

## RomaIntegration2020

### REPORT ON PUBLIC DIALOGUE FORUM

TIRANA, 23 MAY 2017

The First Public Dialogue Forum in Albania was organized jointly with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in Tirana on 23 May 2017 under the framework of the Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 (RCC RI2020).

The Forum brought together about 90 participants including the Deputy Minister of Education and Sports, representatives from the line ministries, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Integration (staff of the NIPAC), the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) Ms Xhafaj, numerous Roma Focal Points from different ministries and municipalities, civil society, international organizations and INGOs (UNDP, UNICEF Swiss Development Cooperation, Terre des Hommes, ARSIS).

The Forum focused on the implementation of the National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 (NAPRE) in 2016 in the six main priorities, namely education and promotion of intercultural dialogue, employment and vocational education and training, social protection, housing and urban integration, health and civil registration and access to justice, achievements and challenges and proposed priorities for 2017-2018.

The Forum was opened by Ms. Merita Xhafaj, the National Roma Contact Point from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and Mr Orhan Usein, Team Leader of the RCC RI2020 Action Team.

Ms Xhafaj referred to the achievements as relevant to the implementation of NAPRE in 2016 in the respective priority areas and highlighted the importance of setting priorities for 2017-2018 by linking them to the respective budgets. She underlined that steps have been made forward as relevant to all the priorities, while underlining that there is always room for improvement.

Ms Xhafaj reported that during 2016 on **civil registration** 406 Roma and Egyptian were registered through the Civil Status Offices.

In the area of **health care**, the Ministry of Health has supported the initiatives of non-profit organizations to identify and train Roma and Egyptian as health mediators in order to provide/facilitate the access to health services for all members of the two communities. Further, in 2016 the Ministry of Health provided 11 045 free health cards for Roma and Egyptian.

In the area of **education**, the Ministry of Education and Sports has organized different post-educational programmes for parents of Roma and Egyptian pupils. Ms Xhafaj has mentioned



that 856 Roma and Egyptian parents have participated in these programmes with their children. Further she shared that the Ministry has requested for support of the NGOs and schools with the view to identifying Roma and Egyptian that are interested in tertiary education.

In the area of **employment and vocational education and training (VET)**, the government has undertaken an initiative to reform the National Employment Service and Labour Office<sup>1</sup>. The reform is ongoing and under the lead of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. The reform foresees the development of the National Model of Service. The model will be applied to all employment offices across the country in order to introduce new standards and provide a more focused approach to jobseekers and employers.

In the area of **housing**, in particular social housing for Roma and Egyptian communities, it has been stressed that a New Strategy on Social Housing (2016-2020) was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2016, which aims to offer affordable and qualitative housing solutions for vulnerable families, including Roma and Egyptian Communities. In addition, the new draft of the *Social Housing Law* proposed by the Ministry of Urban Development is expected to double the supporting schemes to vulnerable people<sup>2</sup>. The draft was adopted by the government in the Council of Ministers' in April 2017 and is now under consultation in the Albanian Parliament. The final approval is expected by the end of 2017. The new law would also tackle the 2012 amendments which had direct impact on the Roma and Egyptian community<sup>3</sup>.

The civil society representatives recalled on the support of the government and donors needed in order to implement the NAPRE, reminding that more than 45% of funds on Roma policies and programs come from donor sources. The civil society representatives also suggested that it is necessary to work on the following aspects:

- Coordination with other international organizations.
- Strengthening the role of civil society in implementing the NAPRE.

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<sup>1</sup> This program (2013 – 2017) sets forth employment and the qualitative development of the labour force as one of the fundamental objectives, in accordance with the vision and directives of the European Union, in particular the European Employment Strategy 2020 and requirements for Albania's EU integration. In addition, the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 (NSDI II), provides directions and objectives for social and economic development of the country during period 2015-2020, combining the advantages of integration agenda and reforms for development country.

<sup>2</sup> The Law will increase quotas to the Roma and Egyptian communities (5% for Roma and Egyptian families in any new social housing unit) and ban forced evictions. In addition, social housing rentals scheme; scheme on improving existing housing condition or improving conditions until new constructions; low cost housing scheme; area development schemes related to housing; temporary housing schemes; and specialized housing schemes are foreseen.

<sup>3</sup> Article 24 on rent subsidy - where Roma and Egyptian communities are identified as a priority group for benefiting rental subsidy; and Article 25/2 on small grants - addressed specifically for projects that support improvement of living conditions of Roma communities. In addition, the condition that only 50% of rent can be subsidised by local government is amended in 2012 (article 24). According to article 24, as amended, if the rent is more than 25% of the family's income, the family is eligible for a rent allowance that covers the difference between the real rent and the one that the family can afford. The law does not specify on cases where the families have extremely low income, whether the full rent can be subsidised 100% in such cases.





- Devoted attention and prioritization of local governments, especially in drafting and implementing local action plans.
- Difficulties in determining the number of Roma and Egyptians benefiting from inter-sectoral policies.
- Raising awareness of the Roma and Egyptian community about the benefits they could have from programs tailored for them.

On the budgeting issues, it is difficult to estimate the total budget spent on NAPREs implementation since not all line ministries have special programs for Roma and Egyptian communities. In addition, there is no information on the budgets allocated by the local government units for Roma integration. A combination of mainstream and targeted actions should be considered to address the six priority areas.

On the monitoring issues, harmonization between official data and survey data is needed. In addition to this, there is a need for gender disaggregated data for both communities. According to Ilir Gedeshi, local RCC RI2020 consultant, there are more Egyptian (60.000) than Roma (9000-10.000) living in Albania. Together they represent 2% of the total Albanian population. 38% of Roma and 50% of Egyptian have never been to school.

In the following session representatives of various line ministries spoke of 2016 achievements:

## **1. Education and promotion of intercultural dialogue**

The Deputy Minister of Education and Sports, Ms Nora Malaj reported on the achievements such as:

- providing free textbooks to Roma and Egyptian pupils,
- free transport to and from schools (it cannot be determined how many children benefited from the service),
- introducing children into the pre-school systems by collaborating with NGOs,
- setting up university quotas for students from the Roma and Egyptian communities.

She also informed of the initiative of the Ministry implemented in cooperation with the municipalities to register every Roma and Egyptian child in kindergarten. Albania will pay special attention to pre-school education in the upcoming period. Segregation remains a problem, and the Deputy Minister mentioned the segregation phenomenon in the schools in Berat, Morava and Korca. Special funds will be devoted to developing programs aimed at de-segregation of schools.

The following are priorities for 2017-2018:

- Continuation of feeding the ROMALB system with data from all regional education directorates and educational offices;
- Strengthening the position of assistant teachers at schools, who will provide extracurricular support to pupils;





- Importance will be placed to creating quality education through developing comprehensive education programs that give attention to the particularities of both communities.

## **2. Housing and Urban Integration**

Ms Aida Seleri (Ministry of Urban Development - MUD) referred to the Law on Social Housing Program which provides social housing opportunities through subsidies for families without income or economic assistance. Such funds are and will be combined with funds from the local municipalities<sup>4</sup>. She informed that the MUD has budgeted the financing of housing programs as follows:

1. *Program for reconstruction of Roma and Egyptian communities' housing*, which is in its fourth year of implementation. For the period 2014-2016, 247 million ALL were invested for the complete reconstruction of 469 housing units in 15 municipalities all over the country.
2. *Social Housing Program*, piloted for the first time in 2016 aims at adapting social property units. The 2017 allocated budget for the program is 12 million ALL and will cover the rent in the range of 50 to 100% of the value for about 210 new families in need.

The representatives of the Municipality of Tirana commented that the enforcement of the new law is showing its first positive effects, i.e. 85 social housing units were provided by the Municipality of Tirana for families from the Roma and Egyptian communities. All municipalities are expected to prepare files for families applying for one of the social housing programs. Subsidies will be provided by municipalities.

Among the concerns raised by civil society, one is related to the families who are continuous debtors and have not paid for their social housing because of no stable income. The Municipality of Tirana promised to make a reassessment and will allow transfers of these families to other housing programs. This issue will have to be followed up further.

## **3. Employment**

Ms Etleva Gjellaj (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth) presented the main achievements in the area of employment and VET:

- An employment monitoring system has been established that is focusing on three elements, namely directing the Roma and Egyptian community in the labor market, encouraging self-employment and increasing capacities of NES staff to address Roma and Egyptian community issues.
- The Law on Employment Promotion encompasses few points for supporting the Roma and Egyptian community.

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<sup>4</sup> 98,391,000 ALL have been approved and spent for 2016 to improve the housing conditions of Roma and Egyptian communities.





The Employment Promotion Program is not effective because the Roma and Egyptian persons that are involved in it are facing a hostile and discriminatory environment. Monitoring of the employment promotion program should be more effective, since there is no follow up and continuity. Many Roma and Egyptian have abandoned the Employment Promotion Programmes because of the minimal pay which is not enough for them to fulfil their life needs. These issues will have to be further elaborated.

#### **4. Social protection**

Ms Denada Seferi (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth) mentioned some of the achievements in the area of social protection, in particular the reforming of the economic aid programme. In relation to this, the new Law of Social Enterprise was discussed in details. It is expected that the Law will benefit also Roma and Egyptian communities. The law aims is to regulate the activities of social enterprises in order to protect and promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups i.e. Roma and Egyptian through its economic and social integration, while encouraging a spirit of responsibility, solidarity and social cohesion in the society, Social enterprises operate in the following areas: social services; employment mediation; youth employment; protection and promotion of health; services in education etc., as specified in Article 10 of the earlier mentioned law. National minorities will be particularly targeted as to improve their vocational training or work experience in order to increase opportunities for sustainable employment.

#### **5. Health Care**

Ms Jonida Seferi (Ministry of Health) spoke of the provision of free health care through donor funds for Roma and Egyptians who are not covered by health insurance or are not registered as unemployed jobseekers. She informed that facilities were created to equip the community members with Health IDs. Following the Order of Minister of Health No. 28 "On Referral System and Public Health Service Tariffs" all uninsured persons receive free visits to their family doctor. Roma and Egyptian community members have benefited from the services of mammography and check-up units (ages 35-70 years).

Civil society representatives have requested from the Ministry of Health to establish health mediators from the community to assist in providing healthcare. In addition, they also requested provision of mobile teams within communities with highest numbers of Roma and Egyptians. Finally, on the Fush-Kruja case, revision is of extreme importance. One of the neighborhoods, Kastriot, is an infection source for Roma and Egyptian community families that are located there. This case requires immediate review. The requests should be followed up at the next inter-ministerial meeting.

