

Country fiche: BULGARIA

Position of civil society involved in the Roma Civil Monitor

SUBSTANTIVE POLICY AREAS

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full enrolment in primary education is a high political priority. Different field services (education, healthcare, social services, policy, and others) track children not attending school, enrol them and prevent dropout. NGOs and school networks (like Amalipe network of 280 schools) have achieved significant decrease of dropout rate. • Since 2018, financing of rural schools and schools that work with vulnerable children have been strengthened (additional to per capita funding). • The government approved a list of specific professions that meet labour demand and provides additional financing and scholarships for related education. • Free transportation is provided for secondary school students from rural areas. • Political commitment to change the pre-school compulsory age from 5 to 4 years old, ensuring at least 3 years of pre-school (instead of current 2 years). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While pre-school is compulsory from the school year when the child turns five, the enrolment rate of Roma children is still low. • Administrative punishment (reducing financial support or replacing with material one) is used to incentivise enrolment, rather than improving teaching or relation with families; causes of non-enrolment or dropout are not addressed. Many children remain not enrolled. • New funding of rural schools should take into consideration also quality and results, not only the region and number of vulnerable students. • There is political support for early childhood education, although there are budgetary challenges in creating enough spaces and eliminating fees and other expenses. Fee-free preschool education is needed at least for the obligatory pre-school age. |
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EMPLOYMENT

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As public employment services are understaffed, main services accessible to Roma are ESF-funded regional development programmes and a new national funded measure to tackle inactivity and long-term unemployment. Roma mentors and youth mentors support outreach. • Anti-discrimination legislation is in place but there is no systematic monitoring of discrimination in Roma's access to employment. There are some initiatives by municipalities and NGOs to prevent discrimination by employers or support victims. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As monitoring is generally weak, it is difficult to assess actual impact of existing employment measures. There are strategies and plans but some of these seem to remain on paper. • Public employment services' capacities and links between social and employment services need to be strengthened. • Roma mediator program has potential if capacities significantly increase and refocus on field work. • There is a need for anti-discrimination awareness-raising among professionals working in the employment and social sphere, as well as monitoring and action (awareness raising and incentives) against employer discrimination. |
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HEALTHCARE

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health mediators have been trained and employed, and mobile healthcare units established to improve Roma's access to healthcare. This has been supported by an information campaign. • Centres for Maternal and Child Health were established with the primary aim to strengthen caregivers' capacities to provide nurturing care. • <i>Médecins Du Monde</i> has provided awareness raising sessions and outreach work over family planning, pregnancy, hygiene and vaccination. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further steps are needed to decrease the proportion of the uninsured population among Roma (57% men, 59% women- the highest in the EU), to approach that among the majority population (20%). • Vulnerable groups' access to free health care services should be further improved, and the present financial disincentives of healthcare providers to spread the information about these opportunities removed. • Public healthcare should concentrate on drug prevention and on battling measles and hepatitis A, B, |
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and C, HIV, tuberculosis, scarlatina, varicella and dysentery (shigellosis).

HOUSING

- Nearly 25% of houses in segregated Roma neighbourhoods remain illegal and local authorities may demolish them. Demolitions and evictions overly concern Roma: 89% of demolition orders concerning residential buildings issued by local administrations refer to the only homes of Roma (399 of 444).
- Cadastral maps of Roma settlements are being created (so far in 127 out of 153 settlements with predominant Roma population).
- ESIF are planned for development of social housing: in the previous period, 334 individual social houses were built in 3 municipalities, for the current programming period, more than 27 urban municipalities have plans to build social houses, but the operation has not yet begun (except of few towns).
- Some municipalities have legalised Roma housing (Kyustendil, Dupnitsa and Peshtera), but most of them hardly take action, even if some houses meet the legalisation requirements. Complexity of administrative procedure is another barrier for legalisation.
- There are no mechanisms for housing assistance targeted at the most needy and vulnerable groups and young people who want to start their professional career and start a family in Bulgaria.
- The financial allocation for development of social housing (14.2 million EUR allowing construction of 100 dwellings yearly) is extremely insufficient given the scale of the challenges and the level of destitution in housing.
- Planned ESIF-funded construction of social housing for Roma encountered many obstacles, including opposition of the public or ultranationalists that pressured local governments to cancel their plans. Many local authorities have instead opted for house demolitions.

HORIZONTAL MEASURES

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

- The Ministry of Education has succeeded in prohibiting the placement of Roma children without disabilities into special schools on social grounds. The new Pre-school Education Act prohibits the formation of segregated classes in ethnically mixed schools.
- The national equality body, Commission for Protection against Discrimination, includes representatives of the Parliament who self-identify as Roma.
- Registration of citizens remains problematic because in many Roma neighbourhoods, the establishment of property rights, the legality of buildings, and the possession of the necessary documents establishing residency remain unresolved and many Roma cannot obtain identity cards.
- Despite adopted measures, the practice of forming segregated classes continues. Monitoring remains a challenge and there are no provisions for the collection of ethnically disaggregated data.
- The national equality body avoids serious cases involving public authorities such as house demolitions and police misconduct, and its interaction with civil society is limited.
- There is no state system for supporting for assisting Roma to file complaints and access legal aid.

FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM

- There are no specific instruments targeting antigypsyism.
- NRIS recognises the existence of some of the manifestations of antigypsyism (intolerance, hate speech, prejudices and stereotypes). Operational programmes include specific priority axis aimed at fighting stereotypes and developing local communities.
- The National Preventative Mechanism run by the Ombudsman monitors police's activity towards Roma, but its budget is very limited. In 2016, some 21,486 police officers were trained to work in a multi-ethnic environment, conditions in detention facilities were improved, and special
- Antigypsyism should be recognised as a bias motivation for hate-crimes (they consider such crimes currently only as „hooliganism”).
- There is no national plan to combat discrimination and racism or official reporting on racist and hate related crime or other incidents. In cases before the Equality Body no record is kept of the complainants' ethnicity.
- Despite concerning reports about police violence against Roma, there is no general statistical information available about crimes committed by police officers; no effective mechanism for protecting victims of police violence and very few police officers are prosecuted.

attention was paid to the vulnerable groups among prisoners.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC NEEDS OF MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS AMONG ROMA

- The national employment programme 'Activating the Inactive' specifically targets Roma NEETs by active and preventive measures for labour market integration.
- The State Budget 2018 Law limited the possibility of collecting fees for compulsory pre-school education (fees may be collected only for meals; other expenses are to be covered by the state budget).
- Public policies and strategies, including at municipal level, are gender-neutral and do not take into account the vulnerable position of Roma women who often face double layered challenges (restrictions within their communities and multiple discrimination outside their communities).
- Decision-makers apparently lack the needed sensitivity and awareness in terms of gender equality in the labour market, gender-based discrimination and formulation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes, aimed at promoting the opportunities of Roma women.
- The lack of housing assistance hinders the labour market integration of vulnerable people, including youngsters.
- No measures have been adopted to address (explicitly) Roma LGBT+ issues.

STRUCTURAL MEASURES

STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

- The NRIS was approved by the Parliament the annual reports about the NRIS implementation should be discussed in its plenary.
- The Roma integration has been delegated to the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII), but its mandate and capacities are very weak and does not allow real decision-making on the Roma-related policies or at least coordination of the sectoral policy-making, which is full in hands of line ministries (they do not have specialised units in charge of Roma inclusion).
- Despite Roma inclusion actions are planned by the NRIS and ESIF allocations exist, low capacity of central agencies is barrier to their implementation.
- Involvement of the Parliament demonstrated the political will to forward the Roma inclusion policy and increases the public and political control over NRIS's implementation, government's accountability and mainstreaming of the Roma inclusion.

CIVIL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- The consultative process and participation of Roma NGOs happens mainly through Monitoring Committees of ESIF Programmes.
- The joint Council of Europe-Commission JUSTROM2 programme focuses on women's empowerment and access to justice, and two legal clinics are operating as a result.
- Since 2013 the work of the NCCEII has been boycotted by many Roma organisations, demanding a profound institutional reform. NGO participation in the NCCEII is limited and does not have clear criteria. There are predictions of civil tensions increasing specifically with respect to housing demolitions and evictions.
- Parents are said to not yet be sufficiently empowered by the existing „Public Council“ arrangements for parental input into the running of the schools.

MAINSTREAMING OF ROMA INCLUSION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- A number of Roma have been elected village mayors, vice-mayors or municipal councillors; in many places, Roma leaders or NGOs participate in local policy-making. They play an essential role in development and implementation of Roma inclusion policies at the local level. Roma NGOs took
- Advancing Roma inclusion mostly depend on political will and priorities of municipalities and is usually driven by committed local political leadership or administration; its discontinuity can jeopardise the continuation of the inclusion process.

part in local plans' development and in 79 municipalities NGOs are responsible for delivery of specific actions.

- Local governments can independently decide if they engage personnel aimed at helping Roma - such as health mediators. Education and labour mediators are employed by schools or labour office branches.
- To be eligible to draw ESIF funding, municipalities must develop municipal action plans for Roma inclusion in line with NRIS. By the end of 2016, 194 municipalities had action plans adopted by a decision of the relevant municipal council.
- Several municipalities designed and implemented initiatives that are considered as successful practices in Roma inclusion in Bulgaria.

- The quality of most municipal plans cannot be assessed as high: planned activities do not have funding or rely solely on project-based funding (mostly from ESIF), without commitment of municipal budgets. Often identified needs are not linked to activities or indicators to measure performance are missing at all.
- Smaller municipalities (where Roma usually live) do not have necessary resources and capacities to design and implement Roma inclusion projects and draw ESIF allocated for this purpose.
- Sustainability of local initiatives aimed at Roma inclusion remains a problem, in particular because of dependence on local political leadership and its priorities, and lack of funding.

DATA COLLECTION

- Roma ethnic self-identification is enabled in the census; members of Roma communities participated in the data collection.
- EU surveys provide a picture about the living conditions, poverty and discrimination of Roma.
- Labour offices collect data on ethnic identity of job-seekers, based on self-identification of Roma to have access to targeted programmes. Also, other governmental agencies collect information on Roma participants of national projects funded from ESIF.

- There is a lack of detailed specific data on impact of mainstream policies on Roma (this also concerns the specific needs of and impact on Roma women).
- Roma often do not declare their ethnic identity because of fear of discrimination (Roma often declare to be Turkish, Bulgarians, Romanians).

FUNDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- Project-based funding is available to some civil society organisations implementing certain aspects of policy.

- The main funding opportunity for civil society is the ESIF for Roma inclusion, but planned systemic measures with bigger funding are not entrusted to civil society (that on their turn, often do not have capacity to meet demanding administrative requirements).

EXAMPLE OF PROMISING PRACTICE

The current government gave high priority to advancing pre-primary and primary education. A significant advance has been achieved regarding the enrolment of Roma in primary school and reducing the dropout rate. The multi-institutional framework for full enrolment established in 2017 brings certain positive results. The new model of financing the school system provides hope for better targeting of resources for rural areas schools. Allocation of additional funds for work with children and students from vulnerable groups is important positive step that could help these schools to appoint school mediators and to keep motivated teachers.

MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Promotion of desegregated, ethnically mixed and inclusive education
- Increasing the number of Roma in secondary education as well as in pre-school education (including through abolishing kindergarten fees)
- Improving living conditions and legalisation of housing in segregated Roma neighbourhoods
- Tackling the residential desegregation and helping inhabitants of segregated neighbourhoods to move out
- Improving Roma's access to health insurance
- Improving (reforming) the governance of Roma inclusion aimed at better policy coordination and Roma participation