



DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005 - 2015
MONTENEGRO PRESIDENCY WORK PLAN
June 2013 – June 2014

Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015

The idea of the Decade emerged from "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future," a high-level regional conference on Roma held in Budapest, Hungary, in 2003. Following this event, Prime Ministers of the nine participating governments signed the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Sofia, Bulgaria, on February 2, 2005.

Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovakia are the nine founding members of the Decade, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain joined the initiative in 2008. Slovenia and USA participate in the Decade as an observer.

Roma participation in the Decade is its core value and principle by which the Decade is acknowledged and respected. It is the most developed platform for dialogue among Roma and governments.

Several international partners are part of the initiative, too: the World Bank, the Open Society Foundations, the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Network Against Racism, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Travellers Forum, the European Roma Rights Centre, and the Roma Education Fund.

The Decade is an open process; other countries as well as international organizations are welcome to join the initiative. Full Roma participation is the core value of the Decade.

To accelerate social inclusion and improve the economic status of Roma within states, each participating country prepared a Decade National Action Plan including a limited number of measurable national goals for improvements in common priority areas - education, employment, health, and housing - and three cross-cutting themes - poverty, discrimination, and gender.

The Decade has launched a process towards making a difference, but it has not yet had the impact that Roma in Europe need – tangible and real integration into mainstream societies. The challenge over the coming years is to design more systematic solutions and to look at positive examples across Decade countries and the EU as a whole. Good examples of systematic policy approaches exist in most countries; the Decade is being used as an effective forum for exchanging this experience, in order to maximize the effect of any governmental measure regarding Roma inclusion.

As a central pillar of the Decade initiative, to expand educational opportunities for Roma communities in Central and the South – East Europe, an international Roma Education Fund was established in 2005. The goal of the Roma Education Fund is to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma, through policies and programs including desegregation of educational systems.

Decade Trust Fund (DTF) is financed out of contributions from all Decade countries as well as interested international partner organizations and administered by the World Bank. The DTF is a flexible tool to finance joint activities of the Decade countries like cross-country technical support, trainings and workshops in the context of refining and implementing the Decade National Action Plans and monitor Decade implementation across the Decade countries.

MONTENEGRIN PRESIDENCY OF THE DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005-2015

Introduction

Montenegro takes over the Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 on 1st July 2013 from Republic of Croatia, and hands it over to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 30th June 2014. In the course of the Presidency Montenegro has the responsibility to: develop, propose and implement the Work Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 consisting of meetings of the Decade partners on relevant priority area that the presidency convenes, organizes, leads, and chairs;; represent the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 on international level and ensure visibility of the Decade; ensure regular flow of information and exchange; ensure effective participation and cooperation of and among Decade partners and other relevant actors; and encourage and administer active membership and potential enlargement of the Decade initiative.

The Work Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 for the period of Montenegro's Presidency is proposed at the 24th International Steering Committee meeting by the Government of Montenegro. It is discussed and adopted during the International Steering Committee meeting. The Work Plan takes into consideration actual developments and issues relevant for the Roma communities and the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 both on international and national level, as well as the previous developments within the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 since the beginning of the initiative, thus ensuring relevance and continuity.

The Work Plan of the Montenegrin Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 will be implemented in close cooperation with the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation.

Objectives

The underlying idea of the Montenegrin Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 is to address primarily the cross-cutting topics: antidiscrimination/human rights, gender equality and poverty reduction. The reason for embracing this idea is the result of the assessment of the opinions about the future of the Decade after 2015, which revealed that these topics have been only scarcely tackled. At the same time Montenegrin Presidency is committed to take innovative approach to addressing these topics with a view to encourage more substantial efforts of the Decade partners to tackle the issues Roma are facing in relation to these topics.

Antidiscrimination and human rights issues are in the focus of the Montenegrin Presidency plan. From the field of human rights the issues related to the legal status of Roma are going to be addressed through a conference aiming at establishing common standards for national policies and cross-border cooperation. The priority on antidiscrimination seeks to build capacities among relevant authorities to deal with discrimination against Roma by deepening their understanding of the issue. Thus, legal status and antidiscrimination are the two core priorities of the Montenegrin Presidency work plan.

In regards to gender equality, Montenegrin Presidency plans to tackle the most aggravating phenomenon that represents both a root and a cause to the inequality of Romani women – domestic violence and violence against women. Having in mind that this issue has not been tackled within the Decade as an individual issue, Montenegrin presidency seeks to bring together representatives of governments and civil society working on this issue to present their practices at a fair of practices that is going to be organized alongside the conference on antidiscrimination.

Poverty reduction relates to all the socio-economic priority areas the Decade substantially deals with: education, employment, health and housing. Therefore Montenegrin Presidency is going to look at the poverty reduction from a slightly different angle – the economic empowerment of Roma. The objective of the Montenegrin government is to collect ideas for governmental support to the economic empowerment of Roma.

Montenegrin presidency will also continue the work on two relevant topics that the Croatian presidency has started: Roma youth participation and Decade future after 2015. On youth participation Montenegrin presidency will host an event supported by international Decade partners, while the work on the Decade future after 2015 will continue depending on the commitments made at the 24th International Steering Committee meeting.

Activities

1. **Legal status** - establish common standards, principles and directions for national policies and international cooperation in dealing with issues related to the legal status of Roma.

Significant number of Roma does not enjoy full citizenship and a number of rights related to this status. This is a result both from political and economic turmoil that forced Roma to move to other countries as migrants or asylum seekers, or without migration made them either stateless or people without full citizenship. Actions to return Roma to their country of origin by readmission, repatriation and deportation and efforts to integrate or re-integrate Roma (either in the host or country of origin) require significant and complex efforts, as well as close cross-border cooperation. However, effective measures to resolve status issues and integrate Roma that have found themselves in the described situations have not been identified yet. The problem is multiplying with each new generation of Roma, thus the solution is increasingly more difficult as time is passing. And, this is relevant to all Decade countries, as well as other European countries, being those countries of origin, recipient countries or countries of residence of stateless Roma.

To address this issue, Montenegrin presidency will organize a conference bringing together relevant government authorities from the Decade countries, as well as from other relevant countries as far as possible, as well as civil society and international organizations representatives. Rather than repeating the discussions on the efforts taken to address the issue, which have taken place during the Macedonian presidency most recently, participants will discuss basic standards that need to be established and adhered in order to effectively address the issue. Cross-border cooperation, including with Kosovo,¹ is going to be one of the main topics of discussion also, since Montenegro and other Decade and non-Decade countries inevitably need to cooperate in order to resolve the legal status issues of Roma. The objective of the conference is to produce a document elaborating the standards for national policy and international cooperation on the issue. Montenegrin presidency will cooperate closely with the UNHCR in order to achieve its objective under this priority. It is envisioned that the conference will take place in November 2013.

2. **Antidiscrimination** – build capacities among relevant authorities to deal with discrimination against Roma by deepening their understanding of the issue.

Prejudices and stereotypes against Roma are deeply rooted, widespread and tolerated by the majority. These often result in discriminatory acts against Roma, including by state officials and public servants. On the other hand Roma don't have enough confidence and information to challenge such practices. Moreover, official policies are sometimes designed in such a manner that they produce further inequalities between Roma and the rest of the society. On

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

the other hand significant developments in the area of antidiscrimination in general have been made recently throughout Europe, including non-EU countries, following the EU equality directives, but studies on discrimination against Roma show that the issue persists. European Court of Human Rights' decisions in this area also have not resulted in substantial changes in the state systems. While the Decade has envisaged antidiscrimination as a cross-cutting theme, the assessment on the future of the Decade reveals that it has been neglected by the Decade partners. Therefore it is necessary to address the discrimination of Roma in a more substantive way.

Montenegrin Presidency has envisaged a conference to address antidiscrimination in January 2014. The main objective of the conference is to equip relevant officials from the governments dealing with antidiscrimination with better understanding of the discrimination against Roma. Representatives of European Roma Rights Centre, Equinet (European Union network of equality bodies), Fundamental Rights Agency, Council of Europe (Venice commission, ECRI, ECHR, etc.), as well as Amnesty International and other organizations will be invited to present at the conference, with a view to include practical, interactive and training style presentations.

3. **Economic empowerment** – catalog of ideas for government support to economic empowerment of Roma.

This topic deals with the ability of Roma to plan and implement domestic budget, to device economic strategies (including for seeking employment, instigating economic activities and reducing outstanding debts.), to gain economic habits (in efficient spending, using credit cards, taking mortgages, etc.), to predict and prevent economic risks (lending money from usurers, mortgages, etc.), to increase economic services eligibility, to know how to succeed in private business, etc.

Besides relevant governmental, international organizations and civil society representatives, the conference on economic empowerment of Roma envisages participation of financial institutions. The World Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank as Decade partners and other intergovernmental and private financial institutions are going to present strategies for economic empowerment and ideas for governmental support. The conference is envisaged for May 2014.

4. **Domestic violence and violence against women** – inform Decade partners on good practices in dealing with domestic violence and violence against women.

The marginalized position of Romani women is a result of a number of phenomena, including multidimensional discrimination and violence. Violence itself is extremely serious issue, since it stands as a root and a cause of discrimination. The issue of domestic violence within the Romani community and violence against women in particular is fairly unexplored area and to certain degree a taboo topic.

Montenegrin Presidency is committed to at least initiate debate on this topic. Alongside the antidiscrimination conference, it will invite practitioners in the area of domestic violence and violence against women working both with Roma and non-Roma to present practices and situation at a 'fair of practices'. In this way, participants at the antidiscrimination conference will have a chance to get informed and discuss in a semi-formal setting, which will provide for more specific and deeper understanding of those particular practices and situations relevant to their field of work.

5. **Youth participation** – The Croatian Presidency of the Decade placed an important emphasis on Roma Youth, introducing it among its priorities. Given the significance of the topic the Montenegrin Government is committed to retain Roma Youth as a priority. Following the international conference on Roma Youth Participation and Activism organized under the

Croatian Presidency, which served as a basis for networking between Roma and non-Roma youth organizations, and provided recommendations for models of participation, the efforts to enforce Roma Youth participation will continue.

The follow-up of this conference includes advocacy work (especially developing local level initiatives) by Roma organizations and National Youth Councils for improved representation of young Roma and Roma youth issues in National Roma Integration Strategies and Decade Action Plans. The main results of these initiatives will be presented at an event organized in March 2014 in Podgorica bringing young Roma and non-Roma from Decade Participating Countries to share their experiences on local, national and international youth activism and participation.

6. Decade future after 2015 – continue the discussion among Decade partners.

Croatian Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 initiated a process of planning the future of the Decade after 2015. By now, a consultation process is completed and a policy options paper is produced. The policy options paper is envisaged for discussion by relevant authorities at the 24th International Steering Committee meeting. It is also envisaged that the discussion will result in a commitment by the Decade partners. At the same time, it is expected that such general commitment would need further consensus building efforts to define the details for the future of the Decade after 2015. Montenegrin presidency will put efforts to continue the discussion in line with the commitment made at the 24th International Steering Committee meeting. The actual activities will be planned accordingly.

Montenegrin Decade Presidency Work Plan Overview

Activity title	Format	Time
23 rd International Steering Committee Meeting / Decade after 2015	Meeting	September 2012
Legal Status of Roma	International Conference	November 2012
Antidiscrimination / Domestic violence and violence against women	International Conference / Fair of practices	January 2014
Youth participation and activism (possibly cultural and linguistic identity)	International Conference	March 2014
Economic empowerment	International Conference	May 2014
26th International Steering Committee Meeting	Meeting	June 2014