

RomaIntegration2020

2016 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION IN MONTENEGRO

01 December 2016, Podgorica

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

The Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration 2020 Action Team, in cooperation with the National Roma Contact Point of Montenegro, organized the 2016 Public Dialogue Forum on Roma integration policies on 01 December 2016 in Podgorica.

Responsible institutions presented the progress in the implementation of activities stipulated in the [Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2016-2020](#) including the main priority measures to be implemented in 2017. The RCC Roma Integration 2020 Action Team engaged consultants to work closely with the Government of Montenegro in developing an Action Plan for 2017 for the implementation of the aforementioned Strategy. This Action Plan was also presented during the forum. Civil society and other interested parties highlighted the main challenges related to the implementation of the Strategy, as well as their views on which measures should be prioritized for 2017.

The Public Dialogue Forum was opened by Mr Leon GJOKAJ, National Roma Contact Point of Montenegro. His main points were that the socio-economic integration and elimination of discrimination against Roma and Egyptians are high on the agenda of the Montenegrin Government, with a view the new Strategy provides for **sustainable results** with concrete and clear objectives and monitoring indicators. Mr Gjokaj noted that some progress has been achieved in the previous years, but still much needs to be done. Good cooperation among central institutions has been established, however, the cooperation with local institutions should be improved.

Mr Orhan USEIN, RCC Roma Integration 2020 Action Team Leader, welcomed the initiation of the action planning process, hoping that it will be accelerated and comprehensive, including budgeting and monitoring of the proposed measures for Roma integration in 2017, discussed at the Public Dialogue Forum. He informed on the forthcoming Regional Workshop on Monitoring and Reporting organized by the Roma Integration 2020 to build the capacities of the relevant civil servants to report on activities and progress. The Action Team expressed its readiness to continue the support to the Montenegrin society to adequately plan the necessary measures for Roma integration, including allocation of adequate resources and mainstreaming of actions into general policies on education, employment, housing, health and civil registration.

The representative of the European Union Delegation in Podgorica, Ms Mladenka TESIC, highlighted the shortcomings related to the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro, as noted in the [progress report](#) of the European Commission for 2016. In particular, Ms TESIC highlighted the lack of relevant regularly updated official data on the situation of Roma and Egyptians and the limited state budget for the implementation of all the measures stipulated within the Strategy combined with the challenging process of state budgeting of the Strategy as such. The support by the European Union through the IPA funding allocated for various measures improving the situation of Roma and Egyptians was also presented, including the so-called "Sarajevo process" assisting the solving of housing issues. Ms TESIC highlighted the need of strengthening and supporting the Roma and Egyptians civil society.

Mr Samir JAHA, expert engaged by the RCC Roma Integration 2020 Action Team to provide technical assistance for the action planning process in Montenegro, highlighted the key challenges in the implementation of the Strategy, namely:

- Local self-government should have strong involvement in the implementation;
- Political will should be expressed in terms of adequate budget allocations;
- Roma participation as public servants at local level should be prioritized;

- The focus on domicile Roma and Egyptians and refugees from Kosovo* should be balanced;
- Roma and Egyptians face the most urgent issues in the area of housing (where positive examples exist, for example in the town of Tivat);
- Civil society receives EU support through the regional project led by Roma Active Albania.

The meeting continued by more specific presentations on the implementation of the Strategy, elaborating on the points previously made, and the operational conclusions from the Roma Seminar organized by the EU Delegation on 05 July 2016. Mr Ramiz SAHMAN from the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights listed the conclusions that were still **awaiting adoption** by the responsible institutions, namely:

- Extending the duration of validity of the measure on subsidised employment for longer than 12 months;
- Some of the measures on elimination of begging were not approved by the Ministry of Interior;
- For the campaign on the noxiousness from begging agreement by the public broadcaster is missing;
- On establishing collaboration with countries of origins for obtaining health insurance status certificates agreement from responsible institutions is missing, but efforts are still being made;
- Introduction of pre-paid measuring appliances has been disabled because of lack of regulation permitting such service;
- Free birth-giving for women without personal documents is not possible;
- Change of the law on primary education to allow inclusion of children from 9-16 years of age is not agreed.

Ms Sanja ELEZOVIC, expert engaged by the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team to work with Mr JAHA on the Montenegrin action plan, elaborated on the importance of mainstreaming measures for integration of Roma within the general policies in the priority areas.

The Public Dialogue Forum continued with a review of the five priority areas: education, employment, housing, health and civil registration.

EDUCATION

Ms Natasa VLAHOVIC elaborated on the progress and challenges of the implementation of the Strategy in the area of education. The first and main challenge noted was that teaching assistants were still not systematized in the school personnel system, although some steps have been taken. According to Ms VLAHOVIC, inclusion of children into preschool and primary school preparatory program is not fully implemented because of the distance of kindergartens from the Roma and Egyptians settlements. Further, she noted that the scholarship program was fully implemented, 45 students were enrolled in secondary school in 2016 and the adoption of quotas for specific secondary schools was ongoing. Accreditation of program for teaching staff in schools has also started, as well as awareness rising of parents. Participation in after-school classes was increased, while prevention of drop-out and improvement of educational achievements were mentioned as measures on which responsible institutions have started working. In this sense inclusion of volunteers to assist children in learning was announced for the next year and information on established drop-out case-management teams in three towns (Podgorica, Berane, Niksic) was shared. Besides this, responsible institutions managed to organize transport to schools in Podgorica (donation by Japan) and activities of 25 mentoring teachers.

Discussions of the participants at the Public Dialogue Forum highlighted the need to institutionalize the work of teaching assistants as soon as possible. It was stated that the measure of free-of-charge involvement of Roma and Egyptian children into preschool was denied at kindergartens with a pretext that free-of-charge meant free from fee, but food had to be paid. A question was raised on the availability of bachelor Romani studies in the region, since Montenegro was ready to provide a

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

couple of scholarships for persons from Montenegro to study abroad with a view to form a base for teacher training in Montenegro. The need for transport of children to schools was also repeated.

EMPLOYMENT

Ms Nevena SUKOVIC from the Employment Bureau started with the successes in the area of employment, informing on the adopted standards for qualification of employment assistants and the plan for a pilot project for engaging employment mediators. She also noted the inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in the program for obtaining qualifications for first occupation (job). However, she noted the budget for active employment measures was reduced, while the rate of unemployed rose to 20%, from which many with long term unemployment among Roma. She announced planning of programs for seasonal work engagement and cooperation with the centres for social work.

Participants noted the work of the Investment Development Fund established with the aim to encompass specific programs, which may be used for Roma and Egyptians. It was demanded that conditions are established for development of social entrepreneurship, regulation is improved and support is provided to enterprises that do handcraft. Moreover, participants highlighted the need for the employment bureau to cooperate better with the centres for social works. Participants further complained that criteria for participation in employment measures were disabling Roma and Egyptians for participation, there was no recognition of informal jobs done by Roma and Egyptians such as collection of secondary goods, there was no functional and vocational adult education and that the recent practice of establishing cleaning agencies taking over the employment of cleaners was depriving them from social and other benefits.

HOUSING

Public officials responsible for housing and the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in this area were not present at the meeting. In their absence, a representative from the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights read a brief on the implementation of the Strategy so far. Participants complained regarding the absence of responsible authorities, but also appealed to representatives from local self-governments present at the meeting to elaborate on the local activities in this area, without much success. It was mentioned that some social housing activities have been implemented, however much more was needed and domicile Roma and Egyptians needed at least same level of attention as the refugees from Kosovo*.

HEALTH

Ms Mitra DZURISIC explained that payment of certain taxes for giving birth in health facilities was required by all without health insurance, including Roma and Egyptians, although she expressed understanding for the demands. She further highlighted the requirement of permanent place of residence for health insurance, depriving many Roma and Egyptians from it. On the positive side, she announced proposals for changes in the law on health insurance. The need to connect family members in cases when some of them do not have status documents was highlighted. Ms DZURISIC was very positive on the results of the 2 Roma health mediators with 1 mentor, and announced possible institutionalization of the health mediators' employment (Gazette 71/16). It was informed that Podgorica's public health facility systematized the job within the patronage department, while negotiations in Berane and Niksic were ongoing. However, on the question by participants to introduce health mediators for domicile Roma and Egyptians, she stated that there was no need. It was further said that Roma were not motivated or knowledgeable enough to use health services, although reasons for such situation were not provided.

Participants discussed the lack of data regarding health for Roma and Egyptians, except for those in the Konik camp.

CIVIL REGISTRATION

Ms Marijana VUJOVIC and Mr Bransilav PEROVIC from the Ministry of Interior provided a report on the activities done in the area of civil registration. They informed that activities in this area were implemented in line with the legislation regulating different types of status of residents and the

Memoranda of Cooperation with neighbouring countries. The activities include assistance in obtaining documents from countries of origin (if such exist), administrative assistance and processing of cases. Statistically, in the past 7 years, 8054 persons applied for resolving their status, 7468 persons received solution and 586 cases were still processed. The current situation is as follows:

- 777 cases for permanent solution of their status in process,
- 196 cases stopped due to emigration,
- 125 cases with acquired documents from countries of origin,
- 32 cases in process of registering in the book of births.

Within the discussions, it was highlighted that some 150 cases are in the “grey zone” - specific cases not possible to resolve within the existing regulation. Participants mentioned these were known persons that have applied. It was also noted that only few cases of stateless persons were found and the Ministry was on the way to resolve these cases.

A couple of issues were raised in addition to the discussions on priority areas. A general issue mentioned throughout the meeting was the need to ensure domicile Roma and Egyptians also benefit from the measures stipulated in the Strategy, besides those in the refugee camps. Another issue discussed, related to education and health, was domestic violence and arranged marriages. It was appealed that the issue should be resolutely tackled and perpetrators prosecuted while victims supported, but that the issues should be tackled diligently in order to prevent spreading out prejudice and stereotypes against Roma and Egyptians men.

The Public Dialogue Forum was concluded by Mr Sokolj BEGANAJ from the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, who presented the closing remarks, and by the experts engaged within the Roma Integration 2020. The experts took the responsibility to finalize the Action Plan by taking into account the conclusions and recommendations from the Public Dialogue Forum, further consulting with responsible institutions, planning the needed budget in details, introducing appropriate indicators for monitoring and sending a final draft proposal to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Roma integration is still one of the priorities of the Government of Montenegro.
- Efforts should focus on achieving **sustainable changes** in the lives of Roma, according to the strategic objectives, advisably by applying an integrated approach.
- Roma Integration 2020 assistance may be used to advance planning and monitoring.
- The operational conclusions from the Roma integration seminar should be fully adopted and implemented, and the recommendations from the EC progress report should be taken into account.
- **State budget** to implement the Strategy has to be allocated appropriately to the planned measures and the detailed budgeting should be used to fill financial gaps by fundraising.
- The focus on **domicile** Roma and Egyptians and **refugees** from Kosovo* should be **balanced**.
- Stronger coordination and **involvement of local self-government** should be ensured.
- Roma and Egyptians should **meaningfully participate** in the whole process, both on central and local level.
- Roma and Egyptian civil society should be supported and developed.
- Education:
 - Systematize teaching assistants.
 - Bring preschool services closer to Roma and Egyptians and ensure actual charge free inclusion.
- Employment:
 - Remove criteria disabling Roma and Egyptians to participate in mainstream employment programmes, and ensure sufficient funding.
 - Cooperate with the Investment Development Fund and centres for social work on achieving employment objectives for Roma and Egyptians.
 - Pursue innovative programs for employment and employability of Roma and Egyptians.
 - Enable development of social and handcraft entrepreneurship.

- Initiate recognition of informal jobs, such as collecting secondary goods.
- Monitor and take actions in cases of cleaning companies employing depriving employees from social benefits.
- **Housing:**
 - Domicile Roma and Egyptians should also benefit from housing measures.
 - Authorities (including the local self-government) responsible for housing should be more accountable for their part of implementation of the Strategy.
- **Health:**
 - Collect data on health indicators for Roma and Egyptians.
 - Assess possibilities to release members of vulnerable groups from charges for basic health services, in particular giving birth.
 - Pursue changes in the law on health insurance to remove obstacles for Roma and Egyptians, including removing the burden of proof from people that they are not insured in another country (particularly Kosovo*).
 - Continue Roma health mediators program towards institutionalization and consider provision of such services to domicile Roma and Egyptians.
 - Remove discriminatory or other malpractices preventing Roma from accessing health services and work on trust building.
- **Civil Registration:**
 - Continue resolving the cases of applicants within a reasonable time and find applicable solutions for those in the “grey zone” as a matter of urgency.