

WARSAW, 11 October 2006

OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 15:

Tolerance and non-discrimination II: Roma/Sinti; Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti Issues.

STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION ON ROMA

During last year's meeting we referred to the Integrated Action Plan for the social inclusion of Greek Roma, which consists of multifactoral interventions in the fields of housing, health, education, employment and culture-sports.

The progress made since last year could be summarized as follows:

In the field of **housing**, carried out exclusively on national budgeting, we have issued 5.754 housing loans, guaranteed by the State. Up to date, 4.987 beneficiaries have received their loans from the banks engaged in the program. A new data base system is also under construction for the management of the accountability of the applications submitted and of any other existing information data regarding the assessment and the qualification of successful applicants. Also the legal framework in force was modified four months ago, in order to safeguard the programs' effectiveness by:

- ✓ Giving the opportunity to Roma people to submit new applications,
- ✓ Establishing evaluation committees at local level with the participation of Roma representatives and social workers.
- ✓ Adopting social assessment criteria taking into consideration Roma living conditions and lifestyle, i.e. one-parent families, families with many children, people of low income, people with physical disabilities etc.
- ✓ Simplifying the application procedure and establishing the active engagement of the local authorities on the basis of solidarity and proximity principles.

Another important development is the amendment of the law on the approval of local urban plans on the grounds of emergency housing rehabilitation programs for vulnerable groups of the society, within which Roma people are also included.

Finally, more infrastructure works are under way, involving the purchase of tracts of land and the construction of development works for the establishment of new settlements.

In the field of **health**, eighteen socio-medical centers are operating already in permanent settlements, providing basic health services, vaccinations, counseling and psychological support services. It is important to note also, that socio-medical centers engage Roma mediators

too. Furthermore, one unit providing exclusively with women targeted health services has been established within the framework of mobile socio-medical units, i.e. pap test and mammograms.

In the field of **education**, we have launched the 3rd phase of the project “Education of Greek Roma students”, carried out by the University of Thessaly. The project is supported by a network of 90 mediators, 170 ‘schools of intervention’, 150 ‘schools of attendance’, 80 support courses and 43 creative engagement workshops. Upon review of the enrollment requirements and by removing any requirement restraints, during the academic year 2005-2006 9.884 Roma students attended elementary school classes, out of which 2,031 were supported due to the innovative “itinerant student card”.

In the field of **culture**, inclusion in contemporary cultural life is advanced through the operation of 13 cultural houses and 132 entertainment-workshop centers in 13 municipalities all over Greece.

Finally, in the field of **employment**, combating of discrimination while accessing the labor market is encouraged by subsidizing of new posts for Roma, new Roma traders and employment training under the EQUAL initiative.

Quite innovative too, as an administrative procedure, is the adoption of oral exams for the issue of driving licenses (for illiterates, non-nationals, duff people etc), as a significant number among the Roma population use vehicles as a main tool for their professional activities.