



Issue 1, 2010

Center Amalipe

Monthly newsletter

WWW.AMALIPE.COM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[OBSERVER

Internship program for Roma in the private sector

Scholarship program for Roma medical students

[KHERE (AT HOME)

Center Amalipe starts the implementation of new programs

Meeting of Roma leaders from Popovo, Lyaskovets, Strajitsa and Byala.

Roma activists took part in the discussion of the local development strategy Lyaskovets – Strajitsa

Preventing Forced Marriages

[SCHOOL

Roma and Bulgarian students greeted the educational and social ministers for St. Basil's Day (the Roma New Year)

Update of the Strategy for educational Integration

Decreasing the Drop-out Rate among Roma Children

Vasilitsa in Varshets

[ROMA HEALTH

Impact of the Health Reform in Bulgaria on the situation of Vulnerable Groups



CENTER AMALIPE STARTS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW PROGRAMS

ROMA HEALTH

In a series of publications Center Amalipe will prepare analyzes of the health care system reform implemented at present, in respect to its impact on the Roma community and other vulnerable groups. The aim is to provide recommendations to the reform in order to improve Roma health status and to include Roma health problems within the health care system.

Continues on p. 8

PREVENTING FORCED MARRIAGES

Since the beginning of 2010 Center Amalipe (Bulgaria), Liga Pro Europa (Romania) and Association for social support of youths ARSIS – Greece have started a joint project directed to preventing early and forced marriages, supported by DAPHNE program 2009 of the European Commission.

Continues on page 3

ROMA AND BULGARIAN PUPILS GREETED THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL MINISTERS FOR ST. BASIL'S DAY (THE ROMA NEW YEAR)

On January 14th students from Vasil Levski Primary School of Karadjovo village and St. Kliment Ohridski Primary School of Tishevitzta village visited the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor. The initiative was organized by Center Amalipe dedicated to the traditional calendar feast Vasilitsa (St. Basil's Day) well-known as the Roma New Year in Bulgaria.

Dressed in colored Roma and Bulgarian costumes the children entered the Ministry of Education. With traditional Roma and Bulgarian sayings for St. Basil's Day (called "survakane") they wished Minister Sergey Ignatov and Deputy Ministers Svetlana Lomeva and Milka Kodjabashieva health and success. Traditional sayings received also the Chief secretary of the Ministry Krasimir Valchev: the students wished him a lot of money for all Bulgarian schools. The students from Karadjovo presented an interesting program composed of Roma, Bulgarian and Turkish folklore. And despite the dozens of journalist cameras, the children kept the scenario and wished Minister Ignatov to keep the doors of the Ministry permanently open for Roma kids during the entire new year. The students of Tishevitzta prepared a St. Basil's Day table and sanctified it with Roma magic words. They gave to the



Minister, Deputy Ministers and all guests traditional "Gipsy banitza" (a type of home-made bread). Minister Ignatov gave them presents and wished all children persistence on the way of knowledge. He invited them to visit the Ministry again to show their successes.

With raised spirit and a lot of emotions, the children visited also the Ministry of Labor

Continues on p. 4

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR ROMA WITHIN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The Roma Program of the Open Society Institute - Sofia and America for Bulgaria Foundation have announced for the first time an Internship Program for young Roma in the private sector. The program aims at assisting the integration of Roma communities through innovative and broad approach to take into account the specifics of the local community and the challenges of economic and financial crisis.

The program aims to meet the critical needs of young Roma who have just completed their education or are about to finish it and to facilitate the process of employment integration. The main objective of the program is to provide access to employment through internships in leading companies in Bulgaria. More information can be found at: www.osf.bg.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME FOR ROMA MEDICAL STUDENTS

Open Society Institute - Sofia in cooperation with the Scholarship Program of the Roma Educational Fund implement together the "Leaders in health care: a new generation of professionals in the health system" project. The program is directed to Roma students studying in medical universities and colleges and to graduate doctors of Roma origin. The program has three components: training in advocacy skills; mentorship component and scholarship component. Participants are expected to contribute for the improving of Roma health status and be successful advocates for Roma health rights. The campaign for applicants and students for the academic year 2010 – 2011 will continue until 30 of May. More information can be found at: www.osf.bg



MEETING OF ROMA LEADERS FROM LYASKOVETZ, STRAJITZA, BYALA AND POPOVO

Around thirty Roma activists and NGO representatives from the municipalities of Lyaskovets Strazhitsa, Popovo and Byala participated in the meeting "Active citizen participation in the absorption of European funds at the local level." The meeting was held from 22 to 24 January in the town of Popovo and was organized by Center Amalipe within the project "Building a model for civic engagement and participation of Roma in the absorption of EU funds", financed by the MATRA program of the Dutch Embassy.

Participants discussed how to strengthen the involvement of NGOs and the participation of local Roma communities in the process of preparing and implementing community projects under the Human Resources Development Operational Program, the Regional Development OP and the Program for Rural Development. The general opinion was that at this stage the European projects are prepared and implemented without the citizens (in particular - Roma) to know about them. Special measures are needed to enhance civic participation - to avoid suspicions for corruption and the projects to meet the actual needs.

The participants draw particular attention to the process of forming Local Action Groups (LAGs) under the LEADER approach within the program for rural development and the development of their local strategies. Participants accounted as a positive fact that, as a result of the activities within the project "Building a model for citizen participation ..." informal Roma leaders are already included in the working groups preparing the strategies for local development for the municipalities of Popovo, Byala, Lyaskovets and Strazhitsa. They set specific steps to include the all demands of the Roma community in the local development strategies of



those municipalities, and the inclusion of Roma and other civil society experts in the governing bodies of the LAG. Participants also discussed mechanisms for sustainable interaction between civil organizations and municipal administration in the preparation and implementation of European projects. Lessons learned will be presented at a special meeting of local authorities at the end of February.

"I feel much stronger now! - Maria Stoyanova, a teacher from the village of Vinograd, municipality of Strazhitsa shared after the meeting - I had not imagined that in our municipalities there were so many educated young Roma, who were willing to work in the social field to help our people. I particularly enjoyed that we found common language with representatives of NGOs attending the meeting - despite differences in ethnicity, our interests are common. I am confident that we can achieve what we have planned at the meeting and will I work selflessly for this! "

"Construction of a model for civic engagement and participation of Roma in the absorption of EU funds at local level" project, aims to create and test a model for the promotion and institutionalization of citizen participation and involvement of Roma in 4 municipalities: Lyaskovets, Strazhitsa, Popovo and Byala.



ROMA ACTIVISTS TOOK PART IN THE DISCUSSION ON THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF LYASKOVETS - STRAJITZA



Public discussion on the first draft of the Strategy for local development of Lyaskovetz – Strajitza took place on January 31 in Lyaskovetz. The Mayor of Lyaskovetz D-r Ivelina Getzova, the experts who had prepared the Strategy and more that 70 representatives of the local business, institutions and NGOs from the two municipalities took part in the discussion. Local Roma activists who were included during the previous weeks in the working groups for drafting the Strategy also participated actively in the discussion. They insisted on the necessity of incorporating special definition of “vulnerable groups” (minorities, people with disabilities and youth) in the document. The Roma activists raised their concrete recommendations: those discussed a week before during the meeting in Popovo (see above) organized by Center Amalipe with the support of MATRA KAP program of the Dutch Embassy.

Continues from page 1

PREVENTING FORCED MARRIAGES

The project ensures coordinated work of responsible institutions, NGOs and Roma community itself for preventing forced / early marriages that is an innovative approach since up to now the efforts of these stakeholders have not been coordinated in any way; Roma informal authorities and NGO activists have not been perceived as possible partners. In addition the project stresses the work with Roma families for avoiding this practice instead of increasing the administrative punishment that is the prevailing unsuccessful practice at present. This approach relies on combined actions coming both from within and outside of the community.

The project activities include:

- **A survey about forced/early marriages:** Since there is no available scholarly research about the problem of forced/early marriages within Roma community and since the project implementation needs reliable data on these issues a survey will be designed and carried out at the beginning of the project. It will produce a reliable picture about the problem of early/forced marriages in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania and about the motivation of different stakeholders. It will be used for defining possible ways for solving the problem;

- **Establishing a pilot model for preventing forced marriages:** based on the survey results the project team will define a set of connected actions for preventing forced marriages. The model will be based on the idea that community work within the most traditional Roma communities and Roma families for preventing forced marriages is a key for solving the problem. The model will stress the coordinated efforts of all responsible institutions, NGOs and Roma authorities for overcoming the problem;

- **Publishing educational materials:** based on the survey and the results of the pilot model the project team will prepare and publish educational paper and video materials for preventing forced marriages.

- **Organizing public awareness campaigns:** Public-awareness campaigns will be organized in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece about the existence of forced marriages phenomenon, the necessity of preventing it and the ways for coping with this problem. The campaign will target the main stakeholders that work with or in Roma community (Roma authorities, NGO activists, social workers, teachers, officials from municipal and national institutions, journalists) and will aim at motivating them to organize activities for preventing forced/early marriages

- **Conference for sharing experience:** Concluding conference will be organized in Sofia. It will summarize the experience gathered in the three countries within the project and will define policy oriented recommendations.

UPDATE OF THE STRATEGY FOR EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION



At its first meeting the Consultative Council for Educational Integration at the Ministry of Education decided to begin the process of updating the Strategy for Educational Integration of children and students from ethnic minorities (SEICSEM) adopted on 11 June 2004. Three working groups have been set up. One will propose indicators and mechanisms to evaluate the performance of SEICSEM so far (coordinator: Ms. Maria Metodieva (OSI); The second group will propose the updating of the Strategy (coordinator: Rumyan Sechkov (SEGA). The third working group will propose the basic parameters for the Action Plan for implementation of SEICSEM (coordinator: Deyan Kolev (Center Amalipe). It has been agreed that no new document is needed, but additions to the existing one should be made: inclusion of intercultural education, consolidation of existing strategic objectives, update the priority activities, and so on.



DECREASING THE DROP OUT RATE AMONG ROMA CHILDREN

is a three-year program supported by America for Bulgaria Foundation. It addresses the high drop-out rate of Roma children in school age. The project activities will further address infrequent attendance of school, low school grades of Roma students, low representation of Roma students in high schools and the low representation of Roma parents in school structures and school life in general. The project is based on the experience Center Amalipe has accumulated during the last seven years and explicitly the experience accumulated with the development of the “Folklore of ethnoi - Roma folklore” SIP program which includes schools from territory of all Bulgarian regions. Therefore, the project sets several major objectives:

- to **deepen and widen** the intercultural (SIP) program that we have developed over the past several years and **measure how it** can help decrease drop-out rates among Roma children across the country.

- to **take the informal network of professionals established by Center Amalipe since 2002 and enhance it.** Peer training will allow us to disseminate best practices that we have learned over the past 7 years, thereby allowing us to have an impact on more than 200 new schools that have drop-out problems

- to **provide teachers working with Roma children with methodological support and tools for creating a classroom that is sensitive to the needs of Roma children and for engaging Roma parents with the education of their kids; to empower Roma parents and make them participants in the school life;**

- to **provoke a systemic change and improvement of the education of Roma children.** That is why the model for reducing the drop-out rate **will be extended to more than 200 new schools** which have drop-out problems. Awareness campaign and advocacy campaign will be organized to ensure its institutionalization and sustainability. One of the major approaches will be “teachers teaching teachers”. Therefore, a group of mentoring schools will be appointed during the first year of project implementation. These are schools Center Amalipe has been working with within the Roma SIP program and which have shown good results in reducing the drop-out rate among Roma children. They will support new/ pilot schools in developing and implementing programs for reducing the drop-out rate. The pilot schools will receive also methodological support from specially established Pedagogical team to reduce the number of dropouts and to raise the quality of education

ROMA AND BULGARIAN PUPILS GREETED THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL MINISTERS FOR ST.BASIL’S DAY (THE ROMA NEW YEAR)



and social policy. They were welcomed there by the minister Totyu Mladenov, Deputy-Minister Hristina Mitreva and Milen Milanov, National Coordinator of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The children wished the ministers health and success with a lot of funny sayings:

“You, as a social minister, do not forget our Roma brothers!” – one of the girls was saying in Romani language incensing the table. “I would not forget – the Minister replied. - But you should also remind me!”

Beside the sayings and the funny moments, the organizers conveyed messages connected not only with the holidays but with the everyday, as well. The school principal of Karadzovo school Krasimira Blagoeva pointed that children from three villages and three ethnic groups (Bulgarians, Roma and Turks) have been educated in her school. “It is very important, she underlined, to raise the motivation of these children for studying, as well as the quality of the school process. We do this through the Roma folklore and culture program initiated by Center Amalipe and a lot of extra-curriculum activities.” It is a problem however that the delegated school budget is not enough. There are also administrative difficulties and delayed payments within the Human Resources Development OP. “Please, ease the procedures and it would create real practical opportunity for the schools to apply; the successes would not come late.” – the teacher appealed.

The school principal of Tishevitsa – Dimitar Kostov has pointed that his school gathers children from five villages; 85% of these children are Roma. All children have after school activities, lunch and different extracurricular activities: Roma folklore and culture classes and three interest clubs. As a result there are no drop-outs in the school and the school holds one of the first places for high school grades. In addition, many of the children graduating the school continue their secondary education.

Deyan Kolev, Chairman of Center Amalipe pointed in his welcoming words that the educational integration meets serious problems. Dozens of schools, municipalities and NGOs implement successful integration models; support their efforts and create mechanisms to turn these models into a national policy, Deyan Kolev appealed.



VASILICA IN VARSHETZ

Untraditional way to greet their peers chose the children from 5 B grade from Ivan Vazov Secondary School in Varshetz. They learned the legend of the Roma saint Bango Vasil who saved his people from drowning, sending a gouse flock, so that Roma could cross a deep river. They learned a lot of new things about Roma. As a result they decided to surprise their friends with hand made e-cards greetings for luck, health and smiles.

The next surprise was presented by Veronika whose family decided to give out traditional meals – boiled turkey and goose, delicious banitzza, sweets and baklava. In the feast day their house was louded with music and songs. The family received as a gift wind bell – to balance the harmony in the friendly home.

*Albena Cvetkova, class teacher of the 5th grade,
Ivan Vazov Secondary School, Varshetz.*



С пожелание за много здраве, щастие и късмет!

IMPACT OF HEALTH REFORM IN BULGARIA ON THE SITUATION OF VULNARABLE GROUPS

Continues from page 1



Amendments in the Legal act for health insurance are aimed at raising the collecting of payments in the health care system but at the same time they will seriously affect vulnerable groups and especially Roma in Bulgaria. Those who are unemployed in fact but does not receive social assistance and relief funds for heating, should pay the health insurance instalments at their sole responsibility. They are obliged to pay health insurance instalments on the basis of not less than half of the minimal income amount for self-employed persons. In addition, they should submit to the territorial divisions of the National Income Agency that they pay their health insurances themselves.

In addition, it is a disturbing tendency that penalties for non-payment of health insurance instalments have increased as well as the period in which individuals should not have neglected to pay their health insurance instalments. Self-employed who have not paid their health insurance instalments for a period longer than three months shall be punished by a fine of 500 to 1000 BGN and in repeated violation- a fine of 1000 to 3000 BGN. People who have not fulfilled obligation to submit a declaration for self-employed, shall be punished by a fine of 500 to 1000 BGN and for a second violation- a fine of 1000 to 3000 BGN. Health insurance rights of persons, who are required to pay instalments by their sole responsibilities, shall be ceased if the person had not paid more than three monthly instalments, payable for a period of 36 months.

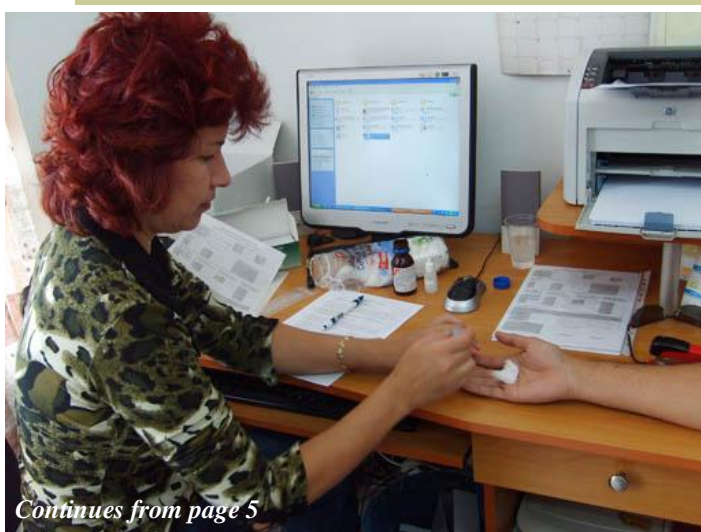
On one hand many unemployed Roma (and not only Roma) do not register at the Labour offices or drop out from the registration due to multiple reasons, on the other hand, the right to receive welfare benefits occurs only after a period of nine months of registration in the Labour office. Thus, in this nine-month period one registered in the Labour office remains in the “self-

employed” list and must pay the health insurance instalments; Increasing the period during which one should have no interruption in the payments within three years will automatically increase the percentage of Roma with negative /interrupted/ health insurance status, who will be required to pay to receive medical care.

These measures are implicitly aimed at enhancing revenues collection but besides improving the collection of health insurance instalments from corporate entities, these chages will negatively affect the poorest segments of the population leaving urgent and emergency care as the only opportunity to access health services. All hospitals are required to provide medical care in a case of medical emergency to any person who needs one regardless of one’s insurance status, nationality and address. However, many hospitals refuse to provide emergency and urgent medical care to persons with negative health insurance status! This fact has been reflected in several publications in the national media. It led to the issuing of a special order by the Minister of Health,



Continues on p.6



Continues from page 5

Dr. Bozidar Nanev to the directors of Regional Health Centres, Centres for Special Medical Care and hospitals throughout the country. Information about the order is published on the official website of the Ministry

<http://www.mh.government.bg/News>

Alarming fact in the so regulated health care system is the situation of patients with interrupted /negative/ health status who have chronic diseases (over 68 percent of Roma in Bulgaria have a person with chronic disease in the family). They will have no access to specialized medical care and they can be admitted to hospital only in case of emergency. Thus, de facto, the health care system would not perform preventive functions regarding chronically ill people but would only react in the case of a crisis, as emergency reaction against a specific threat to the life of the patient, but not concentrated on general reasons leading to this condition.

According to medical practitioners Bulgarian citizens with interrupted /negative/ health status are outside the healthcare system and nobody knows their exact number. This creates a danger to public health in the form of epidemics and a boom in socially significant diseases.

Positive changes in health care policy are noted in respect to children /persons below 18 years of age/. Children shall have unlimited access to profile children's specialists. Until now, it was unlimited only for those under 14 years of age. Unrestricted access means that the GP can not refuse referring one to consultation with specialist. Children under 18 years are exempt from taxes for medical examination or hospitalization. The program "Maternal Health" of the National Health Insurance Fund includes medical examinations and tests to monitor the pregnancy. In normal pregnancy monitoring is carried out by the GP or by a speci-

IMPACT OF HEALTH REFORM IN BULGARIA ON THE SITUATION OF VULNARABLE GROUPS

list in obstetrics and gynaecology – chosen by the mother. Preventive activities include various examinations for children, surveys and immunizations. Monitoring is conducted by the child's GP, if s/he is a paediatrician; if s/he's not the parents have the right to choose a specialist in paediatrics. Immunizations are carried out by the GP. So far 9 types of vaccines were included in the immunization calendar. Since April 2010 it includes two new immunizations - against pneumococcal infections and quinquivalent combination vaccine (against poliomyelitis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Haemophilus influenza type B). Children are exempted from the obligation to pay fees to doctors.

The lack of regular vaccination of children is one of the harshest problems concerning the Roma ghetto or marginalized communities which has led to a boom in the epidemics of measles in several big Roma neighbourhoods: Sliven, Plovdiv, etc. A recent example of this problem on the territory of Veliko Tarnovo was the epidemic of measles in Debeletz where several Roma families of travelling wood-cutters from Gradetz (Sliven region) have been infected.

In case of domicile change, the parents /children representatives/ can choose a new GP for their children: permanent during June and December each year or temporary one /for the period of two months/ - at any time during the year.

If there is a need of hospital treatment for the child - the treatment is paid in full by the National Health Insurance Fund in a hospital selected by the parent. Children under the age of 18 are entitled to comprehensive dental review including dental status and four medical services: two of pulpitis and periodontitis of permanent teeth. For pregnant women under 18 years of age there is additional free dental review including the dental status.

Dental services are fully paid for children who are institutionalized in shelters for medical and social services, special schools and shelters for raising and educating children deprived of parental care, people with mental illness and persons held in custody under 18 years of age.

With the support of



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
Public Health Program

The current material is elaborated jointly with MD Mavrodi Kalejski, Veliko Tarnovo

AMALIPE CENTER FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE

Veliko Tarnovo 5000, 24 Bulgaria Blvd p.o box 113

Tel:/Fax: (062) 600 – 224, center_amalipe@yahoo.com, www.amalipe.com