

## A. Executive summary and recommendations

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from a local-level monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improvement of the Condition of Roma (hereafter, the Strategy),<sup>1</sup> which covered five Romanian counties. The monitoring was a joint project of the Resource Center for Roma Communities in Romania, together with the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP)<sup>2</sup> and the Roma Participation Program (RPP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI) Budapest. Five teams of young Roma civil society activists carried out the monitoring.

The Strategy was adopted in April 2001. It includes ten general sections and a Master Plan of Measures detailing more specific actions to be carried out by both central and local government bodies. In the three years since its adoption, the majority of the administrative structures called for in the Strategy have been established. These include Prefecture-level County Offices for Roma; local experts at the town level; and the organisation of Joint Working Groups at all levels where appropriate. However, local monitoring revealed that while most of these bodies now exist in form, they lack the resources and authority that would enable them to carry out constructive activities at the local level.

For the County Offices for Roma (hereafter, BJR), a lack of real collaboration with other local bodies has hampered efforts to bring a coordinated approach to local policy for Roma. Monitoring indicates that participation in local working groups has been poor in some counties, with participating institutions delegating only low-level staff to attend. There are concerns about the politicisation of the selection process for the BJR staff in some areas, as the nationally dominant Roma Social Democrat Party (RSDP) has been the only organisation consulted in the nomination process, although there are many other active NGOs representing Roma interests.

In the specific areas addressed by the Strategy, few broad-based initiatives have been carried out in the five counties monitored. A number of small-scale initiatives, many funded through the EU's Phare programme, have been successful, notably in assisting Roma in acquiring identity papers, offering family planning advice, increasing access to

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<sup>1</sup> Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improvement of the Condition of Roma, (hereafter, the Strategy), Government Decision 430 25 April 2001, published in Official Gazette number 252, 16 May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> In 2002, EUMAP produced a report monitoring the development and implementation of the Strategy at the national level. The report on Romania can be accessed at: <http://www.eumap.org/reports/2002/content/07>

schools, and job training. However, the resolution of issues such as the legalisation of property, low education levels, and high unemployment will require much more sustained and far-reaching efforts than have been made so far.

Based on the monitoring carried out at the local level, this report contains a series of specific recommendations, to the national Government, to local authorities, to Roma organisations, and also to international organisations and donors. These recommendations highlight the importance of consultation and cooperation with a wide range of Roma organisations at the central and local levels; of mapping out specific tasks and responsibilities of all participating bodies; and of increasing the resources available to carry out implementation of the Strategy goals. In particular, the recommendations urge international donors to enhance opportunities for Roma to participate directly in all phases of planning and implementing projects intended to benefit their communities.

While recent international initiatives such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion bring new focus to the areas of life where Roma face obstacles and inequality throughout the region, the Romanian Government Strategy remains a relevant document. Even as many of its measures are carried out, the need for additional human and financial resources and a reiterated commitment to the Strategy's principles are more important than ever. Broad-based Roma participation, both through the employment of more Roma staff in official bodies, and through collaboration with civil society, is a critical element in ensuring that the implementation of the Strategy meets the needs of Roma communities at all levels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To the national Government:

### *Participation*

- The Government should set a good example by consulting with a broad spectrum of Roma civil society representatives in the development and implementation of the Strategy.
- In the elaboration of the National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the Government should draw upon the Strategy and consult with representatives of Roma organisations to ensure that Strategy objectives are not abandoned in the development of new policy.

### *Coordination*

- The Government should take steps to promote the implementation of the Strategy at the local level, including through the allocation of resources specifically targeted to the experts and bodies established at the county and city level, to ensure that they have the capacity needed to address the needs of Roma in their area.
- The Government should continue to work closely with the European Union and other international institutions to support capacity development among local authorities, contributing financial resources accordingly.
- The Government should encourage collaboration between Roma NGOs and local authorities, to take advantage of expertise that civil society has developed and to ensure that local projects meet the needs of Roma communities.

### *Training*

- The Government should ensure that all County Offices for Roma receive training on anti-discrimination legislation and on the role of the National Council for Combating Discrimination.

To local governments:

### *Administrative measures*

- Where county strategies have not yet been developed, local authorities should take the initiative to draft a local plan for implementation of Strategy objectives, in accordance with the Master Plan of Measures activity 13. Where county plans have been elaborated, there should be annual revision and updating, to include schedules, specific objectives, and periodic reporting by the responsible bodies.
- Local authorities should provide adequate support for the County Offices for Roma, including appropriate office space, transport and administrative support, to enable the office to carry out the tasks assigned to it under the Strategy (Section VIII. 3.).
- Where a Local Joint Working Group has not been established at the county or local level in line with activity 10 of the Strategy's Master Plan of Measures, local authorities should take immediate steps to organise such a Working Group. In all counties, Working Groups should contribute directly to the county strategies and establish specific terms and objectives, including methods for implementation and reporting requirements.

- All local institutions participating in Local Joint Working Groups should delegate representatives with appropriate decision-making authority and a clear mandate to fully participate in the working groups' activities.
- The Prefectures should establish the responsibilities of the County Office for Roma and the local joint working group in the implementation of programmes at the local level.
- All county and local bodies should undertake measures to hire Roma professionals as civil servants, particularly within the County Offices for Roma, ensuring that selection is based on fair competition and professional merits, not political affiliation.
- Local authorities should ensure that budget requests to the Government include sufficient allocations for the implementation of the Strategy at the local level.

### *Participation*

- Local authorities should ensure that input and participation from a variety of Roma groups is incorporated into all activities that have an impact on Roma communities, helping to de-politicise the implementation of the Strategy at the local level.
- Local authorities should take steps to increase the number of Roma working in local institutions for Roma issues, drawing from the substantial pool of qualified and experienced Roma activists.
- Local authorities should approach Roma civil society groups for cooperation and collaboration in Strategy implementation, as these groups possess extensive expertise and experience in planning and carrying out projects to benefit Roma communities.

### *Training and communication*

- In cooperation with civil society, local authorities should elaborate programmes to inform all civil servants about the Strategy's objectives and their role in implementing its measures.
- Local bodies should develop programmes for raising the awareness of the Roma population regarding fundamental human rights, and for civic education regarding the role of institutions, their rights and obligations to the local administrative institutions.
- Local authorities should organise courses for civil servants on minority rights and official responsibilities at the level of local administration institutions.

- Local authorities should elaborate programmes in collaboration with the Roma NGOs to inform the Roma community about the content of the Strategy.

To Roma organisations:

#### *Coordination and cooperation*

- Wherever possible, Roma organisations should formulate a joint approach to common problems, and advocate for issues of mutual interest.
- Roma NGOs should maintain open communication and cooperation with local and national authorities to help ensure that the expertise developed in the civil sector is accessible for Strategy implementation.
- Roma organisations should continue to work with the National Council for Combating Discrimination towards combating all forms of discrimination.

#### *Monitoring*

- Roma organisations should continue to monitor the implementation of the Strategy at both the local and national level, and follow up any negative trends with the appropriate authorities.

To international organisations:

#### *Monitoring*

- International organisations should promote the regular assessment and evaluation of Strategy implementation by supporting the preparation and discussion of domestic monitoring reports and critiques.

#### *Participation*

- Where possible, donors should promote capacity-building programmes for Roma organisations, as well as programmes for monitoring the implementation of public policy. Roma participation in all aspects of design and implementation of public policy should also be a priority, according to the principles elaborated in the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the Roma Education Fund.
- International donors should adopt eligibility criteria and application procedures that increase the access of local-level Roma NGOs to funding opportunities.
- Participants in the Decade of Roma Inclusion and Roma Education Fund should encourage the incorporation of Strategy goals and measures into the programmes elaborated under these international initiatives.

## B. Overview

## INTRODUCTION

The Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improvement of the Condition of Roma (hereafter, the Strategy) was adopted in April 2001. It is the first governmental initiative to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the problems facing the Roma minority in Romania, undertaken as part of the EU accession process and fulfilment of the political criteria established by the Copenhagen declaration (1993).<sup>3</sup>

The Strategy was primarily developed by the National Office for Roma which, at the time, was a body within the Department for the Protection of National Minorities in the Ministry of Public Information. A number of Roma organisations offered input in the elaboration of the Strategy, although concerns regarding the level of Roma participation in drafting the Strategy were raised early on in the process.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Roma welcomed the Government Decision adopting the Strategy as a positive development.

Three years since its adoption, however, the Strategy's level of implementation remains low. Despite some successful initiatives, the objectives of the Strategy have not been successfully translated to the local level and there is a general lack of awareness of how the Strategy should be implemented in practice. The administrative structures at the central and local levels are still functioning poorly and lack financial and material resources, especially at the local level.

This joint monitoring project follows on from an EUMAP report on minority protection in Romania, published in November 2002. Two important objectives were targeted by this joint project:

- monitoring the implementation of the Strategy at the local level; and
- developing the capacity of the Roma organisations to monitor and report on the implementation of public policies towards Roma.

Due to time and resource constraints, the monitoring covered only five counties.<sup>5</sup> In selecting the target counties, the partners involved local Roma students' organisations,

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<sup>3</sup> For an earlier analysis of the Strategy's content and national implementation, see the EUMAP report, *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2002, pp. 476–524. Also available online at <http://www.eumap.org/reports/2002/Minority> (hereafter, EUMAP, *Minority Protection 2002*).

<sup>4</sup> EUMAP, *Minority Protection 2002*, p. 483.

<sup>5</sup> Romania has 41 counties, including the capital Bucharest.

selecting Cluj, Iași, Dolj, Timiș and Brăila counties, located in the main historical regions of Romania – Transilvania, Moldova, Banat, Dobrogea and Muntenia. In the choice of counties to be monitored, consideration was also given to the capacity of local NGOs.

A team of two young Roma was selected from each county, and trained in the field of public policy monitoring. A single methodology was discussed and prepared for use by all teams. The teams started their monitoring activity in the summer and autumn of 2003, collecting relevant data and interviewing public authorities and civil society representatives at the local level. After the first drafts of the county reports were prepared, they were subject to critique by the public authorities and civil society during roundtables organised in each county. The relevant discussions and information were included afterwards in the final draft of the reports.

The five teams of monitors that prepared the draft reports, all young Roma activists,<sup>6</sup> encountered both positive and negative reactions during their work.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, simply the teams' presence and questions may have prompted interviewees to think more carefully about their role in the implementation of the Strategy.

The roundtables organised by the five teams of reporters were an example of good practice for local meetings, in which problems were put on the table and openly discussed by a broad range of representatives of institutions and civil society.<sup>8</sup> These meetings also helped to create communication channels that can be used for solving future problems.

The findings presented in this report are intended to contribute to raising the awareness both of Roma and non-Roma about the problems faced by Roma communities. The report aims to present accurate information about the best practices and less successful aspects of the transformation of the Strategy into local practice.

The work involved in drafting the report and its findings proves that there is still a vital need for the continuation of monitoring and reporting, particularly on the public policy addressed specifically to the Roma community. In addition, it proves once again that the participation of Roma in the entire process is essential; the capacity of Roma civil society for this monitoring already exists, and it must continue its watchdog role concurrent with its active involvement in putting the policies into practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Ursu and Adrian Moldovan in Cluj County; Laura Constantin and Daniela Rusu in Iași County; Anton Gina and Parnica Anisoara in Brăila County; Valentin Pepenel and Carmen Marcu in Timiș County; Costache Marcel and Silviu Bratu in Dolj County.

<sup>7</sup> In one county, one of the young Roma monitors was threatened by the local leader of the RSDP; in other cases the monitors had to request information under Law 544 regarding access to information, due to the fact that the public authorities refused to release the information.

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 120 persons participated in the five roundtables organised in November-December 2003, both representing local public institutions and Roma and non-Roma NGOs;

Section one of this Overview Section highlights some of the latest developments concerning Government implementation of the Strategy since its adoption in April 2001. The second section resumes the main findings from the monitoring carried out in the five counties. In section three the main conclusions from the monitoring are presented.

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Central Government bodies

In 2003, the Romanian Government introduced a number of structural changes that led to the transformation of the Ministry of Public Information into an Agency for Governmental Strategies.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the National Office for Roma was re-named as the Office for Roma Issues<sup>10</sup> and moved under the umbrella of the Department for Interethnic Relations,<sup>11</sup> part of the Government General Secretariat. The Department for Interethnic Relations assumed responsibility for minority issues in general and took over coordination of the Strategy.

The Joint Committee for Monitoring and Implementation,<sup>12</sup> the main structure responsible for the implementation of the Strategy, remains the primary structure for the implementation of the Strategy, while the Office for Roma Issues is the executive body.<sup>13</sup> The level of representation of Roma in the Joint Committee is still limited and there were several attempts to expel some of the Roma members of the Committee, disregarding the established rules.<sup>14</sup>

After the Government's structural changes and the signing of a political protocol between the Social Democrat Party (SDP)<sup>15</sup> and the Roma Social Democrat Party

<sup>9</sup> Government Decision no 754/2003 regarding the Organisation and Functioning of the Agency for Governmental Strategies.

<sup>10</sup> The officially used name of the office does not fully correspond to the literal translation from Romanian – *Oficiul pentru Problemele Romilor*, which is literally Office for the Problems of the Roma.

<sup>11</sup> Changes were made to the office staff: Sub-State Secretary Ivan Gheorghe was replaced by Ilie Dincă, another important leader of the Roma Social Democrat Party. The former president of the National Council for Combating Discrimination, Cristian Jura, became Chief of Department for Interethnic Relations, having a State Secretary status.

<sup>12</sup> Provided for in the Strategy, Section VIII. 1, and established by Order of the Ministry of Public Information no. 259/02; the committee is comprised of State Secretaries representing the relevant Government ministries and leaders of Roma NGOs.

<sup>13</sup> The Strategy names the National Office for Roma as the executive body; following reorganisation in 2003, responsibility was transferred to the Office for Roma Issues. Strategy, Section VIII. 1.

<sup>14</sup> The Roma members of the Joint Committee are: Nicolae Păun – President of RSDP and M.P., Vasile Ionescu – President of Roma Centre for Public Policies Aven Amentza and expert of the Ministry of Culture and Denominations, Delia Grigore – President of AS-TRA/SATRA, Costel Bercuş – Executive Director of Romani CRISS, Mariaea Ionescu – Expert in the National Office for Roma.

<sup>15</sup> The Social Democrat Party (SDP) is the party in government.

(RSDP) in November 2003,<sup>16</sup> the RSDP sought to assume leadership of the Roma movement and gain direct access to important funding from the State budget.<sup>17</sup> In 2004, the RSDP received ROL 35.85 billion (approximately €900,000).<sup>18</sup> Several Roma NGOs expressed concern about this allocation and repeatedly requested that the RSDP publish the details on how this significant sum of money has been spent.<sup>19</sup>

The Ministerial Commissions on Roma are structures created in the most relevant ministries, headed by a State Secretary and comprised of a member of the Joint Committee and three to four additional members, one of whom is to be a Roma person nominated by Roma organisations.<sup>20</sup> There is practically no information regarding the activities of these commissions in the past year.

## 1.2 Funding the Strategy

Since its adoption in 2001, the Strategy has received a very low level of direct governmental funding, in view of the needs identified and according to the Government's own estimate of approximately €105 million for the ten-year period covered by the programme.<sup>21</sup> According to this estimate, the Government should contribute 31 per cent and the remaining 69 per cent could be funded from extra-budgetary resources, mainly international donors. However, three years from the adoption of the Strategy, the Government has not allocated more than €3 million in total, representing approximately ten per cent of its proposed share of €32.55 million.

A Government report of April 2003 on the implementation of the Strategy mentions that out of 123 measures included in the Master Plan of Action, 60 are complete; 48

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<sup>16</sup> Political Agreement signed between SDP and RSDP, 24 November 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Official Gazette no. 137, Government Decision on distribution and use of the funds mentioned in the Law no. 507/2003 regarding the State Budget for 2004. The decision establishes the amounts allocated to all minorities represented in the Council for National Minorities.

<sup>18</sup> The exchange rate is calculated at €1 = ROL 39,833

<sup>19</sup> Gelu Duminica, Director of Community Development Agency Together, Vasile Ionescu, President of Roma Center for Public Policies Aven Amentza, Costel Bercus, Director of Romani CRISS, Moisă Florin, Executive President of Resource Center for Roma Communities expressed this request in their public presence in various conferences and seminars and in the media. There has been no result on this matter so far.

<sup>20</sup> As provided for under Strategy Section VIII. 2. See EUMAP, *Minority Protection 2002*, p. 487.

<sup>21</sup> Estimate completed by MEDE European Consultancy after consultation with each ministry involved in the implementation of the Strategy, 2001.

are in the process of implementation; and 15 have not been accomplished.<sup>22</sup> This means that the Government considers 50 per cent of the Strategy objectives to already have been accomplished, in spite of the low level of funding. However, the measures that have been carried out are primarily of a structural nature, such as the nomination of the local experts, which were given little in the way of continuing support.

In more specific terms, in 2003 approximately €1.6 million was allocated from the State budget for 26 local development projects related to the Strategy.<sup>23</sup> The funds were allocated to local authorities for projects on infrastructure, vocational training and income generating activities.

The most important funding for the Strategy comes, however, from the European Union (EU). Approximately €16 million has already been allocated through the following programmes:

- Support to the national strategy to improve Roma conditions, Phare 2002 – €6 million plus the €1.6 million from the Romanian government mentioned above;
- Improving access to education of disadvantaged groups, with a special focus on Roma, Phare 2001 – €7 million plus €1.33 million from the Romanian Government;
- Fund for Improving the Roma Situation, Phare 2000 – €1.15 million.

The Department for Interethnic Relations and its Project Implementation Unit, in collaboration with the European Commission Delegation in Romania, are in the process of preparing a multi-year programme in order to continue the implementation of the Strategy.

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<sup>22</sup> Romanian Government, Report on the Progress of Implementation of the Governmental Strategy for Improvement of the Roma Condition, April 2003.

<sup>23</sup> €1.6 million, respectively ROL 56 billion allocated for local development projects in 2003, and administered by the Project Implementation Unit within the Department for Interethnic Relations. These projects and their budgets were never made publicly available, and the information has been kept confidential.

### 1.3 Roma NGOs and the Strategy

In 2003, the relationships continuously deteriorated between the RSDP and other active Roma NGOs, especially the members of the Roma National Network,<sup>24</sup> the former members of the Working Group of Roma Associations.<sup>25</sup>

Several active Roma NGO leaders have tried to work directly with the RSDP and even to become local leaders of the RSDP, in an attempt to support an internal party change. In most cases, however, this attempt was not well received by other Roma NGOs and they faced a certain level of exclusion.<sup>26</sup> These leaders also found that the RSDP's level of control over their activity and resources made it difficult to take action effectively at the local level. The RSDP reportedly controls its decision-making process very strictly from the central office in Bucharest, and the regional branches of the party cannot register legally and consequently have only limited access to applications for different funding and support programs. Furthermore, there is a lack of financial resources allocated to the county level; although the RSDP receives a generous allocation from the State budget, the local branches do not receive enough resources for their day-to-day activities. Local leaders are thus compelled to use their private funds or to use their influence to attract funds, sometimes at the limit of legality.<sup>27</sup>

The last Regular Report on Romania's Progress Towards Accession issued in 2003 by the European Commission specifically mentions that the Romanian Government's choice to work only with a single Roma organisation, in contradiction with the principles established by the Strategy, is a matter of concern.<sup>28</sup>

In an attempt to overcome this situation and ensure at least nominal participation of various Roma NGOs, the RSDP organised a new network of Roma NGOs, after several other attempts to attract Roma civil society failed. A group of Roma NGOs known as For Romangue and consisting of 76 Roma NGOs was created in 2003.

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<sup>24</sup> The Roma National Network is a virtual network of NGOs created and supported by the Resource Center for Roma Communities in 2002 and containing 23 of the most active and important Roma NGOs in the country.

<sup>25</sup> The Working Group of Roma Associations, known as GLAR, was a group of Roma NGOs, including the Roma Party (after 2002 RSDP), that actively participated in drafting of the Strategy.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Geza Otvos, President of Wassdas Foundation Cluj; he took over the leadership of the RSDP in Salaj County, February 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Information collected during round-tables in Cluj, Iași, Timiș, Craiova, Brăila during November-December 2003; also, discussions with several Roma leaders in different counties who requested anonymity.

<sup>28</sup> 2003 Regular Report, p. 30.

Available at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report\\_2003/pdf/rr\\_ro\\_final.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2003/pdf/rr_ro_final.pdf)

However, a review of the names of the organisations listed indicates these groups are again closely tied to the RSDP: approximately 60 of the organisations listed were identified as being run by leaders of the RSDP in the region.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.4 The Strategy and new international initiatives

A major initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI), and the World Bank, in cooperation with the European Union, supported also by Governments and Roma civil society, started in 2003. The proposals for a Decade of Roma Inclusion and a Roma Educational Fund (REF) were launched in Budapest on June 30–July 1 2003 at the international conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe. Breaking the Poverty Cycle”.<sup>30</sup>

Such new international initiatives will hopefully lead to a new approach towards the improvement of the Roma condition in the region. It is the expressed wish of the Roma to be part of this process, and not simply the subject of activities organised by different international institutions. The presence at this conference of a delegation of young Roma activists was therefore of major importance for the Roma movement.<sup>31</sup> Their participation in the conference was a result of a selection process based on criteria established by the conference organisers and the participants’ own interest to contribute.

The young Roma Delegation from Romania prepared a document that was presented together with the other country delegations; this document was prepared and had the endorsement of the Roma National Network members and of Roma organisations that participated in a seminar before the Budapest conference. All the participating organisations agreed that the Delegation needs to have the endorsement of the Roma movement and that the use of the Working Group of Roma Association is the most suitable and known for the international community.

The Delegation presented the main points of concern regarding the situation of Roma in Romania and a set of priorities of the Roma civil society in order to deal with the

<sup>29</sup> Observations made by Gelu Duminica, Director of Community Development Agency Together, March 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Further details on the Decade of Roma Inclusion are available at the World Bank website, [http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ECA/ECSHD.nsf/\\$\\$vwbyid/5ACB3FB63019D944C1256D6A00438015?Opendocument&Start=1&Count=5](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ECA/ECSHD.nsf/$$vwbyid/5ACB3FB63019D944C1256D6A00438015?Opendocument&Start=1&Count=5)

<sup>31</sup> The Romanian delegation was comprised of 9 young Roma activists: Costel Bercus, Dezideriu Gergely, Maniana Buceanu – Romani CRISS, Delia Grigore, Lavinia Olmazu – Aven Amentza, Dan Pavel Doghi – Resource Center for Roma Communities Cluj Napoca, Gruiua Bumbu – Roma Democratic Union Alba Iulia, Cosmina Novacovici – Roma Women Association Timișoara, Gelu Duminica – Community Development Agency Together.

broad range of issues affecting Roma in the coming ten years on a European level. The document presented by the Delegation is in line with the principles and directions of the Strategy. Moreover, the document emphasises the problem of police violence against Roma communities, an element that was not properly addressed by the Strategy. This issue has been widely documented by domestic and international human rights observers, and must be addressed together with the promotion of anti-discrimination measures.

The strong position of the Delegation was both appreciated and criticised, especially by government bodies, but it proved once again that the problems faced by Roma are complex and must be discussed and analysed by different actors. It also reaffirmed that Roma participation is essential, and that change can be produced only if the target of the change process is actively participating in all stages.

## 2. FINDINGS FROM LOCAL-LEVEL MONITORING

This section resumes the main conclusions of the local-level monitoring carried out in the five Romanian counties. Further details on the findings in each county are addressed in the full-length county reports in the second part of this volume.

### 2.1 Administrative bodies

#### 2.1.1 County offices for Roma (BJR)

The County Offices for Roma (*birourile județene pentru romi* – hereafter, BJR) were the first structures created in all 41 counties and remain the most important public institutional contact point for Roma issues at the local level.<sup>32</sup> In all five counties monitored, the office was created by an order issued by the Prefecture, according to the rules established by an order of the Ministry of Public Administration.<sup>33</sup> However, not all the Prefectures immediately implemented the orders from the Ministry of Public Administration; in Cluj and Brăila the establishment of the office was delayed.

The main responsibilities of the BJR are the organisation, planning and coordination of the activities conducted at a county level for the implementation of the targets and tasks in the Master Plan of Measures for the Implementation of the Strategy.<sup>34</sup> According to internal rules on their organisation and function,<sup>35</sup> the offices have the following responsibilities:

- evaluating the situation of Roma in their area of responsibility;
- identifying solutions to the needs of the local communities;
- mobilising community resources in order to accomplish the objectives of the Strategy;
- ensuring continuous communication with local administration authorities;

<sup>32</sup> Strategy, Chapter VIII Structures, 3. County Offices on Roma, “The county offices on Roma are structures organised at a county level, within the prefect’s offices and they are subordinated to the Ministerial Commission on Roma under the Ministry of Local Public Administration.”

<sup>33</sup> Order of the Ministry of Public Administration no. 408/28.06.2001.

<sup>34</sup> Strategy, Chapter IX, Master Plan of Measures for the Implementation of the Strategy, No. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Order of the Ministry of Public Administration no. 548/27.11.2001, regarding the approval of the framework rules for organisation and functioning of the County Offices for Roma (*Regulamentul de organizare și functionare*).

- highlighting problems for which the local authorities are responsible in order to resolve them;
- initiating partnerships between members of Roma communities and local authorities;
- collaborating with decentralised institutions;
- mediating any interethnic or inter-community conflicts;
- regular reporting to the General Directorate for Relations with Prefectures (*Directia Generala pentru Relatiile cu Prefecturile*) within the Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Public Information.

Each BJR is expected to have a staff of three to four, at least one of whom should be a Romani person. There is little detail in the Strategy as to the specific responsibilities of the staff within the BJR. It has been noted that there are inconsistencies in the Strategy's terminology, with the words "councillor" and "expert" used interchangeably. In each county monitored, a Romani person has been hired as the Councillor for the Prefect on Roma Affairs (hereafter, Councillor). These Councillors have various levels of expertise regarding the situation of Roma in the monitored counties. In a positive development, in all five counties the experts are university graduates and are quite young, only one over the age of 40. The expert in Timiș County is on a half-time contract, while the four other experts are employed full-time by the Prefecture. All five experts were hired after consultation with RSDP, although in Timiș and Brăila the RSDP is not well developed as an organisation and consultation with additional local groups would have been advisable.

The composition of the BJR in the five counties is fairly uniform, with two to three public servants nominated to be members of the office. Monitoring revealed that their activity is limited, however, because they generally lack experience in the field of Roma issues and have other current responsibilities. A particular situation exists in Timiș County, where the office consists of four Roma local leaders, members of RSDP acting on a voluntary basis. This situation does not conform to the structure specified in the Strategy, which calls for the office to be subordinated to the Ministry of Public Administration and the four volunteers in Timiș do not have the status of civil servants.<sup>36</sup> It therefore appears that the Timiș office has not fulfilled the criteria for its legal establishment.

The Roma experts in the BJR identify the main difficulties in their activity as the low level of involvement of the public authorities in the Strategy implementation; the experts' lack of capacity to make decisions; and a lack of the financial resources

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<sup>36</sup> Order of the Ministry of Public Administration no. 548/27.11.2001, article 2.

available at the local level.<sup>37</sup> In the counties monitored, a lack of space and resources were also common problems for the BJR. The space allocated for the offices tends to be rather small and not easily accessible to Roma clients. The offices are equipped with computers and printers. The resources at the disposal of the experts in the BJR are limited and their capacity to make a decision is seriously restricted. In order to make a site visit or to participate in an event related to Roma issues, the expert must have the approval of the Prefect which can delay or impede an effective response in a crisis situation.

The Roma population generally requests assistance from the BJR for issues such as social support; access to social services; public support documents; unemployment; housing; identity; and property documents. Although their work has been hindered by the lack of resources and authority delegated to their office, the BJR have nonetheless been involved in a number of successful programmes, often in cooperation with local Roma NGOs. In Brăila, for example, the BJR has assisted Roma in acquiring property and personal identification documents. In several counties, the BJR has helped to organise job fairs for Roma.

### 2.1.2 Local experts on Roma affairs

The local experts on Roma affairs are responsible for carrying out actions to improve the situation of Roma at the local level. They operate under the Mayor's offices and are subordinated both to the County Offices on Roma (BJR) and to the Mayor. The Strategy does not clearly set out the responsibilities of the local experts on Roma affairs, noting only that they are the chief mediators between the public authorities and Roma communities.<sup>38</sup> No specific reporting responsibilities or competence is detailed in the Strategy, which gives the Mayors' offices a wide margin of appreciation in determining the extent of the local experts' activities.

Although the local experts have an essential role in the implementation of the Strategy at the community level, the hiring process has been greatly protracted, for several reasons. Frequently, local mayoralties do not have the resources to hire another staff member. For example, none of the towns in Timiș County has yet hired a local expert on Roma affairs.

The Strategy does permit the local experts on Roma affairs to have additional responsibilities. The majority of experts were therefore selected from the local

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews with Titi Marius, Roma expert, COR Cluj, 13 October 2003; Florin Andronache, Roma expert, COR Dolj, 18 June 2003; Grosu Sandel, COR Brăila, 1 July 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Strategy, chapter VIII, no. 3, Local experts on Roma affairs.

administration and simply given a new title and an additional portfolio. However, few such experts are members of the Roma community. For example, in Cluj County, where 43 local experts were nominated, only five are members of the Roma community. Out of these five Roma, only one actually has been hired for the position of local expert for Roma affairs; the others, although performing the same function, were given different positions available in the institution such doorman, maintenance, or simply receiving the minimum guaranteed income.<sup>39</sup> In Brăila County, only five local experts of Roma origin have been hired, with an additional 40 community workers trained in a Phare project in 2003 that are working on a voluntary basis in 40 rural areas.<sup>40</sup> It is also significant that a local expert for Roma affairs has been hired in only two of the five regional capitals,<sup>41</sup> while the remaining Mayors' offices appear unable to fulfil this measure, three years since the adoption of the Strategy.

In most counties, the reports found dissatisfaction regarding the fact that the nomination of the local experts for Roma affairs was made in direct collaboration with RSDP, while other Roma organisations were not involved, and that the required professional criteria were not respected in the selection process.

The local experts on Roma affairs have expressed the view that their activities would be more effective if they were to have adequate office space for maintaining their relationship with their clients. They also expressed concern that insufficient personnel had been allocated to their office and suggested that their additional responsibilities should be reassigned to lighten their workload. The local experts also indicated that Roma themselves should develop a better understanding of the context and limitations of their activities and that the Roma communities should participate in the electoral processes and elect representatives at the local level.<sup>42</sup>

The most common problems for which the Roma are approaching the local experts on Roma affairs are related to housing and access to utilities, including electricity, water, and gas, but also for problems related to minimum income benefits, property and identity papers, and unemployment.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Titi Marius, Roma expert, County Office for Roma Cluj, 13 October 2003

<sup>40</sup> The "Equality relations" project funded under Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma, Phare RO0004.02.02, administered by Prefecture in partnership with local branch of the Alliance for Roma Unity.

<sup>41</sup> Local experts for Roma affair were hired in Iași and Brăila.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Liliana Ecedi, local expert for Roma affairs, Gilău, Cluj County, 10 September 2003; Sebastian Hoda, local expert for Roma affairs, Feleac, Cluj, 10 September 2003; Simona Fizeșan, local expert for Roma affairs, Florești, Cluj, 10 September 2003.

### 2.1.3 Local joint working groups

According to the Strategy, the County Offices for Roma (BJR) are responsible for establishing Local Joint Working Groups, (at the county or local level as appropriate), consisting of both public institutions and NGOs.<sup>43</sup> The precise activities of these working groups is not set out in the Strategy or the Master Plan of Measures. A Government report issued in April 2003 underlines the importance of three essential elements for the success of this social intervention: the expertise of the NGOs in the identification of needs, elaboration and implementation of projects; communication with local authorities; and the authority of Roma leaders or their representatives in the local communities.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, there is still a large gap between the stated intentions of this Government report and the actual situation. As of autumn 2003, a working group had not been established in Brăila or Dolj counties. In Dolj County, the Roma expert prepared a list of 20 representatives of public institutions and the RSDP. This selection was criticised both by Roma representatives and some civil servants.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Timiș County, a structure called the “County Council on Roma” was instead created. This structure has a name similar to the County Council, which is the main administrative public structure existing at the county level. This “County Council on Roma” is constituted and run by the same group of Roma representatives as the BJR and there is no evidence that other entities are participating.<sup>46</sup>

In those cases where such Working Groups have been established at the county level, the level of participation of the public structures in the Working Groups activities is rather low. These institutions usually delegate civil servants who lack decision-making authority and often do not have enough knowledge about the subject or great motivation to participate in the meetings.<sup>47</sup> There are no financial resources allocated for the organisation of the meetings and their frequency is usually once every one to two months, generally concluded without taking important decisions. A possible measure to improve the efficiency of the Local Joint Working Groups would be for the

<sup>43</sup> Strategy, Chapter IX, Master plan of Measures, measure no. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Report on the progress in implementation of the Governmental Strategy for Improvement of the Situation of Roma, Bucharest, April 2003, page 6.

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with Velcu Vasile Năzdrăvan, President of Roma Union Craiova, 20 June 2003; Sorina Popa, councillor at Direction for Culture, Denominations and National Cultural Patrimony Dolj, at Round Table, Craiova, November 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Statement of constitution of the County Council on Roma, 7 December 2002, Timișoara and Report of Timiș Prefecture, 7 April 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Round table in Cluj Napoca, December 2003; Round table in Iași, Timiș, Brăila, Craiova, November 2003.

County Council to adopt a Decision to validate the structure, which would also bring some financial resources.

The role of the Roma NGOs and their collaboration with public structures in the implementation of the Strategy is considered crucial. One of the problems mentioned by several Roma activists is the lack of cohesion among different Roma organisations, including the difficult relationship with the RSDP. Due to this poor cooperation, the Roma are not able to present a coherent point of view in relation to the public institutions, and it is almost impossible to start and maintain a stable partnership.<sup>48</sup>

Examples of public institutions that are part of the Local Joint Working Groups are: the Agency for Training and Occupation of Labour Force; the Agency for Housing; the Directorate for Labour and Social Solidarity; the Directorate for Public Health; the House for Health Insurance; the Police Inspectorate; the School Inspectorate; the Directorate for Youth and Sports; the Directorate for Culture and Denominations; and the Directorate for the Protection of Children's Rights. Local Roma NGOs also participate in the Committees.

## 2.2 Housing

The Strategy is generous in proposing measures for improving the housing situation of the Roma communities, in particular regarding the ownership situation of land and houses and the building or rehabilitation of houses.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the local monitoring revealed almost no concrete results of the Strategy measures at the local level and almost no funds have been allocated for such activities. Instead, more Roma families were evicted from some towns and moved to other places. For example in Cluj Napoca, two new segregated settlements, Pata Rît 2 and Pata Rît 3, were created nearby an existing Roma settlement called Pata Rît, by transferring Roma families and other homeless citizens from different areas of the town.<sup>50</sup> After the RSDP branch and Amare Phrala Association made several attempts to bring this to the attention of public opinion and wrote several letters to the public authorities, in December 2003 the Local Council for Cluj Napoca allocated a budget of ROL 200,000 (approximately €5,000) for heating materials, food and electricity.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Dinu Iulian, President of Roma Student Association Romanitin Iași, October 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Government Strategy, Chapter VII, Section B.

<sup>50</sup> Pata Rît is a community near the city garbage dump, where approximately 400 Roma are living and collecting recyclable materials.

<sup>51</sup> Round Table, Cluj County, December 2003.

In some counties, limited rehabilitation activities were carried out. For example, in Brăila county, some rehabilitation activities for “Colonia KM 10”, a Roma majority community, were started in August 2003.<sup>52</sup> In Dolj county, four families received construction materials from the town budget for rehabilitation of their houses, and some other buildings will be bought by the Town Hall and transformed into social housing.<sup>53</sup>

One of the most important problems faced by Roma communities is the legal status of their housing, from ownership of the land to the lack of property documents of their houses. However, there were very few cases of legalisation of properties in the counties monitored. In Iași county, a large majority of the Roma houses do not have property documents and also lack construction authorisation. In Zanea village, out of 159 houses, some of which are new, only four have land registration documents and none have construction authorisation. In Timișoara, Timiș county, a number of houses built by Roma families without proper authorisation are in danger of being destroyed by the authorities.<sup>54</sup>

It is a general opinion expressed by Roma representatives that the local councils do not take a real interest in resolving the legal status of land and houses and that these problems are exacerbated by the large number of Roma who lack identity documents and are unaware of property regulations.

The Government report on the status of the Strategy implementation mentions only that the BJR collected information on the housing status of the Roma communities and that the future Phare-funded program “Support for the National Strategy for Improvement of the Condition of Roma” will target small infrastructure and social housing problems. Starting in 2004, the program will allocate €2,000,000 for such projects and another ROL 64 billion (approximately €1.6 million) will also be allocated by the Government in 2004 for projects run by public authorities in this area. These projects will be most effective if they address the underlying problems, including the lack of personal documents and low awareness of property regulations among Roma.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ion George, inspector, at Housing Department, 2 July 2003, Brăila.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Vasile Bulucea, Major Craiova, Dolj County, 30 June 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Mirecea Barbu, reporter for Romani language radio program, 12 July 2003.

## 2.3 Social protection

The 2003 Government report<sup>55</sup> presents some of the measures taken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, including benefits for children under Law no. 61/1993; benefits for children in foster families, according to Government Ordinance no. 26/1997; minimum guaranteed income, under Law no. 416/2001; support for heating, according to Law 416/2001 and Government Ordinance no. 121/2002; benefits for new-born children according to Law no. 416/2001; and urgent support according to Government Ordinance no. 118/1999. However, all of these measures are directed at the general population and do not focus on the specific needs of Roma communities or the goals of the Strategy.

In the five monitored counties, most of the activities related to social protection concern the minimum guaranteed income, according to Law no. 416/2001. In practice, local councils are reducing the amount of monthly income benefits during the summer months, on the assumption that beneficiaries are performing seasonal work and receive a certain income. However, such reductions should be imposed only where individual recipients are shown to have an income level above the established benefits threshold.

A very important issue related to the access to social protection is the lack of identity documents, a situation that exists in all five counties. Children born to parents who married according to traditional practice and did not register the marriage lack identity documents and are formally ineligible for social support. These factors further reduce the access of Roma to social services, already compromised by very complex time- and resource-consuming procedures.<sup>56</sup>

In Cluj, Iași, Timiș, and Dolj counties, where there are universities, there are important Roma student groups, with a large number of Roma studying social work.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, however, only a small number of them have found employment in social services. There are few new positions opening up in social work institutions and all graduates of the social work faculties have difficulty finding jobs.<sup>58</sup>

Several activities in the area of social protection have been initiated by the Roma NGOs, most of them in partnership with non-Roma organisations and in some cases with public authorities. In Cluj Napoca, a project funded by the EU's Phare

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<sup>55</sup> Report on the progress in implementation of the Governmental Strategy for Improvement of the Situation of Roma, Bucharest, April 2003, page 12.

<sup>56</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Craiova, Brăila, November-December 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj Napoca, A. I. Cuza University in Iași, Timișoara University in Timiș and Craiova University in Dolj.

<sup>58</sup> Roundtables in Iași, Timiș, Dolj, November-December 2003.

programme in 2002, a partnership between the Town Hall and the Roma Students Association Romano Suno aimed to improve access of the Roma to the social services offered by the institution.<sup>59</sup> Approximately 80 Roma received information and consultation through the project. Brochures with information about local services were printed and distributed, and training in the field of human rights, anti-discrimination, child protection issues, and health was offered to Roma and non-Roma. An information and consultation office has been opened and equipped within the Town Hall premises, but no permanent jobs were created for its continuous operation.<sup>60</sup>

In Brăila, another project funded by the Phare programme and initiated by the Prefecture/County Office for Roma and the Alliance for Roma Unity, aimed at better integration of the Roma communities into the society.<sup>61</sup> As a result of the project, a Roma NGO was created at the county level with four branches in the rural area, and 40 Roma from Brăila County were trained as community workers and directly involved in the identification of problems at the local level, mediation, and information activities. Four of the community workers involved in the program were hired by the local mayoralties. In addition, identity cards and marriage documents for 292 Roma were issued. The partnership between the Prefecture / BJR and the local Mayors' offices and the local Roma NGO, Alliance for Roma Unity Brăila County, was essential in the project's success. This was facilitated by the fact that the Roma expert is also the president of the Alliance for Roma Unity in Brăila.

## 2.4 Health

Greater inclusion of the Roma within the health insurance system is probably the most important issue for the health area of the Strategy. However, the results so far are not satisfactory and continuous efforts should be made by the health system for human resources organisation and reorganisation and legislative measures should be adopted in order to put the provisions of the Strategy into practice.<sup>62</sup>

A project started in 2001 and aimed at identifying, training, and employing health mediators for the Roma community is still at a low level. After the position of health mediator was added to the registry of recognised professions, approximately 166 health

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<sup>59</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, Civil Society Development, Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma.

<sup>60</sup> Resource Center for Roma Communities, project monitoring fiche FISR.

<sup>61</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, Civil Society Development, Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma.

<sup>62</sup> Roundtables in Iași, Timiș, Dolj, November-December 2003.

mediators' jobs were created at the national level. However, a number of Roma representatives consider this far too low to meet demand.<sup>63</sup>

In Cluj County, of four health mediators trained only one was hired with the Public Health Directorate, while in Brăila and Dolj County three health mediators were hired in each. In Timiș County three Roma were trained, but none was hired. In Iași County the situation is better, as eight Roma were hired as health mediators. A matter of dissatisfaction was the collaboration with the RSDP in the selection process, who insisted in recommending persons who are related to their organisation.<sup>64</sup> In one case, monitoring revealed that one of the health mediators was asked by the local leader of the RSDP to promote registration of members of the Roma community with the RSDP, which is at odds with employment by a public institution.<sup>65</sup>

The medical staff working directly with the health mediators generally perceive their activities as useful. Some recognise that more mediators are needed to have an impact on the target communities. The main activities performed by the health mediators are related to identifying health problems and associated social problems; preparing registration with family doctors; preparing vaccination campaigns; disseminating information regarding the health system, hygiene, contraception and family planning; and improving communication with medical staff.

Although in the five counties monitored there are almost no programmes initiated or funds allocated for the health measures of the Strategy, some civil society initiatives have targeted the health problems faced by Roma communities. In Cluj County, a partnership between Association for Roma Women Emancipation, the Romanian Cancer Society and Cancer Institute Ion Chiricuta was created in order to implement a project funded by the Phare programme.<sup>66</sup> This project promoted cervical cancer screening for Roma women and health education. As a result of the project, Pap tests were administered to approximately 1,600 women, who were offered treatment where necessary; 11 Roma women were trained as health mediators and worked during the project's implementation; and a mobile unit with medical equipment and medicines is ready to be used for other communities.

In Dolj County, an initiative of the Roma Students Association Eurodrom and Vasiliada Association targeted schools in Craiova, where 1,000 leaflets on health care

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<sup>63</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Telephone interview with Mariana Buceanu, program coordinator at Romani CRISS.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with health mediator, anonymity requested.

<sup>66</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, Civil Society Development, Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma.

were distributed and 40 Roma children from disadvantaged families participated in a weekend programme for health education, hygiene, and extracurricular activities.<sup>67</sup>

## 2.5 Economic initiatives

The Strategy approach to the economic development of the Roma communities is based on the key issues of poverty reduction and access to labour market. However, in all counties monitored, the local authorities appear to have made more progress registering Roma for the guaranteed minimum income than in developing viable projects to increase employment and self-sufficiency in Roma communities.

The most frequent activities in the field of economic development are related to professional training and qualification of the Roma. In 2003, all of the five counties organised job fairs for Roma based on collaboration between County Agencies for Professional Training and Occupation, the County Offices for Roma, and Roma NGOs. The Roma who took part in the job fairs were satisfied by these type of activities and are hoping that subsequent fairs will be more successful, and include more companies offering more diverse job opportunities.<sup>68</sup>

In Cluj, Iași, Timiș and Dolj Counties, the Community Development Agency Together, in partnership with Roma students associations and County Agencies for Professional Training and Occupation, is implementing a project called “Facilitation of access of Roma to the labour market”, a project funded by European Union Phare programme.<sup>69</sup> Approximately 200 Roma were trained in professions needed on the market. The process of finding jobs is, however, more difficult and a low number of the trainees found jobs.<sup>70</sup>

Except for a project initiated in Iași County, income-generating activities are not promoted in the five counties. In Tîrgu Frumos, Help Association in partnership with Romani Chance Association and the Local Council, are implementing a project for

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<sup>67</sup> Project funded by Resource Center for Roma communities Cluj Napoca, Archbishop Craiova, and World Vision Craiova.

<sup>68</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Phare RO 0004.02.02, Civil Society Development, Fund for Improvement of the Situation of Roma

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Roxana Acojocariei, Community Development Agency Together monitor, 4. 07. 2003.

tailor training and employment of 20 Roma women; the project has approximately €56,000 of Government funding.<sup>71</sup>

In the field of income generating activities and professional training, the Phare programme allocated €1.8 million for 2004 towards projects in partnership between local authorities and Roma communities.<sup>72</sup> The programme started in May 2004 and will also support small infrastructure and social housing (€2 million) and the health sector (€652,000). It will be administered by the Resource Center for Roma Communities.

There is no evidence that the Roma were given land for agricultural activities or building of houses according to government policies.<sup>73</sup>

## 2.6 Justice and public order

The Justice and Public Order section of the Strategy targets the development of information programmes for Roma and non-Roma to address cases of discrimination, initiation of legal education and delinquency prevention programmes, and hiring citizens of Roma origin to work in the law enforcement services and the police force.

At the local level, only a few initiatives have been taken, such as the organisation of regular meetings between Roma leaders and representatives of the police. A common feature is the signing of collaboration protocols between the RSDP and Police Inspectorates. However, unfortunately these protocols rarely have a concrete impact for the members of Roma communities.

In the five counties monitored, there are no educational programs targeting members of the Roma communities, although such programmes would enhance access to justice. The large majority of Roma remains unaware of the main legal procedures and regulations and is subject to frequent fines from the police. However, this situation is complicated by the lack of identity documents, a lack of resources to comply with regulations, as well as discrimination in the justice system.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The budget is contribution of the Government for the Phare 2002 “Support for the National Strategy for Improvement of the Condition of Roma” programme. The total budget allocated by the government is approximately €1.3 million.

<sup>72</sup> Phare 2002 “Support for the National Strategy for Improvement of the Condition of Roma” programme has two components, institutional building and grants scheme. The Contracting Authority is the Central Finance and Contracts unit and the Implementing authority is Department for Interethnic Relation within the Government.

<sup>73</sup> Government Decision no. 256/18.03.2003 regarding agricultural land given for Roma at the community level.

<sup>74</sup> Round-tables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

The issue of racially motivated violence is not mentioned in the Strategy, which is a serious omission as problems have been highlighted by both domestic and international organisations.<sup>75</sup> The incidents in Craiova in September 2003 are a relevant example.<sup>76</sup> Here, a violent confrontation between a group of young Roma and, allegedly, some members of an anti-Roma group was the subject of media coverage across the country. In response, the police arrested 33 Roma, although the initial cause of the confrontation was that Roma had accused the owners of several restaurants and clubs of denying service to Roma.

The Aven Amentza Roma Center for Public Policies, the Ministry of Culture and the National Council for Combating Discrimination organised a “Caravan for intercultural education and revitalisation of Roma culture” in all the counties, including the five monitored. It was an occasion to connect the National Council for Combating Discrimination with Roma organisations, as well as with representatives of public administration and to inform them about the latest developments and procedures for combating discriminatory activities.

In a project initiated by Romani CRISS, Roma NGOs participated in a consultative process for the improvement of the anti-discrimination legislation.<sup>77</sup> The result was a set of recommendations for the National Council for Combating Discrimination and creation of a good communication structure with this institution.<sup>78</sup>

## 2.7 Child protection

All reports and measures taken by National Agency for Child Protection and Adoptions note that there is no discrimination in its policy, be it positive or negative. For example, both Roma and non-Roma children live in state institutions for child protection, and it is likely that the majority of children receiving support from the County Child Protection Directorates are Roma. Roma are also the main beneficiaries from de-institutionalisation and alternative family care projects.<sup>79</sup> However, Roma organisations have expressed concern that this general policy does not respond to some

<sup>75</sup> Human rights monitors are participating in a projects run by Romania CRISS and documenting such cases on a permanent basis.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Vasile Velcu Nazdravan – Roma leader; “Aven Amentza” magazine, September 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Project funded by Open society Foundation Romania.

<sup>78</sup> Ivan Gheorghe, former head of National Office for Roma was recruited in 2003 as councillor for the President of NCCD.

<sup>79</sup> Report on the progress in implementation of the Governmental Strategy for Improvement of the Situation of Roma, Bucharest, April 2003, p. 29.

of the specific needs of Roma children, living with their families or not, and that some specific measures should be taken, especially regarding the preservation of their cultural background.

In the five counties monitored, there are few consistent initiatives related to the situation of Roma children. In Cluj Napoca, the County Directorate for Child Protection implemented a project called Wonder Land Day Centre,<sup>80</sup> designed for pre-school children from a disadvantaged community living near the Cluj Napoca garbage dump.<sup>81</sup> In this project, a number of pre-school children and their families are being provided with support for a better integration in the first school year. So far, out of ten children attending the first year of activity of the Centre, three are integrated in the mainstream classes while the rest are included into the special education classes existing in the Day Centre for Roma pupils within School 12 in Cluj Napoca.<sup>82</sup> It is expected that at the start of the 2005–2006 school year, students entering School 12 from the disadvantaged community will be integrated in mainstream classes, an important shift away from more segregated education.

The low level of employment among Roma social workers in the child protection system is a serious problem. Although many Roma have graduated in the fields of social work, sociology, and psycho-pedagogy and who could be an important resource from which to draw staff, the number of Roma working in this area is very small.<sup>83</sup>

## 2.8 Education

In a context in which the cycle of poverty remains very strong, education is among the most important issues that can bring about positive change. A lower level of education exists in the Roma population compared the majority population in Romania and with other minorities, and since the adoption the Strategy several positive developments have taken place. These include a substantial Phare programme, “Access to education for disadvantaged groups, with special focus on Roma”, with a total budget of €8.6 million, out of which €1.6 million is a governmental contribution.

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<sup>80</sup> Funded by the Phare Child Protection programme

<sup>81</sup> The Pata Rît community has approximately 500 people living in poor conditions, through recycling of metals, glass, paper, etc collected on the garbage dump. The children living in pata Rît are going to School 12, where a Day Centre is organised and where the curricula is the according to the special schools level. Clothes and food is offered to them, together with afternoon support for homework.

<sup>82</sup> The school has a special number of classes attended by the children from the Pata Rît community.

<sup>83</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

Within the Phare “Access” programme’s newly created Steering Committee, there are several Roma activists and other professionals supporting the Ministry of Education and research. As a result of their positive work together, the issue of discrimination in education, and especially the issue of school segregation, is on the regular agenda of the committee and the ministry. A notification regarding the school segregation situation has been issued by the Ministry of Education and Research, creating the environment for better access of the Roma children to quality education and inclusive schooling.<sup>84</sup> The notification is the first educational policy paper to support equal access to quality education for all children and to recognise that the segregation in education is a severe form of discrimination.

The Phare “Access” programme targeted ten School Inspectorates, including Cluj County. Here, eight schools are expected to benefit from the programme, which includes classroom and extracurricular activities, training for teachers, and infrastructure rehabilitation. Significantly, although the County strategy elaborated by the School Inspectorate mentions the participation of Roma communities, the project did not have any Roma organisations as partners, in a county where the Roma civil society is perhaps the most developed. Roma organisations have expressed their dissatisfaction with this situation, and the process of revitalising direct collaboration with the institution took some time.<sup>85</sup>

Cluj County also benefited from two educational projects funded by the Phare programme. One project was implemented by the Industrial Chemistry School Group in Turda, in partnership with a local Roma organisation. Roma pupils received support for improving their school results, health education, meals, etc. Since the Phare contract ended, the project has continued with support from the Town Hall and School Inspectorate. The second project was implemented by the “Association of Gabor Roma wearing hats” (*Asociația Gaborilor cu Pălărie* in Romanian) in partnership with the School Inspectorate and created a kindergarten programme for Gabor Roma children.

In all the five Counties, the number of Roma children receiving Romani language education is increasing, as is the number of available teachers. Brăila is traditionally the host of the National Romani Language Competition, organised in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research and Roma organisations.

All Roma children attending school benefit from the “milk and doughnuts” governmental programme. This supplementary food programme has encouraged an

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<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Education and Research Notification No. 29323/20.04.2004 forbidding segregation in education.

<sup>85</sup> Roundtable in Cluj Napoca, December 2003.

increased number of Roma children to attend school, again demonstrating that the level of extreme poverty among Roma communities is a real barrier to education.<sup>86</sup>

Other educational activities have been organised in all of the five counties, from support for exam preparation, training for teachers, cultural and intercultural activities, among other projects.

## 2.9 Culture and denominations

Several cultural activities take place in the five counties, especially music and dance festivals. For example, in Cluj County there is an annual festival in the memory of a well known violinist, Alexandru Țitruș. In Brăila County, near the winter holiday season, there is an event where all minority groups present their traditional Christmas carols; in Timiș County a cultural group of Roma children was organised by the Roma Women's Association For Our Children.

It is now a tradition to celebrate International Roma Day on 8 April, with meetings, cultural events, marches and conferences.

As mentioned in section 2.6, the Roma Center for Public Policies Aven Amentza in partnership with Ministry of Culture and National Council for Combating Discrimination, organised a "Caravan for intercultural education and revitalisation of the Roma culture" in all counties monitored.

## 2.10 Public participation

The level of public participation of Roma in the five Counties monitored is still at a low level. After the 2000 local elections, a small number of local councillors were elected, mostly from the RSDP lists. However, due to a lack of collaboration between the Roma organisations at the local level, which split the votes of the Roma community between them, the representation of the Roma remained low, with almost no voice at the local level.<sup>87</sup>

Romania experienced a serious setback in 2004, as for the first time in the country's post-1989 democratic history the new Law on Local Elections prevented associations of national minorities from participating in the local elections, with the exception of those already represented in the Parliament. The consequence is lower representation at the

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<sup>86</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

local level, where several associations, particularly of Roma local communities, were previously represented.<sup>88</sup>

The new political protocol signed between the RSDP and SDP promotes the participation of Roma candidates on the SDP electoral lists. However, this agreement is likely to create disadvantages for Roma candidates as the local branches of the RSDP have only limited negotiation capacity.

The presence of several active Roma NGOs is promising in the five counties. In addition, affirmative action measures taken by the Cluj, Iași, Craiova and Timișoara Universities support the further development of a new generation of Roma leadership.

## 2.11 Communication and civic participation

Unfortunately, many public institutions still lack knowledge of the content of the Strategy, especially due to a low level of participation in the Local Joint Working Groups. In the media, little has been done to encourage a more balanced and accurate reflection of Roma life and culture.<sup>89</sup> However, there have been some initiatives in this area in the counties monitored.

In Timiș County, the local state radio station started a radio program for Roma in 2003, with the direct support of the Roma Students Association PARUDIMOS; the program has 60 minutes weekly and presents aspects of the life of Roma, news, and music.

In Cluj and Timiș County a new initiative to train Roma as television journalists started in 2003, based on a partnership between the Resource Center for Roma Communities, Romanian TV Stations in Cluj and Timișoara, the Roma Students Association Romano Suno in Cluj Napoca and Roma Students Association PARUDIMOS in Timișoara. Twelve young Roma students were trained for the television work and started their practical activities with supervision from local professionals. The existing “Amari Emisiunea” program in Cluj continues and a new another program started in Timișoara.

In all the five counties, the Roma organisations, especially those run by students, are organising various events, training sessions, cultural activities, and round-tables. NGOS bring the issue of discrimination to the public agenda whenever possible, but

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<sup>88</sup> “Brief Assessment on Romania’s Compliance with the EU Accession Political Criteria”, drafted by Open Society Foundation – Romania, Institute for Public Policies, Center for Legal Resources, Center Partnership for Equality, May 2004, page 18.

<sup>89</sup> Roundtables in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara, Brăila, Craiova, November – December 2003.

there are no formal governmental programmes for raising awareness and combating discrimination for Roma and non-Roma.

In Cluj Napoca, the active Roma NGOs have a weekly meeting hosted by the Resource Center for Roma Communities, in which they discuss the most urgent problems and solutions for the benefit of the Roma communities.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Three years from its adoption, the Strategy remains an essential document for the improvement of the situation of Roma in Romania. The Strategy brought together the most important and active Roma organisations in the country and created a positive environment for the active involvement of a broad group of institutions and NGOs. The Strategy set out an extensive list of measures to be carried out at the State and local levels, assigning responsibility and deadlines to relevant actors.

A number of important measures implementing the Strategy goals have been carried out. The creation of a network of specialised offices throughout the country responsible for addressing issues related to Roma has the potential to greatly improve the efficiency of local government efforts to improve the situation of Roma. Unfortunately, the positive momentum has been lost and the Government and its partners have been unable to bring about concrete changes in the condition of Roma thus far.

An initial surge of activity and support that followed from the adoption of the Strategy led to the establishment of County Offices for Roma and the appointment of experts at the local level. Yet as these structures were not invested with the authority or the resources to take effective action in their areas of responsibility, confidence in the Strategy has subsequently dwindled. The limited coordination with Roma organisations apart from the RSDP has also discredited official practice related to Roma issues at the local level. Too little has been done at the national level to ensure that local authorities understand, accept, and implement the Strategy's aims. The Strategy itself lacks specific definitions and sets out only very limited guidelines as to the responsibilities of local authorities. More detailed instructions should be issued to ensure that tasks are carried out and goals are met.

Certain areas have seen improvement in the past three years. While there has been some progress in terms of improving Roma access to health, through the training and employment of Roma community mediators, housing needs remain critical, as large numbers of Roma families remain at risk of eviction due to their undocumented property status. The need to integrate Roma into mainstream schools on a national level has been recognised by the Ministry of Education and Research, but further steps are needed to ensure that Roma have full access to quality education throughout the country. The high level of unemployment among Roma communities remains unchanged, although local projects have demonstrated that successful partnerships can create jobs on a small scale.

The goals of the Strategy remain relevant and urgent, and it is critical that the Government does not step back from its achievements so far, but rather continues to build upon the established structures and experiences gained. Romania boasts an active

and established Roma civil society, which could offer expertise and direct knowledge to develop more effective policy for Roma. EU funding, channelled to local projects, is also a resource that the Government should use to guide its policymaking. Many good practices and valuable experiences could be drawn from these small-scale projects and elaborated into larger initiatives at the national level.

It is a matter of utmost importance to renew the constructive relationship between the public authorities and Roma civil society and to put the Strategy back on the public agenda. New regional initiatives, such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion, should assess the Strategy and its results, and incorporate it into forward-looking policies. The situation of Roma in Romania will not improve without sustained, coordinated and collaborative efforts on the part of the Government, civil society, and international actors. Continuous, independent monitoring of these efforts is an essential factor in ensuring that all activities work towards the continuous improvement of Roma in Europe and in Romania.