A brief presentation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion

Within the Conference "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future” held in Budapest in June-July 2003 and as a follow up of the debates, the participants decided that it is a need of a coherent approach of the Roma exclusion phenomenon through a system of long-term impact policies.

Within this conference, the leaders of the participant Governments\(^1\) agreed upon the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) launch, in order to generate a common working framework for the actions meant to improve the social and economic status of the Roma living in the Central and Eastern Europe. The working method proposed, mainly supposes three steps:

- A clear drawing of the objectives, at the national scale, regarding the improvement of Roma condition;

\(^1\) The participant-countries are: Czech Republic, FYR of Macedonia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania Serbia and Montenegro and Bulgaria.
- The development of National Action Plans, in all the Decade participant countries in order to attain the proposed objectives;

- A continuous Monitoring of the implementing status of the proposed objective.

It was agreed, also, upon the establishment of the Roma Education Fund, with the purpose of improving the educational outcomes of the Roma, thus contributing at the completion of the educational objectives of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion represents a political commitment, multi-national-scaled effort with the purpose of eliminating the gap of opportunities and living conditions that had occurred between Roma and the rest of the society. This purpose can be achieved by applying new measures in the field of: social inclusion, anti-discrimination, equal opportunities, eliminating the segregationist practices.

Within the 2003 Conference, it was stressed the importance of the Roma Civil Society involvement in the Decade. The motto of the Roma participant delegations was: “Nothing about us, without us”.

The year 2004 was declared to be a preparatory year of the Decade, in which the governments, through their representatives, established the necessary details of the Decade launch that took place at the beginning of 2005.

Thus, in December 2003 and during 2004, four meetings of the Decade’s International Steering Committee took place.

Within these meetings, the participant-states delegations established four priorities fields of action and intervention in order to improve the Roma condition: Education, Health, Employment and Housing but also three cross-cutting themes: discrimination, poverty and gender equality.

During the year 2004, there were also organized workshops by the World Bank on the above-mentioned fields.

The international launch of Decade took place at Sofia on 2nd of February 2005, the event being organized by the Government of Bulgaria.
Each participant country organized a National Launch of the Decade according with its specific at a certain date, established by the government of the respective country.

On the 15th of April 2005 took place the fifth meeting of the Decade’s International Steering Committee and the main points for debating were the Secretariat and the Presidency of the Decade, respectively their location and functioning.

Romania, through the National Agency for Roma, is the first country in the line of the nine member-states involved in the Decade for Roma Inclusion programme, that holds the Presidency and Secretariat of this programme, for a one year period, starting with the 1st of July 2005. For the preparatory period of the Decade, the Presidency and the Secretariat were secured by the Hungarian Government.

**The PRESIDENCY and Technical Secretariat of the Decade of Roma Inclusion**

*The 1st of July 2005 – 30th of June 2006*

Aiming to re-affirm its commitment, the Government of Romania, represented by National Agency for Roma, it assumed the responsibility to take over the Presidency and the Technical Secretariat of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Technical Secretariat of Decade, consisting of governmental experts in public policies for Roma, was organised within the National Agency for Roma. According to the Terms of Reference of the Decade, the Technical Secretariat fulfils an administrative role while the political role is carried out by the Presidency of Decade.

The main tasks of the Technical Secretariat are to support the activity of the President of Decade’s International Steering Committee, as well as to assist, where the case, the participant governments is.

The Technical Secretariat of the Decade, for the period: 1st of July 2005- 1st of June 2006, is composed by: Claudia Kovacs, Plebis Florea, Maria Ursu.

The Technical Secretariat of Decade is responsible for the fulfilment of the following activities:
• Shall organize the ISC meetings and the work shops, in close cooperation with the Presidency.

• Prepare all documentation related to Roma Decade and required by the Presidency

• Shall distribute any new and relevant information related to the Roma Decade to all member states, Roma civil society and international institutions

• Management of international communication campaign and programmes (web-page, publications, etc)

• Production of annual report of Presidency

• Liaise with national governments, young Roma delegations, civil society, international organizations

• Produce a report related to any major modification occurred within Roma Decade, based on which the Presidency will make a proposal for approval to ISC.

• Upon decision of ISC, facilitate the participation of other countries in the Decade process and support the countries in this process.

INTERMEDIARY REPORT OF THE PRESIDENCY

*Actions and activities undertook by the Presidency of the Decade between July, 1st of July 2005– 31st of December 2006*

The Prime Minister of Romania approved, in September 2005, the Memorandum on the Romania’s priorities established for the period when the Presidency of the Decade is held by Romania and also regarding the international activities programmed for this period, all these for a better developing of the proposed activities during this period of time.

October
4 October 2005 – the ceremony where Romania took over the Presidency of the Decade Of Roma Inclusion

Within a ceremony hosted by the Romania’s Government, the “The Decade of Roma Inclusion” Presidency was taken over from the Government of Hungary.

The President of the National Agency for Roma (NAR), Maria Ionescu took over from her Hungarian counterpart Laszlo Teleki, the documents elaborated by the Technical Secretariat of the Decade, managed until July 2005 by the Government of Hungary. Representatives of the international institutions (UNDP, World Bank, European Commission Delegation that supported this initiative and activists from the non governmental sector took part at this event. Mister deputy Prime Minister Marko Bela, present at this event, said that Roma problems can not be solved by an institution, strategy or law without the active participation of the Roma communities.

November

4 November 2005 – Consultations to establish the Terms of References for the Decade

A delegation from the Government of Hungary, including Mister Laszlo Teleki, Secretary of State for Roma issues and two Hungarian experts, participated at a working meeting organized by the Technical Secretariat, following an initiative of Mss. Maria Ionescu, Secretary of State. The meeting wanted to analyse the last draft of the Terms of References of the Decade, at the meeting being present also two international consultants: Stephan Mueller and Iulius Rostas, coordinator of the programme for Roma, OSI. Following these discussions a draft of the document was produced which was presented after that to the Decade participants during the International Steering Committee meeting held between 17 and 18 November at Bucharest.

17-18 November 2005- The Decade’s International Steering Committee meeting

Between 17th and 18th of November, the Technical Secretariat of the Decade organized the seventh meeting of the Decade’s International Steering Committee. This
meeting gathered the representatives of all decision making actors involved in this ample initiative: governments, international organisations that are partners, Roma civil society. The Technical Secretariat of the Decade was supported in organising this event by the Open Society Foundation. The Prime Minister of Romania, Calin Popescu Tariceanu, the President of the Open Society Institute, George Soros, the President of the National Agency of Roma, Maria Ionescu, the councillor of the Romania’s President, Renate Weber, the Vice-President of the World Bank for Europe and Central Asia, Shigeo Katsu, head of Phare Section for Justice and Home Affairs, Social Sector and Civil Society and Head of ISPA Section from the European Commission Delegation in Romania, Anne de Ligne, the UN coordinator and resident representative of UNDP in Romania, Soknan Han Jung, the Secretary of State for Roma issues in the Government of Hungary, Laszlo Teleki and the Secretary of State from the Romania’s Department for Interethnic Relations, Marko Atila, participated and spoke at this opening ceremony. This was followed by a press conference.

During these two days there were two actions developing in parallel: on one hand the Decade’s International Steering Committee and, on the other hand a workshop with the theme “Media and Roma” where media specialists from the Decade’s countries took part. The ISC meeting had two sessions. Within the first session there were reports on the progresses and obstacles faced in implementing the Decade’s National Action Plans in each of the eight participant countries. These reports were presented by the governmental delegations that were participating at this event.

The Roma civil society pulled some emergency signals regarding the need to improve the communication between the governmental institutions and the Roma NGO-s and on increasing the level of involvement of the Roma civil society in all the stages of the Decade.

In the same time the international organisations that are partners reaffirmed their wish to get involved and to help at the completion of the Decade’s objectives, through financial instruments that already exists and also through new means.

In the second day the governments agreed and signed the Decade’s Terms of References, which means that now there is a document which will be the official
framework and the basis of the future actions. The Bulgarian delegation will present its opinion in short time, after they agree at national level on the acceptance of the Terms of References.

Debates on the mass media influence on the Roma image took place within the media workshop, which took place in parallel.

Starting from some relevant examples, some issues, like the freedom of the press and its limits, the press speech which instigate at ethnic hate, the Roma image through some stereotypes were discussed. Also, there were discussions regarding the need of an active and involved Roma mass media which has to present the real image of the Roma communities. The conclusion was that mass media has to assumed the responsibility of the presented aspects because they have a very big impact on the perception of Roma by the rest of the population.

December


The Roma health conference “Past and future projects and policies: how to impact Roma Health most effectively?” was organized according to the programme assumed by Romania within the period when it ensures the Decade’s Presidency.

The objectives of the conference were:

- To share with government representatives and other stakeholders the conclusions and recommendations of the OSI study on Roma Health Mediator programs in Bulgaria, Finland and Romania;
- To analyse opportunities and challenges raised by Roma Health Mediator programs;
- To assess the effectiveness of current policy frameworks regarding broader issues related to Roma health;

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To discuss and agree upon next concrete steps on the implementation of the Decade National Action Plans on health.

The conference can be considered to be the first in this field that gathered the representatives of the governments from the countries involved in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Also, the OSI study on Roma Health Mediators from Bulgaria, Finland and Romania was presented.

The first discussion on Roma women participation at the community life took place in a governmental framework. This made possible to create an ample vision on the gender issues through the social needs of the Roma communities.

The working methodology was to form workshops on the domains.

Following this conference, the main recommendations were:

1. the need of increased efforts in the fields like advocacy, assistance services, improving the legislation on health care through institutional partnerships;
2. addressing the health programmes for Roma women to be realised taking into account the crosscutting between gender, health care and human rights;
3. institutional assessment regarding the quality of the health mediators programmes;
4. multiplying the experience of the health mediators in the Decade’s participant countries

Outcomes of the Decade of Roma Inclusion under Romanian Presidency

(1st of July 2005 - 30th of June 2006)

1. Organizing the seventh ISC meeting, with participation of the representatives of the nine governments involved in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and representatives of Roma youth. As a result of this meeting, the process of consultations between the governments for establishing an organizing framework was ended, and the next stage is to develop the National Action Plans for the Decade. The most important result of this meeting was the
adoption of the Terms of Reference. It should be mentioned that the process of consultations lasted two years.

2. At the same time with the adoption of the TOR, it was created the Trust Fund, as the annual contribution of the participant governments, which proves the common interest of the governments. Government of Romania as the coordinator of the Decade was the first who obtained this fund.

3. The Romani language was included as the official language in the Terms of Reference of the Decade.

4. All the international Organizations reconfirmed their willing to support the Decade through the financial instruments already existent like European Commission but also through technical assistance like World Bank and Open Society Institute.

5. Within the “Media and Roma” workshop, the participants were media specialists from the participant countries in the Decade; it was proposed to introduce the media theme as a transcendent domain in the National Action Plans for the Decade.

6. Health Workshop - International Conference “Policies, past and future projects. How to act most efficient on Roma Health, organized under the Romanian Presidency, for the first time the National Health Insurance Institution it is willing to work together with the National Agency for Roma on a law project about the health insurance for the disadvantaged groups. This practice could be multiply in all the participant countries in the Decade.

7. Under the Romanian Presidency, the National Agency for Roma will do all possible in order to create mechanisms for monitoring the activity of health mediators.