

RomaIntegration2020

FIRST PUBLIC DIALOGUE FORUM IN TURKEY

13 SEPTEMBER 2017, ANKARA

:: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ::

The First Public Dialogue Forum in Turkey was held on 13 September 2017 in Ankara and was jointly organized by the Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 (RCC RI2020) and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (MoFSP) of Turkey.

The Forum brought together about 45 participants including representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of the EU Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Family and Social Policy, Union of Municipalities and Roma NGOs.

This paper reflects the discussions and highlights the *recommendations* emerging from the discussions towards the institutions, with a view to contribute to more effective and efficient implementation of Roma integration policies.

The Forum provided a wide public dialogue with and among various stakeholders concerned with the issues of Roma integration. At the same time, it has contributed to the transparency of Roma integration policies and accountability of the implementing institutions as well encouraged citizens' participation in decision-making. The discussion focused on the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018) in 2016 as relevant to the main priorities: education, employment, health, social protection and assistance, and housing as well as on the related achievements and challenges. The discussion also provided for setting priorities for 2018.

The Forum was opened by Mr Mehmet Mustafa Nuri NURUAN, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Family and Social Policy and Mr Orhan USEIN, Team Leader Roma Integration 2020 Action Team.

Mr NURUAN referred to the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018), including the overall implementation process. He has, in particular, praised the establishment of the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluating the National Strategy for Roma Citizens that held its first meeting in February 2017. The Committee has over 60 members including the representatives of different line ministries, civil society and academia. The Roma Integration 2020 team has an observer status within this Committee.

Mr USEIN presented the project and its objectives. He underlined the importance of the appointment of the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), Mr Emre ERTEKIN. He reminded that the role of the NRCP is to ensure the efficient and timely implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan, coordinate between line ministries and government institutions/offices in order to integrate Roma issues into the main socio-economic policies and action plans, as well as ensure the financial commitment necessary for the implementation of the plan. Mr USEIN emphasised that the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluating the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018) may consider organizing meetings more regularly, at least every four months. He also invited the participants to consider adopting the reporting and monitoring template developed by the RCC RI2020 as an official annex to the national strategy. Last, but not



least Mr USEIN recalled that the SIROMA¹ project is coming to an end, and has extended an invitation to the government to communicate to the RCC RI2020 how the project and its expertise could be optimally used, since sustainability and continuation of programmes dealing with Roma integration are needed. In addition, partnership with the civil society and support to their capacity in such programmes are also needed.

The forum discussions continued by presenting the [2016 monitoring report](#) of Turkey by priority areas.

EDUCATION

The level of education among Roma is in general low. Roma children are often not able to sufficiently benefit from the education opportunities. Their access to education opportunities is relatively low due to different reasons ranging from poverty to seasonal migration, gender stereotypes and similar. Many Roma perform poorly, leave school early, while absenteeism is very common. One of the reasons for early drop out of Roma children and their poor educational conditions are the socio-economic challenges faced by their parents. Roma youth is often working at early age to contribute to the family income. The school enrolment procedure in Turkey is conducted automatically based on the Central Civil Registration System which uses the residence² as a base. Segregation in schools has been observed in few cases in the past, with Roma children having education in different classrooms or environments, or Roma children forming isolated groups among themselves.

Ms Songül KOÇER from the Ministry of Education, Directorate General for Basic Education reported on the recent developments in the education area. The current structure of the students is reflecting the changes in population, and Turkey is currently making efforts to include Syrian refugees in the education system. She referred to the SIROMA project³, in particular how it assisted in increasing the capacities of educational institutions to review the general policies and curriculum, and in raising awareness on how to work with Roma and girls' schooling. She pointed out the new arrangements in East Turkey where later starting of school was introduced for pupils to be able to come to school on time. An electronic data recording system for monitoring registration and attendance has been developed and implemented in schools.

Further, Ms KOÇER informed that the difference in education levels between Roma men and women has been observed under the framework of the SIROMA project⁴, and that the project has conducted a training needs analysis for teachers. She further informed that the pre-school education is now obligatory and within the next three years this measure will be in place.

Recommendations from the discussion:

- The Action Plan should be more concrete, to including a proper budget. The RI2020 project could assist in drafting the Action Plan beyond 2018.
- Teachers trained under SIROMA should not be removed from their positions or reassigned as the knowledge will be lost.
- The government should work closely with the civil society sector on determining the number of Roma.

¹ EU Technical Assistance for Promoting Social Inclusion in Densely Roma Populated Areas (SIROMA) Project.

² The Strategy Paper on Roma People 2016-2021.

³ The funding for numerous activities foreseen under the employment in the Action Plan were funded by the SIROMA project. It should be noted that the overall contribution of Turkish government is 15 percent of the total SIROMA project amounting to 1, 5 million EURO.

⁴ Social situation of the Roma community in Turkey: Summary of findings of a nationwide survey, SIROMA, June 2017.



- Segregation of students and pupils should not be allowed and condemned.

EMPLOYMENT

There is no adequate data about the status of Roma in the labour market. However, it can be observed that the level of employment among Roma is low, and that they usually work in the informal sector in unsecured, unqualified and low-status jobs. The main reasons include low levels of education. Furthermore, traditional occupations of Roma are seen to provide limited opportunities for the income-generating.

Ms Özlem ÖZMEN from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security spoke about employment. She referred to the National Employment Strategy and its Action Plan for the period 2017 to 2019. The Action Plan continues to focus on four policy goals, namely strengthening the relationship between education and employment, providing assurance and flexibility in the labour market, increasing employment of special groups and strengthening the relationship between education and social protection. She informed that under the SIROMA project, a survey on employment opportunities for Roma and relevant labour market analysis was conducted as well as activities on improving children's knowledge and abilities to prevent child labour. She further informed of the calls for projects for disadvantaged groups.

It should be noted that Roma in Turkey do not have a status of minority, but they are categorized as a disadvantaged group. Ms ÖZMEN further informed that the municipalities, universities and NGOs can apply for funds to projects targeting disadvantaged groups. Five million EURO has been allocated for these projects.

Recommendations from the discussion:

- Roma should be addressed separately from the rest of the disadvantaged population as the generic policies do not always reach all categories of disadvantaged groups.
- Programmes supporting Roma to start-up businesses should be implemented.
- Vocational training for Roma should be designed to combine the needs of the labour market and the demands for skills and knowledge of Roma.
- There is a need to provide equal opportunities for Roma women in the area of employment, but also in a broader context.
- Working groups focusing on specific priority areas should be established under the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluating the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018).

HOUSING

Roma, in general, live in very poor housing conditions, often lacking basic services, and facing overcrowding and physical segregation. Ms Ayçin KIZILBEY from the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization spoke about housing. She referred to the urban renewal project. It has been pointed out by the NGOs that this project often resulted in demolishing of many Roma settlements/homes and displacing families. As the Turkish address based registration system makes it obligatory to have a permanent address to access any public service, this created obstacles for the homeless and displaced Roma.

Ms KIZILBEY informed that there is no budget specifically allocated for Roma and social housing is provided to the disadvantage population which includes also Roma. The State provides accommodation for the disadvantaged families in areas with full infrastructure that includes schools, health centres and similar. The provinces usually provide information to the central government on the needs for social housing. As there is no



positive discrimination towards Roma, they often fail to secure the facilities intended for the low income families.

Recommendations from the discussion:

- The housing programmes implemented have to ensure sustainability of the solutions, meaning ensure possibility for the beneficiaries to cover their rental fee and communal services and ensure integral social services. It is also recommended that the housing programmes ensure desegregation of Roma and prevent forming of new ghettos. It is also highly important to properly monitor the impact of the programme, including collecting data disaggregated by ethnicity.
- A Focal Point for Roma Integration should be appointed in each of the relevant ministries.

HEALTH

Since 2010, the Ministry of Health has been delivering geographically balanced first-step health services. However, the awareness of Roma about the health services and related benefit fluctuates among regions and is overall lower among Roma than non-Roma.

Mr ERTEKIN reported on the situation in health sector. The majority of Roma are covered by the public health insurance. Some face financial challenges when there is a need for a specific treatment. He then presented several activities that were carried under the framework of the SIROMA project i.e. awareness raising activities about existing health services were carried out in several provinces, Roma were also informed on access to maternal and infant health care services, infectious and contagious diseases and similar. Several surveys were conducted in the provinces on health situation among Roma population, basic knowledge of health issues and similar. He added that the main challenge is to produce disaggregated data which would make the efforts of the government to improve situation of Roma more visible.

Recommendations from the discussion:

- Many Roma live in poor housing conditions which impacts their health condition.
- Complaints on lack of access to health insurance and/or health services should be analysed to determine if these are isolated cases that should be solved as such, or patterns of Roma exclusion in the area of health that would require strategic approach.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

Poverty is very high among Roma as their employment rate is low. Very often Roma are not able to pay premium, therefore, they are not enrolled in the system of social insurance and entitled to the support through social services and social assistance. The poor economic standards influence access of Roma to housing, health services and education.

Ms Nihal Janset GÜVEN from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, Directorate General for Social Aids spoke about the social services and social assistance. She underlined that the priority in area of social assistance and services is to address the counterproductive aspects of social assistance to ensure that resources are efficiently used. The issue of the 20 social centres built by the SIROMA project in the pilot provinces across the country was addressed. Their future is unknown; their destiny is at the discretion of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy that will need to decide whether to take them over or not.



Comments from civil society:

- There is a need to ensure the continuity of the social centres, established through the SIROMA project, preferably through an institutional approach, embedding them in the social service system.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the concluding remarks Mr USEIN once again welcomed the establishment of the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluating the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018) and added that he looks forward to more regular meetings. He offered the assistance of the RCC RI2020 with the view to drafting the Phase II Action Plan (2019-2021). In particular, he referred to the idea to develop a regional standardized and unified budgeting approach for all RI2020 participating economies. He once again called for the Reporting Template to become an annex to the national strategy and action plans. He invited the Turkish Government to contribute to the post 2020 EU Framework exercise.

It was felt by the participants that the dialogue forum has provided many additional insights and proved to be a very valuable event. It has provided a space for a lively dialogue among different stakeholders.

Recommendations from the discussion:

- The Action Plan (2019-2021) has to be more concrete including indicators and a proper budget;
 - The Committee for Monitoring and Evaluating the National Strategy for Roma Citizens (2016-2021) and its Action Plan (2016-2018) should meet more regularly, at least three times per year;
 - The establishment of relevant working groups per priority areas should be considered;
 - Focal points for Roma integration should be established in relevant ministries, possibly also at the local level;
 - The reporting and monitoring template developed by the RCC RI2020 should become an official annex to the National Strategy and Action Plan;
 - The RCC RI2020 monitoring template and subsequent reports should be translated into Turkish;
 - Gender dimension among Roma population should be taken into account when developing respective policies;
 - The Government should increase the visibility of its efforts to improve situation of Roma, including dissemination and use of the SIROMA produced data;
 - Active engagement of all stakeholders to address school absenteeism and drop out, with a special focus on Roma girls is needed;
 - NGOs should proactively engage with the Roma communities, in particular awareness rising about available public services and benefits, and facilitate access to them in cooperation with relevant governmental institutions.
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