

2018 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION IN SERBIA

26 June 2018, National Assembly, Serbia

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

The third National Platform on Roma Integration in Serbia was held on 26 June 2018 in the National Assembly in Belgrade. It was organized jointly by the Roma Integration 2020 and the National Roma Contact Point in Serbia, and gathered around 60 participants from central and local institutions, civil society, Roma representatives and media to discuss the implementation of the Roma integration policy and propose the priorities for the upcoming period, including for the public budgeting cycle. The implementation of the policy was presented by the relevant institutions through the [2017 Progress Report](#) prepared by the Government according to the regionally adopted standards for monitoring and reporting.

The National Platform mirrors similar practice established in the European Union Member States and provides important information in the European Union integration process. It serves for coordination and monitoring, reviewing the progress and recommending priorities for the policy planning and budgeting. Consequently, **establishing the National Platform in Serbia as a regular practice is welcomed by the Delegation of the European Union, recognizing the areas of employment and housing of Roma in Serbia are key priorities**. 12 million EUR are currently implemented and around 20 million EUR are programmed for 2019 for social housing and active inclusion of Roma in Serbia from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). It is expected that additional funds will be programmed for Roma integration as part of the Human Resources Development portfolio included in the total of around 350 million EUR proposed assistance for Serbia up to 2027.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Republic of Serbia and Minister for Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, also managing the Roma integration portfolio, has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the National Council of the Roma National Minority. Such cooperation adds to the institutional commitment and allocation of political and human resources to Roma integration. According to the National Roma Contact Point, progress is achieved by increasing the number of Roma in all the levels of education, including in tertiary, achieved through the affirmative measures for enrolment, **indicating that affirmative measures should be sustained and expanded**. The civil society calls upon the relevant **authorities to publically challenge allegations that Roma are privileged by benefiting from affirmative measures**, while in fact it mitigates the results of previous discriminatory practices and facilitates achieving equality.

Important investments are also made in housing, mainly through IPA funding, but the number of sub-standard settlements and the living conditions of Roma indicate that the **challenges in housing should be prioritized**. The Government is particularly dedicated to solve the issue of the Crvena Zvezda settlement in Nis in order to establish a promising practice. The operational conclusion obliging the government to **institutionalize Roma health mediators within the next two years** is also a priority. The key challenge for the upcoming period representing a **key priority for the Government is to increase the employment of Roma, including in the public sector**, to deal also with mainstream, and not only Roma related issues. The **National Roma Contact Point of Serbia commends the continuation of the Roma Integration 2020 project**, necessary in assisting the Government, uniting regional initiatives on Roma integration, and working on establishing unified regional standards for budgeting responsible for Roma. The Coordination Body of Serbia dealing with Roma integration is open for dialogue on all the issues relevant for Roma integration.

The process of monitoring and reporting for 2017 has slightly improved compared to 2016. The responsible institutions partially followed the regional standards for monitoring and reporting, although certain institutions prepared contributions in narrative format. The report on the implementation of the measures is generally detailed in their description, although not strictly following the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 (Strategy) and the accompanying Action Plan. For most of the objectives, data on the budget planned and spent and data on Roma beneficiaries disaggregated by sex are missing. Summarized data on the budget planned and spent are not provided. Impact assessment (statistical) data on Roma



are provided only in education, and for the total population only in education and health. This makes it difficult to perform proper assessment of the implementation and the achievements of the policy for Roma integration in Serbia for 2017. **Establishing a single comprehensive system for collecting and processing annual data (both administrative and statistical) on the situation of Roma, disaggregated by sex, including by proper engagement of the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia (SORS) and the Ministry of Finance, to ensure impact assessment and budgetary data are properly reported, is highly recommended.**

As the Strategy stipulates, after the first two years of its implementation a **feasibility study should be conducted regarding the proposal to establish a specialized governmental body (Agency) to be responsible for managing the Strategy.** This is expected by the beginning of 2018. The need to reform the institutional mechanism governing the Strategy by simplifying and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency for governing, implementing, monitoring, reporting and decision making, and by solving the ongoing inter-institutional conflicts is evident. The existing mechanisms to outreach to the Roma community, including **health mediators, pedagogic assistants, local coordinators and local mobile teams, as well as other targeted measures for Roma integration, should be institutionalized and gradually strengthened along with employing qualified Roma as public servants.**

45 local self-government units have adopted local action plans, third of which without any budget, and 29 have engaged local coordinators for Roma issues. The situation with the **implementation of the Strategy at local level needs to be significantly improved.**

The measures planned with the **Strategy and Action Plan for Roma integration, and the operational conclusions should be thoroughly and timely implemented,** instead of selectively. Particular attention must be paid and tangible results achieved in the **fight against discrimination in all its forms and in all the priority areas.** It is recommended that the **Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women is recognized as viable legal basis for budgeting. The Law on Free Legal Aid should be adopted as a meter of urgency. Adoption of a Strategy for Accepting Returnees by Readmission is also expected.**

HOUSING

The efforts in 2017 in the area of housing are assessed as the most successful so far, including within the EU progress report on Serbia. The adoption of the Law on Housing and Maintaining Housing set the legal basis guaranteeing Roma and other people decent housing, particularly where dislocation is inevitable, housing support and communal infrastructure. The Law on Legalizing Objects provides for the legalization of housing units in cases where this is possible. The challenge remains in the **implementation of the legislation, particularly for Roma, preferably based on individual household status.** To facilitate the implementation the Ministry in charge is preparing instructions for the municipalities. An important principle of the law is to **consult the persons affected with the housing projects, notably those facing eviction (dislocation), throughout the process and ensure the alternative housing is acceptable, affordable and decent.** It is also proposed that a **Law on Legalizing Roma Settlements is adopted as *lex specialis*.**

In the case of the settlement “Crvena Zvezda” in Nis, with around 110 families facing eviction, a construction land one kilometre away from the current settlement is allocated to build a new settlement and technical documentation is being prepared. The inhabitants are consulted continuously and their consent for each decision is required. Estimated 3.2 million EUR are needed to build the settlement. The Ministry will **negotiate with the European Union and other donors to secure the necessary funds to build the new settlement for the “Crvena Zvezda” inhabitants.**

Important projects with IPA funds for 2013, 2014 and 2018 are being or going to be implemented to improve the housing of Roma. With the IPA 2013 around 9 million EUR are being used to prepare urban plans and/or technical documentation, build communal infrastructure and housing units for Roma in 13 municipalities. Often the efforts are combined with ensuring education and employment for Roma. The **holistic approach to housing needs to be strengthened and incorporated in all the future housing project.** The issue of ownership of housing units built through donor funding needs resolving. The **relevant institutions and Roma communities in Serbia consider ownership of the housing units by the beneficiaries the best and the most sustainable option, which needs to be clearly communicated and agreed with the potential donors.**





Notwithstanding the success in the area of housing in 2017, the progress report is containing little data on the actual preparing urban plans / technical documentation and building communal infrastructure and housing units. Other measures from the Action Plan are not reported on, including legalization, reconstruction of individual housing units, fight against discrimination in housing, legal and financial support to Roma in housing. **The annual progress reports of the Government must report on all the measures from the Action Plan in housing with information on the budget planned and spent and the number of beneficiaries disaggregated by sex.**

The Roma representatives demand from the responsible institutions to **act promptly, timely inform and ensure certainty for Roma on their future housing** (remaining at the same location or being dislocated). The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure denies that any lists of settlements to be dislocated are being made and guarantees according to the law that each household shall be dealt with individually with the ultimate objective of reducing homelessness, providing decent, affordable and acceptable housing with the necessary communal infrastructure and the set housing standards. Related to this, **the Geographic Information System - GIS on sub-standard settlements should be made available for interested parties with the due protection of personal data, updated regularly and used for reporting and formulation of policies.**

Besides **more resolute action on legalization of the dwellings and settlements of Roma**, along with assessing the current situation and preventing unnecessary dislocations, it is demanded that **more resolute and internally led action is taken to build dwellings for Roma**, similarly as it is done for the military and the police.

EDUCATION

The number of Roma enrolled in all levels of education increased in 2017, compared to the previous year. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development claims activities are conducted for all the measures planned, either as part of the Education Development Strategy or as part of various projects and sub-projects. The 2017 progress report lacks data on beneficiaries, budget and results, making it difficult to support the claim.

The preschool participation rate for Serbia is 96%. Those not participating, according to the Ministry, are mostly children belonging to marginalized families including Roma. The lowest participation of Roma with only 27.4% from the overall population is at age 1-3. Only 6% of Roma attend preschool education. Thus, for the Ministry the objective is to **increase the participation of Roma in preschool**. The new Law on the Basic System of Education and Upbringing from September 2017 regulates the norms for the nurses and allows for diversified preschool programmes. It is recommended that the Ministry monitors closely such programmes, to **prevent using diversified programmes exclusively from Roma**, which would again keep Roma out from the mainstream preschool education. Through a project supported by UNICEF two informative campaigns are conducted in 2017 and it is expected that the project will contribute to linking the education sector with health and social welfare. The legislation is improved to allow for better monitoring of the work of the inter-disciplinary commissions, and an inter-institutional memorandum for cooperation is signed among the relevant Ministries and civil society organizations.

The most important project implemented in preschool education is “Inclusive Preschool Education and Upbringing” implemented with a loan of around 35 million USD from the World Bank. With the first component preschool facilities are built with 17,000 new places for children (not only for Roma), with the second component the curriculum is reformed, and with the third trainings are delivered and grants distributed to 30 municipalities for initiatives supporting preschool education for children from vulnerable groups. It is recommended to **ensure sustainability of the project, particularly at local level, build new facilities near/in Roma settlements and to give priority or reserve a portion for Roma from the new 17,000 places at the new facilities**. Giving priority to children with at least one employed parent still leaves out most of the Roma from preschool.

The mentioned new law contributes also to better quality primary and secondary education. 69% of the Roma children at the age of enrolling in primary education have enrolled on time. In 2017 25 teachers from 12 schools are trained for drop-out prevention. Research was conducted on the effectiveness of the drop-out prevention, and a model protocol for the local level is developed.

Further, the law also allows for engaging pedagogic assistants in the schools, which **should be further regulated with other acts. Additional pedagogic assistants** (to the existing 175) **should be**





engaged, and the engagement should be for a longer period. The pedagogic assistants are acting as link between the schools and the families, rather than accompanying or mentoring the children. Preschool nurses trained in Romani language are also engaged as pedagogic assistants. However, there is a complaint that only 1 Romani speaking nurse is engaged at a private preschool facility, while the other 17 are not. Furthermore, **Romani speaking trained nurses for preschool education should be employed as nurses, rather than pedagogic assistants.** The Ministry is convinced that it will be possible within the newly built preschool facilities.

Affirmative measures allow for increased number of Roma to enrol in secondary and tertiary education, which indicates that lower education levels are not preparing Roma properly to be able to advance in the education without the affirmative measures. The goal of the Ministry is to **gradually decrease the need for affirmative measures.** In this sense the total **number of Roma enrolled is needed to establish the percentage of those enrolled through affirmative measures.**

Inter-cultural learning is proposed as an element of the new curriculum for education being currently reformed. The Ministry representative ensures that inter-cultural learning will be included as an “inter-subject competence” to be learnt throughout the education. Furthermore, the presentation of national minorities in the existing text-books is being examined in order to improve the projection of national minorities in the future text-books.

Teachers trained to deliver the subject Romani language with elements of culture are available. The department for Romani language at the Philology Faculty of the Belgrade University is currently not running because of lack of students. **Motivation of native Romani speakers to take this faculty, as well as standardization of the Romani language are needed in order to develop the education of and in Romani language.** The representative of the Centre for Education of Roma and Ethnic Communities noted that after the initial 23 teachers trained at the faculty, 55 more teachers are trained and 4 text-books in Romani language covering I-IV grade for the mentioned subject are prepared through a project implemented by the centre with EU funding, requiring from the Ministry to **clearly name the implementers in the future reports.** Romani language teachers are increasingly becoming redundant in Vojvodina. **They should be engaged within the education system in preserving, developing and promoting the language.**

Regarding prevention of segregation and measures for desegregation, the report refers to the new law that defines and bans discrimination in education. A working group is developing a rulebook against discrimination, including segregation. However, segregation persists, and the representative of the Ministry responsible for Roma integration refers to the segregation occurring in schools near Roma settlements as “natural” segregation that is not dealt with, further comparing it with the education of national minorities provided in their mother tongue, which is not comparable. As segregation persists and a number of municipalities with segregated schools are listed, **the Ministry needs to recognize and clearly define segregation and work resolutely on preventing segregation and allowing for desegregation.**

Significant challenge in education is to **collect data on Roma in education, including as beneficiaries of different measures, and consequently beneficiaries of the budget allocated for such measures,** which needs to be addressed.

The budget for education of Serbia will remain at the same level at least in the next couple of years, thus funds for new measures must be sought from other sources. It is recommended to **increase the budget for education to include the measures planned officially with the policy for Roma integration.**

HEALTH

The self-assessment of the Ministry of Health on its work on Roma integration is that it decreased in quality and that the budget implementation rate is low (65% of around 320,000 EUR). The budget from 2015 to 2017 has increased for around 68,000 EUR and is expected to increase more in 2018. However, the Ministry of Health considers the **budget insufficient and pleads to donors to contribute, although there is an obvious need to improve the absorption of the available budget.** Important programmes planned with the Strategy, such as improving the nutritional status of Roma children, have not been budgeted or implemented. Roma representatives intend to address the Deputy Prime Minister with the demand to move away the focus of discussions with the Ministry of Health from the status of the Roma health mediators to **all the activities planned and to the**





budget. For certain measures planned within the area of health **cooperation should be established with other institutions**, such as the one responsible for housing in relation to the living conditions.

The key programme in health for Roma integration is the Roma health mediators programme run by the Ministry of Health for 10 years. The programme is explicitly but not exclusively targeting Roma. The health mediators visit the beneficiaries for campaign vaccination, collecting data, assisting in acquiring official documents, accompanying persons to health facilities, organizing workshops, etc. The number of Roma health mediators in 2017 was 55, with 20 unfilled vacancies from 2014. It is reported that the trend in 2018 is improving by filling the vacancies (only 3 are not filled at the moment) and extending the mediators' network by 10 new mediators. The network is still **insufficient to cover the needs in the 173 municipalities where Roma live.**

The Roma health mediators are **still not systematized within the public health system** - they sign temporary renewable service contracts, do not enjoy all the labour rights or get the benefits as other employees in the public sector, and their salary has not increased. When a mediator is prevented to work (sickness, pregnancy, etc.) or leaves the job, there is no mechanism to replace them because **the budget does not allocate funds for initial training of new mediators.** The Ministry of Health is still insisting on systematization of Roma health mediators at local level, although this proposal is widely opposed. Furthermore, the mediators should not be required to have completed secondary education now, since they were hired without this requirement, based on the criteria set by the Ministry of Health. The National Roma Contact Point informs that an agreement is achieved with the Ministries responsible for health and education to **develop a verified educational programme for initial training of health mediators that are not already medically trained.** In the area of employment Roma benefited from **adult education, which may be used for the health mediators to complete their education** and gain formal title.

The mediators lack transport to Roma settlements, uniforms, maintenance of the equipment they use, etc. The **necessary funds to properly run the programme should be planned.** The programme also lacks **proper database software to record and process data that the mediators collect.** Regarding the database, a comparison is made that in Serbia only around 1,700 EUR were invested in the software by UNICEF, while in Romania around 430,000 EUR. Moreover, the software from the Ministry of Health in Serbia allegedly disappeared and was replaced with a database far less stable and functional (the data were copied without obtaining the software). Roma representatives are **concerned with possible misuse of the data from the previous database, including private data.** The Ministry of Interior is investigating the situation with the database. The Ministry of Health is convinced that the Roma health mediators are an excellent **resource for data collection** on agreed indicators for the Roma integration policy in general, which should be explored further.

It is crucially important to **hire Roma with completed medical secondary or higher education as regular staff within the public health system**, which has not been the case.

Another programme of the Ministry of Health related to Roma integration is the small grants scheme with 42,300 EUR in total, or 2,500-3,500 EUR grants for civil society organizations' initiatives, mostly spent on insects and rats extermination and disinfection (so called DDD protection). The underspending in this programme is explained with ineligible proposals by the civil society organization because of using private instead of public health facilities. A programme dealing with the **dental problems of Roma** supported four times in a row has been mentioned as successful and needed throughout Serbia.

Additional issues raised in health that need to be addressed are the **need for tertiary health protection (such as spa treatments) coverage and dealing with the consequences of depleted uranium contamination.**

EMPLOYMENT

According to the National Employment Service, the results in employment of Roma have improved in 2017 compared to 2016. The number of registered unemployed Roma is increasing, since local mobile teams are outreaching to Roma, informing and encouraging the unemployed Roma to register and participate in the active employment measures. On 31 December 2017 22,456 Roma were registered as unemployed, which increased to 26,359 in the first months of 2018.

While the number of registered unemployed Roma is increasing, the number of Roma participating in the active employment measures and being employed through their own or the efforts of the





National Employment Service are also increasing. The total number of unemployed Roma participating in the active employment measures in 2017 is 5,479 (2,421 women), mostly within IPA 2012 project.

Roma are the majority beneficiaries of the programme for acquiring functional elementary education, with 684 out of 1,336 beneficiaries in 2017. The funds to implement the programme in 2017 were 32,640,362 RSD. 3,501 unemployed Roma (1,524 women) participated in 10-days trainings for active job search, providing skills for writing CV, interacting with employers, etc. Only 5 unemployed Roma (4 women) received professional practice (internship). The National Employment Service analysed the **low participation of Roma in the internship programme** and realized the key obstacle is the low level of education. Out of the 22,456 unemployed Roma, 87.63% are with no or low qualification, while the requirement for the programme is secondary or higher education. The institution is attempting to **address the problem in consultation with the Roma representatives**. Some 20% of the internships are offered in the public sector. 163 Roma participated in vocational qualification trainings, delivered mostly on the demand of the employers that are obliged to employ the trained persons. 194 Roma (74 women) received entrepreneurship training, preceding potential self-employment loans provided by the National Employment Service.

140 Roma (46 women) received self-employment loan in 2017, representing 3.8% of all that received self-employment loans in the amount of 180,000 RSD each. The total amount distributed to Roma as self-employment loans in 2017 was 14,431,250 RSD. The key obstacle for Roma in the programme is the requirement to have two guarantors for the loan. It is recommended that the **National Employment Service and Roma representatives initiate abolishing of this requirement with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Issues**. The employment of 231 Roma (122 women) at private employers was subsidised in 2017.

In total 4,150 registered unemployed Roma (1,562 women) gained employment in 2017, out of which 1,529 (603 women) gained employment through participation in the services provided by the National Employment Service.

The preliminary results of the analysis of the first months of 2018 show further tendency of improvement of the situation of Roma regarding employment and labour rights in general.

In the National Employment Service programmes implemented on the basis of the National Action Plan on Employment, Roma are recognized as one of the “hard-to-employ” groups and are given priority for participation. However, **specific funds for employment measures for Roma are not allocated**. Funds for active employment measures are still available from IPA 2013.

The National Employment Service is maintaining its register of unemployed and beneficiaries of its services. Data on each actual employment can be found at the Central Registry and the Tax Authority. There is a **need for central data collection system on the situation of Roma in the area of employment, using the administrative registries of all the relevant institutions**.

In the area of employment, the measures envisaged with the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women 2016-2025 coinciding with the measures planned with the National Action Plan on Employment are implemented, while other measures are **not implemented, including formalizing the work of the secondary goods collectors and fighting against discrimination in the labour market**. The responsible institutions are encouraged to **fully implement the Action Plan for Roma integration in the area of employment**, including by adopting **Equality Law containing provision for equitable representation in the public sector, and a Law on Socially Responsible Enterprises**. The civil society is also proposing **piloting Employment Service for Roma for two years and participation of Roma in the National Employment Service Governing Board**.

