

National Report of the Republic of Macedonia

With its aspirations for EU membership, Macedonia has made some efforts to address the specific needs of Roma and to ensure the protection of their rights. Trafficking is also a widespread problem in Macedonia, a problem that requires the involvement of both the Government and civil society to solve.

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The Roma community in Macedonia

Macedonia recognises the Romany people as a constitutional people, and the Roma settlement of Suto Orizari is the first Roma municipality in Europe.

In Macedonia there are about 55,000 Roma, which is about 2.6 per cent of the total population. The Roma are in a unique situation to other minorities within the country (State Statistical Office, 2009). As a result a more serious approach is needed to address the specific needs and problems that this ethnic community is facing. Currently, the majority of the Roma in Macedonia live on the verge of existence, enduring severe poverty in non-urbanised settlements and without proper education. In recognition of this situation, in February 2005, the heads of the governments of Bulgaria, Slovakia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Montenegro and the Czech Republic launched the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015', thereby committing to work towards uprooting discrimination and overcoming the unacceptable gap between the Roma and the rest of society. The Decade of Roma Inclusion identifies a number of priority areas on which states need to concentrate: employment, housing, health care and education. In Macedonia, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was appointed to coordinate activities related to the Decade. In order to further these objectives, the Ministry established a National Coordinative Body.

The Strategy for the Roma in the Republic of Macedonia and the Decade of Roma Inclusion are the first steps towards ensuring the protection of the rights of the Roma, steps that have emerged from the country's aspirations for EU membership.

Employment

The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia guarantees the right to a job, free choice of employment, protection at the place of business and material security during temporary unemployment. It also guarantees accessibility to every position under equal conditions. The law on employment and insurance in case of unemployment provides for different social measures, such as: increased opportunities for employment (right to training, etc.), cash

contributions in case of unemployment, health care and so forth.

However, the situation of the Roma people in reference to this issue is different. The high unemployment among the Roma, caused by lack of education, their non-competitiveness on the labour market and their inability to access information about opportunities for employment, are the main reasons for this situation.

According to the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, 32 per cent of Roma were registered as unemployed (17,672) in 2008, of whom 42 per cent (7,410) were women and 90 per cent (15,925) were unqualified. To cope with the situation, the 2007 Operative Plan for Employment envisaged active measures to increase their employment, which included the employment of Roma in the public sector, subventions for employing single mothers, the support of family businesses, and training and re-training schedules. However, there was only limited progress as, in 2007, only 50 Roma who applied for the subvention benefits were employed (Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009).

Housing

Roma settlements are usually on the periphery of towns in non-urbanised areas that lack basic facilities. The biggest settlements are in Skopje, Kumanovo, Prilep, Bitola and Stip. The conditions in which most of the Roma live are below the level of proper housing. As an example, in Suto Orizari, more than half of the families live in a community in which each family member lives within a two to five square metre space, on average; half of them have no facilities for personal hygiene (bathing, etc.); about 60 per cent use water in their homes and 40 per cent use pumps in their yards or in public areas; 15 per cent use improvised toilets; and 1.5 per cent have no water in their homes (Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009).

However, there are isolated efforts on a local level to provide Roma settlements with access to communal services and infrastructure. In 2007, the water supply and sewage system and the streets in the Municipality of Suto Orizari were renovated, and the preparation of the urban plans for the large Roma settlements in Prilep and Bitola is underway.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications provides a certain amount of social housing, but, unfortunately, there is no information as to whether

or not such housing is really accessible to the Roma. With the help of the World Bank and UN Habitat, the Ministry of Transport and Communications drafted a law to legalise buildings built illegally. This law is expected to improve the housing situation of the Roma.

Health care

The situation of health care among the Roma population has its particularities because of the convergence of various factors, such as their dire economic situation, low housing standard, insufficient hygiene, absence of health insurance, insufficient primary health care, low level of health education, culture and the cost of medical services, among others. Unfortunately, no special measures aimed at improving medical services for the Roma have been implemented. Furthermore, there have been no significant efforts by the Government to deal with the main problems, such as the exclusion of the Roma from access to health insurance and impediments to access to medical services resulting from the lack of personal identification documents. For these reasons, the Roma remain extremely poorly represented in health care institutions.

Education

Within the framework of the Roma Decade, an Educational Fund for the Roma was established. The aim of this Fund is to improve the sustainability of Roma education programmes by giving priority to non-segregated education.

The general education situation among the Roma is unsatisfactory, and illiteracy and low education levels contribute to poverty among the Roma in Macedonia. The Education Development Programme shows that the percentage of persons with no education or unfinished primary education on a national level is 14 per cent; the percentage of those with primary education is 35 per cent, which means that about half of the Roma population are either illiterate or half literate. Thus, the compulsory character of primary and secondary education as stipulated by law is not respected in reality (Ibid.).

The main reasons for this among the Roma population are the dire economic situation of most families, the non-regulated citizenship of a large number of Roma children, which makes their inclusion in the educational process difficult, the absence of pre-school education, insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language and

inability to follow the programmes in Macedonian language, illiteracy of the parents, lack of motivation among children to attend school, frequent cases of marriages between minors, and segregation and discrimination at schools.

There are numerous examples of Roma children being enrolled in classes for children with mental disabilities due to their insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language, even though they are perfectly healthy. Moreover, the Roma children are not accepted at school, i.e., the other students avoid sitting with them or socialising with them, some of the teachers do not spend enough time with them and various other types of discrimination.

Because of this worrying situation, it is necessary to prepare specific measures to stimulate and support the educational process, as well as various forms of assistance (for example free textbooks).

The Ministry of Education and Science has made an effort to increase the number of Roma students, with letters of recommendation to primary and secondary schools, and by increasing the quota for Roma at some universities. However, the problems in education have still not been comprehensively addressed, and the approach taken by competent institutions remains inadequate.

Antidiscrimination legislation

Equality and non-discrimination are the basic international norms regarding human rights. Human rights and protection from discrimination are especially important for the vulnerable, marginalised, and socially excluded individuals and groups. Hence, there is a need to adopt a legal framework for protection.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has drafted an antidiscrimination law that prohibits discrimination on both racial and ethnic grounds. Nevertheless, even though the adoption of this law is necessary, in particular for the protection of the human rights of marginalised groups like the Roma community, it has not yet been adopted, even though it was supposed to be approved in September 2008.

Human trafficking in the Republic of Macedonia

Human trafficking, especially of women and children, is a widespread problem in the Republic of Macedonia. It is manifested in different forms and its goal is to exploit the victim in different ways.

The analysis carried out by the services of the Ministry of Interior shows that the victims of human trafficking in the Republic of Macedonia are usually girls or women coming from the countries of the former Soviet Union, who entered the country illegally or through well-established networks for the illegal transit of migrants. Apart from foreigners, in recent times, Macedonian citizens have also been registered as victims of trafficking. These are often minors who are solicited for prostitution, which increases

the probability of them falling into the human trafficking chain.

Domestic and international legislation

In 2001, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a decision to establish a National Commission to fight human trafficking and illegal migration. According to the decision, the National Commission's task is to monitor and analyse the situation of human trafficking and illegal migration and to coordinate the activities of competent institutions, such as international and non-governmental organisations, working in this area. In 2002, the Republic of Macedonia adopted a National Programme to fight human trafficking and illegal migration, which included a commitment to actively participate in the efforts of the international community in the fight against human trafficking as one of the most serious forms of organised crime.

In 2006, a National Strategy for Fighting Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration was drafted. The strategy establishes the directions and priorities for dealing with this type of crime. The plan includes prevention, identification, assistance, support and protection, as well as return and reintegration of the victims, proper criminal prosecution, international cooperation, the establishment of a single information system and informative propaganda with the purpose of influencing public opinion.

The Republic of Macedonia has prescribed and ratified many international instruments against human trafficking and the protection of human rights. After the signing and ratification of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in 2004, the Republic of Macedonia agreed to harmonise its legislation for the purpose of combating organised crime and human trafficking more efficiently. The agreement with the European Union led to a number of reforms of the Criminal Code in the areas of the smuggling of migrants, human trafficking, trafficking of minors, sexual abuse and witness protection.

Progress is needed

Despite the progress made in standardising legislation within the framework of the EU, the internal legal order in this area needs further amendment in order to operationalise these solutions. Even though a lot has been done in the last few years in the field of protection of the victims of human trafficking, the main problems remain, i.e., insufficient education of the potential victims of human trafficking and lack of prevention of this crime.

More effort should be invested in education and training on the topic of human trafficking, specifically by introducing certain topics related to this phenomenon in the regular curriculum of schools and universities. Education and training should be systematic, as a continuous process is the only way to achieve satisfactory results.

Furthermore, success in fighting human traf-

ficking and illegal migration is related to specialised and targeted education of the groups most directly involved in the process. These groups include police officers, public prosecutors, judges, lawyers, prison staff, social workers, medical staff, educators, diplomatic-consular officials, military officers participating in military missions, members of NGOs, media representatives, and professionals taking care of and helping victims of human trafficking. The focus of their actions in the field of education must be on raising awareness about the seriousness of the problem and its damaging consequences, as well as how it can be prevented.

Additionally, the seriousness of the problem requires the urgent ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which was signed by the Republic of Macedonia on 17 December 2005. ■

References

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