

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

## BACKGROUND

Iași county, in Northeast Romania, has a total population of 800,329, of which 9,624 have declared themselves as Roma.<sup>1</sup> Roma in Iași County live in 15 rural and urban communities.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Iași county, implementation of the Strategy has not contributed significantly to the improvement of the living standards of Roma communities. These continue to face more serious problems than the rest of the population, in particular poverty and discrimination; difficult access to quality education; lack of housing and employment; lack of identity documents and property deeds; and limited access to drinking water.

At the time of writing, Iași county had not developed a county-level strategy; however, the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma Affairs prepared a document for 2004 as the “county strategy”, but without even discussing it with the main actors at the local level.<sup>3</sup> A County Office for Roma (hereafter, BJR) and Local Joint Working Groups at the county and local level have, however, been established in Iași county and seven local experts on Roma affairs have been nominated. So far, however, the activities of the BJR have mainly been limited to discussion rather than more concrete actions, and some Roma representatives have stated that only RSDP members are invited to the BJR meetings. Similarly, lack of resources and lack of cohesion among Roma NGOs have meant that the Local Joint Working Groups have also so far had only a very limited impact.

An important point raised by interviewees was that the imprecise and inconsistent wording and of the Strategy has hampered the implementation of the Strategy objective of fuller participation of Roma in decision-making processes.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2002 Census, data obtained from the Office for Statistics of Iași County Council; data of the local RSDP branch concludes that the real number of Roma is much higher. Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Iași (total population 1,793; Roma – 0.55%), Pașcani (417; 0.98%), Hârlău (519; 4.60%), Tg-Frumos (910; 6.68%), Ciurea (601; 10.19%), Dagâta (495; 10.19%), Grajduri (259; 7.94%), Lungani (1,386; 27.39%), Mironeasa (329; 7.61%), Miroslăvesti (603; 8.53%), Moțca (454; 8.91%), Podu-Iloaiei (491; 5.04%), Raducăneni (256; 3.32%), Stolniceni-Prăjescu (325; 5.78%), Dolhești (152; 5.39%).

<sup>3</sup> Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

There have been very few initiatives by the local authorities in implementing Strategy objectives in the key areas of housing, social protection, health care and economic initiatives. Those successful projects, such as the training of health mediators, were initiated by Roma NGOs (in this case Romani CRISS). The most important progress has been made in the area of education, in particular with respect to Romani-language education and the number of Roma graduates.

## 2. LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

### 2.1 Administrative bodies

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

The BJR was established within the framework of Iași Prefecture in April 2001. The members of the BJR are the Prefect;<sup>4</sup> the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma Affairs; the General Inspector for Roma of the County School Inspectorate; and the Director of Directorate for Public Healthcare.<sup>5</sup> The presence of the high rank civil servants in the BJR has not resulted in a greater level of support for the Strategy, however.

Although Roma organisations in Iași recognised the BJR's establishment in 2001, they have not been informed of, and are not familiar with, the composition and role of the office. Furthermore, people who should interact regularly with the BJR staff appear not to be informed about those institutions that have representatives in the BJR.<sup>6</sup> When interviewed in 2003, two of the BJR members were unsure of their responsibilities within this body or, indeed, whether they were members of the office or not.<sup>7</sup> In late 2003, the BJR members and members of the Local Joint Working Group (representatives of local institutions) did not participate in the OSI-organised roundtable for the Iași Prefecture. The only member who participated was the inspector for Roma (a representative of the County School Inspectorate).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Order no. 397/21. 08. 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, prefect's councillor for Roma affairs, 24 June 2003 and 3 November 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Interviews with Sava Remus, member of the Local Joint Working Group, Iași, 19 June 2003; Ion Șerban, member of the LJWG, 14 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with M. Dumitriu, general inspector of the County School Inspectorate, BJR member, 10 July 2003; also interview with Ștefan Georgescu, representative of the Directorate for Public Healthcare 9 July 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Roundtable, 21 November 2003.

In general, the BJR is perceived as being represented by one person – the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma Affairs (hereafter, Councillor).<sup>9</sup> The Councillor is also the president of the Iași branch of the RSDP and vice headmaster of the Trade School in Târgu-Frumos. He has a wide experience in the field of education.<sup>10</sup>

The Councillor has indicated that the degree of active involvement of the NGOs and of Roma students in the BJR is not satisfactory, but that there is good collaboration among the local administrative bodies and with other important bodies.<sup>11</sup> Although the Strategy does not clearly specify the organisation of meetings, the Iași BJR holds monthly meetings attended by BJR members; representatives of Roma communities and local institutions; presidents of Roma NGOs; local Roma councillors and local leaders of the RSDP.<sup>12</sup> These meetings generally focus on social issues, particularly access to the minimum guaranteed income.<sup>13</sup> One of the experts on Roma issues notes that these meetings follow a rigid format, during which the BJR presents its activity reports, focusing on the number of applications for welfare that have been processed.<sup>14</sup>

According to many Local Joint Working Group members, attendance at the BJR meetings is not a priority for the individuals or the institutions they represent.<sup>15</sup> The attendance of Roma NGOs is also low and, according to an NGO representative and member of the local joint working group, membership in the RSDP is a prerequisite for an invitation to the meetings.<sup>16</sup> Other sources corroborate this view, although the RSDP has denied that such practices occur.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the meetings is to evaluate the main needs of local Roma communities and the implementation of programmes for their support. In practice, however, the representatives attending these meetings express their discontentment with the lack of concrete decisions for resolving problems and meeting the needs of Roma that they

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<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Ion Șerban, member of the Local Joint Working Group, 14 June 2003; Acălușariței Cristina, health mediator in Grajduri, 27 June 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 24 June 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 24 June 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 24 June 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mantu Florin – Ciurea LJWG, 18 June 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Pop Mariana, school inspector for Roma, the County School Inspectorate, member of the Local Joint Working Group, 8 July 2003; Ștefan Georgescu, County Directorate for Healthcare, BJR member, 9 July 2003; Mihai Elena, member of the Local Joint Working Group, Podu-Iloaiei, 21 June 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Dinu Iulian, president of “Romanitin”, member of the Local Joint Working Group, 12 June 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

present during the meetings. Some representatives have indicated that during meetings the problems of Roma from various communities are analysed, but the BJR does not propose solutions or follow up with concrete measures for their resolution; everything remains at the level of “discussions”. As a result, the rather formal character of the meetings has led to a loss of confidence in this forum.<sup>18</sup>

The BJR prepares regular reports for the Office for Roma Affairs within the framework of the Government’s General Secretariat and for the Prefecture’s directorate for strategies and programmes. Unfortunately, however, these reports contain little specific data regarding activities and programmes that have been developed, and therefore these activities cannot be verified or evaluated.

Although one of the BJR’s responsibilities is to support NGOs in the development of projects for Roma, the Iaşi BJR has concretely supported only one Roma organisations – the Romani Chance (*Şansa Romani*) Association in Târgu-Frumos.<sup>19</sup> This organisation itself has signed only one partnership agreement, with the Help! Foundation. As of writing, two projects are in development and the organisations are working on the elaboration of projects for emergency food supplies, a cultural project, and a project regarding child protection.<sup>20</sup> Several Roma organisations have expressed concern that non-Roma organisations initiate projects for which they enlist the participation of Roma organisations only to comply with eligibility criteria.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1.2 Local experts on Roma affairs

There are seven local experts on Roma affairs in Iaşi County: at Iaşi City Hall; Târgu-Frumos Town Hall; Ciurea Mayor’s Office; Podu-Iloaiei Mayor’s Office; Lungani Mayor’s Office; Hârlău Mayor’s Office; and Holboca Mayor’s Office.<sup>22</sup> Although the

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Ion Şerban, 24 June 2003; Dinu Iulian, 12 June 2003; Mihai Elena 21 June 2003; Mantu Florin, 18 June 2003.

<sup>19</sup> President is Daniel Roman, BJR councillor at Târgu-Frumos Town Hall, Romani teacher at Ion Creangă School.

<sup>20</sup> “Training Stage of Roma Intercultural Mediators”, financed by the European Commission. This project will last for a year, and the project partners are the RSDP, the Trade School from Târgu-Frumos, Iaşi Prefecture through the BJR, “Romani Chance” Association. Interviews with Roman Ştefan; Cătălina Farcaş, president of “Help!” Association, 21 June 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Iulian Dinu, president of Romanitin, 12 June 2003.

<sup>22</sup> “Following a Decision of Iaşi Prefecture I was sent in Holboca to occupy the position of LERA, but the mayor there did not agree. Subsequently, I was sent to Grajduri, but the mayor there has a discriminatory attitude and his secretary threw me out from the office. Nevertheless, I have worked as volunteer for three months, and I have paid all my own expenses” Round Table, Iaşi, 21 November 2003.

Iași Prefecture requested that Pașcani Town Hall should also designate a local expert on Roma affairs,<sup>23</sup> no one has been hired because the Mayor has systematically refused to accept this position in his institution.<sup>24</sup>

In the job description of the local experts, the position's responsibilities are described as "being actively involved in the relationship between local public administration and Roma communities in order to apply the Strategy for Improvement of the Condition of Roma."<sup>25</sup> All the local experts in Iași County are hired as civil servants, but they are not involved in the local public administration's routine decision-making processes that affect Roma, and generally work on applications for minimum guaranteed income, or for other forms of social support.<sup>26</sup>

Theoretically, the majority of Strategy's general objectives are well established, but a lack of detail has created complication in their application. For example, the measures regarding the objective of including the leaders of Roma communities in the decision-making process lack explicit instructions for implementation.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the measures of the Government Strategy are vague with regard to the local experts, and this creates contradictions between the Strategy and other current regulations, such as the Local Public Administration Act.<sup>28</sup> An expert on legal issues has highlighted the confusion caused by the ambiguous text of the Strategy, primarily the inconsistent and interchangeable use of the terms "expert" and "councillor".

These inconsistencies in the text of the Strategy give local authorities the possibility to interpret the measures to hire a local expert in the way most favourable to their own situation.<sup>29</sup> Where local experts have been hired, in many cases a non-Roma administrator simply takes on a new title and additional responsibilities to fill the position. In other areas, Roma nominated by the BJR are hired by the mayors' offices as civil servants.<sup>30</sup> However, even in these cases, Roma leaders are not fully included in

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<sup>23</sup> Address no. 9601/2.06.2003.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 24 June 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Job description of the councillor Sava Remus, Iași City Hall.

<sup>26</sup> Mantu Florin, Mihai Elena, Sava Remus, LERA.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Iulian Dinu, 12 June 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Law No. 215/2001 of the Local Public Administration, Art. 30 – "(1) the position of councillor is incompatible with: b) the position of civil servant in the specialty apparatus of authorities of local and central public administration ..." The Strategy, however, in Section VIII. 4 provides that local experts can hold other positions in addition to their responsibilities as experts for Roma affairs. Interview with Romeo Chelaru – director of the prefect's office, jurist, 24 June 2003.

<sup>29</sup> See the cases of Vasiliu Vasile (mayors of Holboca and Grajduri) and Prodănescu Gabriela (mayor of Pașcani).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Romeo Chelaru, director of prefect's office, legal advisor, 24 June 2003.

the “process of making political decisions with impact on the economical and social life of Roma communities”.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.1.3 Local joint working group

The Iași county Local Joint Working Group was formed by the BJR and established by Decision no. 331, on 11 September 2001. It includes representatives of Roma NGOs<sup>32</sup> and local institutions,<sup>33</sup> local leaders of the RSDP, and local experts for Roma.

The role of Roma civil society, as well as its collaboration with local institutions, is perceived as a key factor in Strategy implementation.<sup>34</sup> In Iași County, a serious problem in the implementation of the Strategy is the lack of cohesion among Roma NGOs, including the RSDP. Due to this poor cooperation, the lack of a united point of view in the dialogue with bodies of local administration is a real shortcoming.

The Working Group meetings are the only vehicle for collaboration among civil society organisation and there has been no common project resulting from a partnership between Roma NGOs.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the number of projects and programmes initiated by Roma NGOs from Iași for the improvement of the situation of Roma is very low, but there are important partnerships with non-Roma organisations and with well-developed associations and foundations from Bucharest or Cluj.<sup>36</sup>

In general, Roma representatives attribute this low level of activity to the lack of financial, human, information and logistic resources.<sup>37</sup> Although Roma organisations have the possibility to access funds from local and international sources, this is limited by the lack of timely information and by lack of trained persons within the organisations to prepare applications.<sup>38</sup> Roma cite concerns about the difficulty of applying for Phare funds and

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Romeo Chelaru, director of prefect’s office, legal advisor, 24 June 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Ion Șerban, Barbu Lăutaru Cultural Association; Dinu Iulian, Romanitin Roma Students and Young People Association; Sava Adolf, Romani Foundation.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Todosiciuc Vicuța, County Directorate for Healthcare, school inspector for Roma; Pop Mariana, County School Inspectorate, Penciu, General Directorate for Child Protection; Mrs. Onuțu, County Police Inspectorate; Bogdan Bârleanu, Directorate for Culture.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Dinu Iulian, Romanitin Iași, 12 June 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban, president of Barbu Lăutaru, 14 June 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with Dinu Iulian, president of Romanitin, 12 June 2003; Ion Șerban, president of Barbu Lăutaru, 14 June 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban, 14 June 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Sava Adolf, 12 July 2003.

view the eligibility conditions as prohibitively complex for newly created or small organisations, which includes most of the NGOs from this region.<sup>39</sup>

Local public institutions have also not been highly successful in accessing Phare funds and all local authorities cite the lack of resources as an impediment to implementing the Strategy.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.2 Housing

There is no real strategy regarding the improvement of Roma living conditions at the level of Iași County. The areas populated by Roma are located mostly at town's limits, where there is no infrastructure: roads are unpaved, access to water, gas, and electricity is minimal.<sup>41</sup> Roma housing is often constructed without proper authorisation and on land that they do not own; in Zanea village there are 159 houses, of which only four have property deeds for the land, and none have proper construction authorisation.<sup>42</sup> Generally, the number of persons living under the same roof is twice the national average.<sup>43</sup>

There is a database regarding the situation of Roma communities' houses, and concrete measures are planned for the future. To date, only a small number of Roma have benefited from official support; nevertheless, local authorities consider that they have made progress.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.3 Social protection

Due to the high proportion of unemployed people without other sources of income, the majority of Roma in Iași county benefit from the minimum guaranteed income

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<sup>39</sup> Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Sava Remus, member of the Local Joint Working Group, Iași, 19 June 2003; Ștefan Georgescu, County Directorate for Healthcare, 9 July 2003; Sava Adolf, president of RSDP, Iași city, 12 July 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Liliana Florea, Târgu-Frumos, April 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mantu Florin, Local Expert on Roma Affairs, Ciurea, 18 June 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mihai Elena, Local Expert on Roma Affairs, Podu-Iloaiei, 21 June 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Stefan Roman, BJR councillor, 24 June 2003.

measures, as well as from other forms of state support such as child allowances, emergency aid, and pensions.<sup>45</sup>

There have been concerns regarding the practice of withholding a portion of the guaranteed minimum income in summer on the assumption that many Roma find informal work, even where there is no documentation to demonstrate beneficiaries have other sources of income.<sup>46</sup>

The lack of identity documents or registry documents prevent many Roma from accessing benefits to which they are entitled.<sup>47</sup> Without property or land ownership documents, Roma cannot provide a domicile address, which is a prerequisite for many forms of support. Couples who are not officially married, and minors without birth certificates also find it difficult or impossible to access to certain forms of support, goods and services, including medical care.<sup>48</sup> The complex, time consuming and expensive legal procedures for acquiring documents discourage many Roma from pursuing their claims. According the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma affairs, however, the situation has been greatly improved through efforts to better inform the Roma community about social benefits and their rights and obligations.<sup>49</sup>

Iași county is home to a large number of Roma social worker graduates, whose expertise is a valuable resource for Roma communities. In addition, the majority of Roma councillors working in the city halls have graduated from the faculty of social work, are well prepared provide the necessary information to the population and to facilitate the access to the rights that they have by law.<sup>50</sup>

An NGO, “Social Alternatives – From Roma Communities to Roma Communities”, organised a successful project to assist Roma in obtaining identity documents. More than 50 people received support through this six-month project.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mantu Florin, Local Expert on Roma Affairs, Ciurea, social worker, 18 June 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Cătălina Farcaș, Roundtable, Iași, 21 November 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Daniel Roman, social worker, Local Joint Working Group member, Târgu-Frumos, 16 April 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban, social worker at the Centre for Receiving Minors in Urgency Conditions (14 June 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, BJR councillor, 24 June 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with Mantu Florin, Local Expert on Roma Affairs, Ciurea, 18 June 2003; Sava Remus, Local Joint Working Group member Iași, 19 June 2003; Roman Ștefan, BJR councillor, 24 June 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Project financed under the Phare Partnership Fund for Roma in 2001.

## 2.4 Health care

The staff of the BJR includes the Director of Iași Directorate for Public Healthcare, but when interviewed the Director indicated that he is not familiar with his responsibilities as a BJR member. According to the Director, no health programmes specifically targeting Roma are planned, as “resolving all problems, without regard to ethnicity, will also solve the problems of minorities.”<sup>52</sup>

Very few measures have been initiated by local authorities in the healthcare field.<sup>53</sup> The only concrete measure identified at this date is a project training health mediators, organised by the Romani CRISS organisation in Bucharest in partnership with the Ministry of Healthcare and Family. After completing these training courses, eight health mediators have been hired in Iași. Subsequently, their number has decreased, although their presence in the local 15 Roma communities is vital.<sup>54</sup> According to a Romani CRISS representative, the RSDP was also collaborating in the training project, by identifying and recommending the trainees, but that the level of cooperation had been unsatisfactory.<sup>55</sup> The lack of monitoring and follow-up by the BJR was also disappointing.

The mediators have contributed to improving the number of vaccinations and developing a more detailed picture about the health situation of the Roma communities.<sup>56</sup> As a result of this project, a data was collection on the number of people infected with HIV, tuberculosis, and suffering from diabetes and cancer. Family planning advice was also offered for a time, but this was discontinued as the mediators were uncomfortable discussing contraception methods among the community.<sup>57</sup>

Although there are small difficulties at the administrative level, there is hope that the mediators will help to resolve these problems, especially as both the population and local authorities are now aware of the importance of mediators’ presence in their communities.<sup>58</sup> Although the number of health mediators hired in Iași County is superior to the number in other counties of the country.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Dr. Georgescu, director of the County Directorate for Healthcare, 9 July 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Dr. Todosiciuc Vicuța, County Directorate for Healthcare, 8 July 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Interviews with Dr. Todosiciuc Vicuța, County Directorate for Healthcare, 8 June 2003; Mihai Elena, Local Joint Working Group member Podu-Iloaiei, 21 June 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Mariana Buceanu, coordinator of the healthcare department, Romani CRISS, telephone interview on 8 June 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Cristina Acălugăriței, health mediator in Grajduri, 27 June 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Dr. Todosiciuc Vicuța, County Directorate for Healthcare, 8 July 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Dr. Todosiciuc Vicuța, County Directorate for Healthcare, 8 June 2003.

## 2.5 Economic initiatives

In Iași, a Job Fair for Roma was organised by the Iași County Agency for Professional Training and Occupation of Labour Force, offering 469 positions to the 512 visitors. The job fair was quite successful: 69 people found work as a result, placing Iași County third among those counties that organised such fairs.

The Community Development Agency Together, in collaboration with Romanitin Roma Students Association, the Iași County Agency for Professional Training and Occupation of Labour Force, S.C. Romar S.R.L, and the Centre for Adult Qualification (Training) and Consultancy in Work Legislation are working together to implement a Phare project “Facilitation of Access of Roma to the Labour Market.” Through this project, 41 people have qualified in various trades;<sup>59</sup> however, to date none of the participants has yet found employment.<sup>60</sup>

In 2000, the Social Alternatives organisation initiated a training project for the Roma in Pacureni district (Iași), financed under the Partnership Fund for Roma. The partners in the project were the Barbu Lăutaru Cultural Association, Elena Cuza primary school, the Alexandru cel Bun primary school, and the Centre for Adult Training. Classes in shoe repair and metal work were planned for 15 young Roma, but after some delays, the Roma community suggested that training in braiding would be more marketable, and the course was changed accordingly. The training continued for two months, and those who completed it were eligible for a diploma. A Roma goldsmith taught the metalworking course, in which 12 children took part. Throughout this project, the collaboration with the Roma partners was limited to the involvement of a Roma teacher. More active involvement of the Roma partners and of the Roma community was an essential condition for the continuation of this community project.<sup>61</sup> Two years after the end of this project, none of the participants has been hired.<sup>62</sup>

In 2000, 20 young Roma received diplomas as civil servants in public administration through a project sponsored by an international foundation, but to date none of the graduates has been hired by public institutions.

In Iași County, there are no programmes for the stimulation of traditional trades, for the financing of economic activities in Roma communities, nor programmes for increasing the access of Roma to agricultural activities or for obtaining credits for small and medium businesses. Although employment places for Roma women have been

<sup>59</sup> Telephone interview with Roxana Acojocăriței, monitor, Together Agency, 4 July 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Dinu Iulian, president of Romanitin, local partner, 12 June 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Florin Moisă, executive president of RCRC Cluj, 3 November 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Florin Mantu, project volunteer, 9 November 2003.

sought, there has been little success in this area. The project initiated by the Help! Association and supported by the Local Council and by Romani Chance aims to find employment for 20 Roma women as seamstresses, with a budget of ROL 2.7 billion.<sup>63</sup> This project is financed with funds from the Romanian Government and managed by the Office for Roma Affairs within the General Secretariat of the Government.

## 2.6 Justice and public order

In 2002, the BJR and Iași County Police Inspectorate signed a collaboration agreement.<sup>64</sup> This protocol calls for monthly or quarterly meetings between police representatives and Roma community leaders, as a means of crime prevention. In Roma communities, local presidents of the RSDP collaborate informally with the police to prevent conflict, and the representative of the Police County Inspectorate in the Joint Working Group takes part in the quarterly visits to Roma communities for legal education activities.<sup>65</sup>

The gendarmerie has also signed a protocol stipulating that it will collaborate with Roma communities.<sup>66</sup> To date, no specific activities have been initiated to increase Roma enrolment in the police and gendarmerie forces, although these institutions have indicated that when positions are available, they will hire Roma and send them to qualification courses.<sup>67</sup>

## 2.7 Child protection

Several initiatives have been developed for improving the protection of children's rights. These include the hiring of young Roma staff in child protection institutions, such as the "Emergency Placement Centre for Minors", in the framework of the General Directorate for Children Rights Protection in Iași County.<sup>68</sup> In 2003, two Roma graduates were also hired as social workers at the Directorates for Children Rights Protection in Iași and Târgu-Frumos.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 3 November 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Police Protocol no. 4385/5.03.2002.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 3 November 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Gendarmerie Protocol no. 281.789 /24.10.2002.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ștefan Roman, 3 November 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban, 14 June 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Ferariu Geanina in Iași, Sângheorghe Veronica in Tg-Frumos. Interview with Roman Ștefan, 3 November 2003.

Traditional Roma practices received international attention in 2003 when the underage daughter of a Roma leader was married in a large ceremony. Many Roma in Iași support these customary early marriages, considering them advantageous as there are no cases of divorce, abandonment or single-parent families in their community.<sup>70</sup>

## 2.8 Education

In Iași County, there is school inspector for Roma who works half-time, while a representative of the County School Inspectorate is a member of the BJR. The school inspector for Roma emphasised that the governmental “Milk and Doughnuts” programme has led to an increase in Roma attendance in schools. A programme offering writing materials to low-income students has also reportedly contributed to improved attendance.<sup>71</sup>

Romani language instruction has been quite successful in Iași. There are 11 Romani language teachers in the county, all graduates of the long-distance system education programme developed by Bucharest University and CREDIS. These Roma instructors teach in ten schools in rural areas, and in six schools in urban areas. Currently, 63 Roma pupils from Iași County have participated in the National Romani Language Competition. There is also a Romani language club that meets on a monthly basis. In October 2003, Romani language teachers met with Roma pupils to discuss several current issues, including the way in which they have been received in schools. The students raised a number of issues, particularly the costs for housing and meals for students coming from rural areas.<sup>72</sup>

In the 2003–2004 school year, 46 places were allocated, based on affirmative action measures taken by the Ministry of Education and Research, to Roma pupils in high schools and 60 in art and trade schools. Nevertheless, the number of occupied places is low: only 25 of these reserved slots have been taken by Roma pupils.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mantu Florin, Local Joint Working Group member, Ciurea social worker, 9 November 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Pop Mariana, school inspector for Roma County School Inspectorate, 10 November 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Pop Mariana, school inspector for Roma, CSI, 10 November 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Places set aside for Roma were filled as followed: Ion Neculce High School in Târgu-Frumos – 5 students, The Trade School in Târgu-Frumos – 1 student, Unirea School Group in Pașcani – 3 students, Economic High School No. 1 Iași – 2 students, Sports High School Iași – 1 student, Normal School Iași – 6 students, Anghel Sallini School Group Iași – 1 students, Virgil Madgearu School Group Iași – 6 student. Interview with Pop Mariana, 10 November 2003.

While there is wide agreement that the number of Roma graduates and students from the faculties in Iași has increased,<sup>74</sup> there is no available data on the number of Roma students and graduates from the Iași academic centre who are actively involved in working in Roma communities.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.9 Culture and denominations

The inspector for culture from within the Directorate for Culture and Patrimony was initially a member of the Joint Working Group, but due to his lack of involvement in cultural activities for Roma, he was no longer invited by the BJR.<sup>76</sup>

The Councillor for the Prefect on Roma affairs reports that each year on the national day of minorities, the Prefecture and the County Council support the organisation of activities for the affirmation of Roma culture and identity. According to the Councillor, the most important accomplishment of the BJR is its “involvement in social and cultural issues”. In previous years, four of the Roma NGOs in Iași developed cultural activities: Barbu Lăutaru, Romanitin, Romani Association, and the RSDP. This year, a performance financed by the RSDP and an exhibition at the Culture Palace<sup>77</sup> were organised on Minorities Day. In addition, performances were organised with music from orchestra of the Cultural Association Barbu Lăutaru.<sup>78</sup>

Issues related to Roma are rarely presented by radio and television stations in Iași, although on occasion Roma are invited to various broadcasts. The Prefect’s Councillor has made several appearances on local radio and television. The station “Radio Iași” features a broadcast entitled “Intercultural Dialogue”; during this broadcast, all minorities have broadcasting time, including Roma.<sup>79</sup> Local newspapers continually publish articles on Roma issues, and do not include only negative facts. Recently, there have been articles about the future implementation of a project initiated by the Government for the training of Roma councillors in eight regions of the country; this project will last for two years, from January 2004.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban, 14 June 2003.

<sup>75</sup> A database of Roma students has been established, but it is incomplete and not updated.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Roman Ștefan, 24 June 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Iulian Dinu, president of Romanitin 12 June 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ion Șerban 14 June 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Roundtable, Iași, 21 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Roman Ștefan, 3 November 2003.

## 2.10 Public participation

No Roma representative has been elected to a public position at the level of Iași County. All positions occupied by Roma in local administration institutions have been filled following recommendations from the RSDP, which is the only politically-oriented Roma organisation in the county. The dominance of the RSDP is a cause for concern among some civil society representatives, who have raised questions whether the appointments of Roma are made on political criteria rather than competence.<sup>81</sup>

The Iași branch of the RSDP is not legally registered and is run by the central office in Bucharest. Consequently, this branch cannot participate in the competition for various financing programmes, including for EU. It also cannot develop the required expertise and the necessary human resources for implementation of the Strategy.

## 2.11 Communication and civic participation

Iași County had the lowest rate of participation in the referendum on the new Constitution of Romania, only 9.6 per cent. The only locality in Iași County in which all citizens voted in the referendum was Zanea, a community of traditional Roma.<sup>82</sup>

Generally, most activities aimed at increasing public participation and civic awareness have been initiated by civil society groups. In 2001, The Resource Center for Roma Communities Cluj, in collaboration with Romanitin Roma Young People and Students Association developed an information campaign, “Defend Your Rights!”, with regard to new anti-discrimination legislation.<sup>83</sup> In the same year, Romanitin, Romani CRISS and Minority Rights Group International developed the “RIPPLE Programme”, which included monitoring of human rights at local level.<sup>84</sup> As response to several complaints, local monitors and Romani CRISS<sup>85</sup> organised “tests” of possible discrimination in local discotheques. Roma students were denied access in three discotheques out of the five

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Iulian Dinu, president of Romanitin, 6 June 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Information from the electronic publication “Info Rrom”, no. 657/20. 10. 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Iulian Dinu, president of Romanitin, 6 June 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Monitors within the department Human Rights: Ferariu Luiza Public Administration student, and Laura Constantin, Law School student.

<sup>85</sup> Mădălin Morteau, Law School student, assistant of the department Human Rights – Romani CRISS.

tested, and Romani CRISS together with Romanitin brought the owners to trial. At present, they are involved in two lawsuits at the Iași County Court.<sup>86</sup>

Although there have been cases of discrimination toward Roma, officials deny that there is discrimination in Iași.<sup>87</sup> In the same time, the Roma in communities declare that they do not always have access to public services.<sup>88</sup>

The Roma population in Iași is not well informed about their rights and the role of the institutions or the administrators that are responsible for handling various issues.<sup>89</sup> A lack of confidence in these institutions has developed, based on the discriminatory attitude of civil clerks toward Roma, a situation that is widely noted by the Roma community.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Details in the publication “Positive Practices: International Jurisprudence Regarding the Discrimination of Roma in the Access to Public Places”, Dezideriu Gergely, 2002 – p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Roman Ștefan, BJR councillor, county president of the RSDP, 24 June 2003; Sava Adolf, president of Romani Association, municipal president of the RSDP, 12 July 2003.

<sup>88</sup> Interviews with Mihai Elena, 21 June 2003; Lăzărică Costică, vice-president of the RSDP – Pașcani, interview on 21 June 2003.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mihai Elena, Local Joint Working Group Member Podu-Iloaiei, 21 June 2003.

<sup>90</sup> ERRC/RCRC Monitor, Laura Constantin, extract from ERRC/RCRC Report March 2003.