

Monitoring Local Implementation of  
the Government Strategy for the  
Improvement of the Condition  
of Roma in Romania  
in Brăila County

## BACKGROUND

Brăila county is located in south-east Romania and has a total population of 373,897 people, of which 1.6 per cent are Roma.<sup>1</sup> According to the two latest censuses, the number of people who identify as Roma has increased by 30 per cent.

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Brăila county, there has been some limited progress in implementing the objectives of the Strategy in the fields of social protection, healthcare, justice and public order, and education. However, the implementation of the Strategy has yet to contribute significantly to resolving the Roma community's problems of poverty and discrimination; difficult access to quality education; lack of housing and employment; and lack of identity and property documents. The great majority (approximately 80 per cent) of Roma in Brăila are living on the minimum guaranteed income.

At the time of writing, Brăila County had not developed a county strategy for implementing the Strategy. A County Office for Roma (hereafter, BJR) has been established in Brăila county and local experts on Roma affairs nominated. However, although called for in the Strategy, a county level Joint Working Group had yet to be established.

More than two years since its adoption, the Strategy is not yet known in all Brăila county institutions. Even in those institutions which are familiar with the Strategy, there are no coherent organisational measures for improving the condition of Roma at the county level. The Strategy is also not well known among Roma communities. The only person who has played an essential role in informing the Roma community has been the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma issues (BJR). However, his efforts to promote the implementation of Strategy measures have not been greatly successful.

The BJR has been able to achieve make progress in some areas; for example, the BJR has assisted over 200 Roma in obtaining identity cards. However, the fact that the county-level Joint Working Group was not constituted, the lack of consultation with Roma organisations, the lack of knowledge concerning the terms for the implementation of the Strategy, and, in particular, the lack of financial resources, remain the most serious issues related to the lack of Strategy implementation in Brăila county.

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<sup>1</sup> The structure of the population according to ethnic differentiation of the 2002 Census.

## 2. LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

### 2.1 Administrative bodies

#### 2.1.1 The county office for Roma (BJR)

In Brăila, the County Office for Roma (hereafter, BJR) was established in September 2003. The BJR has three members: the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma Affairs (hereafter, Councillor), the Executive of the Directorate for Programmes of Brăila Prefecture, and the Executive of the Directorate for Decentralised Services of Brăila Prefecture. Within the BJR, the Councillor works exclusively on Roma issues, while the other two employees have additional responsibilities. There were two applicants for the position of Councillor; the current councillor has 22 years of professional experience including 15 years in executive positions.

The BJR communicates with local government bodies in order to facilitate the access of Roma to public services; contacts Roma organisations and informs them about funding opportunities; and communicates with the Prefecture directorates and with town councillors. The main achievements of the BJR in Brăila include the establishment of a county-level network to respond to the needs of the community; 36 branches were set up in the county, four with legal character.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Councillor, the main issues impeding the implementation of the Strategy in Brăila include the lack of direct financing sources for local level implementation of the Strategy measures and the very low degree of involvement of local institutions in the implementation of the Strategy. There is also a lack of sanctions for failure to achieve Strategy goals, and a lack of clear instructions regarding the establishment of the county level joint working group and of its responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the BJR would be more efficient if three or four additional staff were employed to elaborate, co-ordinate and monitor implementation of the Strategy. Moreover, if the BJR were further developed at the County Council level, it would have greater access to financing.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.1.2 Local experts on Roma affairs

In Brăila county there are five local experts on Roma Affairs, four of whom were employed by the Town Halls of Suțești, Viziru, Galben, and Bărăgan with support

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect's councillor on Roma issues, 1 July 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect's councillor on Roma issues, 1 July 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect's councillor on Roma issues, 1 July 2003.

from the Phare programme “Equality Relations”. This project also included the training of 40 Roma as community workers who now volunteer throughout the county.<sup>5</sup> The fifth local expert was employed at the Brăila county level. The local experts were nominated by the Alliance for Roma Unity (hereafter, AUR) Brăila, the most prominent local Roma NGO. The local experts maintain good communication with the BJR and have weekly meetings within the AUR Brăila. Generally, the local experts are requested to handle social issues, especially related to social welfare and identity cards.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.3 Local joint working group

Although the Strategy calls for Joint Working Groups to be established at the county level, this has not yet been accomplished in Brăila county. The BJR has drawn up a list of the individuals and institutions that are to be represented in the Working Group. The creation of the Working Group was intended to take place by the end of November 2003, by a decision of the Local Council.

On the initiative of the BJR, Joint Working Groups were created in spring 2003 at the local level in Suțești, Bărăganul, Gradiște, Râmnicelu, Chiscani, and Victoria. These each have five to six members, usually the mayor, the vice-mayor, the school director, the priest, the chief of police, and the community worker representing the Roma community. Unfortunately, these local Working Groups are not yet functioning to their full capacity.<sup>7</sup> Working groups have not yet been established in Ciocile and Mircea-Vodă, as the administrations in these towns have indicated there are no Roma residents in their respective areas and a working group is therefore unnecessary.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Housing

In Brăila county, there has been little activity related to the Strategy’s housing measures. With the support of the AUR, the property situation of 11 Roma families will be

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<sup>5</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, the Fund for Improvement of the Condition of Roma, the project “Equality Relations” developed by Brăila Prefecture in partnership with the AUR, with the Service for Electronic Registration of the Population and with Brăila Town Hall.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Isofache Georgian, expert on Roma issues, 23 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect’s councillor on Roma issues, 1 July 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Address no. 601/4.04.2003 from Mircea-Vodă; Address no. 402/18.03.2003 from Ciocile Town Hall to the BJR.

legalised.<sup>9</sup> In addition, some rehabilitation activities for “Colonia KM 10”, a community with an 80 per cent Roma majority, started in August 2003 and are still in progress. The Directorate for Public Services of the Brăila town hall developed these activities.<sup>10</sup> Housing and living conditions are a serious problem for the Roma communities in Brăila county; many families live without access to electricity or drinking water.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.3 Social protection

The establishment and activities of the County Directorate for Social Work has considerably increased the number of Roma beneficiaries for the guaranteed minimum income. The Directorate instructed county administrations to discontinue the practice of reducing benefits in the summer on the assumption that recipients have other sources of income from seasonal labour; instead, beneficiaries are required to declare any additional sources of income.

A Commission for Social Mediation will be established in 2004 within the County Directorate for Dialogue, Family, and Social Solidarity, and expected to handle complaints related to social services. Its staff will be drawn from the Directorate for Dialogue, Family and Social Solidarity, the Public Service for Social Work, the County Directorate for Protection of Children’s Rights, the Directorate for Public Services, and a civil society representative.<sup>12</sup>

The Phare-funded project “Equality Relations” has helped to improve access to public services for Roma by training 40 community workers from Brăila county and five neighbouring counties.<sup>13</sup> The project also assisted Roma in acquiring identity documents. At the county level, the Roma community also benefits from another project financed with EU funds, “A Step towards the Future”.<sup>14</sup> This programme aims to train 16 computer operators, and to establish an internet centre for Roma children to use computers and receive tutoring.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with vice-mayor Radu Musat.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ion George, the Locative Fund, 2 July 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Stanciu Florin, chief accountant of D.S.P., 2 July 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Government Emergency Order no. 118/1999 regarding the set up and the utilisation of The National Fund for Solidarity. Law no. 366/2001 for the approval of the Government Emergency Order no. 118/1999, article 5, paragraph 1, letter e.

<sup>13</sup> Project financed by the Phare programme RO 0004.02.02, the Fund for Improvement of the Condition of Roma. The other counties included Tulcea, Buzău, Constanța, Vrancea and Călărași.

<sup>14</sup> Project financed by the Phare programme RO 0004.02.02, the Fund for Improvement of the Condition of Roma.

At the initiative of the BJR, the Directorate for Dialogue, Family and Social Solidarity, the CAS and the County Agency for Labour Force Occupation have visited local Roma communities to inform the Roma population about their rights and obligations under the unemployment insurance law; employment legislation; the guaranteed minimum income act; and social inclusion regulations.<sup>15</sup>

The Directorate for Dialogue, Family and Social Solidarity sends quarterly reports to the Ministry for Labour, Social Solidarity and Family regarding the implementation of the Strategy. The National Antipoverty and Social Inclusion Plan is monitored by the County Council through an Antipoverty Commission. However, there are no Roma representatives on this Commission, although 75 per cent of the Roma population is very poor.

## 2.4 Health care

The Association for Roma Unity (AUR) Brăila and the Brăila Directorate for Public Health Care, with the support of the prefecture and the town hall, have established a medical office in a local clinic to improve the Roma community's access to health care. Roma who are not registered with a general practitioner may receive free medical care through this service.

A home health care system was established as part of the "National Programme no. 3", initiated by the Ministry of Health. Under this programme, three members of the AUR received three months of training and practice as health mediators, and were afterwards hired by the Directorate for Public Health Care.<sup>16</sup> As there is a need for more mediators to work in the Roma communities, it has been proposed that the NGO Romani CRISS should train two additional health mediators.

The health mediators provide information and education to Roma population with regards to vaccination, contraception, identification of tuberculosis and other diseases. Some 150 children under the age of three were vaccinated in various campaigns, and ten people with tuberculosis were diagnosed and treated. The health mediator and the family doctor supervise the treatment of young children, and offer family planning consultation within the Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.<sup>17</sup> The activity of health mediators is generally well received both by the Roma communities and by the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Preda Racovita Anica, interim executive of the Social Work Service.

<sup>16</sup> Training programme developed by the Ministry of Healthcare and Family in collaboration with Romani CRISS.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dr. Aurel Stanciu specialist in internal diseases, 16 June 2003.

medical system. The doctors are satisfied because the health mediators are able to achieve results in places where medical personnel have limited access.<sup>18</sup>

The BJR has also supported the implementation of research on the health situation of two Roma communities, financed by the UK Embassy.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.5 Economic initiatives

In Brăila, implementation of Strategy measures in the economic sphere are modest, due to the fact that the relevant public institutions have not focused on these objectives and the projects that have been developed have a more general approach and do not specifically target Roma communities.

In May 2003, a job fair for Roma was organised where 12 employers offered a total of 57 vacancies. However, only 12 of the available positions were filled, although a large number of Roma attended the fair, indicating there is keen interest in employment issues.<sup>20</sup>

The County Agency for Labour Force Occupation, in cooperation with representatives of the BJR, the Directorate for Dialogue, Family and Social Solidarity, the Association for Roma Unity, and the CAS have organised monthly activities to inform Roma communities on various economic issues, such as the current legislation, professional retraining, social work, and other rights.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.6 Justice and public order

In Brăila, the BJR has assisted 292 Roma in obtaining identity cards and marriage documents.<sup>22</sup>

There are no programmes to address legal education and delinquency prevention among young Roma. The only activities in this sphere consisted of information

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dr. Liliana Venter, 16 June 2003.

<sup>19</sup> In the Roma community from Nedelcu Chercea district and in the Roma community from the village of Lanurile, Brăila county.

<sup>20</sup> "The Labour Market", article in the newspaper *Monitorul de Brăila*, 10 May 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Marilena Raileanu, executive of the department of professional rehabilitation of AJOFM, 1 July 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, the Fund for Improvement of the Condition of Roma, the project "Equality Relations" developed by Brăila Prefecture in partnership with the A.U.R., with the Service for Electronic Registration of the Population and with Brăila Town Hall.

campaigns regarding legal education, organised by the AUR in larger towns, with the participation of the county police force. The public institutions that have authority in this field have stated that there is no need for programmes targeting Roma specifically, because there are no discriminatory measures against Roma at this level.<sup>23</sup> At the county level, there have been no efforts to recruit Roma to the police force, and there appears to be a perception that Roma lack the qualifications for police work.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.7 Child protection

The County Directorate for Child Protection is not currently developing any programmes exclusively for Roma children, as the institutional policy forbids discrimination. The Directorate is collaborating with local NGOs like The Light (*Lumina*) Foundation, Euro 21, and the Franciscan Clarice Sisters in identifying children and families with difficulties, including Roma, and proposing possible solutions.

Measures taken by the County Directorate for Child Protection currently extend to over 900 children, of whom 500 are in family placement and care. 70 per cent of the remaining children in institutionalised care live in family-style day centres where children with disabilities are offered counselling and rehabilitation services. There have been no special initiatives to recruit Roma personnel for the child protection institutions, but there are Roma employees in these institutions.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.8 Education

In Brăila county, the number of Roma students who are studying Romani as their mother tongue is increasing. Of an estimated 1,200 Roma pupils, 737 are studying Romani in schools in a number of cities and towns. The Ministry of Education and Research grants free places in summer camps to Roma students who participate in the National Romani Language Competition. In addition, once a semester the “Pedagogic Romani Language Club” is organised, in which one teacher has a Romani language class with Roma pupils.

Brăila county has hosted several activities to the improve teaching the Romani language, including:

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with police sergeant Grosu, 26 June 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with police sergeant Grosu, 26 June 2003. His response to the question if there are any efforts made for the employment of Roma citizens in the police force and in the gendarmerie was: “Hey, man, they should learn if they want to get here”.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Alexandrina Broasca, the General Executive of DJPDC, 12 June 2003.

- 27-29 May 2002 – National Seminar of the Inspectors for Roma Education. The meeting evaluated the concrete measures initiated in each county in the field of Roma education and efforts to match local goals to the strategic benchmarks from Strategy Action Plan.<sup>26</sup>
- 2-19 July 2002 – The Fourth Edition of the National Courses in Romani language,<sup>27</sup> during which 45 course attendants were trained in teaching Romani as a maternal language, including courses on Romani language, teaching methodology, elements of psychology and pedagogy and child rights.
- 1-15 September – National Courses in History and in the Methodology of Teaching Roma History and Tradition – First Edition,<sup>28</sup> attended by 40 Roma and non-Roma experts in this field. In addition to Roma history and the methodology of teaching history and Roma traditions classes, there were also several classes on Roma traditions and a course on Roma social history.
- Beginning of the school year 2003–2004 – a Brăila school was established as “The Resource Centre for Roma Communities”. A classroom will be set up with all the materials necessary for the study of Romani language and Roma culture.<sup>29</sup> Currently, the same school is developing an EU-supported “Socrates Comenius I” Project<sup>30</sup> with participants from school institutions from Belgium, Italy, Poland, Romania; this project has improvement of communication between schools as its objective.<sup>31</sup>

There are no instruction modules concerning the specific needs of Roma students, but once a month, the School Inspector for Roma Education organises a meeting with all the Roma teachers in which they discuss problems they have encountered and search for solutions.

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<sup>26</sup> Note no. 31013, 3 May 2002 regarding the development of the sixth working meeting of Roma inspectors

<sup>27</sup> Courses organised by the Ministry of Education and Research and financed by UNICEF and the Phoenix Foundation, Bucharest.

<sup>28</sup> Courses organised by the Ministry of Education and Research and financed by UNICEF.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Viorel Mortu, general school inspector.

<sup>30</sup> “The overall objectives of COMENIUS are to enhance the quality and reinforce the European dimension of school education, in particular by encouraging transnational cooperation between schools, contributing to the improved professional development of staff directly involved in the school education sector, and promoting the learning of languages and intercultural awareness.” See [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/comenius/moreabou\\_en.html](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/comenius/moreabou_en.html)

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mrs. Tincuta Burlacu, headmaster of the Elementary and Secondary School no. 9, 27 October 2003.

During the school year 2001–2002, 20 Roma children attended a local kindergarten with the support of the “Step by Step” Centre for Education and Professional Development. They received free meals from the Centre, and clothes and writing materials from Brăila Town Hall. All children attending school are eligible for the government’s “milk and doughnuts” programme, which has led to an increase in the number of Roma children attending schools. The fact that even limited food supplements is a strong incentive for Roma families to send children to school illustrates the high level of poverty in these communities.

In an isolated case, a teacher’s decision that the clothes of Roma pupils should be put in a different place from the other children’s clothes was annulled at the intervention of the BJR.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Strategy, young Roma are encouraged to pursue higher education. The AUR has provided recommendation letters to those Roma interested in continuing their education and places are allocated for Roma students at a number of universities.<sup>33</sup>

Both Roma and non-Roma children have received social scholarships and free school writing materials from the Town Hall and the Prefecture of Brăila in order to encourage school attendance and to reduce the number of school drop-outs

The project “Together for a Better Community”, co-ordinated by the Education 2000+ Centre and financed by the Council of Europe and UNICEF, is ongoing in two Brăila county schools. The project aims to improve communication between Roma communities and schools, and includes a module for establishing a school tutor programme.<sup>34</sup> The project also includes a teacher training component, informing teachers about Roma traditions and customs. Parents are involved in school and extracurricular activities.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Elementary and Secondary School Lanurile.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, president of the Alliance for Unity of the Roma.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Anton Nicu, school mediator.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mrs. Tincuta Burlacu, headmaster of the Elementary and Secondary School no. 9, 5 June 2003.

## 2.9 Culture and denominations

There are no specific cultural programmes for the affirmation of Roma identity, but the Office for Minorities of the Directorate for Culture generally promotes minority culture throughout the year.<sup>36</sup> During the celebrations held on the occasion of the International Day of the Roma, the AUR organised a commemorative march and performance in collaboration with the Brăila Prefecture and Town Hall.<sup>37</sup>

At present, there are no events dedicated exclusively to the promotion of Roma culture, traditions and folklore on the agenda organised with the support of the County Directorate for Culture, Denominations and National Patrimony.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.11 Public participation

The number of Roma representatives in local councils and in the County Council is very low, although Roma were included on the electoral lists in the 2000 local elections. Five Roma are employees of the public local administration; four in the larger towns<sup>39</sup> and two in Brăila itself.<sup>40</sup> At the Brăila county level, there is no Roma political party. There are a number of Roma NGOs, of which the most active is the AUR.<sup>41</sup>

### 2.10 Communication and civic participation

Local public institutions lack comprehensive knowledge of the content of the Strategy and there are no media programmes for combating discrimination. The perception of some local media representatives is that Roma leaders should do more to raise awareness of the Strategy's measures.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Monica Popoaca, Executive of the Directorate for Programmes Prognoses External Financing of Brăila Town Hall, 5 June 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect's councillor on Roma issues, 1 July 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with the councillor for minorities, the County Directorate for Culture, Denominations and National Patrimony.

<sup>42</sup> The four community workers trained during the programme "Equality Relations" are employed in Suțești, Viziru, Bărăganu and Galbenu.

<sup>43</sup> The prefect's councillor on Roma issues Săndel Grosu and the local expert on Roma issues Isofache Georgică.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Săndel Grosu, prefect's councillor on Roma issues, 1 November 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Silvia Preda, manager of the newspaper *Obiectiv – vocea Brăilei*, 6 July 2003.

Nevertheless, media attention in Brăila county has been focused on Roma issues. Journalists from the newspapers *Obiectiv – vocea Brailei* (*Objective – the voice of Brăila*) and *Monitorul de Brăila* (*The Brăila Monitor*)<sup>43</sup> have written articles about minority issues on their own initiative. Most of the areas covered by the Government Strategy have been addressed in various articles published by these newspapers.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Sava Gabriel, copy editor of the newspaper “Monitorul de Brăila”, 6 July 2003.

<sup>44</sup> The newspapers *Monitorul de Brăila* and *Obiectiv –vocea Brailei* published articles such as: “Măsuri pentru școlarizarea romilor” (Measures for the School Housing of the Roma), “Mai multe locuri pentru romi în universități” (More Places for Roma in Universities), “Bursa locurilor de muncă” (The Labour Market), “Romii vor să muncească” (Roma Wish to Work), “Romii au birou în Prefectură” (Roma Have Their Office in the Prefecture), “Coșmarul de la km 10 continuă” (The Nightmare from km 10 Continues), “Cel mai rău lucru pentru țigani este autodiscriminarea” (The Worst Thing for Roma is Self Discrimination), “Romii-minoritate în curs de modernizare” (Roma-a Minority that Is on the Path of Modernisation), etc.