in education, and

¹⁷ Officially unified expense standards were regulated as early as 2007, but the change was tangible only in 2008.

¹⁸ Following the scheme of introducing the delegated budgets, the municipalities are obliged to distribute at least 80% of the received educational allocations from the republican budget based on the number of students in a school. Maximum 20% can be rearranged by the municipalities among the schools based on additional criteria reflecting local specifics and the educational policy of the municipality.

namely, in the educational system. This step had four important consequences to the Bulgarian educational system that started to show up as early as 2008. First, the principals were placed in the position of managers. Receiving a certain amount for the year, and not divided in types, the principal obtained the opportunity to prioritize between different activities for the absorption of the whole amount. The stimulus to attract new students was exceptionally raised and hence, the competition between schools. The principal's management skills started to count for the condition and even the survival of the school. Unfortunately, most of the principals in Bulgaria did not possess such skills, which jeopardized the existence of many schools.

„Next year we are closing down two schools. This year we co-financed them in order to see whether they had chances for survival, but it did not work out. Firstly because the children are the minimum number, and secondly because the principals cannot cope with this situation.”

Representative of the municipal administration
of a municipality with less than 20 000 citizens

Second, the system of delegated budgets hit hard the small schools, especially in the rural areas and lead to the closure of many of them. Rough calculations show that for the normal functioning a separate school would need BGN 200–250 000, i.e. about 200–250 students. For demographic reasons most of the village schools did not have that many students. Until 2008 the municipalities had an opportunity to co-finance village schools, realizing their importance not only for the education of the children, but also for the existence of the villages themselves. The delegated budgets to a great extent “tied” the hands of the municipalities for such rearrangement and forced them to close down most of the village schools. So in 2008 300 schools were closed down – a number, unnaturally high for the size of Bulgaria.

As a protective mechanism to guarantee at least partial preservation of the school network in rural areas, the statute of „protected” and „focal”-point schools was applied. “Focal”-point schools are the ones educating children from other places where

there are no schools. The MES provides free busses and the municipalities organize the transportation to the “focal”-point schools for the students from villages without schools. This is a prerequisite for a bigger number of students (and hence, greater delegated budget) in the secondary schools. In addition, through changes in the Law on Public Education (art. 26, paragraph 4) of 30.05.2008, the “focal”-point schools received additional money (above the unified expense standards) to organize full-day training and canteen lunch for the travelling students. In this way the “focal”-point schools were provided with one of the conditions for better quality of education and for prevention of student dropout – the full-day training. This happened in practice in 2008: although the Ministry of Finance had allocated the necessary funds for the application of the newly-approved regulations¹⁹, the Ministry of Education and Science went on with the finalization of the list of protected schools until December 2008 and for that reason the allocated funds were not absorbed. As a result, the effect of the application of the measure on the quality of education in the “focal”-point schools is still hardly visible. Nevertheless, some weaknesses already show up, like the fact that the additional financing (and the requirement for full-day training and canteen lunch) refers only to travelling students. That fact places in an unfavourable condition the students from the same place where the “focal”-point school is. The idea of supporting only the dislocating students and not the school as a whole impedes the quality improvement of education in “focal”-point schools.

„I will receive additional budget for the full-day training and lunch for the dislocated students. And what about the rest, the local children? We should tell them to go home for lunch and to prepare their home-works because they are not travelling. In my case, most of the dislocated students are Roma, and the local ones – Bulgarians. I imagine how that will be interpreted by the parents: they will say that privileges are provided for the Gypsies....”

Principal of a “focal”-point school

¹⁹ Interview with an expert at the Ministry of Finance.

„Our school is “focal”-point but only 11 kids travel. That is to say that I will receive 4–5000 levs above the delegated budget. How can I organize full-day training and canteen lunch with this money?”

Principal of a “focal”-point school

Protected schools are the ones that may not be closed down because that would prevent access to education. They were identified for the first time in 2008 based on criteria related most of all with the existence of road infrastructure and distance to the nearest school. The statute of a „protected” school guarantees additional financing in order to keep the school and this is not related to the quality of education in it; for example, the full-day training is not organized, etc. The effect of that measure was not yet visible in 2008 as the MES went on finalizing the list almost until the end of the year and therefore they could not receive additional financing.

Third, the delegated budgets additionally supported the elite schools with big number of students: they received the biggest subsidies, their principals had already formed management skills and started to apply them effectively. In other words, if delegated budgets meant smaller subsidy for the smaller and poorer school, for the bigger and richer schools they meant bigger subsidy.

„In my municipality there are schools with principals who are very good managers. For example, the school in my living quarter – the principal is young and energetic, with real business attitude. Over 500 children study there and the delegated budget he received was considerable. He expended it very well. He managed to increase markedly the salaries of the teachers, organized education in additional selective subjects and interest clubs, there is a full-day education option for all pupils up to 4th grade... and still, he had some money in reserve. This is because he knows how to spend it. However, this is not so in most of the other schools, especially in the villages, which survive with difficulties.”

Representative of the municipal administration
of a municipality with over 100 000 inhabitants

Fourth, the delegated budgets affected to a greater extend the quality of the education process, at least in the small schools. The budget and the unified expense standard were not bound to the

quality of the provided educational service but only to the number of students. And so, many principals had to cut down the classes in additional selective subjects and did not organize full-day education in order to save money, even though it was well known that the additional selective subjects make the educational process more interesting for the students and the full-day education has undoubted contribution to the learning of the obligatory knowledge. This is valid for many schools with small number of students and budgets covering only the obligatory classes and the maintenance of the premises.

„I have about 60 students. The budget is not sufficient at all. We survive only thanks to the good will of the mayor who provides co-financing for the small schools through the supplementary components. But the money is still not enough. We have no full-day option, study groups, additional selective subjects – things that we had a couple of years ago. As to the quality – it is simply missing. What can they do in the village? Without the Internet, without education – anti-social deeds; and they come to school unprepared. For that reason many parents start transferring their children to the town schools. The teachers also think how to find work in the town. Our school may be closed down in a year... The motivation to work is zero.”

Principal of a village school

Affecting the whole educational system, the reforms had a number of consequences on the education of Roma children and on the educational integration at all. Some of them started to show up as early as 2008. Their effect can be found in three directions. First, closing down village schools will lead to a quick deterioration of the already poor educational level of the Roma people in the rural areas. Let us remind that, as per data of census 2001, 47% of the Roma people live in the villages, and 64% – in the so called „rural regions”²⁰. In many villages most of the students (if not all) are of Roma origin. Many of the Roma children from the villages with closed schools will not continue their education for a number of social and cultural reasons although free transport is provided

²⁰ Rural region is every municipality without a living place with more than 30 000 inhabitants.

to the new “focal”-point school. All these culturally determined fears of Roma parents to send their children (especially the girls) to study in another village or town may seem groundless to the administrators unfamiliar with the psychology of the Roma people, but they are real and will leave to the dropout of thousands of Roma students from school. In reality it started to happen already in 2008. Although we do not have exact statistics for the number of children who have dropped out as a result of the optimization of the school network, the net coefficient of enrolment at the elementary and the junior high school was reduced drastically to unprecedented levels even compared to the worst years of the transition period – 94% for the elementary and 81% for the junior high school. The reasons for that are hardly definitive, but researchers well ground a hypothesis that the optimization of the school network is the main one²¹. Most probably not all of the dropouts in the primary and the junior high school are Roma children, but researches show that the majority is of Roma origin.

On the other hand, the quality of education will be additionally reduced in the villages with preserved schools after the import of the new system of financing: because of the small number of students, the budget is at the existence minimum. This is a hindrance to all-day groups, to classes in additional selective subjects, to extra-mural events, etc. Teachers are unmotivated because of the permanent fear that the school may be closed down – a perspective which is constantly open. As a result, the education process in many such schools is perfunctory and dull, provoking higher percentage of dropouts, and consequently – lower delegated budget. This is how a vicious circle is closed and needs a serious investment to exit. In fact most village schools are condemned, if they do not manage to attract additional funds (by means of participation in projects, etc.), or if they do not receive the statute of “focal”-point or protected schools.

Second, the delegated budgets will additionally stabilize the segregated “Gipsy” schools in the Roma ghettos of the cities and

²¹ Boyan Zahariev, “Otpadashtite uchenitzi – visokata tzena na reformata” (“The dropout students – the high price of the reform”). In: *Sega* newspaper, 20.07. 2009.

will make completely pointless the already scarce efforts for desegregation. Because as a rule these schools have a huge number of students (some of them are among the biggest in the country), the segregated schools will receive the biggest budget subsidy, although the quality of the education process in them is often dubious. At this stage the structural reform is based on the number of students and not on the quality of pedagogical work with them and the desegregation of “Roma” schools is not part of the reform.

Of course, the opposite tendency is also possible – the delegated budget may stimulate a pro-active behavior by the principals of ethnically mixed schools to attract Roma children. For example, in Veliko Tarnovo principals pay – through the delegated budget – for the transportation of Roma children from the near villages. In this way one of the main obstacles to desegregation may be abolished – the distance of elite schools from Roma quarters and the necessary expenses on transportation of Roma children to elite schools. Yet these examples are exceptions; the usual concerns of principals against enrolling Roma students are that this may lead to reflux of Bulgarian students. The financial benefits that would be obtained from enrolling Roma children (higher number of students, hence bigger budget) are neutralized by the possible exodus of Bulgarian children (the number of students, and the budget respectively, would remain the same or would even be reduced depending on the scale of the reverse process).

Third, there is a real danger that the delegated budgets may lead to almost complete decay of intercultural education and in this way to leave the Roma children without the opportunity to learn something more for themselves in school. To date the classes in “Folklore of the Ethnos – Roma Folklore”, “Mother Romani Tongue” and others have been taught as optional classes. The interest towards some of them is great and constantly increasing – for instance, in 2007 / 2008 “Folklore of the Ethnos – Roma Folklore” was studied in 200 to 400 schools without much support from the state²². As the delegated budgets will most probably lead to

²² As per the information from CIEDT Amalipe, the number of schools was about 230, as per the data from MES (reported also in the Monitoring Report on the Decade of Roma Inclusion) – over 400.

quick reduction of the optional classes as a whole (see above), it is plausible to expect that the groups for optional classes connected with intercultural education will be quickly reduced, too: besides the interest of Roma children and parents and in spite of the indisputable need for them...

These threats were noticed by independent experts and activists of non-governmental organizations at the very beginning of the initiation of the delegated budgets in 2008. They were acknowledged also by some high-ranked officials at the Ministry of Education. At meetings principals from the 6 administrative districts of schools where Roma students studied, organized by Center Amalipe and Open Society Institute, suggestions to the MES were specified for actions to reduce the negative effect of the reforms on the educational level of the Roma community and to bind it to the educational integration. Until late 2008 there was no feedback that the Ministry intended to make use of these proposals and to pay special attention to the effects of the reforms on the process of educational integration of Roma children and students.

Recommendations of the meetings of principles of schools where Roma students are educated, organized by Center Amalipe and Open Society Institute in July 2008

1. Establishment of a National Programme supporting the intercultural education within the frames of the MES budget, to finance school and out-of-school activities out of the delegated budget to organize training in additional selective subjects and other forms of intercultural education
2. Leaving an option for full-day organization of the schooling process in all primary schools with funds in addition to the unified expense standards: analogous to the opportunity allowed for the “focal”-point schools;
3. Inclusion of a component “integration of children from the ethnic minorities” or “application of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities” in the formula calculating the delegated school budget
4. Providing money for work with parents from the places with redundant schools to convince them in the need to continue their children’s education in the “focal”-point schools.

5. Allocating funds to create favourable environment for the children of the ethnic minorities in the central schools.

Doubtless to say, the reforms initiated in 2007 and especially in 2008 for the introduction of delegated school budget and unified expense standard are necessary and will proceed. On the other hand, to date the reforms have been passed in a way impeding the efforts for educational integration на the Roma community, leading to additional deterioration of the educational level of the Roma people. This is not due to the nature of the reforms but to the way they are performed. It is necessary to initiate supplementary mechanisms to reduce the negative effect on the most vulnerable – from the educational point of view – groups and to stimulate the educational integration of the Roma community.

Straightforward actions towards Roma educational integration

During the subject period the specific straightforward actions towards Roma educational integration on behalf of the institutions from the central level were very limited. The activity of the MES in this direction consisted only in the methodology and consultancy support to municipalities and schools (and to a lesser degree to NGO-s) during the preparation and implementation of plans and programmes for educational integration, as well as in the financial support (by projects – through the CEICSEM and HRD OP) to the implementation of integration activities. In addition, support was provided for the implementation of three educational projects under the PHARE programme „Improvement of the Condition and the Integration of Vulnerable Minority Groups with a Special Focus on Roma”. There have been no specific initiatives and programmes for educational integration of the Roma people to be implemented by the institutions on the central level.²³ As mentioned above, MES gradually turned – consciously or not – towards a new model for implementing integration activities: to

²³ A partial exception was only the Programme for Literacy and Qualification of Roma implemented by the MLSP within the framework of the annual National Action Plan on Employment – 2007 and 2008.

create stimuli and to supervise the realization of the SEICSEM and the whole integration policy, the implementation itself being left in the hands of the municipalities and the schools.

With the existing situation, characterized with the lack of political will for straightforward actions for Roma integration at the central level and with low administrative capacity for implementation of the integration policies on behalf of MES, this model was the only possible one. As a whole, the said model has two important advantages. Firstly, it provokes active participation of key stakeholders (like municipalities and schools), that will receive financing for the implementation of certain integration activities to a great extent defined by themselves. Secondly, an opportunity appears for projects reflecting the real local needs and offer elaboration of solutions to local problems, as the main actors will be local persons. In its essence, this is a *decentralized and participative way to implement integration policy*. This approach has its heuristic capacities and might be much better than the centralized administrative supervisory model, the more so in the situation of inefficient state administration and lack of strong political will.

At the same time, the model contains four serious shortcomings. First of all, it creates a real opportunity for lack of whatever actions towards educational integration in many places. If the local institutions (municipalities and schools) are not sufficiently active, if they have no capacity to elaborate and implement projects or are not committed to Roma educational integration, they simply will not submit projects under the announced schemes of measure 4.1 of HRD OP or at the CEICSEM. Therefore, there is no mechanism to oblige them to engage with the process of educational integration. Usually the decentralized models for implementation of a certain policy are accompanied by the approval at the central level of certain requirements and standards that imperatively need to be covered. In this case, these may be standards to reach the level of educational integration of the Roma children (for example, reduction of the Roma dropouts to the level of the Bulgarian dropouts, a requirement that the ethnic composition in the school should reflect the ethnic structure of the population in compulsory schooling age, etc.), which should underlie in a document of a sufficiently

high rank that should be mandatory for the municipalities and schools. During the subject period similar set of requirements did not exist and there were no indications that it was going to be prepared.²⁴ This raises serious doubts whether the described model would work out. Second, the model relies on the active behavior of the municipalities with respect to educational integration, which in reality is absent. A clear indication for this is the scarce interest on behalf of the municipalities towards the announced schemes for educational integration under HRD OP (only 14 of totally 64 approved projects are for municipalities) and under the contest of CEICSEM for desegregation projects of September 2008 (only 11 project proposals). In 2007 and 2008 the MES did not foresee and implement activities to increase the motivation of municipalities and other key stakeholders to implement educational integration, and that was doubtlessly necessary. Third, the financial commitment of the state budget for Roma educational integration seems rather insufficient. The regulations of CEICSEM, as well as the Decree on its establishment define that the financing from the republican budget may only be as „additional financing” (during the previous years it varied from BGN 500 000 to 2 million, which is evidently insufficient). The bigger part of the financing is expected to be provided by foreign donors. Considering that the financing from donors refers always to limited pilot initiatives and that with the EU membership most of the donors leave Bulgaria, it seems dubious that the donor financing for the activities of the Center would be considerable or sufficient. In 2007 and 2008 the CEICSEM managed at one occasion to attract money from the Roma Educational Fund and that was the only success in that direction. At present the missing budget funding is supplemented through money from the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, which is also relatively limited. Fourth, the model drastically limits or even rejects the opportunity NGO to implement projects individually or as leading partner. This has been a sustainable trend in the policy of MES during 2007 and 2008. Considering that during the past years, the process of Roma educa-

²⁴ On the contrary – the draft Law on School Education made public by the MES in February 2009 contained nothing in that sense.

tional integration has been implemented mainly by NGO and that the bigger part of the built-up capacity in the area belongs again to NGO, the said limitation has created serious problems to the quality of the process.

These shortcomings of the model prevented its successful implementation in 2007 and 2008. Nevertheless, certain initiatives were undertaken and realized:

Initiatives of the MES

At the end of 2006 the MES opened a public procurement bid for the elaboration of indicators for the implementation of the SEICSEM and for training of school principals on the application of these indicators. The bid was won by the Open Society Institute and implemented in 2007. The effect of this initiative was not big. The experts of the OSI elaborated a system of indicators and trained the necessary number of principals but later this system was not applied by the contracting authority. The results from this research show that the trained principals and teachers are happy with the received training but do not make use of the system of indicators in their work: there are no system stimuli for that. The system of indicators for evaluation of the SEICSEM is completely unfamiliar to the rest of the principals of the schools educating Roma students. We can positively state that this initiative did not fulfill the objectives for which it was performed – to lead to permanent monitoring of the implementation of the SEICSEM and to involve the schools in that process.

Initiatives of CEICSEM

In 2007 and 2008 the Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students of Ethnic Minorities finally started to function. The three-year programme for the activities of the Center was approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers 256/23.04.2007. The Programme defines the five strategic targets of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities as objectives of the CEICSEM for the following 3 years. To reach these objectives, the Center will work in two main areas: attracting funds external to the state budget and financing projects.

The three-year programme also identifies the priorities following which the calls for projects will be announced: guaranteed equal right for access to quality education, preservation and development of cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities, creating prerequisites for successful socialization and turning the cultural diversity into a factor for mutual acquaintance between the children from the various ethnics.

During the subject period CEICSEM managed with fluctuating success rate the tasks in the two main areas. In the area of project funding the Center managed to reach the foreseen comparatively humble amounts from the state budget. In the school year 2007/2008 the Center announced two bids for financing of projects. Under the first procedure, 84 projects were financed for the total amount of BGN 981 372, and under the second one – 28 projects for the amount of BGN 644 347. Other two procedures were implemented during the school year 2008/2009. Eligible to participate in these procedures were schools, kindergartens, non-school educational units, municipalities and RIE; the involvement of NGO was made possible under the form of a partner. This opportunity provoked the interest of dozens and even hundreds of schools. Many of them received financing for the implementation of small projects.

The activities of the Center in this direction had three important positive sides. First, the application forms were very easy, and the payment procedures – favourable to the beneficiaries (i.e. big advances and timely payments). This allowed almost every school with Roma students to participate. What was happening at the bids of CEICSEM contrasted to the forms and procedures of HRD OP, which in fact impeded most of the schools.

We were very happy that our small school managed to defend a project in front of the CEICSEM. Writing it took only 2 days... Then we received 80% of the approved amount as advance payment. The project was a small one – for BGN 5000 only, but for our school it meant a lot. We managed to do small but nice things – Roma costumes, exhibition of the ethnos, a leaflet and a disk. For 2 years we have been teaching the additional electoral subject Roma Folklore but we did not have costumes and other necessary things,

and now we have them. It is completely different with the HRD OP: there we cannot even think of applying with these heavy forms, small advances and delayed payments. Only the municipality can dare...”

School principal

Second, the bids announced were on the same priorities (the 4 priorities of the three-year programme). This gave the chance to schools which did not manage at their first attempts to partially amend their projects and to apply again. Third, a great number of the approved projects were directed towards the preservation and renovation of the cultural identity of the children from the ethnic minorities. The money for this exceptionally important activity from the various donor programmes is insufficient and it was good that CEICSEM contributed.

On the other hand, there were some weaknesses in the activities of the Center in that direction. First, the money allocations were too small compared to the great interest and the big number of submitted proposals. The result was a situation of extremely high competition: in some of the bids, one of ten proposals was approved and thus naturally discouraged the unsuccessful candidates whose “failure” was not due to poor quality of the submitted proposal but to the insufficient financial resource.

„We applied three times and three times were rejected. Once we were second best reserve but no one gave up and we did not get financing. We are not going to try any more.”

School principal

Second, the amounts for a single project were also very small – between BGN 5 to 10 thousand on average. This money is enough for the performance of separate activities but not for the realization of a whole integration process. It is very hard to achieve the desired sustainability with so little money. The effect of the implementation of these projects cannot be other than limited.

Still more problematic is the activity of the CEICSEM in the other direction, defined as per Government Decree 256/23.04.2007, and namely – attracting money outside the state budget. In 2007 and 2008 the Center managed to do so only once obtaining a grant

from the Roma Educational Fund. Although the three-year programme mentions a number of other potential donors, with a focus on the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, 2007 and 2008 were not successful in that respect. This is a bad indicator for the administrative capacity and for the competence of the Center. It is also hardly understandable that to date the CEICSEM has not received funding from the HRD OP – the Center is enlisted as a possible beneficiary under the measures of Priority Axis 4 of the Programme, and the Intermediate Body for this axis is the MES. In 2008 the MES distributed among some of its Directorates considerable amounts from the operational programme through a procedure of direct funds allocation (a procedure enacted by Government Decree 121/31.05.2007), however, the CEICSEM was not in the list. It is evident that the Center had not placed a request, or that the MES had not enough confidence in the capacity of the CEICSEM to implement a large-scale project. It is a separate question whether the direct allocation of funds for educational integration to the CEICSEM – in view of the existing configuration and the method of functioning of the Center– would stimulate in reality the educational integration.

The most problematic fields in the activity of the Center in 2007 and 2008 were the administrative capacity and the missing connection with the civil sector. At the end of 2006 CEICSEM was left without the executive manager after the resignation of the Roma activist Nikolay Kirilov, appointed six months ago. The accountant D. Kavardzhikov substituted him as a provisory executive. Throughout the analysed period there was fluctuation of personnel and keeping renowned experts in the sphere of education for a long period remained a problem.

Even more problematic remained the interaction with non-governmental organizations working in the sphere of education. In 2006 the Steering Committee of the Center included representatives of 3 NGO, but this was done without previous consultations with a wider circle of organizations and left the impression of obscure criteria (including loyalty to certain political parties). The organizations participating in the Steering Committee had no obligation to inform the wider range of civil organizations about the

activities of the CEICSEM and they did not do so. No actions were undertaken towards partnership and collaboration between the Center and the active Roma organizations. As a result, the CEICSEM at present does not enjoy the confidence of the Roma organizations: all the activists interviewed within this research were unanimous in that.

Initiatives under the HRD OP

During the subject period the HRD OP became a main source of financing activities directed towards Roma educational integration. Although its resources were used quite timidly, they exceeded two times the money released from the state budget. HRD OP contributed to the formation of the new model of implementation of the educational integration policy, supporting the efforts of municipalities, schools and a great number of non-governmental organizations (unlike the CEICSEM).

Three main prerequisites contributed to the existence of initiatives under the HRD OP to support the efforts for Roma educational integration. The first one was the inclusion in the final version of the HRD OP of enough texts in favour of the Roma educational integration, including the definition of areas of intervention (measures) explicitly targeting the Roma people (see the analysis of HRD OP in the section „Normative Frame” above). These texts were included after an active campaign of the Roma non-governmental organizations²⁵ supported by Directorate General „Employment, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination” at the European Commission. Initially the MES reacted with slight disagreement but in 2007 gradually changed its attitude and did not object to the inclusion of these texts.

The second important prerequisite was the active attitude of the Roma civil organizations towards the bids for projects in support of the Roma educational integration, the inclusion of a large-scale of interested parties as possible beneficiaries in these projects (including NGO and schools) and the distribution of money through

²⁵ See: Center Amalipe, *Annual Report on the Implementation of the Policies...*, p. 134 – 154.; Center Amalipe, *Monthly Bulletin, Special edition „The Roma People and the Structural Funds in Bulgaria”*

a procedure of competitive selection of projects (and not through direct allocation to directorates and units of the MES). During the subject period the Roma organizations were represented at the Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP, which allowed them to place their requests more efficiently. (In 2007 members of the Committee were Deyan Kolev – elected at a specially organized forum of the Roma non-governmental organizations and Tony Tashev – representative of the Roma Educational Fund in Bulgaria. In 2008 the management body of the HRD OP started a procedure for the election of an observer among 5 groups of non-governmental organizations, and the Roma organizations elected Deyan Kolev, and Radostin Manov as his deputy). The requests of the Roma organizations presented at the Monitoring Committee were some of the main factors to contribute for the inclusion of NGO as eligible beneficiaries in the scheme for financing of projects „Creating Favorable Multi-Cultural Environment...” (June 2007), until the call for the scheme „Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities” (November 2008) and doubling its budget (November 2009)

The third important prerequisite was the collaboration between the MES (as Intermediate Body under the HRD OP), the MLSP (Managing Authority under the HRD OP) and DG „Employment...” of the European Commission in the decision taking process referring to the management of HRD OP. In this way the MES’s low level of determination for projects directed towards educational integration was compensated by the pro-active behavior of the other two units.

During the subject period under the HRD OP were announced the following bids in support of the Roma educational integration:

– „Creating favorable multi-cultural environment for practical application of the intercultural education and upbringing”: total amount BGN 5 574 116. The scheme was among the first announced under the HRD OP as early as 30 July 2007. The focus was on the continuation of the efforts to take out the Roma children from the segregated quarters and „Roma” schools and to integrate them in ordinary public schools. Another focus was on the introduction of the intercultural education as a way to provide

favourable acceptance environment in the public schools. 66 projects were approved amounting from BGN 20 000 to 100 000, of which 55 – directed to Roma children; 42 of them were proposed by NGO and schools, and 14 – by municipalities. The projects commenced in June 2008 and had to be completed until December 2009.

– „Educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities in the school system”: decision for the announcement of this scheme was taken at the meeting of the Monitoring Committee in November 2008 and during the subject period it was not implemented²⁶. The approved budget of the scheme was BGN 6 million²⁷. The scheme places a rational focus on the reduction of Roma school dropouts. The scheme includes a wide range of actions (considerably wider than the previous scheme), that may be implemented in ethnically mixed and predominantly Roma schools, the activities for introduction of intercultural education, identity preservation of the children from the minorities and tolerance building being among the leading actions.

– „Literacy Courses for Adults”: decision for the announcement of this scheme was taken at the meeting of the Monitoring Committee in November 2008 and during the subject period it was not implemented²⁸. The approved budget of the scheme was BGN 15 million. The scheme will be implemented in the form of direct grant to Directorate „Policy in general education” at the MES, which will consequently distribute the money among the schools from the whole country.²⁹ Although the scheme is not directed especially to them, it is expected that the bigger part of its beneficiaries (persons without finished primary education) will be Roma people. The scheme places a rational focus on the liquidation of illiteracy for people who have not completed elementary or junior

²⁶ The call for project proposals was published on 19 October 2009.

²⁷ At the Monitoring Committee meeting in November 2009 the budget was doubled – BGN 12 million.

²⁸ The call for expression of interest was published in December 2009.

²⁹ At a meeting of the Monitoring Committee in November 2008 the observer from the group of the Roma NGO suggested that the scheme should be implemented by means of competitive selection of projects but the proposal was not accepted.

high school. At the end of the literacy courses they will acquire a certificate for finished level (or diploma for finished education), which will give them a chance to be included in courses for acquiring a level in professional qualification.

– A great number of Roma students are included in the schemes for support of out-of-school and extra-curriculum activities „Let’s Make School Attractive to Young People” (2007 and 2008).

As a result, in 2008 (it was in fact the first year in which the approved projects under the HRD OP were implemented) 16 261 students from the minorities were included in projects under the HRD OP. Most of them (9 923) were included in projects under the targeted scheme „Creation of Favourable Multi-cultural environment...”³⁰

During the subject period there was neither completed schemes, nor completed projects, therefore it is quite early to evaluate the real effect on the process of Roma educational integration. Nevertheless, some very important conclusions may be made with a high degree of credibility:

– The announced target schemes (i.e. schemes including explicitly the Roma people as a target group and directed towards improvement of the educational status of the Roma community) stimulate the proces of Roma educational integration. They give a chance to municipalities, non-governmental organizations and schools to implement their ideas for the realization of the national documents in the sphere of educational integration and for solving local educational problems. This decentralized and participatory method of implementation of the integration policy was analysed above (see section *Initiatives of the CEICSEM*);

– The funds from the HRD OP have become a reliable factor supporting the efforts for Roma educational integration. Their value exceeds the resources allocated in the state budget in this direction. At the same time, this money is still disproportionately little – compared to the announced schemes and the real necessity.

³⁰ *Annual Report on the Implementation of the Operational Programme „Human Resources Development”.*

– Serious obstacles are created by the many reporting requirements and the delayed payments to beneficiaries. The said problem seems to be exceptionally grave and there is real danger that it may discourage many beneficiaries to participate in the published bids. To the opinion of many organizations implementing approved projects, the reporting requirements – imposed by the MES and MLSP – are unreasonably heavy and consume about 70% of the personnel’s time, whereas only 30% remain for the implementation of the activities themselves.

Even more serious difficulties are created by the reimbursement of expenses procedure. When the contract is signed, 20% advance payment is effected, after that reimbursements are done on reported and approved expenses. This takes at least 5-6 months, which for many of the beneficiaries is a long term. In this time they cannot cease the activities and have to proceed with their own resources. In view of the projects range, they need to have tens of thousands of leva available and this makes things very difficult for the smaller municipalities, NGO-s and schools.

The burdensome reporting procedure, the delays in payments to beneficiaries, as well as the relatively heavy (compared to CEICSEM and other donors) application forms discourage many smaller schools, municipalities and organizations and hinder their participation in the absorption of the European funds. Bulgaria has not introduced additional mechanisms to guarantee the participation of beneficiaries with little capacity and experience (for example small municipalities and schools) – something done in Hungary, for instance. There is a warning tendency that the absorption of the European funds might not reach the indigent.

– The bids announced so far have very little value (like „Creation of Favourable Multi-cultural environment...” has a value lower than BGN 6 million), in spite of the great interest. This makes the competition too high: between 5 to 10 projects on average apply for one grant. This discourages the beneficiaries whose projects are not approved. If high competitiveness is acceptable for some types of projects, it is unacceptable for projects focusing at vulnerable groups: the European practice is not to allow higher competi-

tiveness than 1,5 to 1 in the work with vulnerable groups. The considerable increase of the budget for the announced schemes supporting Roma educational integration or making them permanently open until the end of the programme period would reduce the competitiveness to plausible levels and would lead to real application of the integration policy.

Main conclusions

During the analysed period the political will to implement straightforward actions for Roma educational integration was weak. The educational integration of the Roma people was accepted as an additional and insignificant task aside of the whole process of modernization of the Bulgarian education. Gradually the alternative model of implementing integration policy was established, in which the application of the Strategy for educational integration (SEICSEM) was appointed not to the MES and its structures but to the municipalities and schools. The MES's role in this model was to provide financial stimuli for the implementation of the integration policy and to supervise the quality of implementation. To date this model has been implemented spontaneously and some of the most important elements are missing: clearly defined national criteria and requirements that need to be imperatively covered, normative/legal provisions, considerable financial stimuli to support the efforts of the local institutions in the application of the national integration policy, etc. All these question the ability of the new model to work out.

During the analysed period the MES did not engage in large-scale initiatives for the application of the SEICSEM, but made efforts to support the functioning of the Center for Educational Integration (CEICSEM) and the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HRD OP). CEICSEM finalized the first bids to support small projects that helped dozens of schools in the country but had limited effect and did not give a noticeable boost to the integration policy. The Center did not manage to attract considerable financial resources to add to the limited financing of the state budget. The Center's administrative capacity remained low and its collaboration with the civil sector – problematic. Within the

HRD OP started the publication of bids and implementation of projects supporting the Roma educational integration. At this stage the interest in them is great and there is a chance that they accelerate the application of the integration policy. At the same time there are many administrative difficulties creating serious obstacles to the effective implementation of approved projects.

The tendencies in the development of the Bulgarian educational system during the analysed period did not support but hindered (at least in the short-term) the efforts for Roma educational integration. The reforms were performed in a way that tangibly affected the vulnerable groups; no effective buffer mechanisms were introduced to alleviate the negative impact and to guarantee equal access to education. This resulted in abrupt reduction of the net coefficient of enrolment in school, considerably increased the number of non-included students, lead to poor quality of education in the rural areas and hindered the introduction of intercultural and integrated education. During the analysed period there were no tendencies for supplementing mechanisms to bind the reforms with the efforts for educational integration of the minorities.

Recommendations

The Roma educational integration is a complex task requiring mutual compensation of the approaches, the resources and the efforts. It cannot be reached only with „efforts on the top” (by the state institutions) or only with „efforts from below” (by the municipalities, schools and non-governmental organizations), but needs coordinated actions at the national and local level. It seems that the educational integration could not be achieved only by a universal or result-oriented approach (the so called targeting or mainstreaming): specific straightforward (targeted) actions towards Roma educational integration are doubtlessly needed, at the same time the initiatives of the MES for the development and modernization of the Bulgarian educational system need to report the necessities of the educational integration and to create the respective conditions. Therefore, efforts have to be made for the establishment of real cooperation among the various participants in this process (institutions at the central, regional and local level, NGO-s,

schools, Roma authorities, etc.) and for the creation of an appropriate base to combine the universal and the target approach. After all, it is necessary to clarify the approach for the implementation of the integration policy: which of its elements will be implemented through initiatives at the national level and which – at the local. Respectively, preconditions should be provided (legal, normative, financial, etc.) for the implementation of the approved documents for educational integration.

The specific tasks and steps to achieve the above could be:

1. Including Roma educational integration as a main objective in the process of modernization of the Bulgarian educational system and applying the educational reforms so that to support the educational integration: Specific steps to achieve that objective may include (but not be limited to):

1.1. Elaboration of a National Programme for Support of the Intercultural Education in the frame of MES's budget, through which schools and non-school educational units may be financed over the delegated budget to organize additional electoral subjects and other forms of applying intercultural education;

1.2. Allowing full-day schooling in all primary schools with funding supplementary to the unified expense standards analogous to the opportunity provided for the focal-point schools;

1.3. Including a component “integration of children from the ethnic minorities” or “application of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities” in the formula calculating the delegated school budget;

1.4. Performing a preliminary impact assessment in the Roma educational integration and the educational level of the Roma community before introducing reforms affecting the development of the educational system, the quality of education and the access to education.

2. Providing the necessary normative frame for the process of Roma educational integration: Specific steps to achieve that objective may include (but not be limited to):

2.1. Including key suggestions in favour of the Roma educational integration and the introduction of intercultural training in the new Law on School Education;

2.2. Expanding the National Programme for the Development of the School Education and Pre-School Training with provisions favouring the Roma educational integration and the introduction of intercultural education.

2.3. Raising the normative status of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities: enactment by a Government Decree;

2.4. Updating the Action Plan of the SEICSEM to guarantee the actual realization of the Strategy: specifying the responsible institutions, budget and timetable.

3. Raising the administrative capacity and providing appropriate administrative frame for the Roma integration policy:

Achieving this objective is directly related to the specification of the model for implementation of the integration policy. If we should rely on a model where the implementation would be mostly an obligation of the local players (municipalities, NGO, schools), the administrative infrastructure on the national and local level would be smaller in number and would have to provide methodological support and supervise the implementation. Should we choose a model where the integration policy would be implemented by the national institutions, the administrative infrastructure on the national level would be bigger in number and variety.

Specific steps to achieve that objective may include (but not be limited to):

3.1. Reinforcement of the infrastructure at the national level: establishment of a directorate, servicing the integration policy and/or appointment of more experts in the department dealing with the intercultural education and educational integration. A positive sign would be if these experts are of Roma origin;

3.2. Establishment of administrative infrastructure for Roma integration policy at the regional level: appointment of experts at the Regional Education Inspectorates with main responsibilities related to the educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities and the implementation of the SEICSEM. A positive sign would be if these experts are of Roma origin;

3.3. Reinforcement of the administrative capacity of the SEICSEM: appointment of experts with proven knowledge in the

sphere of educational integration of the Roma children; building long-term partnerships between the CEICSEM and NGO working on the educational integration of the Roma community;

3.4. Restoration of the Consultative Council for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities: specifying clear criteria for the membership in the Council to guarantee that working organizations with expertise would be included; defining clear authorities of the Council to guarantee its real participation in the elaboration of the integration policy.

4. Selection of the model for implementation of the educational integration policy: It is necessary to finalize the model for application of the SEICSEM – decentralized model, delegating resources and authorities to the local actors (municipalities, schools, NGO) or centralized model where the main role for the implementation of the policies is given to the national institutions. The selected model should provide for active participation of the Roma community and NGO. It is necessary also to provide sufficient human, financial, normative and administrative resources for the application of the selected model.

5. Creating appropriate forms for collaboration between the Roma NGO and MEYS: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science³¹ should work more on the establishment of collaboration with the NGO acting in the sphere of Roma education. Steps to achieve that objective are:

5.1. Supporting successful initiative of the NGO and cooperation for their implementation;

5.2. Restoration of the activity of the Consultative Council for Education of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities: see above;

5.3. Introduction of clear and democratic procedures to select the Roma representatives in the Steering Committee of the Center for Educational Integration.

³¹ During the analysed period the Ministry of Education functioned under the title „Ministry of Education and Science (MES)”. At the end of July 2009 after the finalization of the membership and the structure of the new government, it was renamed to „Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS)”.

6. Promoting the intercultural education as a frame for the Roma educational integration. MEYS should include the intercultural education as one of the main means of modernization of the Bulgarian education and as a frame for the efforts for Roma educational integration. Intercultural education as a pedagogical instrument will add to the existing social and administrative measures for integration of the Roma children and will create a complete set of instruments. This will also make possible the elaboration of a number of specific educational approaches accounting for the variety of conditions in which the Roma children study. At the same time we should remember that the intercultural education is directed towards all children and in this way avoid the further segregation of the efforts for Roma integration.

Specific steps to achieve that objective may include:

6.1. Identification of financial stimuli for the introduction of the intercultural education, such as elaboration and implementation of a National Programme for support of intercultural education, precise identification of funding for the additional electoral subjects (within the unified expense standards or external), organizing bids for projects supporting forms of intercultural education through CEICSEM and HRD OP, etc.;

6.2. Introduction of imperative requirements for the application of intercultural education in the Bulgarian educational system: in the obligatory subjects, the additional electoral subjects, mandatory electoral subjects (such as „Folklore of the Ethnoi – Roma folklore”, etc.);

6.3. Support to initiatives of the NGO in the sphere of intercultural education.

7. Continuation of the process of binding the absorption of the European Structural Funds with the Roma educational integration: At this stage the implementation of the HRD OP supports the educational integration policy and yet, there is more to be achieved in this direction. It is also necessary to relate the application of the SEICSEM with the Regional Development Operational Programme and the Rural Regions Development Programme. Specific steps to achieve these objectives may include the following actions:

7.1. Announcing the schemes for financing of projects within the intervention areas 4.1 and 4.2 of HRD OP as permanently open until the end of the programme period;

7.2. Diversification of the activities under the schemes for financing of projects in intervention area 4.1 of HRD OP: including activities in support of the quality of education of the Roma children in the so called „focal-point” schools, in the village schools, etc., including activities for reintegration of dropout students, and so on;

7.3. Publication of schemes for financing of projects favouring the educational integration (in particular, repair of schools where Roma students study) under the Regional Development Operational Programme and the Rural Regions Development Programme.

Good State Governance in the Sphere of Social Protection, Employment and Health Services for the Poorest People of the Roma Community

After the accession of Bulgaria to the European Community, the Government started to follow its obligations in the sphere of social inclusion as an EU member-state enjoying full rights. During this period the country was acting towards reduction of unemployment, increasing the budget excess and raising the gross domestic product. Nevertheless, the period 2007–2008 was one of the least favourable for the poorest strata of society who faced the burden of the flat income tax, the shorter social benefits term and the lack of sufficient and efficient social services and support.

This chapter of the report presents the major acquisitions and hardships in the implementation of programmes related to the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups from the Roma community. It covers the period 2007 and 2008 and the main trends in the sphere of social policy with emphasis on good state governance in the sphere of social inclusion, and in particular the topics of healthcare, social protection and employment.

This section does not dwell on all Roma people and does not accept the Roma community as solid and socially non-stratified. The text herein relates to that part of the Roma people with the hardest unsettled health, social and housing problems. These are the so called „ghettos inside ghettos” or even whole quarters where poverty, unemployment and low income have done such a damage in the families that they have cut all kind of normal human relations with the other Roma and non-Roma people. This extreme isolation is the focus of the present chapter in pursuit of the real picture of the people living in misery and the families with the lowest quality of life.

The essence of good state governance in the sphere of social policy

The modern understanding of good state governance is the one directed towards elaboration and implementation of efficient public policies in every sphere of public life. This includes precise balance of market, policy and civil sector without bias towards any of the three. In the social sphere, the good state governance relies on the high administrative capacity of the institutions, which means responsible, effective and efficient public administration. Without the administration nothing in the country would function, in spite of the international commitments or political ambitions of the parties.

The good state governance in the social inclusion at the European level is part of the strategic and operational documents of the EU where the English term used is „good governance”, which actually means „good state governance”.

The good state governance is to be found most of all in the relations with the structures of civil society, as it is all about effective and efficient solving of social problems of the people. The good state governance is not the act of the government alone, but also of all participants in public life, like the structures of civil society, informal leaders, political parties in power and in oppositions, educational bodies, media, etc. Needless to say, the biggest responsibility for the application of the good governance is vested in the parties on power and the administration managed by them, because they are in possession of the control leverage. Therefore, the responsibility belongs entirely to those who have all the resources to influence the state governance. The good state governance has eight major characteristics according to the various international organizations¹. These are:

- Participation of all the interested parties;
- Consensus orientation;

¹ Good governance according to the United Nations (UN) – UNDP (1997) *Governance for Sustainable Human Development*. United Nations Development Programme

<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>;

- Clear responsibility;
- Transparency;
- Correspondence to the most serious problems of the people;
- Effectiveness and efficiency of policies and actions;
- Equity and impartiality;
- Application of the law and the norms in society

In the sphere of social inclusion the management of these processes is of utmost importance, as it is about the impact on human lives and the dignity of a large group of people living in poverty.

Social protection of the poorest people from the Roma quarters

Poverty includes lack of means to satisfy basic needs of a person, as well as the lack of conditions and prerequisites for leading a dignified and adequate life as a result of the lack of choice. The living conditions of a person should be able to provide long and healthy existence, education opportunities, as well as free, unrestricted participation in various social activities. The understanding of **social isolation** relates material privation to the participation in social life and the usage of social rights. Poverty isolates people and prevents them from active participation in public life. Therefore, poverty and social isolation go together. Social isolation happens when, for a number of reasons, certain individuals or groups do not manage to get access to or make use of the opportunities offered by the societies and the economies.

According to a research of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 82% of the Bulgarian households cannot afford at least one important expenditure in their life style. Important expenditures are: adequate heating of the house, vacation, replacement of old furniture, meat on the table every other day, new clothes, accepting guests once a month. The research was held by means of 35 000 interviews in 31 countries during the period September 2007 – February 2008. According to the obtained data for Bulgaria, in terms of life standard the country looks more like a candidate than a member-state of the EU. The income of the households is only 1/3 of the European and is comparable with that of Macedonia.

The comparative analysis of CITUB at the European level shows that Bulgaria is still one of the countries with the highest inflation (12.0%). We are preceded only by Latvia with 15.3%, whereas within the Euro area, at an average level of 3.3%, the lowest inflation is in the Netherlands (2.2%). In 2007 and 2008 the inflation processes were the strongest, an unprecedented inflation was registered in the summer of 2007, characterized as the highest for the last seven years. This inflation had the heaviest impact on the poorest population², the structure of consumption of the poorest 20% of the households showing that they spend most of their money on food, where the rise is the highest. In this situation the inflation of alimentary products was not 2.2%, but 4.2% towards the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008.

In one of its analyses on Bulgaria, the European Industrial Relations Observatory (*EIRO*), shows a rather variegated profile of the separate strata of poverty, the main ones being:

- Poverty is to a great extent located in the rural areas (2/3 of the poor people are from rural households).
- Especially distinct is the group of retired persons, where the poverty risk is twice as big as that of the employed
- The large families are a high-risk group (60% of the households of two parents with 3 and more kids are poor).
- Ethnic minority groups (especially Roma) represent more than 60% of the poor people in the country
- Over 80% of the individuals without secondary education are in the category of the poor
- The households headed by an unemployed person are 40% of the poor in the country

Many research agencies point out that poverty encompasses mostly the households of the Roma community and the one-person households. The state response³ in this direction is that in 2007, as per the Regulations for the Application of the Law on Social Assistance, 253 648 poor individuals and households were supported

² Comments by Stoyan Tsvetkov, chairperson of the National Statistics Institute, for the Bulgarian National Radio.

³ Report by the Social Assistance Agency (SAA) on 2007.

on average monthly basis with monthly payments, lump sums and target social benefits. The total paid in 2007 is BGN 74 039 081. This shows that one family or individual living in poverty in 2007 was supported by the state with the average amount of BGN 291,89, which is quite an insufficient amount for large families. Of course, this amount is only average and some people have received lump sums, others have been on social benefits over a certain period of time, etc.

The assertion that an individual can be well off on social benefits in Bulgaria is not true. Many researches show that there are no happy people on social benefits. CITUB publishes own measurement of subsistence⁴ where it is mentioned that at the end of 2007 the subsistence value has reached a new record – BGN 433,43 per month per person (based on a 4-member household of 2 adults and 2 children), or in other words, this household should have BGN 1734 in order to cover its expenditures and to eat following the norms on calories. Compared to the average monthly social benefit for the poor spent by the state (BGN 291,81), it is evident that the social benefits do not really contribute to the poverty reduction in the country.

The social assistance for various vulnerable groups in Bulgaria is divided by four laws, and various rules, ordinances and directives regulating the eligibility and duration of support. The basic law regulating the methodology of social payments and social services is the Law on Social Assistance and its rules for application. The other laws are the Law on Integration of People with Disabilities, the Law on Family Benefits, the Social Security Code, and the Child Protection Law. Social workers in the Social Assistance Directorates handle a huge volume of normative base, very often confusing, especially in particular cases. It is clear from the forums of social workers that the professional circle comment on the variety of cases where the application of this normative base is impeded mainly in connection with access, refusal or amount of social assistance.

⁴ CITUB: Subsistence measurement, December 2007 http://84.242.167.9/knsb/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=546&Itemid=96

What is leading, however, in the Bulgarian system of social assistance, is the formal criteria to which a person at risk should correspond, such as: property status, income, age, employment, ability to work and so on. If a person does not correspond to the formal criteria but is in need or at risk, this person has no access to social assistance. For example, the case below shows that even if a social worker prepares a report demonstrating the need for obtaining more social benefits for a child or a member of the family, the report will not be approved and only the formal criteria will be considered. This approach is very outdated, as the social work and the work on cases is lowered to calculating the amount of the support.

An example of a large family

(The example is a true story but the names of the users are false.)

Ivan and Hristina have five children: Maria is ten months old, Elena is two years old, Krassimir is four, Kamen and Tanya are twins and are twelve. Kamen and Tanya go to school but have many absences because they are ashamed of their clothes and have no money for breakfast at school. Elena and Krassimir do not attend kindergarten.

The father has been registered at the Labour Office as unemployed for 4 months now. Before that he worked in the local cannery. He gets a monthly compensation of BGN 70. The mother is at maternity leave to take care of Maria and gets BGN 100 as per the Law on Family Benefits. In April the twins Kamen and Tanya have 10 absences from school. The monthly support for the mother of BGN 105⁵ for Kamen and Tanya is suspended, as a result of the letter from the school confirming the absences of Kamen and Tanya. For the other three kids, the mother receives the amount of BGN 105 as monthly child benefits.

The income of the seven-member family from social benefits and unemployment compensation is BGN 380, and reduced with the sanction (BGN 105) for the absences from school in April is **BGN 275**.

⁵ The amount of BGN 105 is calculated on the basis of the Law on Family Benefits – as Kamen and Tanya are twins, she takes BGN 52,50 for each of them.

The family applies in May for a monthly support pursuant to the Law on Social Assistance and the coefficients for each of them are as follows:

$[(5 \text{ children} \times 91\% + 100\%) \times 65 \text{ (Guaranteed Income Minimum)}] = \text{BGN } 360,75$ is the differentiated minimum income – BGN 275 income for the month of April.

The monthly assistance for this family of seven members is BGN 360,75 or BGN 51,54 per month per person.

Table 1

Attachment to the case of the large family

Members of the family	Coefficient pursuant to the Regulations for the application of the Law on Social Benefits	Amounts in BGN
Ivan – the father	No coefficient because the requirement is for 9 months registration at the Labour Office	0
Hristina – the mother	100% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	65,00
Maria (10 months)	91% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	59,15
Elena (2 years)	91% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	59,15
Krassimir (4 years)	91% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	59,15
Kamen (12 years)	91% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	59,15
Tanya (12 years)	91% of the Guaranteed Income Minimum	59,15
	Differentiated income minimum of the family $[(5 \text{ children} \times 91\% + 100\%) \times 65 \text{ (GIM)}]$	360,75
	Income for April	-275
	Monthly support as per the Regulations on the application of the Law on Social Benefits	85,75
	The total income of the family in May will be	360,75

From the above example cannot be concluded that people living on monthly social benefits live well once they receive them. On the contrary, the amount of BGN 51 – 52 is insufficient to cover the basic needs of a person in Bulgaria. The more so, as people living for a long time in absolute poverty have no savings and goods.

The present economic recession at the end of 2008 brought serious hardships to the construction workers from the Roma community, and the problems in agriculture and the suspended subsidies also lead to increased unemployment within the Roma community. Especially affected were the people from Roma origin living in rural areas where the employment opportunities are limited and the only income of these families comes from picking up herbs and wild mushrooms or seasonal work in cattle breeding and agriculture.

As per Government Decree⁶, approved on 31 October 2008, as of 1 January 2009, the poverty line for the country becomes BGN 194. It is defined as 60% of the medial total net equivalent income for the country. The poverty line is a monetary index to identify the poor in a society and to guarantee the satisfaction of the so called „minimum living needs” of the people living in poverty. This index is formulated on the grounds of the monetary equivalence of actually realized expense for food consumption covering the recommendation norms for 2700 Kcal daily, considering also the per cent relation between the level of expenses for food and non-food goods and services that should correspond to the average relation within the 20% of the households with the lowest income.

The poverty line is used as an important instrument of the social policy. To define it, in 2006 representatives of MLSP, NSI, BAS, organizations of the social partners elaborated a methodology describing the steps to update the amount of the poverty line. The data from the annual research of the Bulgarian household budgets performed by the NSI is used to calculate the amount of the poverty line. In 2007 it was BGN 152, and in 2008 – BGN 166.

The category of the poor in Bulgaria is not a complete group with the same social profile, as we seem to be accustomed to be-

⁶ Resolution of the Council of Ministers dated 30 October 2008: www.government.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0175&n=3927&g=

lieve that the poor people are the Roma people. It is common for all the people who live in poverty that they face serious privations, as well as the feelings of impasse and humiliation. Among the poor, we can find people with all kinds of education, sex, ethnic identity, age and religion. According to CITUB, in Bulgaria, apart from the retired and unemployed persons who, according to the classical criteria are the most endangered with poverty, also some employed persons are at stake because of their low or irregularly paid wages. The risk of poverty is exceptionally high with the unemployed – from 33.3% in 2001 it reached 37.9% in 2007.

Yet there are citizens who, to a great extent, have been permanently excluded from the society and are in jeopardy to replicate the inequality and poverty in the next generations. Certain Roma groups in Bulgaria continue to combine a few poverty risks – low education, unemployment, poor living conditions, underdeveloped rural regions, large households consisting of three or four generations living in misery and isolation. Many researchers point that the persistent poverty in the Roma community (and namely, in these Roma groups) formulates a permanent cultural model which replicates the poverty. The lack of serious social work in these communities⁷ deepens the problems of the people and results in general discouragement and social isolation.

High rank persons from the Parliament and the Government and most of all the Minister of Labour and Social Policy Emilia Maslarova used extremely harsh wording towards the poor strata of society. These qualifications formulate negative attitude in the public area towards everybody receiving social benefits. More than once the users of social assistance and the unemployed were named in public at various media with insulting nominations and sarcastic intonation, such as „the profession of social weakness”, „the lazy part of the population” and so on.

„I will not allow, and I state it with absolute responsibility, and let all those Roma leaders hear it who have started now to revolt part of the people who lay in bed on their left or right side all day

⁷ We use the term „communities” for the Roma people only as a synonym of „local communities”.

long and wait that the state gives them something, curse the state, but request from the state, just to live on the toil of the other Bulgarian citizens... (I liked most what you said about Maslarova not letting them lay down in bed on their left or right side and obtain... social benefits)... Definitely. But in this, you, too, should help (intending the media⁸). I would be pleased if on covers you bring as news what we have done, how many people were sanctioned because they lied to us and then they cry and say „I don't have”, and at the same time we should be a little bit more careful...”

***Extract from an interview with Emilia Maslarova,
Minister of Labour and Social Policy, 30 June 2007, Darik Radio
http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=158529***

Doubtless to say, such statements in public made people believe that the ones on social benefits should be regularly punished in order to get out of poverty. This belief is so widely spread that many forums, articles and media proclaim anti-social propaganda and implications identifying „poor” with „lazy”.

The government at that time was is one of the most violent ever in the country history in terms of sanctions and limitations in the system of social assistance. During the last four years the duration of benefits was reduced four times from 18 months to 12 months in 2008, and at the moment since January 2009 the duration of payments to unemployed has become six months. The other factor that had an impact on the deepening of poverty is the guaranteed income minimum (GIM), based on which social benefits are calculated. GIM had not been increased for three years and only in 2009 it was raised with BGN 10 and is now BGN 65, although the life standard in the country was increased a few times. The sanctions in families with low income and suspension of child benefits for school absences were legalized and introduced in practice, which additionally deepened the poverty among the poorest strata of society.

Health Services

The governance of healthcare processes in the country is one of the hardest. The healthcare policy is the most criticized, it has

⁸ Note by the authors.

not been reformed, there are serious management and structural problems that influence the quality of health services for the population. In 2007 and 2008 the problems in the hospitals and other medical aid deepened and there even followed a replacement of the minister of healthcare. In spite of this personnel change, serious improvement in the sphere of healthcare was not achieved. With respect to medicine policy of the Government, even the National Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria Ginyo Ganev took up a position⁹, saying during a round table on Responsible National Policy for the Patients with Oncologic Illnesses in Bulgaria that the medicine policy in this area is burdened with a clumsy bureaucracy and suffering from budget limitations.

As to the psychic health and the development of services to people with psychiatric deceases, there is no improvement either. The only alternative to people with such illnesses still remains the accommodation at psychiatric hospitals without the necessary social assistance and support in the community. For the people suffering from psychic deceases who have difficult access to medication or health services and at the same time live in poverty, these problems seam unbearable and insolvable.

As a positive practice can be mentioned the initiation of the position of a health mediator in the Roma community. This is a new practice for Bulgaria, while in other European countries, such as France, Spain and Romania, it has a long history. The health mediator in the Roma community is meant to be an intermediary between the poorest Roma communities and the healthcare and social services. The first attempts to initiate the health mediator started as early as 2001 as a project with a leading organization the Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation.

The problems accompanying the practical introduction of the position of health mediator are an example of the inconsistency in the commitments of the institutions providing healthcare and social services in the Roma communities. For the training of the health mediators considerable amounts of money were spent ranging to millions of Euros under a few projects of the PHARE Programme;

⁹ The National Ombudsman approached himself on the rights of the oncology patients: <http://news.bpost.bg/story-read-15927.php>

in addition in 2007 at the Medical College in Plovdiv nineteen health mediators were trained from municipalities where there had not been qualified health mediators, and the mayors with their own initiative paid for the training of the health mediators. In spite of this interest and although the said projects under the Phare Programme were applied by the Bulgarian Government, the Ministry of healthcare demonstrated lack of interest and unwillingness to appoint the qualified healthcare mediators. Initially they were appointed through the MLSP budget, and in 2008 a total number of 111 health mediators were appointed in 55 municipalities through a delegated budget for the municipalities. This too encountered the disagreement or inaction of the MH, which threatened to leave the appointed health mediators without salaries. For example, the Letter by the MH to the Ministry of Finance settling the transfer of the delegated budget to the municipalities for the appointment of the health mediators was delayed with months both in 2007 and in 2008. This problem was raised at a meeting of the NCCEDI by Prof. Ivaylo Turnev and Deyan Kolev, many times it was discussed at meetings of the Steering Committee of the Phare Programme, too. At present 111 health mediators are appointed, which is an irrefutable success, however, their future remains vague and the engagement of the Ministry of healthcare – dubious.

It is necessary to create a structure that should be able to more efficiently monitor the quality of work of the health mediators, providing regular methodology assistance, supervision and trainings for them. It is necessary to guarantee sustainable financial support for this position.

There are many problems that the health mediators encounter referring to the healthcare for the Roma people. In January 2009 the Roma health mediator Mitko Dokov¹⁰, warned that the newborn babies in the Roma ghettos of Bourgas were not vaccinated against the most dangerous illnesses like tuberculosis, tetanus, whooping-cough, hepatitis, reported the correspondent of BGNES. According to Dokov, immediately after giving birth the Romani women flee from the hospital, while the quarter is “burning” with

¹⁰ http://news.vestnik24.com/newsbg/news_705561.html

tuberculosis, jaundice, syphilis and other dangerous infections. He gave an example, in Pobeda quarter in Bourgas, on 36 Opalchenska Street, where about a hundred Roma people live, about 30 of them have gone down with jaundice. The worst is that the illness is very infectious and is quickly replicated but still the people do not undergo medical treatment because they have no medical insurance and no money to cure.

It is crucial to solve the problem with the high percentage of people without health insurance from Roma origin. In this connection, it is necessary to extend the range of the health secured persons in unequal position by means of legislative and structural reforms in the sphere of health insurance of the socially weak persons, including the long-term unemployed. The health security status is an important precondition for the selection of a general practitioner and for the access to free medical and hospital assistance, the access to which is impeded at present for the Roma and other people living in poverty and isolation.

Employment and unemployment

Following the data from the National Statistics Institute 3,544,000 people is the economically active population in Bulgaria aged 15-64 during the third quarter of 2008. The economically inactive persons aged 15 – 64 are 1,627,100 or 31.5% of the population in the same age range. Nearly half of the inactive persons aged 15 – 64 do not wish to work or are not actively looking for a job because they are attending educational establishments or for personal or family reasons including infant care. The discouraged unemployed aged 15 – 64 are 143,500 or 8.8% of the economically inactive in the same age range.

The major role in the implementation of the state policy on employment plays the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy through the Employment Agency (EA). Indisputably, the official statistics showed considerable decrease of unemployment in the country in 2007 and most of 2008. On the other hand, many organizations and independent experts pointed that the programmes for alleviation of unemployment did not lead to creation of sus-

tainable jobs but rather took certain groups out of the statistics by means of subsidized employment, giving them minimum wages.

One of the most criticizing reports is that of the Institute for Market Economy (IME), whose experts, analyzing 433 reports of the Bulgarian National Audit Office for the period 1998 – 2007 draw the conclusion that 193 employment programmes have been a failure, operating with over 47 billion levs. One of the examples they give, quoting data from the Audit Office reports, is that the programme From Social Benefits to Employment has spent 357,4 million levs, or BGN 445,692 per unemployed, in order to create 801 jobs. The period covered by this research on the employment policy is 1998 – 2007 and overlaps with the last two governments.

During the last years the Employment Agency has definitely been performing initiatives to encourage the labour and social integration of the Roma people. In the National Action Plan on Employment in 2008, one of the target groups of the active labour market policy is the inactive persons, including the discouraged. The Plan foresees to report „specific features of each individual from the target groups on the labour market, paying special attention to the accumulated negative indicators in each beneficiary”. It is in this direction that actions are intended towards unemployed persons of Roma origin, who have low education and no qualifications, who are not active on the labour market because they have little or no employment aptitude and believe that they cannot make it on the labour market. As an indisputable success, we should mention the fact that the EA took up the initiative and elaborated the **Activating Inactive Persons Programme** and introduced Roma labour mediators under the programme.

The main idea of the programme is to activate and bring back to the labour market inactive and discouraged persons, by means of individual and group application of instruments and services to attract and motivate them to register at the Labour Offices, in order to be eligible for training and/or employment. In 2008 the programme was implemented in 9 Regional Directorates Employment Services and 45 municipalities by means of three components:

- Work with inactive persons (appointment of Roma mediators)

- Labour markets
- Encouragement and development of local collaboration on the issues of employment

In general this programme can hardly be qualified as a programme. The financial resource of BGN 219 232 is more like a project and not an overall programme for unemployment alleviation. It is like the budget of an average project of a non-governmental or business organization under the EU operational programmes. Although its range is national, engaging people from the whole country, it cannot be claimed that the Activating Inactive Persons Programme has a deep manifold approach towards uprooting unemployment in the Roma community.

From 9 June to 1 July 2008 at the Human Resources Development Center a training session was held for 41 Roma mediators as part of the profession Labour Market Mediator within the National Programme Activating Inactive Persons. The professional labour mediator is an important figure in the job seeking process, but much more skills and experience are needed for the employment generation among the poorest Roma population, as well as very good provision of methodology support, in order to successfully realize the activities on employment encouragement among the long-term unemployed. Besides, it is not sufficient to be a representative of the Roma community in order to become a labour mediator, but you also need acquiring many social skills for work in the community. Moreover, it is necessary to create specific local projects for qualification and acquisition of social skills for every separate place.

On the other hand, paying a minimum wage of BGN 220 to the Roma mediators is a way of discrimination, as the other labour mediators not involved in the programme receive higher salaries. This approach is restrictive for the initiative and the motivation of the hired Roma mediators and their inclusion in the teams of the Labour Offices is therefore difficult and nonequivalent.

No doubt, the appointment of Roma labour mediators is a positive step: it gives a chance for broader Roma representation in the Labour Offices. This is a way also for the assigned persons to get

comparatively long-term employment and qualification in the profession of a labour mediator. At the same time, the low remuneration and most of all the lack of clear authorities, the depreciation of the Roma mediator's job to the level of paper work at the Labour Office, reduce the effectiveness of the programme and discourage many of the employees (some of them left before the end of 2008).

One of the requirements for the activity of the Roma labour mediator is that the work place should be situated at the Labour Office. There is no flexibility to provide work place close to the persons in need. This in reality hampers the effective implementation of the programme.

For example, the place with the highest concentration of Roma and unemployed in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality is the village of Vodoley. It is 22 km far from Veliko Tarnovo. Many of its inhabitants are discouraged persons and in the village there are a few Roma people who cover the requirements for the position of Roma Labour Mediator. Nevertheless, the programme could not be applied in practice because the appointed mediator should travel every day at his/her own expenses to the work place in Veliko Tarnovo, which would cost two thirds of the salary. Besides, in Veliko Tarnovo the Roma labour mediator would not have to do much, as most of the Roma in town are occupied.

These weaknesses of the programme were pointed out by some Roma organizations¹¹. In 2009 they were partially overcome, at least in terms of the scale of the programme. And so, from 2009 it has included 105 Labour Offices and in each of them 2 Roma labour mediators have been assigned. Their salaries were increased (though with a minimum percentage).

It is evident from the interviews held and the extracted data that, with the appointment of Roma mediators, this programme aims at direct job creation among the Roma people. If this is so, the success of the programme is at stake, and on the other hand, the lack of supporting environment like courses, qualifications, internships and other forms of training accessible to Roma people, will jeopardize the work of the local mediators.

¹¹ Statement of CIEDT Amalipe on the National Employment Plan 2008, Statement of the Integro Association, etc.

The proposed budget shows that the programme is covered only for the first component and the rest have no financial coverage, which questions the quality preparation and implementation of labour exchange and the encouragement and development of local cooperation on employment issues.

As to the implementation of the second component, in his statement at the round table on the occasion of 8 April, the International Roma Day, the National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Baki Husseinov pointed out that in the frame of the programme, general and specialized labour exchange is organized for direct negotiations between job seekers and employers. In 2008 four of the specialized exchange sessions were directed to the Roma communities and were held in the cities of Nova Zagora, Lom, Samokov and Kazanlak. The number of the employed is 1092, and over 11 400 Roma people were included in 2008 in training courses for unemployed persons. For 2009 it is foreseen to organize and hold other labour exchange sessions directed towards the Roma population.

The last component in the Activation Inactive Persons programme is entirely wishful and is not well grounded in terms of suggested measures and activities. These seem more like “office endeavors” such as signing local employment agreements among various interested parties, public debate, etc. The expected results are only put down as „Established local cooperation” and „Signed at least 10 local employment agreements”, and the budget does not provide for funds to implement this activity.

General conclusions

SOCIAL PROTECTION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE

- The social assistance for various vulnerable groups in Bulgaria is divided by five laws, and various rules, ordinances and directives regulating the eligibility and duration of support. The basic laws are the Law on Social Assistance, the Law on Integration of People with Disabilities, the Law on Family Benefits, the Social Security Code, and the Child Protection Law. Social workers in the Social Assistance Directorates handle a huge volume of normative base, very often confusing, especially in particular cases.

- Social benefits do not in fact contribute much to poverty alleviation, as they are exceptionally low and irrelevant to the actual household subsistence. The benefits paid start from 1 lev and the maximum a person can get reaches to 60 levs.

- The most essential problem in the Bulgarian system of social assistance is that it is based only on the formal criteria to which a poor person should correspond, such as: property status, income, age, employment, ability to work and so on. If a person does not cover the formal criteria but is indeed poor and in need, this person has no access to social assistance, whereas those who cover the criteria but are not at risk, may be beneficiaries.

- The usage of extremely harsh wording towards the poor strata of society had serious consequences not only on the poor people but also on the society as a whole. More than once the users of social assistance and the unemployed were named in public at various media with insulting nominations and sarcastic intonation by high rank government representatives and members of parliament. These statements in public made people believe that the ones on social benefits should be regularly punished in order to improve and get out of poverty. This belief is so widely spread that many forums, articles and media proclaim anti-social propaganda and implications identifying „poor” with „lazy”.

- During the last four years the duration of benefits was reduced three times from 18 months to 12 months in 2008, and since January 2009 the duration of payments to unemployed has become six months. The other factor that had an impact on the deepening of poverty is the guaranteed income minimum (GIM), based on which social benefits are calculated. GIM had not been increased for three years and only in 2009 it was raised with BGN 10 and is now BGN 65, although the life standard in the country has increased a few times. The sanctions in families with low income and suspension of child benefits for school absences were legalized and introduced in practice, which additionally deepened the poverty among the poorest strata of society.

HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Healthcare is still not reformed sector and the problems with medicine policy, medical and hospital assistance remain unsolved.

As a positive practice can be mentioned the initiation of the position of a health mediator in the Roma community. A doubtless success was that in 2008 a total of 111 health mediators were appointed in 55 municipalities through delegated budgets. Nevertheless, the high percentage of Roma people without health insurances still remains. A persisting problem is also the lack of commitment by the Ministry of Healthcare to the health mediator's position and to the policies directed to the Roma population.

EMPLOYMENT

- As to the sphere of employment within the Roma community, it may be concluded that the government is working hard and necessary steps are taken in order to achieve higher employment among the Roma population. A positive example is the Activating Inactive People Programme and the introduction of Roma labour mediators in the Labour Offices. And yet the range of the programme is very limited both financially, and with respect to real measures for unemployment alleviation in the Roma community. This approach is strongly restrictive for the initiative and the motivation of the hired Roma mediators, in addition to their difficult and unequal introduction in the teams of the Labour Offices. Two of the components of the programme are just wishful.

Healthcare and the Roma Community

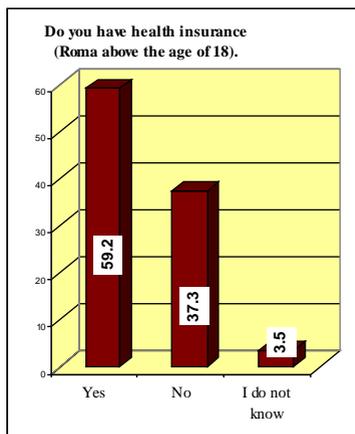
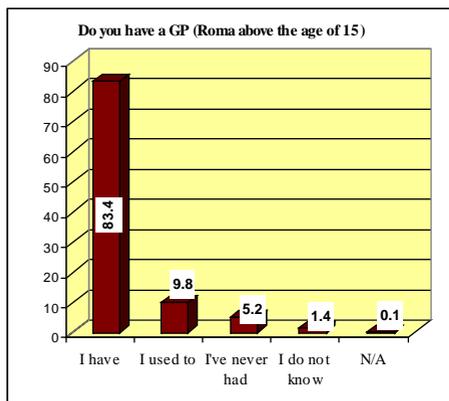
The approach of the Bulgarian Government towards minority issues is regulated by a few normative and programme documents in the sphere of healthcare:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Law for Protection from Discrimination
- National Action Plan for Protection from Discrimination
- Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society
- Action Plan for the implementation of Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society
- Law on Health
- Health Insurance Law
- National Health Strategy
- Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities
- Action Plan to the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities
- Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2007–2013.

Brief description of the main problems in the health integration of Roma

In the present period of healthcare reforms there can be observed exceptionally negative trends connected to the health status of the Roma population: high sickness rate, high death rate, low life expectancy. The average life expectancy of the Roma is more than 10 year lower than the average for the country. Their highest peak of mortality is 40–49 years of age, the main causes being cardiac vascular and brain vascular problems. The Roma

people say that the medical staff demonstrate lack of understanding of their different cultural beliefs and traditions. The Roma rarely care for prevention and very often rely on emergency aid. The majority lives in miserable housing conditions. They inhabit poor quarters (ghettos) located in the suburbs or villages, usually with inferior infrastructure and conditions leading to risks for the health of the inhabitants.



According to a research of Open Society Institute – Sofia held in October 2007, more than half of the questioned Roma people define their health as “satisfactory”, “poor“ or „very poor“. This exceeds with 12% the country average as per the data of Eurobarometer on Bulgaria. (Eurobarometer reports that in the end of 2006 about 40% of the Bulgarians define their health status as “satisfactory”, “poor“ or „very poor“. The same research shows that nearly one third have no health insurance (37,3%) although the bigger part have their family doctors (83,4%).¹

Challenges and problems

There is a steady deterioration tendency in the health status of the Roma community, in spite of the fact that some Roma people living in the towns (especially the children) use health services.

¹ Roma in Bulgaria – information reference book, p. 40-42.

The most important of the whole spectrum of problems and challenges are:

- The high number of persons without health insurance
- Lack of alternative forms of health service and/or introduction of minimum packages of health services for the people without health insurance
- Persisting problems with education, qualification and especially appointment of the health mediators
- Relating health insurances with social benefits: this proved to be a serious problem
- No effective prevention
- No specialized individual approach to the patients
- No health awareness of the Romani women.

Institutional and normative provisions of the process of integration in the health sphere

In September 2005 the Council of Ministers approved the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities. That was in fact one of the first documents approved by the Government at the time. The elaboration of this Strategy was a result of the endeavours of representatives of the Ministry of Healthcare, NGO working in the sphere of healthcare and experts (including Roma health experts like Dr. Zhelyazko Manolov and Dr. Stefan Panayotov). The Action Plan 2005–2007 was also approved with clearly identified sources of financing.

At the same time no administrative structure was built in the Ministry of Healthcare to deal with the implementation of the Minorities Health Strategy: no special Directorate or Department; the closest seems to be the National Health Policy Directorate – Strategies, Policies, Programmes and Projects Sector. This plus the lack of the expected financing formalized the implementation of the Health Strategy during the analysed period.

When various programmes or projects are implemented the Roma people are usually a target group. No effective mechanisms are sought to authorize and let the Roma themselves implement the programmes and projects (with the only exception of Compo-

ment 5 of the Programme for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Prevention and the health mediators).

One of the key problems is the provision of the necessary resources (material and other) for the improvement of the health of the Roma community. The Health problems of the Roma community are not something strictly specific, apart from the health problems of the population of Bulgaria. It is true that the negative health tendencies are stronger among the Roma people, whether because of social and life-style traditions, or because of the stronger impact of the unfavourable social and economic factors.

Major initiatives in the health sphere in 2007 and 2008

In October 2008 the Council of Ministers approved the National Health Strategy 2008 – 2013: a document that had been elaborated during the previous couple of years and the importance of which for the health reforms cannot be underestimated. Certain sections in it dwell on the effects of poverty on health.

„Poverty and illnesses form a vicious circle in which poverty is not only the determination factor for the unfavourable health status, but also its potential consequence. Poverty is associated with shorter life expectancy, higher child death rate, higher risk of catching infectious diseases (most of all tuberculosis and AIDS), higher levels of consumption of various harmful substances (nicotine, alcohol and drugs), higher level of dissemination of chronic diseases, depressions, suicides, more acts of anti-social behavior and violence, and also stronger and long-term impact of harmful factors of the environment.

The influence of poverty is exceptionally strong on young people because of the direct relation of this social phenomenon with the health status and problems such as violation, suicide and drug abuse. Both unemployment and job insecurity have unfavourable impact on health, increase the risk for psychological and physical disturbances and suicides.”

„The problem with urban poverty is characterized with its increase in numbers and internal stratification. The poor part of the urban population is exposed to a greater extent to risks from illnesses because of the fact that in most of the cases there are

poor housing conditions, lack of adequate infrastructure, inferior nourishment, emissions of harmful substances, etc. Some of these people have limited access to medical aid and health-related goods because of deficit of funds and in this way they often are socially inadapttable.”

Nevertheless, the National Health Strategy does not treat the problems of health integration of the Roma people and in essence does not include any of the important elements of the Minority Health Strategy. It is not a precedent: the situation was analogous with the National Programme for the Development of School Education approved in 2006, which in its essence did not include anything of the Strategy for Educational Integration. The lack of the so called „mainstreaming”, i.e. inclusion of the problems of the Roma integration in the main documents focusing on the respective sphere (healthcare, education, etc.), indicates a low degree of political willingness to implement integration policies.

Overcoming inequalities of healthcare

The equal access to medical assistance, together with the solidarity in the actions are founding elements in the policy of the World Health Organization and of each member state in the EU. The increased awareness of the social determinants of health is the reason for the special attention paid to the persons belonging to vulnerable groups – ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

Distinguishing features of the health status of the disadvantaged persons belonging to the ethnic minorities are the higher sickness rate and death rate (especially infant mortality), as well as the lower life expectancy. This concerns mostly the Roma ethnic community. The main reasons for deteriorated health status of the ethnic minorities are *poverty and unhealthy lifestyle*. Poverty among the Roma and Turkish ethnic communities is respectively 11 and 3 times more than among the Bulgarians.

The access to medical aid of the disadvantaged persons belonging to the ethnic minorities is considerably limited also because of the fact that the general practitioners are not aware of and do not reckon with the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of these communities to an appropriate extend.

The unhealthy lifestyle of the disadvantaged persons belonging to the ethnic minorities is connected with high frequency of major risks for the health, such as inadequate nourishment, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, etc.

Moreover, the bigger part of the persons belonging to ethnic minorities lives in quarters with uncompleted infrastructure, lacking water supply and sewerage system. This explains the higher frequency of infectious diseases in these communities, including epidemics. In addition, the scope of planned immunizations of the children in these communities is smaller than necessary.

One of the main tasks in this area is the application of *protection networks* with the respective adequate financing referring to the people belonging to ethnic minorities, the recognition of the position of health mediator as a coordinating figure between health institutions and minority groups.

In addition, in order to provide equal access to health services for these persons, the following important tasks have to be completed:

- ✓ Getting the general practitioners and the specialists closer to the quarters inhabited mainly by Bulgarian citizens of Roma and Turkish origin;
- ✓ Including specialized modules providing specific skills for work with ethnic minorities in the curricula of the medical universities and colleges;
- ✓ Acquisition of the needed knowledge, skills, and motivating the general practitioners and nurses to treat patients belonging to ethnic minorities, as well as awareness of their ethnic and cultural peculiarities;
- ✓ Informing the disadvantaged persons belonging to ethnic minorities about their rights as patients and the guaranteed free medical services.

During the subject period similar *protective measures* were exceptions, realized mostly within the framework of the Phare Programme and rarely with the money from the state budget. One of these exceptions were the preventive and screening examinations for persons without medical insurances for prevention and

early diagnosis of lung deceases in December 2007, organized following the Action Plan of the Health Strategy for disadvantaged persons belonging to ethnic minorities. The campaign was performed as per the Ordinance of the Minister of Healthcare and was covered by an approved amount under the National Programmes activity within the budget of the Regional Health Centers. The examinations had to be performed very quickly (from 10 to 24 December) and in most cases they had to include 600 persons for prophylaxis and 700 persons for lung deceases on the territory of each district. This fact predefined their low effectiveness.

In spite of its doubtless necessity, the campaign was accompanied by a series of omissions and organizational problems:

- Inappropriate time selected for the campaign (at the very end of the year, during Christmas, Bayram and New Year celebrations);
- Lack of updated information about persons without health insurance. The Regional Healthcare Centers were forced to wander about three institutions (Regional Social Security Administrations, National Social Security Institute, Regional Health Insurance Fund) in their attempt to find updates on the persons without health insurance. As a result, the doctors performing the examinations were provided with eligibility lists that were not updated and contained many errors.

I have been unemployed for ten years now and still I was not in the list [of people without health insurance]. I went there, gave my name. They told me, “You are not in the list. You should be insured.” And turned me back. But I am not [insured].

An additional difficulty proved to be the identification of the places where the examinations were held. Nevertheless, some RHC were exceptionally flexible and managed to make the campaign efficient.

First we requested information form the REGIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, but we were turned down. After that we addressed the Territorial Division of the NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE. They directed us to the REGIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE FUND. And so, none of the three institu-

tions gave us information whatsoever. The REGIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION told us to go to the Territorial Division of the NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE, they told us to go to the Central Administration of the NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE, who responded only in January saying that they resend data to the NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE FUND. The NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE FUND were supposed to proceed it to the REGIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE FUND, but we never got an answer from the REGIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE FUND – neither in words, nor in writing. We know that all the general practitioners on a monthly basis receive lists of their patients without health insurance. The doctors themselves know them. In order to be as precise as possible, we requested from the Territorial Statistics Bureau the data from the last census 2001. We requested information on how people determined their own appurtenance. They gave us this information by places within the district. This is how we discovered the places with the biggest concentration of minority groups and contacted the doctors there. We asked them whether they would like to participate in the campaign in this period of time. There were refusals, but only a few, who said that they were very busy and did not want to commit because of shortage of time. We summoned those who confirmed to a meeting and explained about the campaign and their role in it, and signed contracts with them.

Representative of the Regional Healthcare Center

- With little exceptions, no mechanism was foreseen how to reach the target group and what approaches would be most effective to get to as many people as possible. At some places the examinations were initially done at the district dispensaries and hospitals for lung deceases. This was the case of Stara Zagora. Having reported the specific nature and the impossibility to perform all the examinations, the Regional Healthcare Center together with the Association World without Borders took a decision and provided a truck with a fluorograph apparatus which moved to a quarter inhabited by vulnerable and minority groups. Thanks to the active organization of the association, the health mediators and

volunteers are motivated until mid January 2008 to examine more than 250 persons from the Roma neighbourhood.

Of course, some of the Regional Healthcare Centers managed to find the most adequate mechanism to get to as many as possible persons without health insurance. For example, in Shoumen district, the information on the campaign was sent through all official and unofficial channels: regional media, representatives of professional organizations, staff in the administration, formal and informal leaders of the community. Lung examinations were announced on the site of the Regional Healthcare Centers, press releases were sent to all the regional media. The director of the RHC took part in a TV broadcast by the local television. The District Governor's administration cooperated to connect with the responsible persons for minority issues at the municipalities. All the Roma leaders in Shoumen municipality were informed and their collaboration was provided. Informative meetings were held in the smaller municipalities with Mayors and Vice Mayors responsible for healthcare. Cooperation was requested also from the Association of the General Practitioners, the Social Services for children and families, etc.

- The cultural barriers were not taken in consideration that were the reason for the little number of persons from the minorities willing to be examined.

In the end, I was very disappointed from the people targeted by the programme. They do not wish to be examined, have no motivation to check their own status...

General Practitioner

Why should I go to be examined? If they find something wrong, what can I do? I do not have money for treatment. I'd rather not know, at least I will not worry. And who knows what the doctors will do to me ...

Romani woman, 54 years old, village

- No mechanism was foreseen how to engage the local formal and informal leaders, NGO, workers in the community, in order to get to as many as possible people and to overcome

the negative prejudice and stereotypes of both sides – the community itself and the health specialists.

„We were approached by the RIOKOZ (Regional Inspectorate for Public Health Protection and Control) just before the Christmas holidays with a request. „Your people do not come to the examinations and the doctor stays idle. Please, help us!” I spared two persons to go around for three days from house to house following the lists and to talk to the people. It came out that many were abroad and that the list was not updated. Others went, but were disappointed – just a simple examination with stethoscope. They discovered problems with some of them and directed them to the tub dispensary, which was a good thing. But I sent two persons during the period when we were completing projects and I needed all of my people – that was not compensated in any way. If I were a good manager, I would not pay them wages for the week because they did not work for the organization but for RIOKOZ. It is a good idea in similar cases to allocate money for motivation campaign and not just to expect the Roma organizations to do that on good will.”

Leader of a local Roma NGO

The general practitioners included in the campaign believe that it would have been more efficient if the formal and informal Roma leaders were attracted beforehand:

– To your opinion, what has to change, so that the campaign becomes more effective?

– Public awareness. There are various strategies for different things. In some cases, however, common strategies are universally efficient. For instance, there are structures at state level, where someone pays to somebody to do something, but the latter pays to somebody else to do the job. In this case, it could have been more efficient if before the campaign the leaders of the minority communities – the trusted people - were summoned. It would have been a good idea to pay to these people to make them talk to their communities and to explain the importance of this activity, and to give them a boost to participate.

GP

- Not always the general practitioners and the specialists were motivated for an effective campaign. Some of them counted on the people without health insurances to visit the consulting rooms that were away from the quarters with dense minority population. There were cases when the general practitioners demonstrated unconcealed reluctance. One of them, a GP from a district center did the following to reach the people from ethnic minorities without health insurance: *“All the examinations are done at the polyclinics where my consulting room is. I tell my patients to spread the information about the campaign, but nevertheless, no one comes. Only 7 showed up and were examined.”*
- There were cases when the persons without health insurance were not aware of their status. Most of them had recently started work again and wrongly believed that this automatically meant that they were eligible for all health services as fully insured.
- Not all of the doctors had the special apparatus for the examinations.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the Regional Healthcare Centers were most flexible during the campaign. They extended its duration until January 2008, redirected the examinations to places where there was more need. However, the main question remains unanswered: When lung deceases are found out (save for tuberculosis the medical treatment of which is covered by the state), what will happen with the patients without health insurance?

The objective of the recommendations below is to help similar initiatives become more efficient and effective:

- When such initiatives, strategies and campaigns are planned, mechanisms should be provided for real inclusion (also by means of financial resources) of representatives of the Roma NGO experienced in health services among vulnerable groups, in order to guarantee that the Roma community would take up the responsibility and also to account for the specific peculiarities of the community.

- When such initiatives and campaigns are planned, plausible deadlines of the events should be foreseen and reachable expected results (in this case, number of examinations) in the appropriate time of the year (not during the winter holidays).
- Better preliminary preparedness of the organized campaigns: creation of the necessary database, preparation of the various actors (GP-s, specialists, structures of the Ministry of Healthcare, NGO, media, etc.), preliminary information campaign on site in the community.
- The campaigns should include only medical staff without discrimination beliefs and prejudice towards the Roma population

Major projects under the Phare programme directed towards health integration in 2007 and 2008

The PHARE Programme was a main financial instrument of the European Union for cooperation with the countries from Central and Eastern Europe to support the transition to market economy and democracy. The programme was founded in 1989 with the idea to help the transition process in Poland and Hungary, and later it was applied in other countries. After 1998 the priorities were changed and its major objective became the preparation of the candidate countries for EU accession. In Bulgaria, the Phare Programme covered mainly two programmes: National Programme and Programmes for Cross-Border Cooperation (Phare - CBCP). In view of the fact that the implementation of the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society was defined as one of the short-term objectives in Partnership for Accession, part of the money under the Phare Programme were directed towards supporting the process of Roma integration. The health integration was one of the priorities.

During the analysed period three projects were implemented under the Phare Programme in relation with the health integration of the Roma: BG2003/004-937.01.03 Educational and Medical Integration of Vulnerable Minority Groups with a Special Focus on Roma, BG2004/016-711.01.03 Improvement of the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a spe-

cial focus on Roma and BG 2005/017-353.01.03 Improvement of the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma.

Phare 2005: BG 2005/017-353.01.03 – Improvement of the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma

Scope of the project: The healthcare component of the project was implemented at the national level in cooperation with the NCCEDI, MH and the Steering Committee of the project. Most of Task 2 and the whole Task 3 were implemented in 6 target districts in collaboration with the Regional Healthcare Centers and NCCEDI.

Duration: 02/2008 – 05/2009

Budget: 800 000 euro

Partners: BBI Consortium, comprised of Bernard Brunhes International – leader and members: ECIP Foundation (Bulgaria), GVG (Germany) and Scientific Association for Social Medicine, Informatics and Health Management (Bulgaria).

Target group (*direct beneficiaries*):

- National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI) and Directorate „Ethnic and Demographic Issues” (DEDI) under the Council of Ministers

- Ministry of Healthcare (MH)

- Representatives of the Regional Inspectorates for Public Health Preservation and Control (RIOKOZ), Regional Healthcare Centers (RHC), Regional Healthcare Councils

- Health experts

- Municipal social experts

- Health mediators

- NGO working on health problems, organizing campaigns for health promotion prevention measures

- Disadvantaged ethnic minorities with focus on the Roma population in the pilot areas

Indirect Beneficiaries: Regional and local authorities, schools, local communities, other social partners and interested parties

OBJECTIVE OF THE HEALTHCARE COMPONENT

- Improvement of the healthcare programmes for the ethnic minorities with special focus on the Roma

- Assistance to the programme for screening and early diagnosis of tuberculosis, oncological, cardio-vascular and hereditary deceases by means of mobile equipment
- Organization and implementation of a health promotion campaign addressing the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with special focus on the Roma, together with the local and regional interested parties
- Organization of additional training for health specialists, social workers and NGO to work with the Roma communities
- Evaluation of the needs and the opportunities to build upon the National Information and Monitoring System in view of the specific features of the health status of the disadvantaged ethnic minority groups with special focus on the Roma

TASKS OF HEALTHCARE COMPONENT

Task 1: Elaboration of a complete programme and detailed action plan for screening and early diagnosis of disadvantaged ethnic minorities in connection with the implementation of the national health programmes

Task 2: Creating a mechanism for a complete campaign for health promotion and healthcare addressing the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with special focus on Roma at the local level. Implementing the campaign in 6 target areas; Training 100 representatives of 28 administrative districts – from RIOKOZ, RHC and NGP – to prepare and perform campaigns for health promotion and prevention directed to Roma communities; Training 50 municipal social experts in 6 target districts.

Task 3: Cooperation to the implementation of the programme for medical examinations with mobile teams for screening and early diagnosis of tuberculosis, oncological, cardio-vascular and hereditary deceases: Gathering and work with 6 coordination teams; Training of the members of the coordination teams and the mobile units.

Task 4: Analysis and evaluation of the needs and applicability in order to improve the National System for Health Information and Monitoring in view of the health status of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with special focus on Roma

The implementation of these projects faced analogous problems that to a great extent hindered their successful realization.

One of the problems was the delay in the delivery of the mobile equipment. The implementation of the so called 'soft measures', i.e. the examinations of the Roma and other disadvantaged groups, depended a lot on the timely delivery of the expensive mobile equipment purchased under the Phare Programme. The considerable delay caused serious problems to the consortiums applying the "soft measures". Another problem of the kind was the reduction of the foreseen financing by the Ministry of Healthcare for consumables to be used during the medical examinations. Still another problem was the passiveness of the Ministry of Healthcare with respect to the financing of the position of Health Mediator.

These problems in most of the cases discouraged the implementing contractors of the projects and left the Roma community with the impression of permanent corruption.

„We made great efforts to motivate the people to undergo medical examinations: meetings, talks, discussions... Sometimes it is very difficult to convince someone who considers himself healthy in the supposition that he may have serious illnesses. And when the examinations were to start, it came out that the equipment was missing. We were on the first line, everyone accused us, they said we only cared for our fees and did nothing. If I'd known this would happen, I wouldn't get into it at all...”

Roma Health Mediator

These problems were discussed many times at the meetings of the Steering Committee of the Phare Programme, at the NCCEDI, the representatives of the European Commission were informed. In the end, a solution was found, however, the delay lead to lower efficiency of the projects.

Another important issue related to the implementation of the said projects was the participation of the Roma community: not only as a beneficiary, but also as an actor. The consortia implementing Phare projects during the analysed period did not include Roma NGO, although at least a dozen Roma organizations possess the expertise in the sphere of healthcare – they have acquired the experience and the capacity in this area mainly through the implementation of projects within the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS Programme and the Roma Health Programme of the

Open Society Institute – Budapest. Roma were most of the district coordinators in the selected centers, but Roma were not included as key experts (save for Dr. S. Panayotov) under the Phare Programme 2003. Cooperation with Roma was preferred on a personal level (mainly regional coordinators but not key experts) to the partnership with Roma NGO experienced in the sphere of healthcare. The issue of the need to increase the Roma participation was put forth at many occasions by the Roma representatives at the Steering Committee of the Phare Programme (by P. Georgiev, S. Blagoev and D. Kolev), but nothing much followed.

**Prevention of HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
Programme financed by the Global Fund for Prevention
of HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria**

The Programme financed by the Global Fund is one of the few national healthcare initiatives with special focus on Roma. Whereas the programme for prevention of HIV/AIDS is active in Bulgaria since 2003, the programme for prevention of tuberculosis started in 2007 in response to the rapid growth of the number of Roma people ill with tuberculosis. Both programmes include a special component (Component 5), directed towards the Roma community. In this connection we have to point out that the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in the Republic of Bulgaria (2007 – 2011) – unlike the analogous programme for prevention of HIV/AIDS – reports on the higher risk among the Roma community and the need for straightforward actions.

Initially the model of the project was applied in Kyustendil, Sofia, Vidin, partially in Rousse, and in Skopye and later it was multiplied in 10 Bulgarian cities. The idea of the prevention is to apply the best practices to limit the risky behavior. The services provided are connected with the training of the health, educational and leaders' groups, individual consultations and forwarding to medical and social agencies. The emphasis in the training of leaders' groups is the acquisition of skills to render information and consult coevals in the informal youth circles. The groups include representatives of the community aged 12-25. The teams of

the NGO – through the activities in the health and social centers and in situ – work to change the established attitudes in the community, for health education, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, to facilitate the access of the Roma to the health and social services, with a minimum standard of the quality of service provided. Five health and social centers for the Roma community function in the cities of Bourgas, Varna, Stara Zagora, Pazardzhik and Vidin in the framework of Component 5 Prevention of HIV in the Roma community. The programme also provides financial support to centers in Sofia, Sliven and Plovdiv. Purchased and equipped are 2 mobile consulting cabinets housed by Roma non-governmental organizations. During the period 2004 – 2007 the total is 21 683 persons from the Roma community under Component 5 of the Programme; 8 centers have been established, located at the Roma community (Bourgas, Varna, Vidin, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Sliven, Sofia and Stara Zagora), a total number of 12 mobile medical consulting cabinets at the non-governmental organizations have been financially supported in order to reach to the vulnerable groups.

As mentioned above, the programme is one of the few initiatives that not only have special focus on Roma, but also invest in the capacity building of the Roma organizations working in this area. What is more, the programme evolves towards a more active inclusion of the Roma organizations not only as sub-beneficiaries of funds, but also as key factors taking part in various mechanisms of the programme. Of the sub-beneficiaries under Component 5 «Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in the Roma communities», seven of the nine organizations are Roma. One of them is represented by Dr. Stefan Panayotov (Health of Roma Foundation – Sliven) who is a representative of Component 5 at the National Coordination Committee on HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis. For the period 2007–2008 we have to report also the improvement of the coordination procedures with Roma NGO with reference to budgeting and identification of new focal points in the work, although there is still lack of representation at the level of the Programme Management Structures.

In July 2007 the Global Fund for Combating AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria invited Bulgaria **to participate in the evaluation process to qualify for a grant BUL-202-G01-H-00 under the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS Programme** for financing following the newly-created mechanism for financial extension (Rolling Continuation Channel). This mechanism is applied only to grants that have received 4 continuous excellent marks on financial and programme performance during the recent couple of years. The mechanism for financial extension aims at providing **longer-term release of funds for well-performed programmes and correctly absorbed grants**. The main idea of this proposal for financial extension is to contribute to the reduction of the dissemination of HIV among the population and to improve the quality of life of the people living with HIV.

Major target groups of the programme's second phase are people injecting drugs, homosexual men, young people from the Roma community (aged 15-25) who are of higher risk, imprisoned persons, mobile groups, young people at risk (aged 15-24), people living with HIV. Basic aspect of the extension of interventions foreseen in this project proposal is the support for the public healthcare system both in national and regional level, and all 28 Regional Inspectorates for Public Health Protection will be included by stages in the integrated biological and behaviorist researches, as well as in the whole local management process.

The specific areas of services and activities of the programme for prevention of tuberculosis are differentiated in and subordinate to **5 operational objectives**:

- **Operational Objective 1:** Providing efficient management and coordination for the National Programme on Tuberculosis
- **Operational Objective 2:** Increasing the efficiency of diagnosis and medical treatment of tuberculosis in Bulgaria
- **Operational Objective 3:** Reducing the dissemination of tuberculosis in Bulgaria's prisons
- **Operational Objective 4:** Extending the access to medical care of tuberculosis for the groups in high risk – refugees, immigrants, young people in risk, injected drug addicts, alcoholics

- **Operational Objective 5:** Extending the scope of the Roma community with access to treatment of tuberculosis

The available data identifies the Roma community as the most vulnerable in Bulgaria with respect to tuberculosis. Poverty among the Roma is 11 times higher compared to the ethnic Bulgarians. The level of unemployment in the Roma community fluctuates between 70 and 90%, about 46% of them have no medical insurance and this fact drastically reduces their access to doctors and health services.

Tuberculosis among the Roma population is often accompanied with other chronic diseases increasing the risk for the replication of the infection. According to recent researches held in 17 big cities, the patients with tuberculosis in the Roma community are 50% of all the cases of tuberculosis in Bulgaria, which means high rate of illness in the community and contributes to the considerable spread of new cases.

The programme foresees the inclusion of 40 field workers for the 18 additional regions, to perform screening and discover cases of possible tuberculosis, to forward patients to the relevant medical institutions for testing and cure, to support the implementation of the DOT Strategy for patients with tuberculosis in durable phase; for specific consultation and motivation of families and contact persons; educational activities in the Roma community referring to treatment and prevention of tuberculosis and support to patients. In order to provide sustainable reduction of the number of patients with suspended treatment, they will be provided with additional stimuli and season tickets.

The expected results include:

- Providing continuous training for services connected with the scope and efficiency of care to limit the expansion of tuberculosis in the Roma community
- 31 000 persons from the Roma community to be screened to check the risk of tuberculosis within the 5 years of the project
- 4600 Roma people to be forwarded to the respective healthcare institutions for testing the saliva or other medical tests
- 2950 is the expected number of patients with tuberculosis from the Roma community to be supported during the long-term treatment

On Component 5 “Improved discovery of cases and successful treatment of tuberculosis in the Roma community” the Ministry of Healthcare has already contracted the following organizations:

1. Bourgas Municipality – District Roma Union Foundation
2. Varna Municipality – Partners Association
3. Vidin Municipality – Together 2000 Association
4. Kyustendil Municipality – LARGO Liberal Alternative for Roma Civil Society association
5. Plovdiv Municipality – Panacea Foundation
6. Sliven Municipality –Health of Roma Foundation
7. Stara Zagora Municipality –World without Borders Association
8. Capital City \of Sofia Municipality – Initiative for Health Foundation

In spite of the considerably better commitment of the Programme in terms of Roma participation, however, it – just like the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme – assigned to the Roma (and non-Roma) NGO the role of sub-beneficiaries only, that is to say, they accept the philosophy and methodology of the Programme, but do not directly participate in its preparation. In 2008 and 2009 a coordination procedure was applied and opportunity was given to Roma NGO to give suggestions, but Roma experts were not included in the preparation of the final proposals. This implies intensification of the current consultative processes between the Programme Management Structures and the Roma NGO with reference to the adaptation of the Programme to the various peculiarities among the Roma community in order to improve effectiveness.

The concept of the health mediators

In the period 2003 – 2007 a total number of 111 health mediators were trained and certified within three projects. At present 92 of them are working.

The introduction of the health mediator is new to Bulgaria but it was successfully adopted and has proven its efficiency in other countries for the improved access of minorities and espe-

cially the Roma minority to healthcare and social services and for the overcoming of the discrimination attitude. Experience was shared by the Romanian Roma organization Romany CRISS and the Romanian Ministry of Healthcare.

Very important was the presentation of the position of health mediator not only to the community but also to general practitioners, healthcare and social institutions, the local government. In this way mayors from municipalities like Shoumen, Nikola Kozlevo, Tervel, Shable, Kavarna, Novi Pazar, Yakimovo, Montana and others demonstrated their willingness for training of health mediators. Some mayors even paid from the municipal budgets for the training which started in February 2008 at the Plovdiv Medical College. In the early 2008, however, there were vacancies for health mediators in municipalities where such specialists were not trained and redundancies in the municipalities where such specialists were trained. After the active intervention of the National Network of Health Mediators and the support of other civil organizations, the list of the health mediators was corrected.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

1. The tendency is increased for some of the specialized programs of the Ministry of Healthcare to provide for straightforward activities to improve the health status of the Roma community.
2. Roma experts and Roma NGO working in the sphere of healthcare are still included only in the lowest working level of initiatives and consortia implementing Roma healthcare projects.
3. There is not enough transparency/participation during the implementation of initiatives directed to healthcare of the ethnic minorities and especially Roma. This does not allow for adequate monitoring and evaluation of the results
4. There is no accessible data of an approved Action Plan 2008–2009 as part of the Health Strategy for disadvantaged persons belonging to ethnic minorities, or if there is such, then the Roma NGO working in the sphere of healthcare have not been consulted in the process of its elaboration.

Recommendations:

1. The issues of health and healthcare of the Roma community should be considered a specific and exceptionally important priority of the state policy.

2. Roma experts and non-governmental organizations should be included in all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the health policies directed to the Roma community.

3. Doctors' consulting rooms (policlinics) should be set up in close proximity to the community; mobile medical teams should be provided for accessible health services in the ghettos.

4. The medical staff should be trained to discern the peculiarities of the Roma ethnos and to overcome the discrimination attitude, to make it possible that the doctor's approach be conformable to the cultural characteristics of the patient.

5. Healthcare Strategies for prevention and cure should be elaborated and financed to be implemented by the municipalities

6. A Council for the Roma healthcare integration should be set up at the MH with consultative and monitoring functions on major initiatives and projects connected with the improvement of the health status of the Roma communities.

7. The resource capacity should be developed of the Roma NGO working in the sphere of healthcare, by means of continuous training, improvement of the expertise, working in networks and partnerships in order to increase the effectiveness and the transparency of the implementation of projects connected with the improvement of the health status of the Roma.

8. Urgent approval of an Action Plan for the Health Strategy for disadvantaged persons belonging to the ethnic minorities, together with the Framework Programme for the Integration of the Roma in the Bulgarian Society in order to provide continuity of the action plans in compliance with the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015.

9. Payment of the installment on health insurance should be independent of the social benefits eligibility

10. There should be a sufficient minimum package of health services to people with interrupted health insurance eligibility. The expected effects would be, on one hand, increased access to

healthcare for the persons without health insurances, and on the other hand, stimulating the re-inclusion in the health insurance system to become eligible for the wider package of health services.

11. Development of programmes for treatment of socially significant illnesses – TB, cardio-vascular deceases, diabetes, epilepsy, echinococcus, etc. – in order to improve the efficiency of these programmes among the Roma communities

12. Regular comparative and disaggregate data for the health status of the Roma community should be provided in order to identify effective strategies and policies

13. Identification and intensification of an effective model for health prophylaxis and health prevention among the Roma community by means of active participation of the Roma NGO working in the sphere of healthcare and health representation

14. Health education should be introduced in schools as well as adapted system for effective distribution of health knowledge in the extra-school environment

15. The so called “social policlinics” should be set up to serve to the disadvantaged families with the minimum sufficient package of health services

16. Provision of sustainability, continuous education and creation of a register of the health mediators

17. Educational programmes should be elaborated at the medical colleges and institutes preparing future specialists to work with vulnerable groups.

Public Policies for Improvement of the Living Conditions of Roma in Bulgaria

Context

During the last decade a number of strategic and operational documents were approved in connection with the Roma integration into Bulgarian society. They place the main emphasis on basic human rights, and namely – education, employment, healthcare and housing conditions, as well as access to public utilities.

Yet there is no complete integration policy directed to the Roma population. The planning documents in most of the cases remain uncompleted for a number of reasons, mostly because of lack of financial resources, implementation capacity of the local and national institutions, negative attitude of the majority towards measures for positive discrimination, lack of will and resources of the Roma community itself.

With the new role as a member state of the EU and in the conditions of the recent financial crisis, the life style of the Roma community in Bulgaria remains unchanged and the expectations remain negative in view of the incoming elections and the effect of the world-wide economic depression.

The inflated public expectations from the EU towards raising the living standard were not satisfied. Moreover, the lack of confidence in the public administration was hardened as a result of the suspended European funds in 2008 – 2009 on suspicion of corruption and fraud.

In the context of approaching elections for European and national parliament (June – July 2009) traditionally the subject of Roma integration was discussed again by the political parties, however, without specific commitments and results.

Major problems

25% of the houses in the segregated Roma quarters are illegal¹. This is a problem provoked by the state's inaction for years, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the lack of permanent employment, the misery, and the insufficient public housing stock. (Only 3% of the existing housing stock in the country² in 2002 was state or municipal property, the total number of residential buildings for the same period being 3 691 787, of which in the urban areas inhabited by 69,6% of the population, it is 2 305 849).

As per the data of Open Society Institute – Sofia and the World Bank for 2007 more than half of the Roma houses have no water supply system, whereas for the Bulgarians this percentage is twice lower – 21%. The differences in the town population are still greater: 43% of the Roma urban inhabitants sustain that they have no access to sewerage, compared to 7% of the Bulgarians.

The percentage of the households unable to cover the increasing housing expenses because of low income is high, too. According to the data of Open Society Institute – Sofia in the research „Health Status of the Roma people“ as of the late 2007 about 10% of the Roma households have no running cold water. The percentage of households without a bathroom, although with reduction tendency compared to the researches of 5 years earlier, is still high – half of the Roma households have no bathroom (considering that only less than 9% of the respondents sustain that there is a functioning public bath in their quarter). For comparison: as per the data of UNDP and ASA in 2003 no bathroom have about 70% of the Roma households, i.e. there is a certain improvement on this indicator, nevertheless, the differences between Roma and non-Roma remain considerable. As per the data of Open Society Institute – Sofia and the World Bank for 2007 only less than 10% of the Bulgarian households and 1/3 of the Turkish households sustain that they have no bathrooms.

One of the main challenges in front of the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma community is to guarantee the ac-

¹ Reference Book on Roma, Open Society Institute – Sofia, 2008.

² National Housing Strategy, 2002.

cess to public utilities and in particular to electricity in the segregated Roma quarters. The lack of regulation in the Roma quarters, the poor technical infrastructure and the existence of residential stock characterized with poor heat insulation of the buildings place the inhabitants of the Roma quarters in the situation of vulnerability with respect to the access to electricity. The low social and economic status of the inhabitants of the Roma quarters further deepens their vulnerability as users of public utilities.

Initiatives of the institutions

Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works – major initiatives and Action Plan 2007 – 2008

In March 2006 the Council of Ministers approved the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria proposed by the MRDPW. The Action Plan 2006–2007 within the framework of the National Programme was elaborated in the same year. It contained measures and activities in relation with the investment measures and the measures to support the National Programme. The plan was approved at a meeting of the Council of Ministers with Resolution as per Minutes No 19 of 11 May 2007.

To provide for the organization, control and reporting of the implementation, there is an operational unit at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works managed by the Director of the Public Works, Engineering Infrastructure and Landscape Directorate and members – experts from the competent directorates in the ministry. The supervision on the implementation of the resolution is assigned to the area Vice Minister.

A draft Law for amendment and addition to the Law on Urban Planning was elaborated. In compliance with the Statutes of the Council of Ministers and its administration, the draft was coordinated, entered for discussion at the Council of Ministers and approved with Resolution No 62 dated 31 January 2007. On 12 July 2007 the Law was passed by the National Assembly and with Decree No 220 dated 23 July 2007 by the President of the Republic

of Bulgaria, it was promulgated in Official Gazette, issue 61 of 27 July 2007.

The Law for the amendment and addition to the Law on Urban Planning improves or creates new regulations concerning the opportunities for regulation and renovation of existing built-up plots of land in the populated area and for regulation of new territories for social housing. There is an opportunity for approval of specific rules and norms to the urban plans of the inhabited areas, as well as for the new territories intended for residential buildings and social housing.

One of the strengths of this law is that it allows for regulating the Roma quarters, including those outside regulation borders, by means of approving Detailed Urban Plans. Nevertheless, at this stage, the municipalities do not make much use of this opportunity. The Vice Minister of Regional Development and Public Works put that issue forward twice at meetings of NCCEDI (in July and December 2008).

The Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency, with financial resources from other sources, has assigned, approved and now are in force the cadastral maps and cadastral registers of 22 places with compact Roma population on an area of 116 912 ha and comprising 566 354 real estates. The size of the urbanized territories with cadastral maps totals 14 004 ha. Elaborated, approved and in force are cadastral maps and cadastral registers of cities with compact Roma population such as: Plovdiv (Stolipinovo qtr.), Sliven, Dimitrovgrad, Shoumen, Harmanly, Levsky, Tsarevo, Durankulak and the villages: Varvara, Bahovitsa, etc. The total cost of the cadastral registers of these places is BGN 2 621 578, of which BGN 405 139 have been paid in 2006.

In 2007 the elaboration of cadastral maps and cadastral registers was assigned for 10 other inhabited areas with compact Roma population in 9 municipalities. These are the cadastral maps of the cities Oryahovo, Karlovo, Sopot, Zavet, regions of Capital City Municipality, etc.

In 2007 a higher percentage is reported for the planned activities, in agreement with the Action Plan 2007 – 2008 approved by the Government within the framework of the National Programme

for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma 2005 – 2015. During the same period the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works reported input of 80 proposals from 41 municipalities for financing infrastructure projects in segregated Roma quarters. Approved for financing are projects in 35 municipalities.

In 2006, while elaborating the budget forecast of the MRDPW for the period 2007 – 2009, a new separate programme was created for the financial provision of the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria under State Property Management and Housing Policy. For 2007, within the programme budget of the ministry, administered capital expenses are foreseen amounting to BGN 252 000. The money is for renovation of the technical infrastructure in the municipalities Yablanitsa and Breznik.

In 2006 – 2007 actions were activated for the implementation of the Second Phase of a project within the Frame Loan Agreement with the Council of Europe Development Bank for the construction of social residential buildings and adjacent infrastructure for Roma families in need. The first phase of the project was implemented in Plovdiv. In 2007 a group of experts held working meetings and on the spot visits of sites offered by thirteen municipalities. Based on preliminary approved criteria, evaluation was made and four municipalities were selected for final beneficiaries: Pazardzhik, Samokov, Radnevo and Balchik. To date the procedures under the Public Procurement Law have been passed and a building contractor and construction supervisor have been selected for the social housing in Pazardzhik. The procedures have started for the selection of engineering contractors for the social housing in Samokov, Radnevo and Balchik. The commencement of works is expected after the implementation of the regulated procedures with the Council of Europe Development Bank.

This imposes money allocations from the state budget for the Bulgarian contribution in the project³.

³ Report of the MRDPW for the period.

Action Plan 2008-2009 to the National Programme

The Government approved Action Plan 2008 – 2009 to the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in Bulgaria, in this way approving the continuity of efforts to design and build technical infrastructure – water supply, sewerage, road network and public works, as well as to build up the relevant social infrastructure in the regions with compact Roma population.

The money foreseen to be invested in the said activities in 2009 was BGN 20 millions⁴, for the past 2008 being BGN 10 millions. For the preparation of cadastral maps and registers and for the specialized maps in the municipalities with compact Roma population in 2008 the Plan forecasted over BGN 1 million, and in 2009 – over BGN 2 million. In 2009 design works and construction of social residential buildings was foreseen (forecast amount BGN 200 000), as well as design works and construction of new and reconstruction of existing sites of the social infrastructure for BGN 300 000. Over BGN 22 million were foreseen for the two years in public works, construction, reconstruction and repair of technical infrastructure. For training connected with the implementation of the National Programme of the central and regional administrations, NGO and beneficiaries under the programme, the Plan allocated BGN 300 000.

Unfortunately, the budget restrictions prevented the absorption of the humble means foreseen in the Action Plan. As an example, in 2008 the implementation of the National Programme was financed with BGN 10 million, and in 2009 – with less than 12 million. This is money that could be used for partial repairs (street rehabilitation, water piping, etc.), but not for solving the infrastructure problems of a Roma quarter.

The financing of the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria from the state budget was as follows:

⁴ The forecasts in the Action Plan were based on a preliminary financing request. Later only part of this money was issued.

2006 – BGN 256 000
2007 – BGN 10 million
2008 – BGN 10 million
2009 – BGN 11 647 000

With this money water supply and sewerage projects were financed in quarters in the following municipalities: Vidin, Dalgopol, Provadia, Ihtiman, Dryanovo, Popovo, Panagyurishte, Kurdzhaly, Elena, Sliven, Medkovets, Borovan, G. Damyanovo, Boychinovtsy, Kaynardzha, B. Slatina, Berkovitsa, Valchedrum, Novi Pazar, Haskovo, Lovech, Krivodol, Kaloyanovo, Dolni Chiflik. In particular, the following works were completed: water-supply piping (66 624 meters) and sewerage piping (14 169 meters); street renovation in the Roma quarters of the following municipalities: Breznik, Shoumen, Yablanitsa, Lyubimets, Rudozem, Haskovo, Omurtag, Kirkovo, Parvomay, V. Tarnovo, Maglizh, Strumyany, G. Oryahovitsa, Ivanovo, Dve Mogily, Straldzha, Tervel, Borovo, Rakitovo, Tvarditsa, Valchy Dol, Varbitsa, Novy Pazar, Oryahovo, Kotel, Sevlievo, of which street rehabilitation (151 851 sq. m) and renovated areas (14 814 sq. m).

As per the report on the **Social and Economic Situation of the Vulnerable Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria, NCCEDI, Contract MC-80/03.10.2007.**

“Field researches in 2007 in eight big Roma neighbourhoods in district centers showed that in most of the places during the last couple of years partial repairs have been done on the water supply system or new parts have been constructed to the existing one. The problem, however, is that in half of the cases – in Samokov, Sliven (Nadezhda qtr.), Plovdiv (Sheker Mahala and Stolipinovo), Montana (Kosharnika) – during the construction of the new piping of the sewerage system, engineering mistakes have been made and in fact the refuse waters do not run into it but flood the streets, yards, and houses. With hundreds of thousands of leva spent, the hygiene conditions of many families worsened. As a result, the Roma people in these quarters accuse even more the municipal councilors in corruption and institutional racism. When the public procurement bids were won by Roma companies, it came out that they belonged to members of the municipal councils and the quality supervision of their work was diminished or not applied at all.”

Major initiatives in 2007 – 2008

National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers

During the subject period the National Council for Cooperation of Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers continued the **multiannual project „Improvement of the Condition and Integration of Disadvantaged Ethnic Groups with Special Focus on Roma“**:

The three phases of the multiannual project include activities for the improvement of the housing conditions of the Roma population.

Phase 1 of the multiannual project – Housing Conditions Component (budget Euro 3,734,000, of which Euro 2,800,000 – financing under the Phare programme and Euro 934,000 – national co-financing), includes construction and rehabilitation of projects of technical infrastructure in Roma quarters. In 2007 works started on the territory of the following municipalities: Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Kazanlak and Haskovo.

Under Phase 2 of the multiannual project – Housing Conditions Component, at the end of 2007, a grant scheme was published for the amount of Euro 8,334,000, the eligible beneficiaries being the municipalities. The grant scheme includes 2 components: 1) Construction/Rehabilitation of Technical and Social Infrastructure in regions with concentrated Roma population (budget Euro 5,000,000) and 2) Repairs on Schools providing integrated education to children from Roma origin (budget Euro 3,334,000). The deadline for the applications was 30 January 2008. For the implementation of this project, a Technical Assistance Agreement with DEDI was signed for the amount of Euro 278,000. The contractor, in cooperation with the Project Implementation Unit – experts from DEDI, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works – elaborated the project proposal packages for the municipalities to apply under the Grant Scheme.

Phase 3 of the multiannual project – Housing Conditions Component (total budget Euro 8,694,000) foresees construction and rehabilitation of public technical infrastructure in municipalities

with concentrated Roma population (budget Euro 8,187,000) and the respective construction supervision (budget Euro 507,000)⁵.

Regional Development Operational Programme

Structural Funds

The total budget of the programme is Euro 1,601 billion, the co-financing distributed between the European Regional Development Fund – Euro 1,361 billion and national financing amounting to Euro 240 million. The programme's common objective is "Improvement of the quality of life and occupational environment with better access to major services and new opportunities for increased regional competitiveness and sustainable development».

During the past year 2008 calls have been announced under 16 grant schemes for the total amount of BGN 1,472,300,069. On 20 August 2008 the bid was announced under priority Support for Urban Environment Improvement. Beneficiaries under the programme are 86 municipalities in the urban agglomeration areas, with indicative total budget of the scheme BGN 244 million.

To date under the Operational Programme Regional Development 95 contracts have been signed for the total amount of BGN 246,866,637; issued 11 grant orders under priority axis Technical Support for the total amount of BGN 10,870,080; amounts paid to beneficiaries as per grant agreements – BGN 1 754,039.52.

Capital City Municipality Hristo Botev qtr.

- About 1500 households possess homes corresponding to the standards and norms⁶
- About 2500 households do not possess homes at all (illegal and temporary houses built with whatever available materials and means do not correspond to any standards, therefore they are not considered homes)

⁵ Annual report on the activities of NCCEDI, 2007.

⁶ Report of the Social Council on the implementation of the municipal strategy under the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015 at the Capital City Municipality, January – December 2008.

- Over 3000 existing houses can be legalized following certain conditions
- Over 7000 houses should be demolished – some partially, some completely – in order to comply with the category of houses corresponding to the norms and standards
 - The flow of potable water in 3/4 of the territories inhabited by Roma is insufficient and the water supply piping is in need of serious repair
 - In some of the huge Roma quarters there is no sewerage system at all
 - The supply with regular good-quality electricity in many of the quarters is under the minimum required
 - Inadequate conditions in most of the schools and kindergartens in some quarters
 - A big number of illegal dung-hills in the quarters.

BGN 10,88 millions in total have been absorbed to date under a project of the Capital City Municipality that started in 2001 for the construction of experimental houses for Roma families in Hristo Botev quarter, Slatina Region. Half of the money is a loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank.

In the first phase of the project (2001 – 2003) 10 apartment houses were built with a total of 105 apartments (of 1, 2 and 3 rooms) with total floorage of 8 921 sq. meters, with 2 workshops provided with water closets, and 14 shops – „to help for the employment of the local population”.

During the second phase (2004 – 2007) were built another 27 blocks of flats with a total floorage of 3036 sq.meters. Two of the buildings are connected to water mains, and electricity supply, and have levelling and planting completed.

The infrastructure of the whole quarter has been rehabilitated. Two power substations have been built. Road patching asphalt works have been completed. The following repairs have been completed on the buildings of 94th secondary school Dimitar Strashimirov with an interconnection to the gymnasium, 62nd kindergarten and Assen Zlatarov Community Cultural Center: replacement of windows and doors, new pavements, roof and facade repairs, water closets and inner works.

As per the information of the Capital City Municipality, 32 families from the eligibility lists have been accommodated in the newly-built apartments.

The Committee on Housing Policy and Infrastructure this year again spent time, efforts and resources for support and solution of the long-standing problem of the inhabitants of Batalova Vodenitsa qtr. Series of meetings were held with local institutions and administrations trying to solve the problem and take up particular measures to the benefit of the citizens. The committee participated in the preparation of letters to various European institutions for support, assistance and aid.

To date the Social Council has entered a Specialized Programme for revitalization of the problematic quarters on the territory of Sofia city inhabited by Roma population with inc. ref. No 6200-3070/10.05. The programme awaits resolution from the permanent committee on Local Government and Normative Regulation at the Municipal Council.

Kyustendil⁷

Iztok qtr. in the municipal and district center Kyustendil has compact Roma population, about 10 000 people. Over 70% of the buildings are illegally constructed and do not comply with the standards and the normative requirements. For the territory of the quarter there is an approved Detailed Urban Plan since 1978 which cannot be applied because of the illegal massive, semi-massive and frame-built houses dispersed in whole the quarter.

As per the data of Open Society Institute, the average living area of the Bulgarian families in the district is 66.72 sq.m, whereas of the Roma families it is only 49.15 sq.m. The average living space per capita for the Bulgarians is 31.25 sq. m, whereas for the Roma is 12.89 sq. m. Although as a whole the Roma homes in the district are better looking than the average for the country, still 22% of the Roma families have no water supply to the house, half of them have no water-meter, one third have no access to sewerage system

⁷ Interview with Mr. Sasho Kovachev, expert in ethnic and demographic issues, Kyustendil District administration.

or septic tank, and nearly nine-tenth do not have a bathroom or hot water in their homes.

In Kyustendil Municipality ADRA Foundation built 26 single-family houses of 45 sq.m each. The Foundation purchased the land, prepared the design documentation, and constructed the houses. The Municipality cooperated in the connection of the houses to the water supply and sewerage system. The foundation owns and manages the properties.

The National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria is not yet applied in Kyustendil District. The main problem pointed out by the Municipalities is the lack of appropriate terrains. There is available private land but they need assistance from the state to compensate the owners. The other problem is that most of the illegal constructions in the quarters are on agricultural land, which is outside the municipal jurisdiction. It is necessary to invent a compensatory mechanism and convert that land to municipal property in order to take up measures for regulation and technical and social infrastructure.

Plovdiv⁸

Stolipinovo is a quarter in the North-East part of Plovdiv, inhabited by 45 000 persons. The lack of good infrastructure, the illegal construction, housing conditions, healthcare, human rights and public safety are the heaviest problems of the population in this ethnic quarter. According to various sources, the share of the illegal construction in Stolipinovo is 80-98%.

Sheker neighbourhood is inhabited by 10 000 Roma people. The infrastructure, where there is such, is at very low level. In 2001 with a loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, amounting to Euro 5.4 millions, 284 social houses had to be built at a total surface of 39 000 sq. m, for the use of Roma people from Sheker neighbourhood and Stolipinovo qtr. In practice 84 homes were built and the other 200 were redirected to 4

⁸ Interview with Mr. Oktay Sherif, expert in ethnic and demographic issues at the Municipality of Plovdiv.

other municipalities after the effectiveness evaluation following the first pilot phase. According to the Report of the MRDPW, the effectiveness of the first phase is close to the zero:

”The delayed performance of the building contract, as well as the partial fulfillment of the objective, accompanied by the unsparing use per housing unit, as found out, lead to impossibility to reach the additional social effects and determine the implementation of the Project as ineffective.” (MRDPW audit report on the loan funds from the Council of Europe Development Bank).

In 2006 BGN 5,729,563 were approved at the Directorate “Executive Agency ISPA – refurbishment works and water supply and sewerage systems” for a second stage of the project “Construction of 284 homes and basic infrastructure for the use of the Roma families in the deprived regions Stolipinovo and Sheker Mahala in the city of Plovdiv”. The recommendation of the financing institution – the Council of Europe Development Bank – was that the second stage of the project be implemented in another municipality or other municipalities. (Report dated 1 March 2006 – the Bulgarian contribution to the Monitoring Report of the EU)

Pazardzhik

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works published the public procurement bid for construction supervision on the social houses for the needy Roma families in qtr. 540 of Iztok living quarter in Pazardzhik. The deadline for completion is 30 December 2010.

The project is based on the financial agreement between the Council of Europe Development Bank and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works for the construction of social houses for Roma families.

The first 11 houses for disadvantaged Roma families in qtr. 539, Iztok region, were built in 2003 under a project for urbanization and social development of regions with predominant minority population of the United Nations Development Programme. In 2007 other

13 families were accommodated in homes in the same quarter, this time under a project with municipal financing. In spite of these initiatives, the quarter inhabited by 12 000 persons, still suffers from the lack of normal technical and social infrastructure.

On the other hand, Pazardzhik Municipality invested in the procedures to include municipal properties in the regulation of the villages Yunatsite, Ognyanovo and Bratanitsa. Similar procedures have started also in the villages Velichkovo, Mokrishte and Malo Konare, where land surveys are performed at the moment. These are whole quarters where illegal construction has been going on for years.

Conclusions and recommendations

• Moderate progress

Based on the above information, it is evident that there is a moderate progress on the improvement of the housing conditions of the Roma community in Bulgaria. There is clearly stated commitment on behalf of the MRDPW and the Bulgarian Government as a whole to the improvement of the infrastructure in the Roma quarters and of the housing conditions of Roma people – a fact that should be acclaimed. The investments by the state through the approved amendments in the Law on Urban Planning, the opportunities presented to the Municipalities through resolutions by the Municipal Councils to regulate quarters with minority population mark considerable progress compared to previous years.

• No overall implementation policy

Although the Programme for Improvement of the Roma Housing Conditions and the Action Plan are updated, the investments are made in regions with minority population up to 10%. A considerable part of the urban areas remain out of the scope of the housing policies for integration. Specific investments are necessary for the improvement of the living environment in the so called city ghettos where the housing conditions are at exceptionally low level.

• No state investments

There is a tendency to build social houses for the Roma people without their active participation in the design stage. It is evident

from the reports and the public information that there are no investments from the state budget. The social houses built so far, were completed with the financial assistance of the Council of Europe Development Bank.

- **No real financing, no clear administrative responsibilities and working mechanisms for the participation of the civil society, the local government and the Roma community itself**

The existing documents for Roma integration approved by three consecutive Bulgarian Governments are a good foundation for the integration process that needs to be renovated and improved with real financing, clear administrative responsibilities and working mechanisms for the participation of civil society, local government and the Roma community. At this stage these are still missing.

- **To provide opportunities for participation and publicity**

In this sense and in order to achieve full integration of the Roma minority, the Bulgarian authorities should introduce clear mechanisms for participation of the Municipalities and the civil organizations under the Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma in Bulgaria. It is necessary to establish a Council at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, to support, monitor and consult the implementation of the programme. In addition, public information should be provided for the projects with which the Municipalities apply at the Structural Funds, as well as for the reports on the effect of the urbanization interference in the respective places. Easy and transparent application procedures should be introduced, the application requirements should be identical to ease the beneficiaries, and the deadlines for project evaluation should be shorter. It is of utmost importance to create clear application criteria under the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of Roma; at this stage there are no such criteria, no application forms, no deadlines for submission of project proposals, etc. All these leave some of the potential beneficiaries with the impression of ambiguity and corruption.

List of abbreviations

BAS	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
CEICSEM	Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities
CITUB	Confederation of the Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria
DEDI	Directorate of Ethnic and Demographic Issues
DG	Directorate General (of the European Commission)
EA	Employment Agency
EC	the European Commission
EIRO	European Industrial Relations Observatory
EU	the European Union
GIM	Guaranteed Income Minimum
HRDOP	Human Resources Development Operational Program
IME	Institute for Market Economy
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MH	Ministry of Health
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
NCCEDI	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NGP	National Gross Product
NSI	National Statistic Institute
OSI	Open Society Institute
RHC	Regional Healthcare Centers
RIE	Regional Inspectorates of Education
RIOKOZ	Regional Inspectorate for Public Health Protection and Control
SAA	Social Assistance Agency
SEICSEM	Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from the Ethnic Minorities

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