

MEETING INFORMATION  
ROMA INTEGRATION EMERGENCY RESPONSE MEETINGS TO COVID-19  
**ALBANIA**

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**Date:** 21 April 2020, 1<sup>st</sup> informative meeting

**Organized by:** Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020

**Attendees:** Governmental representatives, National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), EU Delegation, International organizations, Open Society Foundations (OSF), Open Society Foundations Albania (OSFA), Roma Versitas Albania, Local and mainstream and Roma-led organizations.

**Objective:** The current situation of Covid-19 pandemic urged the governments in the region to undertake a number of overarching measures. Both the pandemic and the measures significantly influence the Roma communities in the region. In such situation the governments, and accordingly the Roma Integration 2020, need to adjust to the circumstance in performing their mandate for the best possible outcome for Roma within the given possibilities. Hence, the Roma Integration 2020 finds it necessary to facilitate a broad societal dialogue regarding the response to the Covid-19 crisis and its consequences to the Roma community in order to ensure broad needs assessment, proper short, medium and long term response, and adequate consideration of Roma in the mainstream measures.

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#### INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN ALBANIA

##### **Overview of existing measures taken at national and EU level for the most vulnerable Roma**

###### Government/NRCP:

- The Government of Albania due to the pandemic situation, has taken series of measures to help the most vulnerable including Roma communities.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Protection has proposed to the Parliamentary Commission to discuss extension of pandemic measures by middle of June 2020, the decision will be decided on next plenary meeting.
- The Government of Albania will provide initial protection measures for families that do not benefit from the social protection programs and informal workers.
  - o The Council of Ministers (DCM) on 27 of March approved a measure that will finance Roma families and additional payment from the Economic Aid, for the above mention social groups and those who were targeted by the earthquake.
  - o The Ministry of Health and Social Protection issued an order that will help elderly people and people with disabilities to receive the pension by post.
  - o The interest rate caused by electricity payment delays are absolved for all.
  - o The Ministry of Defense in collaboration with the municipalities has distributed food packages to families for three different categories: beneficiaries of economic aid, people that have lost properties and housing during the earthquake and people without property and housing.
  - o The Council of Ministers approved indexation of pensions for elderly people and other categories such people with disabilities, early retired and those who worked in heavy industries.
  - o There are regular disinfection and sanitary measures taken at the Roma communities.
  - o Municipality of Tirana will cover rent accommodation expenses for 385 families benefiting from social housing, during the period March-April 2020.
  - o The Municipality of Tirana is providing food and sanitary packages every 2 weeks in Bregu i Lumit, Selite, Yzberishte, Petrel neighborhoods.



- The Ministry of Health and Social Protection allocated 56,451.61 € (7 million Albanian Lek) from the Social Fund, to support municipalities in providing social services for vulnerable groups.
- 1000 families involved in the informal work sector are being supported by different organization such as Save the Children, Word Vision, UNICEF, Terre Des Hommes.
- The State Agency for the Rights and Protection of Children, with partner organizations, has prepared an instruction for actions to protect children of Covid-19.
- A member of the State Committee for Minorities calls on follow up on areas that are not covered with any support type and those must be identified.

#### EU Delegation:

- Four million EUR are allocating for medical equipment and other medical needs.
- The EU Delegation will provide funding to the civil society who have been partnering on EU projects by now and those who will apply, to address the Roma community needs.
- The project “Economic and Social Empowerment for Roma and Egyptians” -ESERE that finished last year, is mention as a good example and similar projects should be initiated.
- The EUD and the civil society organizations are discussing modifications of their current projects and budgets to answer the immediate need for food and medicines for 260 families.
- Upcoming:
  - o 20.6 million EUR will be dedicated for social inclusion and direct support recovery measures. The process will be finalized with the Government.
  - o The EUD will plan 2 million EUR to support Roma integration on local level. The programing should be planed according to the municipalities and CSOs identified recovery proposals.
  - o Additional 26 million EUR will be directed to economic recovery of small business and companies.
  - o The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is discussing a package of 600,000 EUR to answer to the urgent needs which have to be identified and assessed as soon as possible.
  - o Two calls for proposals will be launch on Active citizenship 1.5 million EUR and Children’s rights targeting children from most vulnerable groups.

#### **Overview of the short term needs**

1. The Ministry of Education and UNDP must take measures on providing Roma children with access to education according to the current home schooling system.
2. Economy measures to sustain Roma families who are engaged in the informal job sector must be put on the agenda. Programs have to be developed.
3. There is an urgent need of coordination and information sharing among different stakeholders to complement the work of different institutions and plan the national EU funding.
4. Relevant data collection and data base with communities and people in need to be established.

#### **Who does what and coordination of various stakeholders**

- The NRCP is proposing to have a regional initiative on perspectives to overcoming the earthquake damages and post COVID 19 according to the recommendations of the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process on housing, employment and education targeting Roma minorities.





- The NRCP recommends establishing a regional social fund to support actions on employment, with a focus on establishing social enterprises.
- Roma Active Albania in collaboration with other Roma organizations was working in Gjirokastra region on delivering 100 food packages and sanitations for period of two weeks usage.
- The UNDP supported 250 Roma families with nutrition aid in Tirana, 65 in Shkodra, 100 in Lezha, 100 in Kruja, 100 in Kamza, 100 in Durres. In coordination with the local government, door to door packages were delivered and more is expected to be delivered in the near future.
- Roma Active Albania, Roma Kham and Institute of Roma Culture are proposing appropriate agenda that will support informal work sector of Roma in Albania.
- Roma Active Albania as a leader of the project “Romany Women Power of Change” across the region in Western Balkan and Turkey, has prepared an analyses on pandemic that has been shared with European Commission and German Government.
- Roma Versitas is providing support in Rroguzhina and Fier area, more than 350 food packages and sanitation has been distributed.

#### **Enduring synergies and complementarity**

- The EU Delegation addresses the need of diverting the scope of the project on returnees with the UNDP and the World Bank.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the national OSF Albania and Roma Active are discussing establishment of social fund for vulnerable groups.
- The NRCP is requesting EU funds to support the Central level governments in line with the previous progress made with the ESTERE project.
- Roma Active Albania initiated a regional request (with Serbia and Kosovo) to the German Government and several German Embassies for funding social aid proposals, for which positive respond is received.
- The Ministry of Education is pointing out the fact that Roma children are unable to have direct communication with teachers due to not having proper appliances like laptop, TV, mobile phones.
- The UNDP is seconding the statements of Roma children not having access to education and home schooling.
- The Ministry of Education and UNDP must take measures on providing Roma children with access to education according to the current home schooling system.
- Institute for Romany Culture puts emphases on informal economy that 8000 persons from Roma community are able to work but currently due to the measures is impossible
- The period after June 2020 is very important for identification of the most urgent support and prevention further poverty in the Roma communities.
- Roma Active Albania, strongly suggest to the EU institutions and the Government to have a clear understanding of the term “vulnerable” when signing bilateral contracts that will enable Roma communities to benefit directly.
- Roma Active Albania is suggesting, similar projects like ESTERE to be implemented in the future and to be adapted with the needs of the Roma communities. The projects should follow up on the post COVID 19 recovery measures.
- OSF Albania responded to the emergency through local partner organizations by supporting Roma families with 1300 packages and hygiene keens in municipalities of: Tirana, Durres, Fier and Elbasan.
- Roma Versitas Albania is conducting a survey on the current situation of education.



**Proposed targeted and mainstream measures**

1. Programming and planning of the EU funds to benefit the most vulnerable and Roma communities.
2. OSF Albania is proposing the Roma families who don't benefit from any social aid schemes, to be taken into consideration of all relevant stakeholders.
3. Post economy recovery measures and programs to be defined for the informal economy workers and reduce the poverty in the Roma communities.
4. The Ministry of Education to propose new methods of studies for children in the communities to be able to follow up on education.
5. There is a need for closer coordination among institutions on local and central level, including international donors and Roma civil society organizations.
6. Infrastructure problems must be addressed such as access to water and electricity and Roma neighborhoods to be disinfected.

**Follow up**

- NRCP highlights the importance of joined collaborations with EU, international donors, central /local institutions and support that is needed to continue for civil society organizations on fighting the pandemic period.
- NRCP recommends starting drafting the new strategy on Roma Integration since the National Roma Integration Strategy will be over in December 2020.
- NRCP addresses the need of use of the EU funds, undertaken already on protection of children and those in needs during COVID 19.
- The EU Delegation is asking to have an insight of short, medium and long term needs as well as proposed recovery measures that will address the needs and benefits of the Roma communities.
- The RCC Roma Integration team expressed their availability for providing technical assistance to support the Government to design program and project ideas and develop them in full proposals. The proposals should involve direct recovery actions that lead towards Roma integration and absorption of the current available EU funds.
- OSF Albania proposed to the Government ideas on economic recovery and building resilience of the Roma Community to respond better especially in post COVID area. Outcomes to follow during the next meeting.
- Roma children must be provided with internet access, smart phones, tablets and computers to have access to education.

**Participants:**

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<b>2. Department: Social Inclusion Directory Roma Specialist</b>	Ina Kokedhima
<b>3. Ministry of Education and Sports Roma Focal Point</b>	Besnik Rama
<b>4. Ministry of Finance -Roma Focal Point</b>	Mimoza Hasani
<b>5. Ministry of Finance and Housing</b>	Doris Andoni
<b>6.Department for Civil registration</b>	Edmond Gjoleka





<b>7.EU Delegation</b>	Alessandro Angius
<b>8.EU Delegation</b>	Lenka Vitkova
<b>9.Open Society Foundations</b>	Neda Korunovska
<b>10. Open Society Foundations Albania</b>	Dritan Nelaj
<b>11.Municipality of Tirana-Roma Focal Point</b>	Kaludjo Taho
<b>12. Centre for Social Advocacy</b>	Romina Sefa
<b>13. Individual</b>	Xhenson Cela
<b>14. Romano Kham</b>	Brisilda Taco
<b>15. Roma Active Albania</b>	Adriatik Hasantari
<b>16. Roma Versitas Albania</b>	Emiliano Aliu
<b>17.Member of the State Committee for Minorities</b>	Erion Xhaibra
<b>18.RCC</b>	Elda Kalaja
<b>19.UNDP</b>	Entela Lako
<b>20.Institute of Romani culture in Albania (IRCA)</b>	Bledi Taho
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