

## National Roma Centrum

Address: „Done Bozinov“ 11/5, 1 300 Kumanovo, Macedonia  
Tel/fax: + 389 31 427 558  
WEB: <http://www.nationalromacentrum.org>  
email: [info@nationalromacentrum.org](mailto:info@nationalromacentrum.org)

---

---



To:

Council of Europe

Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Thomas Hammarberg

The Constitution of Macedonia, and the amendments which were adopted as a result of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (hereafter "Framework Agreement") in 2001, provide general protection against discrimination and guarantees that citizens have the right freely to determine their political status and freely to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. Roma are recognized as an ethnic minority under the Macedonian Constitution. The Constitution guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic identity of all communities. At the time of the 2002 census in Macedonia, 53,879 persons stated that they were Romani. Roma comprise approximately 2.66% of the total population of Macedonia.

Roma in Macedonia live on the margins of the society, often in extreme poverty, and face significant barriers in accessing key economic and social rights, such as employment, social welfare, housing, health care and education. In its response to the questionnaire for the preparation of the European Commission's Opinion on Macedonia's application for membership of the European Union, the Macedonian government stated, "The current social and economic situation of Roma, who are especially burdened by transition problems, places them in the category of the poorest citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. According to the data of the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, the total number of unemployed Roma on 31 August 2004 was 17,014 (4.3% of the total number of the unemployed), of which 7114 were women."<sup>1</sup>.

According to the statistical database of the Macedonian Agency for Employment in 2004, for every one employed Romani individual, nearly three are unemployed<sup>2</sup>. According to data from the State Statistical Office, the unemployment rate of Roma was 83.4% in 2003, 72.4% in 2002 and 71.6% in 2001. Comparatively, the national average of unemployed persons in the same years was 36.6%, 31.9% and 30.5%, respectively – less than half the rate for Roma<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Answers to the Questionnaire for the Preparation of the European Commission's Opinion on the Application of the Republic of Macedonia for Membership of the European Union, Political criteria - Minorities rights and protection of minorities, p. 416. Available online at: <http://www.sei.gov.mk/download/Questionnaire/1-01%20-%20Political%20Criteria.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> 3,558 employed Romani individuals compared to 9,776 unemployed Romani individuals.

<sup>3</sup> Answers to the Questionnaire for the Preparation of the European Commission's Opinion on the Application of the Republic of Macedonia for Membership of the European Union, Political criteria - Minorities rights and protection of minorities,

Ninety-five percent of Roma in Macedonia live in urban areas. Most are concentrated in the poorer areas (including ghetto-like slum settlements) or in suburb areas. The living conditions in such areas are often highly substandard, lacking basic infrastructure and services that the state should provide, such as electricity, water, sewage removal, garbage collection or paved roads.

Many Romani settlements have existed for many years outside urban planning schemes; therefore property status has remained unregulated. In its own Strategy for Roma, the Macedonian government gives credence to information from human rights organisations which indicates that amongst the Roma population there are approximately 14,000 unsolved property status cases. The Strategy further states that, according to some estimates, 70% of Roma do not possess legal title to the place in which they live.

Violations of the right of Roma to education take the form of discriminatory and segregationist practices, such as the segregation of Romani children into so-called "Roma classes", in classes for the mentally disabled or even within classrooms; racially-motivated abuse in school; and the apathy of Macedonian school authorities in combating low attendance and high drop-out rates among Romani school-age children. The low level of educational attainment greatly impacts all other areas of life. As a result of the low levels of education held by a great number of Roma in Macedonia, many Roma who do succeed in accessing employment are engaged in only the least paid and unskilled forms of employment, usually in the form of hard physical labour.

An urgent help is necessary towards all ethnic communities especially for the Roma population because education is still the weakest issue that Roma are facing with. Social educational programmes are necessary in order to realize long term free primary education (providing books and tools as well as social aid packages to surpass the current difficult social status of the Roma families with children grown up for education.

In recent years, the Macedonian government has taken some positive steps towards addressing the overall situation of this extremely marginalized community. On 31 January 2005, the Macedonian government adopted the National Strategy for Roma in Macedonia, which constitutes the government's plan for fostering integration of, and improving the overall situation of, the Romani community in Macedonia. In February 2005, the Macedonian government also joined the multi-country initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, within which additional action plans for improving the access of Roma to adequate education, housing, health care and employment were adopted in November 2005. But, lack of real political will to implement those measures which do exist and to improve the situation of Roma is present in reality.

Since the introduction of political pluralism and first multiparty elections in Macedonia, Roma have had political representatives in the Parliament. Despite the political presentation of Roma at the national and local levels (representation which is, however, not numerically contiguous with the total population of Roma in Macedonia), Romani participation in decision-making processes is not effective, and most Roma regard themselves as partially or totally excluded from decision-making.

The process of adoption and beginning of the implementation of equal representation of the minorities in the public administration and in the public companies is in positive direction predicted in legislation but so far in practice it is

developing with slow paces. It is not enough to state in public with conclusion that the process is successfully completed. Practical activity and time are necessary for larger contribution in further realization of the tasks of this implementation.

#### Recommendations

1. Without delay, adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination law securing protection against discrimination – in particular racial discrimination – in all areas relevant for realizing rights
2. Proactively recruit qualified Roma for professional positions in the national and local administration, labour offices, social security offices, health care centres, and schools
3. Without delay, adopt and financially support measures to achieve effective equality for Roma in access to education. Such programmes should address all levels of education, but particular attention should be placed on the pre- and elementary and secondary school levels
4. Without delay, end the practice of segregating Romani children into so-called “Roma classes”. Integrate all Romani students into mainstream classes and, where necessary, design and implement adequately funded and staffed programmes aimed at easing the transition from segregated to integrated schooling
5. Common and persistent affecting relations between different ethnic groups and entities in Macedonia, combat against violations of their rights and the role of the civil society and state authorities is of great importance in order to build and to strengthen the relations among them and to develop effective and systematic methods to record current violations and to strive to minimalism them in future

Asmet Elezovski

President of National Roma Centrum

Spokeperson of Roma National Congress

Delegate European Roma and Travellers Forum

Sebihana Skenderovska

Vice-president of National Roma Centrum

Member of EAST MEET WESST

Board member of European Roma and Travellers Forum