Advocacy for amending laws that exclude low income and unemployed people from health insurance

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In November 2012, the Macedonian Constitutional Court abolished a law adopted in 2011, which obliged unemployed and low income persons to re-register their health insurance before a fixed deadline by submitting a statement of income for the previous year. The Court’s decision has not been appropriately implemented, which resulted in the exclusion of about 50% of the people insured with the Health Insurance Fund (HIF) from the public health system in 2013 and 2014 year.

The association ROMA S.O.S. implemented an advocacy campaign to ensure proper implementation of the decision of the Constitutional Court and to remedy the exclusion of low income groups from health insurance. Advocacy tools included submitting interventions to the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health and the Ombudsman, and initiating a legislative amendment by organizing meetings with the Parliamentary Commission for Health, the Committee on Labor and Social Policy, and two members of the ruling party. Efforts also focused on raising public awareness by involving the media, citizens, associations, and experts. The advocacy campaign coincided with the period of new national-level elections.

Our advocacy efforts eventually forced the ruling party to include the proposed legislative amendments as a priority on their agenda. Further to a governmental meeting in October 2014, the Ministry of Finance submitted the amendments to Parliament. On 1 December 2014, the Parliament adopted the amendments to the Law on Contributions to Compulsory Social Insurance and abolished the obligation for citizens to submit a statement of income. The Health Insurance Fund is responsible for checking the income of citizens in collaboration with the Public Revenue Office and in that way to establish their right to health insurance.

The power of targeted and well-timed advocacy can abolish laws and practices and contribute to the realization of health rights of vulnerable individuals.

Key messages
- Legislative tools can create both obstacles to and remedies for citizens in access to the health system and implementation of the right to health
- Citizens’ mobilization can positively influence the health policy priorities of governments and legislators