

# Roma Poverty and the Roma National Strategies: The Cases of Albania, Greece and Serbia

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## Summary

Poverty among the Roma is not new. It has its roots in centuries of discrimination and exclusion. Traditionally regarded as unwelcome outsiders, the Roma have been excluded from development, and forced to live on the margins of societies. In Greece, a European Union (EU) member state, an estimated half of the Roma population live in shacks, without access to electricity, sanitation or piped water. They are also often under the threat of eviction.<sup>1</sup> While the former communist countries, including Albania and ex-Yugoslavia, forced a degree of assimilation on the Roma, they did little to ensure the sustainability of Roma development. Few Roma had more than primary-level education or low-skilled jobs. Following the political and economic transition in these countries, the Roma were the first to be dismissed from their jobs and evicted from their homes. They were also subjected to racially-motivated violence. The resulting poverty experienced by the Roma in the region has been likened to sub-Saharan conditions,<sup>2</sup> as Roma communities often struggle to afford basic necessities, such as food and housing.

This study<sup>3</sup> examines the impact of the Roma national strategies aimed at reducing Roma poverty in South-East Europe (SEE).

Recently, often under external pressure, governments have begun to recognize the need for state intervention to alleviate Roma poverty, and several SEE governments in SEE have adopted special Roma programmes. However, these programmes consider Roma poverty to be a cause of Roma exclusion; yet, poverty is usually a consequence of discrimination and exclusion. These programmes also tend to lack a rights-based approach<sup>4</sup> and often omit anti-discrimination, gender sensitive and community empowerment measures.

The Roma are still not universally recognized as a minority within the states in which they live (for example, in Greece). Even where they are, (as in Albania and Serbia), their representation in decision-making structures is negligible, which means they have little input in state policies, including those concerning them directly. In most countries, the Roma populations' size is unknown and usually underestimated, as the Roma are often



Roma picking tomatoes in Greece. *Nigel Dickinson*

undocumented. This means that they are excluded from accessing public services. Even programmes for the Roma lack crucial information on the Roma population. Public and official attitudes can be racist towards the Roma, which makes the implementation of Roma programmes extremely difficult. Further, few countries in SEE have a solid anti-discrimination legislation with bodies to implement it. There is a tremendous diversity among the Roma (linguistic and cultural), and women are treated differently in most societies, the Roma are no exception. Roma women and girls are subject to multiple discrimination. Poverty alleviation programmes need to address the different needs of diverse Roma communities, and tackle the underlying causes of the Roma's poverty.

This study draws on Roma communities' accounts of their poverty, and their perceptions of states' efforts to address it. While the analysis of Roma national strategies is not comprehensive, it aims to draw attention to the correlation between low levels of minority recognition and participation, and the programmes' lack of impact on reducing poverty. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations will be useful for local, national and international policy-makers and advocates. We also hope that this study, published at the start of the Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005–15), will form part of a major international initiative to overcome Roma poverty and exclusion.

## Background to the Roma strategies

International organizations and processes have played a major role in the adoption of programmes for the Roma in SEE. The EU accession process and the recently-launched Roma Decade have been particularly important.

### EU accession process

Roma exclusion and poverty received much attention in the recent EU enlargement process, when minority protection was articulated as a criterion for accession ('Copenhagen criteria'),<sup>5</sup> with the European Commission monitoring the fulfilment of the criteria by candidate countries.<sup>6</sup> Albania and Serbia seek to join the EU, and have adopted Roma programmes with EU accession in mind. This demonstrates the EU's influence and prestige in the region. With the recent enlargement, the EU is home to up to 9 million Roma.<sup>7</sup> Their exclusion and poverty did not disappear on the day of accession.

There has been little consistency in the EU regarding minority protection standards. The Copenhagen criteria have been applied exclusively as an entry hurdle, although existing EU members have been criticized for failing to respect the rights of the Roma and other minorities.<sup>7</sup> Greece, for example, has come under the international spotlight for its infamous Roma evictions policies (see later). The EU's equality directives<sup>8</sup> present clear EU-wide anti-discrimination benchmarks, (although they do not directly address minority rights), yet their implementation has been inadequate, as several countries (including Greece) have failed to fully implement the directives in good time.<sup>9</sup>

Further, despite the Copenhagen criteria, some of the candidates with the worst record on the Roma have gained admission,<sup>10</sup> and monitoring and pressure stopped following accession. This may send the wrong signal to candidates that so long as formal measures, such as Roma programmes, are in place, no improvements in the situation of the Roma are necessary.

### Streamlining the EU's Roma initiatives

While further enlargement is being debated in the EU, the EU has shown its commitment to promoting stability and development in SEE through its regional Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) policy framework.<sup>11</sup> The amount of EU aid to the western Balkans, including Albania and Serbia,<sup>12</sup> also makes the EU one of the region's largest donors and main partners. While much of the EU aid is directed towards Roma development initiatives,<sup>13</sup> Roma development is not mainstreamed in the EU's policy in the region. Further, the Roma have not been mainstreamed within the EU's social inclusion policies. For example, the Lisbon Strategy and the European Employment Strategy, two principal EU policy mechanisms to combat poverty and exclusion, do not specifically mention the Roma as a marginalized group. The EU's Country Strategy Papers

(CSPs), the key programming documents relevant for accession countries, barely mention Roma national strategies, or minorities in general, and the extent of consultations with Roma civil society in the EU's assessment is unclear.

### Roma Decade

The Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005–15) is an initiative by Central and South-East European governments<sup>14</sup> to close the gap between the Roma and the region's majority populations. The Decade's core priorities include: education; employment; health and housing; and cross-cutting issues of discrimination, gender inequality and poverty. It emphasizes Roma participation in overcoming their poverty and exclusion.

Various international and regional agencies and donors, including the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, EU, Open Society Institute (OSI), Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank, have lent weight to the Decade. With the exception of the recently-established Roma Education Fund, the Roma Decade does not have its own funding, which is a significant weakness.

The participating countries (including Serbia and Montenegro) have already adopted national action plans for the priority areas. However, it is not clear how their implementation will be financed. While governments are expected to commit sufficient funding, by reallocating existing resources, this expectation may not be realistic in some of the poorer countries. There are also concerns as to whether donors will also allocate sufficient funding.

## Roma strategies

### Targeted v. mainstream approach

Mainstreaming Roma issues within general poverty reduction programmes often overlooks the specific needs of the Roma. And as the Greek experience shows, it is easy for Roma to become 'invisible' in general inclusion programmes. Roma women and men face barriers such as: being unregistered, discrimination from some authorities, illiteracy, a lack of information, and language problems, which may prevent them from even accessing the programmes. On the other hand, some of the countries that have adopted specific Roma strategies show a negative trend of the 'ghettoization' of Roma issues.<sup>15</sup>

Although mainstreaming and targeted approaches are not mutually exclusive, the countries in focus have yet to ensure that targeted Roma programmes have adequate administrative, staffing and financial resources, and that Roma issues are visible within mainstream policies.

## Rights-based approach

Roma poverty in SEE is a consequence of discrimination and exclusion. Even when governments in the region acknowledge the existence of discrimination against the Roma, their Roma programmes are not tied into an anti-discrimination framework. Further, the rights-based approach is often completely missing from many Roma strategies. The Roma are treated as clients who need help, rather than as people who have rights. The focus on giving and providing, rather than enabling and activating, may impair minority communities' participation, cultivating a dependency culture and perpetuating their marginalization.

## Minority participation and capacity-development

While recommendations for the meaningful involvement of minorities at all stages of programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation have become a cliché, most governments and donors alike have yet to take minority participation seriously.

Even when there has been a certain level of consultation between authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in drafting the text of the Roma strategy, (for example in Albania), state support for community empowerment and capacity-development has been minimal or non-existent. Also, some states appear willing to shift the responsibilities for the implementation of the Roma programmes onto Roma NGOs, without the necessary support.

## Data collection

Virtually none of the countries that have adopted Roma strategies have developed clear indicators defining Roma communities and their vulnerability, covering self- and non-identification, multiple identity and multiple disadvantage, for example of women. None of the countries have accurate statistics on the size of the Roma population. This is crucial for a development programme. Data collection processes, if any, are not transparent, and the use of data is inefficient.

Ethnic data collection is a sensitive matter, as different countries – and Roma communities – often have negative experience of the use of such data.<sup>16</sup> Yet it appears that the authorities generally prefer to ignore the problem of a lack of data, rather than cooperate with diverse grassroots Roma communities to collect disaggregated data in a sensitive manner.

## Monitoring and evaluation

In all three countries, mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategies are weak, poorly coordinated and non-transparent. Usually, beyond the initial input into the strategy development, Roma NGOs are bypassed in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategies, which results in their

feeling used. This is not conducive to building up trust. In the absence of communication and information on their implementation, Roma communities feel that nothing is being done to address their poverty.

## Information and communication

Following their adoption, virtually no efforts have been made to publicize the Roma strategies. The intended beneficiaries are generally unaware of these state programmes, signalling that few Roma communities have been involved in the process.

Across the region, there is also a lack of information from the state about the implementation of these strategies. In Albania, local authorities, allegedly, claim not to know about the strategy so do nothing to carry it out.<sup>17</sup> In Greece, local authorities often refuse to submit proposals for the benefit of the Roma, using the resources to drive the Roma away.<sup>18</sup> In Serbia, authorities claim there is 'no budget even for programmes aimed at the majority, let alone the Roma'.<sup>19</sup> Further, in the context of countries where poverty levels are generally high, the existence of special Roma programmes aimed at reducing Roma poverty may incite anti-Roma feelings among the wider public. Yet none of the countries have adopted public information or communications strategies to ensure the effective implementation of the adopted Roma programmes.

## Roma communities' experiences with poverty

### Albania

Albania is party to the main international human rights and minority protection instruments, and seeks to join the EU.<sup>20</sup> The Albanian Constitution formally guarantees equality before the law; and freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and language etc. There is, however, no specific anti-discrimination legislation, and the implementation of existing norms is lacking.

#### Identity

Roma and Egyptians<sup>21</sup> are identified as the most vulnerable groups in Albania. In the absence of registration, the size of the Roma and Egyptian population is unknown. Estimates range from 80,000<sup>22</sup> to 150,000 people (up to 3 per cent of the total population).<sup>23</sup> While admitting that Roma 'have ethnic characteristics and their own language', the government does not recognize the Egyptian identity: 'they have been integrated completely in the Albanian population and their only difference from [Albanians] is the colour of their skin'.<sup>24</sup> There are no state programmes targeting the Egyptians, who often face similar problems to the Roma.

## Roma poverty: background

Roma poverty should be considered in the context of Albania's economic situation. However, the transition period has affected the socio-economic situation of the Roma more than that of other ethnic groups. Under the communist regime, Roma employment was guaranteed and even forced; however, Roma were usually assigned to low-skilled jobs. When state enterprises began to close, the Roma were the first to be dismissed, and most have since remained unemployed. The resulting poverty is significantly higher among the Roma than among other minority communities or the majority.<sup>25</sup>

### Unemployment

The national unemployment average is c. 14 per cent.<sup>26</sup> Although there is limited official data for Roma women and men, in some Roma communities unemployment rates may be as high as 100 per cent.<sup>27</sup> According to residents of the Roma settlement in the town of Kucove, practically all the Roma there, including women, were previously employed, but most are currently unemployed. Many depend on limited social assistance or occasional informal work. In an estimated 40 per cent of 107 families, a member has emigrated for work, helping support families left behind. Those who have a family member abroad claim that state assistance was stopped when authorities learned about the migrant, on the assumption that these families have sufficient income. Some women earn additional income in the summer by collecting medicinal herbs and selling them to pharmacies, or work cleaning other people's houses.<sup>28</sup>

In the rural settlement outside of Saver, most Roma are unemployed. Although many families own strips of land, they lack the initial capital for equipment, fertilizers, seeds etc. Land ownership, however, generally disqualifies people from state assistance. Roma families find different ways of coping with poverty. Some sell blood to hospitals. Other means to earn an income, for women, men and children alike, include collecting and selling bottles, and scrap metal.<sup>29</sup>

Poverty prevents the Roma from accessing adequate housing and even nutrition. The inability to buy food is often named as the worst problem for the family, and cases of malnutrition among the Roma are allegedly on the rise.<sup>30</sup> (For comparison, even though 25 per cent of the total Albanian population are estimated to live in poverty, less than 5 per cent are unable to meet their basic food requirements.)<sup>31</sup> For many Roma families, modest social assistance is often the only means to survive. Still, many of the poorest Roma are allegedly denied social assistance by state offices in a discriminatory manner.<sup>32</sup>

### Migration

Migration, usually to neighbouring Greece and Italy, has become a crucial source of income for many Roma families' survival. However, illegal migration has also facilitated human trafficking, and Roma women and children are among those most affected. International organizations are concerned about the rates of child trafficking from Albania, noting that a disproportionate number of these children are from Roma and Egyptian communities.<sup>33</sup>

Albanian Roma who migrated to Greece in the hope of finding jobs and better lives say that their living conditions were better in Albania. The income Roma earn as casual workers is insufficient, especially in the more expensive Greece, and Roma women are rarely able to obtain work.<sup>34</sup> Albanian Roma in Greece are subject to discrimination and harassment from both individuals and public authorities.<sup>35</sup>

### Community development experience

While the Roma are recognized as a linguistic minority, their participation and input in policy and decision-making processes are practically non-existent. With the exception of one Roma representative on the recently-established advisory State Committee on Minorities,<sup>36</sup> there are virtually no Roma employed in public administration bodies at the national or local levels. It comes as no surprise then, that state sectoral priorities do not stipulate specific actions for the Roma, even though the Roma were identified among the groups most affected by poverty.<sup>37</sup>

At a recent MRG discussion,<sup>38</sup> Roma NGO representatives cited an Albanian saying: 'Only the owner knows where the roof is leaking'. This means, only Roma know what their problems are, and it is the Roma who can find the solutions. Roma capacity-building is therefore essential, to enable their participation in the implementation of official projects as well as NGO initiatives.

One NGO initiative that has proven a success focuses on community empowerment. Albanian NGO Romani Union Amaro Drom, with support from the Dutch NGO Spolu International Foundation, has been mobilizing Roma communities, including women and older people. It encourages people not to wait for the state but to take the initiative. Communities have identified the problems to be solved and negotiated with local authorities for funds. The Roma provide volunteer labour and materials, and implement the projects. The projects are conducted in a transparent manner. Currently, nine communities across Albania are participating.

### Community development projects

In 2002, the Romani Union Amaro Drom launched a community development project in Levan. The predominantly Roma-populated village lacked a sewage system. The community elected a local Roma board, which planned and implemented the project, with the community's participation. As a result, all of the streets of the Roma settlement were connected to the sewage system.

In Morava, the local Roma community was mobilized to build a school. Amaro Drom and Spolu International Foundation provided funding, and negotiated with the local government to provide equipment, teachers and to facilitate the official recognition of the school. People volunteered their work. Since the school's opening in 2002, the attendance rate has been an estimated 90 per cent, which demonstrates that the people's ownership of a project is an important motivator.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, the Roma community has been included in the annual local budget: Roma NGOs present the authorities with annual action plans and projected costs, and the authorities support their initiatives financially. The Roma community provides labour and other in-kind contributions.<sup>40</sup> More Roma communities across Albania want to participate in these types of initiatives.

Overall, however, the authorities' collaboration is often lacking. It appears that the government tends to shift the responsibility for solving Roma problems onto Roma NGOs, without providing adequate capacity-building support for Roma communities and organizations.

### The Roma strategy

The Albanian National Strategy for the Improvement of Living Conditions of the Roma Minority (2003–15) was adopted in 2003 by a decision of the Council of Ministers.<sup>41</sup> The strategy was based on the 2002 World Bank poverty assessment identifying the Roma as among the communities most affected by poverty, and recommended a targeted Roma strategy.<sup>42</sup> The adoption of the strategy has been welcomed by Roma NGOs and praised by international experts<sup>43</sup> for its comprehensiveness and, particularly, its sensitivity to youth and gender issues. Yet, the omission of specific anti-discrimination and community empowerment measures, and the lack of a human rights approach raise concerns.

Among its aims are: the mitigation of poverty, the promotion of Roma involvement in public life, and support for the preservation of Roma identity.<sup>44</sup> There is no concrete target. Equally as troubling is the formulation of certain objectives, such as the proposal to study the Roma 'way of living' and the objective to 'change it',<sup>45</sup> or the

identification of 'professions that can be learned by Roma', which might imply limiting the Roma to occupations deemed 'typically' Roma, thereby perpetuating their marginalization.<sup>46</sup> The strategy does not contemplate any further policy development, or the mainstreaming of Roma issues within the National Strategy for Social and Economic Development (NSSD), the main development strategy in Albania.

The preparatory process was financed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and the OSCE–ODIHR, within the Stability Pact framework.<sup>47</sup> Most existing Roma NGOs are said to have taken part in consultations leading to the strategy's adoption. Roma representatives state that their recommendations were reflected in the strategy's priority matrix.<sup>48</sup> However, the strategy contains very few references to the role of the Roma in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Those provisions that do refer to the Roma appear to place expectations on NGOs to implement the governmental policies, without adequate support. For example, government representatives and Roma NGOs are expected to collect data, but no funds have been allocated for this task.<sup>49</sup>

Independent experts have noted discrepancies in the allocation of the funds, with some activities (data collection) not funded at all, while others appear to be oversubscribed.<sup>50</sup> In many instances, sources of funding refer to 'donors'. A commitment to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the strategy's programmes is, therefore, questionable.

### Monitoring body

The monitoring body for the strategy was established in 2004, attached to the Ministry for Social Affairs. Although the strategy says that the staff would consist of three to five experts,<sup>51</sup> including Roma experts, none are Roma, and none were involved in the elaboration of the strategy. The monitoring body's mandate appears blurred: on the one hand, it is a monitor; on the other hand, it coordinates the implementation. Further, it does not have clear monitoring indicators.

In practice, the monitoring body has a lower status than its counterparts in ministries, and its requests for information/data on the strategy's implementation are often disregarded by ministries.<sup>52</sup> The monitoring body has neither its own office nor telephone line. It is difficult to contact the body, which prejudices its accessibility and the quality of its work. Roma NGOs want the staff to be augmented by two Roma experts, including one Roma woman, and that the body should be moved from being under the authority of the Social Ministry, to being under the authority of the Prime Minister's office, so that it has the necessary authority to do its work.

The official attitude seems to be to formally satisfy the international donors' criteria, and if funding is provided, something may be done. If no funding is provided, nothing will happen.<sup>53</sup>

### Implementation: successes and failures

The strategy was presented upon its adoption at a press conference, and reprinted in the *Official Bulletin*.<sup>54</sup> No further steps were taken to publicize it. Many Roma representatives claim that some local authorities still know nothing about the strategy, or perhaps pretend not to know, so that they do not have to do anything.<sup>55</sup> Instead, most work is said to be done by NGOs, not the state, and NGOs claim to get more support from international donors than from the national government.<sup>56</sup>

#### Registration process

Registration is key to accessing public services, and the strategy names Roma registration as a priority. Law 9355 provided free registration to all unregistered individuals (Roma and non-Roma) from December 2004 to February 2005. Many Roma reportedly benefited from it, although in the absence of ethnic data collection the numbers are not available.

However, many Roma still could not take up this opportunity. Allegedly, some offices responsible for processing the registrations failed to correctly advise Roma visitors. Further, while the registration was free, other documents required to support the registration were not free and/or difficult to obtain, such as birth and marriage certificates etc.

Even though the registration process has not fulfilled its objective, the Law has already expired.

Roma NGOs feel that after their initial input into the strategy, that they have been discarded from the official implementation processes. Roma women's organizations are particularly concerned that issues facing Roma women from both inside and outside of their communities, will remain unaddressed.<sup>57</sup>

While the authorities reportedly cite a lack of funding as a major obstacle for the strategy's implementation, Roma representatives blame a lack of political will. If there was political will, the problem of funding could also be solved; instead, the authorities appear to have 'locked the strategy away and forgotten all about it'.<sup>58</sup>

### Greece

Greece is a party to major international treaties guaranteeing protection from discrimination, with the exception of minority protection instruments.<sup>59</sup> Following intense international criticism and legal proceedings by the European Commission for failure to implement the EU equality directives on time, Greece finally adopted an anti-

discrimination law, partially implementing the EU directives. However, the meaningful enforcement of anti-discrimination provisions, especially regarding the Roma, is rare in practice.

#### Identity

The Roma are not recognized as a national minority in Greece. Even the concept of a 'national minority' is not accepted by the state.<sup>60</sup> Despite their centuries-long presence in Greece, most Roma were only granted citizenship in the 1970s.<sup>61</sup> However, due to high rates of illiteracy, heavily bureaucratic and costly procedures, and the state's indifference, many do not have official documents.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the size of the Roma population is unknown. The estimates range from 70,000–80,000 people,<sup>63</sup> to 120,000–150,000<sup>64</sup> and 300,000.<sup>65</sup>

While some Roma have assimilated and consider themselves primarily Greek,<sup>66</sup> some others identify themselves as Muslims, particularly in Thrace province (northern Greece). There is also a sizeable community of immigrant Roma from Albania, who have been legally living in Greece for over a decade, although few have obtained citizenship. Foreign Roma are outside of the scope of state programmes.

There is a substantial difference of opinion between various groups of Roma as to their needs and representation. Some representatives of assimilated Roma reject the very notion of an ethnic minority. Poorer (tent-dwelling) Roma communities think differently and feel that their opinions are often not taken into consideration.<sup>67</sup>

### Roma poverty: background

Notwithstanding their identification and degree of assimilation, all Roma face pervasive discrimination and intolerance. According to the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR):

*'The more integrated group faces a very acute problem of equal treatment by the Greek State and non-Roma Greeks, since they are the victims of daily and repeated racist discrimination. The most numerous group, that of the tent-dwellers, have in addition a very serious problem of survival.'*<sup>68</sup>

Although disaggregated data on Roma poverty is virtually non-existent, estimates provide a bleak picture. According to the NCHR, due to low levels of education and illiteracy, only an estimated 40 per cent have a job from which they can make a living.<sup>69</sup> Roma women, who are estimated to have even higher illiteracy rates than men,<sup>70</sup> appear to be completely absent from the labour market<sup>71</sup> (which suggests

that the 40 per cent figure mentioned above is an overestimate). Roma exclusion from the labour market leads to poverty, deteriorating health, and tensions with authorities and the majority.<sup>72</sup>

### Unemployment

For Roma living in urban settlements around Greece, the main occupation is collecting and selling scrap metal and other wares in markets. Roma in rural settlements occasionally earn a living by seasonal agricultural work. This work is usually informal, which means they do not have any health or social insurance. In addition, many claim it is difficult and expensive to obtain the necessary permits, which may lead to problems with the authorities. With the exception of single mothers, who often have to work on a par with men, Roma women usually care for young children and do the household chores. Children are particularly affected by the poverty of their communities, and many girls and boys work to help to earn a living for their families.<sup>73</sup>

The appalling conditions in which an estimated majority of the Roma live have been a subject of sharp criticism domestically and internationally.<sup>74</sup> According to a DEPOS study, most Roma settlements – whether makeshift dwellings or permanent settlements<sup>75</sup> – are segregated and located in remote, substandard areas. They do not have an adequate water supply, are not connected to the sewage system, and many have no electricity, paved roads, or other basic amenities.

### Evictions

Forced evictions of Roma (so-called ‘cleaning operations’) are commonplace. Notorious incidents took place before the 2004 summer Olympics. Many Roma families were evicted or threatened with eviction under the pretext that the land they were occupying was needed for the Olympic infrastructure works. While some Greek Roma were at least offered compensation (which the authorities largely defaulted on paying), Albanian Roma, although legally resident in Greece, were evicted without any compensation or resettlement.<sup>76</sup>

In June 2005, just a few days after the European Committee on Social Rights issued a damning ruling against Greece for its Roma housing and evictions policy,<sup>77</sup> 15 families of Greek Roma in Patras were served with new eviction notices. Despite appeals to the Prime Minister, the authorities continued the ‘cleaning operations’, and at least 16 other families who were long-term residents in Patras, became the object of criminal investigations for violating the then

1983 Health Directive on the settlement of itinerant Roma. Since July 2005, 70 Albanian Roma families in Athens face eviction. The land on which they live is needed for a stadium, for the 2012 European Football Championship, which Greece is bidding for.<sup>78</sup>

### Community development experience

#### The 1996 programme

State attempts to address the situation of the Roma date back to 1996, when the ‘National Policy Framework in Favour of Greek Gypsies’ was adopted. No Roma participated in the elaboration of this policy. No legislation was adopted to ensure its implementation. Even the text was not publicly available, so neither the general public nor the beneficiaries were aware of its existence, until a scandal erupted.<sup>79</sup> According to the government’s own Implementation Review for the Years 1996–9, the only part of the project that had been completed by 2000 was a survey on Roma housing conditions. A Greek government official stated at the 1999 OSCE meeting that the implementation was impeded by ‘bureaucratic sluggishness’, difficulties in achieving consensus with the various Roma groups, and ‘still widespread’ public prejudice occasionally ‘displayed by police officers and elected officials at the local administration level’.<sup>80</sup>

The Deputy Minister of the Interior, speaking at a 2004 meeting of the inter-municipal Rom Network, stated: ‘Our social policy is not exclusively welfare-based, but also aims towards enabling the civil society to have an active role in the amelioration of the living conditions of [the Roma]’.<sup>81</sup> Genuine Roma participation has yet to happen, however. The Roma have no negotiating power and minimal access to decision-making, either at a national or local level. Often, they do not even have access to NGOs and other agencies active on their behalf.<sup>82</sup> Owing to the exclusion that leads to widespread illiteracy, the Roma are usually not aware of their rights and not equipped to stand up to violations of their rights. Therefore, they are vulnerable to, and susceptible to, abuse.

According to the authorities, several development programmes are underway. However, during recent interviews in several Roma communities, no one had heard about them from the state. Many Roma claim that the only time they have contact with the authorities is when the police come to evict them.<sup>83</sup>

Mainstreaming, until very recently, has been an underlying principle for developing inclusion programmes in Greece. Thus, Roma who are Greek citizens formally have a right either to take part in general programmes – since such programmes usually have a 10 per cent quota for

members of socially vulnerable groups (which in Greece includes the Roma) – or to make use of special programmes. However, inclusion programmes are often geared towards individuals who are more integrated into the mainstream society, are registered and are literate. In addition, official programmes usually place the burden on the beneficiaries to seek out information on the initiatives, and they then have to access them.<sup>84</sup> The programmes do not take into consideration that members of vulnerable groups, such as the Roma, may face barriers to participation. Roma women are often isolated, with minimal contact with the outside world, which further complicates their participation in official programmes.

Recently, the Greek state began to acknowledge the need for specific minority-oriented projects. A programme entitled 'Integrated interventions in favour of unemployed with cultural specificities' (which includes the Roma and Muslims) was launched.<sup>85</sup> It aims to impart basic skills (numeracy, reading and writing), as well as other skills (e.g. groups familiar with agricultural work will be taught further agricultural skills, etc.). Some 1,340 Roma are expected to benefit from the training during 2004–6.<sup>86</sup> The Greek Manpower Employment Organization is considering a special employment programme for those Roma who have participated in that programme.<sup>87</sup> However, there are no criteria for the ethnic identification of Roma, and no efforts to ensure that Roma women benefit equally.

### The Integrated Action Plan for the Social Integration of Greek Roma (IAP)

The IAP (2002–8) has superseded the 1996 policy/programme. It:

*'aims at the elimination of social disparities, the promotion of social justice and the social integration of Greek Roma, through an integrated approach and a coordinated cooperation of co-responsible Ministries and Local Government'.<sup>88</sup>*

However, the programme lacks a rights-based approach, which would target discrimination as a key cause of Roma exclusion and poverty, and completely omits gender issues.

The IAP combines various programmes and initiatives for the benefit of the Roma. It has two main areas: 'Structures' (including housing) and 'Services' (including education, employment and vocational training). Its total budget is c. 308.6 million euros: 57 per cent is allocated towards housing, and 42.85 per cent towards services.<sup>89</sup>

The Interministerial Committee<sup>90</sup> in charge of the IAP's implementation does not exercise day-to-day supervision. This is to be done by the relevant ministries and other public bodies.<sup>91</sup> The IAP does not contain clear information on monitoring and evaluation. Some *ad hoc* monitoring committees, have reportedly been set up. No information is available on their mandate, activities or findings.

The IAP was developed by the Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government. Although associations of assimilated Greek Roma took part in the drafting process, destitute Roma communities and NGOs working on their behalf were largely excluded.<sup>92</sup> Roma women have been entirely absent from the process. After a recent reshuffling of the Interministerial Committee, two Roma men were included; one is the chair of the Panhellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations, Christos Lamprou; the other is Vassilis Paiteris, (informal) advisor to the Deputy Minister for Culture.<sup>93</sup>

*'Roma were faced with a finished product. We never were consulted about the programme's content.'*

Vassileios Zapheiroopoulos, President of a local Roma association in Nafplion.

### Implementation: successes and failures

According to Roma in Greece, halfway through the IAP implementation, the governmental commitments still remain 'a piece of paper'.<sup>94</sup> Even the Greek authorities acknowledge that the IAP's implementation has suffered from a lack of information, transparency and coordination.<sup>95</sup> The large number of authorities involved, coupled with a lack of communication, has led to bureaucracy and inflexibility, and had little or no impact on reducing Roma poverty. Most Roma are only vaguely aware of the programme's existence and are not involved in its implementation.

In some other countries, a lack of funding is often cited as a barrier to the implementation of Roma programmes. It appears that in Greece, the opposite is the case: the problem is in the implementation.

### Housing loans

Housing loans have been envisioned as a complementary measure to housing priorities within the IAP.<sup>96</sup> Up to 9,000 loans, and up to a maximum amount of 60,000 euros, on favourable conditions and guaranteed by the government, will be awarded. The responsible offices have received c. 16,000 applications and already approved c. 5,000 loans.<sup>97</sup>

However, most beneficiaries appear to be ignorant of the procedures and conditions of obtaining and repaying the loans. They fear that if they cannot repay the loan, they will be evicted again. These include particularly disadvantaged Roma groups, such as older people, women etc.<sup>98</sup>

The housing loans initiative does not appear to have been thoroughly thought through. If the state intends to find a sustainable solution to Roma housing problems, a means to guarantee financial independence (through employment) and to repay the



loans is needed. If the state does not expect the Roma to repay the loans (which a government guarantee may suggest),<sup>99</sup> then this should be said openly, with an explanation as to where the money would come from.

Local resistance to the IAP's implementation is also a major obstacle.<sup>100</sup> The local authorities are meant to implement measures, which they often simply fail to do. Or, in certain cases, they seem to be using Roma-oriented funds for non-Roma related projects.

In June 2005, under international pressure to relocate tent-dwelling Roma, the Municipality of Patras representatives visited a number of possible sites without any Roma or their NGOs present. Instead, representatives of local neighbourhood associations accompanied the authorities, insisting that the Roma move away from the neighbourhood.<sup>101</sup>

International monitors have been unequivocal in condemning the attitude of some authorities:

*'refusing to act in the interests of Roma when they are harassed by members of the local population...[and] to grant them the rights that the law guarantees to members of the Roma community to the same extent as to any other Greek citizen.'*<sup>102</sup>

Although central administration appears to recognize the existence of discrimination and racism against the Roma, it seems unable or unwilling to force local authorities to meet their constitutional duties towards the Roma. According to Nikos Bistis, the former Deputy Minister of the Interior:

*'It is not at all easy in a real democracy to force local authorities to do things when they have a local population behind them.'*<sup>103</sup>

## Serbia

Serbia and Montenegro<sup>104</sup> is a party to major international human rights and minority protection treaties.<sup>105</sup> Upon joining the Council of Europe, the government pledged that: 'special attention should be paid to combating discrimination against, and promoting equal treatment of, Roma'.<sup>106</sup>

In February 2005, the government of Serbia and Montenegro was among the eight governments to officially launch the Roma Decade. However, Serbia has been frequently criticized for the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and a failure to protect Roma rights in practice.

## Identity

The size of the Roma population in Serbia is not known; official census figures for 2002 for Serbia (excluding Kosovo) cite 108,193. Unofficial estimates put it at as high as 700,000.<sup>107</sup> The chronic levels of unregistered people impact on the data. A 2005 Amnesty International report states that: 'large numbers of Roma have never registered marriages or births, and effectively have lived almost completely outside of the state system'.<sup>108</sup> In addition, many are reportedly reluctant to identify themselves as Roma, through fear of the possible negative consequences. Racially-motivated attacks on Roma by individuals, as well inhumane treatment by the police, are not uncommon.<sup>109</sup> As a result, many Roma are featured in official statistics as 'Albanians' or 'Hungarians', etc., rather than Roma.

## Roma poverty: background

Some Roma still remember 'the Tito times' with nostalgia: Roma children were obliged to go to school like all other children, adults had jobs, and living conditions were better. While this has some truth, the system did little to ensure Roma development or their participation in society. Few Roma obtained more than primary-level education, and held only low-skilled and low-paid jobs. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and raging ethnic conflicts, the Roma were the first to lose jobs and suffer from racism. Many thousands of Roma were displaced or had to seek refuge abroad, and those Roma who stayed now face extreme poverty and exclusion.

## Roma refugees

Roma who are refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and deportees from Western Europe are the most vulnerable. Without identity papers, they are unable to work, or access social security or healthcare. The largest number of Roma refugees, (estimated at up to 50,000), are concentrated in Belgrade, where many were recently forcibly returned from EU countries, without the necessary infrastructure being in place to receive them. Many live under bridges and are forced to beg for their survival.<sup>110</sup>

In 2002, c. 800,000 or 10.9 per cent of the total population of Serbia lived on less than US \$2.4 (less than 2 euros) a day, below the official threshold of the national poverty line.<sup>111</sup> Although there is no specific data on the Roma, the government recently estimated that the incidence of Roma poverty was five times higher than that

of the rest of the population.<sup>112</sup> Further, those who have not completed primary education are thought to be twice as likely as the average to live in poverty. An estimated 62 per cent of Roma have not completed primary education.<sup>113</sup>

Roma women have particular obstacles to employment, facing both ethnic and gender-based discrimination. Women in Serbia are generally considered a disadvantaged group on the labour market.<sup>114</sup> Yet the share of Roma women who are unemployed is greater than that of either minority men or majority women. Roma women often have fewer marketable skills and are subject to exploitation. Some employers reportedly prefer hiring Roma women because they are rarely aware of their rights and usually accept worse conditions.<sup>115</sup>

### Unemployment rates in Serbia

Age/ group	Roma men	Roma women	Majority men	Majority women
15–24	56%	82%	31%	45%
25–54	21%	63%	8%	18%
Over 55	51%	72%	17%	6%

Source: *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope*, UNDP report<sup>116</sup>

### Unemployment

As the national economy is on the verge of collapse, informal work in the 'grey' economy has been a primary means of survival for people from all social and ethnic groups, including the Roma.<sup>117</sup> For a handful of Roma, the informal sector presents possibilities for an improved economic status. While informal employment may make ends meet in the short-term, it does not provide any social security, such as pensions or health insurance. Therefore, most Roma would prefer to be employed in a state-run or a large private company.<sup>118</sup>

In the Bajr settlement in Valjevo, western Serbia, the vast majority of the 300 Roma residents are unemployed. Very few have completed more than primary education. Most work as street musicians, at the market or in other 'grey' areas. However, in Valjevo, there is not enough work, and money is an acute problem for many Roma families. The electricity has been cut off in most Roma homes due to debts.<sup>119</sup>

### Community development experience

Although Roma are recognized as a national minority; their presence in decision-making structures is negligible. In addition, minority status is extended only to those Roma who hold Serbian citizenship. The Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM) Advisory Committee has criticized this policy.<sup>120</sup>

### Roma National Council

Following the adoption of the Law on National Minorities, the Roma National Council was established in May 2003. The Council is the main governmental interlocutor in Roma matters. It only has an advisory capacity.

Roma across Serbia were able to participate in electing the 418 electors who would then choose a 35-member Council (to become an elector, a candidate needed to collect 100 Roma signatures).

The election process was organized by the state. Unfortunately, there were problems. For example, there was allegedly little transparency as to the purpose of the signature-collection among the Roma, little information on the candidates and their qualifications, and some Roma communities did not take part in the signature-collection at all. As a result, the Council is viewed as Belgrade-dominated. Roma from communities that have not obtained representation on the Council feel excluded. They hope that for the next round some eligibility criteria will be introduced, to ensure that the Council consists of Roma from diverse backgrounds, and that more educated, younger Roma serve on the Council. Only two Roma women currently serve on the Council.<sup>121</sup>

Owing to their limited presence in the administration, the Roma have yet to be taken seriously as partners, by domestic and international development planners alike. Since 2000, numerous international development projects have tried to tackle Roma poverty and unemployment through vocational training. However, the lack of thorough needs assessments, with meaningful Roma participation, and poor planning, have led to their failure. Many have lasted only as long as the funding continues and the results are not sustainable.

For example, tailoring and hairdressing courses for Roma women have been quite popular. Yet no research has been done on the labour market needs for these professions. Therefore, only one in 100 trained hairdressers is believed to have found a real job.<sup>122</sup> Public works projects for Roma men are also favoured. The UNDP and the National Employment Agency are implementing a public works project 'Beautiful Serbia' in Nis. The implementers projected a quota of 30 per cent of Roma to be employed as construction workers. The quota has not been met. The organisers did not consider the needs and realities of Roma, who had stable, if informal, work in the 'grey' economy.<sup>123</sup>

### The Roma strategy

The Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of the Roma was drawn up in December 2003. However, as of mid-2005 it has not yet been officially endorsed.

The draft Roma strategy mentions the rights-based approach as a fundamental principle<sup>124</sup> underlying the strategy, although no specific references have been made in the text to principles of non-discrimination, equality, and integration without assimilation. References to gender are also superficial. While the draft strategy stresses that continued economic deprivation would perpetuate prejudice towards the Roma and their exclusion, and outlines several employment-related measures, there are practically no references to social inclusion and/or anti-poverty measures. The draft strategy recommends that local authorities, in cooperation with the Roma, should develop local action plans.<sup>125</sup> However, no adequate funds have been committed to ensure the implementation at the national or local level.

Thirteen priority areas requiring immediate action were identified, including: access to public services, economic empowerment and employment, education, housing, and the situation of internally displaced peoples (IDPs). With assistance from international experts, national action plans have been drawn up for six of the 13 areas: four coinciding with the Roma Decade's priorities (education, employment, health and housing), as well as on gender and IDPs.

The draft strategy asserts that the Roma's participation 'should not be limited to mere consultation but should be conceived as a partnership on an equal footing'.<sup>126</sup> Regional meetings were held in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Nis and Novi Sad with Roma participants to discuss the draft, although Roma women's organizations were underrepresented. Roma representatives are generally pleased with the level of consultation, and the strategy states that Roma recommendations 'were integrated in the draft'.<sup>127</sup>

The Secretariat for the Implementation of the Roma National Strategy will be the main coordinating body. Currently, one Roma is employed at the Secretariat, and 10 more Roma are expected to be employed as advisors. Further, with OSCE/ODIHR support, six Roma interns were placed at the Registrar Offices in Nis and Vranje to support the registration of IDP Roma (funded until the end of 2005). There were also plans to hire 120 Roma to assist in the local self-government bodies. However, only 12 Roma were hired, and the funding only secured until June 2005.

#### Local Roma advisors

The local Roma advisor at the Valjevo town hall is one of the 12 Roma contacts recently employed across Serbia to coordinate the Roma strategy's implementation. He has his own office space and telephone line, and enjoys good access to the Vice Mayor. However, his mandate has not been clarified, which has led to a number of misunderstandings with colleagues. For example, where Roma would previously have addressed their concerns, as with all

Valjevo residents, to the public administration, now, Roma visitors are allegedly cordoned off to 'their Roma officer', even though he has neither the authority nor the resources to attend to their petitions. This might signal a disturbing trend of a practical segregation of Roma access to public services. This also pitches the Roma advisor against the community, who only know that they have a representative who does nothing for them. The mandates of the Roma advisors need to be clarified and contact points at public bodies explained.

#### Implementation: successes and failures

As the strategy has not yet been officially endorsed, its practical implementation has not yet begun. However, some local initiatives are underway.

For example, in Valjevo, the Roma Forum consisting of NGOs, Roma media and Roma political parties, on their initiative, has developed local strategies on: education, employment and social security. Roma working groups, besides designing 10-year strategies, are developing annual local action plans. Roma NGOs plan to conduct monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's implementation through annual data collection, and to use the findings to revise the local strategy and action plans. They plan to give their recommendations to the local authorities. Roma representatives state that there is generally a good level of support from the local authorities and the majority (Serb) population in Valjevo. Lack of funding, however, is the main problem regarding the strategy's future implementation. The authorities seem to expect most of the funding to come either from the Belgrade national budget or from donors, and so far have not followed up on Roma representatives' request to include Roma needs in the local budget.<sup>128</sup>

*'The strategy is great, the action plans are great, the goals are there, indicators are there, practically all components are there, just one "small" thing is missing: who is going to implement it, and with what money?'*

Dragan Gracanin, Roma advisor at the Valjevo town hall.

While the lack of funding is a major obstacle, a lack of political will and insufficient Roma participation in the administration are also formidable obstacles. As some Roma representatives have put it: 'When there is no genuine will, even funding would not solve the problem'.<sup>129</sup>

## Conclusions

As the experiences of the three SEE countries suggest, the Roma strategies are not sufficient to eliminate Roma poverty and exclusion. Full Roma participation – of women and men – is key to ensuring such policies reflect Roma needs, and are effective.

Roma poverty is rooted in historical and continuous discrimination, and in their exclusion. Accordingly, programmes addressed at reducing Roma poverty need to include anti-discrimination measures to attack the underlying causes of poverty. Further, the failure to act in any one field (for example, discrimination or housing) impairs the likelihood of any successful action in all other fields (for example, access to education or work). Therefore, sectoral policies and action plans, as well as local strategies and action plans, on the basis of general priorities outlined in the national strategy, should be developed.

Coordinated sectoral policies would ensure a comprehensive approach to removing the multiple barriers that Roma experience. Any such action for Roma is best achieved on the local level, involving diverse stakeholders.

Mainstreaming should complement Roma policies, ensuring that Roma issues are incorporated within the framework of national policies, with adequate administrative, financial and human resources. Targeted Roma policies and programmes should focus on specific concerns; making sure that Roma women and men do not 'disappear' in bureaucratic planning. This calls for the authorities' accountability to, and direct involvement of, multiple Roma stakeholders in: assessing the needs, setting the objectives, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.

Targeted programmes must be based on reliable data, disaggregated by gender, age and other relevant factors. Data collection is essential to assess the needs, to formulate objectives, and to assess a programme's implementation and impact.

It must be stressed that minority women have problems and needs which are distinct from either majority women or minority men. It is important that project planners talk to women and men when developing anti-poverty programmes, in order to target the specific problems of different groups.

The Roma Decade could be the most important initiative to overcome Roma poverty and inclusion. It should build on past experiences and lessons. The principal lesson to be learnt is that the impact of the Roma programmes on reducing Roma poverty depends largely on the extent and quality of Roma involvement in such programmes.

## Notes

- 1 International Helsinki Federation, 'The situation of Roma in selected European countries', presented at the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance, Cordoba, Spain, June 2005.
- 2 See Zoon, I. and Kiers, J., *Draft report on the Council of Europe project: 'Roma Employment in SEE'*, CoE, 2005 (forthcoming), p. 7.

- 3 This study was conducted in cooperation with non-governmental organizations in Albania (Romani Union Amaro Drom), Greece (Greek Helsinki Monitor) and Serbia (Roma Centre for Democracy). During May and June 2005, consultations were held with Roma community members, other minorities, national and local authorities etc. from these countries who have been involved in the development and implementation of Roma programmes/strategies.
- 4 The OHCHR website, [www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches.html](http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches.html), describes a rights based approach as: 'a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights'.
- 5 Particularly minority protection, see the section on Enlargement on the EU's website, available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.htm).
- 6 The European Commission monitored progress towards fulfilling the accession criteria in the 10 former candidate countries and in the current candidates (Bulgaria and Romania). See Regular Reports available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report\\_11\\_00/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_11_00/).
- 7 The World Bank cites 7–9 million. See <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTROMA/0,,contentMDK:20325461~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:615987,00.html>. See also, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, European Commission/DG Employment & Social Affairs, 2004.
- 8 In particular, Directive 2000/43/EC 'implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin'; Directive 2000/78/EC 'establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation'; and Directive 2000/73/EC 'on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions'.
- 9 Other countries that have failed to do this are: Austria, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg and Portugal. The European Commission lodged a complaint with the Luxembourg Court in October 2004.
- 10 For example, Slovakia has joined, despite documented evidence of serious violations of the Roma's human rights, such as the coercive sterilization of Roma women. See, Zoon, I., *Body and Soul: Forced Sterilization and Other Assaults on Roma Reproductive Freedom*, Center for Reproductive Rights, Poradna Prava, 2003.
- 11 The CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization) programme was specifically set up to support reforms in the western Balkans, see, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/cards/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/cards/index_en.htm).
- 12 EU's PHARE is the world's largest assistance programme providing financial support for countries' reform processes. Since 1991, the EU has provided 6.8 billion euros in assistance for reforming administrative and political structures and institutions see, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/index_en.htm).
- 13 See, *From Pre-Accession to Accession, Thematic Evaluation: Review of the European Union's Phare Assistance to Roma Minorities*, European Commission DG Enlargement, December 2004.
- 14 Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia. None of the 'old' EU member states is participating, even though many have significant Roma populations.
- 15 EU Accession Monitoring Programme, *Monitoring EU Accession Process, Minority Protection: An Assessment of Selected Policies in Candidate States, Vol. I*, available at: <http://www.eumap.org/reports>.
- 16 *Ethnic Monitoring and Data Protection – the European Context*, Budapest, CEU Press–INDOC, 2001.
- 17 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable with Roma NGOs, Tirana, Albania, 2 June 2005.
- 18 CRI, *Second report on Greece*, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Council of Europe, 27 June 2000, p. 21, para. 70.
- 19 Interview with local government representatives, Serbia, May 2005.
- 20 Albania has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ICEDAW), European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), revised European Social Charter (ESC[r]), Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), and Protocol 12 to the ECHR. Albania has not signed or ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML).
- 21 The term 'Egyptians' is based on a historic account that on the way from India to Europe, some groups of Roma stayed in Egypt.

- Egyptians in Albania are not related to people in modern Egypt, and assert their identity to avoid being treated with the prejudices shown towards the Roma.
- 22 *Project Strategy for Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma Minority*, Tirana, April 2003, p. 21 (hereafter, Roma strategy).
  - 23 Information from Amaro Drom.
  - 24 CRI, *Third report on Albania*, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Council of Europe, adopted on 17 December 2004 and made public on 14 June 2005, paras 21–5, available at: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country\\_approach/Albania/Albania\\_CBC\\_3.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Albania/Albania_CBC_3.asp).
  - 25 *Albania Poverty Assessment*, World Bank, 5 November 2003, available at: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servert/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/12/16/000012009\\_20031216103618/Rendered/PDF/262130AL.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servert/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/12/16/000012009_20031216103618/Rendered/PDF/262130AL.pdf).
  - 26 According to the National Institute of Statistics, see, <http://www.instat.gov.al/> (in Albanian).
  - 27 Roma strategy, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
  - 28 Roma community consultations in Kucove, Albania, 4 June 2005.
  - 29 Roma community consultations in Saver, Albania, 4 June 2005.
  - 30 De Soto, H., and Gedeshi, I., 'Dimensions of Romani poverty in Albania', in ERRC, *Snapshots Around Europe*, available at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=774&archiv=1>.
  - 31 Joint Staff Assessment of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 28 May 2002, p. 2, available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/jsa/2002/alb/eng/052802.pdf>.
  - 32 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable with Roma NGOs, Tirana, *op. cit.*
  - 33 CRI, *Third report on Albania*, *op. cit.*, para. 111.
  - 34 Roma community consultations in Athens and Patras, Greece, 9–11 June 2005.
  - 35 *Ibid.*
  - 36 ECRI in this regard stressed that: 'minority groups do not have singular interests and that consultation needs to involve different voices within minority groups. CRI, *Third report on Albania*, *op. cit.*, para. 105.
  - 37 Joint Staff Assessment, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
  - 38 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable with Roma NGOs, *op. cit.*
  - 39 See Spolu International Foundation website at: [http://www.spolu.nl/m5a\\_albania.html](http://www.spolu.nl/m5a_albania.html).
  - 40 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable, *op. cit.*
  - 41 Council of Ministers Decision No. 633, *Official Bulletin*, 18 September 2003.
  - 42 The report was sponsored by the United States Embassy, Soros Foundation, Swiss Development Corporation, UNDP, and the World Bank. Statement of World Bank Country Office Manager, Mr Nadir Mohammed, at the Conference on Roma and Egyptians.
  - 43 See, *Meeting Report on Implementation of the National Programme for Roma*, September 2003, available at: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/social\\_cohesion/Roma\\_Travellers/Stability\\_Pact/II\\_Activities/01\\_Albania/01\\_Ina%20Albania%20Meeting%20report.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/social_cohesion/Roma_Travellers/Stability_Pact/II_Activities/01_Albania/01_Ina%20Albania%20Meeting%20report.asp).
  - 44 Roma strategy, *op. cit.*, p.7.
  - 45 *Ibid.*, ch. II ('Family'), p. 1.
  - 46 *Ibid.*, Annex.
  - 47 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
  - 48 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable, *op. cit.*
  - 49 Roma strategy, *op. cit.*, Annex.
  - 50 *Ibid.*, Annex. See also *Meeting Report on Implementation of the National Programme for Roma*, *op. cit.*
  - 51 Experts are expected to have experience in business and employment, the economy, education and culture; the family, social issues, and urban infrastructure management.
  - 52 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable with representatives of governmental and international organizations, Tirana, Albania, 3 June 2005.
  - 53 *Ibid.*
  - 54 Council of Ministers Decision No. 633, *op. cit.*
  - 55 MRG–Amaro Drom discussion roundtable, *op. cit.*
  - 56 *Ibid.*
  - 57 *Ibid.*
  - 58 *Ibid.*
  - 59 Greece has signed and ratified the ICCPR, ICSECR, ICERD, ICEDAW, and ECHR. It has signed but not ratified the FCNM, ESC(r) and Protocol 12 to the ECHR. It has not signed or ratified the ECRML.
  - 60 See for example CRI, *Second report on Greece*, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Council of Europe, 27 June 2000, p. 8, para. 6.
  - 61 Except for a small group of Muslim Roma who were covered by the provisions of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and obtained citizenship in the 1920s. The rest were regarded as 'aliens of Gypsy descent', and were issued with special identity papers to be renewed every two years. See Roughieri, C., 'Expel first: housing policy for Roma in Greece', *Roma Rights*, ERRC, no. 2, 2000.
  - 62 According to a survey conducted by the Rom Network, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 5.5 per cent of Roma who participated in the survey were not registered; 10 per cent had no identity documents, 25 per cent of Roma of voting age did not have voter booklets (entitling citizens to vote), and c. 50 per cent were not on the municipal registers. See National Commission for Human Rights, *The State of Roma in Greece*, 2004, available at: <http://www.nchr.gr>.
  - 63 Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, Response of Greece to the MG-S-ROM questionnaire on the rights of Roma in Council of Europe member states, Doc. Ref. No. 30823, 31243, 8 August 2003, p. 1 (unofficial translation).
  - 64 Statement by the Greek Delegation, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 17–27 September 2001, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/hdim2001/statements.php3?topic=4a&author=23>
  - 65 See Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government (EETAA), *Integrated Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Greek Roma 2002–2008*, Athens, 2001, p. 5 (hereafter, IAP).
  - 66 In Serres, Roma residents reportedly signed a petition against all designations, whether *yiftoi* ('gyps'), *tsiganoï* ('Gypsies') or Roma, insisting they were Greeks. See, Rinne, C., 'The situation of the Roma in Greece', in *KURI Journal of the Dom Research Centre*, vol. 1, no. 6, spring/summer 2002, available at: <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/16/greece6.html>.
  - 67 See Roughieri, C., 'Assimilationist vs. multiculturalist approaches to Greece's Roma', *AIM*, Athens, 29 February 2000.
  - 68 National Commission for Human Rights, *The State of Roma in Greece*, *op. cit.*
  - 69 *Ibid.*
  - 70 Reply by the Government of Greece to the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/GRE/1) in connection with the consideration of the initial report of Greece concerning the rights referred to in Articles 1-15 of the ICESCR (E/1990/5/Add.56), p. 79.
  - 71 National Commission for Human Rights, *op. cit.*
  - 72 *Ibid.*
  - 73 A 2001 UNICEF study states that 54.8 per cent of Roma parents interviewed said that their children worked. See press release 45/2001 (in Greek), 5 December 2001, available at: <http://www.unicef.gr/oldpress/2001/45-2001.htm>.
  - 74 The CESCR expressed concern about 'the persistent discrimination against Roma people in the fields of housing, health and education...instances of police violence against Roma, sweeping arrests, and arbitrary raids of Roma settlements by the police...extrajudicial demolition of dwellings and forced evictions of Roma from their settlements by municipal authorities...frequently without payment of adequate compensation or provision of alternative housing...'. United Nations press release, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Concludes Thirty-Second Session, 14 May 2004 (see, Final Conclusions on the Initial Report of Greece, available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/0/5AD76B34AEC7943C1256E94006FE6CA?opendocument>).
  - 75 See Public Enterprise for Town Planning and Housing (DEPOS), *Draft study of a programme on confronting the immediate housing problems of the Greek Gypsies*, Athens, July 1999, pp. 7–9 and Annex I, tables I.5–I.9.
  - 76 See Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), joint press release, 'House demolitions of Roma in Greece continue – Government fails to act to stop forced evictions', 9 November 2004.
  - 77 See the Committee's decision at: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human\\_Rights/ESC/4\\_Collective\\_complaints/List\\_of\\_collective\\_complaints/1RC15\\_merits.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/ESC/4_Collective_complaints/List_of_collective_complaints/1RC15_merits.pdf). Also, see the Committee of Ministers Resolution adopted on 8 June 2005, at: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=867037&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>.
  - 78 Information from GHM.
  - 79 See, Roughieri, 'Expel first: housing policy for Roma in Greece', *op. cit.*
  - 80 See statement available at: <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/greece-to-osce-on-roma-21-9-99.html>.
  - 81 'Deputy Minister Nakos Calls for a New Beginning in Solving the Gypsies' Problems', Macedonian Press Agency, 25 June 2004, available at: [http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc\\_id=464049](http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=464049) (translated by GHM).
  - 82 National Commission for Human Rights, *op. cit.*

- 83 Roma Community consultations in Athens, Patras and Nafplion, Greece, 9–12 June 2005.
- 84 According to a recent survey, none out of 356 Roma interviewed received unemployment benefits, which the Manpower Organization was responsible for providing; only three out of 594 reportedly participated in vocational training programmes; and a very low percentage of Roma were employed following the training. See the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 'Employment' Community initiative, 'Integra' Axis / Pan-Hellenic Intermunicipal Network for the support of Greek Roma Network Rom, Operational Programme 'MULTIROMA Action Hellas', *Panhellenic Research Study of the Social and Housing Conditions and Needs of the Greek Gypsy Citizens*, December 2000, pp. 68 and 58 (hereinafter Rom Network Survey).
- 85 The budget totals 13.5 million euros, 75 per cent to come from the European Social Fund, and the rest from the national budget. See Minister of Labour and Social Security Decision No. 179372/09-06-2003 and related documentation, available in Greek at: [http://www.ypergka.gr/ekt/ey/efarmogh/files/gps/prokhyrh\\_gps.zip](http://www.ypergka.gr/ekt/ey/efarmogh/files/gps/prokhyrh_gps.zip)
- 86 The director of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life's estimate is 1,789. Letter from the Director of the Prime Minister's Office for Quality of Life, 19 February 2004, p. 2, on file with GHM.
- 87 See Ministry of Labour and Social Security Doc. Ref. No. 6996, 5 December 2003, p. 3, on file with GHM.
- 88 See IAP, p. 16.
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- 90 See 'On setting up a Committee for the political planning of confronting the issues of the Greek Gypsies', *Official Journal* 24B, 18 January 2000.
- 91 For example, employment programmes will be administered by the Ministry of Labour, and the Manpower Employment Organization and/or regional authorities.
- 92 Dimitras, P., 'Greek Roma leaders lash out at International Romani Union: No to the demand for recognition as nation without a state,' *AIM*, Athens, 6 August 2000.
- 93 See Minister of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, Decision No. 347239, *Official Gazette*, 991, vol. B, 1 July 2004.
- 94 Roma community consultations in Nafplion, 11 June 2005.
- 95 'Deputy Minister Nakos Calls for a New Beginning in Solving the Gypsies' Problems', *op. cit.*
- 96 Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Economy and Finance, and of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation No.13576/2003, *Official Gazette*, vol. B, 396/2003. See also Ministerial Decisions No. 28807/2004, *Official Gazette*, vol. B 812/2004, and No. 7237/2005, *Official Gazette*, vol. B. 236/2005.
- 97 Information from Ministry of Interior, Athens, 9 June 2005.
- 98 Roma Community consultations in Athens, Patras and Nafplion, Greece, 9–12 June 2005, *op. cit.*
- 99 Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Economy and Finance, and of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation No.13576/2003, *Official Gazette*, vol. B, 396/2003. See also Ministerial Decisions No. 28807/2004, *Official Gazette*, vol. B 812/2004, and No. 7237/2005, *Official Gazette*, vol. B. 236/2005.
- 100 CRI, *Second report on Greece*, *op. cit.*, p. 20, para. 67.
- 101 Information from GHM, June 2005.
- 102 CRI, *Second report on Greece*, *op. cit.*, p. 21, para. 70.
- 103 Statement on BBC World TV, 29 January 2004, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/video/39795000/rm/\\_39795749\\_roma\\_03\\_brabant29\\_vi.ram](http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/video/39795000/rm/_39795749_roma_03_brabant29_vi.ram).
- 104 This analysis focuses on Serbia only; most international instruments were ratified by the Federal Government and apply to both Serbia and Montenegro.
- 105 Serbia and Montenegro is a party to the ICCPR, ICSECR, ICERD, ICEDAW, ECHR, FCNM, Protocol 12 to ECHR. It has signed but has not ratified the ECRML and ESC(r).
- 106 See Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Opinion no. 239 (2002), the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's application for membership of the Council of Europe, adopted 24 September 2002.
- 107 It is generally acknowledged that the Roma population is much higher than official estimates. The figures range from 300,000 to 450,000 (including Montenegro, Kosovo and refugees). See, Zoon and Kiers, *Draft report on the Council of Europe project 'Roma Employment in SEE'*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- 108 Amnesty International, *Serbia and Montenegro: A wasted year. The continuing failure to fulfill key human rights commitments made to the Council of Europe*, 22 March, 2005, available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR700052005?open&of=ENG-YUG>.
- 109 See, for example, Humanitarian Law Centre, *Roma in Serbia*, Belgrade, Press Now, 2003.
- 110 Roma community consultations in Serbia, 28–30 May 2005.
- 111 See *Poverty and Reform of Financial Support to Poor People*, Ministry for Social Affairs, Centre for Democratic Studies, Belgrade 2003. The sample consisted of 19,725 people.
- 112 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties in Accordance with Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, *Initial Report of Serbia and Montenegro*, 3 May 2005, available at: [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.C.12.2005.SR.13.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/E.C.12.2005.SR.13.En?Opendocument).
- 113 Sindik, N., Vladislavljev, N., and Kiers, J., *Report on Council of Europe Project: 'Roma access to Employment in Serbia and Montenegro (Serbia)'*, 2004, available at: [http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/RomaTravellers/stabilitypact/activities/SaM/romaaccesssemployment\\_sam\\_en.asp/](http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/RomaTravellers/stabilitypact/activities/SaM/romaaccesssemployment_sam_en.asp/).
- 114 Women earn 15 per cent less than men in the same job; the number of women is decreasing in the higher echelons; 14.8 per cent of women with a university degree are unemployed, while for men it is 8.3 per cent. See, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Serbia*, pp. 37–41, 87, (hereafter PRSP).
- 115 Roma community consultations in Serbia, *op. cit.*
- 116 UNDP, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope: Vulnerability Profiles for Decade of Roma Inclusion Countries*, January 2005, p. 62.
- 117 Around 1 million people are estimated to be employed in the 'grey' economy. Article in Serbian daily *Novosti*, 27 May 2003.
- 118 Jaksic, B., and Basic, G., *Romany Settlements, Living Conditions and Possibilities of Integration of Roma in Serbia*, Ethnicity Research Centre, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, OXFAM, 2002, pp. 51–2.
- 119 Roma community consultations in Valjevo, Serbia, 30 May 2005.
- 120 Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for National Minorities, *Opinion on Serbia and Montenegro*, adopted 27 November 2003, made public 2 March 2004, para. 23, available at: [http://www.coe.int/T/e/human\\_rights/Minorities/2\\_FRAMEWORK\\_CONVENTION\\_\(MONITORING\)/2\\_Monitoring\\_mechanism/4\\_Opinions\\_of\\_the\\_Advisory\\_Committee/1\\_Country\\_specific\\_opinions/1\\_First\\_cycle/1st\\_OP\\_SAM.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/e/human_rights/Minorities/2_FRAMEWORK_CONVENTION_(MONITORING)/2_Monitoring_mechanism/4_Opinions_of_the_Advisory_Committee/1_Country_specific_opinions/1_First_cycle/1st_OP_SAM.asp).
- 121 MRG–RCD NGO roundtable meeting in Valjevo, Serbia, 28 May 2005.
- 122 Sindik, Vladislavljev and Kiers, *Report on Council of Europe Project*, *op. cit.*
- 123 Zoon, and Kiers, *Draft report on the Council of Europe project*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- 124 The 'rationale of the draft Strategy no longer derives merely from the fact that the Roma have needs but also from the fact that they have rights-entitlements that give rise to legal obligations on the part of the others. Action in favour of the Roma then becomes more than charity, more than moral obligation, it becomes a legal obligation', Roma strategy, p. 21.
- 125 Roma strategy, *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 126 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 127 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 128 *Ibid.*
- 129 MRG–RCD NGO roundtable meeting in Valjevo, *op. cit.*

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## Recommendations

### To national governments

- The authorities should fully involve a wide spectrum of Roma communities and NGOs working on Roma (including Roma women's) rights and development in national and local policy-making, and be accountable to the Roma.
- The authorities should collect data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, and age, and develop indicators on the Roma strategies' implementation. Data collection should be conducted with the full and informed consent and participation of diverse Roma communities, in a transparent manner, and with due regard to international standards on protecting sensitive personal data.
- Targeted Roma programmes should be developed and integrated within all relevant sectoral policies, to ensure adequate resources and a comprehensive approach to removing the multiple barriers that Roma women and men experience.
- Local strategies and/or action plans should be developed on the basis of Roma strategies' priorities, using Roma experience and expertise. Local authorities should include the Roma under each category of the local budget planning, to guarantee funding for implementation. All programmes and plans should be gender sensitive.
- Offices at all levels that are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Roma strategies should hire Roma staff, women and men in equal numbers, to coordinate the implementation, inter-agency communication and cooperation, and maintain contact with grassroots Roma communities.
- The governments should adopt a proactive and coordinated information policy on the Roma strategies,

with a view to: informing beneficiaries, making particular efforts to reach Roma women; providing clear instructions on implementation to the responsible officials on all levels; and informing the general public.

- The governments that have not yet done so should urgently adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and ratify relevant minority protection instruments, recognizing the Roma as national minorities.
- Roma economic and social rights should be ensured in practice, including: access to education, jobs, services, and other aspects of development.
- When relevant anti-discrimination and minority protection is in place, their implementation should be ensured: requiring ministries and municipalities to produce a policy on the implementation; informing the Roma and the general public of the available recourses, and providing assistance to Roma to bring test cases in courts.

### To international organizations and donors

- The EU should streamline Roma initiatives within its own social inclusion programmes (Greece), and the enlargement process. It should insist on the strict adherence to anti-discrimination and minority protection norms, not only in candidate countries, but also in its current members.
- International organizations (the Council of Europe, EU, OSCE and World Bank) should support community-empowerment and capacity-development programmes for Roma women and men, to prepare Roma to be employed in public administration.

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