

# **Second Meeting of the Roma Decade Steering Committee: Minutes and Summary**

**April 1-2, 2004**  
**Budapest, Hungary**

## **I. Introduction and Background**

The second meeting of the Roma Decade Steering Committee was held in Budapest from April 1-2, 2004. The objective of the meeting was to advance the preparations of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015. The meeting was hosted by the Ministry for Equal Opportunities of the Government of Hungary, and was opened by Mr. Róbert Kiss, President of the Government Office for Equal Opportunities and Mr. László Teleki, State Secretary for Roma Affairs. Representatives of eight governments attended, along with Roma civil society leaders and representatives of partner organizations, including the European Commission, UNDP, World Bank, Open Society Institute, Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, OSCE, and ERIO. A full list of participants is included as [Annex 1](#).<sup>1</sup>

The meeting focused on two main themes: (i) discussion of the draft Decade Action Plans prepared by the countries; and (ii) Roma participation in the preparation of the Decade. Additional sessions focused on important issues to the Decade including the role and involvement of the European Commission; data for monitoring the Decade; financing; and communications. The ISC was updated on progress on the Roma Education Fund. A summary is provided as [Annex 2](#).

There was a converging consensus at the meeting on the definition of the Decade as a political commitment by governments to close the gaps in development outcomes for Roma and to monitor this in a transparent and quantifiable way. The regional aspect of the Decade, and in particular the International Steering Committee meetings, provide a forum through which countries can learn from each other and gain momentum from working jointly.

## **II. Country Decade Action Plans**

During 2004, the preparatory year for the Decade, each country is developing a Decade Action Plan (DAP) including the goals, targets and indicators that will be monitored during the Decade. These DAPs build on existing government strategies for Roma, extract priority measures, and define specific indicators to be monitored. The DAPs should be finalized by October 2004 so that they can be compiled into a consolidated report for the launch of the Decade in January 2005.

Each country presented its draft Decade Action Plan (DAP) at the meeting, including the goals, targets and indicators proposed for each of the four Decade priority areas: (i) education; (ii) employment; (iii) health; and (iv) housing. Overall progress across countries was impressive, although some country plans were more fully developed than others. There was remarkable consensus across countries on some of the goals. For

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<sup>1</sup> The participating countries are: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, FYR Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the Slovak Republic. It was restated at the meeting that the Decade is open to any other countries interested in participating.

example, nearly all of the countries identified completion of compulsory education as a goal. The common goals mean that there will likely be (cross-country objectives, common to all countries, for the Decade, as well as individual, country-specific goals.

**Sectoral Workshops.** To provide countries with an opportunity to discuss the technical issues surrounding the policy areas of the Decade, the Open Society Institute and World Bank will coordinate sectoral workshops on each of the policy areas. These workshops will involve government officials from the relevant sectoral line ministries, Roma leaders and other experts. The workshop on education held in Budapest on February 26-27, 2004 was the first of the four meetings to assist countries in identifying and developing goals for each of these areas.

The second meeting, on employment, is planned for May 26-27, 2004 in Budapest. National Coordinators will receive an invitation letter asking them to nominate country representatives with relevant expertise in labor market policies. A workshop on health is currently being planned for later in the year, as is a workshop on housing. The World Bank and OSI welcomed the interest of the Council of Europe and Council of Europe Development Bank in possibly being involved in planning and supporting the housing workshop.

**Next Steps.** Countries will continue to refine the Decade Action Plans in preparation for the next Steering Committee meeting scheduled for June 23-24, 2004. The upcoming sectoral workshop on employment, which will take place before the next meeting, will contribute to further developing the goals in that area. Countries should keep the following general points in mind when working on the DAPs:

- **Clearly distinguish between goals, targets and indicators.** Goals are broad objectives linked to outcomes. For example, in the case of education a goal would be to “improve Roma educational achievement.” *Targets* are specific measures which contribute to reaching the objectives. For education, possible targets would be: “all Roma boys and girls complete compulsory education in mainstream schools.” *Indicators* are the quantitative measures which can track progress, such as primary school enrollment rates.

Where possible, the next versions of the DAPs should include specific numbers for the indicators, to allow for monitoring of progress. For example, “increasing Roma completion rates in primary education from X% to Y%.”

- **Keep it simple.** While the issues facing Roma are complex, the DAPs should be as clear and simple as possible, to provide challenging, but realistic goals for the Decade. Countries are encouraged to be selective and choose a small number of priority goals for each of the priority areas (2-3), with manageable and quantifiable targets. For example, while it would be desirable to aim for unemployment rates of 100 percent, such a target is not realistic for any country.
- **Focus on relative measures.** DAPs should focus on achieving progress on relative measures that would close gaps in outcomes between Roma and non-Roma – rather than on absolute measures. Relative measures assess the status of Roma in relation to the non-Roma population. For example, in countries with

large disparities between Roma and non-Roma in employment, a goal could be to raise Roma employment rates to equal that of non-Roma.

- **Include cross-cutting themes in the DAPs.** All of the plans presented covered the four priority areas of the Decade: education, employment, health, and housing. However, not all maintained focus on the three cross-cutting themes which were adopted by the Steering Committee in December: poverty, gender, and discrimination. These themes should be worked into the plans in the selection of indicators. For example, by monitoring school enrollment rates for boys and girls. These themes will need special consideration in the identification of data for monitoring the Decade.

### **III. Roma Participation**

Each country presented its plan for involving Roma in the Decade preparations and each Roma represented presented their plans for broadening Roma involvement in the Decade to a broader coalition. Governments are taking differing approaches, in some cases involving existing consultative bodies, while in others Roma representatives have been invited to join new working groups set up for the Decade. The Roma leaders in each country have organized, or are organizing two day conferences involving a wide range of Roma NGOs and groups to inform them and involve them in the Decade.

The presentations demonstrated efforts on behalf of both Roma and governments to broaden participation in the Decade process. However, a number of tensions remained and it was noted that the issues of Roma participation is one which should be monitored closely throughout the Decade. The discussion highlighted common concerns and challenges:

- **Representativeness.** Both Roma and government officials expressed concern that the young Roma leaders who have been involved in the Decade since the July conference are not necessarily representative of the diverse communities of Roma in each country. As a result, there is a need for Roma civil society and government to reach out to a broader range of Roma. Roma participants in each country described their efforts to build broad coalitions of Roma groups involved in the Decade, in most cases this is being done through two day meetings on the Decade. Roma representatives in some of the countries have formed networks, NGOs and other partnerships to advance their work. Participants made a number of proposals on the involvement of the young Roma leaders, including incorporating them into existing government bodies and legitimizing their involvement. This will be an issue for on going discussion in each country.
- **Government – Civil Society Relations.** Many participants highlighted tensions between government and civil society (NGOs). In some cases these tensions are natural, as many of the government officials involved have worked in NGOs for many years, and vice-versa. These relations can provide constructive tension if communications channels are open and transparent. Governments can benefit from having independent Roma representatives outside of the government to raise issues and provide feedback. On the other hand, Roma activists can benefit from constructive and open relations with governments.

- **Information and Communication.** Lack of information was mentioned as a constraint to productive working relationships. Government officials noted that Roma asked for increased involvement, but the governments lacked information on what Roma NGOs could do for them. On the other hand, Roma noted that they had limited information about government activities. The Decade Country Working Groups should make increased information flows and transparency of decision-making a priority.

#### **IV. European Union Involvement in the Decade**

Participants from the European Commission discussed the EC's involvement in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, particularly as it relates to the Social Inclusion Programme for all member states. The issues raised in the Decade are relevant across Europe, beyond the 9 countries participating in the Decade. The Commission would welcome the involvement of other current and future member states in the Decade.

The EU's involvement in Roma issues focuses in three areas: (i) the legal framework, including protection against discrimination; (ii) financial support; and (iii) a forum for policy coordination and cooperation.

- **Legal Framework:** The EU provides support for protection of fundamental legal rights and has focused attention on this issue during the accession process through work on anti-discrimination legislation. Roma stand to be amongst the main beneficiaries of EU legislation banning discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in employment, education, social security, health care, housing and access to goods and services. However, it was noted that anti-discrimination legislation has to be backed up by other measures (including training, awareness-raising and capacity-building)
- **Financing.** The EC representative emphasized that the EU will provide no new funding for the Decade. However, countries may be able to use the existing financing instruments provided by the EU to meet their Decade goals. The new member states will have access to structural funds, Romania and Bulgaria will have on-going access to pre-accession funds (PHARE), and the Stabilization countries in Southeast Europe will have the CARDS program. The use of EU funding instruments is based on agreed priorities with the national governments. Also, most of the EU funding instruments require national co-funding. Therefore, the take-up of EU funding instruments depends on the commitment of national governments to use them for Roma issues.
- **Policy Coordination.** The EU's coordinated approach to employment and social inclusion policies involves Member States working towards agreed goals and objectives. These include policies to promote the inclusion and participation of the Roma and other ethnic minorities. The European Commission will be monitoring the progress made by both current and new Member States.
- **Social Inclusion Programme.** The links between the EU's Social Inclusion Programme and the Decade were discussed. All member states participate in the Social Inclusion Programme through the preparation of National Action Plans (NAPs). The accession countries prepare Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIMs),

which are a first step toward the NAPs. Because of the complementary objectives and focus on long-term monitoring it will be important for countries to coordinate work on the Social Inclusion Programme and the Decade.

The Social Inclusion Programme includes an intense focus on data for monitoring progress. At the EU level, there are 18 “Laeken indicators,” covering income, employment, education and health. A large amount of effort goes into monitoring these indicators, and further work on data quality lies ahead. The selection of these indicators provides lessons for the Decade: indicators should be ambitious, but realistic and transparent. It seems difficult at this stage to develop EU common indicators by ethnicity. However, this issue is important enough for the Social Inclusion perspective to recommend the formulation of national strategies for the development of relevant statistics and indicators by ethnicity.

At the EU level, the Commission’s approach is not to treat Roma as a separate group, however there is scope for countries to incorporate targeted policies into their national plans. The challenge is to balance between the need for targeted initiatives and the need to integrate policies into the broader policy framework. Key barriers to be overcome for improving social inclusion of Roma include: (i) overcoming prejudice and discrimination (especially in the implementation of policy at the local level; (ii) promoting equal opportunities; and (iii) encouraging capacity building of Roma. Political commitment is also critical for success and the EU’s involvement in poverty and social inclusion is important in this regard.

## **V. Data**

Data are essential for the success of the Decade. Each country will need to identify reliable indicators that can be used to monitor progress on each of the Decade goals. This will be a substantial challenge given the lack of quality data related to Roma. In many countries, data availability is constrained by privacy legislation which does not allow data collection by ethnicity. In other cases, Roma are not included in surveys, because they are inadequately captured in census data, which serve as the basis for sample frames. Another constraint is the reluctance of Roma to declare their ethnicity in surveys, for various reasons.

The meeting discussed two important mechanisms for improving the availability and quality of data available for monitoring the Decade. First, a regional survey being organized by UNDP will aim to provide comparable baseline data for 2004 at the start of the Decade. Second, countries will need to review their existing country-level data sources to assess the extent to which they will be useful for tracking progress during the Decade, and to identify opportunities for improving existing data and initiating new country-level sources. For example, the Hungarian Statistical Office is implementing a new survey of 5,000 Roma households in 2005 which will contribute to monitoring the Decade in Hungary.

It was noted that the two paths – the baseline survey and country level data – cannot substitute for each other. The baseline survey will not provide sufficient information to monitor the Decade in each country and over the long term it will be

critical that countries have their own systems in place for monitoring Roma outcomes and the impact of policies and programs. It was agreed that data would be a central focus for the discussion at the next ISC meeting. Government and Roma representatives should review the existing data sources in their country and develop a plan for how the Decade will be monitored.

**Baseline Survey.** UNDP provided an update of progress on the regional baseline survey. At this stage the planned survey will focus on Southeast Europe, UNDP is currently looking for financing to include Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the survey.<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire and sampling methodology are currently being developed. The approach of the survey will be similar to that of household budget and labor force surveys. It will include data on each of the Decade priority areas and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). An average of 700 Roma households and 700 majority households will be surveyed in each country. In some of the countries in Southeast Europe IDPs and refugees will be sampled separately. Roma will be involved in the implementation of the survey.

UNDP is organizing a Data Experts' Group of officials from statistical offices, academics and other experts and users of data. The group will provide feedback on the baseline survey, and will function as an overall advisory body on data issues for the Decade. UNDP is planning a meeting for the group at the end of May/early June to review the methodology for the baseline survey and other issues.

**Country Data Collection.** Issues related to the challenges of collecting data at the country level were discussed. Each country will need to confront these challenges in developing monitoring plans for the Decade. While privacy legislation in some countries prohibit the collection of administrative data (e.g. school enrollments) by ethnicity, all countries can implement surveys to collect data on Roma development outcomes. Some participants noted that the Decade itself could increase awareness in the region of the need to collect data on Roma and could provide an opening for country level discussions on increasing opportunities for official data collection on Roma and other minorities. The following issues were raised which are important for future work:

- **Data Availability.** Each country should review existing data sources, asking the question of whether good data from both government and non-government sources are available for monitoring the goals selected for the Decade. If data are not available, a new survey is needed. If data are available, it is critical to find out whether they are accessible and if not, what would be needed for the data to be made accessible.
- **New Surveys.** If Roma-specific data are neither unavailable, nor accessible, a new survey is needed. Then the question becomes: What kind of new survey is needed? And who should do it? A preferable option is to integrate the survey into the regular work of the National Statistical Agency. The Bulgarian Statistical Office recently implemented a new household survey which includes ethnicity. If legal provisions prohibit government collection of data, the survey could be

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<sup>2</sup> At this stage, the countries included are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo).

contracted out to an independent survey organization. This was recently done in Serbia and Montenegro.

- **Frequency of Data Collection.** How often should data be collected? The ideal would be annually, if ethnicity is included into regularly implemented existing surveys. The UN baseline survey will be implemented this year, but it will not be sufficient to have another survey at the end of the Decade in 2015. Countries will have to ensure that data are available at least every 2-3 years to ensure that progress is on track.
- **Comparability.** An important issue for consideration is whether data collected are consistent across and within countries. At the country level, data collected related to Roma should be comparable with data collected on the majority population – otherwise it will be impossible to assess where Roma are relative to the rest of the population. At the country level, definitions should be harmonized, as much as possible, across countries to ensure that they can be compared. The Data Expert's Group convened by UNDP will be an important venue for this.
- **Ownership.** Countries should work to ensure that Roma and other stakeholders have ownership of the survey instruments – and that they understand and trust them. Without ownership by government and Roma of the data, there is a risk that the results will not be accepted. At the country level the Decade Working Groups should be involved in identifying data sources and planning any new surveys. The Statistical Offices should be fully involved in the Decade.
- **Roma Involvement.** One way to ensure ownership is to involve Roma in the survey itself. This can also contribute to improving data quality. In a number of recent surveys in the region, Roma have contributed to survey design, interviewing households, cleaning data and interpreting results.

## **VI. Financing**

It was agreed that the next iteration of Decade Action Plans to be presented at the June ISC meeting should include cost estimates, information on financing needs, and potential sources of funds, including from state budgets and external financing. The participating countries each have access to different financing sources. The EU accession countries will soon be receiving Structural Funds from the European Union, Bulgaria and Romania have continuing PHARE programs, and Serbia and Montenegro and FYR Macedonia have financing sources tied to their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

As many countries are currently working on their budget plans for 2005, discussions on financing initiatives included in the Decade Action Plans should begin very soon. Countries are advised to do the following before the next Steering Committee meeting:

- **Identify available financing windows.** (e.g.:The Council of Europe Development Bank loans, Structural Funds, World Bank loans).

- **Initiate discussions with Ministries of Finance.** MOFs should be involved in the discussion of Decade Action Plans with the Country Working Groups, in order to fit in with the budget cycle.
- **Initiate bilateral discussions with donors.** Where appropriate, countries should initiate discussions with the World Bank, Council of Europe Development Bank and other donors on their external financing needs. Demand for financing should come from the countries. The World Bank would welcome discussion of Roma issues at its upcoming Spring Meetings at the end of April or Annual Meetings (October 4-5, 2004).

## **VII. Communications**

The Decade Secretariat, with inputs from OSI and the World Bank, presented its draft communication strategy. The overall strategy will be a sum of individual country plans for disseminating information about the Decade, as well as key regional elements. It was agreed, that because of the importance of communication and outreach for the success of the Decade, countries should draft communication strategies for discussion at the June ISC meeting. The Secretariat, with the support of the World Bank and OSI, will also present a strategy for a pan-European campaign.

**Objectives.** A well-developed communications strategy for the Decade will be essential for its success. The work on communications can help address persistent stereotypes and discrimination of Roma and the lack of information in the public about Roma. The Decade provides a window of opportunity to support a long-term pro-Roma coalition to create a climate of change in governments, and among the public and in the media. Communications will help to build political support for action, mobilize resources, create public support for the Decade and Roma inclusion more broadly, and to enable and empower Roma communicators.

Communication for the Decade at the national level should focus on national priorities and be supported by regular opinion research. Roma ownership is key for success, and the approach should be open to anyone who wants to be involved. The campaigns should emphasize positive success stories and draw upon the expertise and experience of existing communications activities and communicators.

**Roles and Responsibilities.** The role of the Secretariat is to oversee the overall strategy and creative concept. The Secretariat should set up a communication steering group and create and manage a multi-country, multi-language website. A prototype, prepared by a delegate from the Hungarian Roma delegation, was presented ([www.romadecade.org](http://www.romadecade.org)). Country governments should create and implement national campaigns, provide resources, and participate in the regional communications steering group. International partners should contribute toward the overarching communications strategy for the Decade and integrate Roma into their institutional communications plans.

## **VIII. Next Steps**

The next meetings of the Steering Committee are scheduled for June and October, in advance of the launch of the Decade in early 2005. The Decade Action Plans should be finalized by the October meeting so that they can be compiled by the Secretariat into a regional document for the launch.



The June meeting of the Steering Committee is scheduled for **June 23-24, 2004**. The main agenda items for the next meeting will be financing, data and communications.

Countries should plan to bring the following to the June meeting:

- A revised and elaborated Decade Action Plan, including more selectivity in the choice of goals, targets and indicators.
- A plan for financing of the Decade, reflecting the results of discussions with the Ministry of Finance and bilateral discussions with donors.
- A plan for monitoring the Decade, including identification of existing data sources and proposals for any new surveys.
- A communications strategy, including preliminary costing.