

## Basic Trends of Bulgaria's Policy for Roma Integration in Bulgarian Society

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The accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to the European Union represents the challenge of becoming a member of a multicultural society, an integral part of which is the Roma community. In compliance with the European integration process the Republic of Bulgaria adopted the political framework of the EU for solving the social, educational, health and cultural problems of the Roma people. They involve an approach consistent with the overall program for economic and social development of the EU. The application of the European legislation, which prohibits the discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in employment, education, social insurance, health care, housing and access to services, is an important precondition for the improvement of the social status of the Roma people.

### 1. Legislation Adopted

On 27.04.2006 the Council of Ministers adopted the **Rules of Procedure on the Structure, Activities and Organization of the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities**. The projects to be developed and financed by the Centre will aim at promoting the equal access to quality education and improving the results achieved from training children and pupils from ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. The activities of the Centre will develop following a three-year programme approved by the Council of Ministers. For 2006 the Centre will have a financial resource of 500 000 BGN from the state budget and will increase in the following years.

The Council of Ministers adopted on 11.05.2006 the **Action Plan for 2006-2007 for Implementation of the Housing Conditions of Roma**. The necessary activities to change the legal basis which will facilitate the fulfillment of the National Programme and the Action Plan will be taken in 2006. The activities to develop up and to amend currently acting Rules of Procedure will also continue, and measures to improve the existing technical infrastructure will be taken. 240 000 BGN are ensured for road repair works in the Roma quarters for 2006. In 2007 the sum will amount to 1 million BGN.

With a Decision of the Council of Ministers of 25.05.2006 was appointed a **National coordinator of "The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015"**. The aim of the initiative "The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015" is to coordinate and direct the efforts of the governments and the society in Central and Eastern Europe in order to integrate the Roma population, to overcome the discrimination and poverty of Roma people and to preserve their cultural identity.

On 12.06.2006 the **Council of Ministers adopted a Decree on accepting the presidency of "The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015"**, on joining Bulgaria to the rules of procedure of the Decade and taking up one year presidency of the initiative on behalf of Bulgaria for the period 01.07.2006 - 30.06.2007. The presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria of the initiative "The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015" will be of help for solving Roma problems, laid down in the strategic documents.

On 29.06.2006 the **Council of Ministers adopted the Action Plan up to 2007 for the Implementation of the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society**. The draft of the document has been discussed both from the wide public and the government

institutions. The final version of the document represents the consensus achieved on regional and central level between institutions and non-governmental organizations which actively work for solving the problems of Roma communities. The Plan includes measures for improving the effectiveness of the activities of the National Council for Co-operation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues.

On 9.08.2006 the National Assembly adopted a **Law on the Amendment and Supplement to the Law on Protection against Discrimination** (Promulgated State Gazette No.68 of 22.08.2006).

On 2.08.2006 the **Draft Law on the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** was submitted to Parliament.

### **1.1 Additional measures for accelerating the progress of the social inclusion of the Roma communities in Bulgaria**

- A plan was designed for the organization of 6 training seminars (3 in the Northern part of Bulgaria and 3 in the Southern) for raising awareness of formal and informal Roma leaders and of the Roma community in the field of measures and programmes for equal access to the labour market and the social security, education and healthcare.
- In June 2006 some measures were taken to organize the internship of students from Roma communities at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as well as in the territorial structures of the Employment Agency and the Agency for Social Protection (students in social pedagogy and in other humanitarian specialties). Currently are being elaborated the procedural rules for selection of the candidates, that are already significant in number.
- A Media campaign is in progress for limiting prejudices to Roma society and encouragement for the realization of Roma woman and her role for the successful integration of Roma children in the society.
- A preparation is in progress of ten educational films about the activities of Ministry of labour and social policy in the field of Roma society integration in the Bulgarian society.
- Some meetings were conducted in order to encourage the social role of Roma woman and her responsibility as a parent. The most important topics in the training are the decrease of children who drop out of school early and keeping them in school for the full duration of their studies. There was a schedule of the training, which is already implemented in 5 towns (Omurtag, Kazanlak, Dulovo, Velingrad) with compact Roma population till the end of August.
- Press releases about the activities in the sector are posted in the official site of MLSP.

### **Employment**

Since 1998 Bulgaria has been implementing a policy aimed at preparation for fulfillment of the aims set in the European Employment Strategy and Lisbon Strategy. Some of the main priorities in this direction are related to the improvement of the employability and enhancement of the knowledge and skills of the persons from disadvantaged groups.

During the period 1998-2001 the Law for Unemployment Protection and Employment Promotion was in force. Since 2002 it has been transformed in the Law on Employment Promotion. The legislative and sub-legislative base has created the necessary circumstances for smooth and sustainable planning and implementation of employment policy. Through the changes in the legislative base conditions for better targeting of the programmes and measures towards the risk groups on the labour market were created. The existing financial system of the active labour market policy has also been changed: The financing of the active programmes and measures switched from the Fund "Vocational Qualification and unemployment" to the state budget. A new measure for prompting active behavior on the labour market was introduced.

In view of the provision of qualitative employment services in 1989 an Employment agency was established. It has been developing since then. At present the Employment agency is responsible for the implementation of the active labour market policy and since 2001 the servicing of passive policy has been implemented by the National Insurance Institute. In order to integrate people with disadvantages into the labour market, a special and individual approach has been applied. With this approach the specific needs and characteristics of each separate group are taken into account. They are offered individual services such as information and consultation, informative materials, training courses and new employment opportunities.

Annually since 2000 Bulgaria has been elaborating National Action Plans on Employment. The National Action Plan on Employment becomes the main instrument of the employment policy, because it defines the projects, programmes and measures that are implemented on the labour market, the types of incentives and their amounts. The target groups are identified in the plan on the labour market, that are included with priority in the literacy training, vocational training and subsidized employment. This enables better targeting of the activities, as well as the provision of the necessary resources for the implementation of the activities in this direction.

The Employment Agency has started a new specialized initiative which supports the direct contact between the employers and the job seeking Roma. The **Labour exchanges** support the spreading of the information about vacancies for Roma representatives and inactive persons. According to the preliminary schedule 10 Roma labour exchanges were organized in the regions with high concentration of Roma population. For the period May-August in the Roma labour exchanges participated 1955 job seekers and 164 employers, who have announced 2 455 vacancies.

On 13.06.2006 the **List of professions on which the Employment Agency organizes the training of unemployed persons** was approved by the Minister of labour and social policy. The List is prepared on the base of the generalized information about the professions in demand on regional level and the demand and supply tendencies on local labour markets as well as the vacancies announced by the employers in the Labour Offices. With the aim to improve the employability of persons from vulnerable groups till the end of 2006 persons from that groups will be included in the training and vocational qualification courses on the following professions: welder, fitter, motor mechanic, cabinet-maker, tailor, baker-confectioner, plant-gardener, valet, etc. The training is fully financed by the state budget.

Under the National Programme "**From Social Assistance to Employment**" the Employment agency has approved 65 projects. Under these projects 912 work places will be opened in activities for the improvement of infrastructure in quarters and villages with compact Roma population. 794 persons of Roma origin were employed at the opened work places.

In the framework of the component "**Employment for Roma**" from the project "Job opportunities for business support" a vocational training is implemented such as: starting up of own business; training of

private farmers and entrepreneurs in EU requirements and opportunities for acquiring of EU funding; motivation training for seeking and starting of job; vocational training for valets, tailors and plant gardeners. Over the period 1 January- 18 August 2006 in the frameworks of the component "Employment for Roma" 305 Roma were included in training, 190 were employed, 26 were self-employed and 9 firms acquired financial leasing. The grant scheme under the component was officially represented in the Roma communities of Bourgas on 28.06.2006 and in Pazardjik – on 29.06.2006.

**Methodical instructions** for provision of specialized individual consulting, aimed at solving of specific problems of roma ethnic community have been approved by the minister of labour and social policy in July 2006. The instructions are distributed to all Labour Offices and will be used by the staff of the Employment Agency in the work with representatives of roma population. The implementation of the instructions will contribute to better targeting of the problems of roma jobseekers. In this way their activity to participate in the literacy, vocational training and employment through job brokerage of Labour Offices will be enhanced.

A **method** for the selection and inclusion of the unemployed in training for acquisition of professional qualification has been elaborated. The method is in process of internal coordination (within the Employment Agency). The implementation of the method will contribute for the enhancement of the employability of the unemployed.

### Housing conditions

- On 11.05.2006 the Council of Ministers adopted Action Plan for 2006-2007 for Implementation of the Housing Conditions of Roma. **240 000 BGN** are ensured for road repair works in the Roma quarters **for 2006**. In 2007 the sum will amount to **1 million BGN**.
- In implementation of the Action Plan 2006-2007 r. at the national programme, procedures have been opened under the Law on Public Procurement for elaboration of cadastral maps and registers of **58 towns and villages in 12 of the municipalities with over 10% Roma population**. The cadastral maps and registers will be completed by the end of 2007.

### Healthcare

- In May 2006 under the National Programme "From Social Assistance to Employment" an employment was ensured for **12 health-mediators** of Roma origin.
- On **21.07.2006** a working meeting was conducted with the participation of representatives of all interested institutions (*MH, MLSP, National Health Fund, the National Revenue Agency*), *NGOs, mediators, journalists*. The topic of the discussion was the improvement of the access to health care of vulnerable persons belonging to ethnic minorities, the role of health mediators.
- On 7 August prophylactic examinations started on the spot in quarters populated mainly by Bulgarian citizens of Roma and Turkish origin, by teams equipped with specialized equipment and transport, (*within the framework of the Action Plan to the Health strategy for vulnerable people from ethnic minorities*). **Untill 15 August** about **350 Roma women** have been examined. (See Additional information).

### **Educational Integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities**

- Since 2001 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has been implementing the **“Child Welfare Reform in Bulgaria” Project** with the financial support of the World Bank, EU and other donors;
- **Amendments of the Law on Family Assistance and Financial Support** were adopted and were related to the children regular school attendance.
- The implementation of **the National Program for Better School Participation** has been carried out in the following ways: provision of free transport, textbooks and breakfast at school.
- On 7.06.2006 the Parliament adopted the **National Programme for Development of Secondary Education and Pre-School Training (2006-2015)**. The basic focus of the Programme falls on the decrease of the number of the uncovered and dropping out pupils as well as on the introduction of specific measures in respect to the children whose maternity language is not Bulgarian and the rest of children with special educational needs.

### **1.2 Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015**

**Additional measures were accepted for the accelerating of the progress into the implementation of the commitments of the Bulgarian government about the Initiative “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015”.**

- In the 8th International Steering Committee Meeting of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015”, The National coordinator signed the Terms of Reference for the Bulgarian participation into the Initiative.
- The official ceremony was on 4 of July for the acceptance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the “Decade of Roma inclusion 2005-2015”.
- Bulgaria adopted a National Action Plan for the Decade which corresponds to the objectives and tasks of the Framework Program for equal integration of the Roma people into the Bulgarian society. The measures laid down in the National Plan are directed to elimination of exclusion and discrimination as well as raising the living standard of Roma people.

### **A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the Spanish housing policy according to Bulgarian**

The policy of the Roma inclusion is a question of strategy. The most relevant aspect of the Spanish housing policy compared to the Bulgarian context is the basic understanding that this policy constitutes and recognize a deep and complete process of social inclusion. This process must constitute an integrated and multi-sectoral approach including attendant measures, recognizing that successful integration required continuing support in key areas in order to improve access to employment, education, health services and vocational training.