

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 24 September- 5 October 2012**

Working Session 6: “Roma/Sinti and, in particular, empowerment of Roma Women”

Delegation of Romania

Social Inclusion of Roma Minority

Romania is fully committed to implement the *OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti* within the OSCE area, one of the most comprehensive set of international commitments in this field, as well as the provisions of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in order to enhance Roma's social inclusion in the society and to improve the quality of life of the Roma.

The most important public policy document related to the Roma social inclusion is the *Romanian Government's Strategy of Inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for 2012-2020*. This document is part of a broader framework of programmatic documents adopted at European level which include the strategy of the European Union of economic growth-Europe Strategy 2020 and the European Commission's Communication “*An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*”.

The purpose of the Government's strategy is to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of the Roma citizens belonging to Roma minority by implementing several integrated policies in the areas of education, employment, health, housing, culture and social infrastructure. Also, at the end of its first implementation period, the Government's strategy should produce evidence based indicators that would allow Romanian authorities to focus on the specific needs and particularities for the next implementation period.

The *National Strategy for Improving the Situation of the Roma*, the policies and programmes carried out, in the last decade, by the Romanian Government - in education, social protection and employment, in culture, in combating discrimination and in promoting access to information, inter-cultural dialogue and interethnic relations – are proofs of the Romanian Government political will to fulfil, as any other European and OSCE participating State, its responsibility to work towards improving the situation of the Roma in the mainstream societal life.

The specialized governmental agency, the *National Agency for the Roma*, has included, in its entire activity, OSCE Action Plan's priorities and principles regarding setting up a the comprehensive framework of policies and actions, as well as involving Roma representatives and civil society organizations in its efforts to improve the living standard of the Roma.

We are aware of the existing challenges for Roma inclusion still present in our society. The issues related to the social inclusion of Roma population is part of the strategies of

relevant ministries which contain measures for Roma population covering areas such as education, occupation, health and housing.

As issues related to Roma community represent a special area implying both internal efforts and a strong cooperation with the European initiatives in this field, we are aware that the *National Strategy* requires an adequate funding from state budget but also an appropriate allocation through the structural funds. We are committed to work to the end of insuring a substantial improvement of the Roma situation, together with the representatives of the Roma organizations and to actively cooperate with governmental and nongovernmental partners, at national, European and international level.

The Romanian national Reform Program 2011-2013 provides the reduction by 580.000 of the number of persons with poverty and social exclusion risks as compared to year 2008 and an appropriate environment for facilitating the access and the participation on the labour market of persons belonging to vulnerable groups, including those belonging to Roma community.

The action plans for each of the six directions of action are integral part of the Strategy. Regarding the employment field, 22 measures have been identified, among which 2 have been prioritized, as follows:

- Adapting the training courses offered by training centers of the NAE (National Agency for Employment) to labor market needs;
- Providing counseling services to people in difficulty, including members of the Roma minority, for social reintegration: identifying funding sources to start a business on their own, preparing a resume support and participation in an interview, finding a job, access to social, public or private housing

We are convinced that **facilitating inclusion on the labour market** can make a valuable contribution to ensuring, on the long term, a change in social attitudes and behaviour towards Roma as well as provide a stable framework for integration. In this vein the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection promoted active stimulating measures for employment, in accordance with law no. 76/2002, and in cooperation with the NAE - an authority actively involved in achieving *Romanian Government's Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Situation*.

As concerns the equal opportunities and treatment of the Roma, it should be noted that, in Romania, the Roma benefit, without discrimination, from the same legal provisions as the other ethnic minorities or the Romanian population. The NAE is continuously concerned with ensuring the application of the principle of equal opportunities in the provision of its employment services.

The NAE has been actively involved in implementing the previous Romanian Government's Strategy for improving the situation of the Roma (Government Decision no.

430/2001). Thus, the NAE has been implementing, since 2001, employment programs designed for the Roma population, having as objective to increase the level of employment of the Roma, to develop their professional skills, including the assessment of specialized knowledge, as well as of the means and methods for promoting and upgrading their professional skills and qualification. Law no. 76/2002, with its subsequent changes and complements, provides for the active measures for employment stimulation for all categories of jobseekers and especially for those with difficulties in entering the labor market, such as: women, people with disabilities, Roma, etc.

The **professional reintegration of Roma persons** in the Employment program for 2011 was part of Program 145, designed especially for communities with a high number of Roma people. As regard **counselling programmes**, in 2011, until 31 December, the number of Roma persons benefitting from information, guidance and professional counselling services was of 29.702 persons, out of the total of 661.847 counselled persons.

In 2011, a number of 1.057 Roma people, out of which 334 Roma women, had benefited from **free professional training courses**.

At the level of **concrete actions** and after analysing the requirements of the workforce market and in order to offer support to the underprivileged categories, NAE organized **job fairs for Roma people** in the localities with population belonging mainly to this ethnic group. Aside from the objective of creating the conditions needed to meet the employers' needs and to employ Roma persons, the Job Fairs for the Roma were an opportunity to promote their interest to work. This measure allowed for the Roma to meet face to face with representatives of the potential employers (which is more difficult to achieve otherwise) and to become aware of the job requirements. Although the results are far from what was envisaged, this was due to the fact that the Roma drop out of the active measures made available to them by the county agencies for employment, for reasons such as the low level of education and, in some cases, the lack of identification documents, their lack of income that does not allow them to use the public transport to the localities where the vocational training courses are organized, or due to the fact that they prefer to carry-out seasonal activities or other occupations on the black market.

With regard to the **financing of active measures for Roma people**, it is to be mentioned that, although the NEA does not have a budgetary allocation only for Roma people, it has drawn funds from the **European Social Fund** through the Sectorial Program Human Resources (SOPHRD) where, in the first half of 2011, approximately 90 projects were registered having the Roma persons as main or secondary target group, with a total eligible value of approximately 250 million EURO. These projects were concentrated on three main lines: preventing and correcting early school dropout, social economy development, improving the access and participation of vulnerable groups on the labour market.

Access of Roma minority members to public health services is another important means by which the social inclusion of this community can be achieved. The Ministry of Health is another national authority involved in the implementation of the Governmental Strategy of Romania for inclusion of the Romanian citizens of Roma ethnic minority for the period 2011-2012, that had, as main focus, the **increasing of access to public health services** for disadvantaged groups, including the Roma minority citizens, to public health services and raising life expectancy

In this respect, it is to be noted that the Ministry of Health has developed **communitarian medical care**, a system that has the promotion of integrated health and social care at the community level as main goal. The services and community healthcare activities are provided by the professions of community nurse and health mediator. In terms of **Roma health mediators**, this occupation was established in 2002 in order to facilitate communication between Roma communities and health professionals, contributing to the effectiveness of public health interventions. In 2012, at the national level, there were a total of 376 health mediators who provide counseling to more than 360.000 people per year, activity funded by the Ministry of Health. In the first three trimesters of 2012, 45 vaccination campaigns have taken place in local communities with a relevant number of persons belonging to Roma minority.

Two other important instruments of ensuring access to public health services are the **Cooperation Agreement on improving Roma access to public health services**, through which the Ministry of Health provided training, operation, monitoring and evaluation of the Roma health mediators, as well as the **cooperation protocol for the implementation of Roma Medical Scholarship Program 2008-2012**- a program aiming to provide health education, mentoring and training in advocacy for Roma students studying in the faculties of medicine and pharmacy, as well as for resident Roma physicians and Roma pupils. As a result, in the academic year 2008-2009, a package including scholarships, mentoring, training in the public health advocacy and communication was offered to a number of 35 Roma students from Romania. For the subsequent years, the number of scholarships was of 65.

At the same time, **positive measures in schools and universities** have raised the number of Roma pupils and students. For instance, for the current academic year, over 3000 places for the Roma candidates to the high school and college education levels were reserved. These measures will have a medium-term significant effect on the integration of these persons in the labor market.

The lack of identity documents for the Roma has been identified as one of the main difficulties with which they are confronted when entering the labor market. Specific activities have been performed by the Ministry of Administration and Interior in order to obtain identity documents by the members of Roma community.

In regard to the education that is provided for empowering access of Roma women to the public and social life is worth to be mentioned ROMED program of the Council of Europe which provides specifically tailored training course for both health and school mediators who are working in and with Roma communities throughout the country. Since 2011 when the program started to be implemented in the Council of Europe member states, more than 250 Roma women were trained by this instrument and supported afterwards in their work with local authorities.

The results of these programs and the best practices contained therein are currently under constant evaluation and the *National Strategy for the Roma* is being constantly updated and improved on various sectors, in an integrated approach. However, we perceive the issues related to Roma community represent as a special topic, which also implies a strong cooperation with the European initiatives in this field and, as mentioned before, we expect a close comprehensive cooperation with governmental and nongovernmental partners at European and international level in order to facilitate the inclusion process.

*

We look forward to the OSCE Ministerial Council in Dublin, which we consider to be not only an opportunity to reaffirm our commitments to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti, as provided for in the OSCE Action Plan and in the Helsinki and Athens ministerial decisions, but also as an opportunity to reflect on common ways to improve the implementation of these commitments and to enhance the input of OSCE institutions in assisting the efforts made in this respect, by the participating States.