



Co-funded by the
European Union



Organization **DROM**

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

**ON THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACED BY
VULNERABLE GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES IN
RESPECT TO DISCRIMINATION, INTOLERANCE,
HATE SPEECH AND HATE CRIMES**

MUNICIPALITY OF VIDIN

APRIL 2023

The report was developed based on interviews conducted within the framework of the project *"Scaling up the role of civil society of vulnerable communities in Bulgaria to respond to discrimination, intolerance, hate speech and hate crimes"* (EQUAL TOGETHER). The project is co-financed by the European Union programme "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" (2021 - 2027) and it is implemented by a consortium coordinated by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee in partnership with NGO "Organization Drom", NGO "Roma Academy for Culture and Education", NGO "ASSOCIATION INTEGRO", Liberal alternative for Roma civil union, Youth LGBT organization Action. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the position of the European Union or the European Commission. The European Union or the European Commission do not bear any responsibility.

Author: Tanya Kaltseva, Attorney at Law

Senior expert at NGO "Organization Drom"

Contact: NGO "Organization Drom"

<http://drom-vidin.org/drom/>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	4
Introduction	5
Discrimination and hate speech	5
Local context	7
Main affected groups and areas influenced by manifestations of hatred and prejudice	11
Selected case studies describing hate incidents	25
Conclusion	27
Annex	28

PREFACE

"Scaling up the Role of Civil Society of Vulnerable Communities in Bulgaria to Respond to Discrimination, Intolerance, Hate Speech and Hate Crimes" is a project that unites civil organizations of vulnerable communities in Bulgaria. The project's aim is to support and empower non-governmental associations and civil activists in their efforts to oppose intolerance, discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. It seeks to consolidate the work of the Bias Crime Reporting Coalition. This report is part of the first activity of the project, which includes regional assessment of specific local challenges. The regional assessments, conducted for the project, will serve to organize and conduct practical trainings on capacity building for civil organizations and activists. The trainings will have a special emphasis on responding to hate speech and hate crimes (increased awareness of the new standards of the European Court of Human Rights in the fight against hate speech against minorities). We hope that the information in this report and the analysis will attract the attention of state institutions and the Bulgarian society as a whole with a view to improving the tolerant environment in the country and respect for human rights and the values of the European Union.

Ms. Donka Panayotova, Chairperson
NGO "Organization Drom"

INTRODUCTION

The report is aimed at researching the state of public attitude in the Municipality of Vidin concerning discrimination, intolerance, hate speech and hate incidents. Due to the specificity of the Vidin Municipality, the study concerns the manifestations of discrimination, intolerance and display of the language of hatred towards the Roma ethnic community, which is the largest distinctive social group after the Bulgarian ethnic group. In the city of Vidin, the largest city in the Municipality of Vidin, there are extremely few people who can be distinguished by other characteristics - they profess a religion other than Orthodox Christianity, another ethnicity/non-Roma/, different sexual orientation. The analysis still takes account of social groups that can be distinguished according to age, disability, social status, education, and gender.

The interviews were conducted primarily in the fields of education and social services, with some of the experts interviewed having professional experience in both fields. The analysis was carried out based on an interview according to a predetermined template. 17 experts were interviewed between March 8, 2023 and April 5, 2023. More detailed information on the profile of the interviewees is available in the annex. The analysis reflects upon personal perception of the interviewees about the manifestation of discrimination, intolerance and hatred and the impact of these phenomena on citizens and society as a whole.

The report is structured as follows: First, available information on discrimination and hate speech is presented; second, the local context is reflected; third, emphasis is placed on key affected groups and main spheres influenced by manifestations of hatred/prejudice; fourth, case studies describing incidents of hatred are selected. The report ends with a brief conclusion.

DISCRIMINATION AND HATE SPEECH

Discrimination in all its possible forms and expressions is one of the most common forms of violation and abuse of human rights. It affects millions of people daily and it is one of the most difficult manifestations to recognize. Discrimination and intolerance are closely related concepts. Discrimination exists when people are treated unequally by others in comparable situations, solely because they belong to or are perceived to belong to a particular group or category. People can be discriminated against because of their age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political beliefs, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture and on various other grounds.

Discrimination, which is often the result of people's prejudices, disempowers people, prevents them from being active citizens, limits them from developing their skills and in many situations stops them from accessing work, health services, education or housing.¹¹

¹¹ Human Rights Training Manual for Young People, Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/bg/web/compass/council-of-europe>

Bigotry/intolerance is disrespect for traditions and beliefs other than one's own. It also includes rejecting people we perceive as different, for example members of social or ethnic groups different from our own or people with a different political or sexual orientation. Intolerance can manifest itself in a wide range of activities from avoidance to hate speech to physical violence and even murder.

Hate speech is generally considered to involve hostility and vilification of an individual or group of people because of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or sexual orientation. The legislation of some countries describes hate speech as speech, gestures, behavior, written speech, as well as screens that incite violence or to actions that harm an individual or a group of people based on their group affiliation, also actions, that instill fear or contempt towards groups or individuals who are part of a particular group.

Discrimination has direct consequences for those people and groups who are discriminated against, but indirectly it also has profound consequences for society as a whole. A society in which discrimination is allowed or tolerated is a society in which people are deprived of the freedom to develop their full potential for themselves and for society.

Discrimination can be manifested directly or indirectly. Direct discrimination is visible and often uncontroversial in people's attitude and behaviour. While indirect discrimination is often more widespread and difficult to prove than direct discrimination. At first glance, neutral or innocuous behavior and attitude can disadvantage members of certain social groups. Most of the perceptions, examples and opinions, described in this report, reflect cases and perceptions of acts and manifestations of indirect discrimination.

Majorities against minorities usually direct discrimination, although there is also discrimination coming from minorities.

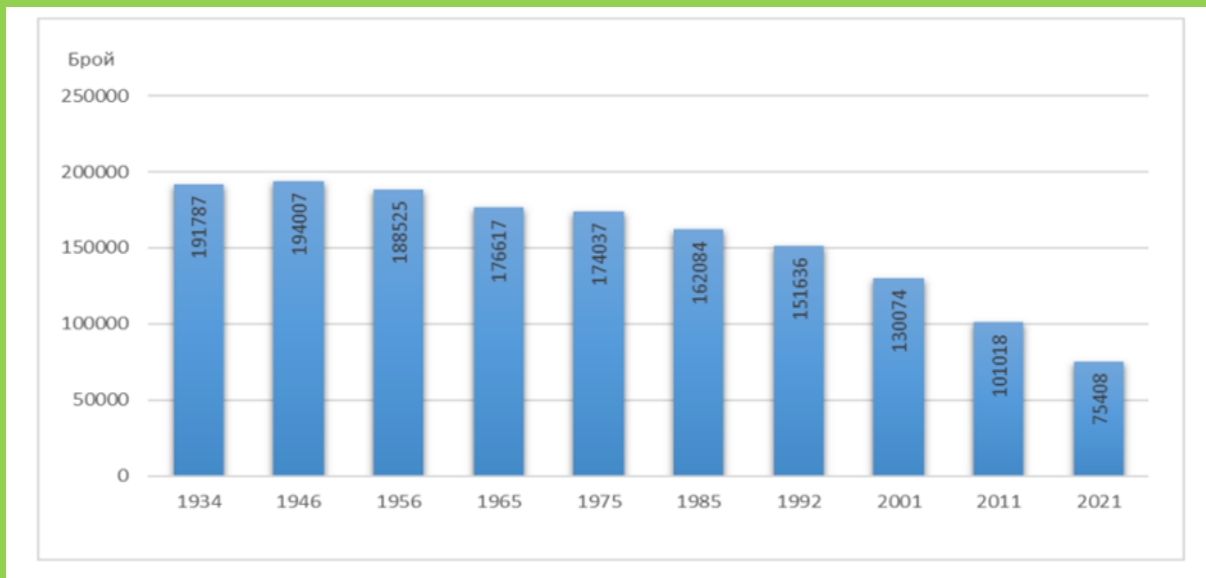
The main role in the manifestation of discrimination and intolerance is played by stereotypes and prejudices. A stereotype is a generalized belief or opinion about a given group of people whose main function is to simplify reality. Usually, stereotypes are based either on some personal experience or on impressions that we have acquired in the process of socialization during early childhood from adults in our home environment, at school or through mass media.

Prejudice, on the other hand, is a judgment, usually a negative one, that we make about another person or people without actually knowing them. Like stereotypes, prejudices are formed as part of our socialization process. One of the differences between a stereotype and a prejudice is that when there is enough information about a person or a particular situation, we stop there with the stereotypes. Prejudices are quite difficult to overcome; if they contradict the facts, we would rather deny the facts than question the prejudice /'he is not a true Christian' or 'she is an exception'/. Discrimination and intolerance are often based on or explained by prejudices and stereotypes against people and social groups – consciously or unconsciously. They are an expression of prejudice shown in practice.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Vidin District, which includes Vidin Municipality, as the largest settlement, is located in the northwestern part of Bulgaria, near the border with the Republic of Serbia and borders Romania via the Danube river. In 2013, the second bridge was built in the Bulgarian section of the river near Vidin-Kalafat. The population of the District of Vidin as of September 7, 2021 is 75,408, which represents 1.2% of the country's population (6,519,789).²² There are 39,066 (51.8%) women and 36,342 (48.2%) men, or 930 men for every 1,000 women. Compared to the census conducted in 2011, the population decreased by 25,610 people or by 25.4%. Moreover, in 1934, the population of Bulgaria was 6.08 million, while at the last census, the population of Bulgaria was 6.52 million. At the same time, the population of the District of Vidin decreased from 191,787 people to 75,408 people or 39%. This is due to the economic migration of the population of the District of Vidin towards Sofia and mainly abroad. In fact, the population of the District of Vidin had a negative growth of about 75,000 people in the post-1992.

Fig.1: Population in Vidin District by census years



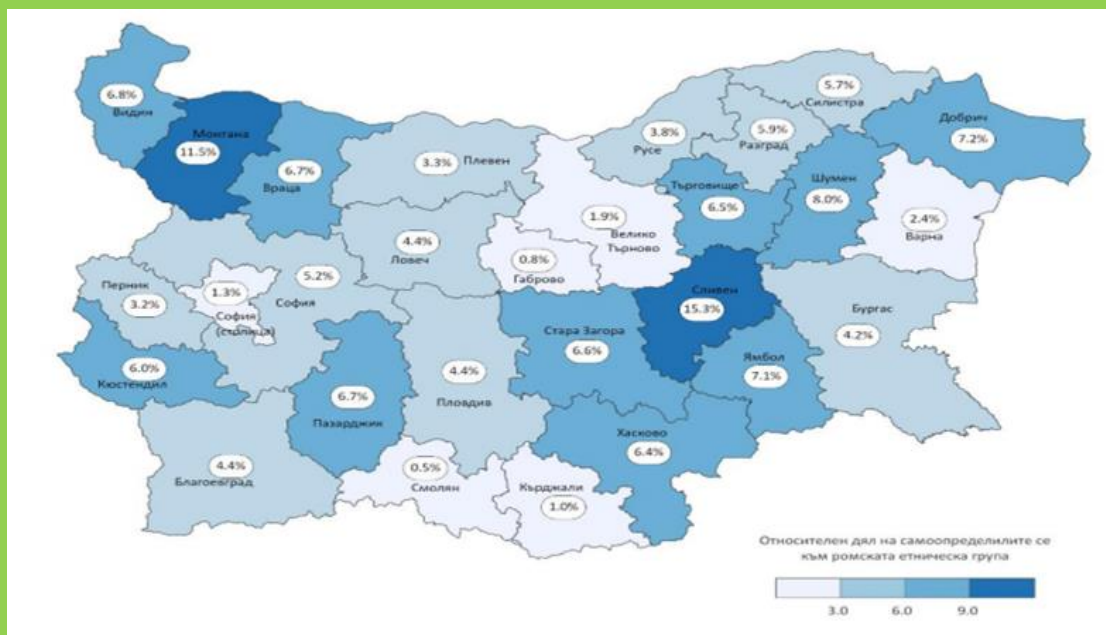
Source: National Statistical Institute (NSI, 2021).

The population in the District of Vidin is divided into 11 municipalities and 140 settlements. The municipality of Vidin has a population of 47,847 people, while the city of Vidin has 35,784 people. Compared to the census conducted in 2011, the population of the city of Vidin decreased by 12,287 people or by 25.6%.

²² More information from the National Statistical Institute on the 2021 population census statistics in Vidin Region is available here: <https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Census2021-ethnos.pdf>

The District of Vidin has the following population age distribution: 11.5% (0-14 years), 57% (15-64) and 31.5% (65+). According to this indicator, the district has the largest share of elderly population (65%) of all districts in the country and the second lowest share of children (0-14 years) after Smolyan District, whose share is at 11%.

Fig. 2: Relative share of self-identified Roma ethnic group by region as of September 7, 2021



Source: NSI, 2021.

The Roma ethnic group is distributed by territory in all regions of the country, with the largest share of the Roma ethnic group represented in the Districts of Sliven - 15.3%, and Montana - 11.5%, followed by Shumen - 8.0%, Dobrich - 7.2%, and Yambol - 7.1%. In the District of Vidin, the relative share of the population that self-identifies as belonging to the Roma ethnic group is estimated at 6.8% (5,055 people). A large share of the population of the District of Vidin professes the Christian religion (85%), while the population that belongs to the Muslim religion in the district is insignificant (51 people), and the Jewish one (8 people), and the remaining about 15% cannot be estimated, as this group did not want to answer or is not shown.

According to NSI, the unemployment rate in the District of Vidin is estimated at 9.8% in 2022. This ranks Vidin District among the top 6 regions with the highest unemployment rate after Shumen (13.9%), Silistra (12%), Targovishte (11%), Razgrad (10.8%) and Montana (10%). The relative share of the poor in the District of Vidin according to the poverty line for 2021 (BGN 342.75 /month for one person and BGN 720/month for two adults with two children under 14 years of age) is 19.1%. Hence, almost every fifth person in Vidin District lives on less than BGN 12 per day in 2020 (reference year for population income). 1 out of 4 people in the Vidin District lives

with material and social deprivation in 2020 (reference year for income).³³ Only the population in the districts of Vratsa, Pazardzhik and Razgrad is ahead of the population in the Vidin District in terms of this indicator. Moreover, 31,500 people in the District of Vidin are *classified as a population at risk of poverty or social exclusion* according to the NSI survey for 2021 (the reference year for income is 2020). This makes about **42%** of the entire population of the Vidin district.

Segregation in compact neighborhoods is a prerequisite for accumulation of economic, educational, and ethnocultural risk factors as families live in isolation within a segregated compact mass. In the city of Vidin, a segregated Roma quarter, called “Nov Pat“ has been set aside, which has its own school, restaurants and about 5,000 houses of Roma households, among other infrastructure. The neighborhood is located on the outskirts of Vidin. It is the home of a large part of the Roma population in Vidin Municipality.

In 2019, NGO "Organization Drom"⁴ has issued a study on the situation of the Roma in the city of Vidin, focusing on the socio-economic conditions and challenges in accessing equal opportunities, compared to the majority. The study took into account the factors and prerequisites that lead to the improvement of the status of the Roma society.

Houses in Roma neighbourhood Nov Pat in Vidin



Photo: Courtesy of NGO "Organization Drom".

The survey was conducted in end-2017, but the situation is no different today. "Organization Drom" reports that every third Roma household in Nov Pat neighbourhood lives in one or two rooms. Half of the Roma households do not have access to water for cooking and do not have their

³ More information at:

<https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/8262/%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%87%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8>

⁴ <http://drom-vidin.org/drom/?q=en/node/207>

own bathroom in the house, as normal sewage does not function in the neighborhood. Illegal houses (today less than 40% of all houses in the neighborhood) do not have access to the electricity grid. 94% of households use wood for heating and 38% have a toilet outside the house.

As a result of these problems, "Organization Drom" commenced work in 2016 to legalize the houses in the Nov Pat quarter, in close collaboration with the Municipality of Vidin, the Vidin Municipal Council and local institutions. The organization introduced good practice, as from 90% illegal houses in Nov Pat district in 2010⁴⁵⁶, today illegal houses came down to 40% according to recent reports of "Organization Drom".

There is also a school in the Roma neighbourhood of Vidin, which has a decades-long history of maintaining illiteracy and demotivation of Roma children. This deprived entire generations of Roma children in the city of Vidin of an equal opportunity to start in life. Considering this problem, in 2000, NGO "Organization Drom" started a pilot project for the desegregation of Roma education, taking 100 Roma children out of the segregated school in Nov Pat district. The children were enrolled in all regular schools in the city and their education was supported by Organization Drom's buses from the neighborhood to the school and back, an extra-curricular learning activity with the participation of 100 teachers to catch up on missed knowledge, daily attendance of Roma mentors in schools (young Roma, graduates from high schools) who were appointed and trained by "Organization Drom".

Within 15 years of active work of "Organization Drom" between 2000 and 2015 on the desegregation of Roma education, over 4,000 Roma children managed to complete their high school education in Vidin and the region, as the organization's activities spread throughout the towns of Belogradchik, Kula, Bregovo, Dimovo and the village of Archar. Moreover, about 10% of these Roma children completed University education in Bulgaria and abroad. The practice of desegregation of Roma education, established by Organization Drom spread to Eastern Europe as early as in 2001. In Bulgaria, the model was also followed by non-governmental organizations that lead projects for the desegregation of Roma education in Montana, Pleven, Sliven, Kyustendil, Sofia, etc. The good practice of Roma desegregation, established by "Organization Drom", was reflected in international reports of the European Commission, the World Bank, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and also by articles in the New York Times, the International Herald's Tribune, etc.⁶⁷

⁵ The Organization Drom research is available here : <http://drom-vidin.org/drom/?q=en/node/165>

⁶ https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/41216-90_ot_kyshtite_v_romskija_kvartal_au_nov_pyt_au_vyv_vidin_sa_nezakonni

⁷ More information about Roma Education Desegregation project: <http://dromvidin.org/drom/?q=en/node/3>

MAIN AFFECTED GROUPS AND AREAS INFLUENCED BY MANIFESTATIONS OF HATRED AND PRUJUDICE

- *Manifestations of discrimination, intolerance, hatred in professional activity and in everyday life*

An expert at the Regional Office of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD), interviewed for this report, confirmed that discrimination exists, but it is difficult to prove, very often it is carried out in private, it is not documented and accordingly there is no way to create a file and conduct proceedings if the case reaches the CPD. Progress in this regard is the European practice adopted by the CPD in 2019 and the change in Article 19 of the Law on Protection from Discrimination that the defendant is obliged to prove that he did not commit the act of discrimination.

Regarding everyday life, the expert from CPD mentioned that he witnessed intolerant, intolerable behavior, disrespect in a bus, a store, a medical facility. *"The manifestations of a brutal, cynical attitude, of overt hatred, are everyday and undisguised. There is no mark of determining a discriminatory attitude from all those mentioned in Article 4 of the Law on Protection from Discrimination, which is not represented in some way in the work of the regional office of the CPD in Vidin. People have never been able to educate themselves about what discrimination is, and every time they come to the office with a complaint, their de facto problem is solved elsewhere."*

From the CDP practice, it has been established that over 70% of those seeking protection under the CPD required the attention of other authorities. Hence, the regional representative sends them to where they will get help. Whether it is always discrimination as the law describes it or whether it is a matter of people's feelings - the law is written by legally literate people, and not every person can be required to be aware of it. The Bulgarian law has good and bad sides. There are 17 marks of discrimination and an open system to add more, compared to seven marks adopted in the European Union, but this makes them difficult to distinguish and streamline. For example, age - not only the elderly, but also the youth are subject to discriminatory treatment. Any age can be discriminated against, misled deliberately into discrimination. The need to perform a given activity places a person in a disadvantaged position despite the presence of legal and ethical norms.

According to the opinion of the expert from the CPD: *"It is very wrongly assumed everywhere that the discrimination is mostly executed against the Roma."* According to the interviewed expert, discrimination is highest in the field of employment (70%), towards people with disabilities 11-12%, then it is discrimination based on age, and somewhere further it is ethnic discrimination. There was such a phenomenon, according to the expert, where until 2010-2011 there was a very serious influx of people of Roma ethnicity to the local CDP office with complaints, strongly encouraged by local leaders and other organizations that there is something here to be exploited. Gradually, people realized that it is very difficult to prove the discriminatory treatment they claim, because you need indisputable not circumstantial evidence (written and oral), the proceedings are slow, there is no monetary compensation, only moral catharsis, and if there is a monetary penalty, it goes to the benefit of the state.

The expressed opinion of a specialist, who's working directly in the field of protection against discrimination, leads to the conclusion that there are bureaucratic obstacles in our society to illuminate and reveal the manifestations of discrimination and it is rather possible that such manifestations are concealed rather than becoming known to the public and appropriate measures to be taken against them. It remains unclear whether the legislative decision, which determines only moral satisfaction for the victim of the act of discrimination is sufficient to compensate the victim.

Another statement by an interviewed employee in an administrative structure emphasized: *"Discrimination and intolerance are constantly encountered in everyday life. These manifestations are most visible outside the institutions, which work according to rules that do not allow discriminatory and unequal treatment, in other words on the street, in everyday and ordinary relationships. There is not enough tolerance there. Rather, there is aggression and it is visible - in the attitude of people as human beings towards each other, for the smallest thing, physical self-destruction erupts. On theory, everyone knows and says to themselves, I should be tolerant, I wouldn't do it, but in a specific situation, the opposite happens."*

The prevailing opinion among interviewees is that the reason for the discrimination is the difficult life, the uncertainty of tomorrow. This brings the aggressive note to the fore. And also that manifestations of intolerance and hatred are the product of deep-rooted prejudices. Over the years, the Roma ethnic group in particular has been treated based on prejudice. Roma have been singled out with negative characteristics, they have always been attributed negative qualities and actions. Prejudice is strong and has not gone away yet, according to the respondents that were interviewed.

It is clear from the conducted interviews that in the field of social services, child protection and state financial support there is strict regulation and discrimination on any grounds and unequal treatment are not allowed. There are precisely defined criteria that persons wishing to use social services must meet. There are veiled manifestations of intolerant behavior among the users of social services - for example, remarks "for the Gypsies there is, but for the Bulgarians there is none", as well as the opposite remark, are often heard in the corridors of the "Social Assistance" Directorate in the city of Vidin. When users' expectations are not met, the institution or a specific employee/in the capacity of an observer of the collisions/ - "you don't want to give us" is blamed. It is difficult to understand that everything is based on regulations and information received from other services after research.

These are the most frequent cases of verbal expression, rather of a feeling of unequal treatment than actual cases of indirect discrimination. From the tours of the social service offices and services and from the observation of the social workers in recent years, it cannot be categorically said that there is discrimination in a direct form and or a similar attitude in this sphere. First, there are no longer these large institutions where people were separated from society on certain basis, there are fewer users of a given service. But in health care, such an attitude is still observed, especially towards those who have fallen into poverty. There are frequent remarks to the Roma "bathe him, make him a soup, feed him" followed by a refusal to undertake any medical intervention. Or people are labeled - insured, uninsured. Even an emergency does not offer help, the person with a negative label cannot get help.

Very often, social services/child protection/ workers are forced to work outside the protocol, with personal acquaintances, due to the poor attitude of the health services and their unwillingness to cooperate. "Perhaps the local structures are encapsulated and full of prejudices. Hospitals in the capital are much more tolerant. They respond in case of need for medical intervention", claim the employees in the field of social services in Vidin.

In institutions/in this case the Social Assistance Directorate/employees have no right to treat clients differently. Moreover, they /clients/ are people of diverse social status, origin, ethnicity. But it is common to see hate speech between people in the waiting room, for example. And this hatred is always aimed at a specific social group - the Roma, pensioners, people with disabilities. As welfare and service users, the hatred is directed at each other and is more a sense of injustice. And the institution guarantees that the provision of services is guided only by legally defined criteria, but people have a different feeling and it turns into hatred towards the different. From observations of the directorate's clients, it can be said that discrimination and intolerance are separate manifestations and incidents between specific people face to face, rather interpersonal relations. People do not accept difference, they have a hard time dealing with it, and on this basis they cannot deal with those who are different. When people do not know how to welcome difference and how to support the different person, then there is a rejection, a negative attitude.

Over time, people change and become more withdrawn and socially maladjusted. Alienation is noticeable characteristic of society as a whole, which inevitably affects the individual. People are not willing to accept the different, and this is the result of the change in the society.

According to the psychologists interviewed for this study, nowadays it is difficult to find a field in which there are no manifestations of discrimination, unequal treatment and behavior provoked by hatred. The attitude of hatred and discrimination towards a certain type of people is based on the fact that the differences are not known, or that the person himself is not doing something right. In most cases, the victims of such manifestations have to make an effort to be accepted because society does not easily accept those who are different, society discriminates against people who do nothing useful for it.

With regard to the language of hate in the media, recently it has been happening mostly in a pre-election situation, according to the interviewees. Local journalists say: *"What is said by and with hatred is aimed at the Roma people openly. The same thing happens in social networks, in discussion groups about life in the district."* Recently, even migrants - Ukrainians placed in a social service for temporary accommodation in Vidin, who have been openly demanded on social media to be removed from the city - have come at gunpoint of the language of hate. This demand was even made at a protest event in the town square.

People have a sense of discriminatory treatment in everyday life situations. Some of the interviewees give an example of the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, when there were protests caused by citizens' dissatisfaction with the imposed measures. They /citizens/ feel this as an unequal, discriminatory treatment. The worst situation was in the Roma neighbourhood, where people were literally closed behind the wall and could not leave the quarter.

Among health mediators, for example, there is an opinion that people still judge by the color of the skin, when they see darker skin they refuse to provide a service, refuse to communicate, judge by the type of clothes.

In different institutions, however, the attitude is different - in the "Social Assistance" Directorate, the employees are kind and do not turn anyone away, as per interviewee. A problem arises when the Roma are illiterate and the officials call the mediators from the Roma neighborhood to help fill out the documents. This is not the case in the Labor Bureau though, where there are officials who openly refuse to serve Roma, and the assistance of the director of the service has to be resorted to in order for the Roma to be served.

People do not show their hatred towards certain groups of society openly, according to the interviewees: *"In most cases, they are cunning, protect themselves, do not like to openly hate, do not like to enter into direct conflicts; this happens in accidental situations - in hospitals, schools, on the street. Very often it is attributed to ethnicity, because a participant turned out to be from a different ethnic group, but when the conflict started, no one knew who was who. Not everyone can be distinguished by external features anymore - the Roma have changed and cannot be distinguished at once."*

• ***Existence of hate groups***

According to the interviewees, there are no organized groups around the idea of spreading hatred. Some say that the initiatives in this direction come *"most often from the pseudo-patriotic parties, patriot leaders who take advantage of frozen patriotic feelings to stir them up and use them politically. It's been a long time, only the leaders change. There are also other supporters of a similar type of behavior, again with a commercial purpose, and for this reason they create an atmosphere of non-acceptance /in the soft version/ or satanization or dressing in stereotypes and prejudices in society."* For example, for the Roma - lazy, relying on social assistance, pretending to be sick, dirty, arrogant, aggressive, etc. According to a number of interviewees, such an attitude is quite strongly expressed here in Bulgaria. Skin heads are also supporters of such behavior, however, there are no organized groups of skin heads in the town of Vidin and its surroundings, they are simply mentioned in passing by the interviewees, rather as a reflection of past events. Unfortunately, there are employees at various levels in the administration who also exhibit hate speech in small municipalities, town halls /personal impressions/ as per interviewees. This includes small and medium business owners. Not a few of them at the official level exhibit hate speech. There are also cases of social workers who show open hatred towards people "depending" on them. And some of the football fans and fan clubs. Hatred is implanted in them not only towards other teams, but also towards individual social groups.

The prevailing opinion among the interviewees is that there is no tension between different social groups in the city and it is not expected to escalate. And one of the stated reasons is the reduced number of the population. Relations between Roma and Bulgarians are calm and tolerant despite the segregated Roma neighbourhood "Nov Pat". Another important reason for the relatively tolerant environment in the city is the process of desegregation of Roma education in the city, which began in 2000, supported by NGO Organization Drom. The joint education and

communication between Roma and Bulgarian children on a daily basis contributed to their getting to know each other and, accordingly, to overcome of many of the barriers, stereotypes and prejudices. In the "Social Assistance" Directorate of Vidin, there were Roma youths who were educated and employed in institution. Over the years, 3-4 female employees of Roma origin were employed in the directorate, and even one of them was promoted to the Regional Department. The service welcomes these young people and wants to have more, especially because of the variety of languages and the ease of work in this way.

There are always exceptions, but Vidin does not have this problem with organized groups spreading hatred and intolerance towards others. Interviewees rather uncertainly say "Maybe there are isolated cases..." but are unable to specify. In Vidin, the prevailing opinion is that the attitude is tolerant and without problems. The two Roma families who fought here years ago are now fighting elsewhere in Bulgaria. But even this is not an example of a social problem, rather interpersonal problems that necessitated the intervention of the authorities. According to a large part of the interviewees, the problem of hate speech exists in social networks very often. There, anyone who feels hurt or offended practices hating and denouncing others. There are always constant critics and grumblers, but not organized groups.

In the Vidin region, in general, there is no problem with groups, but with individuals. The opinion of a psychologist with many years of practice with different social groups stands out, according to whom the discriminatory attitude was imposed in older times in order to preserve the community, mostly the white heterosexual Christian community. Now the world is global, we communicate with the whole world directly, we already know a lot about different races, religions and we know that people are biologically built in one way and the opinion is that things tend to be less and less discriminatory. Alongside the general feeling of the presence of discrimination and unequal treatment in almost every human activity and between different social groups, this opinion is isolated and unsupported by examples and evidence.

• ***Other social groups that are vulnerable to intolerance, impatience, hate speech***

The prevailing opinion of the interviewees indicates that the elderly, the socially weak, and the unemployed are particularly vulnerable. Regarding the latter there is an apriori created stereotypical thinking – if one is unemployed, socially weak, one is passive, lazy, a curmudgeon. These labels stick and there is no way exiting the created frame. On this occasion, the Bulgarian people have great proverbs that contain a folk psychology that is not subject to any corrections - stay away from a scarred person/when it comes to an external scar/. *"If the different ethnic group has no outward signs of difference, it will not be treated differently,"* according to an expert from the CPD.

The opinion of the manager of a non-governmental organization in Vidin is of interest, according to which *"the most serious manifestations of discrimination, intolerance and hatred are directed against the Roma - a negative attitude towards them is still noticeable in the shop, the cafe, the restaurants"*. In the city, especially in the summer, when Roma emigrants return for vacation, conflicts and incidents often occur, and this inevitably affects our society and makes the problem seriously noticeable. The same interviewee continues: *"Secondly, there is also a similar negative*

discriminatory attitude towards the LGBTIQ community. Very few of the locals react normally to this type of people, in most cases people with different sexual orientation suffer ridicule, dislike and insults. In the next, but not least place - migrants - also suffer such treatment, regardless of where they come from - the Middle East, Afghanistan, Ukraine". The expert was unable to formulate a precise explanation as to why this is happening, but he summarizes: "yes, there are manifestations of intolerance, discrimination and hatred, and the Roma are the most affected."

The constant suspects, the ones who easy become victims of hatred, discrimination, intolerance - the Roma, they are the most vulnerable. They go with a mark. People with disabilities are vulnerable, it happens without even thinking about it. Virtually everyone who differs from the mass. Next come the people with mental problems - incorrectly assessed, beaten, blamed, there is fear of them. There is also an element of social status, but it is very much masked by the stretched perception of poverty. The relationship is usually two-sided. Some of the interviewees believe that serious cases of discrimination are observed in relation to women with small children or pregnant women in the process of looking for a job. Such women are openly not hired/returned by employers because it is assumed that they will be absent frequently and will not be effective in their work. And these are not isolated cases and ethnical origin is irrelevant.

We can justify the treatment of a large part of the members of the social groups mentioned so far with the discriminatory factor. But when we look at the individual, we will see that he actually has to do other things, behave differently, to generate a different attitude and be accepted well in society, without misunderstanding and hatred.

At the moment, sexual minorities are particularly vulnerable/the problem is bigger around the discussion about the adoption of the Istanbul Convention/. The reason is that, instead of taking into account the local peculiarities, we take individual examples from Europe and mechanically put them into our society. In Western European societies, the convention appears to be working, but our society is pulling back, according to an interviewed expert. This is the most vulnerable group - with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. People take advantage of the different sexual orientation in both directions - the different for their own benefit and the others to unleash hatred. The mixing of different social groups makes a good impression. Interviewees' statements indicate the following:

"20, 30 years ago you couldn't see gypsies in the city, we knew they lived somewhere on the outskirts but we didn't see them. Now we are used to being mixed and being together. There is progress, but we are hardly considered equal. And the tension is rather incidental; no stagnant or accumulated tension; relations between people are more or less normal. There are irritants that are often associated with the Roma ethnicity and they are capable of creating a problem. Sometimes an unpleasant incident can happen from very little."

There are experts who believe that there is no discriminatory and unequal treatment towards any special group, rather they think that society is right when it shows an intolerant attitude towards someone who does not respect himself. It has been that long period where there was really a lot of discriminatory treatment of different people, but now we're much more open and tolerant to accepting refugees, another religion, different sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities.

It is stated that there is discrimination against pregnant women and mothers with small children. "Who would hire such a woman? No one!" Business owners exhibit hidden discrimination. For example, they announce that they are looking for staff, but in reality they are looking for a woman for the job, and if a man comes, they will refuse to hire him.

It is put as a common opinion that stereotypes and prejudices are deeply rooted. It's a built in instinct and we never know when it will manifest itself. But it manifests itself automatically, it is automated, it does not require reasoning, it is convenient.

Interviewed psychologists, and not only them, indicate that people use the phrase "I am being discriminated against" as some kind of defense, some want to present themselves as a victim. If a person is lazy, has no abilities and does not want to do something about his social and life status, he uses the phrase as an excuse.

A manager of a non-governmental organization from Vidin says that in his work he encountered a rather negative attitude from some representatives of the Roma ethnic group, rather the so-called "Gypsy barons".

"They are outraged that we Bulgarians go to the Roma neighbourhood to work with their children and charge a lot of money for it." He cannot say for sure whether this behavior is based on ethnic intolerance or a personal attitude towards the organization. They/the Gypsy barons/ are outraged that someone is allowing himself to enter where he does not belong.

There is definitely no reason for this reaction of the so-called Roma "barons" to be classified as reverse discrimination, i.e. attitude based on the fact that the NGO is Bulgarian. They, the "barons", had a similar attitude towards NGO Organization Drom at the beginning of the desegregation process of Roma education in 2000. However, then the organization organized public discussions in the Nov Pat quarter itself, at which they argued the benefits of integration, and thus Drom's theses were understood and accepted both by the community and by the Roma "barons". The fears are that the Bulgarian non-governmental organization missed this part of the work, and there were expectations that it would only mechanically recruit the "numbers of children" needed for the project.

In this sense, we see another example of misunderstanding of the meaning and inappropriate use of the term "discrimination" by the NGO in question. Another issue is that the so-called Roma "barons", as a rule, in symbiosis with the elites of some parties, treat the Roma quarter as a kind of their feudal domain. But this is a question for the political elites, not for the Roma population itself. There are many examples of discrimination and there is even still a presumption that the Roma are second-class people and it goes without saying that they cannot be trusted. An example from the field of repair services: *"He will do the proper work, but he is a gypsy"*.

• Roma's attempt to overcome stereotypes and prejudices against them

The opinions of the interviewees on the issue of whether the Roma try to overcome the stereotypes and prejudices against them are divergent. Some say "not sure". Others think the progress is sensitive. For example, there are cases in which Roma become bitter towards the Bulgarian ethnic group, even among themselves, and thus do not contribute to improving the situation. But it can

be seen that those who travel to work abroad acquire a different self-confidence of more complete people, although sometimes they cross the border /a common case of people who are not well educated/. It can be seen that there is progress on their part, the changes are for the better. In the words of an interviewed psychologist: *"we cannot expect a lightning change, since they have not done it since the 14th century, now in 15-20 years a miracle will not happen. But for such a short historical period, progress is sensitive."*

Prejudice against the Roma still exists in society, and the Roma themselves are ready to behave in a hostile manner towards the Bulgarians in any situation. What is interesting here is that such an opinion was expressed by a person of Roma origin working in the social sphere, but it is also supported by a large part of the other interlocutors. However, all interviewees point to the reassuring fact that more and more Roma are educated and strive to realize themselves professionally.

A number of interviewees testified that NGO "Organization Drom " is of great merit for the progress in the education of the Roma living in Vidin and the region. For more than fifteen years, the organization has been working on a project for the desegregation of Roma education. The project is inherently a human rights project and it covers all schools - segregated in Roma neighborhoods and those within the city, as well as all Roma children. After its implementation, the phrase "Vidin model of desegregation" became popular, which gives equal access to quality education to the Roma. The results of the project are the presence of Roma and non-Roma children in every class and level of education, the opening of groups to catch up on the study material in basic subjects for students with poor grades regardless of ethnic origin, many competitions, annual camps, sports games in schools, trainings for teachers, even training parents of early school leavers. According to the interviewed experts, the model introduced by Organization Drom has become an independent process after 2015, which no longer needs external intervention to function normally and universally in the region. The work of "Organization Drom" in the field of Roma education and its desegregation showed the way to create tolerance between different social groups and gradual overcoming of discrimination in society.

• ***Tension between different social groups***

Most interviewees believe that if tension is felt it is mainly between ethnic Bulgarians and Roma, but not everywhere. There are settlements that are dominated by representatives of the Roma population and there is a certain tension; the Bulgarians even emigrated.

Tension is created by purposeful and deliberate actions that are not accidental. An attitude has been created in advance in people to provoke a conflict, an incident, some event that will offend the other party. There are no random things, especially in relation to the other.

• ***Modern Bulgarian society' tolerance***

There are many positive examples of good relations between ethnic groups - training, friendship, joint business. Roma children are interested in activities outside the compulsory ones at school. They are willing to participate in games, sports competitions, trainings, they get involved. But there is always a distinctive behavior of detention and closure when they are in common events

with the Bulgarian ethnic group. But when we talk about individuals, this behavior is lost. It is unique to the group.

Relationships are seriously changing. Thanks to the work of NGO "Organization Drom" for the desegregation of Roma education, more and more Roma study at schools of their choice, according to their wishes, continue their education in universities and take positions in various institutions such as teachers, doctors, and social workers. A tolerant school environment affects the relationship between people. And again, thanks to the efforts of Organization Drom, the Roma live in a safer neighborhood with no worries about their homes. They don't even have a problem living within the city anymore, not just in the segregated neighborhood on the outskirts. More and more exchanges are taking place and this is leading to a reduction in the tensions that existed years ago. As a result, experts claim that there have been fewer and fewer incidents of hate between the Bulgarian and Roma ethnic groups in recent years.

Another factor mentioned for people being more tolerant today than in the past is the opportunity to travel, which shapes a new view of the world. Along with better and more diverse education this makes the coexistence of different ethnic groups less problematic and possible.

It is also shared that the level of intolerance is high on the internet, anonymity breaks down barriers and people are bold, attack directly and that's clear speaking with/from hatred. Maybe there are people interested in doing so, not just pure emotion, there may be paid ones too. But the phenomenon is widespread in social networks. To a large extent, such an attitude is the result of stereotypes. Education does not always and everywhere manage to remove the long-term position in the mind of certain views already outdated and not working. The interviewed psychologists believe that the mentality is a hard constant - we make pleasure in spoiling each other's work. But there is definitely progress in terms of tolerance in society. Many people at least refrain from speaking publicly against the Roma. Even if they have negative thoughts, they remain hidden or are expressed only in a close circle. The fact that children learn and grow together is already bearing fruits.

Yet, there is categorically no tolerance for different sexual orientation. The Bulgarian society has a hard time accepting this perhaps because it has not been talked about or shown until now; it was thought to be someone else's fault that it happened, and the attitude of the people was to oppose it. And this attitude is carried over to children. Children are as encapsulated as their families. At home, they hear a negative attitude and interpret this outside. No wonder they are full of prejudices, psychologists state.

When Roma and Bulgarians are together in life, at school, in the neighborhood and everywhere else, borders are erased and everyone understands that others are not different. When someone comes to the "Social Assistance" Vidin Directorate and declares that they are of Roma origin, the employees say - we serve people, we do not serve them as Gypsies and as Bulgarians, separately. If a person of Roma origin refers to his ethnicity and holds on to it/presumably/ everything possible is done to break the thinking that something different is owed to him. When the self-imposed label is removed, communication becomes easy. But quite often, as interviewees say, people cannot understand that there are rights and obligations for everyone in the state and when their wish is not

fulfilled accordingly they start to alarm all possible institutions and bodies and look for rights that they think are violated. It is difficult to work with these social groups, they are difficult to understand, they do not want to understand. A third, independent but trusted party is needed to help with contact, to mediate, because many people not only can't, but also they do not want to understand.

In spite of being a small town, society in Vidin is changing. *"We have moved to the next phase, for people to take care of themselves and not justify themselves with discriminatory treatment,"* said psychologists and those working in the non-governmental sector. *"Let's do what we can do well, make an effort, and then think it's a discriminatory attitude if something doesn't happen as we imagine it."* But this seemingly reassuring statement leads to the question of where institutions stand in the process of protecting the individual from unequal treatment, discriminatory treatment, incidents of hate. The whole situation shows the inefficiency of state structures for the protection of human rights.

Most interlocutors believe that recently people have become more tolerant to others in society. The cases in which we talk about intolerance are isolated, incidental, and not mass. There are groups on social networks that only aim to instill hatred, but towards specific people/politicians, public figures/. There are no cases of openly speaking out of hatred and instilling hatred towards the Roma ethnic group.

The media is sensitive to manifestations of discrimination, intolerance and hatred and is always ready to cover such incidents. The journalists emphasize: *".. we have recently observed a decrease in such situations and less and less need to cover them, and this is due to the growth of society and increased tolerance. Although these manifestations are unlikely to disappear permanently and it is good to have more campaigns to educate and explain the differences."*

At the moment, the attitude towards the Roma is much better than years ago. The interviewees, whose daily activities cover both ethnicities, emphasize the serious change mainly among young and middle-aged Roma. As stated above, thanks to the long and hard work of NGO Organization Drom in the field of education and protection of Roma rights, they are educated, have a profession and want to practice it. And this leads to a change in the attitude towards them on the part of the Bulgarian ethnic group, but with the proviso that these are still young and middle-aged people. Among the older Bulgarian population, there is still a negative attitude, they clearly show hatred without having a specific reason, just because they don't like Gypsies. Young Roma communicate and live freely, with no problem with their peers of Bulgarian origin, there are even mixed marriages, they live both in the Roma quarter and in the city.

In most public places in the city, there is no problem with Roma access. But still there is one of the restaurants in the city park that openly does not allow Roma and the owners without hesitation declare it and turn them back.

A problem exists in the city hospital - the Roma have to wait very often for examination and manipulations, regardless of whether they have health insurance or not. It often happens that doctors openly express disdain and unwillingness to do their job which evaporates the moment

money is offered in hand. This is a very common practice in the maternity ward of the city hospital as well.

In educational institutions - kindergarten and school - a different attitude is felt, but not by the teaching staff. Hatred is most often instilled in children of Bulgarian origin towards Roma children by their parents/grandparents. This once again shows that the older population has not yet overcome the stereotypes of the past towards different ethnic groups. But when children are together since childhood, in one place, study and live together, they overcome negative accumulations very easily and differences are no longer paid attention to.

The problems of discrimination, unequal treatment and hatred exist among the elderly population. They openly express their hatred and dislike for the Roma ethnic group.

The feeling among the Roma themselves is that there is a lot of open hatred towards them on social networks. In groups formed on a regional basis, this is felt especially strongly. Very often words of hatred towards the Roma, open insults and threats of massacre are written, just because they are Roma. Even when public events are commented on, the Roma intervene and insult and ugly qualifications are poured on them. On social networks, people are more emboldened to speak with and from hate because they are anonymous and can hide behind a fake profile. That is why hatred spreads in these places.

• ***Main factors creating the right environment for discrimination, hatred, prejudice, different/intolerant treatment***

There are factors in society that provoke discriminatory attitudes, hatred and unequal treatment. Most of the interviewees point out that poverty explodes in psychological complexes in both groups, but most from Bulgarians towards Roma ethnic group. Recently, many Roma who work abroad come home with money after a period of living in poverty and behave very arrogantly and intolerantly. This irritates and creates particular attitude in other people. There is an attitude that during the summer it is not good in Vidin because the Roma are coming home, which creates a negative attitude and tension.

The media is able to radically change the thinking of many people by suggestion, emphasizing the bad, and the film industry should not be underestimated. And if the young don't have a corrective and a good example, things go bad. The media does not adequately cover cases of intolerance, violence, hatred. Inadmissible and unmeasured is the attitude towards the human tragedy, which instills fear and panic and in turn provokes misunderstanding.

Next comes the economic situation. When a low-educated and economically inactive human cannot satisfy his basic needs, tension is created; if there is a secure income, things will be different. Otherwise people turn against each other.

Family upbringing is also a factor that we forget to mention, we think that it is *a priori* given and there is no need to talk about it. And many of today's parents, according to interviewees, do their best to make teachers the servants of their children and refuse to do their job in the family.

The prevailing opinion is that in Vidin there is no intolerance of any kind that could provoke discriminatory hateful behavior. Perhaps the economic situation awakens reprehensible manifestations of intolerance. We should not ignore the educational level of both ethnic groups, which has already been commented on in the report.

During the conversation with an expert in the field of human rights protection, the following statement appeared: *"One must be very careful with segregation in education - it has the opposite effect - toleration of the minority/Roma/ at the expense of the majority/Bulgarian/, the privilege for some is already discrimination for others"*. The interviewee noted that in the town of Dunavtsi and the village of Archar, the schools are already almost segregated with a predominance of Roma; the Bulgarians deliberately withdrew. Secondary segregation exists throughout the country, and unfortunately also in the Vidin region, but the reasons for it are not at all any supposed "privileges" towards the Roma. Years ago in the town of Dunavtsi, when there was an economy, between 700 and 800 children were educated on average. Now that there is no economy left in the city, the bulk of the population left to seek a livelihood elsewhere. The Bulgarians moved out a long time ago, together with their parents and without connection with the Roma and the "privileges". As a result, one of the schools was closed at the end of the last century, and in the other primary school there are only about 60 children - most of them are of Roma origin. Hence, economic migration to Italy, Spain, Germany, etc., is the main reason, not the non-existent privileges of Roma children in the school.

The second reason is again not related to any privileges for Roma children. It is about the massive anti-Roma campaign carried out for more than a decade (2010-2020) by various parties, politicians, media and many other factors at the national level, which inevitably led to a deterioration of inter-ethnic attitudes in general and to quite a few cases in the country of secondary segregation in particular.

According to health mediators interviewed for this report, the Covid-19 pandemic has fueled negative attitude among people. Probably, due to the created situation of physical restriction, it was easier for the tension to be released through the more vulnerable groups of Roma, and due to the separate living in the neighborhood, they suffered especially. Dirty, respectively very contagious and therefore they should be locked up in the segregated neighborhoods – this was the general opinion towards the Roma in society, pushed by the media. Otherwise, according to the data of the health mediators, in Vidin there was no resistance from the residents of the Roma neighbourhood to the vaccinations against Covid-19 because everyone wanted to keep their jobs and be able to provide for their families.

If personal behavior can be counted as a factor, it should be noted that sometimes the Roma are very impudent without reason, which provokes the negative attitude towards them. Social experts think that the Roma are worried in advance about the possible negative attitude and are therefore disposed to be harsh and assertive. But once they encounter a normal attitude, without prejudice, most of them also change their behavior. And this is happening more and more often. However, such behavior is sometimes observed on the part of ethnic Bulgarians towards Roma. A major role in influencing such behavior in the last decade can be attributed to parties, political, media and other factors, creating an environment for discrimination and generating hatred, mainly towards

the Roma community, and recently also towards other groups such as migrants, LGBTIQ and others.

• ***Talking about discrimination, attitude towards different people, hatred and overcoming them***

Hatred and discrimination should be talked about, examples should be given, it should be pointed out that hatred is not a way to solve problems. Some of the interlocutors believe that the topic is sufficiently represented in the media, schools, and other public places. The media rather negatively participates in the speech, does not extinguish the tension, but instills, accentuates it. They should show the real situations with a real explanation and not just seek the sensation to give the right explanations and seek professionals to explain the situation they reflect. There is no conviction that the media is doing it in a serious manner despite the freedom of speech they have. Or precisely because of it, their speaking causes hatred rather than contributing to the recognition and limitation of incidents. The topic should be discussed by professionals, by people with experience and attitude. A pure journalist is not a specialist and could not adequately deal with the problem and present things correctly. The subject is exaggerated, but in quantity, not in quality.

Others believe that more can be done in the direction of quality speaking. Current speaking does not contribute to reducing this phenomenon. There are various projects and programs on the subject but it must be covered at school. The opinion of psychologists is that the problem is rather in anger, with tolerance we have advanced since a young age. Discrimination and tolerance are talked about and known, but hatred is a product of anger, about which little is said. And the problem is not only in the children but also in the parents themselves who do not know how to deal with the problem, how to set boundaries and educate emotionally. When one cannot deal with one's own emotions, good results are not obtained and one cannot function well. Then he becomes angry, and hatred appears in all its manifestations.

In order to overcome intolerance and hatred, the different groups must be worked with purposefully and with methods adapted to their specifics. Not enough is being done on training and education regarding tolerance and discrimination.

• ***Knowledge of how to seek help and assistance in case of an incident of hate and intolerance***

The prevailing opinion is that institutions that deal with human rights should become popular among people through the results of their work. There are institutions that are absolutely unknown. Even CPD for 17 years of existence is not so well known to people and the results of its work are not popular. There are many institutions in Bulgaria that deal with the protection of various rights - Consumer Protection Commission, Labor Bureau, Social Assistance Directorate. However, they are not working in the field, most of them are just registrars. They do not work at the level of real human needs. There is a need for the institutions, which are normatively determined, to work with people, to go on field among people.

People do not know who to turn to for help and assistance when they feel discriminated against and intolerant towards themselves. In most cases, they cover up incidents because they don't know or, worse, don't dare to seek help. For example – A case of a young man being beaten in a night bar by a group of Roma with serious consequences. The father of the beaten man consults for help

and is told "don't bother, you'll just spend your money and do nothing." It is largely unknown, and if the person is less educated, he seeks revenge in a circuitous, illegal way, and then accidents often happen. A mechanism needs to be worked out, a way to show people the way to react in such situations, to know who to turn to first, how much will it cost them, etc., experts say in the talks.

Very often, people who consider themselves the object of discriminatory and unequal treatment turn to NGO Organization Drom, which has over 25 years of experience working in the field of human rights in Northwest Bulgaria. Those who turned to the organization for support and help received not just legal and life advice but a complete resolution of their case.

It is generally believed that the worst cases with victims of discrimination and intolerance do not know how to seek their rights. They rush from door to door, they are usually old people, weak. On the other hand the bolder ones easily find a way to speak out and seek protection. For assistance in an incident of hatred, intolerance and discrimination, the most frequent call is tel.112. Then comes the CPD, when the case is more delicate; e.g. refusing to hire someone because they don't match, not in ability, but in color. Serious cases are the subject of police and prosecution work.

• ***Regulatory framework in the field of protection of human rights in relation to discrimination, intolerance and hate incidents***

The general view is that the legislation is good, but its implementation is a problem. More specifically:

"There are enough normative acts. The problem is how the laws are applied and how the institutions do their job in solving the problems that have arisen. The work of the institutions is very sloppy, they can hardly be made to do their work. State employees are negligent in their duties /personal impressions/. The prosecutor's office works chaotically, and if the one who needs help does not insist and press, he will not receive the assistance he deserves. There are enough mechanisms, but the people in the institutions are not doing their job."

• ***A platform for reporting incidents of hate and prejudice.***

There are opposing opinions on the existence of a platform for reporting incidents caused by hate and prejudice. On the one hand, interviewees believe that such a platform will be useful. Anything that gives information is useful. It is absolutely necessary to have it even if only for informational purposes. It would be useful except for everyone and especially for those working with the risk groups. It is good to offer help and assistance so that it does not remain just a statistic. And once it's in virtual space, people will be more inclined to complain and reveal unpleasant situations hidden behind anonymity. The fear of personal contact does not exist. It is important to find the right mechanism for handling the signals so that the opportunity to complain is not abused. Such a platform will also be useful for the media to publicize incidents and how to deal with such behaviour.

On the other hand, interviewees say that it is pointless, it will become a talking point and more emphasis on non-existent problems will happen. It will only instill negativity. Nothing positive would be contributed by this platform in the society. For example, a witness to an accident would not look for such a platform. He will prefer to protect himself from a negative reaction to himself.

Rather the platform should be aimed at helping victims with information on decisions in such cases. There is also the other point - if a single case appears in a state service and it is reported on such a platform, it will spoil the good image of the service, which otherwise works very well for the citizens, and this single case will suddenly collapse a good name built over years. But discrimination is also a vague concept and difficult for people to recognize. Facebook also works for this purpose. All kinds of platforms have become too many and it is not possible to tell how much people will get involved, except to some reactive individuals. It is not clear how much people are willing to share outside of specialized organizations. On the other hand, accumulating information can help. But overall skepticism prevails.

It happens that ethnic Roma try to complain about unequal treatment in social networks but the attitude is contradictory. There are both tolerant and intolerant users. In particular, it can be concluded from the interviews with the health mediators that a platform for registering incidents of discrimination and hatred will be widely used.

SELECTED CASES DESCRIBING HATE INCIDENTS

These are good examples of the non-homogeneous attitude of people, caused by prejudices and stereotypes and their unwillingness to be tolerant. For one reason, they are hateful and discriminatory, but for another reason, they behave radically differently towards the same person.

A/Negative

Kindergarten case study: A resistance towards a child in municipal kindergarten who is placed in a foster family. The resistance is not specifically directed at his Roma ethnicity, but rather at the fact that the child is in a foster family. In the long procedure before the CPD, the child was adopted, and before that he was transferred to another kindergarten without a problem, where he feels well. The CPD confirmed discriminatory treatment. But it is not right that the defendant has to be the municipality in this case, rather, it should a person in charge as discrimination is a personal attitude. The proceedings to prove discrimination must be conducted against the perpetrator personally.

Mixed couple case study: A psychologist mentions a young mixed couple /Bulgarian-Roma/ who need psychological help because of bad treatment towards them. In civilized countries, the attitude towards others is much more normal. The psychologist claims that she also had several youths with homosexual orientation; they have a problem already in the family, then at school and they need support.

Case study related to different religion: A woman works in forestry company in a small village and professes a religion other than Orthodox Christianity. During her scheduled break she plays music from her church but quietly so that only she can hear it in her room and there is a poster of her church hanging on the wall. The manager who wants to appoint his acquaintance to this position makes a stern and open remark and constantly persecutes her for this fact. The woman has no reprehensible behavior and follows all the rules at her workplace. Yet, the superior used the fact

of the different religious affiliation to fire her. In the neighbouring room of the same company, an employee works who constantly listens to pop-folk music loudly and plastered the wall with posters of naked women but faces no resistance from the superiors. Discrimination has been established by a decision of the CPD. But the woman left her job because an intolerable situation has already been created.

Case study of a man with a disability in a telecom company: A man was purposefully prevented by the head of the branch in Vidin by openly insulting and hateful speech and by forbidding the employees to serve him, to use a service paid for by him. Discrimination based on public status and disability proven by a decision of the CPD; insults based on social status are not recognized. The incident is an expression of mental harassment in a public place by an employee who by law must refrain from treating customers differently.

Case study in a restaurant: A boy of Roma origin, an excellent student at the local English language school in Vidin, a talented actor, starts working in a restaurant in the city garden and does the work excellently. The owner decides to fire him precisely because he is a gypsy. *"If I had known, I wouldn't have employed him from the beginning. He's not doing anything wrong, but just in case as people in the restaurant will be upset."*

Case study of a health mediator: A personal story of one of the health mediators – a doctor, a pediatrician refused to examine her own child because it was brought by the grandmother who is dark-skinned and *"looks like a gypsy from a distance"*. It takes the intervention of other people, outside of health care, and giving money in hand to examine the sick child. And the pediatrician emphasized *"why didn't you tell me from the beginning who the grandfather was/referring to the social and economic status/"*.

B/Positive

Case study of a child of Roma origin: In one of the central kindergartens in the city, a child of Roma origin is being educated, placed in a center for weekly care, due to limited possibilities of the family to take adequate care of him. For Christmas, the child receives presents together with the other children thanks to the parents, who themselves decided to help so that he does not feel different.

Case study from the Social Assistance Directorate: When people are unable to write, read and understand documents, various sources of help are used. If there are no relatives or anyone else to help, health mediators are most often used to write, to explain, when the Bulgarian language is not sufficiently understood and it is easier in a native language. With the advancement of electronic services, mediators and relatives of those in need will benefit even more, especially at the front desk for accepting applications. And in other offices employees do not have the right to fill in the documents/e.g. Bulgarian Post Service/ and such assistance is simply a necessity. Health mediators even transfer cases to social workers and vice versa. This cooperation is of help and support to people.

Case study related to religion: In Vidin there is an Evangelical church which is very active in its church life. Separately in Nov Pat quarter where there are several religious groups that belong to

different subdivisions of the Christian religion and each of them has its own pastor. They are not numerous in membership but they are very sociable, enthusiastic, and serious in their attitude to religion. The mentioned religious group from the city very often hold general gatherings, prayer meetings with the religious groups from the Roma neighborhood. This is more often a practice in the neighbourhood because they are not very inclined to come to the city. All believers are tolerant of each other. Different ethnicity has never stood as a problem or dividing line. Rather, there are minor differences in religious orders but these are minor and are resolved quickly and quietly. They show respect to each other and call each other "brother". The interviewee has not met or heard that people of different beliefs are treated differently, with disrespect or disregard. Faith and church orders make them respect others whatever they may be and believers do not allow themselves to violate the principles and rules of the church. This builds a tolerant and understanding society.

CONCLUSION

The society in the town of Vidin is generally tolerant towards different social groups. Over the past years tolerant attitude prevailed over cases of misunderstanding, discrimination and hatred. Of course, it cannot be said that behavior of non-acceptance has disappeared. Incidents provoked by hatred and intolerance still occur but to a much lesser extent and affect fewer and fewer individuals. For the most part, they are rather individual acts that do not seriously affect social relations, and cases of discrimination from or towards certain groups are not observed.

The relations between the two largest ethnic groups - Bulgarians and Roma - are moving in the direction of acceptance, understanding and improvement of joint life. There is still much to be desired and done to educate all members of society on issues of non-discrimination, acceptance of differences and prevention of hate speech. Professionals in the field of education are aware of the need to develop in each individual a tolerant and non-discriminatory attitude and to create a learning environment that affirms and benefits from diversity instead of ignoring or excluding it. As part of this development, professionals who work with children and young people, as well as children and young people themselves, need to have knowledge of their own and others' discriminatory behaviour.

By way of conclusion, anti-discrimination efforts are only effective when they are built on the solid foundation of serious commitment by state institutions, equality authorities, civil society and every single individual. Interaction, cooperation and commitment to the cause of diversity will reward us with the achievement of a more just and democratic society despite the challenges of the financial and economic crisis.

ANNEX: List of interviews, conducted between March 8 and April 5, 2023.

1. Manager of the Association of Danube Initiatives for United Regions, Vidin, 21 March, male
2. Municipal Kindergarden director, Vidin, 17 March, female
3. Regional representative of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, Vidin, 16 March, male
4. Head of the Probation Office and psychologist, Vidin, 27 March, male
5. Psychologist with own practice, Vidin, 22 March, female
6. Director of the Home for elderly in the village of Kutovo, 23 March, female
7. Social workers from the Center for temporary accommodation-daily care, Vidin, 23 March, females
8. Director of the "Social Assistance" Directorate, Vidin, 5 April, female
9. Social worker in Directorate "Social assistance", Vidin, 5 April, male
10. Manager of NGO "Free Youth Center", Vidin, 31 March, male
11. Journalist at Radio Vidin, 8 March, male
12. Journalist at Radio Vidin, 8 March, female
13. Health mediator in Nov Pat neighbourhood, Vidin, 14 March, female
14. Social worker at the Complex for Social Services and Crisis Center, Vidin, 27 March, female
15. Director of the Vocational Technical High School "Vasil Levski", Vidin, 20 March, female
16. Deputy director of Vocational Technical High School "Vasil Levski", Vidin, 20 March, female
17. Director of the Labor Bureau, Vidin, 5 April, male.