

## RomaIntegration2020

# SECOND NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION IN KOSOVO\*<sup>1</sup>

## 17 OCTOBER 2017, PRISTINA

### ::OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS::

The Second National Platform on Roma Integration in Kosovo\* was held in Pristina on 17 October 2017. It was jointly organized by the Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 (RI2020) Action Team and the Office for Good Governance (OGG) of the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Forum brought together about 40 participants including representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, and other line ministries and municipalities, civil society, NGOs working with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and international community.

This paper reflects the discussions and highlights the recommendations emerging from the discussions for the relevant institutions, with a view to contributing to a more effective and efficient implementation of Roma integration policies.

The event provided a wide public dialogue with and among various stakeholders concerned with the issues of Roma integration in the respective participating economy. At the same time, it has contributed to the transparency of Roma integration policies and accountability of the implementing institutions as well encouraged citizens' participation in decision-making. The discussion focused on the activities promoting integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in 2016<sup>2</sup> as relevant to the areas education, employment, health, social welfare and on the related achievements and challenges. It should be noted that the most recent Strategy for the inclusion of Roma and Ashkali communities in Kosovo Society (2017-2021) was adopted only in April 2017. Overall in 2016, the institutions were implementing the relevant activities as per sectorial strategic plans, various ministries' 2016 annual working plans and the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy for the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (2009-2015).

The RI2020 project allows Kosovo\* to be present within the regional context and take a part in the wider process of enlargement efforts. The objective of this forum was to identify what has and has not happened, i.e. in terms of concrete implementation, identifying drawbacks and challenges of the past, and using lessons learnt as a preparation for the upcoming EU Roma seminar. In line with this, particular attention was paid on the issues of coordination among line ministries, as well as with the local level municipalities' coordination.

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\* 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.

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Roma' as per the European Commission refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. In the context of participating economies, the term Roma also covers Ashkali and Egyptians as relevant.



The Forum was opened by the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), Mr Habit Hajredini, Director, Office of Good Governance/Office of Prime Minister, and Mr Orhan Usein, RI2020 Team Leader. The NRCP explained the roles and responsibilities of the Focal Points for Roma integration from different ministries, tasked with implementation of Roma related policies. The NRCP recalled the 2016 monitoring report and challenges encountered throughout the process of filling it, including lack of statistical data and indicators. On the positive side, the NRCP added that the process was participatory with numerous stakeholders attending the coordination meetings organized to assess the progress.

A reference was made to the new Strategy for the inclusion of Roma and Ashkali communities in Kosovo Society (2017-2021). The key priorities are education, employment and social welfare, health and housing. The Strategy addresses also the cross cutting issues such as gender equality, security and registration and includes a detailed Action Plan with indicators as well as information on the budget needed for the implementation. The Strategy is based on three key principles; the principle of equal right and opportunities, principle on non-discrimination and the principle of elimination of differences.

The NRCP clarified that an inter-ministerial coordination group for human rights to be chaired by the Prime Minister will be established, as well as the Collegium of general secretaries. At the local level the establishment of municipal action committees is foreseen. The Office of Good Governance/Office of Prime Minister will oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Strategy. Concerning the issue of the Egyptian community, all the institutions are required to work equally with all the three communities.

Concerning the implementation of the Strategy at the local level, the strategy was distributed to all the municipalities, however only Lipljan has developed the action plan for its implementation. Mitrovica and Gjakova's action plans are pending approval after the forthcoming elections.

With regards to budgetary issues, the ministries are underspending with about 75 percent of the capital investment budget still unspent. Municipalities, on the other hand, should assign budget for the needs of the three communities as well.

The discussion continued by presenting the [2016 Kosovo\\* monitoring report](#) by priority areas.

## **EDUCATION**

Ms Nazan Safci, Head of Division for Community Education at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) presented the current state of affairs in education. The situation in education of the three communities is characterized by a high rate of illiteracy, low rate of enrolment in compulsory education, high drop-out rates with a very small number of students from the three communities attending college or university. In fact, no data are available on the number of students from the three communities in higher education. Although some progress has been achieved in increasing participation in education, the number of members of the three communities remains significantly below the Kosovo\* average. Teachers from the three communities are also underrepresented.

Significant steps were made to include the children of returnees into the educational system. According to MEST, data are available for all children of returnees, but these are not disaggregated by ethnicity. MEST in cooperation with Municipal Education Departments (MED) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) have provided additional learning programs for returned children. There are no disaggregated data for students from the Roma, Ashkali





and Egyptian communities, nor is there a special budget for such communities, since additional learning is provided to all repatriated and reintegrated persons within the regular teaching process.

MEST in cooperation with various donors has provided 500 scholarships in the academic year 2016/2017, as well as school textbooks and materials free of charge for students from all communities in grades 1 to 10.

*Recommendations from the discussion:*

- MEST should collect information on Roma language programmes enrolment from the municipal level,
- The status and future of the so-called learning centres which provide additional education to the children from the three communities including mentoring and psycho social consultations should be addressed by the government,
- Reporting on specific indicators should become automatic,
- The awareness raising on the activities of education inspectorate and funding should be implemented,
- Coordinating mechanisms both at the national level as well as between the national and local level need to be improved.

## **EMPLOYMENT and SOCIAL WELFARE**

Employment rates in Kosovo remain low, and in particular among the three communities which contributes to high level of poverty. Members of the three communities usually work in the informal sector holding the unsecured, unqualified, and low-status jobs. One of the main reasons is also low education level. Furthermore, traditional occupations of Roma are seen to provide limited opportunities for the income-generating.

Mr Gani Ismajili, Head of Training and Certification Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) presented the activities implemented in 2016, which have focused on increasing the level of employment of the three communities through mediation, professional training, and employment in public works.

In total, 9 activities were implemented during 2016. In particular, trainings were organized for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian returnees to be able to apply for self-employment grants. Nevertheless, employment of three communities is most difficult as their jobs are temporary, difficult, and mainly physical. Among the challenges, only a small number of the members of the three communities are registered as unemployed. Further, illiteracy is seen as a main obstacle concerning access to education and labour market. Specific attention should be paid to the situation of women from the three communities, who find it most difficult to engage with services provided under active employment measures.

The MLSW has presented the allocated grants for self-employment to members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The value of a grant for funding a business plan was 3,000-6,000 EUR. These grants are co-financed by UNDP (50%) and MLSW (50%). Candidates are initially trained on issues of self-employment in Vocational Training Centre of MLSW. 7 grants have been allocated for members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities with an average of 4,000 EUR for each grant. The amount of these grants has been criticized as insufficient for creating a sustainable business plan.





The issue of the returnees benefitting from different measures versus the sedentary Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities was raised. Different available social welfare schemes were presented, i.e. subsidies for electricity bills, support through foster families' scheme, disability scheme, displaced and pension scheme. About 2400 families from all three communities benefited from the schemes in 2016.

*Recommendations from the discussion:*

- Attention should be paid to the situation of women from the three communities, and ways sought that would improve their access to the services provided under active employment measures,
- Measures promoting the vocational education among the members of the three communities should be rethought as many of them are not able to benefit from them due to illiteracy,
- There is a need to strengthen the coordination between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Welfare as relevant to the welfare of the returnees,
- The use of the RAE acronym (Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali) should be avoided in the oral and/or written communication.
- Follow up on the changes in the employment situation of the trained beneficiaries is recommended to assess the actual impact of the measures, i.e. the increase in the employment rate.
- The government should work closely with the civil society sector on awareness raising on the available welfare schemes.

## HEALTH

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has, since 2010, been delivering geographically balanced first-step health services. However, the awareness of Roma about health services and related benefit fluctuates among regions and is overall lower among Roma than non-Roma. The representative of the Ministry of Health (MoH), Ms Sanie Kicmari, Head of the Division for citizens' rights to health care, informed that the MoH carried out a number of activities through the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), focused towards awareness-raising of the three communities on children vaccination, different chronic diseases, hygiene and sanitary conditions as well as on healthy environment.

Nevertheless, criticism from the civil society sector prevailed on discrimination issues that members of the three communities have faced while accessing healthcare services, as well as many administrative barriers for repatriated persons to receive health insurance.

*Recommendations from the discussion:*

- MoH, NIPH and local institutions should establish mobile teams, and ensure financial and logistic support for these teams in order to offer on-site healthcare services, children vaccinations, including other awareness raising activities on health and hygiene among RAE communities,
- The government should work closely with the civil society sector on awareness raising on health issues,
- Discrimination against members of the three communities as relevant to the access to the health services at the local level should be addressed.





## HOUSING

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) has the primary responsibility in the housing area. Ms Merita Dalipi, Senior Officer for Social Housing, presented the main activities and achievements in this area. During 2016 identification of families with poor housing conditions was done using three-year housing programs with the assistance of the Central Commission for Repatriation. 793 families in 14 Municipalities have been identified as families living in difficult housing conditions. Out of these families, 304 families belong to the Roma community, 341 Ashkali and 155 are Egyptian.

During 2016, through the re-integration fund MESP has reconstructed and furnished four houses in the municipalities of Obiliq, Vushtrri and Ferizaj. Additionally, during 2016, MESP has supported municipalities in drafting three-year housing programs. The aim of these programs is to plan and provide assistance to families with housing difficulties, in terms of setting priorities, projects, and allocation of budget for accomplishing projects.

### Recommendations from the discussion:

- Social housing should accompany measures to ensure security of tenure, making the results sustainable and integral with appropriate employment interventions.
- Lack of basic infrastructure – paved roads, sewage, water supply – in the Roma settlements amounts to discrimination towards Roma. This should be appropriately targeted.
- Database on the situation of housing, including the legal status of the buildings is needed.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the concluding session, the Forum called for the continued collaborative spirit between government and civil society. It agreed that the important step ahead is to implement the new Strategy and its Action Plan. It is also of utmost importance to establish an inter-ministerial body as soon as possible and enhance the coordination at all and among all the levels. A need for more data was identified.

### Recommendations from the discussion:

- The OGG should be strengthened, especially with additional human resources,
- Capacities of the Focal Points in the ministries need to be developed and strengthened,
- Budget needs to be more effective and follow programmatic methodology,
- Continued collaborative spirit between the government and civil society to be promoted, as well as between different levels of governance,
- Local action plans for Roma integration need to be developed,
- Inter- ministerial body to be established,
- Further improvements top the 2018 budget might be needed,
- The participation of the civil society in the coordination mechanisms should be promoted and ensured.

