



Romania

United Nations Development Programme

Issue # 33
06 September

Newsletter

2004

First Social Support Center for Roma Communities opens in Romania



From left: Mr. David Lunderquist, Counselor, Embassy of Sweden, Mr. Ilie Dinca, State Subsecretary, Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations - Office for Roma Issues, Ms. Soknan Han Jung, UN Resident Coordinator/ UNDP Resident Representative Romania, Mr. George Baesu, Prefect, Vrancea County, and Mr. Emilian Brasov, Mayor of Marasesti.

On 6 September 2004, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Romania launched the first pilot Social Support Center for Roma Communities in Marasesti, Vrancea county. The project is supported by the Swedish Government (SIDA) and implemented in partnership with the Government of Romania, through the Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations, the Prefect's Office of Vrancea County, the Mayor's Office in Marasesti, and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The status of ethnic minorities, such as Roma, is particularly important in the context of Romania's EU accession. The Romanian Government has achieved considerable progress in addressing the situation of the Roma minority by approving the *National Strategy to Improve the Condition of Roma* in April 2001.

To support the Government's Strategy, UNDP established the pilot community centre in order to enhance economic, social and personal prospects for Roma communities in Marasesti, with special focus on women and children. An essential part of the

project is to involve the local Roma to identify and solve the problems they are facing, so that they can become an active part of their own social integration process. The project is also targeting other actors who can contribute to the improvement of the Roma situation. It will establish solid partnerships between local authorities, public institutions and the local community and will lead to the establishment of a local Roma NGO.

The city of Marasesti was selected on the basis of the overall high poverty level, and of the high concentration of Roma (approximately 28%) who face social problems. The enthusiasm and active contributions of the local authorities and the Roma community in the preparatory phase was another reason for choosing this site.

The Social Center is staffed by a team of six dedicated professionals comprising two social workers, one medical assistant, one IT trainer, one entrepreneurial counselor and one local coordinator. They will provide the local Roma community with social services: information and counseling regarding social rights, support for employment and professional reorientation, support for school recovery; medical services: health education, medical counseling including family planning, support for registration on the family physicians lists; training services: computer literacy, training of sanitary mediators; and entrepreneurial counseling.



The opening ceremony was attended by representatives of national and regional partners of the project, local public institutions, Roma NGOs, mass-media and project beneficiaries.

The project is the first step in UNDP's scaled-up effort to improve the status of Roma in Romania. It lays the ground for further expanding this intervention by replicating the project in other locations with high concentration of Roma.

For more information, please contact UNDP Romania's Socio-Economic section at socio@undp.ro