



Rural Development. The project raises the awareness and strengthens the capacities of rural communities and stakeholders for planning and using financial resources through networking, as well as through design and implementation of integrated local development strategies. The project is expected to enhance the inter-municipal cooperation, especially among smaller municipalities, and will facilitate the creation of horizontal links among rural actors, including public-private partnerships in the form of Local Leader Groups.

*Strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) to manage EU funded programmes and projects* increased the managerial capacity of the MLSP's Pre-accession Funds and International Programmes and Projects Directorate and the Ministry's relevant regional structures to function as the managing authority for the Operational Programme for Human Resources Development.

In 2006 UNDP and the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform (MSAAR) started a similar joint initiative to *improve the capacity of the MSAAR and its relevant directorates in the finalization and implementation of the Operational Programme 'Administrative Capacity'*. This project is also expected to strengthen the local and national capacities required for successful participation in EU programmes and funds.

A number of projects and programme initiatives contributed to align national policies and practices with the EU *acquis communautaire*:

*Establishment of a new system of administrative justice:* The project supported the institutional and structural changes required for establishing a new system of administrative justice in Bulgaria. An Administrative Procedure Code (APC) was elaborated, adopted by Parliament and entered into force in 2006; a system of specialized admin-

istrative courts was designed and started its functioning as of 2007; and an extensive training programme on the novelties introduced with the adoption of the APC was offered to representatives of the State administration and the judiciary. The project worked in close cooperation with the EU Phare Twinning Project – Improvement of Administrative Justice in View of the Fight against Corruption (2003–2005).

*The project Urbanisation and Social Development of Areas with Predominant Minority Population*, financed by EU pre-accession funds, was implemented in 6 small municipalities with predominantly minority population. It supported construction work and employment generation schemes, which resulted in building water supply and sewerage network, asphalt coverage & side walks, one kindergarten and one community centre; 317 unemployed from the targeted minority groups were hired on sites through the local labour offices. 1122 unemployed (766 men and 356 women) from the target group were provided with professional qualifications in construction skills, of which 1108 successfully passed the exams and received certificates. 125 trainees found sustainable jobs due to the vocational training. In addition to that, 215 representatives from ethnic minorities were trained under 'Start Your Business' programme and 113 were provided with sustainable jobs as a result of leases/credits/consultation services and business start-up support;

As a follow-up to its support for the integration of minorities UNDP developed together with the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works a proposal for a *National housing strategy for the Roma population*. In March 2006 the National programme and Action plan were adopted by the Council of Ministers. Implementation starts with demonstration projects showing a range of financial mechanisms to transform Roma slums.

As of January 1 2007 Bulgaria is fully-fledged member of the European Union. The intensity and rate of change in economic and human development and, ultimately, of Bulgarians' quality of life depends to a large extent on the country's capacity to benefit to the maximum extent from the support provided through the EU funds. "Are We Prepared for the EU Funds" was the theme of the tenth National Human Development Report, launched in December 2006. The Human Development Report analyzed primarily the capacity of local development actors - municipal and district administrations, businesses and NGOs to efficiently work with EU funds. Strong capacities mean more than the ability to absorb the funds allocated. They suggest that all participants through their own action will help ensure the maximum impact of the European funds. UNDP will continue its support in this area so that the benefits from EU membership reach more people and more communities.

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*For further information, please visit:*  
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