

Roma health newsletter

Published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe in cooperation with the European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Consumers and the Interuniversity Institute of Social Development and Peace at the University of Alicante



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Issue 1 – May 2012

Welcome to the first issue of the Roma health newsletter. Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority: an estimated 10 to 12 million Roma live in Europe, about 6 million of whom live in the European Union (EU). There is evidence that Roma can experience significant inequities in health system access, exposure to risk factors and health outcomes. Adverse social conditions such as poverty and exclusion contribute to these inequities. The purpose of this newsletter is to share information and resources relevant to improving Roma health, and thereby support current efforts to strengthen the health components of national Roma integration strategies or sets of policy measures in the EU and action plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The newsletter is divided into the following sections:

- Events
- Resources and reports
- Professional opportunities
- Issues in focus/feature

EVENTS

[Extraordinary meeting of the Platform for Roma Inclusion](#)

An extraordinary meeting of the Platform for Roma Inclusion was held 22 March 2012 in Brussels. The meeting provided an opportunity for national and local authorities, civil society and international organizations to exchange views on policy documents submitted to the European Commission by 27 Member States in response to the Commission's call for an "EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020". Input from this extraordinary meeting (including on health) will be included in the Commission's analysis of the submitted national strategies or sets of policy measures.

[Conference – Scaling up action for Roma health in Serbia and beyond](#)

The Serbian Government and partners held a Roma health forum in Belgrade on 28–29 February 2012. The meeting enabled participants:

- to review progress in, and challenges to, Roma health in Serbia and beyond
- to exchange experience and learn from good practices, and
- to further define ways to improve Roma health.

[OHCHR meeting of the Roma Civil Society Group on the Right to Health](#)

Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) convened the inception meeting of the Roma Civil Society Group on the Right to Health in Brussels on 30–31 January 2012. The purpose of this group is two-fold: (i) to provide a sustained mechanism for civil society input to the activities of the United Nations/multilateral agencies cooperating on Roma health and (ii) to foster intercountry exchange among civil society on the health components of the national Roma integration strategies or policy measures submitted to the European Commission and national action plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Meeting outputs include a statement on strengthening the health components of the national Roma integration strategies.

[Decade of Roma Inclusion conference on Roma health in Skopje](#)

The conference "Towards Better Health of Roma" took place on 24–25 January 2012 in Skopje. Open to all countries taking part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, it was convened under the current Presidency of the Decade, which is held by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The conference included sessions on:

- health components of the national Roma integration strategies or sets of policy measures submitted to the European Commission;
- a human-rights-based approach to Roma health; and
- strengthening primary health care to improve Roma health equity.

[EU Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities](#)

The most recent meeting of the EU Expert Group on Social Determinants and Health Inequalities took place in Luxembourg, 12–13 December 2011. The next meeting is provisionally planned for 19–20 June 2012. The Expert Group is a mechanism for follow-up to the communication on "Solidarity in Health: Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU," which calls for actions to address the gradient in health across the whole of society as well as actions specifically targeted to vulnerable groups (including socially excluded Roma).

[ECDC meeting on communicable diseases and Roma](#)

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) meeting on "Communicable Disease Prevention among Roma" took place on 28–29 November 2011 in Vienna. Outcomes include a discussion paper focused on empowering Roma people and improving their access to preventative services in the area of communicable diseases, including vaccination uptake.

UNFPA/WHO workshop on Roma health

The Roma health workshop convened 26–27 October 2011 in Istanbul by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) addressed issues such as:

- applying the Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion to health sector actions
- social determinants of Roma health, and
- monitoring and evaluation of the health components of national Roma integration strategies or policy measures in the EU and action plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The final report of the workshop can be obtained by writing to romahealth@euro.who.int.

RESOURCES AND REPORTS

[Web site for all national Roma integration strategies and policy measures in the EU](#)

As encouraged by the "EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020", 27 EU Member States presented to the European Commission a strategy or set of policy measures within their social inclusion policies for improving the situation of Roma people. The Commission is currently analysing each country's submission (also with regards to the health components of the integration strategy or set of policy measures).

[UNICEF: launch of web site on Roma children](#)

As for all children, cross-sectoral investment in the early years for Roma children is crucial for reducing health inequities. With support from the EU, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently launched a web site on Roma children featuring various resources, including print and visual materials, to support policy-makers and practitioners.

[Country reports of the Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Project](#)

The purpose of this project is to gather data and information about the inclusion of young Roma children in early childhood services. The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Project (RECI) is a joint effort of the Open Society Foundations, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF. Five country reports (for the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia) have been, or are in the process of being, completed.

[UNICEF report on Roma women and children](#)

The recently published UNICEF report entitled "Women – Motherhood – Early Childhood Development" explores how the status and situation of Roma women influences the health and development of their young children.

[UNICEF: release of findings from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in Serbia, with additional Roma sample](#)

Findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Serbia conducted in late 2010 by the Government of Serbia with support from UNICEF were released in March 2012. To better understand inequities, an additional sample was added on Roma living in Roma settlements. The final report presents data both for the national sample and the Roma sample. MICS covers mortality, nutrition, child health, water and sanitation, reproductive health, child development, education, child protection, HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour, access to mass media and ICT and subjective well-being.

[UNDP to publish country profiles based on regional survey of marginalized Roma](#)

Basic statistical profiles of the Roma population in 12 countries of central and eastern Europe will be published in early May 2012. These profiles include indicators in seven thematic areas: education, employment, health, housing, economic situation, migration, and lifestyles and awareness calculated for Roma and non-Roma living in close proximity to them. The profiles result from the regional Roma survey conducted in spring 2011 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the World Bank and Fundamental Rights Agency (partially funded by the European Commission – Directorate-General for Regional Policy). The survey presents comparable data on the socioeconomic situation of Roma living in municipalities with higher density of Roma population and of non-Roma living in the same locality. The data allow comparison of the situations in 2004 and 2011 and provide baselines for the national Roma integration strategies.

[OSF report assesses impact of health mediation programmes](#)

The 2011 Open Society Foundations (OSF) study "Roma Health Mediators: Success and Challenges" assesses the impact of Roma health mediation programmes on access to health services for Roma in Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, and to a lesser extent, in Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine.

[COE report on human rights situation of Roma and Travellers in Europe – focus on health](#)

The recent report by Commissioner Hammarberg "The human rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe" includes a section on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

OSF and EPHA Roma health fellows

OSF's Roma Health Program together with the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) is launching a two-year fellowship to train and mentor two Roma health advocates. The fellowship aims to increase the capacity of the Roma community for leadership on Roma health at EU level. Fellows will contribute to OSF and EPHA efforts to advocate for the creation of an EU Roma Health Strategy.

Roma Health Scholarship Programme

The Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) offers merit-based open competition scholarships for Roma students who are citizens of Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. It is supported by OSF's Roma Health Program and implemented by the Roma Education Fund. Eligible applicants must be full-time students pursuing or seeking to pursue degrees as nurses and medical doctors at state-accredited medical universities or medical-vocation schools in their home country or country of residence.

ISSUES IN FOCUS/FEATURE

Community monitoring for accountability on Roma health

The Accountability and Monitoring in Health Initiative (AMHI) and the OSF Roma Health Program (RHP) support civil society efforts to mobilize Roma communities around health through an approach called "community monitoring for accountability". The approach helps Roma communities compile their experiences of health services and advocate for better quality/removal of access barriers with providers and policy-makers. The approach aims to ensure that community perspectives inform the development, implementation and monitoring of health strategies, including those targeting Roma, and related action plans and programmes. Roma organizations in Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania are using the community monitoring for accountability approach.

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We are sending the first issue of this newsletter to our colleagues working for Roma health. If you do not want to receive this newsletter in the future, you can remove yourself from our database by using the "Unsubscribe" link below.