

UNDP Bulgaria and Human Rights Initiatives



FAST FACTS

UNDP considers human rights as a key component to development. Through advocating for minority integration, equal opportunity access, gender empowerment, UNDP Bulgaria focuses on poverty reduction and raising the quality of life within the overarching challenge of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Through its projects and advocacy, UNDP assist national efforts in addressing human rights issues focusing more on the needs of vulnerable and marginal groups.

ADVOCACY INITIATIVES



National Contest for Excellence in Journalism on Ethnic and Religious Tolerance

UNDP Bulgaria is the initiator of a national contest to single out professionals from written and electronic media who cover ethnic and religious issues with excellence and sensitivity. The contest has a year-long media-monitoring component and an Award ceremony that takes place on Human Rights Day – 10 December. A Jury of distinguished Bulgarian journalists and media experts from different ethnic background awards the national **Dimitar Peshev distinction award** for excellence in journalism on ethnic and religious tolerance. This award is named after a Bulgarian Parliament Deputy Speaker who was one of the main actors in the historic Salvation of Bulgarian Jews in 1941. The organizers of the Contest and media monitoring are UNDP Bulgaria and its trusted partners - the Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation, the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University. Initiated in 2004, and gaining increasing popularity amongst mainstream and specialized print and electronic media the national contest and the Dimitar Peshev Award were singled out recently as Bulgarian best practice during the First Annual Meeting of the UN Alliance of Civilizations initiative in Madrid (January 2008) and at the meeting of the heads of state and government of the South East Europe Cooperation Process in Pomorie, Bulgaria. (May 2008).

Possibilities for a regional edition of the contest and/or replicating it in other countries of the region were discussed during an International Conference convened in April 2008 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria with the support of UNDP Country Office. The the Sofia International Conference on the

The 2006-2009 UNDP Country Programme for Bulgaria focuses on three thematic areas: (a) social inclusion and local economic development for poverty reduction; (b) good governance for equitable local and regional development; (c) conserving energy and preserving the natural environment for sustainable development. Issues of human rights as well as gender and HIV/AIDS cut across the themes and are among the elements integrated into existing and new project and non project activities. Synergies with relevant initiatives of UN agencies working in the country as well as joint activities with national partners – public authorities, civil society and the private sector - complement the wide range of advocacy and public awareness raising actions in the area of human rights.

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United Nations initiative Alliance of Civilizations brought together representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Spain, Turkey, and Bulgaria, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, journalists and media experts. Special session made publicly available the observations and moral lessons from the carrying out of the national contest for ethnic and religious media tolerance for the Dimitar Peshev Award. In his message to the Conference the AoC Special Representative Jorge Sampaio stated: “As a member of the Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends – a growing community of over 85 member states and multilateral organizations – Bulgaria is playing a key role in promoting cross-cultural understanding, including in relation to the media. Bulgaria’s “National Contest for Excellence in Journalism on Ethnic and Religious Tolerance”, now in its fourth year, is a very good example of these efforts.”

UNDP Bulgaria implements since 2004 jointly with the State Agency on Youth and Sport the project **I Want to Be** which is also part of the National Action Plan for the International Roma Decade. The **I Want to Be** project strengthens through sport and fair play tolerant inter-ethnic relations. Participating in the initiative are Bulgarian and Roma children’s and youth football teams from different Bulgarian towns. Every year from March to May the National Football Union and Bulgarian municipalities

partner with the State Agency on Youth and Sport and UNDP in the organization of football tournament with the final play-off and a special award giving ceremony taking place on June 1st (when the Children's Day is celebrated in Bulgaria).

I Want to Be is a continuation of the **Join the Team** initiative of UNDP in Bulgaria. It consisted of producing a six series documentary about the lives and fortunes of the ethnically mixed (Roma and Bulgarian) youth football team – Romitelli from the town of Lom on the Danube River. The documentary convincingly dispelled myths and prejudice against the Roma and showed real-life ethnic tolerance in a small town in Bulgaria. Subsequent to it, UNDP and the British Council sponsored the football team on tour around Bulgaria.

Currently UNDP Bulgaria and one of the best film production companies in the country (Also active member of the Global Compact national network) are finalizing the **Jazta Prazta** documentary about a Roma Bulgarian role model – the Jazz musician Martin Lubenov. Lubenov lives and works in Vienna and symbolizes a very different type from the trivial and quite distorted model for self realization, in general currency in the marginalized Roma communities. His internationally gained reputation and his example for a show business career is very different one from the doubtful popularity gained by other successful Roma performers. UNDP co-financed a workshop for talented Roma kids as part of the Lubenov journey back to his native country.

CURRENT PROJECT ACTIVITIES

JOBS for Roma initiative is part of the JOBS (JOBS Opportunities through Business Support) Project, a USD 30 mln., eight year long project, implemented by UNDP Bulgaria with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Economy and other national and international partners. The JOBS for Roma component, financed by the Swedish International Development Agency, established two business centres in large Roma neighbourhoods in the cities of Bourgas and Pazardjik to address the needs of Roma communities and assist minority entrepreneurs. They provide vocational and motivational training, business advisory services, job placement assistance and access to micro credit. Approved applicants under the financial leasing scheme use start grants from an additional micro fund. By late September 2008 the two Business Centres helped create more than 500 jobs for Roma people. Nearly 700 minority people received training and 25 minority entrepreneurs were given financial leases to equip their business. **Roma Inclusion through Business Support (RIBS)** was launched in December 2006 with co-financing from the UK Global Opportunities Fund, Switzerland and UNDP. Two offices in Roma neighbourhoods were set up in the towns of Elhovo and Peshtera. The new offices have already helped 70 people to begin work, and have trained more than 150 clients. JOBS addresses unemployment by creating sustainable long-term jobs through assisting micro and small business development in rural areas. Under the project a nationwide network of 43 Business Centers/Incubators/Information Centers was established.

PREVIOUS WORK OF UNDP BULGARIA ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERETHNIC INITIATIVES

In partnership with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, the formulation of a **National Programme for Improving the Living Conditions of Disadvantaged Ethnic Minorities in Urban Areas**. The formulation process involved a review of the overall situation in the country in terms of Roma housing in towns and based on it proposed a plan for technical and operative implementation of Roma slums eradication, drawing on international best practice adapted to the Bulgarian context. The programme was adapted by the CoM and is currently implemented with national financing.

Urbanization and Social Development in Areas with Predominant Minority Populations This six million euro initiative was jointly funded by the European Commission (EC), the Government of Bulgaria and UNDP. The project improved the living conditions of the predominantly minority communities through the expansion, improvement and upgrading of infrastructure in 6 municipalities. The project had three main components: construction works and employment generation, vocational training in construction jobs for unemployed persons from ethnic minorities and generation of sustainable employment through business promotion. The business development component was implemented in close cooperation with the Jobs through Business Support (JOBS) Project.

Beautiful Bulgaria (BB) is the biggest partnership project (total budget – \$ 65,697,625) implemented with the support of UNDP in the country. The Beautiful Bulgaria started in 1997 as a Demonstration joint UNDP/Sofia Municipality project, aimed at testing an innovative policy tool to alleviate the social impact of crisis, addressing key and pressing problems related to: 1) run down urban infrastructure 2) poverty and high unemployment 3) crisis and pessimism about the country's future. The concept involved providing training in construction skills to long term unemployed amongst them many representatives of ethnic minorities, subsequently hired by firms, contracted by the project to upgrade urban environment. Throughout the years it gradually transformed into a Program for social and economic development - expanding from 5 to over 180 participating municipalities and including a variety of new components. Nearly 40 000 workers have been given temporary employment, of which approximately one third from minority populations. Overall, BB has trained a total of more than 11 000 unemployed people in construction skills, 20% out of which from minority groups. Additionally, numerous Roma construction companies have been contracted to work on BB sites. Since 1998, people from the Roma community have put a total of more than 18,502 man months of labour. Overall, minorities' integration into the workforce has helped to change attitudes among contractors, other employers, and even the people in the local communities.

Last updated: December 2008

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