



PROGRAMME PROMOTING THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF ROMA COMMUNITIES AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ROMA COMMUNITIES IN BULGARIA



Following the expansion of the school in Pobeda district in the city of Burgas, 240 Roma children can now attend school in their own neighbourhood. © SDC

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria. Many Roma suffer from social exclusion, discrimination, poverty and unemployment. Social, cultural and economic barriers hinder access to education and healthcare for members of the Roma community. With its contribution to the enlarged EU, Switzerland is supporting projects to improve the living conditions of the Roma in Bulgaria.

Between 700,000 and 800,000 Roma live in Bulgaria, accounting for about 10% of the country's population. The Roma population is anything but homogeneous: according to the most recent official census, conducted in 2011, the Roma are divided into several ethnic subgroups that speak Bulgarian, Romani, Turkish or other languages. Members of the Roma minority often lack health insurance or are inadequately informed about their healthcare rights. Furthermore, the fact that many Roma children do not speak Bulgarian often makes it difficult for them to start school and cope with the Bulgarian school system.

Switzerland supports Bulgaria in implementing the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma (2012–2020). The aim of this strategy is to integrate marginalised Roma communities into Bulgarian society and thereby reduce their poverty and social exclusion. A particular focus is placed on facilitating access

to education and healthcare. The strategy also aims to reduce prejudice and discrimination against the Roma by Bulgaria's non-Roma population.

CLOSE COOPERATION WITH LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES

In order to ensure the long-term integration of Roma communities, Switzerland is working closely with the Bulgarian Ministries of Social Affairs, Education and Health. To achieve the social recognition and integration of the Roma, the programme is taking a comprehensive approach encompassing health, education and the promotion of Roma cultural identity and its wider acceptance by Bulgarian society. The programme involves measures and projects that are being implemented in the six municipalities of Sliven, Burgas, Ruse, Montana, Plovdiv and Shumen. To ensure a lasting impact, the municipalities are responsible for implementing the projects.

PROMOTING EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Switzerland is actively involved in ensuring better access to education, with priority given to the social integration of Roma children into the national school system. The focus is on early childhood development and learning to prepare children for school, as well as on additional support and tutoring for school-age children. The aim is to significantly reduce the drop-out rate in schools and to improve the school performance of Roma children, enabling them to pursue secondary education or vocational education and training. This considerably increases their chances of employment. The Bulgarian municipalities are working together with local NGOs and educational mediators from Roma communities. The educational mediators play a key role, as they enjoy the trust of Roma parents and are better able to convince them of how important regular school attendance is for their children.

One of the projects was the expansion of a primary school in Burgas which mainly serves children from the neighbouring Roma district of Pobeda. Construction work has also begun on two new kindergartens



Health mediators from Roma communities provide families with information about various health-related matters and are also on hand to offer advice to them. © SDC

in the municipalities of Sliven and Montana, where about 240 young children from Roma communities will be able to learn Bulgarian and thus become better equipped to start school.

HEALTH AS A DRIVER OF WELFARE AND PROSPERITY

Health mediators also play a key part in promoting health by providing advice on various health-related matters and carrying out the valuable task of helping to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Health mediators thus play an important liaison role between the Roma community and health service providers. In addition, medical centres are being set up in segregated Roma communities, for example in the city of Montana.

THE PROJECTS IN BRIEF

OBJECTIVE

Improving social security

AREA OF ACTIVITY

Social integration of the Roma and other minorities

COUNTRY

Bulgaria

PARTNERS

Six Bulgarian municipalities, the Bulgarian ministries of social affairs, education and health, and NGOs

STARTING POINT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

23% of Roma children under 15 years of age in Bulgaria do not attend school and only 0.5% of the country's entire Roma population have completed tertiary-level education. This not only hinders the integration of Roma people into the labour market, but often also has other serious consequences, such as poverty, migration, ghettos or crime.

PURPOSE

As part of its contribution to the enlarged EU, Switzerland aims to improve the living conditions of marginalised and socially excluded Roma communities and other disadvantaged groups in six Bulgarian cities and their outlying districts. The aim is also to make long-term improvements to the social and cultural integration of Roma communities and other vulnerable groups.

ACTIVITIES

Education: Construction of kindergartens; renovation of schools, teacher training; advice provided to parents by educational mediators from the Roma community
Health: Health screening; advice and information on health-related matters provided by educational mediators from the Roma community; renovation of medical centres and provision of equipment

TARGET GROUPS

Roma communities and other disadvantaged groups in six municipalities in Bulgaria

COSTS

Total budget
 6,920,000 CHF
 + 15% Bulgarian participation

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The six Bulgarian municipalities of Sliven, Burgas, Ruse, Montana, Plovdiv and Shumen. The municipalities are supported by the Programme Management Unit (PMU) at the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

DURATION

2013–2019
 (Differs according to project)

Additional information and documents

The project database of the website on Switzerland's contribution to EU enlargement contains detailed information on the projects mentioned above.