

# VIRAL HEPATITIS PREVENTION BOARD MEETING

SOFIA, BULGARIA, 24 – 25 MARCH 2011  
BURDEN AND PREVENTION OF VIRAL  
HEPATITIS

## IN BULGARIA

Healthcare Policy for vulnerable  
groups, especially Roma in  
Bulgaria

Mrs. Rositsa Ivanova, NCCEDI

- **The National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues Cooperation is established at the Council of Ministers. Chairperson of the Council is the Vice Prime Minister.**
- **NCCEDI is the governmental body in charge of coordination and consultation of minority issues as well as of the general regular monitoring of the implementation of the integration policies.**
- **Its purpose is to influence the governmental decision-making process on the ground that its members are representatives of the government as well as representatives of the civil society, particularly organization of ethnic minorities.**
- **The Secretariat is the structure within the CoM administration established to administratively assist the NCCEDI and actively participate in the formulation and conducting of the governmental policy in the field of multi-ethnic relations.**
- **The NCCEDI has a respectable experience of the formulation, implementation and coordination of international projects and programmes, financed by EU pre-accession funds.**

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- **Healthcare reform in Bulgaria brought to light some very alarming tendencies in Roma health: high morbidity, high mortality, low life expectancy. These tendencies have been observed for more than a decade due to overwhelming poverty, poor nutrition, permanently poor living conditions and lack of proper sanitary conditions. Infectious diseases have become a particularly serious problem for the Roma in Bulgaria. The most common among them are tuberculosis and viral hepatitis. According to the data presented by the St. Sofia Pulmonary hospital in 2009, 30% of the patients treated there are from Roma origin. A study on common health problems among the Roma in the town of Kyustendil, Senovo and Tulovo (conducted by Prof. Turnev) demonstrates the high percentage of tuberculoses of the Roma population where approximately 25% of the cases involve children. According to data from the specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Pulmonary Diseases in Sliven (submitted by Dr. M. Dimitrova), 60% of the tuberculosis patients are Roma. Viral hepatitis is also a serious problem for Roma neighborhoods where incidents of Hepatitis A and B are very high. The number of physically and mentally disabled Roma is six times higher than the rest of the Bulgarian population.**

- **The relations between the medical staff and the Roma communities is hampered due to the fact that many general practitioners (GPs) who work in Roma neighborhoods are not familiar with the cultural differences and traditions of their patients. Poor Bulgarian language skills of many Roma people only aggravate the problem. The main risk factors for Roma health have been identified as:**
- **Mass unemployment, the consequence of which is that only a small part of the Roma population is health insured;**
- **Poverty and thus inability to pay health insurance contributions and to buy medicines;**
- **Poor nutrition;**
- **Lack of basic sanitary conditions;**
- **Bureaucracy of the medical system and direct or indirect discrimination;**
- **Lack of medical/ health prevention activities;**
- **Low educational level, including health education.**

## **Phare 2003 “Educational and Medical Integration of Vulnerable Minority Groups with special focus on Roma”**

**The overall objective of this project is to contribute to the implementation of the health care strategic policies of the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of the Roma into the Bulgarian Society through:**

- support for improvement of the equal access to health care services;**
- support for qualification of medical staff to work in multicultural environment;**
- support to preventive health care services;**
- support for health promotion and education for vulnerable minorities groups.**

**Specific objectives:**

- To update the existing curricula of 5 universities;**
- To train 30 university and 28 nursing colleges lecturers from 5 universities and 14 nursery colleges to help them deliver knowledge on work in multiethnic environment and especially with the Roma community;**
- To educate up to 50 mediators between the health care system and Roma Community;**
- To achieve maximum public health knowledge and better access to health services among the Roma population through implementation of Health Promotion;**
- To develop a curriculum for mediators' education in the medical universities/colleges**
- Delivered 5 mobile units for prophylactic**

**Phare project BG2004/016-711.01.03 “Improvement of the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma” is a multi-annual project with three programming years | Phase I - Phare 2004 “Health promotion & preventive maternal and child health care”**

**The purpose of the project is the improvement of the maternal and child health through implementation of health care educational programmes for disadvantaged ethnic minority women and children, implementation of an outreach examination pilot programme for preventive maternal and child health care and provision of additional qualification of physicians, family practitioners and nurses.**

**Results:**

- Disadvantaged ethnic minorities families were educated on measures for preventive family health care;**
- Physicians, family practitioners, nurses and radiology technicians were qualified to implement the pilot programme of primary and preventive health care directed to improvement of health status of 12 000 patients from disadvantaged ethnic minorities women and children;**
- Delivered – 10 mobile units**
  - - 4 pediatric mobile units;**
  - - 4 gynecological mobile units;**
  - - 2 mamographs**

- **Phare 2005 “IMPROVEMENT OF THE SITUATION AND INCLUSION OF THE DISADVANTAGED ETHNIC MINORITIES WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON ROMA”**
- **The purpose of this contract is:**
  - **- To improve the health care programmes for disadvantaged ethnic minority groups with a special focus on Roma;**
  - **- To support the implementation of an outreach examinations Programme for screening and early diagnostics of tuberculosis, oncological, heart and inherited diseases with mobile equipment;**
  - **- To design and implement in cooperation with local/regional stakeholders health promotion campaign for reaching the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma.**
  - **- To provide additional training to health professional, social workers and NGOs for work with Roma communities;**
  - **- To assess the needs and study the possibilities for upgrade of the existing Health Information and Monitoring System with regard to the specifics of the health care status of disadvantaged ethnic minority communities with a focus on Roma.**

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- **RESULTS:**
- **A Comprehensive Programme and detailed Action plan for screening and early diagnostics of tuberculosis, oncological, heart and inherited diseases, which is targeted at disadvantaged ethnic minorities, related the implementation of the existing national health programmes drafted;**
- **Disadvantaged ethnic minorities families educated on pressing health care issues, like hepatitis, tuberculosis, cardiovascular, pulmonary and oncological diseases;**
- **Mechanism for a comprehensive health promotion and preventive health care campaigns at community level created and implemented;**
- **Disadvantaged ethnic minority families screened and diagnosed;**

- **Project "Initiative of Health and Vaccination".**
- **9 meetings were held in:**
- **- Plovdiv , Sofia, Blagoevgrad, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Golden Sands, Aheloy**
- **During these meetings, the Speakers emphasized the importance of timely execution of immunization on the extension of immunization and work among vulnerable groups, among which the most commonly spread gaps are found. Scientifically proven facts and statistics presented introduced sufficient number of arguments to support the need for immunization of the population. New multivalent vaccines and new vaccination calendar have been discussed also. The letter ranks Bulgaria among the best European practices for increasing vaccination among the target group.**
- **The mediators took an active role in the meetings - they explained how to work in minority communities, shared their experiences how local teams could be established, including GPs, representatives from health sector etc.**
- **During some of the meetings specific questions relating to the work of mediators were asked.**
- **Part of GPs heard for the first time about the profession of "health mediator" and had the opportunity to acquaint with the experiences of their counterparts in similar partnerships.**

## Measures in the field of Roma integration in 2011

- **Implementation of preventive programs and provide operation of mobile offices.**
- **Conducting health awareness activities in schools and kindergartens with the help of the mediators in Roma settlements and remote areas.**
- **Preparation and distribution of modern health education materials - preparing and issuing appropriate video materials - in short, modern-made films, videos and other account-specific target group.**
- **Dissemination of information and promotional materials relating to the conduct of preventive examinations.**

**Mrs. Rositsa Ivanova, NCCEDI**

Thank You for  
Your attention!

Mrs.Rositsa Ivanova, NCCDEI



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