



2018 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2016-2020 NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR INTEGRATION OF ROMA AND EGYPTIANS

11 June 2018, Tirana, Albania

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

INTRODUCTION

The second National Platform on Roma Integration in Albania was, jointly organized by the Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration 2020 Action Team and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) on 11 June 2018. The policy recommendation paper reflects the discussions at the National Platform and is aimed to assist the Government of Albania in formulating more effective Roma integration policies and to serve as an entry point for defining the Operational Conclusions of the Roma Seminar for Albania on integration of Roma within the European Union (EU) accession process.

The National Platform in particular focused on the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 in 2017, and what should be prioritized and budgeted for the period 2018-2019.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of Albania prepared the 2017 progress report on Roma integration, which was presented and discussed at the meeting. The report was prepared according to the regionally adopted monitoring standards.

The Government underwent change in its composition during 2017. The Ministry of Urban Planning does not exist anymore. Thematic priorities of housing and employment are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was dissolved in 2017. The thematic priorities of social protection and health are now under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, which also coordinates the process of Action Plan implementation and the progress report preparation.

Albania has adopted a new set of laws. In 2017, The Law on Minorities was adopted defining Roma and Egyptian as minorities. The two minorities agreed with the final version of the adopted Law. The Law gives stronger legal basis for pursuing Roma integration policies. The new Law on Social Housing and the amended Law on Economic Aid further give opportunities for promoting Roma integration. The economy is in the process of developing coordination mechanisms for the implementation of integral

programmes in education and VET, employment, and housing. The Law on Legal Aid was also adopted in 2017.

The Roma civil society actively engaged in the discussions, providing additional insights about the situation on the ground and implementation gaps. The civil society and Roma representatives should be more engaged in the policy development and implementation, but also in policy monitoring.

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth did not participate in the National Platform. Their participation would be helpful in addressing some of the questions raised by the civil society such as the accuracy of statistical data and the issue of universities not implementing affirmative measures.

- The practice of annual reporting according to the regional monitoring standards should continue and improve. The information on the budget spent and Roma and Egyptian beneficiaries are generally lacking or are not disaggregated. Impact assessment needs to be substantially improved.
- Sufficient funds should be allocated at the central and local level. The funds requirement has significantly increased due to the adoption of new Laws on Social Housing and Economic Aid, but also the Law on Social Services adopted late in 2016.
- The local level capacities to implement and monitor Roma integration policies need to be strengthened. Better coordination of central and local level is also required in this regard.
- The Ministry of Justice should participate in the future National Platforms to share information on free legal aid provided and progress on housing legalization.
- Discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism, as well as how they manifest, need to be recognized and combatted in the future period.
- New legislation adopted will require implementing integral approach in housing, employment and other thematic priorities. Besides adopting the coordination mechanism, government institutions should also launch joint dialogue with the civil society to devise appropriate measures for addressing real-life situations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY COORDINATION, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

Albania uses an online system ROMALB (www.romalb.org) to collect data for monitoring report in real time, and to generate indicators for the progress report. Currently, about 35% of all information is collected at the local level by 61 municipalities. The data collected are consolidated by the MoHSP and are validated by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). The information gap between the local and central level remains. Where possible, data from the 2017 Regional Roma Survey¹ Fact Sheet data were used for the report.

¹ 2017 Regional Roma Survey implemented by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, funded by the European Commission. More information is available at: <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets.html>.



Common concern raised by the civil society was that data presented do not comply with the reality on the ground. The issue raised several times was that the reported number of beneficiaries is not in line with the size of Roma and Egyptian population in Albania as assessed in the previous census.

- Not all municipalities are active in entering data in the ROMALB system and the accuracy of data entered can be improved. The gap between local and central level remains. The support by the ROMACTED² project may contribute to tackle this issue.
- Progress report generation needs to become an ongoing process. In order to collect required data for the 2018 progress report on time, the report preparation should start in the last quarter of 2018.
- The Roma Integration Action Plan requires more information than those generated by ROMALB system. In 2017, remaining data were collected manually. The system needs changes so that all necessary information can be generated.
- ROMALB system is run by the MoHSP, but it needs to be up to the statistical standards of the INSTAT. The government should consider resolving the issue by transferring the management of the ROMALB database to the INSTAT, or other solutions which would ensure that data necessary for the annual reporting are collected and that the database is up to the statistical standards.
- Impact assessment by INSTAT needs to be provided from next year on. The issue of limited collection of data due to institutional reshuffling needs to be addressed.
- The discrepancy of reported data with those provided by civil society and by the previous census should be addressed and clarified in order to establish reasons for such a situation.
- The practice of combining statistical, administrative, as well as relevant data from research implemented by international and other actors should be continued.
- The Ministry of Justice should engage more on providing statistics on the provision on free legal aid legalization procedures.
- The civil society should engage more systematically in providing and validating progress report information.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION AND PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The first objective of Roma and Egyptian integration in the thematic priority is to increase the number of Roma and Egyptian boys and girls to complete all levels of education. In 2017, 13.5% more Roma and Egyptian children and youth have completed all levels of education compared to 2015.

Furthermore, in 2017, 13.683 Roma and Egyptian children were enrolled and attended pre-school and compulsory education, compared to 4.437 when the baseline was established in 2015.

Parents' education was promoted through their participation in after-school courses together with their children. During 2017, 1.704 parents participated in various after-

² The Romacted project is implemented by the Council of Europe in partnership with local civil society. The project promotes good governance and empowers Roma at local level.



school courses compared to 1106 in 2016. 130 Roma and Egyptian parents were member of school boards during 2017, compared to 71 reported in 2016.

Scholarships were provided to Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory, high school and university education, with 159 Roma and Egyptian students benefitting from scholarships in 2017, against 55 cases reported for year 2016. For the academic year 2016-2017, 32 Roma and Egyptian students benefited from quotas in higher education of all levels.

- Discrimination and scapegoating of students benefiting from affirmative action by university personnel, as reported by students themselves, needs to be stopped by targeting anti-Gypsyism at the university level.
- The issue of universities not implementing the instruction on quotas and university fee waivers brought about with the independence of public universities needs to be resolved by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth.
- The economy should consider introducing full exemption from university fees for master students benefiting from the quota, as well as increasing quotas at both bachelor and master level studies.
- There is an ongoing practice of non-Roma and non-Egyptian individuals benefiting from affirmative action in university education through misrepresentation of their community belonging. New mechanisms for identifying community belonging need to be introduced, and could benefit from providing for Roma and Egyptian community participation during interviewing of applicants.
- It is necessary to implement the measure of reviewing compulsory and secondary education curricula and textbooks to reflect tolerance and multiculturalism, while adding material on Roma and Egyptian identities.
- The issue of transportation for pupils where the school is less than 2km from their place of living should be resolved, as also stipulated by the Operational Conclusions from Roma Seminar.
- The indications that there are remaining segregated schools need to be investigated, to be followed up by better distribution of students.
- The measure of providing meal in schools is having an unplanned effect of promoting segregation as only some schools are offering the meals and parents are more inclined to send children to those schools. This should be solved by increasing the number of schools offering meals.

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

Roma and Egyptians currently constitute 7% of registered unemployed job seekers in the economy, out of whom 52% are women. The employment rate as reported through the Labour Force Survey was 43.6% in 2017.

The goal of Roma integration in employment is to provide equal opportunities for formal employment of Roma and Egyptians. The goal is to be achieved through two main objectives. The first objective is to integrate Roma and Egyptians in the labour market primarily through participation in VET and active employment programmes. In relation to the measure "Supporting the participation of Roma and Egyptians in employment promotion programs (EPP), by establishing quotas", 338 Roma and Egyptians



participated in EPPs implemented by the MoHSP and National Employment Service (NES). After completing the EPP programmes, 174 Roma and Egyptians were employed, all of whom are from urban areas. 854 Roma and Egyptians have been reported as employed through Regional Employment Offices.

The results of the measure on Roma and Egyptians participation in free of charge public vocational trainings for professions in high demand in the labour market show that 67 Roma and Egyptians completed such vocational trainings and found employment or were self-employed during 2017. Roma and Egyptians are exempted from the requirement to have at least compulsory secondary education to attend these programmes. Additionally, 333 Roma and Egyptian students who attended the VET programmes received scholarships, free textbooks and a one-time 50 EUR assistance.

944 Roma and Egyptian job seekers were involved in career counselling programmes for equipping them with necessary skills and facilitating their labour market. The counselling programmes were piloted in Durres, Tirana, Berat, and Shkoder. At the same time, 842 Roma and Egyptians were enrolled in a VET or employment promotion programme, compared to 69 individuals reported in 2016. Due to a large dropout rate, only 193 individuals successfully completed programmes in question. The number of persons who found employment after the termination of VET or employment promotion programme was 25.

The second objective is to promote (social) entrepreneurship and self-employment of Roma and Egyptians. It was reported that no Roma and Egyptian farmers were supported with grants for development of agriculture or rural development projects.

- Employment programmes specifically focusing on the needs of Roma and Egyptian women and youth need to be developed and implemented.
- The government should consider devising specific employment programmes for Roma and Egyptian or modifying the existing ones to better address the population.
- Discrimination against Roma and Egyptian in the employment sector needs to be addressed, particularly for women and notably mothers.
- Further activities are needed by VET centres to better reach Roma and Egyptians and increase their participation in vocational trainings.
- It is necessary to address the large dropout rate from employment programmes by increasing incentives for Roma and Egyptians to attend. Ratio of employed people after termination of employment programmes needs to be increased.
- More support needs to be given to Roma and Egyptian farmers by the Rural Agricultural Development Agency.
- Roma and Egyptian employment in the public sector needs to be promoted. One of the ways to achieve this is also by giving preferential status to those complying with vacancy requirements. The inclusion of Roma and Egyptian in the public sector can have added benefit of their participation in Roma integration policy making and implementation.
- NES need to strengthen the monitoring system to be able to better track employment status in the period following the initial employment. Data on employment after the expiry of first three months period should be collected, together with data on reasons for leaving employment when this is the case.
- Scholarships to individuals attending VET education need to be provided in due time, which currently is not always the case.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEALTH

In 2017, one new health centre close to Roma and Egyptian settlement was constructed. The centre was constructed in Tirana, funded by *Save the Children*.

Two members of Roma and Egyptian community who were interns in public hospitals were employed in 2017. The performance against the target is 100%.

The practice of providing Roma and Egyptians with free of charge health cards was continued in 2017, with 30.354 individuals benefiting from free health cards.

2.056 Roma and Egyptian mothers who delivered babies at the hospital received information and material healthcare packages for baby and maternal care for the first three months of baby life.

Through medical mobile teams, 10.258 Roma and Egyptian community members received information on physical, mental, reproductive health, child immunization, drug use and other issues.

In 2017, 2000 leaflets on the topic of personal hygiene were developed in Romani language. The leaflets will be distributed during 2018.

The merging of health and social protection sectors early in 2018 put a specific focus on Roma and Egyptians. Information activities are specifically targeting Roma and Egyptian women (also in rural areas), on planned parenting. Mammography tests are being offered free of charge. The Awareness campaigns on early and forced marriages are being implemented, especially aiming to prevent potential cases of domestic violence and/or human trafficking.

- The number of Roma and Egyptian community members benefiting from health cards should be further confirmed. The number was regarded as not compliant with the results of 2011 population census.
- More Roma and Egyptian community members should be employed in the health sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING AND URBAN INTEGRATION

During 2017, an increased number of Roma and Egyptians were included in housing programmes directly or indirectly.

13 Albanian municipalities were provided technical assistance for project proposals and were funded by the former Ministry of Urban Development through a call for proposals aimed to improve living conditions of Roma and Egyptians. Through grants for municipalities, 508 Roma and Egyptian families benefitted from infrastructure works, such as water supply, sewage, hydro- sanitary equipment and similar.

101 Roma and Egyptian families benefitted from low-cost dwellings against 37 families reported during year 2016. At the same time, 77 Roma and Egyptian families benefitted from rental bonus.



The new Law on Social Housing strengthened the principle of affordability of housing by increasing rent and other support for low income families, as well as the security of tenure through legally defining procedures for evictions. In order to ensure sufficient housing stock, 3% of all privately built housing units above 2000 square meters will be allocated to the social housing fund. The Law increased the number of support measures and specifically prioritizes Roma and Egyptians. No less than 5% of total housing fund will be allocated for Roma and Egyptians.

In 2017, Albania has completed the mapping of Roma settlements, together with the assessment of costs of urbanization cost and possibilities to prioritize investments into Roma and Egyptian housing and settlements. The government did not collect statistics on the number of beneficiaries from free legal aid for completing legalization documentation, nor on the success of legalization procedures.

The Albanian Government is currently assessing projects submitted by municipalities for investments in housing of vulnerable groups. Roma and Egyptians are considered a priority. Current request for funds are three times higher than the annual budget ceilings. Projects not funded in 2018 are planned to be phased for the following years.

- Budgetary ceilings introduced for social housing programmes are much lower than needed by the current policy objectives. Additional funds are required to successfully implement the new Law on Social Housing and invest in housing for Roma and Egyptians.
- The Government will require technical assistance for the efficient management of the housing fund and the implementation of new social housing programmes requiring inter-disciplinary expertise.
- To facilitate implementation of the Law on Social Housing, the Government will require input from all partners about the potential beneficiaries and their specific needs.
- Holistic approach combining housing initiatives with other thematic priorities and especially employment needs to be applied to ensure sustainability of housing for Roma and Egyptians.
- The deadlines for transferring housing bonuses to beneficiary families need to be respected. This requires improved central-local level coordination to timely plan the funds and have a ready list of beneficiaries immediately after the central budget is opened.
- The issue of discrimination in the housing sector persists. The mainstream population is not willing to rent to Roma and Egyptians. Consequently they cannot enter rental contracts and benefit from rent support. The problem should be addressed through facilitation by municipalities and stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination provisions of the new Law on Social Housing.
- The lingering issue of informal settlements (Shkoder, Bregas) which are not connected to public utilities and cannot benefit from housing improvements due to housing owners not having land rights and/or not being registered in the municipality need a specific approach and a long-term solution.
- The issue of isolated settlements far from public services needs to be resolved.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND JUSTICE

In 2017, 427 Roma and Egyptian children were identified as unregistered with 70% cases of registration successfully resolved. The remaining 30% of children are still in the process of civil registration.

Four new legal clinics were established in Tirana, Durrës, Lezhe and Fier. The legal clinics are established with donor support and are led by local NGOs. The clinics are open for the whole population but Roma and Egyptian community are also beneficiaries.

No information on the provision of free legal aid for judicial proceedings related to civil registration and awarding custody in case of divorce was provided by the Ministry of Justice.

With the donor support, 40 Roma and Egyptians were reimbursed for the fee for DNA tests in birth registration or determination of parental rights.

1,082 Roma and Egyptian community members were informed about procedures for civil registration and change of residence during 2017, compared to 4,575 in 2016.

Eight reception offices were established at the border crossing points to provide initial care to human trafficking victims, and are fully accessible to Roma and Egyptians. In 2017, 9 potential victims of trafficking and victims of trafficking who are Roma and Egyptian were identified and provided with the assistance for reintegration services.

- The Ministry of Justice should provide information on the free legal aid for civil registration and awarding parental custody. Considering that the new Law on Legal Aid was adopted, there is a stronger legal basis for monitoring and reporting on relevant cases.
- Besides informing on the civil registration procedures, stronger involvement of the Ministry of Justice is needed in the implementation phase.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Decision of the Council of Ministers for the establishment of a Social fund was adopted in 2017, for financing services under the Law on Social Services. The Decision will enter into force on 1 January 2019 when the Social Fund will start operating. The Government is currently defining methodology for distributing funds. Furthermore, the Law on Economic Aid was adopted in 2017.

Albania aims to promote social protection through combining economic and social assistance, and also by providing social care services in residential care institutions at local and central level.

In relation to the first approach, 1,717 Roma and Egyptian families (8,537 individuals) benefitted from the economic aid scheme. Beneficiaries of the economic aid also benefitted from other services. Hence, 554 Roma and Egyptians were additionally included in reintegration programmes comprising community work, craft workshops and similar.

Following the decision of the Council of Ministers, families with children who regularly attend school and are vaccinated were eligible for additional aid on top of regular



economic aid. 899 Roma and Egyptian children were identified to comply with the criteria, thus 590 households received additional payments.

2,012 Roma and Egyptians benefitted from social care services in public and non-public residential centres for orphans, elderly, victims of trafficking, domestic violence and persons with disabilities.

In accordance with the principles of the Law on Social Services, Albania is devising a plan to promote deinstitutionalization of children attending residential (day-care) centres. The approach presupposes strengthening Roma families by fostering capacity building and employment of parents. The plan will be piloted with biological families, to be followed by a plan including all children who are institutions' residents.

In relation to the above, 48 community centres for the provision of integrated care services were established in 2017, compared to only 4 in 2016.

The number of social administrators trained in 2017 on the new curricula for facilitating access to services for Roma and Egyptians was 82, which is only 8% of the annual target.

During 2017, only 6 out of 10 families targeted exited the Emergency Transitory Centre. However, the impact assessment of the work of the Centre is not performed, and not all families exiting the centre were monitored to follow up on the developments upon exiting and the success of reintegration.

- The Government should ensure sufficient funding for the implementation of the Law on Social Services considering the increased number of programmes and eligible beneficiaries.
- Relevant subordinate legislation related to the operationalization of the Social Fund and financing methodology needs to be adopted in 2018 so that the financing mechanism can be implemented as planned from the beginning of 2019.
- More support by the MoHSP is needed to increase the number of social administrators trained on the curricula for facilitating access to services for Roma and Egyptians.
- The operational conclusion on exempting Roma and Egyptian children coming from low income families (below 20,000 ALL/month) from kindergarten fees needs to be enforced at the local level.
- Impact assessment of the success of the work of the Emergency Transitory Centre needs to be performed from 2018 onwards. More efforts should be made to monitor Roma and Egyptian families emerging from the Transitory Centre and enhance their reintegration skills.
- Social administrators should always inform economic aid beneficiaries of the self-declaration option, with the aim to establish more accurate figures about Roma and Egyptian beneficiaries.

