

Report from the First Workshop on Anti-Discriminative Practices for Front-Line Social Workers and Employees of the Agency for Employment and Health Insurance Fund

Skopje, 6-7 December 2012

On 6 and 7 December 2012, the project “Best Practices for Roma Integration” brought together 26 front-line professionals¹ from the Centers for Social Work (CSW), the Employment Agency and the Health Insurance Fund, with the purpose to improve the access to rights of the Roma community. The training focused on anti-discriminatory practice and increased awareness among state officials about Roma rights. This was the first of four such workshops to be implemented until the end of January 2013. The training was delivered by Ms. Sonja Kiprovaska and Ms. Vesna Samojlovska, both experienced trainers on social protection issues.

Participants were welcomed by the BPRI National Project Officer Aleksandar Lazovski and the two trainers. The trainers focused on the following points:

- The definition and understanding of the term ‘value’;
- The differences between professional and personal values;
- Asked the participants what discrimination their Roma beneficiaries face in daily lives.

The training included a practical exercise aiming to help participants identify their personal and professional characteristics that help them in working with vulnerable people, especially the Roma. Participants were again divided into pairs and asked to discuss the reasons why they chose their line of work. Each person was asked to identify three specific characteristics that help him/her in the work with vulnerable people. These were presented in plenary and some of the most important ones were stressed and further



Representatives from the CSW in Suto Orizari presenting experience in working with the Roma community

¹ 21 representatives from 6 Centres for Social Work; 2 representatives from the State Employment Agency; 1 representative from the Health Insurance Fund; and 2 observers.

discussed: What does it mean to be non-judgmental? What is an unconditional positive relationship? Why do members of the Roma community often have a negative attitude towards social protection professionals? What are the Roma community's opinions about social protection professionals? How do we see ourselves and how do others see us?

Participants also had an opportunity to get more informed about the definition and legal context of discrimination (both in national and international legislation). They discussed their daily work and examined their usual day-to-day practices to identify any 'unintended' discrimination.

On the second day of the training, participants focused on approaches and feelings that contribute to better communication with vulnerable beneficiaries, especially the Roma. In parallel, the trainers facilitated practical exercises that helped participants to develop awareness for *relative* and *active* listening when communicating with their clients, and also provided them with exercises to practice active listening.

The day concluded with a presentation and a set of exercises (role plays, case studies) on communication with the Roma.



Participants engaged in group work

Observations:

- Workshop participants came from the three institutions that are most commonly accessed by members of the Roma community: the Centres for Social Work, Agency for Employment and the Health Insurance Fund. This presented an excellent opportunity for participants to get an overview of the difficulties that Roma face when trying to go from one institution to the other in order to fulfill their rights.
- Participants coming from ethnically mixed environments were more careful in their work with the Roma and showed greater sensitivity to their needs. Those coming from ethnically homogenous environments generally expressed more less sensitivity and awareness.
- Professionals do not spend enough time on outreach work and in the Roma settlements due to a general lack of resources.
- Professionals expressed their overall satisfaction with the training design and delivery. A number of them proposed that other institutions be invited to follow-up training events.
- Representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the OSCE Mission to Skopje attended the workshop. They both expressed satisfaction with the delivery of the training and interest in scaling-up and continuing with this training module.



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Report from the Second Workshop on Anti-Discriminative Practices for Front-Line Social Workers, Employees of the Agency for Employment and Health Insurance Fund

Hotel Sirius, Strumica, 20-21 December 2013

On 20-21 December 2012, the project “Best Practices for Roma Integration” brought together a total of 21 front-line professionals¹ from the Centers for Social Work (CSW), the Employment Agency and the Health Insurance Fund, to provide training aimed at improving the quality of life and access to rights of the Roma community through anti-discriminatory practice and increased awareness among state officials about Roma rights to be included in society and not be discriminated against. This was the second workshop out of a set of four to be implemented until the end of January 2013. The training was delivered by Ms. Sonja Kiprovskaja and Ms. Vesna Samojlovska, both of them experienced trainers on social protection issues.

The training methodology followed the one from the first training that was held on 6-7 December in Skopje. The main difference was that this time, the workshop welcomed Ms. Almira Redzeqi, Roma Focal Point from the State Anti-Discrimination Commission, as a presenter. Ms. Redzeqi provided valuable input on the culture and history of Roma in the country, and answered questions from participants on the social and economic status of the Roma community.

In relation to these workshops, BPRI met with the Mr. Blaze Kojcevski, Head of Human Resources at the State Health Insurance Fund. On behalf of the Fund, Mr. Kojcevski expressed his satisfaction with the training methodology and overall delivery of these workshops. As a result of this training, he informed that the Fund is planning to scale-up the workshops and deliver them to another 170 employees throughout the country. The Fund is interested in using the BPRI training methodology and materials for these workshops.

¹ 14 representatives from 7 CSWs; 2 representatives from the State Employment Agency; 4 representatives from the Health Insurance Fund; and 1 representative from the State Anti-Discrimination Commission.

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Observations:

- Many participants stated that the Roma from this region (especially Strumica, Vinica and Radovis) often do not declare themselves as 'Roma', but as Turks or 'Islamists'. This hampers the institutions' efforts to assess more precisely the number of Roma in their respective municipalities and thus create appropriate policies. For example, the official records of the Employment Agency in Strumica identify only 8 unemployed Roma in this city.
- Participants stated that in their daily work they have contact with the most socially vulnerable categories of the Roma community. These people are often uneducated and are poorly integrated into society. As a result of these limited contacts, front line service providers often create an opinion about the entire Roma community.
- Early marriages among Roma in this region are very prominent.
- It is also difficult to reach the Roma through awareness raising campaigns over TV and radio, because they often do not follow the local and national TV and radio stations, but are usually subscribed to Turkish channels over satellite.

Report from the Third Workshop on Anti-Discriminative Practices for Front-Line Social Workers and Employees of the Agency for Employment and Health Insurance Fund

Hotel Klimetica, Ohrid, 21-22 January 2013

On 21 and 22 January 2013, the Best Practices for Roma Integration (BPRI) project organized a training for 23 front-line professionals¹ from the Centers for Social Work (CSW), Employment Agency and the Health Insurance Fund. The purpose was to improve access to rights of the Roma community through anti-discriminatory practice and increased awareness among state officials about the rights of Roma. This was the third workshop out of a set of four to be implemented by the end of January 2013. As with the previous workshops, the training was delivered by Ms. Sonja Kiprovskaja and Ms. Vesna Samojlovska, both experienced trainers on social protection issues.



Dusko Minovski, President of the State Anti-Discrimination Commission awards a Certificate of Attendance to Dzenifer Dzeladin, BPRI Young Roma Professional

The training methodology followed those from previous training events on 6-7 December 2012 in Skopje and 20-21 December 2012 in Strumica. The main difference was that this time, the workshop welcomed Mr. Dusko Minovski, the President of the State Anti-Discrimination Commission. Mr. Minovski provided valuable input on the main goals and role of this Commission, as well as the potential for co-operation between these institutions with the Commission. Furthermore, he answered

¹ 16 representatives from 7 CSWs; 3 representatives from the State Employment Agency; 2 representatives from the Health Insurance Fund; 1 representative from the State Anti-Discrimination Commission and 1 BPRI Young Roma Professional.

specific questions that participants had in regards to discrimination and the work of the Commission.

This workshop was different in comparison to the previous two as the participants came from multi-cultural environments. All of the participants came from municipalities where Roma live together with members of the Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish communities.

Observations:

- A significant number of the participants at this workshop were native Albanian speakers. As a result, handouts and evaluation forms were provided in the Albanian language, as well. Still, some participants suggested that in the future it may be productive to provide simultaneous translation in Albanian language. Although this may be a good idea, it is very difficult to implement in practice as the nature of the training is interactive and is based on practical exercises and role-plays that are difficult to translate and implement in several languages.
- Participants reported that unlike other parts of the country, in Ohrid and Struga there is a prominent Egyptian community.
- It is difficult to reach to the Roma through awareness raising campaigns over TV and radio, because they often do not follow local and national TV and radio stations.

Report from the Fourth Workshop on Anti-Discriminative Practices for Front-Line Social Workers and Employees of the Agency for Employment and Health Insurance Fund

Bitola, 30-31 January 2013

On 30-31 January 2013, the Best Practices for Roma Integration (BPRI) project brought together a total of 22 front-line professionals¹ from the Centers for Social Work (CSW), the Employment Agency and the Health Insurance Fund, with the purpose to provide training aimed at improving the quality of life and access to rights of the Roma community through anti-discriminatory practice and increased awareness among state officials about Roma rights to be included in society and not be discriminated against.



Social Worker from the Prilep Center for Social Work engaged in role-play activity.

This was the fourth and final workshop out of a series implemented in December 2012 and January 2013. The training was delivered by Ms. Sonja Kiprovska and Ms. Vesna Samojlovska, both of them experienced trainers on social protection issues. The training methodology followed the approach from the previous workshops in Skopje, Strumica and Bitola.

Observations:

- Some of the participants indicated that they initiated certain co-ordination activities with representatives of the Roma communities (i.e. NGOs, local leaders, etc.). Although these initiatives start well, they are relatively short-lived. Participants noted that the competition and lack of agreement between different community leaders are among key challenges for the sustainability of co/ordination processes.

¹ 15 representatives from 8 Centres for Social Work; 3 representatives from the State Employment Agency; 3 representatives from the Health Insurance Fund; and 1 BPRI Young Roma Professional.

- Inter-agency co-operation at the local level is instrumental in assuring that the Roma community has access to services. The local self-governments were pointed out as detrimental in this process, as much depends on the good will of the Mayor. If a certain Mayor is not interested to co-operate, the entire framework at the local level collapses.

A total of 93 persons participated at all four workshops (10 participants from local branches of the Employment Agency; 10 from local branches of the Health Insurance Fund; 66 from all 33 Centers for Social Work; 2 representatives from the Anti-Discrimination Commission; 2 BPRI Young Roma Professionals; and one each from the Institute for Social Activities, the OSCE Mission to Skopje and the ODIHR.