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Roma NGOs
Macedonia

Agenda Item: 3a

Joint intervention made by:
HCAR Mesečina and RDDA Sonce, Macedonia

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

My name is Alexandra Bojadzieva and I speak on behalf of RDDA Sonce and HCAR Mesečina. These are civil society organizations from Macedonia working on the protection and promotion of the human and minority rights with particular focus on the Roma minority. Thank you for this opportunity to draw your attention to the problem of Roma unemployment in Macedonia.

Unemployment in Macedonia is a general problem that affects all communities, both the majority and minorities. However, some minorities are disproportionately affected. The Roma community is suffering the most.

At about 40 percent, high unemployment in Macedonia has increasingly had a negative influence on the social stability in the country. Yet, when it comes to Roma, the official unemployment rate skyrockets to more than 70 percent. In practice however, the number of unemployed Roma is much higher.

According to USAID Labour Market Review of Macedonia from February 2005, the share of Roma effectively seeking employment is almost the same as that of majority Macedonians. This is not the case with the other minorities. The rate of employment for Roma, however, is lowest while the rate of unemployment is the highest compared with all the other ethnic groups.

In the Macedonian society where the economy is fragile and instable, Roma are severely affected because often they are the least educated and most unskilled workers. The lack of education of Roma can be illustrated through some of the results of Sonce's research in 2005. While non-Roma men mostly have secondary education, which is primarily vocational, and the percent of non-Roma women with university degree is the highest among the percentages of the others, Roma men mostly have only primary education and Roma women are basically uneducated or have primary education. Regarding the professions for which working age population in Macedonia is qualified, there is obviously very high rate of both Roma men and women that are without any qualification. Most of the qualifications are within the garment industry, for which non-Roma women are most numerous, and there are some Roma men and women as well. Technicians are almost exclusively non-Roma men, and professions in regard with public services are almost exclusively reserved to the non-Roma women. In opposite to this, cleaners are almost exclusively Roma women. Handcraft professions are mostly reserved for men, but non-Roma prevail. Seasonal works are almost exclusively reserved for the Roma, with more women than men. Roma men are mainly illegal traders with small goods.

The unemployment is more present among women. Looking at the unemployment including illegal workers, Roma men are the most unemployed. Roma

men are also the most numerous working illegally. Roma women are also unemployed or working illegally far more than non-Roma.

Unemployment of Roma is not only caused by the low education and lack of qualification, but also by their lack of knowledge of rights, widespread poverty and social exclusion. Consequently, Roma have minimal access to the state's economic development programs. Moreover, Roma are underrepresented in the decision-making bodies and therefore their specific employment needs are inadequately addressed.

There are efforts to reduce the unemployment in Macedonia, both by the Macedonian Government and international actors. However, there are no records of participation of Roma (or other minorities) in most of the employment programs. Sonce's research also provides findings about employment programs. Women usually benefit from programs in terms of knowledge and experience, while men have benefit in terms of employment. Regarding state programs, benefits are almost exclusively reserved for non-Roma, while Roma have some benefits from employment programs of NGOs only. State employment programs assume at least primary or higher education thus many Roma are precluded from participation. Consequently, Roma economic rights enshrined in the domestic and international legal provisions of the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and other relevant instruments, are effectively violated.

We therefore recommend to the Macedonian Government:

1. To implement the Action Plan for the Roma Decade and the Roma National Strategy - in particular the introduction of employment programmes targeting Roma is a matter of urgency.
2. To improve Roma access and participation in national employment programmes. Roma participation in drafting the National Action Plan on Employment II (NAPE II) and implementation can prioritise means to achieve this.

To international actors, in particular UN and the European Union, we recommend:

1. UN should urge the Macedonian Government and development agencies to introduce targeted and mainstreaming programs for vocational qualification and actual jobs creation for Roma in Macedonia as part of the poverty reduction efforts framed with the Millennium Development Goals.
2. That targeted and non-targeted employment programmes they support in Macedonia should be contingent on the involvement of Roma to ensure that they do not have the effect of deepening the inequality gap between Roma and other communities.
3. That they should prioritise support for programmes targeting Roma education and employment in Macedonia.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.