

## **INFORMATION FROM THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA ON SESSIONS 14 AND 15 RELATED TO IMPROVEMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMA- RELATED OBLIGATIONS TAKEN ON WITHIN THE OSCE**

### **Introduction**

In 2009, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the **Strategy and Action Plan for Improvement of the Position of Roma** covering 13 areas. Work groups tasked with their implementation have been formed within ministries competent for education, health, housing, employment, culture, the media and informing, internal affairs, state administration and local self-government, justice, labor and social policy, as well as within the Commissariat for Refugees. The activities of these work groups are coordinated by the Human and Minority Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government, which also gives technical support to the Government of the Republic of Serbia's Council for Improvement of the Position of Roma. The Council is headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration.

Each year, the ministries allocate funds within their budgets which are intended for implementation of the Strategy. During the last three years, these funds amounted to around five million euros a year. Implementation of the Strategy has received a significant support in the form of projects/programs financed by donors.

### **The Working Session 14: Effective Response to Intolerance Against the Roma: The Role of the Public, the Media and the Civil Society**

One of the areas covered by the Strategy for Improvement of the Position of Roma is the field of **media and informing**.

**The Ministry of Culture, Media and Information Society** organized in 2011 another regular **Public Contest** for co-financing of projects in the area of public informing in languages of national minorities whose aim is to allow the exercise of the right of national minorities to receive information in the own languages, to support publication of at least one print media in minority languages, and to produce and distribute audio or audiovisual production in minority languages, while preference was given to programs with multicultural and intercultural content aimed at developing the culture of dialog and better understanding between different communities.

The Ministry of Culture allocated 300,000 euros for the Public Contest from its budget, while the sum of 50,000. euros was allocated specially for projects/programs intended for the Roma Decade.

The aforementioned budget regularly finances the magazine of the National Council of the Roma National Minority published in Romany and Serbian languages, "Romano Nevipe", while the Autonomous Province (AP) of Vojvodina finances the magazine of

the Office for Roma Inclusion of the AP of Vojvodina in Serbian, Romany and English languages, "The Roma Decade in AP of Vojvodina".

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government has given its support to the **media campaign** organized by MTV Serbia and the music band KAL entitled "Do You Know Who I Am?", the implementation of which began on September 13, 2011 and which is aimed at recognizing the Roma and promoting the Roma culture. Young people are the main target of the campaign, which includes promotional video content, songs written specifically for the purpose, appearance of campaign promoters in various media outlets, and initiation of public discussion about the position of the Roma.

### **The Working Session 15: Partnership Between States and Roma Representatives in Defining and Implementing the Policy of Integration of the Roma and Sintis**

The Republic of Serbia is one of the members of the "**Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015**", which confirms its commitment to active participation of the Roma since the active participation is one of the fundamental principles in implementation of the international initiative.

In 2008, the Government of the Republic of Serbia formed the **Council for Improvement of the Position of Roma and Implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion** for the period of four years. The Council is headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration and the National Coordinator for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, and is comprised of representatives of the ministries authorized to implement specific segments of the Strategy and representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority and Roma associations. The Council is tasked with the following: preparation of proposals for creation of comprehensive and integral policy for improvement of the position of the Roma population and implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion; preparation of proposals of measures that are necessary for implementation of the adopted policies of the Government related to improvement of the position of the Roma; reviewing of planned budget funds from the viewpoint of implementation of the policy of the Government related to improvement of the position of the Roma; issuance of opinions and expert justifications necessary for realization of important social indicators related to care about the Roma, and analysis of effects of measures implemented by competent state bodies; participation in international events related to the Decade of Roma Inclusion; monitoring of exercise and protection of the rights of the Roma population and implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Serbia.

The Office for Improvement of the Position of the Roma operates at the level of the **AP of Vojvodina**, while the Office of Roma Inclusion has been formed at the level of the City of Belgrade. At the same time, coordinators for Roma issues have been hired in 54 **local self-government units**. Aside from this, 124 Roma teaching assistants work in the education system, while 74 Roma health care mediators are active in the field of health care.

The first convocation of the **National Council of the Roma National Minority** was elected at the electoral assembly in 2003, while the second convocation of the **National Council of the Roma National Minority** was elected in 2010 in accordance with the Law on National Councils of National Minorities via direct elections and is comprised of 35 members, out of which 13 are women (the Law stipulates that one third of candidates on lists must belong to the gender which is less represented). The Law also defines the authority of national councils of national minorities in the areas of education, culture, informing and official use of language and script.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and with the Roma National Minority Council, implemented the **affirmative action measures** for the school year 2011/2012, by getting 380 students enrolled at high schools and 154 students at universities and colleges. Since the school year 2003/4 to date, 854 higher education students and 1,580 high school students have been enrolled through affirmative action measures.

In the **budget** of the Human and Minority Rights Directorate, funds are allocated for financing the work of national minority councils. In 2011, the funds allocated for the work of the Roma National Minority Council are around 160,000 euros.

The President of the Roma National Minority Council this year also chairs the **coordination** of all 19 National Minority Councils.

Representatives of the Roma National Minority Council, local coordinators in local self-government units, health mediators, as well as Romany associations, are involved with the issue of providing **access to identification documents**. At the level of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government, a special task force has been set up, dealing with the issues of matriculation in birth registers and besides the representatives of this Ministry, it consists of representatives of relevant ministries in charge of health, the interior and the Roma National Minority Council. It cooperates with representatives of associations and coordinators of Roma issues in the local self-government units.

The Human and Minority Rights Directorate has implemented the concourse for associations where 8 Romany associations received funds in total worth of around 50,000 euros for identification of persons without identification documents and for providing professional assistance.

Besides, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government has initiated the abolishment of administrative and court taxes in procedures for exercising the right to inscription of the fact of birth in birth registers, sent instructions and an opinion to bodies of the local self-government units which perform the duties of birth register inscription and it has launched cooperation with UNHCR and the Ombudsman on solving this issue.

In the Serbian Parliament, two **Members of Parliament** are ethnic Roma.

In the Republic of Serbia, 27 Roma **political parties** have been registered.

In the Republic of Serbia, around 100 Romany **associations** are active, У Републици Србији активно је око 100 ромских **удружења**, organized in informal networks, the most important ones being the Decade League and the Roma Women's Political Network.

Representatives of the Roma National Minority Council and Romany associations have designated their members to the working groups and thereby participated in drafting the **Strategy and Action Plan** for improvement of Roma position.

Representatives of the Roma National Minority Council and associations are participating in the work of the **groups for the Strategy Implementation**, tasked with defining annual priorities and budgets of competent institutions, as well as with monitoring of the planned measures' implementation, established within the ministries in charge of the affairs of education, health care, employment, housing, culture, media and information, interior affairs, public administration and local self-government, justice, labour and social policy, as well as the Refugee Commissariat.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government is launching the implementation of the **Three-Year Programme for Implementation of the Strategy for Improvement of the Roma Position**, led by the State Secretary, Roma herself. The major components of the programme are: more intensive work on coordinating the Strategy implementation, as well on establishing the system of monitoring and reporting at the national and local level, direct support to local self-government units (5 pilot-municipalities 250,000 euros each, small 300,000-grants) for implementation of comprehensive local plans for Roma position improvement, as well as **support to Roma civil sector**.

A special emphasis has been placed on the issue of **Census** implementation in October this year. In order to get as credible information on Roma population as possible, the National Statistical Office, in cooperation with the Roma National Minority Council, is going to engage additional 800 Roma interviewers for census circles where Roma settlements have been identified. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government has supported the campaign launched by the Roma National Minority Council, aiming at encouraging Roma to declare their national affiliations at the Census. Besides the Roma National Minority Council, the field campaign is run by the Decade League and the Roma Women's Network.

The three-year programme envisages engagement of another 10 local coordinators and 5 advisors for Roma inclusion in line ministries, as well as engagement of Roma interns. A special priority will be providing support to empowerment of the Roma issues coordinator in local self-government units and cooperation with the City of Belgrade on resolving the issue of informal Roma settlements.

This programme implementation is planned to be funded from the Republic of Serbia's budget and from donors' funds. **Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA)** is providing financial and technical support for implementation of certain parts of

the programme in total value of **2,763,988 euros**. The main implementing partner is the **OSCE Mission to Serbia**.

Besides, drafting of the **Action Plan for the Strategy Implementation 2012-2014** is planned for the end of 2011, given that the same planned was adopted for 2009-2011.

In 2011, within the “Month of Roma Women’s Activism”, a special session of the **Gender Equality Committee** was held, organized by the Roma Women’s Network, the Gender Equality Committee of the Serbian Parliament, the Gender Equality Council of the Serbian Government, Gender Equality Directorate and the OSCE Mission to Serbia. The session was dedicated to the position of Roma women in Serbia. One of the **Serbian Government’s Gender Equality Council** members is a Roma woman. The session was held on April 7, on the occasion of April 8, the International Roma Day.