

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ROMA INTEGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA (2012-2020)

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Mrs. Rositsa Ivanova, NCCEII

- The National Council for Ethnic and Integration Issues Cooperation is established at the Council of Ministers. Chairperson of the Council is the Vice Prime Minister.
- NCCEII is the governmental body in charge of coordination and consultation of minority issues as well as of the general regular monitoring of the implementation of the integration policies.
- Its purpose is to influence the governmental decision-making process on the ground that its members are representatives of the government as well as representatives of the civil society, particularly organization of ethnic minorities.
- The Secretariat is the structure within the CoM administration established to administratively assist the NCCEII and actively participate in the formulation and conducting of the governmental policy in the field of multi-ethnic relations.
- The NCCEII has a respectable experience of the formulation, implementation and coordination of international projects and programmes, financed by EU pre-accession funds.

- **Healthcare reform in Bulgaria brought to light some very alarming tendencies in Roma health: high morbidity, high mortality, low life expectancy. These tendencies have been observed for more than a decade due to overwhelming poverty, poor nutrition, permanently poor living conditions and lack of proper sanitary conditions. Infectious diseases have become a particularly serious problem for the Roma in Bulgaria. The most common among them are tuberculosis and viral hepatitis. According to the data presented by the St. Sofia Pulmonary hospital in 2009, 30% of the patients treated there are from Roma origin. A study on common health problems among the Roma in the town of Kyustendil, Senovo and Tulovo (conducted by Prof. Turnev) demonstrates the high percentage of tuberculoses of the Roma population where approximately 25% of the cases involve children. According to data from the specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Pulmonary Diseases in Sliven (submitted by Dr. M. Dimitrova), 60% of the tuberculosis patients are Roma. Viral hepatitis is also a serious problem for Roma neighborhoods where incidents of Hepatitis A and B are very high. The number of physically and mentally disabled Roma is six times higher than the rest of the Bulgarian population.**

- The relations between the medical staff and the Roma communities is hampered due to the fact that many general practitioners (GPs) who work in Roma neighborhoods are not familiar with the cultural differences and traditions of their patients. Poor Bulgarian language skills of many Roma people only aggravate the problem. The main risk factors for Roma health have been identified as:
 - Mass unemployment, the consequence of which is that only a small part of the Roma population is health insured;
 - Poverty and thus inability to pay health insurance contributions and to buy medicines;
 - Poor nutrition;
 - Lack of basic sanitary conditions;
 - Bureaucracy of the medical system and direct or indirect discrimination;
 - Lack of medical/ health prevention activities;
 - Low educational level, including health education.

At its summit on 21 December the Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy for Roma Integration and the adherent Action Plan for its implementation.

The National Roma Integration Program focuses on education, healthcare, and housing; other major integration areas are employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, and media.

The strategy Action Plan of the Bulgarian government is to be realized in two phases – the first one is 2012-2014, when Bulgaria's participation in the international initiative for a Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015 will be completed, and the second is 2014-2020, coinciding with the next seven-year EU budget framework.

Bulgaria's Roma integration measures are to be funded with EU money and funds from the state budget, the government points out.

- **COMPONENT HEALTHCARE**
- *Operational objective: Providing access to quality healthcare services and prevention programmes*
- **Objectives to be attained:**
 - **Preventive measures for maternal and child healthcare.**
 - **Providing equal access to healthcare services for people in disadvantaged position, belonging to ethnic minorities.**
 - **Involvement of qualified Roma in the healthcare programmes and health mediation development.**
 - **Increasing of health knowledge and providing access to health information to Roma.**
 - **Overcoming cultural barriers in communication as well as all forms of discrimination attitudes.**

- **Increasing the number of health insured disadvantaged persons, belonging to ethnic minorities, through legislative initiatives concerning health insurance of the socially disadvantaged, including in this context the long-term unemployed.**
- **The measures for the objectives implementation are included in the National Plan of Action, part of the Strategy.**
- **The Ministry of Healthcare is the leading responsible institution for the implementation of the Strategy objectives within the scope of priority “Healthcare”.**

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- **RESULTS:**

- **A Comprehensive programme and detailed Action plan for screening and early diagnostics of tuberculosis, oncological, heart and inherited diseases, which is targeted at disadvantaged ethnic minorities, related the implementation of the existing national health programmes drafted;**
- **Disadvantaged ethnic minorities families educated on pressing health care issues, like hepatitis, tuberculosis, cardiovascular, pulmonary and oncological diseases;**
- **Mechanism for a comprehensive health promotion and preventive health care campaigns at community level created and implemented;**
- **Disadvantaged ethnic minority families screened and diagnosed;**

- **For the purposes of the realization of the National Strategy for Integration of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) the cooperation of all concerned institutions at national, regional and local level with representatives of NGOs and the Roma Community is of a crucial importance.**
- **Ensuring the active participation of Roma is particularly important. Within this context, as participants not only in the process of forming and executing policies for integration of the Roma Community, but in all other policy levels, they would contribute for the development of the society in general. Their involvement in all stages of the elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies at all levels will enrich the process from the point of view of the social interests and the competences of the experts, dealing with Roma issues. This requires the promotion of the involvement of representatives of the Roma Community in the national administration and will ensure the actual participation of Roma in all priority areas within the current programme.**

Measures in the field of Roma integration in 2012

- Implementation of preventive programs and provide operation of mobile offices.
- Conducting health awareness activities in schools and kindergartens with the help of the mediators in Roma settlements and remote areas.
- Preparation and distribution of modern health education materials - preparing and issuing appropriate video materials - in short, modern-made films, videos and other account-specific target group.
- Dissemination of information and promotional materials relating to the conduct of preventive examinations.

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Thank you for
your attention!

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