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NATIONAL STRATEGY  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
BULGARIA  
FOR EQUALITY,  
INCLUSION AND  
PARTICIPATION  
OF THE ROMA (2021-2030)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030), hereinafter referred to as the Strategy, is a framework document that sets out guidelines for the implementation of policies for socio-economic inclusion and participation of the Roma. The strategy takes into account the lessons learned and builds on what has been achieved during the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020) (NSRBRI).

Deepening poverty and social exclusion are grounds for stepping up the measures to address the challenges still facing a number of vulnerable citizens, including those in the Roma community.

In this document, the term "Roma" is used as a general term<sup>1</sup>. It includes groups of people who have more or less similar, but not identical cultural and social characteristics. Their self-identification can also vary. In Bulgaria, a lasting tendency is for some of the people who are perceived by the surrounding population as Roma to identify themselves as Bulgarians, Turks, Romanians, etc. Not all Roma are subject to social exclusion, but all of them may be discriminated against and deprived of their rights<sup>2</sup>. The strategy applies a common and targeted integrated approach to vulnerable citizens of Roma origin and does not exclude support for disadvantaged people from other ethnic groups as well.

The strategy fits into the context of the development of European integration and inclusion policies, taking into account the guidelines set out in the Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of 7 October 2020 "Union for Equality: European Union (EU) Roma Strategic Framework on Equality, Inclusion and Participation", as well as its appendices, "Guidelines for Planning and Implementing National Roma Strategic Frameworks", and "Portfolio of Indicators". The strategy will contribute to the implementation of the EU Action Plan against Racism (2021-2025) and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). The EPSR sets out twenty basic principles and rights in support of well-functioning labor markets. The EPSR Action Plan sets out concrete actions to make these twenty principles of the pillar a reality. These actions require joint efforts with the active participation of social partners and the civil society. The EPSR Action Plan proposes three objectives at EU level in the fields of employment, skills and social protection, to be achieved by the end of the decade. These objectives are in line with the objectives of the United Nations (UN) for Sustainable Development by 2030 and set a common ambition for a strong social Europe.

The conducted analysis of factors, challenges, as well as the adopted approaches and measures for their addressing for the period of implementation of the NSRBRI until 2020 shows that the

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<sup>1</sup>Following the framework of the European Union (EU) for national Roma strategies, this document uses the term "Roma" as a summary for both Bulgarian citizens in vulnerable socio-economic situation who self-identify as Roma and for citizens in a similar situation perceived by the surrounding population as such, regardless of their self-identification; The term "Roma" is a general term that unites ethnic groups who have lived in Bulgaria for centuries, having a common history, similar linguistic, cultural and social characteristics, and who self-identify as Roma or are perceived by the majority as Roma (millet, Vlachs and others). In Bulgaria, Roma communities are divided into two main dialect communities, five main groups and eighty-eight subgroups. See "Classification of Roma groups and subgroups in Bulgaria", Roma in Bulgaria: Information Handbook, OSF, Sofia 2008.

<sup>2</sup>According to Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), "in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation".

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ambition to end the exclusion of Roma has not been achieved, but at the same time, indicates positive results and initial change in trends.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the vulnerability of isolated and marginalized Roma communities and highlighted the urgent need for a more effective and comprehensive policy response at national and European level. The strategy reaffirms the country's long-term commitment to cooperate with all stakeholders to address existing problems and challenges for Roma at risk of being exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Strategy contains a vision, goals and priorities to establish an integrated approach in the implementation of Roma inclusion and participation policies; it contributes to the coherence and complementarity between sectoral policies and strategies<sup>3</sup> which help to promote equality, inclusion and participation.

In order to achieve the long-term goal of ensuring effective equality and reducing disparities between the Roma and the rest of the population, **the Strategy sets three horizontal objectives in the field of equality, inclusion and participation, and four sectoral objectives in the field of education, health, housing and employment.**

The leading strategic document in the development of the Strategy is the National Development Program: Bulgaria 2030 ("NDP: Bulgaria 2030")<sup>4</sup> which defines the vision and general objectives of development policies in all sectors of government. The strategy contributes to achieving the objectives of the "NDP: Bulgaria 2030" with an emphasis on the implementation of Objective I. Accelerated economic development and Objective III. Reducing inequalities.

The focus of this strategic document on these goals is related to the findings that despite the progress made in improving the standard of living after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the Bulgarian economy's growth is not sufficiently inclusive to help reduce social inequalities and overcome social exclusion. Inequalities in income and living conditions continue to grow. The growing demands on the competence of employees and the peculiarities of new professions can become an obstacle to the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, if the currently observed educational and other deficits are not addressed in early childhood. The deepening regional disparities in the development of all socio-economic spheres and areas are an essential circumstance for the development of negative trends.

Achieving equity and inclusion requires increased use and better targeting of resources, as well as the participation and partnership of all stakeholders at all levels of government in all sectors. Close cooperation between the European and national levels is particularly important.

Policies for Roma equality, inclusion and participation are on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which places a special focus on vulnerable people/groups at risk of marginalization and social exclusion. Implementation of the priorities and objectives of the Strategy in the area of employment, education, health and housing policy will contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular: Goal 1 "End poverty in all its forms,

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<sup>3</sup>Strategic and operational national documents of responsible institutions: Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice; Commission for Protection against Discrimination, etc. in implementation of the national policy for improving the quality of life and for guaranteeing equal opportunities for Bulgarian citizens.

<sup>4</sup>The National Development Program BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019) is published at <https://www.minfin.bg/bg/1394>

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everywhere", Goal 2 "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture", Goal 3 "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages", Goal 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", Goal 7 "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all" and Goal 10 "Reduce inequalities within and among countries".

The Strategy is in compliance with the **UN international instruments** in the area of human rights of persons belonging to minority groups to which Bulgaria has acceded and has committed to apply<sup>5</sup>.

The strategy is within the context of development of **European policies on the integration of the Roma community**, taking into account the guidelines provided in directives, recommendations, resolutions, communications, conclusions, and other documents of the **European union**.<sup>6</sup>

The document takes into account the commitments in the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**, including in line with the OSCE Action plan for improvement of the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area adopted in 2003.

The strategy also takes into account the Framework Convention for protection of national minorities of the **Council of Europe**. It is in compliance with the recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the adoption of an approach for initiation of positive action toward the Roma community, whereas it is especially important that this happens in the context of transparency in its implementation, with the public consent and strict adherence to democratic principles within the country. It takes into account the guidelines of the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion 2020-2025 of the Council of Europe; it also takes into account the Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2020)357 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, as well Resolution CM/ResCMN(2021)1 of 13.01.2021 on Bulgaria's implementation of the Framework convention for the protection of national minorities.

The main principle in the development of the Strategy is the partnership and broad consultations with all stakeholders. Their participation at each stage of the document preparation process aims to reflect the real needs and significant problems of the community directly related to

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<sup>5</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (effective for the Republic of Bulgaria from 1970); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 (effective for the Republic of Bulgaria from 1970); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1966 (effective for the Republic of Bulgaria from 1992); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 (effective for the Republic of Bulgaria from 1982); Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 r. (effective for the Republic of Bulgaria from 1991), the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 "Transforming our world" and the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals included in it.

<sup>6</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin; Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation; Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law; the Charter of Fundamental Rights; Resolution of the European Parliament of 28.04.2005 on the situation of the Roma in the European Union; Resolution of the European Parliament of 01.06.2006 on the situation of Roma women in the European Union; Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment {SEC(2008)2172} of July 2008; Conclusions of the Council of the EU of 8.12.2008 on the inclusion of the Roma; Resolution of the European Parliament of 11.03.2009 on the Social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labor market in the EU (2008/2137/INI); the General principles for Roma inclusion adopted by the EU Council on 8 June 2009, taking into account the need to step up the efforts of governments to achieve visible results of integration actions with regard to the Roma community, with the respective European policy instruments and institutional mechanisms, programs, and initiatives; the results of actions within the framework of the European platform for Roma inclusion; the European summit meetings for the Roma; the Recommendation of the Council of 9 December 2013 on effective measures for Roma inclusion in member states; Resolution of the European parliament of 12 February 2019 on the need for a strengthened post-2020 strategic EU framework for national Roma inclusion strategies and stepping up the fight against anti-gypsyism (2019/2509(RSP); Report of the European Parliament of 17 September 2020 on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies: Combating negative attitudes towards people with Romani background in Europe (2020/2011(INI); Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01).

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the socio-economic development of the country, as well as to cover all possible solutions.

This document is adopted for the period up to 2030 inclusive.

The operational implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) is carried out through short-term national action plans (NAPs), the first of which is for the period until 2023.

After 2030, the Strategy can be continued, supplemented or amended, depending on the results achieved, the existing political, social and economic realities and new challenges.

### **Consultative process conducted in the development of the document**

The following principles, which guarantee the success of the application and implementation of the strategy, were central in the process of elaboration of the National Strategy:

Partnership and teamwork to reach consensus, to share and communicate information, knowledge and ideas.

Coherence and coordination among all stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, institutions, etc. involved in the consultation process. The principle also applies to linking with strategic documents and plans at different hierarchical levels.

Publicity, transparency and civic participation – the Strategy was developed on a broad public basis and has been discussed and consulted at numerous forums, working groups and others.

The process of developing the strategy is structured into the following stages.

#### **The first stage of the consultation process (November 2019 – December 2020) includes:**

- Preparation of a Report and Analysis of the Progress of the Republic of Bulgaria with regard to the main priorities for social inclusion of the Roma, according to available public documents 2012-2019, by a team from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS).

#### **The second stage of the consultation process (June 2020 – March 2021) includes:**

- Sending the report prepared by BAS to the horizontal ministries so that the analysis in it can be taken into account in the process of preparing the Strategy.

- Preparation of a draft framework of a Strategy by The Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers, which is the National Point of Contact (NPC), including: the main elements of a strategic document; the recommendations from the Report prepared by BAS; feedback from the ministries, as well as the guidelines given in working order during the regular NPC meetings in Brussels, presented by the Directorate-General (DG) "Justice and Consumers" of the EC. The draft Strategy was sent for proposals and discussion to the members of the Commission for Implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020) (part of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers). The Commission was part of the entire consultation process.

- Conducting 13 meetings within the project "T.E.A.M. 2– Together we Achieve More", funded by the European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers, under the European Union's "Rights, Equality and Citizenship" Program (2014-2020), with the participation of: representatives of ministries, district administrations, local authorities, mediators, district experts on ethnic and integration issues, teachers, representatives of the academic community, Roma activists,

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representatives of civil society organizations from all over the country;

- Conducting of 6 meetings organized by the NPC; Commission for Protection against Discrimination and Civil Society Organizations;

- Conducting of public consultations (3 rounds) through the public portal for public consultations [www.strategy.bg](http://www.strategy.bg); conducted consultative process on the website of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers (NCCEII) [www.nccedi.government.bg](http://www.nccedi.government.bg);

- Establishing, by order No P-32/05.03.2021 of the Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the NCCEII, of an interdepartmental expert working group with the participation of representatives of institutions and civil society organizations with the task to record the received proposals and comments within all meetings, consultations, discussions. The working group actively exchanges information by email, and the proposed draft Strategy incorporates a significant part of the proposals of the civil sector representatives, which are in line with European policies and national priorities.

**The third stage of the consultation process (April 2021) includes:**

- Discussion of the National Strategy at the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues.

**At a later stage (July-August 2021)**, organizations working on Roma issues – the Roma Integration Network and the Integro Association and the Intelligence Coalition – provided suggestions and comments on the Strategy and NAP, which were discussed with the responsible institutions. At this stage of the consultation process, a section entitled "Empowerment and Equal Opportunities for Roma Women" was added to the Strategy.

**In early 2022**, at the initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of the NCCEII, launched a new stage of the consultation process in order to prepare documents that reflect current challenges at national and local level in the field of integration policy;

- Conducting an online meeting, at the initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of the NCCEII (February 2022), with representatives of institutions and civil society organizations involved in the working group in the previous stages of consultation;

- Bilateral meetings organized by the NCCEII Secretariat, with institutions (online or in person) - review of the objectives and measures in the National Action Plan in relation to the proposals received from the civil society sector.

- Publication of the drafts of the National Strategy and the National Action Plan in the public portal for public consultations [www.strategy.bg](http://www.strategy.bg);

- Submission of documents for approval by the Council of Ministers.

## II. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The data provided in the section are from the European Parliament Resolution of 17 September 2020 on the implementation of national strategies for Roma integration: combating negative attitudes towards people of Roma origin in Europe (2020/2011 (INI). The Resolution also uses data from the Second Survey on the Situation of Minorities and Discrimination in the European Union – Roma – Selected Results, Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union, 2016 (EU MIDIS II) 2016.

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The European Commission (EC) published in 2018 a Report on the Interim Evaluation of the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Strategies (2011 EU Framework)<sup>8</sup>.

The assessment showed that the ambition of the 2011 EU Framework to "end the isolation of the Roma" has not been met. The Commission's evaluation report concluded, *inter alia*, that "the evaluation showed that the 2011 EU Framework is the beginning of a process which, despite many limitations and given the large-scale task, shows positive results and initial changes in trends." This clearly shows its added value for the EU, in particular by putting Roma inclusion high on the EU agenda and in national programs and by mobilizing EU policy, legal and financial instruments. Without the 2011 EU Framework, Roma inclusion would have enjoyed more modest political commitment, less financial support and attention at national level<sup>9</sup>.

It is further emphasized that "while some tangible, albeit insufficient, results have been achieved at the initial phase, the assessment shows that the overall process needs to be strengthened and better focused, with an emphasis on improved political commitment, the introduction of specific measurable goals and rigorous monitoring and more effective implementation, supported by sufficient funding and participation management systems"<sup>10</sup>.

According to a study by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) EU-MIDIS II<sup>11</sup> in 2016, 80% of the Roma population in nine EU Member States with the largest Roma population, incl. Bulgaria, lives below the poverty line in the country.

**Poverty** is both a result and a factor of anti-Roma attitudes<sup>12</sup>, exclusion from education, employment, health care and housing.

The main goal of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy is: for 20 million people, including the Roma population, to be lifted out of poverty; given that the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased by 3.1 million between 2008 and 2017. The EU is far from achieving its target in the Europe 2020 program of reducing that number by 20 million by 2020.<sup>13</sup>

According to EU-MIDIS II survey, 61% of EU citizens believe that **discrimination** against the Roma population is widespread in their country. There are still deep-rooted, fixed and structural, and often institutional and administrative **anti-Roma attitudes** at all levels of European society, and they are a daily major obstacle to achieving the full potential of the Roma population as EU citizens fully enjoying fundamental rights, social inclusion and equality in all spheres of life, including housing, education, health care and employment<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 {SWD (2018) 480 final}; COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Report on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 {COM(2018) 785 final}.

<sup>9</sup> COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Analytical report accompanying the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Union for Equality: EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, and the accompanying proposal for a revised Council Recommendation on national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion and participation {COM (2020) 620 final} - {COM (2020) 621 final}, Bulgarian translation, p.10, published on <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/335>.

<sup>10</sup> COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Analytical report accompanying the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL Union for Equality: EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, and the accompanying proposal for a revised Council Recommendation on national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion and participation {COM (2020) 620 final} - {COM (2020) 621 final}, Bulgarian translation, p.10, published on <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/335>.

<sup>11</sup>Second survey on the situation of minorities and discrimination in the European Union – Roma – Selected results, Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union, 2016 (EU MIDIS II) 2016.

<sup>12</sup> The Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma (2021/C 93/01) adopted the term "anti-Roma attitudes" as a translation of "antigypsyism";

<sup>13</sup> European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies: combating negative attitudes towards people with Romani background in Europe (2020/2011(INI))

<sup>14</sup> European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies: combating negative attitudes towards people with Romani background in Europe (2020/2011(INI))

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The European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the implementation of national strategies for Roma integration: Combating negative attitudes towards Roma people in Europe (2020/2011 (INI)) states that 43% of the Roma population are discriminated against when trying to buy or rent **housing** and are not sufficiently aware of their rights with regard to equality.

Limited access to housing and utilities such as clean water and sanitation has a negative impact on education, employment and health outcomes, and adversely affects social inclusion in general.

Life expectancy and **health status** of the Roma population remain significantly lower than for other citizens in all European countries. Life expectancy at birth in the EU is 76 years for men and 82 for women, and for the Roma population these projections are 10 years lower. The infant mortality rate in the EU is 4.3 per thousand live births, and there is evidence that the percentage is much higher among Roma communities.

The share of Roma who do not complete primary education is still high. The number of Roma who drop out of school early and do not complete secondary education is also significant. Only half of Roma children receive pre-school education or attend kindergarten, and very few of them continue school after completing compulsory education. Only 21% of Roma women and 25% of Roma men between the ages of 16 and 24 have completed secondary education (ISCED3) or higher education. In 2019, 68% of Roma children dropped out of school early, despite the target of 10% of the previous EU Framework 2011 for National Roma Integration Strategies and the EU 2020 Strategy.

18% of Roma children proceeded to a higher level of **education**, and the percentage of absenteeism and early school leaving among Roma students was significantly higher than among other categories of students.

The Roma population faces discrimination in **employment initiatives**. In 2015, the levels of paid employment of 43% for the Roma population aged 20-64 were well below the EU average of 70%, given that the situation of young people is significantly worse, with 63% Roma aged 16 to 24 not employed, working or studying, compared to the EU average of 12%.

72% of young women of Roma origin are not employed, studying or training, compared to 55% of Roma youth. 43% of Roma men and 22% of Roma women have some form of paid employment. The European Pillar of Social Rights has highlighted the fundamental right of everyone to work, as well as the strengthening of social rights as a condition for a positive impact on the lives of people, including the Roma.

A large part of the Roma population living on the brink of extreme poverty is forced to accept low-paid jobs, while others are forced to survive thanks to employment in the informal economy, which greatly increases the likelihood of exploitation and abuse of their labor rights.

The **Roma culture** is a part of European culture and European values. The Roma have contributed to the EU's cultural wealth, diversity, economy and overall history. The active participation of Roma individual or group performers in the creation of products of European culture is proof of the potential for the implementation of inclusive and integration policies in other spheres of public, economic and political life.

With clear goals and a renewed commitment to real change over the next decade, **the European Commission is proposing minimum goals for 2030** based on the progress made under the previous framework.



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They include:

- at least halving the proportion of Roma who are discriminated against;
- doubling the proportion of Roma who report cases in which they have been discriminated against;
- at least halving the poverty gap between the Roma and the population as a whole;
- at least halving the gap in early childhood education;
- halving the share of Roma children attending segregated schools in Member States with significant Roma populations;
- at least halving the employment gap and the employment gap between women and men;
- at least halving the difference in average life expectancy;
- reducing by at least one third the difference in extremely poor housing conditions;
- ensuring that at least 95% of Roma have access to tap water.

The series of common characteristics and minimum commitments proposed by the European Commission for all national strategic frameworks for Roma outline a common approach and aim to help Member States develop meaningful and effective national strategic frameworks for the Roma. At the same time, the EC points out that the Member States have the main competences in the areas covered by the Framework and supports the application of a differentiated approach in policy development.

### III. NATIONAL CONTEXT – ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS AND THE SITUATION<sup>15</sup>

Many Roma suffer from extreme poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, inadequate housing, poor health and well-being. Social exclusion reinforces prejudice against the Roma, making their marginalization socially acceptable. Certain categories of the Roma community, such as Roma women, young people and the elderly, remain particularly disadvantaged. First, they are discriminated against as Roma, and then again, including by members of the Roma community. Roma women and young people continue to lag behind Roma men and the women in the general population in key areas such as health, education and employment.

A study by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency – FRA (2016), which includes Bulgaria, shows that Roma women have much lower employment rates than Roma men – 16% compared to 34%. The percentage of young Roma aged 16-24 who do not work, study or receive additional training as a main activity in Bulgaria is (distributed by gender): 79% for young Roma women and 52% for young Roma men (65% average rate for Roma in Bulgaria, with an average rate for Bulgaria of 22% and for the EU of 11,5%) (FRA, EUROSTAT, 2016). There is a risk that, due to the medium-term socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities will increase further from a strategic perspective. Distance and digital education, for example, is often inaccessible to Roma

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<sup>15</sup>The conclusions embedded in the section are based on the analysis in the Comprehensive Report on the Assessment of Roma Integration Policies in Bulgaria in the period 2012-2019, including recommendations on the target areas of public policies, incl. anti-discrimination, gender equality and interaction with civil society, prepared by a team of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The report is available at <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/356>.

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children from disadvantaged families, which exacerbates inequalities in education, which will inevitably lead to exclusion from all spheres of individual and group social activity.

According to World Bank forecasts,<sup>16</sup> by 2050, Bulgaria will have the fastest shrinking working age population in the world. According to the bank's report,<sup>17</sup> Bulgaria is on the verge of becoming the country with the largest decline in people of working age. The bank's experts note that the aging population requires a change in the labor market, education and health care. More flexible working conditions need to be promoted, as well as adapting of workplaces to the needs of the older workforce. According to the same report, the share of Roma workers will also increase: the Roma now represent between 9% and 19% of new entrants to the labor market.

The level of educational characteristics of the population is a key prerequisite for the quality of human resources.

In recent years in Bulgaria<sup>18</sup>, there is a steady trend of improvement in the educational structure of the population, with an increase in the share of higher education graduates and a decrease in the number of people with primary and lower education. The National Representative Survey "Educational Achievements of Roma Communities in Bulgaria" commissioned by the Trust for Social Alternative (TSA) Foundation, conducted by Global Metrics in 2019<sup>19</sup> shows that:

- An increasing proportion of Roma believe that young people in the community should stay in the education system for as long as possible. "This refers first to completion of secondary and then to completion of higher education";
- The share of Roma children attending school has increased in all age groups compared to 2011;
- The share of Roma higher-education graduates is twice as high among those who have attended kindergarten;
- In 2019, the share of employed Roma was twice as high as in 2011.

Despite the improvement of the educational structure of the population, some challenges still remain, as well as alarming signals regarding the quality of education. The share of Roma students attending schools with mixed ethnicities has almost halved. The share of students in schools with a concentration of students of Roma origin is increasing – almost every second child of Roma ethnic origin is enrolled in a school where Roma predominate<sup>20</sup>.

The processes for ensuring equal access to quality and inclusive education and for educational integration of children and pupils of Roma origin are closely linked and are accompanied by inherited negative factors and new ones, further complicating their implementation and effectiveness. The presence of so-called "primarily segregated" educational institutions, existing negative attitudes and stereotypes towards "difference", conservative traditions that underplay the importance and value of education, the low educational status of parents have a negative impact. These processes are further aggravated by: the increased dependence on socio-

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<sup>16</sup>National Development Program BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019).

<sup>17</sup>Analysis of the World Bank on the Development of Bulgaria since 2013

<sup>18</sup>National Development Program BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019).

<sup>19</sup>The national representative survey "Educational achievements of Roma communities in Bulgaria", commissioned by TSA, conducted by Global Metrics in 2019.

<sup>20</sup> The national representative survey "Educational achievements of Roma communities in Bulgaria", commissioned by TSA, conducted by Global Metrics in 2019.

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economic factors, the demographic development of settlements, the expanding process of so-called secondary segregation of educational institutions. Their impact has different dimensions, degree and specificity of manifestation in different settlements, which proves the need for clear, differentiated measures, reproduced by local authorities and supported by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES).<sup>21</sup>

The results of the 2014 FRA survey "Education: the situation of the Roma in 11 EU Member States, Roma Survey"<sup>22</sup> show that children living in neighborhoods with a large share of Roma households are more likely to study in schools/classes with a high proportion of Roma children. The concentration of Roma in certain residential areas may also be a cause of school segregation. Children usually attend schools near their home, and therefore, the ethnic composition of school classes often reflects the ethnic composition of the neighborhood. Although it can be expected that housing segregation can be transformed into educational segregation, surprisingly, the results of the study show that the opposite is not always true: living in a non-segregated environment does not necessarily lead to integrated education.

Although the share of Roma living in mixed areas and attending segregated educational institutions is lower than that of Roma living in segregated housing, this share still remains high.

There are cases in which Roma children living in mixed or predominantly non-Roma neighborhoods find themselves in classes where most or all of the students are Roma. Therefore, housing desegregation increases the chances of school desegregation, but it is not enough in itself to prevent *de facto* segregation.

Municipalities should take action to prevent potential secondary segregation. The municipality is the most important institution that can deal with this threat, the school alone cannot stop the outflow of non-Roma students, especially in an environment with strong tendencies towards segregation.

The performance of students of Roma and Turkish ethnicity shows a significant lag behind ethnic Bulgarian children, equal to 3 educational years in reading and 2 educational years in mathematics and science. Recent studies<sup>23</sup> show more and more clearly that first-class, affordable and accessible in terms of distance early childhood education and care (ECEC), early childhood health and social services are at the heart of good health, well-being, development and lifelong learning for every person. In the short and long term, the provision of quality ECEC has a clear positive impact on success in education, on the labor market, tackling poverty and social exclusion. In addition, investing in early childhood development reduces inequalities in achievement and improves health outcomes. Although programs for parental support, home visits and inclusive, quality education and early childhood care benefit all children, these and other early childhood investments are particularly beneficial for children who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including Roma children, whose families both belong to a minority and have low incomes. In order to maximize impact, early childhood care providers must actively engage and build relationships of trust with all parents as equal partners, united by the common goal of comprehensive care and early learning opportunities in both service facilities and in the everyday home environment of young

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<sup>21</sup>National Program Supporting Municipalities for Implementation of Activities for Educational Desegregation <https://www.mon.bg/bg/100740>.

<sup>22</sup> [Education: the situation of the Roma in 11 EU Member States, Roma Survey – Focus Data](#), FRA, 2016

<sup>23</sup>Report "Early Childhood in Roma Communities in Bulgaria" (RECI+), prepared by the Open Society Institute – Sofia 2020

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children. Although the decline in early school leaving and the increasing participation of Roma children in compulsory education have been positive trends in Bulgaria in recent years, a number of barriers continue to prevent Roma children from equal access to and participation in ECEC and other services relevant to early childhood. Children in smaller settlements grow up with an extreme lack of access to health, education and social services. They do not have access to a speech therapist, rehabilitator, treatment, etc. In general, there are no accessible kindergartens in rural and remote areas, near Roma neighborhoods in cities. The quality of the ECEC provided is hampered by the lack of training of educators and other staff in areas such as inclusive education, early childhood development, ethnic diversity and others. Special attention should be paid to increasing parental competence in the implementation of policies for ECD (early childhood development), which occurs in a family environment and requires the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills of parents. Therefore, the services aimed at increasing parental competence are of utmost importance, as well as the policies for creating various forms of quality services for the development and education of children close to the family environment and the option to work with parents.

In order to improve the results of the work of the Mechanism, the activities of the coverage teams and of all involved institutions at all levels, but especially at regional and school level (including kindergarten), should be aimed at adapting the interaction on the one hand to the introduced emergency epidemic situation and on the other hand - to the regional specifics. Measures in this regard should be focused on prevention and effective counteraction to the risk of dropping out of the education system in a situation of distance learning in an electronic environment and at the same time - on preventing interruption of the return of children and students to the education system and additional measures for their effective inclusion in the educational process. It will be important to link the actions of school teams with educational mediators, social workers, leaders of local communities and other local resources. The success of these measures will be determined by their continuity, sustainability and upgrading.

Providing "quality education in a multicultural environment" also encounters problems in its implementation. The support for the placement of children in mixed schools and kindergartens has been clearly and unambiguously increased and from 387 children in 2014, the supported children in 2018 reached 3,468.

The established National Standard for Intercultural Education<sup>24</sup> is in line with relevant international standards and the training of educators and principals in this regard should be continued and further developed.

In the field of education, progress has been made with regard to the establishment and operation of local-area and sheltered kindergartens and schools, which are extremely necessary in terms of social integration and inclusive education of population of Roma identity, the population perceived by others as such, and the population living in small and remote settlements. One of the most significant achievements in supporting equal access to quality education is the achieved broad range of children involved in trainings for learning Bulgarian, for whom it is not their mother tongue. Language integration is the best possible way for successful subsequent socialization in the labor market and is the key to overcoming segregation and concentration of poverty based on ethnic characteristics. The policy for all-day organization of the school day for pupils from 1st to 8th grade

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<sup>24</sup>State educational standard for civil, health, environmental and intercultural education, adopted by Ordinance No 13 of 21.09.2016, promulgated. – SG, issue 80 of 11.10.2016, in force since 11.10.2016, issued by the Minister of Education and Science.

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of local-area schools is sustainable and successful, as it overcomes some shortcomings in families without educational capacity to support children in education, as well as problems related to the concentration of poverty in some parts of the country.

Measures for training of illiterate people are extremely appropriate as a key to their labor and social integration in society, work with parents, teacher training, validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through informal learning and self-study.

In order to assess the impact and long-term consequences of the implementation of certain measures (especially in the field of education), a certain period of time must pass, covering the entire school educational cycle. For example, for cohorts (generations) that started pre-school in 2016, it will be most relevant to make an assessment after 2030, when their entire school education cycle will be completed. This, in turn, sets the task of developing appropriate monitoring tools and methods to assess the effectiveness of policies and activities and to propose the necessary changes.

Further refinement of the procedures for identification of target groups is needed; the measures should be oriented toward solving specific complex problems, clearly defined through local communities and with a preliminary assessment of needs and planning of costs; specifying prevention models and approaches to ensure coverage; working to build an understanding of good practice; focusing on overcoming prejudice and discrimination based on aporophobia and xenophobia, which are key causes of segregation in education, employment and living conditions.

In recent years, the average life expectancy in Bulgaria<sup>25</sup> has followed the general EU growth trend and reached 74.8 years in 2017, compared to 72.7 years in 2007, but remains the lowest in the EU.

According to Eurostat data for 2018, life expectancy at birth in the EU is: 78.2 years for men and 83.7 for women. For the Roma population, these predictions are 10 years lower.

At the same time, the country still has the highest mortality rate within the EU, with a further increase in the indicator over the last ten years, where in 2017, the mortality rate reached 15.5 ‰ (compared to 10.3 ‰ on average for the EU).

Infant mortality has shown a steady downward trend in recent years, reaching 6.4‰ in 2017, but remains almost twice as high as the EU average (3.6‰)<sup>26</sup>, still particularly high in regions with compact ethnic minorities and marginalized communities. According to NSI data, for 2020, the districts with the highest infant mortality are Sliven (11.7 ‰), Montana (10.8 ‰). Veliko Tarnovo (9 ‰), and in Sofia the indicator amounts to 2.4 ‰<sup>27</sup>

Raising the health culture and awareness of the population is an important step in realizing the need to use health care and services. Measures for conducting interviews, information campaigns for feeding and raising children, ways to prevent unwanted and early pregnancies, family planning and campaigns on the benefits of immunizations and the motivation for their regular application, according to the National Immunization Calendar, etc. are appropriate, but there is no information on the procedures for identification of the target groups.

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<sup>25</sup>National Development Program: BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019)

<sup>26</sup> National Development Program: BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019)

<sup>27</sup> National Statistical Institute,

<https://nrpcsystem.government.bg/SitePages/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0.aspx>

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The relatively low participation of Roma on the labor market leads to low incomes, which is associated with limited access to health services. Conducting of preventive examinations and tests of persons of Roma origin without health insurance and those who don't readily have access to medical institutions, through the 21 mobile offices provided, is assessed as having a positive impact.

The efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH) are focused on expanding the network of health mediators appointed on a delegated budget. The appointment of health mediators in target municipalities is a process coordinated by the respective municipal administrations. This creates a risk that some neighborhoods will be left without health mediators. In order to overcome the existing risks of uneven distribution, Ordinance No 1/19.07.2020 of the Minister of Health on the requirements for the activity of health mediators was adopted.

The long-term unemployed are estimated to be a quarter of the total uninsured population. People who can afford social security and health insurance, but choose not to pay it, represent another quarter of the entire uninsured population.

Citizens without a valid ID card are also not insured. This problem affects the Roma population in particular. It is estimated that nearly a third of the Roma population does not have a valid ID card (Institute for Market Economics 2018). Together, these groups represent about 16% of the total population in the Burgas, Varna and Dobrich regions. Although additional funds are transferred to the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) to cover some preventive activities and active treatment of uninsured persons, data shows that such persons are more likely to skip primary care or seek help only after their health has deteriorated. The shortage of medical professionals, especially nurses and general practitioners, hinders the development of primary care and the provision of services.<sup>28</sup> The uneven distribution of health facilities, medical professionals and services across the country also hampers access, with rural areas often overlooked, while an oversupply of services is present in larger cities. This, once again, leads to inaccessible health care for members of various social groups.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, a deterioration of the situation of marginalized groups of the Roma population is observed in overcrowded areas and settlements.

Support and medical care are needed to limit the spread of the virus, given that the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis threaten to hit most seriously and exacerbate existing inequalities in all priority areas of inclusion of the Roma population.

In terms of employment, according to data from the National Statistical Institute, the level of economic activity in the country is growing steadily and reached a historic high in 2019, with the reached level of 73.2% for people aged 15-64 still lagging behind the average level of 74.0% in the EU. In the different age groups, the biggest lag behind the EU was among young people (15-24 years), reaching 17.8 percentage points (41.7% – average for the EU, and 23.9% – in Bulgaria). The difference in the main contingent in the labor force (persons aged 25-54) is significantly lower – 85.8% of the population in the country is economically active, compared to 86.1% in the EU. One in four with a secondary education and one in ten with higher education are economically inactive. This means that there are significantly fewer people excluded from the labor market among the highly educated.

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<sup>28</sup>Health Profile of the Country 2019, State of Health in the EU, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, Brussels

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In 2019, the unemployment rate in Bulgaria dropped to 4.2%, compared to the EU average of 6.3%. Despite the positive trend, however, the majority of the unemployed in the country (56.7% in 2019) remained out of employment for more than a year, and every third unemployed person failed to find a job for more than 2 years. Long periods of absence from work are associated with the loss of work skills and habits and significantly reduce the chances of individuals to reintegrate into employment. Persons without qualification and specialty form the largest group (59%) in the structure of the unemployed, and a little over two thirds of the persons in the group have primary and lower education. In territorial terms, the unemployment rate also varies widely, for example: 2.3% in the Southwest region to 10.8% in the Northwest region.

Bulgaria is one of the EU Member States with the highest share of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are neither in education, nor in training, nor in employment (NEETs). Given an average level of 10.1% for the EU in 2019, the value of the indicator for the country amounts to 13.7%. According to a study by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the majority of NEETs in the country have secondary or lower education, live mainly in small towns and more than half of them belong to minority ethnic groups.

Four risk factors have been identified which form the group of NEETs – family environment, education which is insufficiently aligned with the needs of students, lack of appropriate qualifications and lack of motivation for development.

In most regions in the country, policies for Roma activation achieve good results. Mediators help a lot in this, and there should be more of them in the regional centers with a large concentration of Roma population. The more serious development of services for professional orientation and the achievement of a sufficient number of successfully developed individual cases could help both the youth and the Roma mediators in their activation efforts.<sup>29</sup>

Youth activation policies successfully identify groups with the most significant problems – the Roma and young people with primary and lower education, but so far, efforts for their inclusion in the labor market have had moderate success.<sup>30</sup>

For the observed period<sup>31</sup>, there is a decrease in the number of registered Roma in Labor Office Directorates (LOD) in the country, which is explained by the effectiveness of the implemented programs and measures, as well as the overall economic development of the country. In addition, many local communities still refuse to identify themselves as Roma at the LOD.

There is seasonality in employment related to cross-border labor migration.

The trend of urbanization persists<sup>32</sup> – an increase of the relative share of the urban population and decrease of the population in villages. At the end of 2017, 5,181,755 people lived in the cities, or 73.5% of the total population (compared to 70.7% in 2007), and 1,868,279 people lived in villages, or 26.5% of the country's population.

After 2007, the population in cities decreased significantly more slowly (by 4.1%) than in the villages (by 16.5%), which led to an increase in its relative share<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> *Evaluation of NEETs in Bulgaria and policy measures for their effective integration. IME 2019*

<sup>30</sup> *Evaluation of NEETs in Bulgaria and policy measures for their effective integration. IME 2019*

<sup>31</sup> Comprehensive Report on the Assessment of Roma Integration Policies in Bulgaria in the period 2012-2019, including recommendations on the target areas of public policies, incl. anti-discrimination, gender equality and interaction with civil society, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Science.

<sup>32</sup> National Development Program: BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country after its accession to the EU (May 2019).

<sup>33</sup> National Development Program: BULGARIA 2030, Appendix 2 to the NDP 2030 – Analysis of the socio-economic development of the country

The concentration of population in the 7 big cities of the country and the depopulation of large territories in the country is a trend that leads to deepening regional and territorial disparities in the demographic – and hence in socio-economic – development of Bulgarian regions. Dynamic urban processes confront cities with many economic, environmental, climate and social challenges and problems.

According to data from the National Statistical Institute, from the 2011 census and housing stock, the Roma are territorially distributed in all districts. The largest share is in the district of Montana – 12.7% and Sliven – 11.8%, followed by Dobrich – 8.8%, Yambol – 8.5%, with a total of 4.9% for the country.

### **Ethnic poverty**

According to the Indicators of Poverty and Social Inclusion published by the National Statistical Institute<sup>34</sup>, in 2020, the highest relative share of the poor was among the persons who self-identified as members of the Roma ethnic group – 66.2%, and the lowest – among the persons who self-identified as members of the Bulgarian ethnic group – 17.8%.

Poverty by ethnicity (BG-SILC 2020)

Distribution of persons in households by ethnicity and risk of poverty

	Poor	Not poor
Total for the country	23.8	76.2
Bulgarian	17.8	82.2
Turkish	29.5	70.5
<b>Roma</b>	<b>66.2</b>	<b>33.8</b>
Others	12.7	87.3

There are significant differences in the distribution of the poor from different ethnic groups according to their economic activity.

Among the poor of the Bulgarian and Turkish ethnic groups, pensioners predominate (56.6% and 36.5%, respectively), while the Roma ethnic group has the highest relative share of working people (31.9%). Regarding the unemployed, the relative share of the poor unemployed is the highest among the Roma ethnic group - 31.6%, compared to 16.5% of the Turkish ethnic group and 10.4% of the Bulgarian ethnic group.

According to BG-SILC 2020, the level of education has a strong influence on the risk of poverty regardless of ethnicity - in all three main ethnic groups, as the level of education increases, the risk of poverty for workers decreases. The risk of poverty for people with primary and no education is 31 times higher than the risk of poverty for people with higher education for the Bulgarian ethnic group and 11 times for the Turkish ethnic group. Among the persons who identified themselves as Roma - nearly 70.0% with primary and no education are poor, while among persons with higher education there is not a single poor person.

The spatial separation of the Roma community continues, both in urban and rural regions, leading to social isolation of their inhabitants, to deteriorating housing conditions, to problems with building and maintenance of infrastructure and hygiene, to transport problems and difficulties in

after its accession to the EU (May 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Indicators of poverty and social inclusion in 2020, BG-SILC 2019, National Statistical Institute, 2020



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providing services.

The problem of illegal construction, inconsistent with building regulations, high population density and overcrowding of homes remains unresolved. This puts a high percentage of Roma households at constant risk of removal of their only homes and turning them into homeless people. The problem with the lack of legal measures to provide alternative housing in cases of removal of an only home remains.

Projects and activities reported as "Roma-centric" are not directly related to improving living conditions in compact neighborhoods, nor to improving the social environment and street infrastructure in them, but have to do with general administrative activities at municipal level and improving the urban environment and educational institutions outside neighborhoods with a concentration of poverty. Special attention should also be paid to spatial segregation, which is a multidimensional phenomenon of housing and social differentiation that occurs for various reasons. Special attention should be paid to mapping and tracking of changes in the territorial scope of Roma neighborhoods; the characteristics of models of spatial segregation, their structure and spatial organization need to be studied.

The Recommendation of the Council of the European Union adopted on 12 March 2021 on equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma after 2020 states that special attention must be paid to combating discrimination and preventing it, including by combating antigypsyism<sup>35</sup> – a specific form of racism against the Roma, rooted in the way society as a whole perceives and treats them, based on stereotypes and negative attitudes, which can sometimes be unintentional or unconscious.

During the period of implementation of the NSRBRI 2012-2020, the public institutions – administration, prosecutor's office, judiciary, police authorities, Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) conducted a number of trainings to increase their institutional capacity to recognize anti-Roma discrimination and stigmatization<sup>36</sup>.

A number of manifestations of hate speech against the Roma in the public sphere continue to be observed, in most cases combined with false news. Hostile speeches delivered by politicians and public figures who shape and influence public discourse from the position of power and public prestige they possess are particularly dangerous for social cohesion. Hate speech online is not fundamentally different from similar expressions found offline. However, the flexibility of the online space, the anonymity it allows, its potential to reach a large audience quickly and the relatively low barriers to entry pose particular challenges, unique to its content and the manners of its regulation. Both online and offline, disseminated hate speech against the Roma requires future analysis and further decisive action to find new ways to combat such rhetoric, such as alternative messages and fact-checking technologies.

According to the EU-MIDIS II FRA survey conducted in 9 EU Member States, the proportion of respondents who felt discriminated against on the basis of Roma origin in the last 12 months prior

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<sup>35</sup>The Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma (2021/C 93/01) adopted the term "anti-Roma attitudes" as a translation of "antigypsyism"; The Council's recommendation is published at <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/379>. A legally non-binding working definition of anti-Roma discrimination (antigypsyism) was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance on 8 October 2020, published at <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/337>; The Republic of Bulgaria has been a full member of the organization since November 2018.

<sup>36</sup>Comprehensive Report on the Assessment of Roma Integration Policies in Bulgaria in the period 2012-2019, including recommendations on the target areas of public policies, incl. anti-discrimination, gender equality and interaction with civil society, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Science.

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to the survey in various spheres of life (job search; place, education, housing, other public / private services, healthcare), is 26% in total for the nine countries, for Bulgaria this percentage is 14%.<sup>37</sup>

According to a 2014 World Bank study<sup>38</sup>, Roma women and men are affected differently by poverty, social norms and the ability to make their own choices.

Changes are observed in Roma communities in terms of several norms regarding the social roles of men and women. The scope of change varies among communities, including: equality between women and men and the understanding that men are superior to women; the association of masculinity with the role of the person ensuring the well-being of the family. Although equality between women and men is not a widely accepted value, as in any patriarchal community, a process of reassessment is observed in some communities. Educated women openly oppose the traditional division of labor in Roma families and the role imposed on them by this, which is limited to household chores and childcare.

Some of the most impressive changes in gender norms<sup>39</sup> in the Roma communities are: equality between women and men and the notion that men are superior to women; the role of the man as provider for the family; women's higher education creates new values related to their work and changes the perspective of their role in family life.

Roma women seeking to complete higher education see their work not only as a means of additional income, but also as a form of self-expression. Many Roma women are increasingly active to fill the economic vacuum in the family created by male unemployment. Very few younger women are willing to migrate and increasingly seek to complete higher education. Education is creating an increasing proportion of young women with the ability to broaden their life choices, and this expands the characteristics of the traditional norm of "good girl" and "good wife". Women's education and the adoption of a new way of life (i.e. the challenge of traditional social norms by young women) can strengthen their ability to make strategic choices for their future. In order to strengthen the adoption and impact of measures for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma, policies and programs should take into account the diversity of Roma communities in Bulgaria, applying specific approaches at local level. Any policy or program in this area must study or take into account the socio-economic dynamics of Roma communities, as well as the high level of diversity among communities, shown by their clear self-identification, location (including urban or rural), culture, traditions. Roma communities change under the influence of the dominant society around them, but only if active, systematic, consistent and financially secure policies for inclusion and integration are implemented with the active participation of the community in them. There is currently no known approach to social integration that is applicable to all communities, but there are still some common challenges that need to be addressed urgently, such as discrimination, unemployment, education, health, and early childhood development. Investing in intermediary activities, labor, health, educational mediators is also a positive step in this direction. These representatives of the community, by working in the Roma communities, are guarantors of the effective and sustainable implementation of policies and programs for integration and social inclusion among the Roma communities.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Second survey on the situation of minorities and discrimination in the European Union – Roma – Selected results, Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union, 2016 (EU MIDIS II) 2016.

<sup>38</sup>GENDER EQUALITY AND ROMA INCLUSION Social Development Unit, Europe and Central Asia Region, World Bank, January 2014

<sup>39</sup>The concept of "sex" is based on the understanding of the existence of two biologically determined sexes – male and female, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>40</sup> Gender dimensions of Roma inclusion: perspectives from four Roma communities in Bulgaria, Europe and Central Asia, Social Development Unit,

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Public institutions should step up their efforts to combat discrimination, hate speech and hate crime. For the past period of operation of the NSRBRI 2012-2020, the following were identified: the need for greater community involvement in the fight against discrimination; the need to introduce consistent, systematic and upgrading measures aimed at enriching the knowledge of the values of the rule of law in the involved institutions and the community; the need to plan activities related to raising the sensitivity of institutions involved regarding the problem of hate speech used against the Roma community; the need to work with the media, especially with regard to the use of hate speech and fake news.

Ensuring equality, social inclusion and participation of the Roma will improve the well-being of Bulgarian society, will reduce poverty in the country, will improve human and social capital, as well as the human development index.

### **Causes of unresolved issues:**

In general, the difficulties faced by the Roma can be summarized in three main groups as follows:

#### **1. Difficulties regarding rights**

- Continued inequality and discrimination (including stereotypes, hate speech, including online, turning the Roma into scape goats, lack of recognition by the majority of such cases of discrimination); cross-sectoral discrimination – a combination of gender-based violence and racism; anti-Roma attitudes;
- Traditional attitudes in the Roma community regarding (in)equality of men and women.

#### **2. Difficulties regarding fair (re)distribution**

- Insufficient participation of Roma in quality general education (including distance learning in an electronic environment);
- Insufficient participation of Roma in paid, quality and sustainable employment (including as self-employed), with a high percentage of Roma working in the "gray" sector;
- Insufficient access of Roma to adequate housing and basic services;
- Poor health care of the Roma and insufficient access of the Roma to quality health and prevention services;
- Intergenerational transmission of poverty and material deprivation among the Roma;
- Insufficient access to financial services.

#### **3. Difficulties regarding representation**

- Lack of Roma participation in policy formulation and decision-making (including political representation) and lack of civic engagement;
- Empowering the Roma woman, strengthening her ability to make strategic choices for her future;

Taking into account the current implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020), the main strategic intentions could be defined as:

- Better coordination and integrated approach in the implementation of policies and measures;
- Shared responsibility, which includes the recognition by all stakeholders of their own responsibilities in the implemented policies;
- Effectiveness and efficiency of the implemented policies;
- Implementing innovative and flexible approaches, multiplying good practices and approaches in Roma inclusion and participation policies;
- Improving information provision, greater publicity of positive examples.

**4. Risks for policy implementation:**

- Insufficient resource (including financial) security for policy implementation;
- False news, manipulation of public attitudes and reactions against policies;
- The role of digital technologies in all professional areas, which in turn creates a new work environment and new requirements for digital skills (the level of digital skills of the population of Bulgaria remains very low).

**ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL (STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES) AND EXTERNAL (OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS) FACTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, AS WELL AS THE REASONS DEFINING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available strategic documents and well-developed/improving legislation at the national level for the implementation of individual sectoral policies;</li> <li>• Clear connection and coherence of the national policy with the European priorities, principles and indicators;</li> <li>• Accumulated capacity and experience in mobilizing and using European funds to support the implementation of policies;</li> <li>• Established long-term partnerships with NGOs and research institutions;</li> <li>• Established National Roma Platform covering Roma and pro-Roma organizations and activists from a large number of settlements;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient or partial recognition of policy commitments by the responsible institutions;</li> <li>• Insufficient staffing and financial security of policies;</li> <li>• High levels of economic inequality, including strong regional disparities and imbalances;</li> <li>• High share of people at risk of poverty in the so-called pockets of poverty;</li> <li>• Low level of digital skills of the population, incl. in the Roma community.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established and functioning Mechanism for inter-institutional coordination in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020) and the policy on ethnic and integration issues</li> <li>• Established good cooperation with regional and municipal experts on ethnic and integration issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the process of coordination and interaction in the planning, implementation and monitoring of implemented policies;</li> <li>• Application of innovative and flexible approaches in the effective use of European Structural Funds for the purposes of implemented policies;</li> <li>• Improving the qualification and skills of the workforce;</li> <li>• Establishing the principles of a democratic state, with an emphasis on the rule of law and anti-discrimination, among vulnerable communities and in society's attitude towards them;</li> <li>• Improving the interaction with representatives of the civil sector;</li> <li>• Adoption of digital technologies in almost all professional areas, which creates a new work environment that requires digital skills.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepening socio-economic inequalities;</li> <li>• Negative demographic processes;</li> <li>• Increasing share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion;</li> <li>• Continuing trend of regional disparities;</li> <li>• Insufficient resources for policy implementation;</li> <li>• Manipulation of public attitudes and reactions against the implemented policies;</li> <li>• High vulnerability of young people up to 29 years of age, who are a disadvantaged group on the labor market;</li> <li>• Unpredictable social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
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**IV. VISION**

**Achieving equality, inclusion and participation of vulnerable ethnic groups and communities such as the Roma in all spheres of society for successful and sustainable development of the Bulgarian society.**

**V. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

**Creating conditions for equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma, by ensuring access to rights, goods and services, participation in all spheres of public life in**

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compliance with the principles of the rule of law and non-discrimination.

## VI. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND HORIZONTAL OBJECTIVES IN IMPLEMENTATION

The seriousness of individual challenges in each policy area and the interdependence of problems require a multidimensional integrated approach combining investment in employment, education, health and housing.

Measures related to the implementation of general and sectoral policies are based on prior identification of needs at local, regional and national level, prepared by state institutions at all levels in partnership with local Roma communities, NGOs and other stakeholders responsible for these policies, applying the bottom-up approach and included in the territorial strategies and plans at regional and municipal level (Integrated Territorial Strategies for Regional Development for Level 2 Planning and Integrated Municipal Development Plans).

In order to make progress within the period 2021-2030, the Strategy relies on the following **guiding principles**:

- Preventive measures – taking actions to eliminate and reduce the causes of risk of inequality and social exclusion;
- Efficiency, coherence and effectiveness – coherence between the EU framework and other policies, funding instruments and EU legal instruments (Europe 2020, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), anti-discrimination legislation, extension). Implementation of goals and measures to achieve progress towards the goals of equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma;
- Complementarity — complementarity with other strategic documents and national programs
- Partnership – setting common goals, adopting coordinated approaches to work, sharing information and experience among all stakeholders;
- Non-discrimination – full and active participation of all in public life;
- Involvement of persons from marginalized groups in activities for changing the conditions and the way of life with gradual increase of their commitment to reach full coverage of all residents in the respective settlement.
- Innovation in applying new approaches in equality and inclusion policies.

A leading role in the implementation of the Strategy is played also by the Ten Common Core principles of inclusion of the Roma adopted by the Council of the European Union on 8 June 2009:

- 1) Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies;
- 2) Explicit, clearly defined but non-exclusive focus;
- 3) Intercultural approach;

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- 4) Inclusion in the majority;
  - 5) Awareness of the dimension of gender equality;
  - 6) Transfer of evidence-based policies;
  - 7) Use of EU instruments;
  - 8) Involvement of regional and local authorities;
  - 9) Civil society participation;
  - 10) Active participation of the Roma.

These principles are the basis for the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive Roma policies. They promote the development of upgrading, constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies, the affirmative action approach, the intercultural approach, and do not exclude their application to other vulnerable citizens. They take into account the needs and situation of Roma women.

The principles address key success factors, such as the transfer of proven good practices, the use of Community instruments (legislative, financial and coordination), participation of regional and local authorities, involvement of civil society and the active participation of Roma.

Achieving justice and inclusion requires increased use and better targeting of resources, as well as the participation and partnership of Roma communities, all levels of government, sectors and stakeholders.

### **Horizontal goals:**

Policies for Roma inclusion are an integral part of general national policies to increase the welfare of the Bulgarian people. Mutually reinforcing horizontal objectives – equality, inclusion and participation – will contribute to their achievement.<sup>41</sup>:

1. Effective equality: Fight to prevent manifestations of anti-Roma attitudes and discrimination against the Roma in general;
2. Socio-economic inclusion: Reduction of poverty and social exclusion and elimination of socio-economic differences between the Roma and the rest of the Bulgarian society;
3. Significant participation: Encouraging participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust.

### **Sectoral objectives:**

Four **sectoral objectives** underline the continuing importance of the four policy areas set out in the Strategy. With regard to education, employment, health, housing, and basic services, as well as

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<sup>41</sup>COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Analytical report accompanying the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, Union for Equality: EU Strategic Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation and the accompanying proposal for a revised Council Recommendation on national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion and participation, {COM (2020) 620 final} – {COM (2020) 621 final}.

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the three horizontal objectives (ensuring real equality, socio-economic inclusion and Roma participation), the following are of importance:

- Increasing effective access to quality inclusive education;
- Increasing effective access to quality and sustainable employment;
- Improving the health status of the Roma and increasing the effective access to quality health and social services;
- Increasing effective access to adequate desegregated housing and basic services.<sup>42</sup>

### **Approaches:**

Inclusive policies require a combination of focused and basic approaches. The strategy follows an approach based on the development of common policies (mainstream) with the implementation of targeted measures by sector, especially at local level. The targeted approach is designed to compensate for inequalities.

Activities in the different priority areas will be implemented through complementarity of the following approaches:

- Encouraging positive action to overcome various forms of inequality in all public sectors; affirmation of positive public attitudes towards the Roma community;
- Encouraging positive action to overcome traditional practices in the Roma community which violate the rights of women and children;
- Encouraging the participation and partnership of all stakeholders;
- An integrated approach to territorial development, in which, on a territorial basis, measures are taken and resources are pooled simultaneously with regard to different priorities, based on local specifics and needs and the involvement of all stakeholders in meeting specific local challenges;
- Differentiation of the approaches, methods and means for implementation of policies for inclusion, according to the peculiarities of social and demographic subgroups among the Roma community.

## **VII. PRIORITIES**

### **1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is the leading institution responsible for implementing the objectives of the Strategy regarding the "Education and Training" priority. The Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (CEICSEM),

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<sup>42</sup>E.g., running water, adequate sanitation, waste collection and management, environmental services, electricity, gas, access to transport, financial services and digital communications (in accordance with principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights). The operational objective under this sectoral objective is to promote environmental justice and combat environmental damage (see Appendix 2 to COM (2020) 620 final).



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which is a secondary budget spending unit at the Ministry of Education and Science, supports the implementation of the policy for educational integration, intercultural education, work with parents and community representatives, including educational mediators.

The Ministry of Education and Science implements the state policy for equal integration of the Roma in Bulgarian society through two global processes: inclusive education and educational integration as fundamental components for the effective social inclusion of Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin, as these processes are guaranteed for implementation through the Law on Preschool and School Education (LPSE), the Ordinance on Inclusive Education and the Program for the activity of CEICSEM (2019-2021).

With the adoption of the LPSE and the identification of inclusive education as a priority policy, the MES actively and consistently implements measures to ensure conditions for inclusive education, which is expressed in the application of differentiated and individualized approach to children and pupils, including from vulnerable groups, the Roma being among them, by compensating for the difficulties in mastering the curriculum, the lack of motivation and the difficulties in completing a class, stage or level of education. Measures are also applied to develop the potential of those for whom the mother tongue is different from Bulgarian and who do not speak Bulgarian well. Along with the work on the Mechanism for joint work of the institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and pupils of compulsory preschool and school age, priority is given to work with parents from vulnerable groups, including the Roma.

The educational disparity between rural and urban areas remains a challenge. Given this, targeted support is needed for the school-age population in rural areas as a condition for achieving a balance in education. Therefore, investment in educational infrastructure in rural areas is essential.

The implementation in 2018 of measures for educational institutions with a concentration of children and pupils from vulnerable groups allows directing resources to the so-called "segregated" or "secondary segregated" kindergartens and schools, and also improves the conditions for the educational process in them.

The situation with the spread of COVID-19 posed a serious challenge to the Bulgarian educational system – to modernize in such a way as not to deepen the gap in education, incl. raising the level of digital skills and the introduction of digital technologies as a key element of the modern school. In this regard, e-learning through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools has been introduced in the education system.

The introduced regulatory changes provide an opportunity for students to master educational content for the respective class for the academic year 2019-2020 and to prevent the occurrence of learning difficulties. These changes ensure the application of principles of equal access to quality education and inclusion for every child and every pupil, as well as equality and non-discrimination in the conduct of pre-school and school education.

The objectives proposed in this Strategy are in line with the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030), which was prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with stakeholders. The framework has a clear and widely shared vision for education by 2030, outlining key priority areas for development, as well as coherence of policies and measures in individual strategic documents.

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The Education Program 2021-2027 has been developed in accordance with the Strategic Framework, providing support on a horizontal basis for all children and students, including those from vulnerable groups, the Roma among them, through systematic operations throughout the country and targeted support for marginalized groups such as the Roma, including through the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) approach and the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach.

The defined goals require the implementation of policies in the field of education, training and learning over the next ten years allowing rapid adaptation to external influences and the maximum use of internal factors.

***Operational goal: Creating conditions for the implementation of quality and inclusive education, for educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including the Roma, and for the establishing of intercultural education***

**General objectives:**

1. Effective coverage, inclusion and reintegration of children and students in compulsory preschool and school age from vulnerable groups, including Roma.
2. Providing conditions for the implementation of inclusive education and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.
3. Improving the quality of education in kindergartens and schools with a concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma
4. Overcoming the processes of differentiation (so-called segregation and secondary segregation) in kindergartens and schools through educational measures for desegregation.
5. Preservation and development of the cultural identity of children and students with various ethno-cultural markers, including Roma through the promotion of inter-cultural education, as an integral part of the process of modernization of the Bulgarian educational system
6. Effective “educational institution - family” interaction with a focus on parents from vulnerable groups, including Roma, to increase the importance of education by changing attitudes.
7. Encourage the participation of persons from vulnerable groups, including Roma, in continuing education and/or vocational training and/or higher education.

A necessary condition for the realization of these goals is the active cooperation of kindergartens and schools with the state and local authorities in the social and health sphere, with the educational mediators and the local communities. In implementation of this priority, activities for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minority groups in vulnerable situations will be implemented as well, with a focus on the Roma, through the provision of educational and social support.

The measures for achieving the goals are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of measures under the "Education and training" priority will contribute to the implementation of indicators under the priority "Education and skills" from the "NDP: Bulgaria

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2030" and the implementation of certain aspects of Goal 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** MES, the Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (CEICSEM), the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP), municipalities.

**Partners:** Regional Departments of Education (RDE), State Agency for Protection of the Child (SAPC), Social Assistance Agency (SAA)/Social Assistance Directorates (SAD), district administrations, educational institutions, educational mediators, NGOs.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021, Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

## 2. HEALTHCARE

The Ministry of Health (MoH) is the leading institution responsible for implementation of the objectives in the Strategy under the "Health" priority.

Improving the health of all citizens is at the heart of public health policies. Objectives related to this priority are aimed at active health promotion and prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases and socially significant diseases, as well as active support of vulnerable groups to gain effective access to health care and health services.

Implementation of policies in the field of health prevention among people at risk, where there is also high mobility and difficult access to medical care, will ensure the sustainability of preventive activities not only among vulnerable communities, but also among society as a whole; support and medical care to limit the spread of COVID-19, vaccination programs, etc.

Access to health services is guaranteed through the mediation of health mediators who are the link between vulnerable groups and the health care system.

***Operational goal: Equal access to quality public health and improvement of the population's health condition in isolated vulnerable ethnic communities, with concentration of poverty.***

### **General objectives:**

1. Improving maternal and child health in isolated vulnerable ethnic communities with poverty concentration. Systematic implementation of activities ensuring the health aspects of early childhood development.

2. Improving access to quality public health for people in a situation of poverty and social vulnerability.

3. Reducing stigma and discrimination against vulnerable people and raising awareness of public health.

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4. Development of the concept of health mediation.

5. Ensuring sustainable implementation of the vaccination prophylaxis policy and expanding the scope of vaccinated persons with a view to implementing the immunization calendar, national vaccination programs and maintaining a high immunization coverage.

The measures for achieving the goals are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of measures under the "Health" priority will contribute to the implementation of indicators under the "Health and Sports" priority from the "NDP: Bulgaria 2030" and plays a key role in the implementation of Goal 3 "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** MH, NHIF, municipalities.

**Partners:** Regional Health Inspectorates (RHI), NGOs, district administrations, municipalities, the National Network of Health Mediators.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, EEA FM 2014-2021, NFM 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

### 3. EMPLOYMENT

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) is the leading institution responsible for implementation of the objectives in the "Employment" Priority of the Strategy.

Successful integration into the labor market and improving the employability of disadvantaged groups on the labor market is one of the main priorities of an active employment policy. The implementation of a set of measures to support fast and quality transitions from inactivity and unemployment to employment or from education to employment aims to achieve successful integration of these persons, both on the labor market and in the socio-economic life of the country.

The preventive effect against social exclusion and marginalization occupies a particularly important place in the employment policy. Economically inactive persons, incl. the Roma, are a potential labor force on the labor market. Their integration into the labor market and active involvement in employment will continue with the implementation of appropriate targeted actions.

While a little more than one in ten ethnic Bulgarians belongs to the group of inactive youth, this is true for close to one in three ethnic Turks and two of three ethnic Roma. According to a study by the Institute of Market Economics<sup>43</sup>, this is of great importance for policies, as it shows that continued effort is required, so that the educational system and the labor market can manage to integrate to a greater degree representatives of ethnic minorities, regardless of their educational level, gender or region, as with the representatives of the Bulgarian ethnic group.

Unemployed young people under the age of 29 are one of the priority target groups of the active labor market policy. Timely support for young people will be provided through the implementation of the new EU Council Recommendation "A Bridge to Jobs – Strengthening the Youth Guarantee".

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<sup>43</sup> Evaluation of NEETs in Bulgaria and policy measures for their effective integration. IME 2019

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Targeted measures to promote the active behavior of young people, increase their employability, support their initiative and entrepreneurship, increase their motivation for work and their successful integration into employment, combating discrimination on the labor market are important elements for achieving priority objectives.

The strategy focuses on young people who have difficulty finding work due to lower competitiveness on the labor market, such as the unemployed under 29; unemployed young people not covered by the employment, education and training systems (NEETs); young people who dropped out of the education system early.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the need to develop the capacity of labor market institutions in order to achieve better management of emergency measures by activating employment programs.

Integrated employment and social assistance services will be implemented to facilitate access to employment and training for unemployed persons and people receiving social benefits and to reduce the period of social assistance.

***Operational goal: Equal access and improvement of the realization of the Roma on the labor market and increase of the share of the employed among them; reduction of social inequalities and their active social inclusion.***

**General objectives:**

1. Equal access to the labor market through:
  - Encouraging employers to create jobs for disadvantaged groups on the labor market;
  - Promoting entrepreneurship and own business for disadvantaged groups on the labor market;
  - Promoting dual training, internships and apprenticeships, as well as validation of acquired skills;
  - Advanced training, incl. retraining for sought-after professions;
  - Support for the acquisition and improvement of digital skills and competencies among jobseekers, with a focus on young people and the long-term unemployed;
  - Improving employment mediation services;
  - Improving access to employment and training through integrated delivery of services for employment and social assistance;
  - Increasing the participation of women from vulnerable communities in the labor market, with a focus on the vulnerable age groups 18-29 and 55+;
  - Support for the acquisition of green skills;
  - Promoting social and civil dialog in support of employment of the Roma;
  - Activation of the long-term unemployed and economically inactive persons by promoting labor mediation.
2. Social economy:
  - Promotion of social entrepreneurship among people from the Roma community by conducting information campaigns/events/webinars.

The measures for achieving the goals are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of the measures under the "Employment" priority will contribute to the

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implementation of indicators under the "Social Inclusion" priority of the "NDP: Bulgaria 2030" and has a key role in the implementation of Goal 1 "End poverty in all its forms, everywhere" and some aspects of Goal 2 "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture", Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", Goal 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all" and Goal 10 "Reduce inequality within and among countries" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** MLSP, EA, municipalities.

**Partners:** SAA, district administrations, NGOs.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, EEA FM 2014-2021, NFM 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

## 4. HOUSING CONDITIONS

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) is the leading institution responsible for the implementation of objectives in the Strategy under the "Housing conditions" priority.

Most of the Roma live in the so-called "separate Roma neighborhoods", where housing conditions are extremely unacceptable. Separate neighborhoods continue to be one of the main obstacles to the full integration of the Roma into society, as living conditions in them lead to a deepening of their exclusion, to lower opportunities to improve their educational, socio-economic and health status and to marginalizing of a significant part of the community.

Possible solutions regarding the housing conditions of the Roma population should be integrated into broader national activities and legislative initiatives. They should focus mainly on regulating and improving Roma neighborhoods, expanding opportunities for families to build their own homes, and, to a lesser extent, on social housing programs or supporting families with intergenerational poverty, especially with young children and children who are pupils, sick family members, single-parent families and others.

In social housing programs, the Roma should be included together with families from the majority. In order to ensure the success of such programs, it is necessary to provide long-term social and psychological support. Municipalities have a leading role in these programs, which is also linked to expanding municipal housing.

The inclusion of Roma families in social housing programs is linked to the provision of integrated cross-sectoral support, including social, health, educational, as well as employment services.

Activities related to the implementation of projects providing support for the social integration of marginalized groups, incl. the Roma, are encouraged, through improvement of housing conditions, providing cadastral and urban planning basis, construction of a technical infrastructure for neighborhoods with compact Roma population and new land intended for low-rise housing, construction of social housing and social infrastructure.

***Operational goal: Improving housing conditions, including adjacent technical and public service infrastructure.***

**General objectives:**

1. Establishment of a working mechanism for assessment of the housing stock in areas with a

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- compact Roma population;
  2. Providing conditions for the acquisition of affordable housing and conditions for the introduction of alternative models of social housing for households in poverty areas;
  3. Construction/renovation of infrastructure for the provision of integrated health and social services in the community for vulnerable groups;
  4. Reconstruction of social infrastructure sites for the purposes of education, culture, etc.;
  5. Search for tools to improve legal and economic conditions to eliminate housing and neighborhoods that do not comply with the Spatial Planning Act (SPA)/legislation. Adoption of an Act amending and supplementing the Spatial Planning Act to introduce the principle of proportionality in issuing an order for the removal of illegal construction, representing only housing for its occupants;
  6. Expanding legal access to quality water, electricity and sewerage in detached neighborhoods with a concentration of poverty. (Goal 6 falls within the scope of district planning and will be implemented by municipalities).

The measures for achieving the goals are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of the measures under the "Housing conditions" priority will contribute to the implementation of indicators under the "Social Inclusion" and "Local Development" priorities of the NDP and has a key role in the implementation of Goal 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" and Goal 6 "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, municipalities.

**Partners:** Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Health, SAD, district administrations, NGOs.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, EEA FM 2014-2021, NFM 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

## 5. RULE OF LAW AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Rule of law, guarantee of life, dignity and rights of the individual within conditions of equality and non-discrimination based on race, nationality, ethnicity, sex, origin, religion, education, beliefs, political affiliation, personal and social status or property status are basic principles in a democratic and legal state. As high values, they have found their constitutional regulation in the country (Article 4, paragraph 2 and Article 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria).

Bulgaria has also adopted the basic legal framework for combating discrimination. The Law on Protection against Discrimination is fundamental, as it established and designated an independent state body – the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, which will consider and rule on complaints related to direct and indirect discrimination both on constitutional grounds and on the grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation and any other characteristics established by law or in an international agreement to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party. The Ombudsman Act entrusts

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the Ombudsman with the function of protecting the rights and legitimate interests of citizens against illegal actions and inactions by the administration. The Civil Servant Act, the Labor Code and its implementing regulations, and the codes of ethics in the administrations regulate the conduct of employees in the performance of their official duties, including the protection of the rights, legitimate interests and freedoms of citizens. Special laws – the Law on Equality of Women and Men, the Law on Child Protection, the Law on People with Disabilities, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, etc. envisage special protection measures for persons and groups in vulnerable situations. The Criminal Code of the Republic of Bulgaria defines as crimes the preaching or incitement to discrimination, violence or hatred based on race, nationality or ethnicity ( through speech, press or other mass media, through electronic information systems or otherwise); genocide and apartheid; insult and slander; human trafficking; coercion to marry; inciting prostitution and other acts, victims of which are often persons belonging to ethnic minorities.

The Law on Advocacy, and in particular the Law on Legal Aid, establishes a mechanism for providing legal assistance to victims of offenses or victims of crime, including on the basis of their ethnicity and in cases where these persons do not have the necessary financial resources to secure one.

As a Member State, the Republic of Bulgaria is responsible for the implementation of European law (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Racial Directive 2000/43).

Despite the existence of this legal framework, cases of discrimination and anti-Roma attitudes continue to create barriers for the Roma community, despite evidence of a reduced feeling of discrimination among the Roma.

Extreme poverty, unemployment, low levels of education in segregated schools and classes, inadequate housing, poor health and well-being among a part of the Roma population continue, putting members of these communities at a disadvantage.

Social exclusion reinforces prejudice against their Roma, making their marginalization socially acceptable and reinforcing anti-Roma attitudes. The Roma continue to face deep-rooted negative public attitudes and prejudices.

Roma women throughout the European Union still face inequalities in many respects, further exacerbated by extreme poverty, exclusion and discrimination.

Roma children and women face various forms of discrimination, including multiplied discrimination, trafficking in human beings, marriages of minors and forced marriages.

Therefore, for the forthcoming period, the main emphasis is on effective implementation of the existing legislation to combat anti-Roma attitudes and discrimination by increasing the institutional culture and expert capacity of public institutions, improving confidence in their activities with emphasis on the protection of rights and justice, raising the awareness of representatives of Roma communities about their rights and the mechanisms for their protection to overcome obstacles and barriers to access to justice, raising the public culture on human rights and the history of the Roma to understand the causes of social exclusion and poverty, raising public awareness of cases of racism, discrimination and their negative consequences for society, and changing public attitudes and stereotypes.

The priority objectives will step up the fight against discrimination by broadening the focus of work on Roma inclusion and participation in new horizontal and structural areas outside of employment, education, health and housing.



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***Operational goal: Guaranteeing the rights of citizens, with an emphasis on women and children, protection of public order, prevention and counteraction of manifestations of intolerance and "hate speech".***

**General objectives:**

1. Increasing the guarantees for effective protection of the rights of Bulgarian citizens in vulnerable social situations belonging to different ethnic groups. Effective implementation of Roma integration policies to achieve equality, dignified existence and full participation in public life:

- Improving measures for identification, prevention and protection of victims of anti-Roma attitudes, hate speech and hate crimes;
- Improving the legal protection services to persons belonging to ethnic minorities, as well as persons living in households in deep poverty;
- Improving measures for effective criminal justice in the cases of hate speech and hate crimes;
- Systematic implementation of measures, gradual increase of the legal culture among communities in a vulnerable socio-economic situation;
- Improving the measures for protection of minors belonging to ethnic minorities, and also of children living in households in deep poverty.

2. Increasing the institutional culture and expertise of public institutions (including national and local administration, courts, prosecutors and bodies of the MoI) in relation to EU policies on diversity, equality, dignity and fundamental human rights. Overcoming cultural barriers in communication and all forms of discriminatory attitudes:

- Raising awareness of the "equivalence" of cultures and respect for cultural diversity;
- Raising awareness of poverty as a factor in the emergence of negative social phenomena and the ethnic heterogeneity of areas with a concentration of poverty;
- Building capacity to work with people living in deep poverty and people from minority communities (i.e., with a different language, religion, community ethnicity, etc.) – with respect for diversity, dignity and fundamental human rights; trainings, seminars and other forms;
- Carrying out inter-institutional cooperation to improve the dialogue with vulnerable groups; trainings, seminars and other forms;
- Conducting public campaigns to build a culture of the EU policies for diversity, equality, dignity and fundamental human rights and raising public sensitivity to anti-Roma attitudes and discrimination.

3. Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement authorities to combat crime and acts of discrimination, violence or hatred based on ethnicity:

- Improving measures for the social reintegration of prisoners belonging to ethnic minorities or originating from a social environment characterized by deep-rooted poverty, incl. through targeted inter-institutional support;

4. Forming a culture of equality for Roma women. Encouraging their full individual, social and economic participation in public life;

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- Raising awareness of Roma with a focus on Roma women and youth, in relation to the possibilities for access to legal aid;
  - Improving the access of Roma women to legal aid and justice.
5. Undertaking targeted measures and innovative integrated services to improve parental capacity in support of vulnerable families, improve parental care and protect the rights of children:
- Raising awareness of children and their families about the rights of the child regulated in international and national standards and existing social, health, educational and other public services;
  - Raising awareness of children and their families about the prevention of violence among and against children;
  - Improving the monitoring and control of observance of the rights of the child.
6. Increasing civil participation and awareness of civil rights and obligations of persons living in areas of poverty concentration:
- Improving the legal culture of the Roma in connection with the acquisition, use and storage of Bulgarian personal documents;
  - Raising awareness and civil culture of the Roma in connection with the rights and obligations with regard to education, health care, housing and employment;
  - Raising awareness among the Roma about the adequate reaction against hate speech and false news reinforcing anti-Roma attitudes and discrimination;
  - Prevention of unwanted social phenomena in areas with poverty concentration (incl. early marriages, domestic violence, domestic crime and anti-social behavior). Building of video surveillance systems, analogous to those in other settlements by the municipality and the law enforcement institutions;
  - Involvement of persons from the Roma community in the activity for protection of public order, by including them in the Local Commissions for Public Order and Security.
7. Increased efforts to combat trafficking in human beings through the effective implementation of provisions set out in UN, CoE and EU documents, and the use of existing instruments in the EU:
- Prevention of specific forms of human trafficking in areas with a concentration of poverty and providing additional measures to protect victims of trafficking in human beings belonging to ethnic minorities, in order to reduce the number of cases of trafficking in human beings and increase the detection and prosecution of traffickers;
  - Development and implementation of services for reintegration of children who are victims of trafficking for the purpose of effective socialization of this most vulnerable group, achieving prosperity and overall development.
8. Solving the issue with the lack of identity documents and the legal status of Bulgarian citizens from vulnerable communities, including Roma.
9. Establishing tolerant interethnic relations through sport

The measures to achieve the objectives are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of measures under the "Rule of Law and Anti-Discrimination" priority will contribute to the implementation of indicators under the "Social Inclusion" priority of the "NDP: Bulgaria 2030" and has a key role in the implementation of Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", Goal 10 "Reduce inequality within and among countries", Goal 16

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"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior (MoI), MES, MoH, MLSP, Ministry of Culture (MC), State Agency for Child Protection, Civil Registration and Administrative Services, municipalities, district administrations, Commission for Protection against Discrimination, consultative structures.

**Partners:** district administrations, municipalities and NGOs.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, EEA FM 2014-2021, NFM 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

## 6. CULTURE AND MEDIA

Roma culture is a part of the European cultural space and part of the cultural diversity in the country. Preservation of the cultural heritage of the Roma, promotion of creative development, cultural interaction and participation in the cultural life of the country play a crucial role in social cohesion.

The goals in the priority are aimed at improving the conditions and expanding the opportunities for socialization through cultural dialogue.

The National Action Plan details consistent measures to preserve and promote the traditional culture of the Roma community and to improve the conditions for creative development and participation in cultural life.

Special attention is paid to the crucial role of the media in reducing anti-Roma attitudes through non-discriminatory coverage of members of the Roma community; disseminating positive images of the Roma and the benefits of interculturalism and inclusion in the media.

***Operational goal: Improving the conditions for equal access of the Roma community to public cultural life, preservation and promotion of Roma traditional culture, development and promotion of creativity as factors for cultural integration and social cohesion. Overcoming hate speech and reproduction of prejudices against the Roma in the media in order to build a positive image of the community.***

### **General objectives:**

1. Preservation and promotion of the traditional culture of the Roma community.
2. Encouraging the creative development of community representatives.
3. Stimulating the Roma community to actively participate in public cultural life and promoting intercultural dialogue.
4. De-ethnicization of the phenomena of poverty in the Bulgarian public media.
5. Fight against xenophobia, racism, anti-Roma attitudes and hate speech in the media.

The measures for achieving the goals are set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of the measures under the "Culture and Media" priority will contribute to the implementation of indicators under the "Culture, Heritage and Tourism" priority in the "NDP: Bulgaria 2030" and has a key role in the implementation of Goal 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all", Goal 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" and Goal 12 "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns" of the UN Sustainable Development

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Goals.

**Responsible institutions:** MC, municipalities, district administrations, Council for Electronic Media (CEM).

**Partners:** NGOs.

**Source of funding:** state budget, municipal budgets, EU Structural Funds, EEA FM 2014-2021, NFM 2014-2021 and other donor programs.

## VIII. EMPOWERMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OF THE ROMA WOMAN

In the current strategy, the problems of the Roma woman are included not only as a horizontal policy, but are also targeted.

The priorities of education, health care, housing, employment are enriched with specific goals and measures sensitive to women.

Special laws – the Law on Equality of Women and Men, the Law on the Protection of the Child, the Law on People with Disabilities, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, etc. envisage special protection measures for persons and groups in vulnerable situations. The Government adopted the National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men for the period 2021-2030. The main goal of the document is to contribute to the achievement of *de facto* equality between women and men in Bulgaria by implementing a unified, consistent and sustainable state policy. The adopted action plan to the strategy sets out measures for: promoting equality between women and men in decision-making processes; combating violence and protecting and supporting victims; overcoming gender stereotypes in various spheres of public life, as well as sexism, etc.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Bulgaria defines as crimes the preaching or incitement to discrimination, violence or hatred based on race, nationality or ethnicity ( through speech, press or other mass media, through electronic information systems or otherwise); genocide and apartheid; insult and slander; human trafficking; coercion to marry; inciting prostitution and other acts, victims of which are often persons belonging to ethnic minorities.

The Law on Advocacy, and in particular the Law on Legal Aid, establishes a mechanism for providing legal assistance to victims of offenses or victims of crime, including on the basis of their ethnicity and in cases where these persons do not have the necessary financial resources to secure aid.

Roma women throughout the European Union still face inequalities in many respects, further exacerbated by extreme poverty, exclusion and discrimination.

Roma women face various forms of discrimination, including multiplied discrimination, trafficking in human beings, marriages of minors and forced marriages.

***In view of everything that is analyzed, stated and formulated as a problem in this document, the operational goal is to promote the empowerment of the Roma woman, making her an active factor in social, political and public life, overcoming her exclusion in the main areas of education, health care, employment and housing.***

The issues of empowerment of Roma women have been reflected in the priorities of this strategy. E.g., the "Rule of Law and Anti-Discrimination" priority addresses key topics, such as:

- Encouraging and supporting the participation of Roma women in all forms of social

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and political life, including in public administration.

- Overcoming domestic violence, early marriages and other forms of traditional patriarchal practices of control and violence. Providing conditions for greater access to justice for Roma women.

- Improving measures for identification, prevention and protection of victims of anti-Roma attitudes, hate speech and hate crimes;

- Improving measures for effective criminal justice in the cases of hate speech and hate crimes;

- Improving the access of Roma women to legal aid and justice.

- Improving the measures for protection of minors belonging to ethnic minorities, and also of children living in households in deep poverty;

- Improving the activities for limiting the dropping-out of Roma children from school;

- Raising awareness of the Roma with a focus on Roma women and youth, in relation to the possibilities for access to legal aid;

- Prevention of unwanted social phenomena in areas with poverty concentration (incl. early marriages, domestic violence, domestic crime and anti-social behavior).

Building, by the municipality and law enforcement institutions, of systems for video surveillance similar to those in other parts of settlements;

- Prevention of specific forms of human trafficking in areas with a concentration of poverty and providing additional measures to protect victims of trafficking in human beings belonging to ethnic minorities in order to reduce the number of cases of trafficking in people and increase the detection and prosecution of traffickers;

- Development and implementation of services for reintegration of child victims of trafficking in order to effectively socialize this most vulnerable group, achieving prosperity and overall development.

Institutions are conducting public campaigns to build a culture in line with the EU policies for diversity, equality, dignity and fundamental human rights, and to raise public sensitivity to anti-Roma attitudes and discrimination.

The National Legal Aid Office is experienced in facilitating access to legal aid and justice for representatives of vulnerable groups, including victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children, women from minority groups and/or from remote and geographically isolated areas through the deployment of mobile legal aid teams. This is a very important aspect of the work related to empowerment and equal opportunities.

Special attention is paid to the issue also in the section Monitoring of the implementation of the strategy. It is planned to attract young people and Roma women in the form of advisory councils and civil monitoring.

The National Action Plan 2021-2023 sets out measures on the issue, indicating the specific responsible institutions.

## **IX. MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATION POLICY**

The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) is an integral part of the overall strategy of the government to achieve real

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changes in the lives of all Bulgarian citizens. The government pursues a policy to encourage investment in the development and improvement of people and their active participation in overcoming existing challenges.

**Horizontal cross-sectoral approach**

Given the horizontal nature of the policy, a number of institutions and organizations with different competencies and capabilities will be involved in its implementation. Therefore, the activities for implementation of the National Strategy and the plans for its implementation will complement each other in order to create a cumulative effect.

Implementation of the National Strategy will be carried out by institutions and organizations which, according to their powers and competencies, will set specific activities and measures.

The organization for the implementation of policies for equal inclusion and participation of the Roma is built on the basis of efficient and purposeful use of the available resources at national, regional and local level, as well as those at European level, deriving from the country's EU membership and access to funds of the EU for the programming period 2021-2027.

The main tool for implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) at the operational level is the National Action Plan (NAP). The Action Plan is open, in order to allow flexible reaction in the event that changes are needed and in compliance with relevant budgetary procedures.

The plan is prepared for a period of 2 years (2022-2023) and includes activities, responsible authorities, financial resources and indicators for the implementation of activities. The activities contained in the plan are structured according to the priority areas of the Strategy. The competent institutions and organizations propose to include in the plan activities which implement and provide information on their progress.

Coordination and methodological support for implementation of the Strategy and the NAP is provided by the Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers, which is the National Point of Contact (NPC) for the implementation of the Strategy.

Operationally, all measures for the implementation of the Strategy and the NAP, including resource provision measures, are coordinated, aligned, controlled and approved by the Deputy Prime Minister appointed as Chairman of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers (NCCEII).

**Coordination of the model for distribution of governance responsibilities among the executive bodies:**

The National Point of Contact, which is the Secretariat of NCCEII, carries out the coordinating role in the implementation of this National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030).

An inter-institutional mechanism has been set up, which includes representatives of the ministries, agencies, and secondary budget spending units responsible for the respective priorities. They participate in the development, planning and reporting of measures and activities in the National Action Plan and report on the progress of implementation of the Strategy through the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System:

- The Chairperson of the NCCEII, who is the Deputy Prime Minister, approves, coordinates and aligns the measures for implementation of the Strategy and the NAP.
- Formation and maintenance of the necessary administrative capacity in the key line institutions and in the secondary budget spending units by assigning certain functions to directorates, departments, units or individual experts responsible for the implementation of the Roma inclusion policy, as well as by forming specialized units. The key line ministries and bodies

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are responsible for updating the relevant thematic program operational documents for Roma integration, implementing the planned measures, monitoring, evaluating and reporting to the NCCEII and the National Point of Contact.

- Formation of the necessary administrative capacity within the structures of the District Administrations by assigning certain functions to directorates, departments, units or individual experts responsible for implementation of the Roma inclusion policy. At least one official should be appointed in each district administration, whose main job functions should be related to inclusive policy. Regional councils for cooperation on ethnic and integration issues have been established which are attached to regional governors, as consultative and coordinating bodies supporting the implementation of the policy on ethnic and integration issues at regional level.

**Improving the mechanisms for coordination with the structures of civil society through the functioning of:**

- National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers.

- Commission for Coordination of the Implementation of the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma 2021-2030.

- Consultative structures and mechanisms with the participation of civil society attached to line departments, district governors and local authorities. Their formation and capacity building for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy will be consistently encouraged.

- Cooperation with legitimate civil and religious organizations.

- Active participation of the Roma and all stakeholders at all stages (planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review) of the policy.

**Involvement of municipalities in the implementation of policies for inclusion and participation of the Roma through:**

- With a decision of the respective municipal council, municipal councils may be established in the municipalities for cooperation on ethnic and integration issues.

- Development, together with representatives of the local Roma community, of specific annual plans based on prior identification, analysis and assessment of problems and needs of local Roma communities and in accordance with regional strategies and the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma in the Republic Bulgaria (2021-2030). These plans are adopted by the municipal councils, should be provided with resources, and their implementation should be closely linked to the inclusive goals and indicators set out in the Integrated Development Plan of the municipality.

- Delegation of activities supported by the municipalities' own funds for the inclusion and participation of the Roma at municipal level.

- Establishment of appropriate consultation and coordination mechanisms involving civil structures and all stakeholders, including representatives of the Roma community.

- Formation of the necessary administrative capacity in the structures of municipal administrations by assigning certain functions to directorates, departments, units or individual experts responsible for the implementation of integration policies. Appointment of municipal experts on ethnic and integration issues, where necessary.

**Financing of inclusive policies and programs is carried out with funds from the state budget, European funds and other sources.**

Financial support for the implementation of activities set out in the National Action Plan is carried out through:

- Providing, within the funds for municipalities from the general subsidy for activities

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delegated by the state, the development and implementation of municipal programs in line with the priorities of the integration policy.

- Financial provision, within the budgets of line ministries and institutions, incl. with targeted funds, of the implementation of the integration policy.
- Funding of measures and activities at national and local level to provide information on the state and trends in the development of the situation in the priority areas of this Strategy in the respective territory; this will help plan measures or take action in a crisis or emergency;
- Stimulating municipalities to finance the implementation of measures and initiatives through municipal budgets at the expense of own revenues, and in partnership with NGOs; adequate funding for NGOs that provide such activities, as these activities are crucial for creating an environment and conditions for inclusion and participation.
- Financing of thematic projects under Programs from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.
- Financing and co-financing of thematic projects under programs of the European Union, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and others.
- Adequate integration of the needs and problems of the Roma in the new multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027 and the respective priorities of the programs with a view to financial support through EU instruments. Financial support through EU instruments has an important complementary role to policies in place to reduce poverty and social exclusion. For the next programming period 2021-2027, Bulgaria will receive funds from the European Social Fund + for the Human Resources Development Program 2021-2027 (HRD), the Food and/or Basic Material Assistance Program 2021-2027 (FP) and the Program for Education 2021-2027 (EP), as well as the European Regional Development Fund for the Regional Development Program 2021-2027 (RDP).

In HRD 2021-2027, the integration of the Roma community for the period will be implemented through three approaches:

1. Targeted approach - targeted measures aimed at marginalized communities such as the Roma. Within a separate specific objective, specific actions are planned aimed at social inclusion and integration in the labor market.
2. Mainstream approach (horizontal approach - implementation through all measures): The mainstream approach includes the Roma as part of the vulnerable groups that will receive support through the measures of the Programme at national level (including socially excluded people, people living in poverty and material deprivation, persons belonging to disadvantaged groups on the labor market, persons without education, with low qualification or without such, etc.).
3. Territorial approach - through “Integrated Territorial Investment” in Level 2 areas and the “Community-led local development” approach.

The two territorial approaches, ITI and CLLD, will pursue specific objective 8 of the draft ESF+ Regulation "Promoting the socio-economic integration of marginalized communities, such as the Roma". Territorial approaches will provide an opportunity for targeted impact in the communities and will thus complement measures of the national implementation of the program, which are on a horizontal level (mainstream approach). These two territorial approaches will make it possible to finance measures in places that are most in need in relation to the specific population profile of the territory concerned.



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The focus for future ESF+ investments is invariably linked to the EPSR, which has been declared an "EU compass" for employment and social cohesion. It will lay the foundations for even more focused and effective efforts for equal opportunities, access to the labor market, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion. Investing in people is a top priority, from education and training to health, equality and social inclusion. It is important that the means of implementing of these policies reach those who need them most, especially in regions with high social inequalities.

### **Continuity and resilience over time**

The implementation of this Strategy will aim to ensure a lasting positive effect of the implemented policy for equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma in all priority areas. Adherence to the above principles will contribute to the implementation of this strategy and the measures set out in the plans for its implementation.

## **X. PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) sets quantitative target outcomes for monitoring the achievement of minimal progress towards its 2030 goals in pursuance of the long-term goal of ensuring effective equality and reducing disparities between the Roma and the general population.

Evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy is carried out through a System for monitoring, evaluation and control of the implementation of the Strategy (the System). The System takes into account implementation of the Roma inclusion and participation policies at regional and local level, which also includes cooperation with the Roma civil society and other stakeholders.

The System provides regular, systematic inspection, control and monitoring of the progress and quality of implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan under it, as well as of all other interventions (activities, projects, research, studies, etc.) for inclusion and participation of persons belonging to vulnerable ethnic groups with a focus on the Roma, including those implemented at the local level by municipalities, NGOs, research and analytical institutions, centers, etc. An impact assessment of the implemented interventions is provided, identifying problems in the implementation of measures in order to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

The System implements:

- data collection through formal and informal methods at local, regional and national level in different areas (sectors) according to a certain methodology;
- allows analysis of the collected information, incl. by different sections/segments, as well as cross-checking the information in them; assessment of the impact;
- allows drawing lessons learned and formulating recommendations and guidelines for improvement of the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) and the integration policies.

Monitoring is measured by an indicator model which includes a list of indicators, definition and methodology (algorithm) of formation, collection, processing and analysis of primary data for the formation of indicators. The Strategy includes a baseline and measurable goals.

Along with the general statistical approaches, data on implementation of the Strategy are

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also collected on a territorial basis for settlements and parts of settlements with a concentration of poverty, illegal construction and other indicators characteristic of this Strategy.

### ***Monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy***

1. Implementation of the Strategy is monitored through the annual reporting on progress. This is done by preparing an annual Administrative Monitoring Report based on information from the System.

- The NCCEII Secretariat coordinates the preparation of the report, summarizes information and prepares a draft report.
  - The report is discussed in the framework of a Committee for Coordination of the implementation of the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma 2021-2030.
  - The report is submitted for approval to the NCCEII.
  - The report is adopted by the Council of Ministers.
  - The report adopted by the Council of Ministers is sent to the National Assembly for information.
2. Attracting young people and Roma women in the form of advisory councils and forms of civil monitoring.
3. Establishing a Council for monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy.
4. Collection, systematization and analysis of information on good practices for monitoring of sectoral policies.

The National Point of Contact is the Secretariat of the NCCEII with address at Sofia 1000, 1, Knyaz Alexander Dondukov blvd., Council of Ministers, and email address [www.nccedi.government.bg](http://www.nccedi.government.bg).

Progress in the implementation of the Strategy and the NAP is also reported to the European Commission through an electronic reporting platform.

### ***Evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy***

Evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy aims to provide information on the fulfillment of objectives and the effectiveness of the measures taken. It takes place at the end of the effective period of the Strategy.

### ***Principles of monitoring<sup>44</sup>***

Transparency – providing sufficiently reliable information, which, provided that stakeholders have access to it, is a prerequisite for public policies to be understood, monitored and adopted. The transparent system of management through monitoring and evaluation has clear procedures for public decision-making and open channels for communication between stakeholders and public institutions.

Accountability – providing information on the degree of achievement of the set goals, the efficiency, effectiveness and rationality of the use of public resources and the degree of the achieved impact on stakeholders.

Management responsibility – institutions need to constantly try to take into account the

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<sup>44</sup> Мониторинг на публични политики, Ас. Евелина Парашкевова, Стопанска академия „Д. А. Ценов”

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interests of all target groups and stakeholders in the implementation of policies.

Monitoring builds capacity to create, implement and apply quality policies with optimal combination of results and resources. Increases interest and intensifies participation – monitoring creates a mechanism for civil participation in the process of formulating and implementing of local policy. A well-developed civil society which is interested in the implemented policy, monitors the achievement of goals and performs a control function.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

Achieving equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma requires the cooperation of all directly involved institutions at national, regional and local level in partnership with the civil society and full participation of the Roma in this process.

In order to make real progress by 2030, in which Roma communities in all their diversity have equal opportunities and equal participation in all spheres of life, joint action is required from all participants in the process.

The strategy has a framework nature. It sets guidelines for action in the priority areas for the period 2021-2030. They can be supplemented and updated according to the dynamics of development needs and the challenges of the socio-economic situation.

This Strategy is adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

## **XII. APPENDIX: Indicators for monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030)**

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
1.	Relative share of people at risk of	23.8% (2020 г.) total for	Halving the poverty gap	17.1% (EU27)	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes Indicator with code 00000010 in

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
	poverty	the country; 66.2% (2020 г.) self-identifying as Roma	between the Roma and the general population			the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System
2.	Relative share of Roma who have been discriminated against for any reason (in any of the areas included in the study) in the last 12 months	17.9% (2020 г.)	Halving the share of Roma who have been discriminated against	X	NSI, a one-time survey (2020) <sup>45</sup>	Yes
3.	Relative share of children under 18 at risk of poverty	28.5% (2020 г.) total for the country; 73.3% (2020 г.) self-identifying as Roma	Halving the poverty gap between the Roma and other children	19.5% (EU27)	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes Indicator with code 00000010 in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System
4.	Relative share of Roma who have been discriminated against (in any area) in the last 12 months and have reported this	8.0% (2020 г.)	Doubling the share of Roma who report when they are discriminated against	X	NSI, a one-time survey (2020)	Yes
5.	Proportion of children aged from 4 to the age of compulsory primary education attending pre-school education	82.3% (school year 2020/2021)	91.0%	93,6 (EU27) school year 2018/2019	NSI, Survey of Educational Institutions	No

<sup>45</sup> Survey conducted by the NSI and the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) within the Project BGLD-3.001-0001 “Novel Approaches to Generating Data on hard-to-reach populations at risk of violation of their rights”

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
6.	Relative share of young people (aged 20-24) with at least secondary education	85.4% (2020)	89.0%	EU-27 84.3% (2020)	NSI, Labor Force Survey	No
7.	Relative share of children aged 6-14 from households in which at least one member self-identified as Roma attending schools where "all or most of the classmates are Roma"	58.0% (2020)	Less than 1 in five Roma children attends schools where most or all of the children are Roma	X	NSI, a one-time survey (2020)	Yes
8.	Employment rate of persons aged 20-64	73.4% (2020)	Reaching the EU average	EU-27 72.3% (2020)	NSI, Labor Force Survey	No
9.	Employment rates for men and women aged 20-64	Men 77.8% (2020) Women 68.9% (2020)	Reaching the EU average	EU-27 Men 78.0% (2020) Women 66.5% (2020)	NSI, Labor Force Survey	No
10.	Relative share of young people aged 15-29 who are not employed or in education	18.1% (2020)	Reaching the EU average	EU-27 13.7% (2020)	NSI, Labor Force Survey	No
11.	Average life expectancy	(2018-2020) Total – 74.6 years Men 71.1 years Women 78.2 years	Increase the average life expectancy by 5 years	X	NSI	No
12.	Relative share of	8.6% (2020)	Reduction by	4.2%	NSI, BG-	Yes

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
	people living in poor housing conditions	total for the country; 43.5% (2020) self-identifying as Roma	1/3 of the difference in the share of residents of homes with extremely poor conditions	(EU-27)	SILC	
13.	Relative share of persons living in overcrowded housing	39.5% (2020) total for the country; 76.9% (2020) self-identifying as Roma	Halving the overcrowding gap	17.8% (EU-27)	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes Indicator with code 30000009 in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System
14.	Relative share of persons living in a household without a toilet and bathroom inside the home	7.4% (2020) total for the country; 34.7% (2020) self-identifying as Roma	Halving the difference in the share of persons self-identifying as Roma	1.7% (EU-27)	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes Indicators with code 30000007 and 30000008 in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System
15.	Human Development Index*	0.812 (2019)	0.840	X	UN	
16.	Relative share of children (0-15 years) living in material deprivation (deprived of at least one of the 13 indicators)	18.4% (2020) total for the country; 64.0% (2020) self-identifying as Roma	Halve the percentage of self-identified Roma	X	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes Indicator with code 00000009 in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Control System
17.	Relative share of households with Internet access	83.5% (2021)	Reaching the EU average	91% (EU-27)	NSI, Survey on the use of ICT in households and by individuals	No
18.	Burden of	14.4% (2020)	Reaching the	10.0%	Eurostat	

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
	housing costs according to poverty	total for the country; 23.6% (2020) self-identifying as Roma	EU average	(EU-27)	NSI BG-SILC	Yes
19.	Unmet need for medical care in the lowest income quintile	For 2020, the relative share of persons aged 16 and over from the first quintile with unmet needs was 5.4%	Reaching the EU average	6.8% (EU-27)	Eurostat	No
20.	Early school leavers (relative share of persons aged 18-24 who completed at most primary education and did not participate in education and training, within the population of the same age.)	12.8% (2020)	7.0%	9.9% (2020) EU-27	NSI	No
21.	Net enrollment ratio of the population in the educational system (V-XII grade)	86.3% (2020/2021 school year)	90%	X	NSI	No
22.	Share of basic or above	31% (2021)	58.0%	62% (2021)	Eurostat	No

No	Indicators	Current value in %	Target value in %	EU 2020 average	Source	Note (option to collect data by ethnicity)
	basic common digital skills of persons aged 16 to 74 living in a household with children under 16 years of age			EU-27		
23.	Share of teachers prepared for teaching in multicultural conditions, %	25.8% (2018)	35%	X	OECD, TALIS	
24.	Relative share of the poor who self-identified as employed, by ethnicity (Roma)	31.9% (2020)	Halve the relative share	X	NSI, BG-SILC	Yes

\*The Human Development Index measures the average performance of a country in the following three main aspects of human development: The assessment given to each country is the weight of life expectancy, education, income level in that country. The index is a standard tool for measuring the level of well-being and especially the well-being of children.

- Life expectancy and healthy lifestyle, which is assessed according to the likely life expectancy at birth; allows to calculate indirectly the provision of essential products, including access to drinking water, housing, good hygiene and medical care and services.
- Knowledge or level of education which is assessed according to the level of literacy of adults. This is the percentage of the population over the age of 15 who can read and understand a short and easily accessible text about everyday life. The total sum of the ratio of enrolled students in primary, secondary and higher education is also taken into account. This number expresses satisfaction with intangible benefits such as the opportunity to participate in decision-making in society or at the workplace.

## XII. ABBREVIATIONS USED

<b>EA</b>	Employment Agency
<b>SAA</b>	Social Assistance Agency
<b>BAS</b>	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
<b>CLLD</b>	Community-led local development
<b>DG</b>	Directorate General
<b>SACP</b>	State Agency for Child Protection
<b>LOD</b>	Labor Office Directorate
<b>SAD</b>	Social Assistance Directorates
<b>EUROSTAT</b>	Statistical Office of the European Union
<b>EEA</b>	European Economic Area
<b>EC</b>	European Commission



<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ESIF</b>	European Structural and Investment Funds
<b>EPSR</b>	European Pillar of Social Rights
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>LPSE</b>	Law on Preschool and School Education
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IME</b>	Institute of Market Economics
<b>ISIM</b>	Information system for implementation of the Mechanism for cooperation of the institutions for coverage and inclusion in the educational system of children and students of compulsory preschool and school age
<b>ITI</b>	Integrated Territorial Investments
<b>CPD</b>	Commission for Protection against Discrimination
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MC</b>	Ministry of Culture
<b>MYS</b>	Ministry of Youth and Sports
<b>MES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>MJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MRDPW</b>	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
<b>CoM</b>	Council of Ministers
<b>MLSP</b>	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
<b>MF</b>	Ministry of Finance
<b>NHIF</b>	National Health Insurance Fund
<b>NPC</b>	National Point of Contact
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental organizations
<b>NDP: BULGARIA 2030</b>	National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030
<b>NSI</b>	National Statistical Institute
<b>NSRBRI</b>	National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020)
<b>NCCEII</b>	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers
<b>NFM</b>	Norwegian Financial Mechanism
<b>ECEC</b>	Early Childhood Education and Care
<b>UN</b>	United Nations Organisation
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>DCoM</b>	Decree of the Council of Ministers
<b>EP</b>	Education Program
<b>RDP</b>	Regional Development Program
<b>HRDP</b>	Human Resources Development Program
<b>FP</b>	Food and/or basic material support program
<b>ECD</b>	Early childhood development
<b>RHI</b>	Regional health inspections
<b>RCoM</b>	Resolution of the Council of Ministers
<b>RDE</b>	Regional departments of education
<b>TSA</b>	Trust for Social Alternative Foundation
<b>EEA FM</b>	Financial mechanism of the European Economic Area

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<b>CEICSEM</b>	Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities
<b>BG-SILC</b>	NSI Survey "Statistics of Income and Living Conditions" for Bulgaria
<b>EU-SILC</b>	European Survey on Income and Living Conditions
<b>FRA</b>	European Union Fundamental Rights Agency
<b>NEET</b>	Young people not in employment, education or training
<b>OECD-TALIS</b>	International study on teaching and learning of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development