



OSCE Mission to Serbia assists in building independent, accountable and effective democratic institutions, particularly in the fields of rule of law, human rights, media, law enforcement, economy and environment.



Factsheet

## OSCE Mission to Serbia



Mission to Serbia

# SUPPORT FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ROMA

### Background

Starting in 2001, the OSCE Mission to Serbia, within its mandate has dedicated considerable and on-going efforts to the integration of the Roma in Serbia<sup>1</sup>. These efforts have been directed towards supporting the Serbian authorities in implementing “The Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area” (OSCE Action Plan) and achieving the aims and objectives of the Decade on Roma Inclusion.

The OSCE Action Plan was adopted by the OSCE Permanent Council in 2003, with the goal to ensure that Roma and Sinti play a “full and equal part” in their respective societies, to eradicate discrimination against them and promote Romani participation in policy making and implementation.

Since February 2006, the thrust of the Mission’s Roma related activities has taken place within two consecutive projects, funded by the European Commission<sup>2</sup> in the amount of Euro two million. The projects have been planned and implemented in partnership with the Roma National Strategy Secretariat in the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights.

### Support for State Structures and Policies

#### Roma National Strategy Secretariat and Roma National Strategy

In 2002, the OSCE Mission to Serbia advocated for the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights to initiate the drafting of a National Strategy for the Inclusion and Empowerment of Roma. This document was finalised in 2003 with the support of the OSCE Mission, and was followed by the Mission’s support to the Ministry for the establishment of the Roma National Strategy Secretariat (RNSS). The RNSS has become the principle coordination and steering body for Roma related issues in Serbia, and remains a key partner of the OSCE Mission. The RNSS received direct OSCE operational support for four years.

#### Roma National Minority Council

The Roma National Minority Council was formed in 2002, on the basis of the 2002 Law on the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, which was actively supported by the OSCE Mission. The OSCE Mission also supported the election of the first Council and assisted it in developing institutional capacity. In 2008, the OSCE Mission supported the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights in preparing the final draft of the Law on Elections and Competencies of the Councils of National Minorities.

In 2006/07, the OSCE Mission as part of its EC funded programme and in close collaboration with the RNSS supported further enhancement of national and municipal level capacity and policy frameworks, through:

- **National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion**  
The OSCE Mission provided financial and technical support for the development of four National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion (Education, Health, Employment and Housing) and establishment of the respective working groups to coordinate their implementation; along with support for the setting up and operation of the Readmission Centre for returnees from Western Europe.
- **Local Action Plans and Roma Municipal Coordinators**  
The OSCE Mission supported the training and deployment of Roma Municipal Coordinators to eighteen municipalities<sup>3</sup>. The Coordinators bridged the divide between local Romani communities and local self government, and provided technical support for the drafting and adoption of local action plans. Implementation of the Plans was supported through small-scale grants for local action plan initiatives that totalled euro 305,872<sup>4</sup>. Thirteen of the municipalities subsequently systematised the post of Municipal Coordinator, and UNDP subsequently extended the initiative to include 10 additional municipalities, following the success of the OSCE Mission to Serbia scheme.

1 | Decision of OSCE Permanent Council (11 January 2001) defined the mandate of the OSCE Mission to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as inter alia “to promote protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and to monitor the proper functioning and development of democratic institutions, processes and mechanism”.

2 | The projects were managed by the European Agency for Reconstruction until October 2008, when responsibility passed to the European Commission office in Belgrade.

3 | The 18 municipalities of Bujanovac, Bela Palanka, Nis-Crveni Krst, Pirot, Vranje, Aleksinac, Kragujevac, Valjevo, Koceljeva, Sabac, BG-Barajevo, BG-Grocka, Novi Sad, Sombor, Kikinda, Krusevac, Negotin, Novi Beograd.

4 | Details of the 35 small grant projects are available in the publication “Implementation of Action Plans for Roma at the Local Level”.

OSCE Roma Assistance Programme

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## Implementation of National Action Plans

**The OSCE Mission to Serbia, in the context of the EC funded programme and in close collaboration with the RNSS, has dedicated significant efforts and resources to supporting the respective State Ministries in the implementation of the National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion.**

### Roma Teacher Assistants

In 2006/07, the OSCE Mission provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Education in introducing a scheme of Roma Teacher Assistants (RTAs) to Primary schools in Serbia. The introduction of the pilot scheme followed a joint OSCE-supported study visit of the representatives of the Ministry and the RNSS to Hungary. From December 2006 to March 2007, the Mission supported the Ministry in the selecting and training 54 RTAs, of which 28 were subsequently deployed by the Ministry. The RTAs worked in 26 schools<sup>5</sup> from March to June 2007. In the period ending June 2010, the OSCE Mission will provide operational support to the Ministry of Education in strengthening and extending the system of Roma Teacher Assistants. The Mission will support the professional development of the RTAs, pay the salaries of an additional 26 RTAs, provide school supplies for distribution by the RTAs, and organise education workshops for Roma women and training courses for school teaching staff.

### Roma Health Mediators

In 2008, the OSCE Mission provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Health in introducing a scheme of Roma Health Mediators (RHMs). The introduction of the pilot scheme followed a joint OSCE-supported study visit of the representatives of the Ministry and the RNSS to Romania. The OSCE Mission will provide support for the ongoing professional development of the 45 Mediators to be employed by the Ministry, as well as support for the implementation of small-scale health initiatives.

### Legalisation of informal Roma Settlements

The Mission supported the drafting of the National Guidelines for the Improvement and Legalisation of Informal Roma Settlements. In 2009/10, the OSCE Mission will provide technical support to the Ministry for Environment and Urban Planning in the legalisation of selected informal Roma settlements.

## Gazela Settlement

In 2008, the OSCE Mission provided support to the City of Belgrade in organising pre-school classes for 79 children from the informal Roma settlement under the Gazela bridge. This was followed by extensive support for the enrolment and attendance of the children in primary school<sup>6</sup>. In September 2008, 27 of the children enrolled into three local primary schools for the first time and 37 children enrolled into "Djuro Salaj" school for adults. The OSCE Mission received financial support for this initiative from the Norwegian and Spanish Governments.

## Complementary Initiatives

Over the years, the OSCE Mission has undertaken an array of small scale complementary initiatives to promote the inclusion of Roma. In 2008, these initiatives included:

- Jointly hosting with the Ministry of Interior, four roundtables and a study visit to Hungary, with the aim of fostering relations between the Roma community and the law enforcement agencies and promoting good policing practices;
- Assessment of political participation and the implementation of measures to promote the political emancipation of Roma Woman;
- Jointly hosting with the RNSS, a presentation on Roma inclusion issues for eighteen media outlets in Serbia which broadcast programmes in Romani language; and organising trainings for selected journalists from Roma Media outlets;
- Implementation of measures to address the special concerns of Roma victims of trafficking;
- Jointly organising with the RNSS, local public hearings in five cities.

## Future Programmes

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, represented by the RNSS, and the OSCE Mission will build upon their existing partnership in jointly developing a comprehensive and multi-sectorial project. The project will focus on promoting Roma inclusion in five cities/municipalities throughout Serbia through creating complementary and appropriate policies, structures and capacities among different service providers, for examples, local self-government, schools, health centres, social services, law enforcement and media. This comprehensive approach would provide models of best practice to be followed by State and local authorities, particularly in regard to the value of coordination in public service delivery; and serve to energise the integration process more generally. The Ministry and OSCE Mission plan to submit the project for consideration by the European Union under the EU Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).



Mission to Serbia

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe works for **stability, prosperity and democracy** in 56 States through political dialogue about shared values and through practical work that makes a lasting difference.

5 | 26 schools in 18 municipalities.

6 | Each of the children received full sets of textbooks and winter clothes (including sports kits), rucksacks with school supplies and stationary, and hygiene kits. The Mission has also appointed two RTAs to work with the children.