

## **Principles**

### **of the long-term strategy for Roma integration to 2025**

#### **Introduction**

Improving the situation of the Roma in society (in response to reports on the serious problems experienced by sections of the Roma as a result of social change since 1989) has been an explicit objective of Czech government policy ever since the Bratinkova Report was adopted in 1997 (Czech Government Resolution No 686 of 29 October 1997). In 2000 the Government adopted, with Resolution No 599 of 14 June 2000, a strategy paper on policy towards members of the Roma community with a view to promoting their integration into society, which has since been updated a number of times, most recently in 2005 (by Government Resolution No 532 of 4 May 2005). Though the strategy papers have always recognised the integration of the Roma as a long-term process, they nonetheless set tasks to be accomplished in the medium term. The proposed document, which has been drafted in response to the request made by the Government in Resolution No 1573 of 7 December 2005, attempts for the first time to formulate the basic principles of long-term government policy in this area over a time frame of roughly two decades, to 2025. The principles are based on a set of interrelated strategic assumptions and objectives.

The proposed principles for the long-term Roma-integration strategy do not change the assumptions underpinning government policy towards members of the Roma community, as set out in the existing strategy papers on integration. The principles of the long-term strategy are the product of a threefold approach to the Roma: (1) a human-rights-based approach emphasising equality and protection from discrimination, (2) an ethnic approach highlighting the Roma's culture and free choice to define themselves as an ethnic minority, and (3) a broader sociocultural perspective working with the concept of a 'Roma community'. These approaches are not contradictory but complementary. In current circumstances, reducing Roma issues to any one of these would be an unwelcome distortion. Linking these approaches does not, however, mean mixing them, which could in practice lead to muddled decision-making, especially with regard to funding. It also needs to be emphasised that while the human-rights and ethnic dimensions are by nature permanent, the broader socio-cultural approach is contingent on specific historical circumstances and therefore temporary.

The long-term Roma-integration strategy is consistent with internationally recognised principles, standards of protection, experience and the recommendations of international institutions and organisations.

The principles take account of the progress of Roma integration since the adoption of the first Roma-integration strategy in 2000 and the assessment of the Government's progress and activities in this area to date. Account has also been taken of the progress of Roma integration at local level and forecast trends resulting, in particular, from the Czech Republic's membership of the EU and its accession to the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.

#### **Principle No 1**

The Roma are an integral part of Czech society. The Government's approach in its Roma integration policy is informed by respect for Roma traditions and culture. The Government views the social exclusion of sections of Roma communities and their successful integration as a problem for society as a whole and advocates solutions that are acceptable to all stakeholders.

#### **Principle No 2**

Government policy in the field of Roma integration is founded on the principles of a high level of protection for fundamental rights and freedoms, freedom from discrimination and support for equality and equal opportunities. The Government is committed not only to creating conditions for the consistent prosecution of every breach of these principles but to supporting the creation of a tolerant environment free of prejudice, in which membership

of a group defined by race, colour or ethnicity is no grounds for judging and treating a person differently, and in which diversity is on the contrary respected and valued as enriching society and welcomed.

### **Principle No 3**

Government policy on Roma integration complements policy on the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, which is aimed at preserving the Roma's identity, culture and language. In this respect, the Government treats the Roma in the same way as other ethnic minorities living in the Czech Republic. When supporting the Roma as an ethnic minority, the Government will also take account of the Roma's specific situation in Europe and the world and will therefore also support supranational scientific and cultural activities aimed at preserving the cultural heritage, which would be lost to future generations without the help of society. Whereas Roma integration is a long-term but, in principle, temporary task, support for ethnic minorities is a permanent task laid down in the statutory foundations of the state.

### **Principle No 4**

When developing long-term Roma-integration strategy and supporting the protection of minorities, the government respects the multifaceted identity of the Roma. This means, for instance, that nobody may be forced to give up their origin or identity, even if only indirectly or symbolically, in order to consider themselves – or be considered – a member of the Czech nation. The Government will use every appropriate means to counter the persistence and spread of negative stereotypes of the Roma and will strive to create a more realistic and nuanced public perception of the Roma so that nobody is handicapped by their freely chosen appurtenance to the Roma ethnic minority.

### **Principle No 5**

The central objective of the Government's long-term Roma-integration strategy is to improve the situation of the Roma in all spheres of the life of society, in which a significant proportion of Roma are currently disadvantaged by unjustified and unacceptable differences with a large part of the majority community, and thereby to enable the Roma and the rest of the community to co-exist peacefully. The Government aims to achieve by 2025 such an improvement in the social situation of the Roma, especially in key areas such as education and the labour market, that special measures to include members of Roma communities in the form of 'affirmative action' are no longer necessary and that any remaining subordinate problems can be effectively resolved by the mainstream policies in these sectors. The Government recognises that successfully achieving these goals also depends on a pro-active approach by members of Roma communities. The Government furthermore advocates the enforcement of laws and regulations with a view to preventing third parties from abusing aid to individuals from socially excluded communities and thereby remedying the decline in solidarity and trust between the majority and Roma communities.

### **Principle No 6**

The aim of the Government's Roma-integration policy is to bring about the improvement of the social and economic situation of the Roma (individually and collectively) and an appropriate distribution and stratification of the positions held by Roma in society. Though it does not expect to be able to remedy all the unjustified social differences created over the years by 2025, the Government wants to achieve by 2025 a situation in which the Roma are more visibly and equally represented in all layers and segments of Czech society, including the best-educated, most prosperous and most influential groups.

### **Principle No 7**

The first step is therefore to step up efforts to counter the over-representation of Roma at the bottom of the social ladder. One of the pillars of integration policy over the next two decades is therefore to mitigate and prevent the social exclusion of members of Roma communities, whose extremely poor economic and social situation adversely affects the overall capacity of excluded persons and groups to take part in the life of society as a whole. In order to prevent social exclusion from worsening and to begin reversing the processes, it is necessary to use all available instruments and methods, including affirmative action. This specific approach should be combined with efforts to adapt general measures and sources to the specific conditions and needs of members of Roma communities so that specific measures and general policies generate synergies.

### **Principle No 8**

Local authorities have an essential role to play in the integration of members of Roma communities. It is therefore part of the Government's policy to create sufficient financial, organisational and incentive instruments to involve them actively in creating and implementing the long-term strategy for Roma integration. The centre of gravity of integration should increasingly be shifted to the local level. The priority of the Government's policy for the integration of members of Roma communities, above all in the economic and social sphere, is to join up the activities and measures offered by the state in all spheres and to offer a comprehensive package of services at local level. The Government will disseminate examples of good practice in the integration of excluded Roma communities for use by local authorities, formulate the principles that guided proven projects and create conditions for their systematic application. Districts and municipal authorities with extended competence will draw up, in line with the Government's policy, plans for the implementation of the integration policy in a given locality.

#### **Principle No 9**

When implementing Roma integration, the Government will give preference to measures targeted on empowering members of Roma communities over measures based on the passive receipt of assistance. The Government's Roma integration policy therefore also entails involving the Roma in its drafting and implementation.

#### **Principle No 10**

The long-term strategy and the associated medium-term Roma-integration policy and action plans are drawn up by the Council of the Government of the Czech Republic for Roma Community Affairs and are implemented by the relevant ministries and other administrative authorities in cooperation with local authorities, non-governmental organisations and businesses. Implementation of these policies is coordinated by the Council for Roma Community Affairs.

#### **Principle No 11**

The Government supports the creation, operation and development of non-governmental non-profit organisations and associations of members of Roma communities and creates transparent conditions for their participation in the integration of members of Roma communities.

#### **Principle No 12**

The regular and long-term monitoring of the situation of Roma communities and the evaluation of the success and effectiveness of measures and the rational use of the resources invested is part of the Government's Roma-integration policy. When designing and evaluating policies, the competent authorities also cooperate with academic and research establishments.

#### **Principle No 13**

The preparation and implementation of the long-term Roma integration strategy and the Government's policy in this area will be financed in particular by the state budget and European structural funds. The Government will endeavour to get local authorities to help finance implementation. The Government will support the introduction of measures guaranteeing the use of European structural funds to support programmes for the social inclusion of members of Roma communities in both the 2007-2013 programming period and the following one.

#### **Principle No 14**

When designing long-term Roma-integration strategy and policy, the Government cooperates closely with the EU and with international and intergovernmental organisations and initiatives, in particular the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and with the institutions and member states of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. It seeks closer cooperation with other countries where a harmonised approach is more effective.