

## **THE INTEGRATION IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF KAVARNA – A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH**

In the last 10 years the municipality of Kavarna has been working for the integration of the minorities consistently and purposefully. On 12th October 2012, at a formal ceremony of the Budapest Conference 'MERI - Mayors making the most of EU structural funds for Roma Inclusion' the municipality was awarded for its comprehensive approach to the integration of the minorities with regard to the residential policy, education, healthcare and employment. The award, however, had been the result of a multitude of efforts in different directions.

### **INCLUSION OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE**

The inclusion of minority representatives, respectively of Roma ones, in the Municipal Council and the Minority Integration Department at the Municipal Administration as well as that of a health mediator, has proved to be a successful step towards the implementation of the municipal policy for Integration of the Roma population as part of the Plan for the Development of the Municipality of Kavarna 2005 – 2013.

The method of direct involvement of Roma people in the solution to the problems of the minority on the territory of the municipality of Kavarna was introduced; certain measures for the implementation of the national and the European policy with regard to the ethnic groups on the side of the appointed officials of Roma origin have been taken.

In addition, the local public mediator, the monthly visits of the regional representative of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination as well as the Customer Charter of the Municipality of Kavarna have contributed to the improvement of the attitude to the Roma population.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

Our choice has been hard work for the improvement of the infrastructure in the Roma Neighbourhood in Kavarna. The gasification of the area, the replacement of the existing water pipelines and sewage system, the asphaltting of the streets and the provision of lighting, the placing of pavement surfaces took a couple of years. There are about 700 houses, a kindergarten, a primary school, Mayor's Office where the officials for minority integration work, an Internet hall, three hotels owned by Roma people, two playgrounds.

An individual approach has been applied to the Roma people belonging to different social strata. An administrative two-floor building was converted to a hostel in which 10 of the poorest Roma families have been accommodated. An information campaign took place among the Roma population and its focus was on the opportunity of taking advantage of the vested rights to construction. As a result, about 60 Roma families have succeeded in building homes of their own by themselves, which has raised their social status as well as the confidence in their own abilities.

The Roma Neighbourhood in Kavarna has turned into a residential area which anyone could envy. What is more, visitors to Kavarna often mistake it for the town centre ...

**EDUCATION:** Education is one of the integration pillars. For that reason the municipality of Kavarna puts a special emphasis on increasing the motivation to learn and measures are taken to minimize school leaving by children and adolescents of school age. Some of the initiatives undertaken in the municipality have turned into national campaigns: the Roma children are provided with transportation from their remote neighbourhood to the schools, snacks are given away to socially disadvantaged Roma schoolchildren, clubs for extracurricular activities have been set up, the teachers' qualifications are improved permanently, special attention is paid to the regular meetings between teachers and parents. The development of intercultural education and integration of bilingual children as well as ones with special educational needs is encouraged. The children living abroad with their parents are helped by the school managements to proceed their education individually.

The Municipal Council accepted in a resolution all the good practice and the policy of qualitative integration and it became part of the Educational Integration of Ethnic Minority Children and Students.

The annual national external assessment shows that the score of the Roma students in the municipality exceeds the average score of the Roma students for the country. More than 50% of the Roma youths in the municipality of Kavarna have already got secondary education and some of them are university students.

**HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES:** One of the main tasks of the municipality is to provide access to quality healthcare. The health mediator appointed to work for the Municipality has contributed to that. Her Roma origin is essential as she manages to find the most appropriate way of giving the necessary information to the different social strata of Roma population and of encouraging them to pay attention to their health.

Lecture campaigns on health issues as well as prophylactic examinations have been conducted. The preventive maternal and child health services are taken into serious consideration. Each year special funding for treatment of socially disadvantaged people is provided.

**INTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY:** The Roma people have to be integrated and socially engaged so that the integration can be real. The annual celebration of the International Roma Day on 8<sup>th</sup> April has turned into a tradition. Concerts with the participation of popular Bulgarian and foreign actors, musicians and bands are organized. Sports events take place. Many Roma people are involved in the preparation for the rock festivals.

The number of the children practising actively at one of the sixteen sports clubs of the municipality is ever increasing and some of them have already won prestigious rewards.

**PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES:** To achieve the desired level of integration we rely not only on our own means but also on funding accessible through projects and programmes. The undertakings are in all fields - education, infrastructure, healthcare and sport. EU funding, national and municipal budget resources as well as public and private partnership all enable the realization of courses, campaigns on health issues, investment in education and qualification improvement, provision of new facilities, better infrastructure.

A new project for educational integration of ethnic minority children and students has been launched only recently. Kavarna is the beneficiary with the highest project budget approved.

**EMPLOYMENT:** It is a wrong practice to pay social benefits to the Roma population. There are few unemployed Roma people in Kavarna. About 40% cultivate land, mainly melon fields. The rest are employed in the construction business or the trade abroad, mostly in Poland and Germany. There are communities of Romas from Kavarna in the towns of Kielce, Radom and Poznan. Hadji Dimitar Neighbourhood is the home of about 4,000 people. Nearly 1,500 of them are currently employed in other European countries but invest their money in their hometown. They usually come back in winter (February) and then leave again.

**PROBLEMS:** The problem with the emigration of Roma people from Bulgaria is quite serious although it has not manifested itself to a full extent in our town. The negative trends could only be eliminated by improvement of the Roma people's qualifications and provision of permanent jobs in the areas they live in. Thus they will be competitive enough at the labour market, well-paid and unlikely to emigrate.

Another essential problem is the change in the way of thinking of the Roma people themselves as well as of the public in the widest sense. Any local, national or EU institution would be doomed to failure unless the minorities, including the Roma population, were willing to integrate into the society they live in. The application of traditional and innovative approaches is a process requiring awareness and mutual efforts and can be successful only if lots of will, careful thought and systematic work are involved in it. The unification of the policies of the various institutions working with the minorities and their displaying perseverance, not campaigning in the activity performed will definitely have further contribution to the eventual success.

As a conclusion, let us use a quotation which is absolutely pertinent in the context of the integration approach: "The only way you can predict the future is to build it."