

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BULLETIN 2/2008

1. POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

A New Framework Programme for Equality and Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society Underway

On 02.07.2008 the first meeting of the working group for the creation of the new *Рамкова програма за равноправно интегриране на ромите в българското общество* [Framework Programme for Equality and Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society] and an Action Plan, based on it, for 2009-2010, took place. The working group comprises representatives of ministries and other agencies, NGO's, researchers and independent experts. The priority areas in the new programme will be education, healthcare, employment and social policy, housing and infrastructure, legality and public order. An emphasis is also put on preservation of Roma culture and the fight against discrimination. Working sub-groups were formed for each of the priority areas, which were convened for their first substantive discussion on 15-17.07.2008. Experts of the *Център Амалипе* [Amalipe Centre] propose that the new document should have a higher normative rank, should be financed by the state budget and should be supplied with an adequate administrative infrastructure and mechanisms for participation of Roma organisations in the process of its implementation and assessment. An inclusive drafting process is also strongly recommended.

The draft Framework Programme and Action Plan are supposed to be discussed at a meeting of the *Национален съвет за сътрудничество по етническите и демографските въпроси* [National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues] until 31.10.2008 and should be submitted for review to the Council of Ministers until 15.11.2008.

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=828> (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=838> (in Bulgarian)

http://amalipe.com/files/bulletin/180508_newsletter_april_2008_bg.pdf (in Bulgarian)

Solution for Roma Housing Problems in Sofia Sought

Фондация „С.Е.Г.А.“ [C.E.G.A. Foundation] reports that members of the Sofia Municipal Council have recently drafted a *Програма за ревитализация на ромските квартали* [Programme for Revitalisation of Roma Neighbourhoods] in an attempt to solve the housing problems of the Roma community in Sofia. According to the document, around 6,000-10,000 one-storey buildings will be built on the sites of the dilapidated houses Roma currently have.

According to a member of the *Комисия по местно самоуправление* [Local Self-Governance Committee] with the Council, buildings will not be free for the Roma, inhabiting them, but they can pay part of their price by contributing labour to the building. Temporary “settlements” will be established where Roma families can be accommodated until the buildings are finished. The families will be provided with medical assistance and the settlements will have security guards.

In order to be implemented, the programme will be voted and adopted by the Municipal Council.

However, that can only be done after the whole Roma community gets identification documents and concrete data is gathered on the status of all 14 territories, where Roma live. Municipal administration has set a term of one year for those tasks to be accomplished.

<http://pakivnet.org/docs/START5f.pdf> (in Bulgarian)

Decreasing Administrative Capacity for Implementing Roma Integration Policies

The Amalipe Centre reports that there have been reductions in the staff numbers for *експерти по етническите и демографските въпроси* [experts on ethnic and demographic issues] in the regional administrations, as well as a lot of resignations among those experts, which leads to a decrease in the administrative capacity for implementing Roma integration policies.

In May 2008 reductions were made in Bulgarian administration pursuant to a decision of the Council of Ministers. In a number of regions the posts for experts on ethnic and demographic issues were the first to be affected. At the same time many experts resign due to the low salary and the low staff rank they have and they were never replaced by new ones. According to the Amalipe Centre, as of May 2008, only 13 regional administrations have experts on ethnic and demographic issues, while in others those issues are covered by experts, having various other portfolios. Regions around towns like Sliven, Vidin and Razgrad, where large Roma communities live, do not have experts on ethnic and demographic issues, which means, according to the Centre, that in those regions the administrative capacity for implementation of Roma integration policies is already missing.

http://amalipe.com/files/bulletin/220608_newsletter_05-06_2008_bg.pdf (in Bulgarian)

2. LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGNS

Social Policy Week

On 26-29.05.2008 a *Седмица на социалната политика* [Social Policy Week] took place for the first time in Bulgaria, organised by the *Министерство на труда и социалната политика* [Ministry of Labour and Social Policy], Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities of the European Commission and the European Social Fund. The initiative aimed at discussing the challenges before social policy and social integration in Bulgaria a year and a half after the country joined the EU.

The week was divided into six thematic days, one of which being dedicated to anti-discrimination and equal opportunities. Officials from the European Commission, Members of Parliament, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, as well as representatives of other institutions and non-governmental organisations took part in the initiative.

The issues, related to the social inclusion of the Roma community, were discussed on the anti-discrimination day, as well as during the rest of the week. The conclusion reached was that active steps were needed for the improvement of the integration of vulnerable groups, including Roma, and the European Commission would insist on this to be done rapidly.

http://amalipe.com/files/bulletin/220608_newsletter_05-06_2008_bg.pdf (in Bulgarian)

Round Table on Roma Women

On 16.05.2008 a round table *Ромската жена – настояще и бъдеще* [The Roma Woman – Present and Future], attended by over 35 women of Roma origin, representatives of non-governmental organisations and academics, was organised by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, who said at the opening that Roma women have the potential to change social attitudes towards the Roma community. The Minister noted the special role Roma women have for the education in the community and for the reduction of the number of children, dropping out of school. According to statistics, presented at the round table, only 7 per cent of the Roma have university degree and over 90 per cent of Roma children never finish their primary education. There are over 2000 Roma students in Bulgarian universities and 53 per cent of them are women. The Minister also emphasised that the aim of the round table is to encourage Roma women towards professional development, good balance between professional and family life, responsible parenthood and competitiveness on the labour market. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy reported to have organised in 2006 and 2007 22 regional seminars for awareness raising among the Roma community throughout the whole country with over 1500 participants. Out of the 22 seminars, eight were dedicated to the problems of Roma women and hosted over 400 Roma women.

<http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/news/news.asp?newsid=10288&catid=1> (in Bulgarian)

Regional Conferences on Initiatives for Raising Consciousness of Society towards Acts of Discrimination

Starting from the beginning of May 2008, five regional conferences were held in the towns of Vratsa, Kyustendil, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo and Varna within the framework of a project, dealing with initiatives for raising consciousness of society towards acts of discrimination and co-financed by the European Commission under the Progress Programme. The conferences were organised by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues and the *Дирекция „Етнически и демографски въпроси“ към Министерския съвет* [Ethnic and Demographic Issues Directorate with the Council of Ministers] in partnership with the *Национален омбудсман* [National Ombudsman] and the *Комисия за защита от дискриминация* [Commission for the Protection against Discrimination]. The conferences focused upon topics and problems, related to the implementation of EU and national norms for protection against discrimination, equality and equal opportunities for all. The annual reports for 2007 of all organising institutions were presented. Representatives of local governance bodies, state institutions and the civil society took part in the conferences. Joint interinstitutional efforts and policies, as well as best practices and useful experience for effective implementation of anti-discrimination legislation were discussed.

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=785> (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=786> (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=799> (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=811> (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=835> (in Bulgarian)

3. RESEARCH

A Guide on Roma in Bulgaria Presented

On 30.07.2008 an information guide „*Ромите в България*” [Roma in Bulgaria] was presented by the Roma Programme of the *Институт „Отворено общество*” [Open Society Institute] in Bulgaria. At the presentation, Mr Georgi Stoychev, Executive Director of the Institute, commented upon the negative attitudes in Bulgarian society towards the Roma Community and their role as obstacles to the successful implementation of integration policies. According to Mr Stoychev, those attitudes are not due to malevolence, but to ignorance and lack of knowledge, which necessitates the provision of reliable information on the Roma.

The guide looks at the history, ethnic identity and socio-demographic structure of the Roma in Bulgaria, their political participation, the media choices they make and the attitudes towards them. The book has an extensive chapter on policies and priorities of Roma integration, including the institutional framework of the integration process on national, regional and local level. There are also annexes, listing contact information of institutions, involved in Roma integration, and Roma non-governmental organisations, the main strategic, programmatic, normative and political documents, concerning Roma integration, as well as key Roma holidays. According to the authors, the guide attempts to answer questions, such as who and how many the Roma in Bulgaria are, what their origin is, what the reasons for their serious socio-economic situation are and what the instruments are to overcome the problems.

http://www.osi.bg/?cy=32&lang=1&a0i=222671&a0m=read&a0p_id=180 (in Bulgarian)

<http://www.osi.bg/downloads/File/RomaGuideFinal.pdf> (the text of the Guide in Bulgarian)

A Book on Roma Evangelists

On 03.06.2008 a new book on Roma religious activities was presented, entitled „*Циганите евангелисти в България*” [Gipsy Evangelists in Bulgaria] and authored by Ms Magdalena Slavkova. It claims to be the first piece of research in Bulgaria on a problem, which Bulgarian society has actively discussed in the last few years – the massive conversion of Roma to Protestant denominations, which is allegedly a widespread tendency throughout the whole world. The book looks at the history of evangelisation of Roma and the activity of Protestant temples, which continued to work even under most repressive political circumstances. According to the presentation of the book, it explains what a Roma Church is, how it functions and what its significance and the role of the Roma ministers is for the life of the Roma communities. It also describes the various groups of people, attracted to the Protestant denominations and claims to contribute to the mutual understanding among the citizens of Bulgaria.

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=805> (in Bulgarian)

Hitchhiker’s Guide to Multiethnicity Presented

In June 2008 the book „*Пътеводител на междуетническия стопаджия: Наръчник за*

общуване и работа в мултиетническа среда" [Hitchhiker's Guide to Multiethnicity: Guidebook for Communication and Working in a Multiethnic Environment] was presented, which is part of a project of the C.E.G.A. Foundation, called „*Старт за общуване и работа в мултиетническа среда*" [Start for Communication and Work in a Multiethnic Environment]. The guide aims at supporting institutions, organisations and young people in their communications and work in a multiethnic environment. It was drafted with the active participation of 30 young people from four towns in Bulgaria, who also elaborated a number of recommendations to local and national institutions for improvement of interethnic dialogue.

The young people from the towns of Sevlievo, Kazanlak, Byala Slatina and Dupnitsa created the guide after two exchange visits and two workshops. It has an introduction, presenting the aims of the publication, the project, under which it is done, and the organisations and groups who took part in the working process. There is a chapter on the different stages of the project, as well as a methodology part, where advice is given for organisations and institutions, wishing to implement similar projects. The publication also contains the results of a survey among young people on their attitudes towards communicating and working in a multiethnic environment and the related problems they face.

<http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=73&id=832> (in Bulgarian)

4. Official / unofficial statistical data

The Human Resources Development Operational Programme and the Roma

The Amalipe Centre reports that the *Министерство на образованието и науката* [Ministry of Education and Science], which operates part of the priorities under the *Оперативна програма „Развитие на човешките ресурси”* [Human Resources Development Operational Programme] – a strategic document, acting as a framework for absorption of funds, co-financed jointly by the European Social Fund of the EU and the national budget – announced in 2007 four calls for financing amounting to 23,176,586 BG leva. Under the priority *„Създаване на благоприятна мултикултурна среда”* [Creation of Favourable Multicultural Environment] 157 applications were submitted, out of which 67 were approved. Most of the project proposals approved had been submitted by NGOs – 27, followed by 21 proposals by schools, 15 projects by municipalities, two by other educational institutions and two others. According to the aims the projects had announced, around 17,000 students should be taken out of segregated schools and integrated into common educational institutions. As for the priority *„Да направим училището привлекателно за младите хора”* [Young People to be Attracted to Schools], directed towards educational integration, applicants were a lot more – 689 proposals were submitted, 256 were approved, out of which 83 belonged to NGOs, 149 – to schools, 18 – to municipalities and 6 others. The projects are supposed to cover 85,000 children and students by extracurricular activities.

For 2008, the Amalipe Centre notes that there will be only 3 grant schemes for “outside” participants and the rest of the funds will be allocated directly to institutions, determined by the Operational Programme. The budget of programme for extracurricular activities will be doubled, but the desegregation programme will most probably not start until the end of the year.

http://amalipe.com/files/bulletin/300408_Amalipe_SF_special%20issue_bg.pdf (in Bulgarian)