

and the interest of the target group. The materials were distributed for free among the Roma community in the three towns involved in the project, but also in other areas. The educational video follows the key stages in the development of the project, the preliminary expectations, and the final results.

Since their opening the family planning centers have provided consultations to more than 20,000 people. The intensive training program on reproductive health, organized by the Bulgarian Family Planning Association, included 23 interactive seminars, which also involved people from Samokov, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Lom, and Veliko Turnovo. More than 120 informal Roma leaders, volunteers, teachers and local authority officials were trained. All project activities were supported by volunteers who held numerous meetings and discussions within the Roma community. The project fostered many new partnerships with local administration offices, Roma NGOs, women and youth clubs, which helped overcome a number of obstacles and build up mutual trust and tolerance. The family planning centers in the three Roma communities are still functioning. Efforts to ensure their sustainability continue.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Joint teams

The reproductive health of Roma, and of the Bulgarian population as a whole, is in a critical condition. This problem should be addressed with the necessary attention taking into consideration the cultural differences of Roma. Integration should be promoted and this could be done by establishing joint teams of Roma and non-Roma. The winning and more adequate approach is “all for all”, rather than “Roma for Roma” or “Bulgarians for Bulgarians”.

Focus on education programs

Equal start means equal access and right to make an informed choice. That is why until real desegregation is achieved, special attention should be paid to schools in Roma neighborhoods. Because if we wait for schools to become mixed, we would lose many generations. The idea is to develop appropriate and interesting education materials, which would provide accessible information without preaching. Measures should be also taken to keep Roma kids in school because it is education that would give them equal start and better opportunities. Those who have already left school should be addressed through a suitable extracurricular form of education.

Continuity and sustainability

The success of a good reproductive health program depends on its continuity and sustainability. This can hardly be achieved in just a few years. It would take decades to change behavioral models and family stereotypes. This is a formidable task, which needs both financial and human resources.

Self-respect and tolerance

Building self-respect is a milestone of success. Self-confidence and self-esteem should be promoted not only among Roma, but also among the rest of the population. Meanwhile, it should be well understood that integration is not unification, but respect towards the good traditions and tolerance to the other.

The Medical and Social Project of Doctors without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers – Switzerland under a Program for Supporting Health Reform in Turgovishte

November 1999–December 2001

1. General overview of the activity of Doctors without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) in Turgovishte

In July 1997 following a request by the Bulgarian Ministry of Healthcare, an MSF team started a program for delivering medicines to hospitals in 14 towns, which were selected in view of their difficulties in the sphere of economy, social services and healthcare. One of these towns