



THE CZECH REPUBLIC'S PRESIDENCY OF THE DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005–2015: PRIORITY AREAS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PRESIDENCY

The Czech Republic's Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 commenced on 1 July 2010 and last until 30 June 2011. The Czech Republic took over the Presidency from the Slovak Republic at the 18th Meeting of the International Steering Committee of the Decade, due to take place in Bratislava on 24 June 2010. At the end of its tenure, the Czech Republic will pass on the Presidency to Macedonia.

The Czech Government decided to accede to the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 under Government Resolution No 136 of 26 January 2005 on accession to the international initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015. The Decade Declaration was signed on 2 February 2005 by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice, Pavel Němec at the opening ceremony of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (the “Decade”) in Sofia, Bulgaria. Here, the participating States undertook to draw up and apply policies and programmes contributing to a reduction in the poverty and social exclusion faced by the Roma.

The founding international partner organizations of the Decade project are the World Bank, the Open Society Institute (OSI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODHIR), the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). In 2008, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) became new partners of the Decade.

Thus far, the Decade has drawn together twelve European countries¹ with the political commitment to address the situation faced by Roma communities (poverty, exclusion, discrimination) on both a national and regional scale. The Decade brings together the participating governments, international institutions and Roma civil society in the process of:

- (i) initiating activities to promote the social inclusion of the Roma as a priority of the regional and European political agenda;
- (ii) exchanging experiences and mutual learning;
- (iii) involving Roma men and women in decisions that affect them;
- (iv) drawing on international experience and expertise to accelerate the handling of challenging Roma integration issues; and

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Spain

- (v) raising public awareness about the situation of the Roma through active society-wide discussion.

The **objectives of the Decade** in each country are pursued via national Action Plans, in which each country defines tasks in education, employment, health care, housing and cross-cutting themes. The results are continuously monitored and, based on the information collected, each State assesses progress in achieving these objectives.

In the Czech Republic, a Report on the Implementation of the Decade is submitted to the Czech Government each year jointly by a member of the Government and the Chairperson of the Government Council for Roma Affairs² (hereinafter referred to as the “Council”). A national coordinator (hereinafter referred to as the “coordinator”) is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the Decade in the Czech Republic. The coordinator is appointed by the Prime Minister or may be a delegated member of the Government. The Council Office is responsible for the coordination of the Decade. In 2004, the Council established the Committee on the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (hereinafter referred to as the “Committee”) as an advisory body.

The **Committee** consists of representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry for Regional Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities, as well as non-profit sector representatives from the NGOs Open Society Prague (Otevřená společnost Praha), Dženo o.s., and IQ Roma Servis, and members of the Government Council for Roma Affairs. Since 2009, the Committee has focused primarily on shaping the priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Decade, which are presented in this paper.

Internationally, the **International Steering Committee** is the initiative’s supreme decision-making and coordinating body. It approves international priorities and plans the joint activities of the Decade which are financed from the common budget for all States. The Committee meets twice a year and is hosted by the State holding the Presidency of the Decade. Its principal tasks are to coordinate the activities of the Decade at international level and to monitor the implementation of the action plans of those countries participating in the Decade.

The **international management structure of the Decade**, and the powers of the International Steering Committee (ISC), the State holding the Presidency and the Secretariat of the Decade are governed by the “Terms of Reference”. Each State participating in the Decade chairs the International Steering Committee a year at a time, coordinates the international activities of the Decade, and actively communicates with the Secretariat of the Decade. The Secretariat of the Decade ensures continuity between Presidencies and assists in the preparation of seminars and conferences.

² The new name of the Government Council for Roma Affairs derives from Government Resolution No 254 of 29 March 2010, amending the Statutes of the Council together with its name.

Priority areas for the Presidency of the Czech Republic

The Roma make up a significant minority in the Decade countries; their cultural, economic and civic exclusion is too high for candidate countries and Member States of the EU. We are confident that our proposed priorities make a step forward in the situation of Roma communities; by collaborating with other European initiatives, we prompt fresh discourse re-emphasizing that the Roma belong to Europe and are fully accepted by European society. Hence continuing in integration processes of previous presidencies, the Czech Republic focuses on the following priorities:

1. **Inclusive Education** – making Roma inclusive policies based on empirical evidence and the opportunities to collect and use ethnically disaggregated data;
2. **Well being and Rights of Children;**
3. **Roma Women** – viewing the integration policy in all areas;
4. **Implementation of Integration Policies at Local Level**, focusing on local and regional government;
5. **Media and the Image of the Roma.**

1. **Inclusive Education** – making Roma inclusive policies based on empirical evidence and the opportunities to collect and use ethnically disaggregated data

Objective: Explore the means in which ethnically disaggregated data can be used for public policy evaluation especially with the view to improvements in education. To start a public discussion on the role of schools specializing in FEP MMD:³ efforts to cooperate with schools specializing in FEP MMD and to transfer responsibility to mainstream schools.

Resources: Two Conferences.

Coordinator: The Office of the Government, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and partners of the Decade.

Reasoning:

Departing from the experiences of the past presidencies (the Republic of Serbia – the fight against discrimination in education; the Slovak Republic – an integrated school system and multicultural education) the Czech Republic focuses on inclusive education in its first priority, especially on evaluating methods for the collection of disaggregated ethnic data to identify the academic results of Roma children in schools. An emphasis is placed on using information about the proportion of Roma and non-Roma pupils in localities as a basis when developing strategies for the increased inclusion of Roma children and pupils in mainstream education. An emphasis is also placed on the role played by local government in the process of improving the chances for better the education of Roma children.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic collected ethnically and gender disaggregated data in order to determine the proportion of Roma students in primary schools. In October 2009, an in-depth analysis of the diagnostic tools used by school counselling facilities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was carried out. The analysis results show that the diagnostic tools used are not, in principle, unfair and

³ Primary schools specializing in FEP MMP: primary schools providing education in accordance with framework education programmes for children with mild mental disabilities

discriminatory. Instead, the root of the problem lies in the practical application of these tools when the skills of Roma children are assessed by experts from psycho-pedagogical clinics and special education centres. An important milestone in this process is the use of the data collected to configure the new strategic NAPIE (National Action Plan for Inclusive Education) document.

Therefore, the education priority under the Czech Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion focuses on knowledge gained in the field of data collection and the sharing of good practice in the following areas:

- indicators and the collection of ethnically disaggregated data;
- a presentation of the National Action Plan for Inclusive Education (NAPIE) within the scope of the inclusive education concept;
- a public discussion about the role of special schools: efforts to collaborate with special schools and to transfer responsibility to mainstream schools.

2. Wellbeing and Rights of Children

Objective: To grasp the needs of Roma children, and to create a Europe-wide appeal to improve the situation faced by Roma children in Europe.

Resources: Side event of a Decade ISC Meeting.

Coordinator: The Office of the Government in collaboration with the partners of the Decade.

Reasoning:

The living situation and rights of children should be reflected in all priority areas. The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is an international initiative drawing together 12 European countries. The second priority stresses the need to focus on the living situation in which Roma children in Europe find themselves. This priority will be presented in the context of the need for a safe environment in which children can receive the care necessary for their personal development and education. Roma children face different challenges across the States participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Our task is to open the theme of 1) the possibility of increasing Roma children's educational opportunities and 2) the chance for their individual development in the current environment.

3. Roma Women – viewing the integration policy in all areas

Objective: The emancipation of Roma women in the process of integration and consideration for their views and requirements.

Resources: A national seminar and an international conference.

Result: Manual showing how Roma women view integration.

Coordinator: The Office of the Government, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and partners of the Decade.

Reasoning:

The way Roma women view the integration policy is the third key priority of the Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015. This priority focuses on a discourse on the emancipation of Roma women and on women as an important link in the shaping of integration concepts. The first angle of this priority concentrates on the position and role of

Roma women, i.e. on the influence wielded by Roma women involved in integration programmes in Roma communities, in particular with regard to working with children and their attitude to education. The second angle is the emancipation of Roma women. This emancipation offers active education, labour market participation, career-building and independence. Many Roma girls believe their future lies in motherhood, and are unaware that attaining a certain level of education and successfully finding a job are crucial if they are to stabilize the socio-economic situation of their family.

The challenge for the Czech Presidency in this area is to produce a manual which will build on the experience of Roma women and assist the development of integration policies and measures targeted at the Roma minority. For this purpose, a special international panel of Roma women will be set up to participate in the programmes of conferences and seminars, thus ensuring that the impact of individual actions is presented from the perspective of Roma women.

4. Implementation of Integration Policies at Local Level, focusing on local and regional government;

Objective: To motivate regional and municipal government bodies to implement integration policies, to find appropriate forms of cooperation between central and local government, and to obtain feedback.

Resources: A conference focused on the transfer of good practices to local level mainly in the field of housing.

Coordinator: The Office of the Government, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry for Regional Development and partners of the Decade.

Reasoning:

The commitment by Decade Member States to comply with the National Action Plans they have adopted indicates that these countries accept the issue of Roma inclusion as a priority area and will pay due attention to this priority during the Decade. At EU level, the issue of Roma inclusion has figured on the agenda of several presidencies; both the current and upcoming trio of countries holding the Presidency of the EU Council seem set to continue dealing with this issue in detail.

Therefore, there appears to be strong will centrally (in terms of national policies) to seek the right answers to coexistence between the Roma and the majority, to address social exclusion and the role of Roma in society, and to introduce sensitive measures related to housing, employment, education and health. A study carried out under the Decade of Roma Inclusion (see the SONCE⁴ Report) notes a general shift in the establishment of central/national integration concepts and strategies. However, on the other hand, the same study pointed to pitfalls in the transmission of national policies, strategies and integration measures to local level.

For this reason, another priority for the Czech Presidency of the Decade is to increase local government motivation to implement central policies and strategies or to create local policies for full integration and feedback. The discussion will also address the amendment of legislation affecting integration on a local level (In the Czech Republic's case, the main

⁴ http://www.romadecade.org/report_examines_institutional_setup_for_roma_policy_in_six_decade_countries

legislation in this respect is the Municipalities Act and the Act on the Rights of Members of National Minorities).

The development of this priority will entail close collaboration with the Open Society and the Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities. A due attention will be paid to housing (a draft concept of low-cost – subsidized – housing), education and social work.

5. Media and the Image of the Roma

Objective: To seek ways of presenting the Roma minority positively in the media and thus to promote the improved co-existence of the Roma in majority society.

Resources: Side event of a Decade ISC Meeting.

Coordinator: The Office of the Government in collaboration with the partners of the Decade.

Reasoning:

Media sensationalism and the sensitivity of issues presented by the media in connection with the Roma often form a generally negative media image of the Roma, which is then presented to general society. For the successful implementation of integration measures locally, it is necessary to promote the positive perception of these measures to majority society.

For this reason, the Czech Presidency aims to highlight the ways of presenting Roma in the media and point out the pitfalls faced by Roma in the media.

The significance of the Czech Republic's Presidency of the Decade

The Decade of Roma Inclusion is a prestigious international initiative pursuing unquestionably noble goals, which include improving the economic situation of the Roma in Europe, combating anti-Ciganism and involving Roma in political, civic and economic activities. Activities carried out under this international initiative are organized in close cooperation with civil society, and thus inherently meet the main requirement, which is the participation of the Roma in the decision-making process covering inclusive measures and policies related to the Roma themselves.

The Czech Republic is well versed in the subject of Roma inclusion. One of the priorities of the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU Council was Roma inclusion. In this area, we promoted a pivotal document entitled "Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion", which was then also attached to the EPSCO meeting conclusions. This is a key document for the process of Roma Inclusion, which is used by the European Commission and Member States to propose measures inclusive measures and serves as a sort of guide or recommendation to inspire Member States in the shaping of their inclusive policy.

The Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 offers the Czech Republic another opportunity to build on the results achieved by the Czech Republic during its Presidency of the EU Council, and to streamline the real impact of integration policies on the Roma in the Czech Republic and throughout Europe.

Human resources

The Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is the responsibility of a "coordination team", to be created within the Office of the Government Council for Roma

Affairs; this team is directly tasked with arrangements for the Presidency. The coordination team is mediate communications between the Secretariat of the Decade and States participating in this international initiative. The team's activities consist of representing the Decade of Roma Inclusion, organizing two meetings of the International Steering Committee of the Decade and preparing thematic conferences and workshops.

The coordination team is headed by the National Coordinator for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, who represents the Decade of Roma Inclusion during the year. The coordination team works closely with the Secretariat of the Decade, which has long ensured continuity and consistency in the development of the Decade of Roma Inclusion for the rotating presidency.

The coordination team consists of two employees from the Office of the Government. Ad-hoc internal redeployment is carried out in order to cover these positions; there is no increase in the number of positions at the Office of the Government. Financing and operations are covered by the existing space and resources of the Office of the Government.

Table 1: Planned Timetable of the Czech Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015

| Month | Dates | Activity | Objective/Purpose: | Target group | Priority |
|------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| June | 23-25 June | 18th ISC Meeting – Slovakia | Handover of the presidency to the Czech Republic at the International Steering Committee meeting in Slovakia | Member States of the Decade. | |
| | 28 June | Press Conference – Cultural event to launch the Czech Presidency of the Decade | Official launch in the Czech Republic | Czech civil society and experts, general public, Czech and foreign media, international institutions. | |
| July | | | | | |
| August | | | | | |
| September | 30 September / 1 October | 19th ISC Meeting – Prague: World Bank reports: “The Cost of Social Exclusion” | The Decade’s position at the international plenary and DecadeWatch. The role of the EU Roma Platform and Decade. Publication of the World Bank study: The Cost of Social Exclusion | Political representatives of the Decade. | Media Education Employment |
| October | 5 October | International Conference: Public policy evaluation on Roma inclusion – the use of disaggregated data for better policies | Sharing of good practice | Technical workshop for staff in the fields of education and the collection of ethnic data and Roma representation. | Education Roma children |
| November | 11-12 November | International Conference: Desegregating Education in the CEE, Good Practice and the Way Forward | Discussion on the theme of desegregated education, primary education, secondary education, local government liability. Follow-up on the output from Belgrade. Assessment of entry tests to schools. Possible ways of integrating children | Representatives from education ministries, local governments, Council on Education. 4–6 countries should form teams to ensure that this issue is properly represented. | Education Roma children |
| | November | National Seminar: Roma Women – empowerment | Seminar focused on empowerment of Roma women. | Roma women in the Czech Republic. | Roma women /mothers |
| December | December | National Cultural Event: Gypsy Spirit | Awarding good national practices and good policies | NGO, local government | Media |

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| January | | | | | |
| February | February | International Conference: Roma access to housing: Regional planning and local government | Focus on regional planning and local government Infrastructure and planning at local level Children-friendly environment Friendly policy for Roma families Children's education at local level, early development of children | European Commission, regional development, IPA funds, DG Enlargement. | Local government Housing Roma children |
| March | | | | | |
| April | April | International Conference: Roma women empowerment and women view on integration | New approach: "stocktaking" of approaches focusing on women under the Decade. How women would deal with the situation in education, employment, housing, health, etc. Follow up on workshop in the Czech Republic. | Roma women and female academics – current scholars and university students. | Roma women Local government |
| May | | | | | |
| June | June | 20th ISC Meeting – Prague: What women want, Manual with workshops and ideas | Official closing of the Czech Decade Presidency. Presidency conclusions. | Political representatives of the Decade. | |