

REGIONAL WORKSHOP: “ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION AND ANTI-GYPSYISM IN THE ENLARGEMENT REGION”

13-14 February 2018, Berlin, Germany

:: CONCEPT NOTE ::

RATIONALE

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.

Significant focus of the project is placed on mirroring the processes related to Roma integration within the EU Member States and the EU as a whole into the region. An important issue for Roma integration debated at the EU level is the discrimination against Roma, and particularly the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism. The enlargement region is lagging behind in this regard. There are some efforts and public discussions on combating discrimination, primarily as part of aligning legislation with the EU acquis, but the specific context, reasons, manifestations and schemes of discrimination against Roma are far from the spotlight.

At the same time, virtually at all events organized within the Roma Integration 2020 project both at national and regional level, where wide range of public officials, civil society, international and other relevant stakeholders discuss Roma integration, highlight the discrimination against Roma as the key reason for the exclusion of Roma from the society and the significant socio-economic gaps between Roma and non-Roma. Moreover, the phrase that the laws are equal for all and do not discriminate against Roma is very often spelt out during meetings, without understanding that the same laws equal for all and their implementation in practice have caused exclusion of Roma, exactly because of schemes of discrimination.

The 2016 monitoring reports on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and Action Plans of the Western Balkans and Turkey show that little is done to address discrimination against Roma. While the governments are working on establishing the basic systems for protection from discrimination, effective fight against discrimination, and in particular discrimination against Roma is an area that needs significant improvement. In particular, officials dealing with the Roma integration strategies, action plans and operational conclusions need to understand better this phenomenon in order to be able to devise strategies to tackle it.

The Roma Integration 2020 Task Force, which is the steering body of the project consisted of National Roma Contact Points, civil society and representatives of the RCC, EC and OSF, recognized this need during its first meeting on 09 November 2016 in Belgrade and decided to focus a regional workshops to this topic.

Having this in mind, the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team is organizing the first regional workshop on discrimination and anti-Gypsyism. The main objective of the workshop is to ensure officials from the enlargement region dealing with Roma integration recognize and understand this issue. It would be one of the rare opportunities at regional level to discuss discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism. The specific objectives of the workshop are several:

- To increase the knowledge and understanding on discrimination among officials dealing with Roma integration from the enlargement region by understanding the situation that Roma are put in through such practices;
- To understand the historical background of the discrimination and anti-Gypsyism phenomena;
- To contribute to the alignment of the discourse at regional level with the discourse at EU level in order to cope with the developments in the field of fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.

METHODOLOGY



The first specific objective of the workshop to increase the knowledge and understanding on discrimination among officials dealing with Roma integration from the enlargement region is going to be tackled by so called “experiential learning”, by which the participants are put in a situation to actually experience the same experiences Roma have in their everyday life. Such exercise has to be carefully prepared and rigidly controlled, as it creates artificial situation in which participants are taken out from their comfort zone and experience situations they virtually never have and probably never will. Putting the participants “in the shoes of Roma” serves as a method to actually understand and change the attitude towards the everyday experiences of Roma. It is indeed a strong method, but it is efficient and it is followed up by thorough deliberation and reflection afterwards. In turn, it is expected that the officials dealing with Roma integration shall gain a new perspective in their work on designing, implementing and monitoring Roma integration policies. For this part of the workshop the Roma Integration 2020 aims at engaging the Czech Republic Police Education and Training Unit that has proven experience in conducting such experiential learning exercises, and an expert on the topic of a Romani background.

The second workshop objective to understand the historical background of the discrimination and anti-Gypsyism phenomena is the reason that the workshop is held in Berlin, Germany, where resources and data, as well as sights and knowledgeable persons can help officials from the Western Balkans and Turkey understand how the attitudes towards Roma have been built over time and why such attitudes are so easily accepted and tolerated even today. The resources of the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism and other resources shall be used, with the assistance by the Open Society Institute, to bring the workshop participants to understanding of the roots of the issue. Experts shall be engaged to talk with the participants and sights shall be visited by the participants to gain the knowledge on the roots of anti-Gypsyism.

The third workshop objective to align the regional discourse with the one at EU level on the topics of discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism is not only being achieved by having the workshop itself, but by wrap-up discussion among participants on the follow up that may be undertaken both through the Roma Integration 2020 project and by themselves back at their workplace.

PARTICIPANTS

As envisaged by the Roma Integration 2020 project, the regional workshops bring together the National Roma Contact Points from the Western Balkans and Turkey, along with the primary responsible officials dealing with the priority areas of education, employment, housing, health and civil registration, as well as officials dealing with discrimination (Equality Bodies and/or Ombudspersons). The regional workshops also anticipate participation of one Roma civil society representative per participating economy.

Guests and experts of the workshop shall include relevant persons from Germany and other EU Member States, as well as relevant intergovernmental and international organizations’ representatives. The opening of the workshop should feature EU representative to provide an overview of the developments at EU level on the topic, as well as high representative of the RCC and possibly the hosting government. Appropriate level of representation of the Open Society Foundation, the European Roma Institute of Art and Culture and through their contacts of the German Government shall be ensured.

The venue of the event is set for the library of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany at the offer of the German authorities.





DRAFT AGENDA

Day 1

Opening Session (EU, RCC, Germany representatives)

Session I: Discrimination and Anti-Gypsyism - Experiential Learning Exercise

Session II: Exercise Deliberation: Defining and Understanding the Phenomena

Day 2

Session III: Guided Historical Background and Relevant Sight Seeing

Session IV: The Perspectives to Tackle Discrimination and Anti-Gypsyism in the Region through the Roma Integration Policies

NB. The option to start with the visit of the Documentation Centre and the Holocaust Museum shall be considered.

