

Acknowledgements

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Preface

With the expansion of the EU in May 2004, an estimated 1.5 million Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) became EU citizens. When Bulgaria and Romania join, scheduled for 2007, that number will increase to some 4.4 million.¹ What will this mean in practice for the majority of CEE Roma, who continue to experience discrimination in every aspect of their lives and on a daily basis?² Roma constitute the largest and most marginalized ethnic minority group in Europe; and its biggest civil rights issue. Although most people agree that the enlargement process is likely to bring positive changes for Roma in the region, the impact of EU membership can only be assessed in the years ahead in terms of real, measurable progress in such key areas as equal access to education and levels of employment comparable to those of the majorities.

Romania has the largest Roma population in Europe, estimated at some 2.5 million people.³ Although Romania is not yet an EU member State, the strong desire to join the EU has fostered some positive results. As in other candidate countries with a significant Roma minority, the Government has formulated a national plan aimed specifically at improving the situation of Roma. Adopted in April 2001, the “Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improving the Roma Condition” (hereafter, Strategy) established a detailed program for addressing the discrimination and poverty faced by Roma communities. In addition, the Romanian Government adopted the first anti-discrimination law in response to the EU’s Race Equality Directive in August 2000. It has been revised several times.

¹ Dimitrina Petrova, The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), “The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future”. Accessed on the web at <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1844&archiv=1>

² For example, unemployment in Roma communities is estimated at between 50 and 90 per cent. See “EU support for Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe”, European Commission, Directorate General for Enlargement, published by the Enlargement Information Unit. Accessed on the web at http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/docs/pdf/brochure_roma_oct2003_en.pdf

³ In some cases, estimates are considerably higher than official figures, due at least partly to the reluctance of some Roma to identify themselves as such. According to the 2002 census in Romania, the official figure for the Roma population was 535,000. Dimitrina Petrova, The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), “The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future”. Accessed on the web at <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1844&archiv=1>

In 2002, the Open Society Institute's (OSI) EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (EUMAP) monitored the implementation of such strategies and plans at the national level.⁴ The 2002 monitoring report commended the Romanian Government's Strategy for its straightforward approach to problems of discrimination, and for creating new structures at the central and local levels to give Roma a greater role in decision-making. However, it also challenged the Government to do more to implement concrete projects called for in the Strategy.

Two years ago, Prime Minister Nastase acknowledged that, "The Strategy is excellent, we adopted it, everybody was satisfied and after that we put it in the drawer."⁵ These same concerns persist to this day. Now, more than ever, Romania must take steps to ensure that the gains made in the past are the foundation for continuous and expanding efforts to improve the situation of the Roma. This will require local interagency coordination; sufficient resources; the will to implement the plan; the inclusion of broadly representative Roma in the design and management of its implementation; and transparent monitoring of progress, so that adjustments can be made as needed. To promote social inclusion and facilitate equal access to public services, the Government will have to adjust its anti-discrimination legislation to be in full compliance with the Race Equality Directive.

This report follows from the 2002 EUMAP report on Romania and extends the monitoring from the national to the local level. Three years after the Strategy's adoption, it is precisely at this local level that real improvements for Roma should now be expected. However, the findings and conclusions of this local-level monitoring emphasise the need for further effort on the part of the Romanian Government to seriously implement the Strategy measures in full. The five county reports include success stories where small-scale initiatives, many of them supported with EU funds, have had a direct impact on local communities.⁶ The Government must take steps to ensure that these smaller projects have the necessary resources to be sustainable and to be scaled up where appropriate, and also draw lessons from the local level to improve policy at the national level. Short-term local results must be incorporated into a longer-term vision for improving the situation of Roma.

This monitoring project highlights the need for Governments across Europe to maintain focus on the problems faced by Roma and to ensure that their policy

⁴ *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection*, Volume 1. An Assessment of Selected Policies in Candidate States. All EUMAP reports are available on the EUMAP website, at <http://www.eumap.org/reports>

⁵ Prime Minister Adrian Năstase, Video-conference with Counties and Bucharest municipality, Friday, 6 September 2002, 9.00 hrs. Available at <http://www.gov.ro>

⁶ Funded through PHARE's Civil Society Development Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma, and the Partnership Fund for Roma.

decisions have a real impact on the daily lives of their Roma citizens. The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) is a regional initiative focused on closing the gap between Roma and non-Roma in a limited number of key sectors over a ten-year period. The Decade, a joint initiative of eight countries, supported by OSI, the World Bank, the EU, UNDP, OSCE and COE brings together representatives from the CEE countries with significant Roma populations.⁷ The participating countries are in the process of establishing national goals, targets and indicators in four key areas: education, employment, health and housing, with discrimination, gender and income poverty as cross-cutting issues in each. As part of the Decade initiative, Governments have agreed to monitor progress toward the goals annually and in a transparent manner. In addition, Roma and other actors recognize that regular, independent monitoring of progress is essential.

This report provides an example of how monitoring can be effectively transposed from the international to the community level, providing much-needed guidance to policy-makers at the local, national and international levels. This report also illustrates the importance of the active involvement of Roma in decisions affecting their communities. Carried out by young Roma activists engaged by *The Resource Centre for Roma Communities, in Cluj*, the local level monitoring was able to assess in detail the limited progress to date in achieving the ambitious targets established in the Strategy. It was also able to underscore the main factors which have impeded progress at the grassroots level, and make appropriate recommendations aimed at moving forward the Strategy goals.

For the situation of Roma to improve over the coming decade there is an urgent need for similar types of monitoring exercises to be initiated across the enlarged EU and its candidate countries. However laudable the aims of the EU Social Inclusion Process and its requirement for National Action Plans, without measurable progress they will remain just so many good intentions. The EU has been the major funder of Roma projects and its legacy there is well-known. The accession process, however, provides an important new impetus for national and local policy reform. Our collective goal now should be to seek and obtain measurable, lasting improvements in the lives of Roma across Europe.

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⁷ Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia. Further information on the “Decade for Roma Inclusion” can be found on the OSI website, at http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/focus_areas/decade