

Regional Conference

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO EMPLOYMENT OF ROMA

10-11 December 2018, Budapest, Hungary

:: CONCEPT NOTE ::

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration 2020 project, funded by the European Union and the Open Society Foundations, works with the governments of Western Balkans and Turkey to improve their performance in formulating, implementing, budgeting and monitoring their Roma integration policies within the EU integration process.

The Regional Cooperation Council's Employment and Social Affairs Platform, funded by the European Union and implemented jointly with the International Labour Organization, strengthens regional cooperation and institutional capacities of national administrations, employers' and workers' organizations, enabling development and effective implementation of employment and social policy reforms within the EU enlargement process.

The Roma Education Fund (REF), founded by the World Bank and Open Society Institute, promotes Roma inclusion in all aspects of the national education systems of sixteen European countries aiming to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. REF also facilitates the transition of Roma students and graduates from education to employment via direct project interventions and advocacy.

The Roma Integration 2020 (RI2020), the Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP) and the Roma Education Fund are jointly organizing a regional conference to tackle the challenges in employment of Roma across the enlargement region.

RATIONALE

According to the 2017 Regional Roma Survey funded by the European Commission and implemented jointly by the UNDP and the World Bank, the employment rate of Roma in the region is 16.5%, while the general employment rate in the region is 41.57%. The difference (gap) in the employment rate of Roma compared to the general employment rate is 25.07% in absolute terms, or the employment rate of Roma is only 40% the employment rate of the overall population.

The comparison of the 2017 data with the data from 2011 shows that the employment of Roma across the region is worsening. Looking at the unemployment rate and the rate of informal employment, the region is showing tendencies of improvement, but this is not due to employment. In fact, the lack of employment opportunities (due to obstacles both on the demand and the supply sides) has the consequence of less Roma participating actively in the labour force in the region. Such situation is effectively pushing more Roma into poverty, dependent from social services.

ESAP finds that the active labour market measures are very limited in the region (average of 0.12% of GDP compared to 0.72% of GDP in Western Europe). Additionally, the quality, efficiency and targeting of such measure can be greatly improved in order to ensure that the most vulnerable groups of population (among them Roma) can be reached. The discussions at the National Platforms and other activities within the RI2020 project indicate that the mainstream active labour market measures (ALMM) are yielding very modest results and are largely excluding Roma by their design (criteria, outreach, methods, etc.). The National Action Plans for Roma Integration across the region are offering some innovative measures that may contribute more significantly to the employment of Roma, but besides the ALMMs, very little has been implemented.



The analysis of the 2017 progress reports on Roma integration submitted by the governments in the region (by 15 June 2018 reports were received from all the governments except Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), shows that out of 79 measures in employment, 34 are fully or continuously implemented, 9 are partially implemented and 36 are not implemented at all. Those fully/continuously or partially implemented make up 54% of the total measures planned with the action plans on employment (which are not necessarily including all the measures planned with the National Roma Integration Strategies in the region).

From the available data, only 14,839 Roma across the region participated in the employment measures implemented as part of the action plans for Roma integration. It should be noted that only some of the implemented measures lead to actual employment, while the majority of the measures improve employability. The budget reported as spent on employment in the region in 2017 is 5,222,360 EUR (only 25% of the planned 20,654,411 EUR).

The situation among young Roma is even more concerning. According to the 2017 Regional Roma Survey (UNDP), the shares of youth Roma (ages 18-24) left out of participating in employment, education or training are extremely high. This ranges from 73 to 86 percent in the Western Balkan. Only one out of ten young Romani women (age 18-24) is in employment, education or in training in the Western Balkan. The unemployment gap between Roma men and Roma women is also significant. The unemployment rate of Roma women is greater than 15% compared to Roma men.

The statistical data point out to the urgent need to create opportunities for actual employment of Roma, and the progress reports point out to the need to change the approach in this area.

RI2020 is working with the governments in the region to set a clear target for the employment of Roma on 25% by the time of accession to EU of each economy in the region. Achieving this target would reduce the gap from the (current) general employment rate to 16.57% in absolute terms, or less in case the general employment rate rises. While this is obviously a modest target from the human rights perspective that calls for full equality, within the given timeframe and context it is in fact an ambitious target and it would be considered a success to reverse the negative tendencies and start reducing the gap to the extent feasible. The RI2020 intention is to provide technical assistance and knowledge exchange platform to the governments in the region to modify and design new approaches that would enable achieving the set target.

The Regional Conference on Roma Employment should inevitably look into the current practices of the governments to identify the reasons for their failure to produce better results and to look into those measures that are not implemented at all to identify their potential and possibility for implementation. It should also offer new approaches to employment that may be offered by international organizations such as the UNDP.

At the same time, the Regional Conference should look into other practices of the governments aimed at improving employment for other vulnerable groups that may be applied in the case of Roma. Within the ESAP project regional analysis and peer learning activities are being conducted on the topics of self-employment, youth employment, employment of persons with disabilities, on the job training, local employment partnerships and internship programmes. The expert reports on these topics include the practices from across the region and in-depth analysis of the hosting government performance. The reports are also looking into the inclusion of Roma in the measures described within these topics. Presenting and discussing the findings of the analysis done with the ESAP project may provide valuable information on modified or new measures that may serve increased employment of Roma across the region.

Specific focus shall be put on the possible measures and opportunities for employability of Roma and their transition to employment. The knowledge gained through REF implemented projects in facilitating and increasing Roma youth employment will be presented, including lessons learned, challenges faced by Roma youth, possible comprehensive solutions and synergies among the various stakeholders.





OBJECTIVES

The Regional Conference on Roma Employment has four specific objectives:

1. To examine the current practices of the governments in the enlargement region in the area of employment of Roma and identify the need for modified or new measures.
2. To examine the mainstream policies on employment implemented by the governments in the enlargement region covered with the ESAP and identify possible measures that have the potential to yield results for the employment of Roma.
3. To examine other proposals for employment measures/policies that may be effective for Roma by relevant regional and international organizations, including civil society organizations.
4. To explore possibilities for smooth transition from education to employment for young Roma.
5. To identify possible synergies among governments, business and civil sector to address Roma youth unemployment.
6. To draft regional recommendations on potentially effective measures for employment of Roma.

The specific objectives are expected to contribute to the overall objective of the Regional Conference, which is to examine and propose employment measures for Roma that may contribute to the reduction of the gap between the employment rate of Roma and the general employment rate in the enlargement region.

METHODOLOGY

The Regional Conference is organized in a typical format of providing information by experts and discussion among participants, including sharing experiences, identifying challenges, proposing existing or potential good practices and identifying solutions. The 2017 Regional Roma Survey data will be presented as evidence for the need of formulating effective Roma employment policies, followed by presentations of the current governments' policies on employment of Roma and data on the performance. Mainstream employment policies will be presented by the relevant experts of the ESAP project, including specific reference to the potential of such policies for Roma. Other proposals for innovative approaches for employment of Roma (or other vulnerable groups) will be presented by regional and international experts. REF will also present its experiences in project implementation for Roma youth in the region. The civil society from the region will be involved in the discussions, and if relevant as key-note speakers presenting promising practices for employment of Roma. Each panel will be followed by open discussions by the participants or work in small groups. The conclusions and the recommendations from the conference will be presented at the end, based on the discussions at the conference.

PARTICIPANTS

The regional conference will be attended by delegations from each of the enlargement region governments led by the National Roma Contact Points and including representatives from the public employment agencies and the ministries dealing with the areas of employment/social welfare, education and local self-government. The regional workshops also anticipate participation of one Roma civil society representative per participating economy. Civil servants or officials dealing with mainstream employment policies (public employment services and ministries of employment/social welfare) as partners on the ESAP project shall also be invited (2 per economy). Their participation will allow both for exchange of experiences from the mainstream policies and for learning about the situation of Roma in order to consider Roma into mainstream employment policies. Experts from the region and relevant international organizations will participate as key-note speakers.

The venue of the Conference will be determined through a call for offers. The location of the Conference is Budapest, Hungary. Translation from English to the local languages in the region and Romanes will be provided.





DRAFT AGENDA

Day 1

Opening Remarks (RCC, ILO, REF)

Session I: Data on employment in the enlargement region (in general and on Roma)

Session II: Overview of employment measures

Session III: Review of selected mainstream active employment measures

Session IV: Undeclared work - overview, potential (Roma), proposals

Concluding Remarks

Day 2

Session V: From education to employment - Challenges and opportunities

Session VI: From education to employment - The way forward

