

NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR INTEGRATION OF ROMA IN SERBIA 2017

13 June 2017, Belgrade

:: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ::

The Roma Integration 2020 project is implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council and funded by the European Union and the Open Society Foundation. It aims at contributing to the reduction of the socio-economic gaps between Roma and non-Roma and strengthening the institutional obligation of the enlargement governments to integrate Roma. One of the key activities of the project is the National Platforms on Roma Integration organized jointly with the National Roma Contact Points of the partner governments in each enlargement economy. The National Platforms provide wide public dialogue with the relevant institutions, civil society, media, and others concerned with the issue of Roma integration, at the same time ensuring transparency of the Roma integration policy, participation in the decision making process and accountability of the implementing institutions towards the public.

The second National Platform in Serbia was held on 13 June 2017 in the main Government building Palace of Serbia, with over 60 participants, including relevant officials from the line ministries and other institutions, Roma and pro-Roma civil society organizations, representatives of international organizations and media. The representatives of the institutions presented the [2016 annual report on the implementation of the Roma integration policy in Serbia](#), followed by the [civil society view on the issue](#). This paper reflects the discussions at the National Platform and highlights the recommendations emerging from the discussions towards the institutions, with a view to contribute to more effective and efficient implementation of the Roma integration policy in Serbia.

The National Platform on Roma Integration 2017 in Serbia was organized by priority areas: education, employment, housing, health and social care. However, throughout the discussions certain cross-cutting issues were raised and recommendations were made as follows:

- Noting the increased number of incidents of hate crime / speech against Roma, concrete measures towards the mainstream society to increase tolerance and understanding, at the same time discouraging prejudice, discrimination and hate crimes have to be put in place and strengthened where such exist, particularly in the area of education.
- The institutional setting of Serbia as precondition to implement the [National Roma Integration Strategy](#) adopted in March 2016 has been completed with the designation of the Vice Prime Minister as the officer in chief on Roma issues, the establishment of the high-level [National Coordination Body and its supporting expert group](#), and the adoption of the biennial [Action Plan 2017-18](#) containing implementing details including budget. While these positive developments are commendable, the delay in their implementation should be noted as a lesson learned.
- The Government of Republic of Serbia is commended for the cooperation in organizing the National Platform on Roma Integration and is encouraged to continue and institutionalize this practice on its path to EU integration.
- Relevant stakeholders that shall participate at the Roma Seminar organized by the European Commission and the Government of Serbia in October 2017 are encouraged to take into account all the recommendations emerging from the National Platform on Roma Integration in the formulation of the Operational Conclusions for the following two years. At the same time, responsible institutions are instructed to prepare concise and focused reports referring directly to the expectations expressed within the operational conclusions and covering the reporting period. For those conclusions not (fully) implemented, substantial reasons should be provided and amendments to the plans with a view to achieve the expected results should be proposed.
- The Government of Republic of Serbia is encouraged to work further with the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team towards setting up unique monitoring mechanism on Roma integration at national and regional level, to feed into the various reporting requirements and to further align this process with the EU practices.



- Local self-government units should be engaged in the implementation of the strategy for the integration of Roma in Serbia under the leadership, guidance and support by the central Government.
- The Government of Serbia is encouraged to make sure that the EU funds committed to the integration of Roma from the national IPA funds are adequately planned, negotiated and absorbed for the implementation of the Roma integration strategy and for the benefit of the Roma community. The country has good examples on this issue to build on.
- Throughout the process of the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the strategy for the integration of Roma, the Government of Serbia needs to maintain meaningful cooperation and coordination among its institutions and with independent institutions, local governments, civil society and international organizations.
- The work of the Government on detailed assessment for the fundraising needs to cover the budgeting gap of the Action Plan should be pursued further, with a view to complete the assessment and produce concrete fundraising document based on the Action Plan before the donor conference in September 2017 organized within the Roma Integration 2020.
- The existing data base collecting local level data on the actions towards integration of Roma should be further strengthened to reflect all the measures from the Strategy and the Action Plan, including impact assessment and possibility for analysis.
- Central and local level institutions dealing with Roma issues have to employ Roma professionals. Furthermore, existing local level mechanisms for implementation and monitoring, primarily the local coordinators, teaching assistants, health mediators and mobile teams should be further supported, strengthened and institutionalized, and extended to social care centres and local employment offices.
- Where the Roma integration policy relies on mainstream public services that regularly exclude Roma, deliberate effort to ensure access of Roma must be incorporated. Auxiliary measures, such as teaching assistants in education or health mediators in health, ensuring Roma access to mainstream public services should be applied in all other areas (including employment, housing and social care). Data on public services disaggregated by ethnicity should be collected.
- Re-establish working groups by priority area at each responsible ministry with the participation of adequate civil society organizations and experts that know and understand the situation of Roma and can offer concrete solutions.
- Stop adopting new documents and start implementing the existing ones meaningfully with tangible results on the ground.
- Monitor and report on the changes in the lives of Roma in line with the EU practices, using the impact indicators by meaningfully involving the State Statistical Agency by a Government decision.

EDUCATION

Participants noted that the education is most successful priority area in Roma integration.

One of the strategic objectives of the education system in Serbia is to strengthen and further develop the non-discrimination efforts towards achieving zero-tolerance towards discrimination. To tackle intolerance within the education system, school teams exist for inclusive education and for protection of children from abuse, neglect or violence.

The 2008 rules on enrolment allowing parents to choose the school for their children resulted in non-Roma parents pooling out their children from dominantly Roma attended schools, resulting in segregated schools in Leskovac, Vranje, Nis, Zemun and certain areas of Belgrade, most of which with 100% Roma students. To date, the Ministry has not effectively addressed the discriminatory result of the enrolment rules.

The most comprehensive strategic goal in education is full inclusion of all Roma children and youth into quality preschool, primary and secondary education. The system supports inclusive education as a key to developing the human capital in the society, increased inclusion into preschool education, ensuring continuity of education at all levels, recognition of differences among students, ensuring





achievement of the maximum potential of each students, as well as preservation and promotion of the Roma identity. Measures include identification and catering of the educational needs of each student, overseeing and supporting their development, but also work with their parents. Both continuous and new measures have been implemented in 2016 and are planned further.

Measures for preschool education include systemic support for early inclusion, rulebook for priority enrolment of children from marginalized groups, specific programmes, training of personnel. As a result the number of children in preschool education has increased, in 2016 reaching 953 Roma children in preschool education. On a project level, there is a plan to involve teaching assistants in preschool education through the Care International support. The project for inclusive preschool education with the World Bank is formulated and expected to commence. The project “Preschool without Borders 3” has started. Another project in the pipeline is the “Establishing of Network of Practitioners for Support of the Preschool Education and Upbringing”, as well as other projects.

Participants argued that while efforts are made to encourage Roma parents to enrol children (0-5) to preschool education resulting in increased interest, the number of Roma children into preschool has dropped. A criterion preventing Roma from enrolling to preschool is the one giving priority to families in which both parents are employed, which usually is not the case with Roma. The comment does not refer to the 900 Roma included in the preparatory preschool year.

Regarding the commencing World Bank credited project for inclusion of Roma into preschool education, participants raised concerns about the aforementioned criteria for priority enrolment, as well as about the criteria for small local grants, including only the number of Roma in the municipality, but not other specific conditions of the Roma or of the preschool education in the municipalities.

In primary education the objectives are to ensure effective prevention of drop-out and to ensure each child is provided with more opportunities through additional support until completion of education. Measure to boost access to primary school include non-discriminatory enrolment (in cases where documentation is incomplete), identification of individual needs for additional support (instead of tests for preparedness), and tests in Romani language. Most important measure to support children in education is the programme of teaching assistants. The programme has been assessed and conclusions and recommendations are prepared. 181 teaching assistants have gone through a life-long learning course within the EU funded project “Support to Inclusive Education of Roma”. 175 teaching assistants are engaged at the moment, and those areas not covered by teaching assistants also have support to children to successfully pass the final exam. Teachers are continuously trained particularly in the field of multi-culturalism and development of individual educational plans. Inter-disciplinary commissions on local level for inclusion of children in early development and education are established and trained (project with UNICEF). Roma children enrolled at special schools without decision by the inter-disciplinary commission are being reintegrated in mainstream schools and individual plans for support are developed for each child. Special schools are obliged to develop programmes for additional support for pupils at higher grades to prepare them for final exams and enrolment into regular secondary schools.

Participants explained that while the Office for Human and Minority Rights and the National Roma Council were in charge for enrolment by affirmative measure, around 700 Roma students were enrolled each year - half of the number for 2016. In their view, ‘one-time Roma’ abuse the affirmative measure (only by claiming being Roma to the school director), effectively restricting the right of Roma to benefit from the affirmative measure.

On technical level, participants noted that the rules of procedure were still mentioning the Office for Human and Minority Rights as responsible for the affirmative measure.

The positive effects of the EU funded so called [TARI project](#) were noted, including licencing teaching assistants and increasing the number of children into the preparatory year of preschool education. It was explained that the TARI project aimed at preventing the drop-out of pupils at most risk - those with 2.5-3.5 average grade that have 50% drop-out rate. Scholarships were allocated to these pupils, thus reducing the drop-out rate of this group to 7%. The Roma Education Found took over the project with funding from the German Government, after the Ministry was not successful in obtaining accreditation for EU funds in time. The EU Delegation representative explained that procedures have been set and





negotiations for the project may start, with a special note on the decentralized management of these funds. Furthermore, 27 million EUR EU funded project negotiations that include Roma inclusion in education (including scholarships and engagement of teaching assistants) are being finalized.

The additional support entails scholarships for pupils. The rulebook for criteria and procedure of enrolling Roma pupils in secondary education under more favourable conditions is providing for a series of affirmative measures, including provision of scholarships for 520 pupils from all secondary education grades in the amount of 3 900 RSD each, engagement of 201 mentor teachers, 176 scholarships for excellent students (funded from the public budget) in the amount of 5 400 RSD each. 1632 secondary school Roma students, 792 of which are girls, have been enrolled in secondary education in 2016 through affirmative measures. The project “Advancement of the Opportunities for Integration and Education of Roma in Serbia” started a month ago. Through the project the employability of young Roma and reintegration of people returned by readmission is promoted, and activities include scholarships for 500 pupils, support for employment of the 195 scholarship recipients, support to 142 graduating pupils to complete the education and overseeing the development of former scholarship recipients that completed school. The first phase of the project “Prevention of drop-out of students from the education system” completed by mapping the situation in 10 schools, activities that led to 66.1% reduction of the drop-out rate in these schools and publishing of manual for teachers to recognize signs of risk. The rulebook on recognition of discrimination by teachers, pupils or other persons shall be amended in the forthcoming period, as the rulebook doesn’t instruct on procedures in case of identified discrimination.

Noting that 520 scholarships from project (or around 1500 as another participant noted) and 176 scholarships from the state budget are provided (mainly for excellent students), participants complaint that more mentor teachers (201) are paid than scholarships given from the state budget. At the same time more than 700 Roma students with high grades have been refused from scholarships.

Education in Romani language and learning the Romani language and culture is also one of the priorities within education. 70 schools are identified that fulfil the criteria for establishing learning groups for learning this subject of choice. The rectory on Romani language at the Belgrade University started the course on Romani language last year and 47 persons completed it and qualified for teaching this subject. 2264 pupils are attending this subject, thought by 56 teachers.

A comment on this issue by the participants noted that the qualification of 40 teachers of Romani language and culture was funded by EU funds and implemented by a civil society organization, without which it would not be possible. The project also supports publishing of a schoolbook on the subject. At this end, a complaint is raised that only 6% of the pupils are provided the possibility to learn this subject. On a positive note, the questionnaire for choosing the subject of minority language has been improved, and children are provided the right to choose from minority language (instead from all other subjects of choice), which makes much difference.

Call for councillors for overseeing education in minority languages have been published with a single applicant from South Serbia from the Roma community, Prof. Tane Kurtic who is also director of a school. However, this applicant was not selected - instead a non-Roma was selected to oversee education in Romani language, which is a remark made at the meeting.

The aim to advance education of Roma students for professions of special interest to the Roma community, entailing carrier guidance and university education support, provides additional support to 74 students through scholarships and to 42 through student credits, while 96 students have been enrolled to universities by affirmative measure.

According to the participants, out of 300 applicants only 70 scholarships are approved, resulting in drop-out of students after the first year of university education by 30% of the initial 300 students, increasing by the end of the education.

The education of adult and gender equality also entails a series of activities, by which 5950 adults (15+) attended education for adults at 73 primary schools. 191 secondary schools provide programmes for vocational qualification of adults, 60% of which are Roma (40% female).

Conclusions and recommendations in the area of education include:





- The government is encouraged to keep up the good work in education that is the most successful area in the Roma integration policy. At the same time, there is a need to move gradually from project based towards institutional solutions of the problems.
- Wherever relevant and possible, Roma professionals should be engaged to deal with issues of interest of Roma in education, and in particular for the overseeing the education of Romani language and culture.
- The effect of indirect discrimination towards Roma of the criterion for priority enrolment into preschool of children with two employed parents should be removed, including within the World Bank credited project.
- Before the implementation of the World Bank credited project for inclusion of Roma into preschool education starts, it is recommended that a meeting with a wide range of relevant stakeholders is organized in order to discuss and address the open issues. Furthermore, it is recommended that Roma participate in the governing board of the project.
- The segregation of Roma at a number of schools resulting from the 2008 enrolment rule has to be resolved at the level of Ministry with a view to both dismantle the results of the indirectly discriminatory rule and to prevent further practices resulting in segregation of Roma.
- The rules of procedure and criteria for benefiting from the enrolment in education by affirmative measure urgently need to be revised with a view to ensure that Roma are benefiting from the measure and non-Roma are prevented from abusing it. The technical slip in the rules of procedure about the Office for Human and Minority Rights still being responsible for the measure should be corrected.
- Scholarships should be gradually provided from the state budget (instead of donors) with an objective to supply all (1600 for 2016) Roma students with scholarships until full equality is achieved, as committed by the Minister. Mentor teachers paid by the state budget should not outnumber the scholarships for students.
- Scholarships for university students, along with the accompanying benefits, should be provided to all the 300 Roma university students.

EMPLOYMENT

Serbia's Roma integration policy in the area of employment focuses on the objective of encouraging Roma for inclusion in the formal labour market. Through a range of conferences and meetings, relevant officials inform on the active measures for inclusion of hard-to-employ persons on the labour market, including Roma. Support is provided to increase the employability of such persons, to ensure first employment experience, and to assess the labour market.

Individual employment plans are legal obligation and a mainstream measure in the employment provided by the National Employment Agency within 90 days from the registration of a person as unemployed, and adjusted each 6 months. During 2016, individual interviews with 37 996 unemployed Roma were conducted, 18 750 of which with Romani women. For 28 357 Roma individual employment plans were developed, 12 672 of which for Romani women. Unemployed are informed on available employment services through the interviews and by the employment counsellors involved in the 20 local mobile teams. Employment services adequate for each unemployed person are included in their individual plan, particularly important being the service for active job seeking.

During 2016, 8 unemployed Roma have been involved in the programmes providing vocational skills and knowledge, 3 of which Romani women. Within the programme of acquiring practical skills in the private sector 4 Roma were involved, 1 of which a Romani woman. 6 Roma have participated in the programme for acquiring additional vocational skills and knowledge, out of which 4 women. In the trainings on demand of a private employer, 13 Roma have been involved, 7 of which women. Functional education and basic skills competences have been provided for 661 Roma, 368 of which were women. Within the internship programme funded by the EU, 1 Roma have participated.

Besides employability, the National Employment Agency also implements direct employment encouragement programmes, including provision of subsidies for employment of hard-to-employ





persons and support to self-employment initiatives, including a specific measure for subsidizing employment of Roma.

Employers are informed both on the affirmative measures for employment of hard-to-employ persons and on the prohibition of discrimination. During 2015 and 2016 employment counsellors at the offices for employment have been trained on non-discrimination at the labour market. The National Employment Agency have also participated in a number of meetings, conferences and trainings related to economic empowerment of Roma and non-discrimination of Roma at the labour market, including promotion of good practices.

Occasional discussions with employers are not considered effective anti-discrimination measure. Data on the situation are not presented despite the fact that discrimination is considered the underlying reason for the enormous unemployment rate among Roma

The low level of education and the lack of labour market competences of the registered unemployed Roma is an aggravating factor for the inclusion of Roma in the labour market and their involvement into the existing employability and employment programmes. The National Employment Agency is continuously supporting local level employment measures and is overseeing the implementation of such measures, including collecting data.

As a general note, participants considered employment as the gravest problem faced by Roma, leading not only to poverty, but also to other social deviations. At the same time, regretfully, they expressed concerns that the plans and reports in the area of employment throughout the years amount to no more than lip service. It was noted that from the Roma Seminar in 2011 when some 17 000 Roma were registered as unemployed, the situation has worsened (according to the number of individual plans for unemployed Roma in 2016). At the same time, measures in the area of employment focus on employability rather than employment, and report participation of handful of Roma.

The state report, as presented, did not refer to the employment of Roma in the public sector. According to the participants, only 0.02% Roma is employed in the public sector, and the Roma community is the only one among the national minorities facing such disproportion. Institutions mostly dealing with Roma don't employ Roma, such as the centres for social care with no Roma employees, or the National Employment Agency with 2 200 employees throughout the country, none of which Roma. Specific request by the participants was made to employ Roma mediators within the social care centres and the local employment offices.

Another issue not mentioned in the 2016 state report presentation is the recommendation to support initiatives targeting secondary goods collectors, who are the starting point of a potentially strategic recycling industry. The job has been codified previously, but no further support to these workers has been provided.

One of the operational conclusions from 2015 to finalize the Law on Social Entrepreneurship has also not been mentioned in the report as being implemented.

Conclusions and recommendations in the area of employment include:

- A working group within the National Employment Agency on the issue of employment of Roma with participation of Roma civil society should be established as soon as possible and Roma (at least 1) should be involved in the governing board of the National Employment Agency, with an objective to tackle the issue of employment of Roma seriously.
- Resolute and effective measures leading to actual sustainable employment of Roma have to be planned, implemented and monitored as a matter of urgency, while participation of Roma in the employability measures has to be increased to the level of significance relative to the number of unemployed Roma.
- The Roma civil society demands that a National Employment Agency for Roma is established as a separate institution to deal with the unemployment of Roma.
- The government is strongly encouraged to act upon its legal obligation for proportional representation of Roma in the public sector and to pursue to achieve the goal of 2% Roma among the public servants, including in the areas of health, judiciary, police, local administration, and other areas of importance to Roma, particularly in the social care centres and the local employment offices.





- Secondary goods collectors, as an entry point of the recycling industry, should be systematically supported.
- The Law on Social Entrepreneurship to be considered and adopted with a view to benefit Roma.
- Meaningful and effective measures against discrimination in the labour market should be put in place, involving all the relevant institutions dealing with discrimination and/or labour market, as well as the Roma civil society.

HEALTH

The presentation of the state report on the implementation of the Roma integration policy in 2016 in the area of health focused on the Roma health mediators programme implemented since 2008. The programme normally engages 75 Romani women as health mediators (the number is lower at the moment) at the patronage service of 59 health facilities. They provide information on health care and public services and assist Roma in the access to public health services. Since the beginning of the project, 145 227 Roma are recorded as beneficiaries (over 48 000 women, and 52 654 children). 711 165 individual actions are realized by the health mediators, including 195 815 visits to families, 19 372 for obtaining personal and 13 252 for obtaining public health insurance documents.

Interventions resulted in 16 330 obtained documents, over 16 000 gynaecological exams, 11 572 preventive exams for pregnant and birth giving women, over 2 000 mammography exams, 56 688 Roma registered with primary medical practitioners, 40 750 women registered with primary gynaecologists, 35 000 children vaccinated (5 748 children up to 1 year old).

Roma health mediators collect data from the local communities as part of their work, by which data are collected from 1 102 Romani communities from 64 municipalities. While the data base has been improved and summative data may be made available, the Ministry of Health is awaiting a permit from the Commissioner for Protection of Personal Data to publish the data base.

According to the evaluation study done in 2011, the project has positive measurable effects on: the extension of the lifespan of Romani babies and children, as well as adults, the decrease of the mortality rate of the Romani population, and the reduction of the costs for primary health services. The project also has non measurable positive effects, such as facilitation of the access of children to education, access of Roma to social services, particularly disabled and poor, effect on the poverty reduction and improved material situation of Roma.

The Ministry of Health allocated funding for the project for 2017 at the same level as before. This does not allow increase of the number of health mediators by 15 (as planned with the Strategy, the Action Plan and the Operational Conclusions). The situation is the same for 2018. Thus, the Ministry works on filling the funding gap for 2017 and 2018 from donor funding.

Participants expressed grave concern that the Ministry of Health failed to increase the number of Roma health mediators by 15 as planned, without any notion that this expectation would be met by 2015 as planned.

Concern was also expressed because of the fact that Roma health mediators were paid 150 EUR per month without any benefits (compared to the average salary in the public health of around 350 EUR per month plus benefits). This is considered unequal treatment of Roma.

Regarding the planned institutionalization of the health mediators within the system at central level, the Ministry has changed the plan for including the health mediators within the regular health network and decided to pursue agreements with local self-governments to include the health mediators within the local health councils. The arguments provided are the ban on employment in the public sector, the legislation allowing employment of only medically trained personnel in the health system, and the fact that Roma health mediators were providing wider range of social services than health.

The participants expressed surprised by the idea to engage Roma health mediators at local level. They expressed doubts to such solution because members of the local health councils are not councils' employees, the solution puts health mediators in further inequality to other health service providers, it puts the burden to the local level that is not responsible





in the matter, it risks arbitrary and different situations at different areas and it prolongs the achievement of the result with the negotiations with each local self-government.

Participants also challenged the argument about the law requirement to only employ medically trained personnel within the health system. They argued that on one hand Roma health mediators were provided trainings, but not adequate education, and on the other hand that they were increasingly asked to provide services outside their scope of work.

In general, participants expressed dissatisfaction that the presentation covered the period from 2008, rather than only for 2016. Furthermore, it included information only about the Roma health mediators programme, but not other planned measures. No information on the reasons for not implementing the plan was provided.

Participants recalled that the Ministry of Health made a commitment to employ medically trained Roma within the regular health system, as a completely different issue than the systematization of the Roma health mediators.

Conclusions and recommendations in the area of health include:

- The Ministry of Health should comply with its obligations as planned or provide substantial arguments for failing to implement the plan in order to discuss their mitigation. Its reports should focus on the expected results, covering the reporting year and all the planned measures.
- The systematization of the Roma health mediators within the centrally managed public health system should be addressed as a matter of urgency in an inter-disciplinary manner by the National Coordination Body.

HOUSING

The Law regulating forced evictions is adopted according to the international standards, with the accompanying bylaws and monitoring mechanism. The Law on Housing and Maintenance of Housing Buildings is also adopted. The laws regulate the issue of resettlement of persons living in illegal or others' private buildings, providing for adequate resettlements, housing for people that can't afford it, minimum housing standards, and housing support for inhabitants. Housing support includes subsidising rental housing, purchasing of dwellings, or settling in private properties in rural areas.

The Strategy for inclusion of Roma with the accompanying action plan and the Strategy for Social Housing are guiding policies in the housing of Roma. Measures include: urban planning, advancing the infrastructure and the living conditions in the substandard Roma settlements. The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure funded formulation of urban plans during 2009-2011 at local level (through IPA 2012 funding). Adoption of (general or detailed) regulatory urban plans for 13 substandard Roma settlements with around 1 150 families (4 200 Roma persons), and development of technical documentation needed for implementation of communal infrastructure and social housing projects are achieved. The later shall provide housing for around 1 200 families (4 500 persons) majority of which Roma.

Following the preparatory activities with the IPA 2012 funded project, local projects for construction of communal infrastructure and improvement of the living conditions of Roma shall follow with IPA 2013 funding. 9.5 million EUR was planned for distribution to local self-governments in partnership with civil society. 70 proposals have been received (half of the expected 150), and 30 passed to the second phase. 11 projects are selected and agreements for funding are signed in the total amount of 7.5 million EUR (2 million EUR remaining unabsorbed, because of the requirement for building permit before the start of the project). Accompanying project for technical assistance in the amount of 1.5 million EUR is implemented with 3 components: technical assistance for the management of the grants, development of technical documentation (for potential future projects), and strengthening the mobile teams for Roma inclusion at local level. IPA 2014 also envisages a project for development of technical project documentation in the amount of 3.5 million EUR, expected to result in 40-50 detailed regulatory urban plans and other technical documentation.

Previous criticism on the "emptiness" of the report, listing preparatory and regulatory measures, instead of measures for direct benefit for Roma, was repeated in housing, along with the comments that the implementation heavily relies on EU funding.





A serious concern was raised that social housing (built with EU funding) inhabited by Roma is lacking accompanying social measures to ensure security of tenure, making the results unsustainable and pushing Roma into to the initial state.

The EU Delegation representative noted that IPA funded projects are implemented with the commitment by the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure. EU expects government's financial commitment being aware that housing is costly. Employment and housing intervention proposal of 20 million EUR in 2018 was announced.

According to the participants, lack of basic infrastructure - paved roads, sewage, water supply - in the Roma settlements amounts to discrimination towards Roma.

Conclusions and recommendations in the area of housing include:

- In the area of housing the government should move from plans and regulations towards actual implementation, gradually replacing donors' with public funding.
- Housing interventions has to be combined with social and economic interventions and ensure sustainability.

SOCIAL CARE

The Strategy for inclusion of Roma includes three wider aims in the area of social care. The key developments in 2016 are under the first aim. Social centres implement the guidelines for registration in the book of births, acquiring citizenship, and registration of place of residence. UNHCR trains around 250 employees of the social centres on related topics each year (to be continued in 2017 on the topics of tolerance, elimination of discrimination and respecting the rights of internally displaced persons in pursue to sustainable solutions).

With the Decision on Fixed Transfers, sustainable financial support to local communities is ensured, by which underdeveloped municipalities may develop specific social services. Agreements are signed in 2017 with 120 municipalities for transfer of such funds, which in total amount to over 700 million RSD, almost twice more than the 400 million RSD in 2016.

Third key measure is the continuation of the process of de-institutionalization with two new services: family assistant and temporary fostering. By the end of 2016 the family assistant service covered 479 families with complex social problems, while temporary fostering covered 189 families with disabled children. The family assistant social services is found as the most appropriate for the Roma families, as 37% of the covered families are Roma.

Law on prevention of domestic violence entered into force in 2017. Social centres play important role with other institutions (police, judiciary, prosecution, etc.). Strategy for Protection of Children expected is to be developed soon. Regarding street children, the capacities of the Programme of Intensive Treatment have been increased from 6 to 20 places for sheltering such children in 2016. In 115 of the 140 social centres, inter-disciplinary teams are established to work with street children. The teams identify street children and place them either in shelters, temporary or permanent fostering or at the biological family.

Regarding the area of social care, participants had the same general comments as in the areas of employment and housing.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Referring participants to read the civil society monitoring report that is publically available, the civil society representative decided to react on the discussions. According to the civil society, the institutions need to take the integration of Roma seriously and produce tangible changes in the situation of Roma. Institutional response should match the dimensions of the problem and address it in partnership with the Roma civil society, which expressed readiness to engage. Institutions should adhere to the obligations undertaken through the adopted documents, and finally meaningful implementation should commence.

Re-establishing of the working groups at each line ministry including civil society organizations working in the respective field was suggested. It was also demanded that regular meetings are held according to the rules of procedures of the National Coordination Body and its expert group.





Regarding monitoring and reporting of Roma integration, the methodology of the Chapter 23 action plan should be applied as it provides clear information as to whether measures are (fully or partially) implemented or not.

The issue of readmission and return of people was also raised as an issue that has not been tackled, although it has been envisaged in the Strategy, as an example of an important measure that has not been implemented at all.

The civil society representative also warned on the risk that increasing incidents of extremism and violence towards Roma may backfire and create serious societal turbulences.

