

## ***Information from the Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, National Roma Contact Point<sup>1</sup>***

### **(1) Dialogue with regional and local authorities**

With the adoption of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria of integrating Roma 2012-2020 in 2012 by the National Assembly the building of the framework for the implementation of the strategy continued in 2012 and early 2013. A process of regional and municipal planning was triggered in accordance with the NRISRB for drawing up municipal action plans for integration of Roma.

In this respect, in 2012 a series of consultations and meetings with governors, mayors, experts of regional and municipal administrations in the country, representatives of Roma NGOs, experts from the World Bank, UNICEF were held on how the planning process to proceed. A Pilot planning was held in one region. The Secretariat of NCCEII coordinated the process, prepared Aid Guidelines and provided methodological support.

The Regional Councils on Ethnic and Integration Issues (Regional council) have the major role in this process. Each district has a regional council, which organizes the planning process, monitoring, etc. They are chaired by the governors and they include directors of all regional units on the priorities of the strategy, the mayors of the municipalities in the region and representatives of NGOs. Each district administration has experts, engaged with ethnic and integration issues, who are secretaries of these councils.

The Cooperation between districts, municipalities, NGOs and the Secretariat of NCCEII, which is a National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) led to the preparing and adoption of 27 regional strategies and 220 municipal action plans in the late 2012 and early 2013. It should be noted that all municipal plans were reviewed and adopted by the municipal councils and became an annex to the regional strategies.

In May 2014 the second phase of planning began. The NRIS provides a mechanism for reviewing the strategy and action plan. A mid-term review / update of the Action Plan in 2017 is foreseen in order to ensure efficiency and sustainability of the measures. In this regard most municipalities develop action plans by 2017. Planning process started with a meeting of NCCEII. It was held with the governors and non-governmental organizations, members of the council, who were acquainted with the possibilities of the Operational programmes until 2020 to support the integration of Roma and the resources granted. In each region, under the coordination of the Regional Council began the second period of planning. In 2014 due to political changes and the administrative changes related to them in many places this process was slow, but the municipal plans have been preparing everywhere. Most of them will be adopted in January and February 2015 (eg. Varna, Vidin, Dobrich, Gabrovo, Ruse, Razgrad, Gabrovo, Stara Zagora and others.).

The Regional councils have established themselves as the most important place for dialogue between all stakeholders at regional level in the field of Roma integration. The role at municipal level of such bodies is rising, such as: municipal councils on ethnic and integration issues; working groups for planning, units for monitoring and evaluation, local groups (more details in item2), community councils and others.

An example of good planning organization is Pazardzhik district. It started in June 2014. By an order of the governor were formed:

- Regional working group to coordinate and support the planning process at the local level and to create and realize links with the Secretariat of the NCCEII.

---

<sup>1</sup> This information is sent to the European Commission Directorate-General Justice Directorate D: Equality Unit D.4: Non discrimination policies and Roma coordination

-municipal working groups, which include: an employee with managerial functions in municipal administration, a coordinator - an employee with expertise in municipal administration functions; heads and experts on the 6 priority areas; a representative of NGOs, representatives of the Roma community. Terms and responsibilities to be determined. These groups should prepare an analysis of the current situation; identify actions, according to the analysis, carry out activities on the concrete aims and objectives of the regional strategy; to advise the process with the regional working group; funds under municipal budgets and /or new Operational programs;

90% of the information, provided by the regions reports an increased interaction of local and regional authorities in the planning, implementation and monitoring through discussions, exchange of information and sharing of experience. The conclusion is that the dialogue is improved in several directions: between districts and municipalities, between the units, implementing the activities of the plan; pooling the capacity of several municipalities as well as the dialog with the organization working in the field of Roma integration and with the Roma communities. (more details in item 2).

Some examples:

**Region Vratsa:** “In relation to the implementation of the plan, the communications with the regional and local institutions became more frequent which resulted in a more effective and constructive dialogue. Experts from different institutions are involved in discussions and try to find the possibility to solve a problem related to a member of the Roma community.”

Region Kardzhali: „Regional administration has a very good partnership with the municipal administrations, Regional Education Inspectorate(REI), Regional Health Inspection(RHI) and other authorities in the integration sphere.“. „There is a good coordination with the Secretariat of the NCCEII“.

**Region Gabrovo:**” As a result of the active dialogue of the four municipalities in Gabrovo region – Gabrovo, Sevlievo, Dryanovo and Tryavna, the project “Integration and inclusion of risk groups in Gabrovo region” was developed and submitted for financing under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. The project unites the efforts of all four municipalities in Gabrovo region to achieve inclusion and integration of Roma people and other vulnerable groups in the community.

NRCP accomplishes continuous interaction with the regional and local authorities in planning, implementation, monitoring of the NRIS, it coordinates solving of the specific cases or problems. NRCP initiates extraordinary meetings, for example in September 2014 the Deputy Prime Minister for Social Policy and Minister of Labour and Social Policy and President of NCCEII, Professor. Jordan Hristoskov, met representatives of the Managing Authority of Operational Programme Regional Development 2007-2013, representatives of the National Association of municipalities in Bulgaria, representatives of the municipalities - beneficiaries and NGOs. The meeting discussed the readiness of the reserve municipalities - beneficiaries to prepare in short terms and implement a project for providing social housing upon OPRD 2007-2013, and to take measures to raise public awareness of the scheme.

The Capacity of the representatives of local authorities to work with ethnic groups constantly increases through their participation in seminars, round table discussions,etc. The Government conducts training of the staff of the institutions at all levels and in all priorities of the NSRI, trainings also is conducted on projects, implemented by institutions or non-governmental organizations.

With the years the **Ministry of Health** established the good practice of cooperating with NGOs, constantly increasing the number of those working among the Roma communities.

The network of health mediators developed is an achievement for Bulgaria and the Ministry of Health. The job position of Health Mediator has been included in the National Classification of Professions and Positions of the Republic of Bulgaria. Health mediators help both the inhabitants of the urban areas with dense Roma population and the medical specialists servicing this population. They are also valuable assistants in carrying out of the explanatory

campaigns for young people, mothers-to-be and the population in the neighbourhoods, organized by the regional health inspectorates on various topics related to the improvement of their health.

The positive results of the work of the health mediators are a proof that we need them in order to improve the health status of the Roma population from the isolated minority communities and bring it close to the health status of the remaining population of Bulgaria. It is necessary to increase the number of health mediators as they directly contribute to: improving the access to health and social services for vulnerable groups with focus on the Roma, overcoming the cultural barriers in the communication between the Roma population and the medical staff locally and overcoming the existing discriminatory attitudes in the area of health services for the Roma locally. Health mediators significantly contribute to optimizing the range of prophylactic programs among the Roma and especially among the young children; they also support the health education and health awareness of the Roma and perform active social work within the communities. They create sustainable partnerships between the disadvantaged communities and the local and national institutions.

The network of health mediators is expanding every year. In 2012, 109 health mediators worked in 59 municipalities. In 2013, 130 worked in 71 municipalities. In 2014, there were already 150 mediators in 79 target municipalities in 25 Bulgarian districts, and in 2015 the state budget has provided funds for a total of 170 health mediators.

Being the leading institution in charge of the implementation of the targets contained in the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) in the Education Priority, **the Ministry of Education and Science** supports the capacity building of regional and local authorities. In addition, the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and students from ethnic minorities / CEICSEM /helps the implementation of governmental policy for educating the children and students from ethnic minorities. In 2014 trainings were organized for 230 employees, working in youth centers, Roma mediators; teachers and other staff in kindergartens, due to the project "Capacity Building". The Center funds three measures in priority "Education": access to quality education for children and pupils of Roma origin; preserving the cultural identity of Roma children and work with parents of Roma children.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy realizes a project for social inclusion, which is funded by government-guaranteed loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Beneficiaries are 26 municipalities. It creates a new type of integrated services for early childhood development through combined social, health, educational and cultural services. This new approach is not only in terms of the type of service, but also concerning the professionals, who work and provide these services. The focus of this policy is to prevent early dropping out of the educational system, work with children with disabilities and work with Roma children.

**Social Assistance Agency** conducts trainings of social workers from the regional structures to raise their awareness and ability in working with representatives of ethnic communities and as part of a policy to combat poverty and promote social inclusion of representatives of ethnic communities in disadvantage. In 2012 - 2013 were held the following training seminars on the projects: "To touch the untouchables - struggling with traditional and new anti-Roma stereotypes", "Worthy work and a better life without discrimination", "Health Problems of Roma", "Roma Education ", " Work with risk groups of Roma ", " Best Practices in the Integration of Roma in the labor market of Bulgaria ".

**Ministry of Interior** fulfils annually:

- "Training on the job of police officers on human rights and the problems of minorities within the framework of the professional school year". To maintain a stable level of the professional qualification of police officers, the training is delivered by officers who, within their powers, have passed a special training-of- trainers on specific topics. Various topics have

been presented to enhance the qualification of police officers for working in multiethnic environment: “Specifics of the police work and concrete actions in performing police duties in areas with predominantly Roma inhabitants”, “Ethic behavior in the work with citizens”, “History, customs, traditions and religious beliefs of different ethnic groups and more specifically the Roma population”, “Roma issues in the social sphere”, “Police actions during group violations of public order and other serious law offences in areas of compact Roma population”, “Human rights and ethics”, “Convention for the protection of human rights and basic freedoms”, “Identification of problems related to public order and security in the local Roma neighborhoods”, “International convention against all forms of discrimination”, “European standards for working with multi-ethnic societies - stereotypes, discrimination and prejudices”, “Framework convention for the protection of national minorities”, etc.

In 2014, 1157 trainings were delivered on the job, whereby 31461 officers from police departments at the Metropolitan MoI directorate, the Regional MoI directorates and the Gendarmerie within Chief Directorate Public Order and Security Police were trained.

The systematic trainings of police officers on the abovementioned topics are in accordance with the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), and the Action plan on the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) strategy, which facilitates police officer in their daily work through carrying out effective communication with the Bulgarian citizens who have self-defined themselves as Roma.

- “Annual deliverance of 10-week theoretic-practical training courses on national and local level on the topics “Police work with ethnic minorities”. Under the MoI action plan, 18 230 BGN have been planned for every year, provided by the Republican budget. Due to the lack of finances for 2014, the training of police officers was oriented towards topics, related to human rights and minorities issues within the professional school year delivered on the job.

**Ministry of Culture** with a view of improving the dialogue between regional and local authorities and civil society organizations, including Roma, organized in 2014 an information campaign about the role of ethnic groups in cultural diversity in our country and in Europe as well as for the introduction to the European and national policies for the recognition and protection of universal values and the promotion of cultural diversity.

There were three seminars in municipalities Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad - for training of executives and experts from across the country. Five discussion forums were conducted in Targovishte, Haskovo, Pazardzhik, Montana, Kyustendil which included exchange of experience and knowledge topics for implementation and management of the process of cultural integration in our society, aspects of the partnership between the public and the private sector at national, regional and local level for the full inclusion of ethnic communities in the national cultural life and others. The capacity of representatives of local administrations, civil society organizations, community centers, cultural institutes and others has been increased.

In 2014 **Pazardzhik Regional Administration** implemented a project for the improvement of qualification of its personnel funded under the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme. One of the training modules was intended to provide skills in dealing with minority groups. This was attended by 23 people working in the administration.

The training introduced the main problems of vulnerable groups providing specific approaches for particular groups and ethno-cultural and minority characteristics of the related vulnerable social group.

The regions, municipalities and the NGOs use different ways to work with Roma by involving them in initiatives, campaigns, project activities, projects under NRIS. As an example:

**Region Gabrovo:**

-Roma field-work collaborators participated in the realization of the Programme “Strengthening the National Tuberculosis Programme in Bulgaria”;

- 32 volunteers aged 18-29 years from Roma and Wallachian origin were attracted for the implementation of "Free choice" project under the National Youth Program. The project activities were aimed at young people from the Roma community. The aim was the establishing and training of volunteer teams from Dushevo and Yavorets villages. Their main task was to organize and conduct a regional campaign supporting young people to express themselves and make autonomous decisions and choices. 25 youths were trained. The campaign covered around 2000 young people from Gabrovo region.

The provision of financial support to regional and local authorities is carried out through the budgets of the line ministries and institutions, including, with specific means of implementing integration policies; within the approved municipal budgets, through the project financing under the Operational Programmes, the financial mechanism of the European Economic Area, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (2009-2014), Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme and other donors.

The most districts define the limited funds available to municipalities as a major difficulty in the implementation of the plans. The activities of the regional and municipal administrations in the field of Roma integration is funded under the budget of the administration. The realization of large-scale measures of strategic and planning documents on the work on a project basis with grants for various programs, including EU funds.

## **(2) Dialogue with Roma civil society**

With changes in Rules of procedure of the NCCEII a Commission has been set up for the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020). The functions of the Commission are to plan resourced and integrated interventions to implement the policy of Roma integration as defined in the National Roma Strategy, based on objectives and priorities at the level of basic policies, health, education, social policy, housing as well as to support, discuss and monitor the implementation of the measures and achievement of results on the priorities of the National Roma Strategy.

In the commission participate heads of structures in ministries of: Labor and Social Policy; Education and Science; Agriculture and Food; Youth and Sports; Regional development and Public Works; Health; Interior; Culture, with responsibilities in the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012 - 2020), appointed by the respective Ministers; representative of the Central Coordination Unit in the administration of the Council of Ministers - a member of the NCCEII; representatives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the National Association of Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria - Members of the NCCEII; Representatives of NGOs members of the NCCEII, working in the area of the integration of Roma in Bulgarian society.

Under the Commission are operate two working groups: Interdepartmental Working group for resource support of Roma integration with funds of the European Union and the Interdepartmental Working group for monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012 - 2020) and legal changes. These changes strengthen the control and monitoring of civil society organizations on the implementation of the strategy.

The Interdepartmental Working group for resource support of Roma integration with funds of the European Union actively worked in 2012 and 2013. Its members represent different NGOs, institutions and Managing Authorities of the Operational Programmes. The group discussed and planned intervention activities under Operational Programmes (OP) for implementing the strategy. The managing authorities of OPs were introduced to the results of the group activities.

Representatives of Roma organizations ("Amalipe, World without borders") participated actively in the work of the thematic working groups, preparing new Operational Programmes

(OPs). Their opinions, suggestions and formulations are included in the OP "Human Resources Development", which is crucial for the integration of Roma, as well as in the OP "Science and education for smart growth."

Representatives of Roma organizations are participants in the work of the Monitoring Committees of OP HRD, OP ESSG, OPRG. In addition to them other NGOs will also participate in the sub-committees, related to the integration of Roma ("OP Human Resources Development OP" Science and education for smart growth).

Representatives of Roma organizations are participants in the Regional Councils on Ethnic and Integration Issues and are involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of municipal action plans. All regions and the majority of municipalities indicate the good cooperation with Roma organizations or organizations working in the field of Roma integration. The following actively working organizations can be pointed out: Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance „Amalipe“, Association „National Network of Health Mediators", Association "Integro, Foundation "Health and Social Development", Association "L.I.D.E.R", Foundation "Regional Roma Union“, Foundation "Lozenets", Foundation "Iskra", Association "Largo" and many others.

Actively working organizations operate in places, densely populated by Roma : Sofia, Plovdiv, Sliven, Yambol and others. There are areas in which many Roma NGOs have been operating, but there are individual municipalities where there are no NGOs (Nessebar, Sozopol, Kardzhali, Gabrovo) and they rely mainly on cooperation and communication with the so-called informal leaders of the Roma community.

An example of good cooperation between institutions, local authorities and NGOs are running programs ROMMED and ROMAKT. The information from the national coordinator for Bulgaria of programs ROMMED and ROMAKT:

Six Local Active Groups (LAG) were created within the programs of the Commission and the Council of Europe ROMMED and ROMAKT in 2014. They include citizens of the local Roma communities of the municipalities - Varna, Shumen, Sliven, Tunja, Maglij and Byala Slatina. At the end of 2013 the mayors of those municipalities signed an agreement to participate in the programs.

The Groups have the following objectives:

- 1) To activate and mobilize Roma citizens to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the municipal plan for implementing the NRIS;
- 2) To strengthen the responsiveness and readiness of local authorities to include the proposals of the citizens in the local policies to improve public services and activities for all citizens;
- 3) To facilitate the constructive dialogue between the local authorities and the citizens of Roma origin, to improve the process of decision-making at a local level for the benefit of all citizens.

Experts of the Council of Europe have ensured a systematic and consistent support, namely 45 visits on the spot, meetings and trainings in the communities themselves; guidance and counselling, dialogue between different groups within the community and between the Roma community and local authorities and other local institutions. In the process more than 900 community representatives and over 30 municipal employees were involved.

As a result, a substantial part of the proposals of the Local Active Groups were included in the plans of Varna, Shumen, Sliven, Tundzha and Byala Slatina.

It is envisaged that these groups should be actively involved in the mechanism for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local municipality plans for implementing NRIS in the coming years.

Some districts also provide information about good cooperation between local authorities and NGOs to support the capacity building of Roma civil society:

Experts from the Regional Administration Razgrad provided expert assistance for establishment of NGO "AMOR - Association for Local Community Development" in Kubrat

Town and helped for the elaboration of project proposal under The NGO Programme in Bulgaria under the EEA Financial Mechanism. The project was approved for funding, and its implementation started in 2014. The project aims to increase awareness of local communities about the implementation of the Regional strategy for integration of Roma in Razgrad District (2012-2020) and Municipal Action Plan for its implementation of the Municipality of Kubrat and to aware their responsibilities in their implementation; establishment of the Municipal Advisory Council on Integration Issues involving informal community leaders; Increasing the capacity of the NGO "AMOR" for community development and active participation in decision-making by local and regional authorities. The project target groups include vulnerable Roma communities in 7 settlements in the municipality of Kubrat, local and regional authorities in Razgrad District. This project is funded under Program to support NGOs in Bulgaria in the framework of a financial mechanism of the European Economic Area.

**In the field of Education** - the Roma organizations are involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the project BG051PO001-3.1.06 "Improving the quality of education in central schools by introducing full-day learning process" under the Operational Programme "Development of Human Resources 2007 -2013 ". Within the project in 2013 a Monitoring Committee was constituted, which meets once a year to make a review of the implementation of project activities. Representatives of Roma civic organization are included in the Committee.

The project implementation targets the policy of ensuring an access to quality education for all children and students, regardless of their ethnicity and contributes to the achieving the objectives of priority "Education" of the NSRF.

**The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy** implemented activities under the Strategy for Roma integration with the participation of representatives of Roma civil organizations. The plans govern the promoting of social and civil dialogue in support of the employment of Roma people by holding meetings, round tables, seminars, discussions and campaigns with Roma organizations.

Territorial structures of the **Employment Agency** cooperates and seeks the assistance of community leaders and representatives of Roma NGO's for the implementation of various initiatives, related to support the integration of unemployed Roma: motivation of individuals for their participation in programs and projects for employment and training; participation in specialized job fairs, aimed at the Roma community, mediators, etc.

**Ministry of Interior holds meetings with:**

- Periodical (monthly) meetings held with the informal leaders of Roma communities in order to obtain the necessary information for analyzing the state of play of the safety environment in Roma neighborhoods and the level of internal inter-clan conflicts in the communities.

- Regular preventive discussions are organized with persons from the Roma communities, periodical and regular visits are paid to the differentiated Roma districts, to better learn the problems of the Roma and ensure their due solution

- Meeting are organized with representatives of NGO, related to joint work with problematic Roma children

- In regional police departments in the country were organized meetings with minority groups on issues related to "Abuse of social security systems in Germany"

- Regular meetings are held with representatives of NGOs, to identify tensions among the Roma population as well as violations of public order in preparation. Talks are held with Roma persons and their leaders in order to increase trust and solve encountered problems.

### **(3) Allocating European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for Roma inclusion in the 2014-2020 period**

Using ESIF Bulgaria will implement an integrated approach to support the people at greatest risk of social exclusion such as representatives of vulnerable ethnic communities such as the Roma people.

In signed Partnership agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria outlining the support from the European structural and investment funds for the 2014-2020 period is stated that:

In terms of support for members of ethnic communities at risk of social exclusion, ESIF will support the implementation of regional strategies and municipal action plans for Roma integration under the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020).

The support will be provided primarily through funding of integrated projects of municipal beneficiaries and other stakeholders at local level, incl. for further development of the pilot model from the 2007-2013 period for integrated investments for the marginalized communities which live in social houses. Projects will be designed to improve access to employment, education, quality health and social services and measures to build tolerance for ethnic differences, promote the culture of different ethnic groups and others. In line with the application of so-called "mainstreaming" approach, the various ethnic communities at risk of social exclusion will be explicitly defined among the target groups of other operation. In this way the principle of "explicit but not exclusive" targeting, which is one of adopted at EU level 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion will be observed.

Support for the development of appropriate administrative capacity of the structures responsible for the design, implementation coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the leading strategic documents and policies in the field. Implementation of an integrated and phased approach to sustainable integration into the labour market of vulnerable groups including Roma people is envisaged. Persons will be provided with services for activation help for finding work and a differentiated approach to service delivery will be developed. Literacy training and professional qualification will also develop skills for job search by providing motivational training. There are opportunities to improve coordination between institutions in the process of full integration into society and the labour market of groups at risk of exclusion, inactive people, and disadvantaged groups in the labour market including Roma people. Increasing the efficiency and results of the implemented measures will be achieved through an approach combining individual needs and reconciling work and family life.

#### **In particular regarding the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020 detailed information is provided by Ministry of Labor and Social Policy:**

Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2014-2020 (OP HRD 2014-2020) in the new programming period will contribute to the socio-economic integration of the Roma community, mainly within the priority Axis 1 "Improving access to employment and the quality of jobs" Axis 2 "Reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion" and Axis 4 "Transnational cooperation" will be used mainstream and targeted approach. Under the Investment priority № 1: "Socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as Roma" of Priority Axis 2 support will receive measures targeting persons living in areas including areas with low population density, rural and isolated areas, parts of towns, where there is a concentration of problems, creating a risk of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization (high unemployment, low income, limited access to public services, spatial segregation, spatial insulation, etc.).

In the new programming period in relation to the integration of marginalized communities will continue supporting integrated measures through coordination mechanism between the two funds ESF and ERDF. As a starting point for planning interventions will be taken results of implementation of operation BG051PO001-1 / 4/5 / 6.0.01 "INTEGRA" which



is supported by the ESF in the period 2007-2013 in the municipalities of Vidin, Devnya and Dupnitsa. The operation is performed in coordination with the procedure BG161PO001 / 1.2-02 / 2011 "Support for provision of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and socially disadvantaged groups and other disadvantaged groups" financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The overall objective of both operations is to improve the quality of life and long-term integration of the most marginalized communities. The integrated approach is to combine measures to improve housing conditions (ERDF) with such employment, education, social and health services (ESF).

Operations also contribute to capacity building of local communities, project beneficiaries to plan and implement initiatives to overcome the challenges facing the integration of marginalized groups and communities by segregated neighborhoods and urban areas.

In addition, two of the programs financed by the ESF, namely HRD OP and the 2014-2020 Operational Programme "Science and education for smart growth" 2014-2020, (OP SESG 2014-2020) are foreseen the implementation of mechanisms for coordinated implementation of operations and where applicable - through "integrated operations" OP SESG will complement initiatives in HRD OP, providing support to improve access to education for the target groups. Thus support for the most marginalized groups will include the provision of comprehensive "social package", attacking simultaneously all the problems impeding the integration of target groups in the Bulgarian society.

Within the second priority axis of the OP HRD 2014-2020, "Investment priority № 1: "Socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as Roma", "Direction" Development of local communities and overcome negative stereotypes" will allow implementation of different actions and campaigns to overcome negative stereotypes. Some of the examples of activities that could be implemented in this area are; Community action aimed at changing practices having a negative impact on social inclusion, supporting the integration of target groups in the process of formation and implementation of national and local policies, initiatives to overcome negative stereotypes; initiatives to promote the cultural identity of ethnic communities, incl. in the field of traditional activities and talents (arts and crafts) and others.

Unlike OP HRD 2007-2013 the new OP HRD 2014-2020, relies to a greater extent in the implementation of operations with complex measures through an integrated approach.

**Under Priority Axis 2 "Reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion" will be supported investment priority "Socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as the Roma"** with the specific objectif under it "Increasing the number of persons from vulnerable ethnic communities involved in employment , education, training, health and social services with a focus on Roma migrants, participants from other countries."

Specific objectif addresses the representatives of the most marginalized communities, with a specific focus on the members of the Roma ethnic group among which the risk of poverty and social exclusion is highest. It is important to note that the inclusion in the horizontal measures for employment and social inclusion of these target groups are not always sufficient effectiveness due to their specific and multiple needs. That is why in this specific objectif to finance only integrated measures aimed at improving the quality of life and long-term integration of marginalized communities, which mainstreaming approach is not suitable.

The measures will be implemented in the following areas 1) improving access to employment; 2) improving access to education; 3) improving access to social and health services; 4) development of local communities and overcome negative stereotypes, measures for access to social and health services should be mandatory.

Under this investment priority to 2023, HRD OP aims to include about 19,380 persons from the Roma community, as the means for the various measures aimed at Roma integration indicative amount of around 111 million levs. The measures will be tailored to the municipal plans for Roma integration in view of the fact that they are the main tool for the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma integration through integrated action at the local level and municipal strategies for social services. As a starting point for planning interventions will be taken results of implementation of operation BG051PO001-1 / 4/5 / 6.0.01

"INTEGRA" which is supported by the ESF in the period 2007-2013 in the municipalities of Vidin, Devnya and Dupnitsa.

Among the main target groups are members of the Roma community; people from other countries; people at risk and / or the victim of discrimination; people living in areas including with low population density, rural and isolated areas, parts of towns, where there is a concentration of problems, creating a risk of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization (high unemployment, low income, limited access to public services, spatial segregation, spatial insulation, etc.

Among the main types of beneficiaries are: MLSP and its secondary budget spenders to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy; Ministry of Health (MH and secondary budget spenders to the Minister of Health; providers of social and health services; social partners; employers; municipalities and areas of municipalities; organizations providing mediation services; educational and training organizations and institutions; centers for information and guidance; community centers; NGOs, social enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities registered religious branches.

UNDER the Monitoring Committee of OPHRD will be create three subcommittees, one subcommittee in the labor market, one in the field of social inclusion and a subcommittee on Roma integration.

The functions of these three subcommittees are to support the work of the Managing Authority in the development of criteria for selection of operations, as well as the functions related to the assessment of the transactions and evaluating the program.

NGOs working in the field of integration of minority ethnic groups, migrants and civil sector were included as partners in the implementation of public policies. NGO representatives proved a huge contribution to the development of the second priority axis of the operational program and most of the investment priority, which focuses on the integration of marginalized communities.

**Measures in terms of integration of the Roma community in OPHRD, except the IP "Socio-economic inclusion of marginalised communities such as the Roma" are mainly in:** Priority Axis 1 "Improving access to employment and the quality of jobs" IP 1: Access to employment for job seekers and inactive people, including permanent unemployed and distant from the labor market, and also through local employment initiatives and support for labor mobility; Eligible activities, which will be supported by investment IP 1 are:

- providing intermediary services on the labor market,
- activation of inactive persons, organizing and participating in job fairs and more. supporting employment services, vocational information and counseling, psychological support,
- providing motivational training, provision of training to enhance the professional qualifications or acquiring new provision of training for acquisition of key competences,
- Employment after providing intermediary services and / or training, the provision of training on the job (apprenticeship) and internships,
- providing incentives to promote mobility of jobseekers, providing incentives to employers for hiring unemployed people from disadvantaged groups in the labor market.

Provides over 6000 persons of Roma aged 30 to 54, which will be provided services are acquired or increased their qualifications and started work.

IP 2 Sustainable integration in the labor market of young people, particularly those who are not engaged in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalized communities, including through the implementation of the youth guarantee.

IP 2 is aimed at young people aged from 15 to 29 years, and it is planned to be supported activities:

- activation of inactive youth who are not enrolled in the educational system,
- provision of intermediary services in the labor market, vocational information and counseling,

- psychological support, providing motivational training, training for acquisition of professional qualifications or key competencies, providing opportunities for employment, including training at work (apprenticeship) and apprenticeship, after registration as an unemployed person,

- providing incentives to promote geographical mobility job, providing incentives to employers for hiring unemployed youth, providing training for acquisition of entrepreneurial, managerial and business skills, etc.

Under this priority is envisaged to include over 5300 persons of Roma aged 15-29, who upon leaving in education / training, receive training or a job, including self-employment.

**Under Priority Axis 3 of the new program is expected to be capacity building of institutions implementing the policies related to social inclusion of the Roma community,** and for this purpose in the investment priority 1 "Investment in institutional capacity and efficiency of public administrations and public services national, regional and local level to the implementation of reforms, better regulation and good governance", as direct beneficiaries are expressly mentioned NRCP - the Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, and the Commission for the Protection of discrimination.

**In particular regarding the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” (OP SESG) 2014-2020 detailed information is provided by Ministry of Education and Sciences:**

The Republic of Bulgaria develops a new Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” (OP SESG) for the period 2014-2020. It includes supportive measures related to the Roma inclusion.

The distribution of funds under the programme is consistent with funding opportunities from the European Social Fund (ESF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the thematic objectives specified in the Partnership Agreement. ESF may finance measures under OP SESG in the scope of two thematic objectives in accordance with under the Regulations No 1303/2013 and 1304 / 2013:

- Promoting social inclusion, poverty and all forms of discrimination
- Investing in education, training, including vocational education for skills acquisition and lifelong learning

Both of these thematic objectives include measures and activities related to Roma integration. The ESF is expected to contribute towards achieving the national target to reduce poverty by 2020 and to promote social inclusion.

OP SESG envisages measures to support marginalised communities for the period 2014-2020. Systematic efforts will be made to overcome prejudices and discrimination based on ethnicity and religion. In this regard, special care will be taken to retrain teachers and administrative staff in the education system to work in multicultural environments, especially those working with bilingual children, as well as to tackle the difficulties associated with obtaining quality education in small schools in rural areas, the need to update the learning content of general subjects with a view to preserving cultural identity, and the lack of appropriate social and psychological climate in society.

Other measures will be aimed at improving the access to education for children and students of Roma origin. A pressing issue in this area is the lack of sufficient motivation to learn the mother tongue.

Special actions have been envisaged to prepare children at an early age (3-6 years old) for successful future participation in the education process, especially children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, including Roma. This is expected to result in an early integration into the education system, as a means to prevent dropping out in the next stages of education and overcome language barriers. It is particularly important to ensure equal access to quality education through elimination of primary and prevention of secondary ethnic segregation of schools and through improvements to the school environment. The number of ethnically

segregated schools is expected to decrease and that of integrated students whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian is expected to rise alongside with securing an environment that will help them preserve their cultural identity.

The OP SESG is a multi-fund OP, a strategic document which will guide the investment of resources from the ESF and the ERDF, as well as from the national budget, in Bulgarian science and education in the programming period 2014-2020 with a view to achieving a more integrated and sustainable impact of investment in research and education. The Operational Programme will cover the entire territory of the country.

Investment for sustainable urban development will be implemented primarily through an integrated priority in OPRD 2014-2020, and the ESF funding will be an additional function. In accordance with the National Spatial Development Concept 2013 – 2025 Bulgaria provides considerable support from ESIF for integrated actions for sustainable urban development in the period 2014-2020.

The OP SESG provides funding from the European Social Fund "soft measures" for funding under OPRD 2014-2020 objects of education infrastructure. According to the specific need, investments in educational infrastructure in different cities will be complemented by such under ESF through investments under OP SESG in activities for the provision of educational services. Concentration of support will be achieved by focusing on predetermined areas of impact in the cities on 1, 2 and 3rd level: social areas, areas with public functions and areas with potential for economic development.

The financial interventions will concern the enforcement the territorial targeting in less developed regions and community-led local development. The objective is to ensure synergy to solve national and regional challenges. The launch of operational programs will provide an opportunity for partnerships with international financial institutions in order to ensure support associated with the Roma inclusion.

The planned mechanism for coordination of different complementary funding sources will provide the necessary synergy for solving Roma problems. The Operational Programme Human Resource Development (OP HRD) 2014-2020 also includes Roma among the main target groups. Action plans for implementation of various national and European programs will also be consistent with an integrated approach for Roma inclusion.

OP SESG proposes sustainable financial intervention regarding the needs related to the access to schooling. The integration of children from different ethnic communities (in particular Roma) will be intensified through additional training in Bulgarian, measures for early socialisation, development of teaching skills, and prevention of public prejudice. As common framework for the access to education OP SESG will put in place policies to prevent early school leaving with special focus on Roma children.

The financial allocation and selection of thematic objectives and investment priorities that are directly related to the Roma integration are in accordance with the priorities set out in following European and national strategic documents:

- Council Recommendation on Bulgaria's 2012 National Reform Programme, Specific Recommendation 4;
- The National Programme for Development of School Education and Preschool Education and Training, 2006-2015;
- Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities, 2004-2015;
- National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012-2020;
- Action Plan for Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012-2020 and the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.

Two OPs have chosen the ESF specific investment priority "Socio-economic inclusion of marginalised communities such as the Roma": The Operational Programme "Science and

Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020 and the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014-2020.

The Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020 will provide ESF funding.

**Under the priority axis 3 “Educational environment for active social inclusion” of OP SESG there are two investment priorities: 9i “Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability” and 9ii “Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma”.**

Through the measures under Investment priority 9ii “*Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma*”, the number of ethnically segregated kindergartens and schools is expected to decrease and that of the integrated students whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian is expected to grow alongside with a provision of an environment for preserving their cultural identity.

The following needs are identified that should to be taken care of with the European Funds:

- Reduce the number of early school leavers;
- Increase the number of students from the ethnic minorities and especially Roma who continue in higher education;
- Ensure equal access to quality education and personalized support services in accordance with the needs of children from ethnic minorities.

The expected result that we seek to achieve with Union support is an early integration in the education system. Bulgaria has established statutory conditions for equal access to education for all children and students, including children and students from ethnic minorities and children and students seeking or received international protection, and there has been systematic effort to overcome ethnic and religious prejudice and discrimination. The resources under investment priority 9ii “*Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma*” will be used in order to assure conditions for:

- equal integration of students in the Bulgarian educational system
- development of cultural identity in children and students
- improvement of financial and physical conditions
- raising the qualification of the staff for working in multicultural environment
- implementation of a strategy for training and re-training teachers and administrative staff in the education system for working in multicultural environment, especially those working with bilingual children
- obtaining quality education in rural areas
- updating the curriculum content of general subjects in order to preserve cultural identity,
- creating appropriate social and psychological climate in society
- increasing motivation to learn the mother tongue
- additional training in Bulgarian for children and students (including children and students seeking or received international protection) whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian;
- capacity building for pedagogical specialists for working in a multicultural environment;
- provision of an appropriate material and psychological support for inclusion of children and students of Roma origin from ethnically segregated kindergartens and schools into kindergartens and schools outside Roma neighbourhoods through phased acceptance;
- support to the process of educational integration and social inclusion through the closure or conversion of ethnically segregated kindergartens and schools in urban areas with more than one kindergarten/one school;

- support for the training of children from Roma families and children and students seeking or received international protection in kindergartens from age 3 for early socialisation;
- support for continuation of the education to upper secondary and higher education level;
- support for development and preservation of the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities, and children and students seeking or received international protection;
- recognition of intercultural education as an integral part of the process of modernisation of the Bulgarian education system;
- promotion of parents' participation the educational process;
- overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity (including through information campaigns for non-discrimination based on race, ethnicity or religion);
- support for the provision of access to quality education in rural and remote areas.

Specific objectives corresponding to the investment priorities 9i and 9ii are:

- Increasing the number of educational institutions having ensured supportive environment for inclusive education;
- Increasing the number of successfully integrated through the educational system children and students from marginalized communities, including Roma.

The following common and programme specific result indicators are envisaged under Priority axis 3 "Educational environment for active social inclusion":

- Children aged between 3-6 who receive early prevention services which aim to prevent educational difficulties
- Kindergartens / united institutions for childcare, who have provided a supportive environment for early prevention of learning difficulties
- Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system
- Share of pedagogical specialists among those involved in actions under the Operational Programme qualified to work in multicultural environment
- Share of persons (including Roma), received certificates for successfully completed literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the Operational Programme.

The total amount envisaged for Priority axis 3 "Educational environment for active social inclusion" is 128 860 921 euro. The total EU financial support amounts to 109 531 782 euro (the proportion of total Union support for the operational programme is 18,38 %). The total amount and the total EU financial support envisaged for IP9i under priority axis 3 of OP SESG are 25 500 000 euro and 30 000 000 euro respectively. The total amount and the total EU financial support envisaged for IP9ii under priority axis 3 of OP SESG are 84 031 782 euro and 98 860 920 euro respectively.

Besides Operational Programme Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014-2020 (OP SESG) the Operational Programme Human Resource Development (HRD OP) also includes Roma among the main target groups.

In view of the fact that both the OP SESG and the OP HRD will be co-funded from the ESF, they have a number of intersections with special focus on Roma.

As far as public participation in various forms of lifelong learning is concerned, the guiding principle in the coordination between the two programmes will be that the OP HRD will only support training for economically inactive, unemployed and employed persons outside the formal education system, whereas the OP SESG will support public participation in various forms of lifelong learning as part of the formal education, i.e. forms that lead or contribute to obtaining a document of completion of an educational level or degree (certificates, diplomas).

As part of the formal education, adult literacy will be covered by the OP SESG, however, given that the majority of the target group, in particular from the Roma communities, are economically inactive and unemployed persons, integrated operations will be implemented between the OP HRD and the OP SESG in order to ensure the participation of the public employment services and other employment agencies.

Using mechanisms for coordinated implementation of operations, the OP HRD and the OP SESG will support the reform for deinstitutionalisation of childcare in Bulgaria. The OP HRD will offer financial assistance for community-based social services in lieu of institutional care, and the OP SESG will implement measures to ensure that, upon leaving the institution, children have access to quality education.

As part of the support for integration of the most marginalised communities, the OP HRD is planning to implement operations including both support to improve access to employment, social and health services, and measures for local community development and overcoming negative stereotypes. With the help of mechanisms for coordinated implementation of operations and, where applicable, integrated operations, the OP SESG will complement the initiatives of the OP HRD by improving the access to education for the target groups through measures for inclusion in the education system. Thus, the support for the most marginalised social groups will include provision of a comprehensive social package that will simultaneously address all problems hindering the integration of the target groups in Bulgarian society.

It is an indisputable fact that the existing problems of the Roma inclusion are particularly acute among marginalised communities and are especially worrying in the case of Roma children.

The planned actions for a successful educational integration<sup>2</sup> of children and students of Roma origin are linked to the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) and its Action Plan, developed in accordance with the recommendations of the EC from 2012, 2013 and 2014 to Bulgaria to increase the efforts to improve access to quality inclusive preschool and school education for disadvantaged children, particularly Roma. They include preparation of children at an early age (3-6) whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian for a successful future participation in the education process. It is particularly important to ensure equal access to quality education through elimination of primary and prevention of secondary ethnic segregation of kindergartens and schools and through improvements to the educational environment.

Measures will be taken to improve the educational environment and modern conditions will be created to develop the physical, intellectual and personal potential of each child aiming for a successful social integration and subsequent career development. Other related measures will focus on motivating families from ethnic minority groups to include their children in education and additional training in Bulgarian for people from ethnic minority groups, as well as teacher training for working in multicultural environments and provision of additional teaching support.

Special efforts will be targeted to overcome historically formed negative public attitudes towards the Roma ethnic group, by explaining the positive aspects of the joint/integrated education to the non-Roma children and their parents. The successful integration of children and students of Roma origin, in particular with regard to the clarification of the benefits of such integration, will continue to rely on the participation of non-governmental organisations, in their capacity as beneficiaries, working in the fields of social inclusion, human and civil rights and freedoms, non-discrimination etc.

Given the increasing number of children seeking or having been granted international protection, adequate measures should be taken for their inclusion and retention in schooling. The measures to be implemented for their successful educational integration include Bulgarian language training and additional training in subjects to fill the gaps in mastering the learning

---

<sup>2</sup> Successfully integrated are such representatives of the target group who attend general education schools and benefit from the whole complex of measures targeted to disadvantaged children, students and young people (incl. Roma)

material once the level of their knowledge for a particular grade has been established in accordance with the state educational requirements, including for those without certificates for a successfully completed grade or level of education. In the course of their integration in Bulgarian society the principle of preserving the cultural identity of children and students from different ethnic backgrounds should be observed, and effort should be made to prevent the possibility of emergence of, as well as to overcome, negative public attitudes towards people seeking or having been granted international protection (refugees).

Another objective is to raise the number of Roma people with higher education, because according to the NSI's data for 2011, despite a slight increase, the percentage of university graduates among the Roma population is negligible – just 0.5 % of their total number. There is clear correlation between ethnic origin and participation in the higher levels of education. The basis for attaining a higher education degree is either missing or insufficient. The result aimed at will be that more people from ethnic minority groups (including Roma), enter universities and successfully graduate.

In the programming period 2007-2013 some changes were introduced to reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries, such as electronic submission of applications for grant funding and electronic project reporting. In spite of those, the administrative burden has remained quite high. This is mostly due to the large number of documents requested from beneficiaries at the stages of application and contracting. In the new programming period 2014-2020 reducing the administrative burden should be taken up as a priority by the Managing Authority of OP SESG in order to avoid delays in procedures.

The main focus will be:

- Fast administrative services;
- Electronic service provision – electronic submission and electronic reporting;
- Optimising the process of evaluation of project proposals;
- Reducing the number of requested documents from beneficiaries;
- Providing beneficiaries with the opportunity to request clarifications electronically and ensuring quick and efficient feedback;
- Using simplified costs options;
- Ensuring the logistics of the management and implementation of the OP SESG;
- Strengthening and improving the administrative capacity of the staff of the management structures of the OP SESG, including implementation of analyses and capacity assessments;
- Improvement and technical maintenance of the facilities and equipment available to the management structures of the OP SESG;
- Ensuring the logistics for the work of the Monitoring Committee of the OP SESG and of its sub-committees and working groups;
- Provision of information and publicity of OP SESG, including actions from the Annual Action Plans implementing the National Communication Strategy 2014-2020, assessments, studies, analyses and the like;
- Ensuring the logistics of the preparation activities for the programming period 2021-2027;

The strengthening and reinforcing the administrative capacity of the Managing Authority and the beneficiaries of the Operational Programme is also very important. The actions will be aimed at upgrading the administrative capacity of the Managing Authority.

There is also a need to reinforce the capacity of the beneficiaries for project management and reporting under the Programme. The actions related to capacity building of the MA staff and the beneficiaries are key to ensuring the successful management and implementation of the OP. During the first programming period of the OP HRD 2007-2013 the administrative capacity of MES in its role as Intermediate Body was developed, however, there is a need for further training related to improving the processes and procedures for the management of the Operational Programme. Special attention will be paid to the adequate



staffing and provision of material and technical equipment for the processes and activities, which are new for the MES in its capacity as a Management Authority.

As main problems for the OP HRD 2007-2013 were identified: the frequent changes in the statutory environment, which required ongoing upgrading of knowledge of both the administration and the beneficiaries; the staff turnover in the administrative structures, involved in the management of the OP; the administrative burden, expressed in large document flow and insufficient use of the new IT when implementing the individual operations.

The main actions that will be supported will be related to improving the human resources capacity through training and other appropriate measures, increasing the motivation of the experts involved in the programme and project management, including through additional remuneration, and providing technical support for the management of the OP.

Conducting of independent evaluations of the OP will be provided, as well as development and maintaining of an internal system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its implementation.

The implementation of the awareness raising and publicity actions will ensure maximum transparency of the interventions and improve public awareness of the OP SESG and its achieved results. Thus will also be encouraged the participation of the beneficiaries and the target groups at a larger scale.

Another positive measure might be the possible adoption by the National Assembly of a special law for the management of EU funds which is now under discussion.

According the information by the Ministry of Education and Sciences the total amount of funds under OP SESG that could be used for Roma integration measures (targeted and mainstream) is expected to be 38 346 891 euro.

**In particular regarding the OP "Regions in growth" 2014-2020 detailed information is provided by Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works:**

In the 2014-2020 programming period OP "Regions in growth" provides support for infrastructure measures for the integration of marginalized groups, incl. Roma within the Priority Axis 1: "Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development" and Priority Axis 2 "Support for peripheral geographic areas most affected by poverty".

The proposed activities will directly contribute to achieving the specific objectives aimed at improving the living conditions of marginalized groups, including Roma. In addition, within these two integrated priority axes projects for municipal educational and social infrastructure will be implemented which would also benefit marginalized groups, incl. Roma.

The activities under Priority Axis 1 will be implemented on the basis of developed strategies for sustainable urban development (Integrated plans for urban regeneration and development - IPURDs), in accordance with Art. 7 of the ERDF Regulation 1301/2013. The approach to support under OPRG 2014-2020 suggests integration of measures specifically aimed at socially vulnerable groups within the general policy for integrated sustainable urban development in the city.

For measures aimed at providing social housing for vulnerable groups, incl. Roma, financed by OPRG 2014-2020, OP "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020 (OPHRD) will also provide additional funding by ESF through "soft" measures. OPHRD will support measures for active inclusion - social inclusion through social services, improving access to health care and health promotion, eliminating the institutional model of care for children, the elderly and people with disabilities, with a view to improving the quality of life of vulnerable groups.

Coordination, complementarity and integration between the different programs and projects will be implemented through a plan for the implementation of relevant IPURD and through coordinated implementation of grant schemes.

OPRG 2014-2020 provides targeted support for social vulnerable groups, incl. Roma within the Priority Axis 1: "Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development" and Priority 2 "Support for peripheral geographic areas most affected by poverty".

The support will be provided through the investment priority 9a "Investing in health and social infrastructure which contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services". The investments are focused on infrastructure projects in support of providing modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and socially disadvantaged groups and other disadvantaged groups.

In addition, target groups, among which can be identified the Roma, are included within the sectoral priority axes within the OPRG 2014-2020 – for investments in health, education and social infrastructure. The investments under Priority Axis 3 "Regional educational infrastructure", 4 "Regional health infrastructure" and 5 "Regional social infrastructure" will contribute to improve the population's access to health, social and educational services.

The Priority Axes 1 and 2 of the OPRG 2014-2020 provide support for investments in upgrading the educational infrastructure, including objects of pre-school and school education.

The activities for sustainable urban development under Priority Axis 1 are concentrated in certain urban areas (intervention zones), defined in relevant IPURDs of cities. Investments in educational infrastructure are important to the overall social impact zones, where it is often a concentration of Roma population. A fundamental principle in the selection of educational institutions where parents to enroll their children is the proximity to their homes. In this respect investment in educational infrastructure in social zones will facilitate the choice of parents to enroll their children in kindergartens and schools and will contribute to the overall improvement of housing and social conditions in the social impact zones.

Thus mixed educational institutions of local importance will be supported, which provide education for children living close to the institutions within social zones, including disadvantaged children and Roma children.

Thus the measures to improve the educational infrastructure under OPRG 2014-2020 will contribute to achieving the specific recommendation 4 of the Council aimed at stepping up efforts to improve access to quality inclusive pre-school and school education of disadvantaged children, in particular Roma. Improved buildings/ premises and equipment, together with the planned "soft" measures under other operational programmes will contribute to the overall implementation of local programs to work in a multicultural environment and programs for children and students with special educational needs and preventing early school leaving among which the largest share is of marginalized groups, incl. Roma.

In addition, in the support for the implementation of Specific recommendation 4 of the Council are the interventions envisaged under Priority Axis 3 "Regional educational infrastructure" – construction, reconstruction and repair of public schools of national and regional importance, which aims at achieving an inclusive education and training and preventing early school leaving.

To support the implementation of the investments under the OPRG 2014-2020 funds are provided under Priority Axis 8 "Technical assistance", some of which are aimed at improving the administrative capacity of the beneficiaries of the Operational programme. In this regard, from technical assistance can benefit beneficiaries of the programme, including municipal administrations for the projects for ensuring social housing for vulnerable groups, including Roma.

In addition, in the 2007-2013 programming period a pilot model for integrated interventions to support marginalized groups of society, including investments for social housing under OP "Regional Development" has been applied (scheme BG161PO001/1.2-02/2011 "Support for the provision of modern social housing for vulnerable and disadvantaged minority groups and other disadvantaged groups") and under OPHRD (procedure for direct award BG051PO001-1/4/5/6.0.01 "Integra" by measures to ensure better access to the labour

market, social and health services). This model has been reported as a good example of coordination and complementarity between the two programmes which is to be upgraded during the period 2014-2020, when experience shows that it is more appropriate that the "soft" measures under OPHRD start at an earlier stage - before interventions in infrastructure under OPRG are performed.

The information from the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works states that according to the OPRG 2014-2020, at least 5% (or 42 mln. euro – EU and national funding) of the total budget of Priority Axis 1 "Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development" will focus on the implementation of projects of group activities for social infrastructure.

In addition, within the Priority Axes 1 and 2 of the OPRG 2014-2020 are provided 26 mln. euro (EU and national funding) specifically for the provision of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and socially disadvantaged groups and other disadvantaged groups.

#### **(4) Reinforcing the role of the National Roma Contact Point**

Secretariat of NCCEII is the National Roma Contact Point of the Republic of Bulgaria on the NSRBIR. The Secretariat is a unit within the administration of the Council of Ministers.

With changes to the Rules of Organization and Operation of NCCEII was reinforced coordination function of the Secretariat of the administrative activities at national level in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the integration policy, including in carrying out the monitoring of the enforcement measures policy for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian society.

For the effective everyday operational coordination and cooperation with the NRCP responsible respective ministries designated contact persons at expert level to work more concentrated on these issues. The mechanism for inter-institutional coordination in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies on ethnic and integration issues was renewed. It should be emphasized that the key line ministries and authorities are responsible for updating the relevant thematic program operational documents for Roma integration, implementation of the planned measures, monitoring, evaluation and reporting to NCCEII.

Development in a positive direction for strengthening the role of the NRCP as a coordinating structure at national level is the growing number of working groups and consultative mechanisms in which the NRCP participate. An important step is the inclusion of NRCP among the structures worked for programming and implementation/application ESIF 2014-2020. Representatives of the unit take part in the working groups preparing the Partnership and operational programs for the 2014-2020 programming period. Through the coordination of the NRCP was nominated NGOs members of the NCCEII to take part in monitoring and steering bodies under programs and projects such as: Coordination Council for the National Plan for implementing the European Youth Guarantee, working group on Roma issues at the Ministry of Justice on project financed under EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014. Representatives of the NRCP are members of: MC of EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014, SC of Thematic Fund Agreements „Reform Fund linked to Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups” and Thematic Fund Agreement for the Reform Fund linked to the Inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups, concerning Home Care Services Activity under the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, The National Coordination Mechanism on Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc. At the international level: the Secretary of the NCCEII is the representative of Republic of Bulgaria in CAHROM, representatives of the NRCP participated in bilateral meetings with MS of the EU dedicated to so-called migration of poverty, in the meetings of the SC of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the representatives of the NRCP took part of NRCP Network at DG Justice as well as of FRA-Member States Working Party on Roma Integration, etc.

The Secretariat of the National Council for Co-operation on Ethnic and Integration Issues is a central coordination unit of the process and it has coordinated the overall process of

Regional planning since 2012. Guidelines for Regional Planning were developed by SNCCEII with the aim to assist the district governors and the administration governed by those to organise the development of the regional planning. (More details – item 1).

The Secretariat organized a series of workshops to enhance the capacity of regional and local authorities to improve the coordination between regional and municipal authorities in the preparation of regional strategies and local plans.

An active dialogue with the responsible institutions and Roma NGOs and organizations working in the field of Roma integration was organized by NRCP - seminars, round tables, discussions on the topic of implementation of the integration policy.

On the occasion of International Roma Day on April 8, 2014 a Round Table on rule of law and non-discrimination has organized by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues. The discussion was attended by Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on "Human rights and complaints of citizens", MPs, the President and Vice-President of the CPD, the President of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Director of the Center, representatives of NGOs. Many ambassadors followed the invitation and attended the roundtable. Were discussed achievements and challenges of continuing and intensifying the fight against racism and discrimination, the formation of the public understanding of the overall benefits of Roma inclusion, increasing public knowledge of the history, culture and traditions of the Roma.

In the period of 2010-2014 Eight Annual national meeting, under the project “Initiative for health and vaccination” were organized by the NRCP, Ministry of Health, Commission on Health issues of the National Assembly. The Initiative brings together the efforts of the governmental, non-governmental and private sectors for improving the collaboration between general practitioners, health mediators and the Regional Health Inspectorates (regional structures of the Ministry of Health) in order to decrease infant mortality, to take preventive activities aimed at preventing outbreaks of polio and other vaccine preventable diseases, to raise the health awareness among the society and to tackle the healthcare and education challenges among the hard to reach communities.

NRCP initiated a meeting (November 2014) to discuss an integrated model for the development of the Roma community as a part of project “Stopping the process of marginalization of the Roma in Kyustendil by creating a model for community development (2013 - 2016)”

The project aims to create a model to end the marginalization of Roma. This model will include strategies for dealing with growing social problems in the Roma community, the result of marginalization. Some of them are: dropping out of school, early marriage, the institutionalization of children, poverty, lack of access to quality health, education and social services. The aim of the project is changing the attitudes and prejudices in Bulgarian and Roma communities, as a factor in maintaining the processes of exclusion.

#### ***(5) Fighting discrimination effectively***

##### *In the area of Education*

The policy aimed at comprehensive, accessible and quality education addresses all children and students in Republic of Bulgaria.

For the purposes of improving children’s access to quality education, activities are underway to assist early child development and pre-school upbringing and preparation. According to Art. 20, paragraph 5 of the NEA: “For children, who do not have a good

command in Bulgarian, the preparation under paragraph 1 shall be supplemented by Bulgarian language training according to a specialised Bulgarian language mastering methodology“.

Implementation of the National Programme “With care for each school student“ provides support to children from preparatory groups who face difficulties and to whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian through small groups and individual programs.

In the Education Act / PDO / Art. 26, para. 3-6 states that children and students who are subject to compulsory training for school or compulsory education in the village, where no kindergarten or school engaged in the pre-school preparatory group or training in that class is provided free transportation to kindergarten or school in the nearest village in the municipality or a neighboring municipality.

Students under 16 years of age in the village, where no school is provided free transport and / or hostel in central school in the nearest village in the municipality or in an adjacent municipality, where this reduces travel time and / or the costs for this purpose.

Of pupils from I to VIII grade, who are trained in central schools / PDO, Article 26, para. 4 / providing day organization of the school day and canteens, funds to be determined in accordance with the financial rules.

Provision of textbooks and teaching aids free of charge is a measure that contributes to overcoming social burden for children from poor families and serves to promote school attendance. The terms and conditions for the provision of textbooks for free use are defined in Decree of the Council of Ministers № 104/2003 on Bulgaria

Means of transport costs to day organization of the school day and canteens are provided from the central budget and / or European funds and programs and operate on the basis of regulations approved by the Council of Ministers Decree on the implementation of the state budget.

In the Additional Provisions of PDO / § 6c. (1) § 6f. (1) / regulate the creation of central and protected schools. The list and criteria for fixing the central schools be adopted annually by the Council of Ministers and are determined by the Minister of Education and Science. In 2012/2013 school year in Bulgaria there are 793 central schools, during the 2014-2015 school year - 794.

Creation of protected schools is a measure by which garantira equal access to education for children and students from remote from major cities, border, mountainous and hilly settlements. For the period from 2012 through 2014, the number of protected schools in school years is as follows: In 2012 - 2013 school year in Bulgaria there are 127 protected schools, during the 2014-2015 school year - 137

Creating conditions for equality and adaptation of children and students of Roma origin in the educational environment is a priority for the Ministry of Education and Science, the regional education inspectorates and the Municipalities. For this purpose it is provide methodological support and control of the kindergartens and schools to prevent groups and classes divided by ethnic origin.

Overcoming the discriminatory practices and prejudices against Roma in pre-school and school education is a process that is realized through consistent and targeted efforts linked with

- activities in the kindergartens and schools aimed at building positive attitudes toward the educational integration of Roma children
- seminars and other forms of training of parents to overcome the negative stereotypes and building tolerant interrelations.
- specialised activity of the school psychologists and pedagogical advisors to facilitate mutual adaptation of the Roma and the other children and students to the new multicultural educational environment.

In 2013 and 2104 the Centre for educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities (CEICSEM) carries out a number of activities in these areas.

Measures have been taken to prevent dropping and early leaving of the education system. Prevention aims to prevent the emergence of prerequisites for the dropout and early school leaving, and limiting the conditions that favor them.

Policies and measures to prevent dropout and early school leaving are targeted in the period from education and childcare in early childhood to secondary level.

An amendment of the National Education Act effective as of the 2010/2011 academic year triggered a stage-by-stage introduction of the compulsory two-year pre-school preparation of children prior to first school class. According to Art. 20, paragraph 1 of the NEA (enforced as of 05.10.2010), “Pre-school preparation of children two years prior to their entering the first school class is compulsory, however, not earlier than the year when the child is 5-year-old“. Its introduction is aimed at an equal start of each child, by so contributing to an earlier socialisation and to a development of skills needed when entering the first school class. This measure is also a precaution given the reduction reported in the numbers of school students that are not covered by the school system or are leaving schools.

As of the 2010/2011 academic year, the gradual introduction of all-day academic scheduling was initiated. In the 2013/2014 academic year the children from the 1st to the 5th class inclusive being already encompassed. Under such arrangement, the compulsory academic hours are combined with some forms of self-paced training, activities according to interest and leisure time. With this measure in place, the Ministry of Education and Science intends to provide to all children: better adaptation to school life; diverse opportunities for development through their inclusion in various activities; individual approach to training. To support this process number of projects are being implemented: BG051PO001-3.1.06 “Enhancing the quality of education in the central schools by introducing all-day academic day scheduling, BG051PO001-4.2.05-0001 “School for self-fulfilment and preparation toward European horizons“ USPEH /“SUCCESS” etc.

Ministry of Education and Science implemented national programs, some of which are focused on prevention and reducing early school leaving, including children and pupils of Roma origin as: “With care for each school student“, “Optimisation of school network“, “School: territory of school students“, “No absences at school”.

Tackling school dropout and early leaving the educational system requires an integrated policy and commitment of all sectors and institutions related to education and personal and professional development of children and young people in Bulgaria

The overcoming of school dropping and early leaving the educational system requires an integrated policy and commitment of all sectors and institutions related to education and personal and professional development of children and young people in Bulgaria

In 2013, a Strategy for reduction of the share of early school leavers (2013 – 2020) was adopted. The policies and key measures to prevent premature school leaving, as laid down in the Strategy address the prevention and intervention against premature school leaving and include the provision of access to education and improving the quality of education for the children and students of vulnerable ethnic communities.

MES implements a project “A New Chance of Success“ financed under the OPHDR 2007-2013 aimed to liquidation of illiteracy among adults – training of illiterate and barely literate persons aged over 16 years. A main target of the project is through liquidation of illiteracy and forming key competences to facilitate the further access of illiterate and barely literate people to general education and vocational training standards leading further to their more competitive participation on the labour market.

#### *In the area of employment*

In its activities the Employment Agency employees does not allow discrimination, observing the Employment Promotion Act. According to Art. 2 Upon realization of the rights and discharge of the duties under this Act, no direct or indirect discrimination and privileges or restrictions shall be admissible on the basis of nationality, origin, gender, sexual orientation, race, skin colour, age, political and religious convictions, affiliation to trade-union and other public organizations and movements, marital, social and property status, and mental and physical disabilities.

Employees of Labour Office Directorates (LOD) have participated in the training of non-discrimination, organized jointly with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination.

Roma people are encouraged and have an equal start for participation in social, economic, political and cultural life in the community. In the structures of the Employment Agency work 12 staff and more than 60 persons of Roma as mediators in programs and employment projects.

In 2008, the Employment Agency started implementation of the program "Activation of inactive persons", first piloted in 44 LOD, and later in all labor offices.

The prerequisites for implementation of the program are the large number of inactive persons in the labor market, according to the Labour Force Survey of the National Statistics Institute.

The main objective of the program is to activate and to include in the labor market of inactive and discouraged persons by motivating them to register as jobseeker, and to use the mediation services provided by LOD for employment or enrollment in training.

Inactive are those who are not employed and not registered in the LOD and discouraged workers are those who want to work and are available for work but not seeking work. Roma are part of this group.

In this group fall mostly members of the Roma community who have no or low education and skills. They are not active in the labor market because they have low or no employability and consider that they can be realized.

In accordance with the regulations of the program "Activating of inactives" the activities of the mediators is to provide intermediary services in LOD and to work among the Roma community. Specific activity of mediators in the community consists in organizing and conducting information campaigns "Come and register in LOD", conducting individual and group meetings with inactive persons on the spot as well as meetings with representatives of NGOs, social partners and employers.

To upgrade their skills in working with inactive and local administrations in 2011 and 2012 Roma mediators are involved in the training program ROMED. At the end of 2013 and in 2014 the same training program ROMED were held in the six planning regions for other economic Roma mediators organized by the Association "Different and Equal" under the project "Vulnerable empowered."

For the period of implementation of the program the number of Roma mediators changes as to 31.12.2014 in 52 LOD work 57 mediators, in five of LODs they have two mediators. Of all mediators 38 are women and 15 are university graduates.

As a result of the implementation of the program at the end of 2014, in the labor offices are registered 10,923 inactive and discouraged people. Of them, 5,423 are women, 2,104 are young people under 29 years of age and 5883 are persons with less than primary education.

Of the total number of registered persons 2500 were realized - in training included 333 persons and 264 persons in employment.

#### *In the area of Health*

The policy of the Ministry of Health is aimed at creating better conditions and providing equal access to health services for all Bulgarian citizens, irrespective of their gender, age, ethnic or social group. It pays special attention to the improvement of health services for disadvantaged groups.

The Ministry of Health allots funds on an annual basis for the carrying out of prophylactic examinations and tests in settlements and settlement areas inhabited by socially uninsured persons of Roma origin and of those with difficult access to healthcare establishments, using the mobile surgeries received under the PHARE 23 programme, which comprise: 5 surgeries for general prophylactic examinations, 2 fluorographs, 2 mamographs, 3 surgeries for echographic examinations, 3 mobile laboratories, 4 surgeries for pediatric examinations and 4 surgeries for gynecological examinations.

The examinations in the designated regions are preceded or accompanied by lectures, talks and campaigns. The topics discussed are from the areas of contraception, sexually transmitted infections, breast cancer, cervical cancer, healthy eating, immunizations, patient's rights, socially significant diseases, environment and health, osteoporosis and smoking. Enhancing health knowledge is largely achieved with the aid of information materials: leaflets, information sheets, etc., which explain the respective health problems in an accessible form.

The Ministry of Health works actively towards improving the health of the persons belonging to the ethnical minorities, the Roma in particular, and improving their access to medical services.

*Activities and measures of the Ministry of Interior taken to fight discrimination:*

- Meetings are held with officials from the departments "Social activities and minority integration" with the local administrations and directorates for social assistance, during which are discussed possible issues and questions within the competencies of the police, in order to solve them timely, as well as with regard to crime prevention.
- Specific police actions with operative methods are performed in order to exercise control and prevent criminalization of the environment in the Roma communities that are part of the serviced areas
- Talks and discussions are organized in schools and kindergartens attended by Roma children. Lectures are delivered to Roma persons to inform them about their rights and obligations as citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria
- On a team principle, police officers servicing areas with compact Roma population report monthly on moods/attitudes and issues in these communities, as part of the MoI proactive model for police work in multiethnic environments
- Open surveillance is placed on persons of Roma ethnicity who have committed offences, discussions are held with them to encourage them to start work thus provide the necessary means for a normal living
- Preventive discussions of police officers with persons of Roma ethnicity who have effectively served a sentence of imprisonment, or who have been imposed with probation measures, in order to help them integrate in society
- Together with the departments "Child protection" are organized discussions to raise awareness among the Roma population on issues related to early marriages
- Working road maps are prepared on issues related to Roma population (assistance for victims of domestic violence; measures for countering antisocial behavior and drug abuse and distribution among juniors and minors, measures against hooliganism, alcohol abuse)
- Variously-focused specialized police operations are performed in small towns/settlements; task assignments to officers from the National program "Security"; active cooperation with private security companies guarding farmlands, enterprises and warehouses
- With regard to minority groups, regular checks are jointly performed with officials from municipalities and directorates for social assistance in areas with compact Roma or other minority population, related to address registrations, illegally residing persons, illegal buildings/structures, living conditions in which juveniles and minors are raised.

**(6) Monitoring transformation and enabling policy adjustment**

Progress on the implementation of planned activities on the priorities of the action plan of the NRIS is reported in an administrative monitoring report. The report is prepared on the basis of information submitted by the responsible ministries, regional and municipal authorities and NGOs and includes information from national statistics offices. The



information at the municipal, regional and national level is collected by experts in the field. The Secretariat of the NCCEII coordinate and summarize the provided information in the report.

The report goes through several levels of discussion and approval:

- Is discussed within the Commission for the implementation of NSRBIR at NCCEII and agencies involved in the implementation of the Action Plan,
- Is approved by NCCEII, which is a consultative and coordinating body to assist the Government in developing and implementing the state policy on ethnic and integration issues.
- Is adopted by the Council of Ministers,
- Is submitted to the National Assembly.

Under the OPHRD will be financed a scheme Development and implementation of a System for monitoring, evaluation and control of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012-2020.

The Monitoring system will include information at municipal, regional and national level in a unified information platform. Monitoring and control system will perform accumulation data fusion, data processing, which will improve the process of tracking and analysing results and contribute to more effective evaluation of the implementation of integration policy.

Secretariat of NCCEII - NRCP through the administration of the Council of Ministers is a beneficiary under OPHRD of building of the sisystem.

Criteria for selection of operation “Developing and implementing a system for monitoring, evaluation and control on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2020 were approved by the Monitoring committee of OP HRD 2014-2020 at its first meeting in December last year. The main activities of this operation will be: to analyse and review of the legislation, of the existing similar systems and information systems, to identificate the good European practices; to develop a concept and methodology of the monitoring, evaluation and control; construction of the system for monitoring, control and evaluation; training to work with it; networking platform of all relevant stakeholders that need to submit information to the system.

**An example ilustarting current monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the measures under Health priority of the NRIS** is provided bu the Ministry of Health

The Regional Health Inspectorates (RHIs), functioning as secondary authorizing officers for the Minister of Health, submit to the Ministry of Health quarterly summary information regarding the implementation of the Action Plan under the NRIS.

In the written summary information on the reports of activities implemented under the programme, RHI states the exact number of activities, the number of people included, the topics discussed and the sites. The target groups that participated in the events are determined as to age, gender and population groups, including children up to 18 years of age, working age people, men, women, pregnant women and mothers with children.

Every year, by order of the Minister of Health, RHIs are assigned the performance of activities with the 23 mobile units intended for the performance of activities under the Health Priority of the Action Plan at NRIS and for the holding of explanatory campaigns on the importance of prophylactic examinations among people without health insurance of Roma origin and of those with difficult access to healthcare establishments.

In accordance with the order of the Minster of Health, RHIs hold a healthcare establishment selection procedure. After considering the offers submitted by healthcare establishments, RHI signs a contract with the selected establishment for the performance of at least 500 prophylactic examinations, tests and immunizations in the areas with highly concentrated Roma population.

The prophylactic examinations, tests and immunizations are performed after preliminary approval, cooperation and organizational assistance by RHI and the local health mediators of the Roma neighbourhoods.

RHIs submit the summary information regarding the completed prophylactic examinations, tests and immunizations to the Ministry of Health in accordance with the deadline specified in the order of the Minister of Health.

The prophylactic examinations, tests and immunizations are provisioned with funds of the Ministry of Health released from the state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for the purpose of implementing the activities from the Action Plan for the period 2011-2015 to the Health Strategy.

## **(7) Main challenges and successes**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) implemented in 2013 project “Drawing up complex measures for integration of the most marginalised communities among the ethnic minorities with a focus on the Roma“ under the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”. As a result: 10 trainings were carried out of a total of 600 municipal employees from 180 Municipalities addressing capacity improvement in development and implementation of local action plans for integration of the most marginalised communities among the ethnic minorities with a focus on the Roma people and for presenting the results of the project.

All activities under the project were promoted and discussed with more than 600 representatives of Ministries and Agencies, locally based State institutions, Municipalities, Provincial Governments, social partners, non-governmental organisations and media at a total of 12 public events at national and local level: 7 workshops, 2 seminars and a final conference and 2 press-conferences.

Awareness was raised on the issues of vulnerable minority groups integration with a focus on the Roma people of more than 1200 people across the country attracted as participants in the public events having been carried out under the project.

In implementation of the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities 2005-2015 and with a view to improving the access of the Roma population to medical services, every year on-spot prophylactic examinations and tests are performed in settlements and settlement districts inhabited by Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin without health insurance using the 23 mobile surgeries provided within the projects under the PHARE programme for the period 2003-2006.

For the period 2011-2014 a total of 3,789 immunizations of children with incomplete immunization status and 42,235 examinations and tests of disadvantaged people belonging to ethnic minorities were performed with the mobile surgeries.

All children and persons with diagnosed diseases or established deviations in the laboratory test results were referred to the respective specialists for following treatment.

The examinations in the target areas are preceded or accompanied by lectures, talks and on-spot conversations at which patients are handed out the specially developed information materials presented by the specialists from the Regional Health Inspectorates. The topics discussed and the materials developed are from the areas of contraception, sexually transmitted infections, breast cancer, cervical cancer, healthy eating, immunizations, patient’s rights, socially significant diseases, environment and health, osteoporosis and smoking. Enhancing health knowledge is largely achieved with the aid of information materials: leaflets and information sheets, which explain the respective health problems in an accessible form.

The filed activities performed with the mobile surgeries are a suitable form for screening examinations of high-risk patients.

In order to reduce child mortality and improve health assistance for newborns and preschoolers, there are talks and lectures with adolescents, youths and their parents on the ways

of unwanted or early pregnancy prevention, the dangers for the mother and baby posed by early pregnancy, marriages between kins and early marriages.

For 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> year students and youths dropped out of school there are talks, lectures and film showings on the specifics of puberty and sexually transmitted diseases. Talks and conversations are held with young mothers on the importance of immunizations in order to motivate them to apply them regularly in accordance with the National Immunization Calendar with the handing-out of immunization calendars. In addition, video and audio clips on the importance of immunizations are presented.

To improve the prophylactic activities among the Roma population there are explanatory campaigns on the necessity of vaccinating them with the compulsory immunizations as per the National Immunization Calendar. Via the electronic media information is also provided on the activities of the immunization surgeries in RHI.

Campaigns and talks are organized to introduce people to the ways of preventing the most common infectious and non-communicable diseases (with a focus on cardio-vascular diseases). Periodic talks are delivered by health specialists and mediators on the damage to health caused by the most common risk factors: smoking, alcohol abuse, drug use, hypertonia and the advantages of healthy living. An increased number of health programmes are shown on local radio stations and TV channels with main focus on prophylactics addressing the issues of health insurance. Video and audio clips on health topics addressed to the Roma population with a focus on illiterate groups are developed and broadcast.

Health education materials on specific health problems are handed out at information events in the places with predominant Roma population.

The Roma population is receiving information about their health-insurance rights and obligations and their patient rights.

The National Roma Integration Action Plan for the period 2015-2020 as well as the municipal action plans is forthcoming to be finalized this year. NRCP has a coordinating role in this process. Therefore one of the main areas in which the NRCP will focus efforts is to improve coordination between the institutions of a national, regional and local level, as well as NGOs. This is a prerequisite for better planning and implementation of the measures in the strategy and more effective and efficient use of the opportunities of the ESIF.

The main challenge facing the NRCP associated with short deadlines for the development and implementation of the System for Monitoring, Evaluation and Control of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012-2020.