

## RomaIntegration2020

### 2016 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION IN KOSOVO\*

21 November 2016, Pristina

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

The Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 Action Team organized a public dialogue forum on 21 November 2016 in Pristina to discuss:

- national policies and priorities on Roma integration;
- budget proposals for 2017, including sources of funding for the proposed measures; and
- relevant mainstream socio-economic policies to be used for advancing Roma integration.

The forum gathered around 50 participants representing various line ministries, civil society and international organizations as well as representatives from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Representatives of line ministries dealing with education, employment, health, housing and civil registration were invited to present their priority measures for 2017 and discuss with the participants the measures outlines in the draft Strategy and Action Plan on Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities 2017-2021.

This paper provides a summary of the discussions during the forum, as well as recommendations gathered from the participants.

#### **Background:**

According to the 2011 population census, there were 1,739,825 people living in Kosovo\*, out of which 8824, (0.5%) were Roma, 15,436 (0.9%) were Ashkali and 11,524, (0.7%) were Egyptians.

The first Strategy on Integration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo (2009-2015), as well as the Action Plan for its implementation, were approved in December 2008. Progress Reports by the European Union<sup>1</sup>, as well as the monitoring report on implementation of the Framework Convention on National Minorities<sup>2</sup> have called attention to delays in the implementation of this strategic plan. Among others, the following reasons were highlighted: insufficient funding, lack of human resources to monitor

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<sup>1</sup> EU progress Report 2015, KOSOVO\* 2015 REPORT Brussels, 10.11.2015, SWD (2015) 215 final [http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key\\_documents/2015/20151110\\_report\\_kosovo.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_kosovo.pdf) and EU Progress Report 2014, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-kosovo-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-kosovo-progress-report_en.pdf) (accessed 14.10.2016); [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2015/20151110\\_report\\_kosovo.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_kosovo.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CoE Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for National Minorities, Third Opinion on Kosovo ACFC/OP/III(2013)002, 6 March, 2013: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3\\_FCNMdocs/PDF\\_3rd\\_OP\\_Kosovo\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_3rd_OP_Kosovo_en.pdf)

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progress of implementation, inadequate coordination of efforts between the ministries and authorities at the central and local level and inadequate utilization of expertise of non-governmental organizations.

Following up on the 2009-2015 Strategy, the government drafted the Strategy and Action Plan for the inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo\* society for the period 2017-2021. By the end of 2016 the document remains a draft and there is no clear indication by when the final approval may take place. At the same time the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities remains challenging<sup>3</sup>.

The Strategy and Action Plan aim at fostering the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The Strategy contains analysis and challenges faced by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and identifies four priorities, namely education, employment and social welfare, health and housing. The document also addresses areas such as civil registration, returnees and reintegration, and safety.

The Strategy defines for each of the four main priority areas a strategic objective. In particular, for education - increase and provide opportunities for personal development, training and quality education for members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. For employment and social welfare - improve the economic and social situation of the three communities. For health - improve the health situation and quality of life. For housing - provide adequate and sustainable housing for members of the three communities in line with the effective legislation.

The Action Plan outlines concrete measures to be taken to address the challenges.

A positive development is that the Strategy promotes gender as a cross-cutting issue, although many measures will have to be complemented to ensure gender equality.

During the drafting process of the Strategy, several issues were raised. Namely, there are no clear budget estimates available for all objectives and measures that would allow for sufficient allocations of funds. In some instances, while the budget might be allocated, the relevant institutions fail to absorb it. Furthermore, there seems to be lack of measures benefiting Roma returnees and displaced persons.

Concerning the drafting process, it has been observed that while the consultation process concerning the 2017-2021 Strategy was inclusive, only some recommendations by civil society and international organisations were taken on board. Still, the lack of wider participation in the policy process is noted, and will continue to be tackled through the Public Dialogue Forums of the Roma Integration 2020.

### **Summary of the discussions during the Public Dialogue Forum:**

Kosovo\* has numerous mechanisms focusing on the non-majority communities, both at the central and local levels. While a number of these mechanisms deal with protection from discrimination, others focus on issues pertaining to participation of the non-majority communities in decision-making. Many institutions were invited to present these mechanisms during the public dialogue forum.

The key role in the drafting process and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan is with the Office for Good Governance (OGG), within the Office of the Prime-Minister (OPM). The OGG among others also coordinates on issues of human rights with all ministries and

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission Brussels, 9.11.2016, SWD(2016) 363 final, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Kosovo\* 2016 Report

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municipalities. The Office advises the Government, drafts policies, monitors recommendations by the Ombudsperson's Office and the implementation of the Strategy on human rights. The Director of the OGG is also acting as the National Roma Contact Points for Roma Integration 2020.

Another relevant stakeholder is the Office of Community Affairs (OCA), within the OPM. It was established in 2008 to contribute to the coordination of Government's efforts to implement the national legal framework on the rights of communities and to ensure that policies and respective interventions meet the community interests and needs. Its role in the process of drafting and implementing the Strategy might be strengthened.

The Communities Consultative Council, among others, collects and articulates communities' views and ensures the inter-community coordination and consultation. The Commission for Community Rights and Interests and Return, within the Kosovo\* Assembly is responsible for review of draft laws and formulation of recommendations regarding communities and return.

At the local level, the municipalities, in which communities comprise over 10 percent of the local population have additional obligations, such as establishing positions for the Municipal Council Deputy Chair-person for Communities and the Deputy Mayor. Municipal Offices for Communities and Return (MOCR) are responsible for protection and promotion of community rights, ensuring equal access of communities to public services, and creating conditions for sustainable return and reintegration of refugees, displaced and repatriated persons.

Budgeting remains the key component of the Strategy. According to the draft Strategy, about 15 million EUR is needed for the implementation of the Strategy, 60 % of which are expected to come from international donors. As mentioned earlier, many of the objectives are not clearly budgeted, and the absorption capacities remain weak. It is noted that the budget is still much donor dependent and that there is a need for further coordination, including among donors.

The budget as the key component of the Strategy implementation should be more detailed with clear allocations from the government. Consultations with the local governments concerning their budget plans and expenditures would be beneficial.

Overall, poor coordination and cooperation among different stakeholders has been noted. The inter-ministerial body called Steering Committee<sup>4</sup> that was responsible for implementation and monitoring of the Strategy is no longer active and would need to be revived. The Committee was a political body set up to ensure co-ordination between the government and the non-governmental sector in the implementation of activities envisaged by the Action Plan and was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Once the Strategy and Action Plan get adopted it will be essential to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are part of the implementation process, and in particular the civil society.

The Office of Good Governance (OGG) has a key role in the process, however it cannot carry out the task alone and isolated from other institutions. The Office for Community Affairs (OCA) is also relevant to ensure efficient co-operation among relevant institutions, necessary to implement the Strategy and its Action Plan. It is up to all the mechanisms and stakeholders "to get the machine working" and coordination and cooperation among all the stakeholders is needed. The Strategy foresees that the OGG will address issues related to the implementation

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<sup>4</sup> The Committee held its inaugural meeting on 8 July 2010, seven months after the endorsement of the Action Plan, without the representative of the Communities Consultative Council<sup>11</sup> who was only appointed in September 2010.

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of the Action Plan with the Inter-ministerial Coordinating Group on Human Rights that is chaired by the Prime Minister. Furthermore, the establishment of four working groups for the coordination of the Strategy and Action Plan implementation, while at the local, municipal level a Municipal Action Committee (MAC) would be set up. Building capacities of all the stakeholders and in particular the government's office dealing with Roma issues is essential. Promoting self-reliance and promoting the local ownership is key to the sustainability of the process and sustainable effect.

Confirming that the Inter-ministerial Coordinating Group on Human Rights will be the inter-ministerial body monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan should take place as soon as possible.

The finalization and approval of the 2017-2021 Strategy and related Action Plan is key to continuous and optimal work on Roma issues giving the process the validity and possibility for its actual implementation.

### **Recommendations:**

Kosovo should take full ownership of the measures needed to support the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians communities through the renewed commitment and reiterated political will to promote Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities' integration.

With the view to contributing to the further improvement of the Strategy and its implementation additional, updated and fine-tuned information on the situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo\* (i.e. their legal status and similar) would be valuable. Further, the information on how many Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian have migrated in 2014 and 2015 would be useful in particular with regards to the formulation of the relevant policies.

Linking the Strategy closer to other national strategies and aligning it with them would be beneficial in order to ensure complementarity (i.e. Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, Employment and social welfare sectoral strategy 2014-2020, Strategy on Human Rights, Strategy for the protection and promotion of linguistic rights, etc.).

Concerning **education**, building on cases of successful inclusion in education systems, in particular primary schools, and share best cases how to promote youth participation and improve performance in the schools is of extreme importance. Measures promoting training programmes for parents on identification and prevention of cases of segregation and discrimination could be included. Also addressing illiteracy has been seen as essential and additional measures might be incorporated to address this issue. Additional measures ensuring access of girls to education would be beneficial.

Concerning **employment**, awareness raising trainings for employers might be considered among the measures. Organizing employment fairs targeting also the three communities would be beneficial. Development of specific financial schemes supporting the employment of the qualified members of the three communities might be considered as one of the measures.

Concerning **health**, measures addressing awareness raising among three communities on the importance of preventive health care should be strengthened. Reproductive health as well as the functioning of the health service (i.e. under the Objective 3.1 Improved health service for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities) should be among the issues addressed.

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Concerning **housing**, under Activity 4.2.1 Organization of the awareness raising campaign for inclusion in housing initiatives it should be ensured that numerous communication methods will be used to reach also the illiterate population. Capacity building activities for the three communities should be incorporated, so the members of communities know about their rights and can claim them.

Concerning the **return, reintegration and safety** area adding measures for suitable solutions for persons repatriated from Western European countries should be considered.

Similarly, it would be overall beneficial to have clearer objectives and indicators to ensure the results are measurable. Also more specific timelines would facilitate the process. The document would benefit from including information on status of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, i.e. on some occasions they are mentioned either as marginalized groups, minorities or minority communities and ethnic minorities.

The Roma Integration 2020 Action Team will continue assisting the government of Kosovo\* in terms of conducting a proper monitoring of the implementation of activities, policies and programs. For this purpose, the Action Team has customized a reporting template which will serve as a tool for monitoring and annual reporting on Roma integration.