

was Turgovishte. The program was phased out in October 1999 when the Bulgarian healthcare system was already capable of providing for these needs alone.

In the two years of cooperation we managed to establish excellent relations based on mutual trust and we fostered successful partnerships with most of the organizations involved. The hospital in Turgovishte is a typical example of this. The MSF donations to this hospital were managed very professionally and the good administrative and technical organization helped improve the management of the existing medical resources in the hospital's pharmacy in spite of the serious economic problems, which the institution experiences. The pharmacy was equipped with computer, printer and management software, which has been approved by the Ministry of Healthcare and has been introduced in other Bulgarian hospitals.

In December 1999 following a request by the former director of the hospital in Turgovishte and current Mayor of the Turgovishte Municipality, and by several Roma NGOs, the MSF team started a medical and social project in one of the Roma neighborhoods in town.

2. Health and social problems

According to the latest UNDP report on Bulgaria, the least developed regions in the country are the Northwestern (Vidin), the Northeastern (Turgovishte) and the Southeastern (Kyu-stendil). The UNDP report for 1998 mentions that Roma are the most vulnerable group in Bulgaria.

Unemployment, which runs between 18 and 25% (according to different sources), reaches 80 to 95% in some areas or among some minority groups. 90% of Roma in Turgovishte, for example, are unemployed.

In the same time public agencies have very limited budgets and are unable to meet the needs of the social services, the schools, the hospitals, etc. This inevitably affects the quality of the services provided: unemployed people, for example, receive only 50% of the social assistance they are entitled to. When patients are admitted to the hospital, they often have to bring their own medicines, and occasionally even their own linen. In winter hospitals, schools and day-care centers are poorly heated or sometimes not heated at all.

The negative population growth relates not so much to the lack of an effective family planning system, but rather to the high abortion rate (2 abortions versus 1 birth in Turgovishte). Children are also often abandoned, especially if they come from disadvantaged and impoverished social groups.

A research conducted by the MSF team in the Turgovishte hospital revealed that the inhabitants of the Roma neighborhood need hospitalization twice as often – for adults, and ten times as often – for children. Usually people have to be admitted to the hospital with ordinary diseases, which have been complicated because they have not been treated on time due to the limited access to healthcare services (patients living too far away from the hospital or the polyclinic) and the lack of funds for medicines.

The region of Turgovishte and its minorities are greatly affected by the current crisis and this motivated MSF to respond to the appeals for help.

3. MSF activities in Turgovishte

Activities in the Roma neighborhood

3.1.1 Distributing food donations throughout the winter

3.1.2 Establishing a primary healthcare unit consistent with the reform in the Bulgarian healthcare system

3.1.3 Providing free medicines for the neediest patients of the primary healthcare unit in Malcho Malchev District