

## Protection of the Roma in Croatia



National Programme for Roma pays a special attention to schooling of Roma little girls. A total of 5250 Roma children were provided with schooling in Croatia in the 2009/2010 school year.

Roma have lived on the territory of Croatia since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Today, they are a constitutionally recognised national minority. According to the last Croatian population census in 2001, officially there were 9,463 Croatian citizens of Roma origin (0.21% of the overall population), although some NGOs estimate the number to be higher. Like other national minorities in Croatia, Roma enjoy a high level of protection, especially under the Constitution and the Constitutional Law on the rights of National Minorities, in accordance with the highest international standards. In order to further improve living conditions of this vulnerable minority and continue fighting against all forms of discrimination, the Government has adopted a National Programme for Roma in October 2003. In 2005, Croatia

has joined several other European countries and has been participating in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015* with a view to co-ordinating its efforts for Europe's biggest minority, by focusing mainly on education, health care, employment and housing, and improvement of its living conditions. Through its pre-accession PHARE and IPA programmes, the EU has allocated 4 million euros for the achievement of the Decade's main goals in Croatia. In addition, the state budget funds allocated for the implementation of the NPR have recorded a manifold increase in the last several years, in so much so that the number of Roma children attending pre-school education doubled, and of those attending elementary schools quadrupled, while almost 100% of pre-school-aged Roma children have been included in vaccination programmes. At the last parliamentary elections held in 2007, a member of the Roma community, Mr Nazif Memedi, has been elected into the Croatian Parliament as a minority representative and has signed a coalition agreement, together with other representatives of national minorities, with the then Prime Minister Ivo Sanader's Croatian Democratic Union. All these improvements were acknowledged by the Roma representatives themselves. According to the president of the Roma Forum of Croatia, Mr Kasum Cana, "living conditions of the Roma are much better in Croatia than in many neighbouring countries".

### The Roma minority in Croatia

- About 10,000 Roma registered in Croatia. Roma have lived in the territory of Croatia since the 14<sup>th</sup> century when a few hundreds Roma settled in Dubrovnik and Zagreb. According to population census, from 1948 to 1991, their number increased from 405 to 6695. According to the last population census from 2001, there were 9,463 Croatian citizens of Roma origin (0.21% of overall population). Most of them live in the northern part of Croatia, particularly in Međimurje County (2,900) as well as in Zagreb (around 2000). The two languages spoken by Roma in Croatia are Romani and Bajas.
- A recognised national minority. Croatia guarantees minority rights to all its national minorities, in accordance with the highest international standards, international conventions and other human and minority rights instruments deriving from the Constitution, the Constitutional Law on the rights of National Minorities and other laws of Croatia that regulate the rights and protection of national minorities. The Roma are a recognised national minority in Croatia and they have the same rights as the other national minorities in the country.

In June 2010 the Croatian Parliament, with the support of all national minority members of the Parliament, adopted changes in the Constitution of Croatia and in the Constitutional Law on the Rights on National Minorities. Most significant changes refer to the fact that, out of eight seats reserved to national minorities in the Parliament, three are reserved for the Serbian national minority on the basis of universal suffrage. Another novelty is the legal personality given to the coordination of national minorities.

In addition to the universal suffrage, national minorities comprising less than 1.5% of the population of Croatia are guaranteed five seats in the Croatian Parliament on the basis of the special suffrage through elections in a single electoral unit, comprising the whole country. Roma national minority belongs to this category. All of the 22



The former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and the Roma MP Nazif Memedi at the occasion of concluding the coalition agreement after the 2007 parliamentary elections.

constitutionally recognised national minorities in Croatia are now being stated in the Preamble of the Constitution, including the Roma national minority.

- **A Roma parliamentary representative.** At the last Croatian parliamentary elections held on 25 November 2007, a representative of the Roma community has been elected as member of the Croatian Parliament for the first time: besides Roma minority, Mr Nazif Memedi also represents Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Jewish, Polish, Romanian, Ruthenian, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vallach national minorities.
- **Being part of the ruling coalition.** Alongside other representatives of national minorities, Mr Memedi has signed a coalition agreement with the ruling party, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Those agreements in general deal with financial support to national minorities, election legislation guaranteeing special electoral rights, proportional employment of national minorities' members in the state and local administration in line with the Government Action Plan on the employment of minorities as well as ensuring the implementation of the Law on education in languages and scripts of national minorities, regional and local development, etc.
- **Local-level representatives.** Members of the Roma national minority participate in the decision-making process from the level of the Croatian Parliament to the level of local communities. Apart from the fact that a member of the Roma national minority has been elected to the Croatian Parliament, the Roma have also their representatives on the local level. Three Roma members have been elected to representative bodies at the municipal level in the Međimurje County, while more than 300 Roma have been elected as members of councils and representatives of the Roma national minority at all levels in Croatia.

### National Programme for Roma - NPR

- **Improving living conditions of the Roma.** In October 2003, The Croatian government adopted a National Programme for Roma (NPR) with a view to providing systematic assistance to Roma to improve their living conditions and to include them in social life and decision-making processes in their local and wider community, while at the same time preserving their identity, culture and traditions.
- **A wide-ranging programme.** The NPR is being implemented by state administration bodies, bodies of local and regional self-government, other government and non-government institutions, domestic and foreign associations, international organisations, and Roma associations and other interested citizens of Croatia.
- **Using international best-practices.** The NPR was harmonised with international treaties in the field of human rights and minority rights with a view to:
  - exercising the human and minority rights of the Roma,
  - monitoring the international system of protection of the Roma,
  - monitoring the Roma policies of other countries,
  - participating in the creation of an international system of protection of the Roma,
  - harmonising the legislation with the European Union *acquis communautaire* and Council of Europe's documents.
- **Monitoring the NPR.** The cooperation with representatives of Roma associations, councils and representatives has been intensified with the goal of establishing a partnership. Roma representatives are members of the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Programme for the Roma and all five of the Commission's working groups.



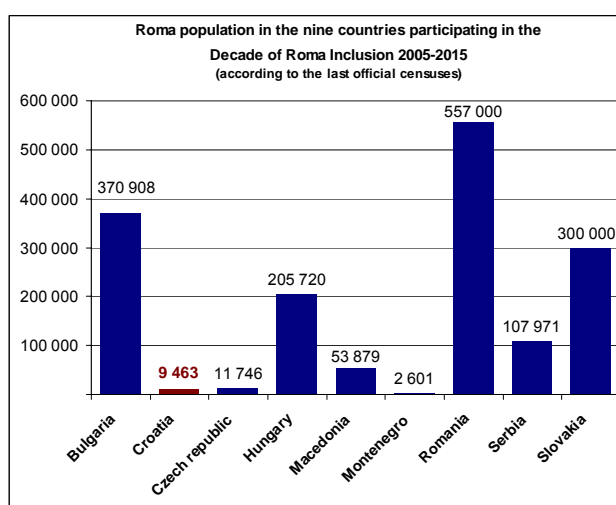
Celebration of the International Roma Day in Kotoriba.

- Taking part in the decision-making process. There are 17 councils and 9 representatives of the Roma national minority in Croatia, and this allows the Roma national minority to participate in the decision-making process in local self-government units. Since the implementation of the NPR, activities have been intensified aimed at training young Roma, especially women, in order to facilitate their involvement in public and social life, in the decision-making process, and in the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma.

## Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015

- Co-ordinating with neighbouring countries. In order to further improve the living conditions of the Roma minority and with a view to including them further into the social and public life through a co-ordinated initiative on a regional level, Croatia decided to join eight other European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia) and to participate in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015* that has been initiated by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.

- Co-ordinated Action Plan for Roma. In accordance with the recommendations of the Roma Decade Steering Committee, a Roma Decade Action Plan has been designed: in each of the envisaged areas, it sets out the goals, the targets, indicators and monitoring methods, as well as the necessary funds. The Action Plan also contains the cross-cutting issues: combating discrimination and poverty and promoting gender equality. Thus, the text adopted by the Croatian Government is consistent with the texts of the other countries participating in the Decade.

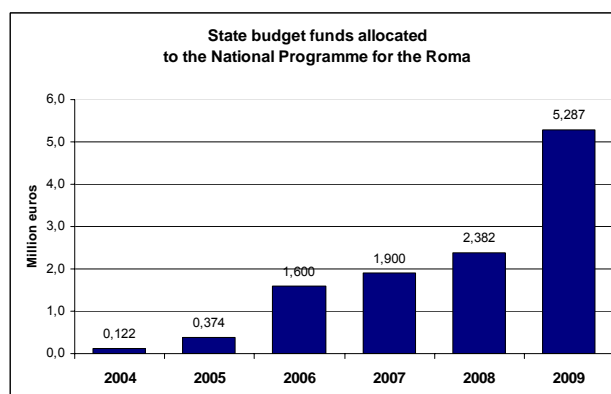


- Measures and funds planning. The Ministries and relevant government bodies have to determine each year during the Decade the measures to be implemented over the following year and submit their proposals to the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the NPR. To this end, all implementing agencies are to plan the necessary funds that will be allocated from the state budget.

- Improving education, healthcare, employment, housing and living conditions. Within the NPR and the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, a series of measures are being taken to address the problems faced by the Roma, ranging from status issues, fight against discrimination and the preservation of the traditional Roma culture to education, healthcare, employment, housing and improvement of the living conditions in Roma settlements.

- Seminars for young Roma. Special attention is paid to the education of the young Roma. To this end, 11 annual seminars and workshops have been held so far to inform them about their rights and to encourage them to participate in social and public life. Also, young Roma journalists were included in the seminars held for minority journalists.

- A governmental website for Roma. The Croatian Government has launched a special website where all interested parties may find information on the implementation of the NPR and the Action Plan of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion for 2005-2015*.



- **Steep increase of allocated funds.** In an effort to improve the living conditions of the Roma national minority and include them in the social and public life of the country, funds for the implementation of the NPR and the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion are regularly allocated from the state budget. Thus, between 2005 and 2009, allocated funds increased significantly from 374,000 to 5.3 million euros, which is a 14-fold increase compared to the starting year of the allocation of funds for these purposes. Funds under the 2005 and 2006 PHARE programmes totalling nearly 4 million euros have also been provided (Croatia co-finances these projects with 1.2 million euros). These funds are spent on improving the community infrastructure in four Roma settlements in the Medimurje County. The works on these projects have started in February 2008.

| Funds allocated from the state budget for the implementation of the NPR |         |         |           |           |           |            |
|---|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Year  | 2004    | 2005    | 2006      | 2007      | 2008      | 2009       |
| Allocated funds (€)   | 122,000 | 374,000 | 1,600,000 | 1,900,000 | 2,383,300 | 5,287,400* |

\* Including resources from the EU funds

- **Inclusion in social and political life.** Current legislation of Croatia, and especially the 2002 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, has made it possible for Roma to participate in the political decision-making. In May 2009, following the Initiative of the Roma Forum of the Council of Europe, Roma NGO representatives formed the National Roma Forum, an umbrella association of Roma NGOs. Its main goal is to coordinate activities of Roma NGOs from parts of Croatia directed to promoting minority rights and social inclusion of the Roma. The National Roma Forum will provide assistance to state bodies in policies regarding the integration of Roma in the Croatian society and monitoring the implementation of the NPR and the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.
- **High turnout of the Roma in elections for minority councils.** Both in 2003 and 2007, elections for national minority councils demonstrated the Roma's high awareness of the need to take part in them. The turnout of the Roma voters in municipalities was over 33%, higher than the turnout of most other national minorities.
- **17 councils and 9 representatives elected by the Roma minority.** In the last elections for national minorities' councils and representatives, held on 17 June 2007, altogether 253 Councils have been elected, out of which 119 were the councils of the Serbian and 17 of the Roma minority, whereas, out of 154 representatives of national minorities, 32 were elected to represent the Serbian and 9 to represent the Roma minorities.
- **Free Legal Aid for Roma.** Under Croatian law, members of the Roma community are entitled to a free legal aid until the adoption of the Act on Free Legal Aid. To this cause, approximately 48,000 euros have been allocated in 2007, with an increase to over 61,000 euros in 2008. According to the Free Legal Aid Act adopted in June 2008, under the certain conditions, Roma, as any other Croatian citizens, are entitled to free legal aid.
- **Roma cultural autonomy.** Significant amounts have been used to create preconditions for cultural autonomy of the Roma national minority and to preserve the traditional Roma culture. In 2004 a total of 210,000 kunas (27,400 euros) was allocated for the preservation of the Roma traditional culture, in 2005 155,000 kunas (21,000 euros), in 2006 128,000 kunas (17,400 euros), in 2007 180,000 kunas (24,600 euros), in 2008 218,000 kunas (29,800 euros), and in 2009 181,000 kunas (24,800 euros). There are 114 registered Roma associations active in Croatia. Funding is available through various channels, including the Council for National Minorities, State bodies, local and regional authorities, and EU and other international funds.
- **Subsidies for Roma culture.** In the field of culture, the appropriations of the Office for National Minorities are used every year to finance traditional Roma culture, activities of choreographers and teachers, acquisition of musical instruments and folk costumes, and other programmes. In the period between 2004 and 2009 a total of 1,072,000 kunas (147,200 euros) was allocated to Roma associations. Two Romani-Croatian dictionaries have been published with the support of the



The Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, then Vice-Prime Minister, cut symbolically a celebration cake on the occasion of the launching of Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.



central state budget. Budgetary funds and City of Zagreb funds were also used to finance the Seventh Roma World Congress (IRU) that was held in Zagreb on 24 October 2008. A total of 27,400 euros was allocated for its organisation.

- "My Rights". In line with a measure of the National Programme for the Roma, the Office for National Minorities has, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and representatives of umbrella Roma associations, developed and printed two booklets entitled "My Rights", one in Romani and one in the Croatian language. These publications provide information on opportunities and methods of exercising the rights of the Roma national minority in three important segments: status-related issues, health insurance and social welfare. The booklet "My Rights" was printed in 800 copies in Croatian and 800 copies in the Romani language and it was distributed to all Roma NGOs registered in Croatia free of charge. The amount used for this purpose totalled 4,600 euros.

## Implementation of the NPR

- A Monitoring Commission. Representatives of the Roma community are members of the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the NPR. In the previous seven years since the launch of the Programme (October 2003), many things have been achieved on the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma community.
- Key achievements :
  - Systematic physical mapping of settlements in 13 counties.
  - Conditions were created for legalisation and adaptation of Roma settlements.
  - Some settlements have already been legalised, mostly in Međimurje County, while the legalisation of others is underway.
  - Out of 14 counties that should have made the local programmes of activities and measures for improving the environment of the Roma settlements, 13 of them have already made them, and in the one remaining county they are currently being drafted.
- Donja Dubrava settlement. Conditions in the Roma settlement in Donja Dubrava in Međimurje County have been fully upgraded: now all its residents live in solidly built houses, integrated with the majority community. Measures were undertaken in order to resolve the Roma status questions, to improve their access to health care and social protection.
- Improving education and employment. Big efforts have been made in improving the education of the Roma: the number of Roma children attending the pre-school education doubled, and of those attending elementary schools tripled. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has continued encouraging involvement of Roma children into pre-school education. This has been carried out through four community mobile teams (established in February 2010), involving welfare advisers and Roma teaching assistance, as well as through direct contacts with cities and municipalities, in charge of pre-school and basic education. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has also increased covering of the parental part of the pre-school education fee for the Roma children. In addition, significant measures are being undertaken in order to increase the employment rate among the Roma community, ranging from information activities and public works to co-financing both training and employment of Roma job-seekers. These significant efforts in integrated education and in giving equal opportunities are meant in the long-term to lead to increased employability of job-seekers.
- Croatia's Action Plan for Education, Health care, Employment and Housing of the Roma. Like other member states of the Decade, Croatia has prepared its own Action Plan, committing itself to implement it over the next ten years. The Action Plan of Croatia is complementary to the 2003 NPR. It undertakes to tackle the problems that the Roma population faces in four areas: *education, health care, employment and housing*. The measures proposed by the Action Plan will help to eliminate the marginalisation and discrimination of the Roma minority, eradicate poverty and improve their living standards as a result of faster economic development. In all four areas special attention has been devoted to the rights of children and women, their education, health care, and



inclusion of the Roma in the labour market. However, the Croatian Government is willing to take further commitments to overcome the difficulties that the Roma minority has been facing for many years not only in Croatia but in almost all other European states.

## Implementation of the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion

4 priority areas. The Action Plan concentrates on four areas: education, health care, employment and housing and the improvement of living conditions of the Roma.

### 1. Education

- Increasing number of Roma pupils and teaching assistants. Roma children are enrolled in primary schools under conditions equal to those of all other children, and their number has quadrupled. Training has been provided to Roma teaching assistants. Currently, 25 Roma teaching assistants are employed in primary schools.
- Scholarships and accommodation for Roma students. Scholarships have been provided to all secondary-school students and students of an institute of higher education who have applied to receive them. Accommodation in students' dormitories has also been secured, and assistance in exercising one's right to financial support. Students of the final year of secondary schools who wish to continue their schooling can attend lectures and receive professional assistance that should help them prepare for university entrance exams and facilitate their further education.
- Free textbooks, transport and accommodation. Educational policy measures encompassing free textbooks, free transport and accommodation in students' dormitories - and also scholarships for the Roma students - are preconditions that are necessary to increase the number of Roma students who will successfully complete their secondary education.
- Better schooling of Roma children. A significant increase in the number of children of both genders attending elementary education has been achieved, a number of scholarships have been secured for Roma, targeted vocational education. Educational Fund of the Decade has approved a donation in amount of 551,000 euros as a contribution to the improvement of the Decade's four main goals in Croatia. The EU has, through its PHARE pre-accession programme of assistance, allocated 4 million euros for these activities, and the Croatian government has to this end allocated additional 6.7 million kunas (915,000 euros) from the state budget. In July 2010, significant changes to the Law on Education in primary and high-schools were made through amendments to Art. 43 obliging schools to help children with insufficient command of Croatian language.



| Schooling of Roma children in Croatia |           |           |           |           |           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                       | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 |
| Pre-school education                  |           |           |           |           |           |
| Roma children provided with schooling | 345       | 707       | 640       | 661       | 734       |
| Elementary education                  |           |           |           |           |           |
| Roma children provided with schooling | 1013      | 3010      | 3224      | 3940      | 4186      |
| Secondary education                   |           |           |           |           |           |
| Number of enrolled Roma pupils        | 72        | 108       | 82        | 98        | 304       |
| Higher education                      |           |           |           |           |           |
| Number of enrolled Roma pupils        | 7         | 11        | 11        | 12        | 26        |
| Total of enrolled Roma pupils         | 1437      | 3836      | 3957      | 4711      | 5250      |

All high school pupils and students in the higher education system receive scholarships.

- **Funding Roma students.** There is a possibility of funding all Roma students, either from international funds or from the corresponding line ministry.
- **Roma Education Fund.** In the framework of the project "More affordable and quality education of the Roma in Croatia", funded by the Roma Education Fund, 1.8 million kunas (247,000 euros) have been allocated to this cause in 2007. In 2007 the tender has been published and the best offer for the educational component of the "Roma Support Project - phase" has been elected. The value of the educational component of the Project is 800,000 euros, and the implementation of the Project started in January 2008. In January 2009 the project ended providing training for Roma teaching assistance and materials for quality assurance in education. Additionally, in 2009 the Roma Education Fund allocated over 597,000 kunas (82,000 euros) to fund and extended stay programme in three elementary schools and in integrated pre-school programme in a pre-school facility in Medimurje county.



Renovated school Držimurec-Strelec in Medimurje.

## 2. Employment

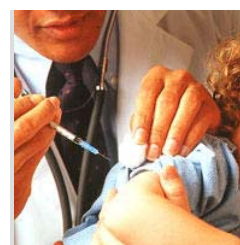
- **Incentives for employment of Roma.** In order to increase employment of Roma, the Croatian Government adopted a programme including public works, training and employment of registered Roma job seekers. The employment of the Roma in duration of 24 months is subsidised in the form of co-financing the cost of labour for the employer, calculated on the basis of a net salary of 1,500 kunas (205 euros).
- **Employment statistics.** In the area of employment, people of the Roma nationality have been informed about opportunities for employment, services provided by the Croatian Employment Service and possible co-financing of their training and employment. They have also been provided with assistance in defining their job profile and developing an individual plan of job-seeking. The Croatian Employment Agency in 2009 co-financed employment of 233 members of Roma community in the duration of up to 24 months, conducted group information activities involving 1,294 people, and individually advised 6,500 people. Since 2008, 24 people of Roma origin benefited from the co-financing of their education.
- **Improving employment of Roma.** The Croatian Employment Service (CES) has been implementing with special attention the activities aimed at preparing and including unemployed Roma into the labour market ever since the Croatian Government adopted the NPR and the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. As the CES does not keep records on unemployed persons by nationality (ethnicity), the CES counsellors inform unemployed persons about the Programme and the opportunities for including unemployed Roma in the Programme.



Members of the Roma community in Croatia have been informed about opportunities for employment and provided with assistance in defining their job profile and developing an individual plan of job-seeking.

## 3. Health care

- **Improvement of health and health care.** In the field of health care, systematic efforts have been made to improve the health status of Roma babies and children, by reaching the same level of vaccination of Roma children as of other children in Croatia. Nowadays all Roma children have been included in the vaccination programme.
- **Health education programme.** A programme of health education has been implemented in several counties, with efforts also being made to increase the level of hygiene in the houses. Various measures have been aimed at raising the health awareness of Roma parents and both preventive and curative health protection measures have been carried out. Roma assistants and Roma families have been informed and trained by field teams that have visited them.



All Roma children have been included in the vaccination programme in Croatia.

#### 4. Housing

- **Spatial plans for Roma settlements.** With the support of an EU grant within the framework of the PHARE 2005 project, the entire infrastructure of the largest Roma settlement, Parag in the Međimurje County, has been constructed through the PHARE 2005 project. The process of legalization of individual houses and connecting them to the water supply and electricity network is in its final stages. Improvement works in an additional three settlements in the Međimurje County (Pribislavec, Lončarevo and Piškorovec) have been initiated. They are financed by a PHARE 2006 project.
- **Construction of Roma settlements.** The European Commission donations through the PHARE 2005 and PHARE 2006 programmes, along with the funds from the state budget for the Roma Support Project, have been used for the development of the entire infrastructure (construction of roads, water supply and electrical network) in four Roma settlements in Međimurje County (municipalities of Nedelišće, Pribislavec, Piškorovec and Podturen). The total value of works envisaged within these projects amounts to 4 million euros. Of this total amount, the co-financing from the Croatian State Budget accounts for 1.2 million euros. Moreover, within the IPA 2008 programme, the complete infrastructure of two more Roma settlements (Orehovica and Sitnice) in the Međimurje County will be developed, for which purpose the European Commission has allocated funds amounting to 2.5 million euros, with co-financing from the state budget amounting to 0.8 million euros.
- **Alternative residence for Donja Dubrava Roma.** The settlement of Donja Dubrava in the Međimurje County, which is not suitable for residence due to constant flooding, has been torn down and all 17 families have been provided alternative residence and integration in brick houses. The Croatian Government allocated 147,518 euros for this purpose.
- **Granting state's property.** The Commission on the State Property of the Croatian Government allowed the transfer of Governments' property to the local government and self government units in Darda and Podturen for the purpose of construction of communal infrastructure in the Roma settlements there.
- **Financing of housing.** The Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the NPR has passed several decisions on granting the financing of housing. Thus, 80,000 kunas (10,900 euros) have been granted for housing of several Roma families as well as 100,000 kunas (13,650 euros) for the solving of the housing problems of the Roma community in the municipality of Donja Dubrava. The Međimurje County has been granted 350,000 kunas (47,800 euros) for the Project of improvement of conditions for Roma settlements.

#### Websites

- Croatian National Programme for Roma:  
<http://www.vlada.hr/nacionalniprogramromi/>
- Croatia's Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015:  
[http://www.vlada.hr/nacionalniprogramromi/Clanak\\_APD/](http://www.vlada.hr/nacionalniprogramromi/Clanak_APD/)
- Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015: <http://www.romadecade.org/>
- Zagreb Roma Association:  
[http://www.umrh.hr/Novo/Aktualno/aktualno\\_education.htm](http://www.umrh.hr/Novo/Aktualno/aktualno_education.htm)
- Croatia's Union of Roma: <http://www.unija-roma.hr/home.html>

