

conomic, educational, health and other issues, information on social support and health insurance mechanisms. The Association has developed programs for increasing the awareness of Roma on human and children's rights, and providing consultations on Bulgarian social, health, labor, education, and administrative legislation.

The health status of Roma in the town of Senovo was investigated by conducting interviews in all 95 houses.

Healthcare Services in the Senovo Roma Neighborhood

There is a primary healthcare unit in Senovo with one general practitioner, one physician assistant and one obstetrician. Recently a dental practice was established within the unit. The emergency aid unit, which serves the town of Senovo, is situated in Viatovo. Patients who need specialized lab tests or hospitalization are referred to the regional hospital in Rousse, which is 55 km away from Senovo. Health insurance for nearly 90% of Roma is covered by the municipality because they are unemployed. The remaining 10% have no health insurance because they have not been registered with the local Employment Bureau or their personal documents are invalid or incomplete. Only 30% of the people in the Roma neighborhood have a family dentist; 10% have sought medical assistance in private medical practices.

Problems and Violations in the Provision of Healthcare Services

The access to the primary healthcare unit is not restricted, but is slightly limited because the general practitioner lives in a neighboring village and does not come to Senovo every day. When the doctor is unavailable, medical services are provided by the physician assistant who he is also part-time in Senovo because he works for the emergency aid unit in Viatovo. Direct connection with the primary healthcare unit cannot be established since Roma have not telephones. Moreover, the phone number listed at the entrance of the healthcare unit is invalid. If people need medical assistance when the healthcare unit is closed, they often have no choice but to turn to the local retired physician assistant whom they have to pay. As was the case in Kyustendil, Roma in Senovo avoid seeing their general practitioner because they cannot afford to pay the user fees or buy the medicines that would be prescribed to them.

They do not feel there are any discriminatory attitudes on behalf of the medical staff, but 80% of them do not know who is their general practitioner and have never seen him. To them their family doctor is the physician assistant. Many of the Roma we interviewed complained that he examines them under the influence of alcohol, requires them to pay fees for examining children, sells medicines to them at twice the price, and issues no receipt for the money he takes. All the respondents spoke highly of the obstetrician who performs her duties very accurately. Children are regularly immunized according to the immunization calendar for the country. During our visits to Senovo, we found only her working in the primary healthcare unit. Our last visit was on a weekend but she was still there. We asked her to give us the phone numbers of the general practitioner and the physician assistant (none of the patients seemed to know them) and we tried to reach them, but to no avail.

The people in the Senovo Roma neighborhood are not satisfied with the emergency aid unit in Viatovo and reported that on many occasions physician assistants from the unit have forced them to pay for services or have refused to send an ambulance to the neighborhood when it was needed.

The access of Roma to the diagnostics and consultation centers or the regional hospital in Rousse is very limited because they have to travel far and cannot afford the cost of transportation or the fees for conducting lab tests. Last year, before being admitted to the hospital, each patient was required to make a "donation" to the Health for Rousse Foundation. Sometimes communication between Roma patients and the medical staff is frustrated because Roma have a poor knowledge of the Bulgarian language or do not understand medical terminology, or