

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NADEZHDA ASSOCIATION OF ROMA WOMEN AND CHILDREN – VIDIN

The Nadezhda Association of Roma Women and Children was registered in May 1997 and has offices in Dunavtzi and in the village of Archar.

The mission of the organization is to promote the culture and improve the education of Roma women and children, thus supporting their integration into civil society.

Projects in healthcare carried out by the Nadezhda Association:

1. Seminar in early marriages and their consequences, financed by the International Initiative for Human Rights Foundation
2. In 1999 the International Initiative for Human Rights Foundation supported another project of the Association for creating an interethnic center to work with women and children. Women's clubs were established in Vidin, Dunavtzi and the village of Archar where medical specialists – gynecologists, pediatricians, dermatologists, and psychologists – offer free consultations to Roma women and their children.
3. In 1999 the Association organized a five-day workshop for 25 Roma women from Vidin, Dunavtzi and the village of Archar under a project financed by the Women's Program of the Open Society Foundation – Sofia. The participants learned how to protect their health and the health of their family and how to provide emergency medical assistance.

Since August 2000 the Nadezhda Association has been working on a project for establishing a Roma Community Center, which was supported by the Roma Program of the Open Society Foundation – Sofia. The project also addresses women's problems and healthcare issues. Activities in this sphere include:

- organizing seminars on health issues, on the advantages of family planning, on raising and bringing up children, etc.;
- visiting sick people in need in their homes; offering assistance to pregnant women in getting a job at least for 7 days so that they could be eligible for maternity payments;
- collecting and publicizing information on issues related to violence against women and children, and placing stray or homeless children in special social care establishments.

THE STEPS IN THE POSITIVE DIRECTION PROGRAM – PREVENTION OF HIV/AIDS AMONG INJECTION DRUG USERS

In the last few years the use of heroin and other drugs in Bulgaria increased dramatically. More than 70% of the people on heroin are injection drug users. This leads to increased dependence, overdosing, infections and other health risks. According to data from the National Center on Drug Dependence 8% of the people who have sought help in the last year are Roma.

Research shows that more than 35% of injection drug users use secondhand needles and syringes. The common use of other items necessary for mixing the substance (bottle caps, filters) is probably even more widespread. 10 to 20% of the drug-users hospitalized for treatment are infected with hepatitis B virus, 50 to 70% carry hepatitis C. These alarming facts necessitat-