

2020 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION

29 September 2020, Virtual meeting

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

INTRODUCTION

The fourth National Platform on Roma Integration in Albania was organized jointly by the Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration Team 2020 (Roma Integration) and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) on 29 September 2020. The Policy Brief reflects the discussions and proposals from the National Platform. It aims to assist the Government to formulate more effective Roma¹ integration policies. The event was attended by 47 participants including relevant officials from the line ministries and other institutions, the European Union Delegation to Albania, Roma and pro-Roma civil society organizations and representatives of international organizations who showed quite an interest to be informed on the topic.

The main focus of the 2020 National Platform was to enable constructive dialogue on the key issues in *"Implementation and Priority Measures for 2019- 2020 for Roma"*, with a view to identify and plan the most effective solutions acceptable for all the stakeholders, including the Roma community, central and local governments, the general society, the funding community, and any other interested parties.

OPENING STATEMENTS

The 2020 National Platform meeting was opened by Mr Orhan Usein, Head of Office, Roma Integration Team 2020, Regional Cooperation Council, Ms Merita Xhafaj, Director of the General Director Ministry of Health and Social Protection, and National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), Mr Alessandro Angius, EU Delegation, Office in Albania, Mr Adriatik Hasantari, Executive Director, Roma Active Albania and Ms Romina Sefa, Director, Center for Social Advocacy.

Mr Usein shared an overview of the RCC activities in the region and in particular with the Government of Albania that will host the upcoming Ministerial meeting on Roma Integration. This meeting is organized under the framework of the "Berlin Process", and has the purpose to discuss the achievements and shortcomings of the Roma Integration Declaration, one year after its adoption. This meeting will serve to present the deliverables on the Roma Integration Declaration to be endorsed by the Leaders of the Western Balkans at the upcoming Summit organized by the joint "Berlin Process" on 10 November 2020. The Roma Integration process was introduced in the Berlin Process, that proved the socio economic development of the region must take into consideration the specificities of the vulnerable groups including Roma. Roma Integration Team 2020 is currently preparing four important (deliverables) to be presented and discussed in the Ministerial meeting:

1. **Housing mapping methodology:** legalization of informal settlements for mapping, Roma Integration Team 2020 has developed a methodology for locating geographic

¹ Here, the term 'Roma' is used in line with the terminology of European institutions and international organisations, to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal) and also includes travellers, without denying the unique features and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups.



settlements and informal settlements please see the methodology² The piloted municipalities in Albania have proven to be successful and excellent exercise that is aimed to enhance through all the territories of the Western Balkans. This methodology will help us further to ensure that legalization and upgrading for the Roma housing is finalized properly and legally.

2. **Roma responsive budgeting:** Roma Integration Team 2020 developed Guidelines for Roma Responsive Budgeting in 2018 within the intergovernmental working group that included Western Balkan Governmental representatives, please see³. This document should be endorsed from the Western Balkan Leaders at the ministerial meeting. The region should learn from the great example achieved from the Ministry of Finance and Economy in Albania, agreed and signed an official document as commitment towards setting specific focus and objectives in local government budgeting for Roma and Egyptians. The continuation of this process is lead as a sustainable ground to further facilitate the process with authorities and implement it. Medium Term Budget Program 2021-2023 is to be prepared according to the methodology approved. Preparatory budget expenditures for the preparation of the MTBP 2021-2023 will be sent to the units of the government.
3. **Civil registration roadmaps:** to end statelessness by 2024. Roma Integration Team 2020 is currently working on defining the Roadmap on ending statelessness in Western Balkans. Progress in the area of civil registration (in terms of adopted legislation, introduction of statelessness determination procedures, enhanced regional cooperation in solving cases which require bilateral agreements), is envisaged as one of the deliverables.
4. **Data collection and monitoring:** sample model proposal for monitoring the implementation of the Poznan commitments by national statistical offices.

Roma Integration Team 2020 is planning to travel to Albania and jointly with National Roma Contact Point, will visit the responsible line ministries to ensure these documents are fully discussed and endorsed by the line ministries, before they are presented for the political endorsement at the Sofia Summit.

Ms Merita Xhafaj, Director of the General Director Ministry of Health and Social Protection, and NRCP, expressed her gratitude to the ROMA Integration Team 2020 for the continues support towards the better coordination and implementation of the Albanian Government policies for Roma and Egyptians. She highlighted that this stronger coordination and cooperation between the line ministries and full engagement of the municipalities is necessary to achieve the objectives mentioned by Mr Usein. Such processes of dialogue are important to start implementing social inclusion on Roma minority, provided and supported through IPA implementation in the amount of 2 Million Euros. She highlighted the implementation of policies and guidelines synergies between Regional Corporation Council-RCC at the national level and ROMACTED project at local level municipalities. Moreover, this is a momentum to identify the gaps and the strengths for the Action plan 2019, in order to play and empower the Roma National Action plan for the period 2021 up to 2025.

² <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/126/regional-methodology-on-mapping-of-roma-housing>

³ <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/96/guidelines-for-roma-responsive-budgeting>





Mr Alessandro Angius, EU Delegation, Office in Albania, expressed his acknowledgements to the organizers for having this meeting, sharing information and close corporation with the EU Delegation, particularly in such difficult times. Mr Angius, emphasised several current and important periods that Roma policy developments such as: The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, up to 2030, jointly with the enlargement package after its adoption in October and the specific communication on Roma that will be on the German Presidency of the EU. The Albanian Government are present and this reflects most immortally as strong reference towards the Enlargement policies. Please with the presentation of the achievements from the Albanian Government. The new policies will require proportionate resources in terms, collecting future data, financial resources at national level but also at the level of international donor's community. The success of the future strategy is strongly linked with the level of support that EU will be able to give to the Albanian Government as public authority and RCC was a key player to strengthen the implementation of Roma Policies. The authorities are in the ongoing stage for IPA III, as additional support for the civil society and their presence. Furthermore, the next Roma seminar is another opportunity to discuss with all stakeholders on the importance of the Roma policies.

Mr Adriatik Hasantari, Executive Director, Roma Active Albania, recalled the important of participation of the Albanian Government and civil society in larger number at the German Presidency of the EU. He also encouraged to have more ambitions targets for the future in Roma Integration policies and recommended to monitor closely how the implementation of the current policies has been impacted from the people in the ground. The future policies on Roma must have structured indicators to enable successful implementation and monitoring.

Ms Romina Sefa, Director, Centre for Social Advocacy, highlighted the importance of the meeting and shared the main focus of their work in 2019 jointly with other SCO's in two important topics on housing and employment. I significant milestone was achieved in employment by directly increasing the minimal income level. There is a need to closely monitor the embayment measures to be applicable for Roma active employment especially during and post pandemic period. Centre for Social Advocacy, was worked very closely in monitoring the program on housing and worked directly with Roma on supporting them to benefit from this assistance. During last year 2019, the organization was closely involved in impacting the medium term budget plan, concretely in the social fund budget pacification to have the same stable budget as previous year. As result of our advocacy 30 municipalities, this year have benefited from this program. The housing topic is highly impotence and our aim is to continue having the constant level of corporation with Government at both levels.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND JUSTICE

Total budget spent for CIVIL REGISTRATION in 2019	EUR 84,414
Total budget planned for CIVIL REGISTRATION in 2019	EUR 235,600

There were 82 Roma born children identified as unregistered. The General Directorate of Civil Registration in cooperation with state bodies and non-governmental organizations operating in the field of human rights and especially children's rights, during 2019 have held several meetings throughout Albania with the higher number of participation of members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities, in order to identify cases of unregistered children and then treat them until the final settlement id finalized.





The Ministry of Interior has continuously strengthened the capacities of civil servants in implementing civil registration recommendations, including those affecting Roma; 7 potential victims of trafficking and victims of trafficking were identified during 2019.

2,902 Roma were informed about civil registration procedures and change of residence during 2019 versus 2,493 reported for the year 2018.

With the issuance of law no. 57/2019 on "*On Social Assistance in the Republic of Albania*", there is an update of the role of social administrator. This legal change supports better defined tasks and functions of the social administrator to facilitate the access of Roma and Egyptians to the field of social protection. Moreover, 5,167 Roma and Egyptians benefited from the services provided by NGOs licensed by the Ministry during 2019 under approved programs and / or a Memorandum of Understanding with the local government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More efforts should be made in the future to provide free court-mandated psychological services to Roma and Egyptians in need in court proceedings, such as divorce, child custody, detention orders, parental responsibility, and children in conflict with the law.
- The improvement should be made in relation to the provision of data on the reimbursement of members of the Roma minorities for the legalization (certification) fees of documents charged by the Albanian consulates and necessary for civil registration.
- With regards to the implementation of the measure 1.8. in the National Action Plan there is needed to initiate thematic trainings for civil registration officials, since none was completed during year 2019.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION AND PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Total budget spent for EDUCATION in 2019	EUR 1,933,317
Total budget planned for ECUCATION in 2019	EUR 2,943,114

Free textbooks provided for 10,994 Roma and Egyptian children, girls and boys from first to fifth grade of compulsory education, and for Roma and Egyptian children in grades six through nine.

158 Roma and Egyptian parents are already registered members of school boards according to the annual report in during 2019, whereas 221 Roma and Egyptian families have benefited from social protection services or other sources of support for children dropping out of school compared to 198 reported that were reported in 2018. In compulsory education, there are an increasing number of school dropouts due to family migration, or attraction to the labor market. Providing employment opportunities for parents can minimize school dropout by Roma and Egyptian children. There were reported 14,379 Roma and Egyptians enrolled and attended preschool and compulsory education during 2019. Major increased number was achieved in final year, 199 high school and vocational school teachers / students were appointed as mentors for Roma and Egyptian students in vocational schools during 2019 versus 9 reported for the year 2018.

RECOMANDARTIONS

- Strengthen the role of mediators in promoting Roma and Egyptian children in education.





- The Ministry of Culture and the National Folklore Center, as the responsible implementing institutions, should be more active in translating and publishing Roma literature in the Albanian language and vice versa.
- The Ministry of Culture should work harder to include Roma and Egyptian history, and identity in tourism guidelines, and to produce brochures for both of these minorities in Albania.
- The Ministry of Education in close collaboration with schools and board of parents should organize national and local campaigns for increasing the number of students from Roma and Egyptians in compulsory education.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

Total budget spent for EMPLOYMENT in 2019	EUR 491,020
Total budget planned for EMPLOYMENT in 2019	EUR 874,683

During 2019, 568 Roma and Egyptian students benefited from increased scholarships for Vocational Education training; 953 young Roma and Egyptians were employed by the regional employment offices, including individuals who participated in employment promotion programs and those who were employed through mediation by the Regional Employment Directorates. 457 Roma and Egyptian women were employed through employment offices during 2019; In March 2019, the Albanian Parliament approved Law no. 15/2019 on Employment Promotion Programs. The law introduces a specific program for self-employment, which addresses some issues of Roma and Egyptians who are engaged in informal economic activities or who are interested in developing a small business. There is an increase of number of Roma and Egyptians (245) completed vocational training courses during year 2019 compare to 148 reported during year 2018. During 2019, 568 Roma students benefited from the increase of scholarships for Vocational Education Trainings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More support should be given to Roma and Egyptian farmers through the ARDA-funded project mechanism, which will encourage employment in the agricultural sector.
- The study on the position of individual Roma and Egyptian collectors of recyclable waste in the context of concession of waste collection sites has been completed.
- Highly recommended to employ Roma and Egyptians in public administration for instance by employing Roma mediators by the public administration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEALTH

Total budget spent for HEALTH in 2019	EUR 6,127,717
Total budget planned for HEALTH in 2019	EUR 882,250

The provision of baby and maternal care packages for Roma and Egyptian mothers who give birth at a hospital was implemented very successfully, with a steep increase in the number of mothers being reached from 1,961 in 2016 to 2,059 in 2017, 7,753 in 2018 and 11,797 in 2019. Health centers are present in Roma neighbourhoods, or easy to reach. Immunization and awareness campaigns have been launched in different areas where Roma population lives





30,003 (**17,850 of them females**) Roma and Egyptians have received information (including on physical, mental and reproductive health issues, STDs, child immunization 0-14, drug use, etc.) and services from the medical mobile teams during year 2018 against 16,650 reported for year 2018.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, from January 2018 has launched the community health care program, paying special attention to vaccination, mammography and other preventive services. The community health care program was implemented during 2019 to guarantee services close to the place of residence for vulnerable categories, especially for the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Direct contact in the community is priority of this program in order to disseminate information on health care. The program serves not only to raise awareness of the Roma and Egyptian minorities about preventive care, but also to improve their health by increasing access to health services where they live. During 2019 the Decision of Council of Ministers for the of health care mediators for the provision of public health services was not yet approved. Though mentioned as a priority in the National Plan, there is no programme to introduce health mediators. A health mediators programme should be established and piloted with health mediators being trained and recognized as a professional qualification and working closely both with Roma and Egyptian communities and health services. During 2019, 88 health centers worth 2,459,016 Euros were reconstructed nationally. The Roma and Egyptian minorities have also benefited from this intervention. 2. Given that the indicator that falls below measure 1.6 of this sector has had a very high performance against the target set for this measure (target 300 mothers and currently 11,797 mothers have benefited), the budget spent for this measure has gone beyond planning. This measure is related to the number of R / E mothers who have received the child and mother care package three months after birth during 2019. The work done by the health structures to raise the awareness of mothers has directly affected the implementation of this measure are born in health institutions and consequently benefit from bonus packages 3 months after birth. 11,797 Roma and Egyptian mothers have received the baby & maternal care package during year 2019. There is an increase in the number of mothers received the baby & maternal care package compare to the year 2018 which is reported 7,797.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More action needs to be taken by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in preparing brochures and promotional materials on health issues including in the Roma language.
- Promoting the role of health mediators. A program of health mediators should be established and piloted with health mediators trained and recognized in the professional qualification.
- More efforts should be made to compile leaflets regarding the topics of personal hygiene in the Roma language.
- Ministry of Health should approve the decision to be taken from the Decision of Council of Ministers for the of health care mediators for the provision of public health services that was not yet approved since early 2019.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

Total budget spent for SOCIAL PROTECTION in2019	EUR 241,209
Total budget planned for SOCIAL PROTECTION in2019	EUR 723,766





There were reported 6 social enterprises benefited during 2019 from government support by the Municipality of Tirana. During the period 2018-2019, the project of the Municipality of Tirana so called "*Empowerment of Women and Promotion of Entrepreneurship*" (II) supported with grants, 6 women entrepreneurs of small businesses, from the Roma / Egyptian minority. For the year 2019-2020, the same project in the phase (III) gave a grant of 500,000 Albanian Lekë (62,103,559.03 EUR) for an entrepreneur woman representing her small business. Moreover, 1,785 Roma and Egyptians receiving economic assistance were included in reintegration programs during 2019 versus 729 that were perversely reported in 2018. 514 Roma and Egyptians benefited from both public and non-public residential centers during 2019 versus 412 that were reported in 2018; 54 community centers were established and continue to be operational during 2019 where 3,608 Roma and Egyptians received services from these centers.

The municipalities reported for this indicators explained that in cooperation with ministry – licensed NGOs have provided services to the Roma and Egyptian communities, consisting of: administrative need, civil registration, children's registration for the first time in the Republic of Albania, medical reimbursement, health cards, vaccination, employment and vocational training, transportation, children enrolment in school, illiteracy classes, parenting classes, counselling, day care at the center, support for community initiatives (food, clothing, school supplies). etc. In the Saranda municipality, 79 Roma and Egyptians have been treated to New Year's food packages and some of them receive food service at the Santa Marcelina social center. In Diber municipality, 10 members of R&E minorities are supported by World vision, Argitra vision, There are 6 MoUs in municipality of Korca with local organizations Kennedy, Mercy Without Borders, Emanuel Mission, IRCA, Distutni Albania, Word Vision. 400 Roma and Egyptians were reported by municipality of Lezha. They have received service from community centers. These centers occasionally address issues that focus on the fight against human trafficking and illegal migration. Also, the Social Services in the Municipality in the 16 days of activism each year carries out activities focusing on these sensitive issues for the society, not only with the beneficiaries of the community centers but also with all the pupils of the schools in the Municipality of Lezha. 1300 Egyptian and Roma were reported by municipality of Durrës. This includes beneficiaries of training, information, awareness raising, various activities, assistance, case management support, etc.; 200 Roma and Egyptian Roma were reported in municipality of Korca. These have been beneficiaries of frequent meetings by various local organizations, the local coordinator for gender equality and domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More support is needed from Ministry of Health and Social Protection to continue strengthening the capacity of social administrators, who should facilitate Roma and Egyptian minority members in receiving services.
- More efforts should be made to increase the reintegration of Roma and Egyptian families leaving the National Transitional Emergency Centre.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING AND URBAN INTEGRATION

Total budget spent for HOUSING in 2019	EUR 241,209
Total budget planned for HOUSING in 2019	EUR 4,978,977

There were reported 341 Roma and Egyptian families benefited through small grants for new infrastructure, water supply and sewerage, sanitation equipment or new construction during the 2019; 191 Roma and Egyptian families benefited from additional services in cases where





they were unable to pay their financial obligations under a housing program during 2019 against the 127 families reported in 2017; 371 Roma and Egyptian families benefited during 2019 from social rental housing across the country. Moreover, 158 Roma families benefited during 2019 from low-cost housing; 246 Roma and Egyptian families benefited from the rent bonus during 2019. 23 municipalities benefited from Roma / Egyptian minority projects to improve their livelihoods. The practice of allocating funds received from the state budget in two years is followed to reduce the risk of non-implementation of funds by local government units due to various delays that may occur during the implementation of projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The new administrative and territorial reform has verbalized the need for more support and training for local government staff to prepare narrative and financial proposals, in order to attract funding and implement housing projects that meet the needs of Roma.
- Funding for housing programs remains insufficient given the extent of the needs of Roma and the rights conferred by the new legislation.
- Municipalities need to increase responses to requests for improved housing conditions from Roma.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY COORDINATION, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

The Government of Albania uses the online system ROMALB (www.romalb.org) to collect monitoring information in real time, and to generate indicators for the annual monitoring report. By the end of 2019: 80% of the Municipalities were active in entering data in the ROMALB system.

Pursuant to the point of the Poznan Declaration, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection coordinates the work on Roma budgeting. Three budget programs for the piloting of the next cycle of the public budget, 2020-2022 have been developed:

- Budget Program for Social Inclusion and Social Care - Ministry of Health and Social Protection.
- Social Housing Budget Program - Ministry of Finance and Economy.
- Budget Program for Basic Education and Higher Secondary Education - Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The practice of annual reporting according to the regional monitoring standards should continue.
- The accuracy of data on indicators and budget expenditure should be improved. The preparation of annual monitoring reports needs to become an ongoing process. In order to collect precise data for 2020 monitoring report, the report preparation should start in the last quarter of 2020.
- ROMALB should be updated and expanded to better comply with NAPIRE and the regional monitoring template so that all required information can be generated automatically.
- Impact assessment indicators need to be included in ROMALB system. This would oblige responsible institutions and INSTAT to report on the indicators.
- To harmonise the reporting process, trainings for civil servants on how to use ROMALB system and to understand indicators and measures should continue.





- Before the annual monitoring report is officially submitted to the Roma Integration project, the civil society should be systematically engaged to provide and validate reported information until considered final.

