

2019 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION

7 June 2019, Tirana, Albania

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

INTRODUCTION

The third National Platform on Roma Integration in Albania was organized jointly by the Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration Team (Roma Integration) and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) on 7 June 2019. 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 and serves as entry points for defining Operational Conclusions from Roma Seminars within the European Union (EU) accession process.

The 2019 National Platform in particular focused on the presentation of the [Roma Integration Roadmap 2019-2021](#) and achievements and challenges in the implementation of [the National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 \(NAPIRE\)](#) in 2018.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of Albania prepared and presented [2018 annual report](#) on Roma integration according to the regionally adopted reporting standards. The report was presented and discussed in the meeting. The Ministry of Justice did not participate in 2019 National Platform.

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

To support the achievement of the [Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process](#) stated goals and targets, the Roma Integration project and the Government of Albania prepared the [Roma Integration Roadmap 2019-2021](#) for Albania. The document envisages priority actions in employment and housing together with technical assistance expected from the Roma Integration project. Targets and actions set in the [Roadmap](#) are based on available data, [NAPIRE](#), and Operational Conclusions documents. Special focus is put on complementing promising ongoing activities in Albania and piloting those that were not implemented thus far. The main [Roadmap](#) elements are presented under the employment and housing chapters of this document.

- Sufficient funds should be allocated at the central and local level in accordance with those planned and donor dependency should be reduced. Budget expenditure information should be more robust.
- Albania should continue to participate in the Roma Responsive Budgeting initiative led by the Roma Integration project in order to improve budget planning and execution.
- The legislation adopted in recent years will require implementing holistic approach in housing, employment and other thematic priorities. The Government should continue dialogue with the civil society so to appropriately operationalise adopted legislation to make it effective in addressing real-life situations of Roma.

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.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY COORDINATION, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

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. The collected data are consolidated by the MoHSP and are validated by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). In 2018, 80% of municipalities were active in entering data in the ROMALB system.

The annual report requires more data than that generated by ROMALB system. In 2018, some of the information was collected manually. The impact information was not provided by INSTAT.

- 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 2019 monitoring report, the report preparation should start in the last quarter of 2019.
- In order to populate 2019 monitoring report with impact indicators a specific Roma survey should be implemented during the year. The survey should be repeated in 2020 so that collected information can be used as the end-line for NAPIRE 2016-2020 and as the baseline for the new Roma integration strategy.
- 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.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION AND PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

In 2018, 13,987 Roma boys and girls enrolled in pre-school and compulsory education, compared to 13,583 in 2017. At the same time, 50% more Roma students and pupils benefitted from scholarships at different education levels compared to the previous year.

In relation to promoting Roma participation in the provision of education, 34% more Roma women worked in auxiliary positions in preschool and basic education in 2018 than in 2017.

To promote diversity and multiculturalism through education, new curricula and textbooks were compiled that reflect on tolerance, marginalisation, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender equality. Roma culture is also reflected in the new curricula and textbooks.

The local government was more active in referring families of children who drop out or were at risk of abandoning compulsory education to social protection services and other support services compared to 2017.

- Indications of existence of segregated schools should be investigated to be followed by the best distribution of students.
- The issue of Roma children aged 3-5 who do not have a birth certificate and cannot be included in the education system should be officially recognised and prioritised in the following period.
- The issue of universities not implementing the instruction on quotas and university fee waivers (due to independence of public universities) should be resolved by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth. This year nothing was reported on the implementation of university quotas for Roma.

- Roma should be employed by the institutions of the Ministry of Culture; no Roma found employment in these institutions in 2018.
- Activities to translate and publish Roma culture in Albanian language and vice versa should be implemented; this is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and the National Centre of Folklore Activities.
- Activities to recognize and promote Roma history and culture in the tourism offer of Albania should be implemented.

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

With regards to the first objective, to integrate Roma in the labour market through participation in VET and active employment programmes, the number of Roma participating in employment promotion programmes increased in 2018, by 1,236 persons. While the number of people completing employment promotion programmes is increasing, Albania still faces difficulties to ensure sustainable employment of Roma.

The National Platform further recognised that the involvement in community work increased, that 120% more Roma completed vocational trainings in 2018 than in 2017, and that 527 Roma benefitted from scholarships to attend vocational training programmes. However, the reported subsequent employment is not high.

One of the reasons for low employment levels is the fact that 94% of registered Roma with the labour offices have only compulsory education or less. Due to the low qualifications, not many of those completing different employment promotion programmes become employed. This indicates that the employment programmes do not sufficiently increase capacities of the trained individuals.

The Government recognises the issue and is striving to continue increasing investments in employment programmes together with the ratio of registered jobseekers that participate in the programmes on an annual basis. In cooperation with the EU, the main focus is on mediation and employment promotion programmes. The Government approach is not to isolate a single group when targeting it and thus contribute to its victimisation, but to pursue an individualised approach that targets all aspects of vulnerability of an individual. This is in line with the previous year recommendation to consider modifying existing programmes to better address Roma needs. UNDP led ESERE project contributed in this regards as it piloted certain employment models that proved promising. The models will be replicated by the Government in the period to follow.

Another recommendation in the previous National Platform was to improve the monitoring system to better track employment status of individuals who participate in employment programmes, especially in the period following the initial (government subsidised) employment. In 2018, the National Employment Service was designing the IT platform for Vocational Training Centres that will include a tracking module. Similar module will also be developed for the employment promotion programmes. The new IT platform will allow assessing effectiveness of employment programmes and evidence-based policy-making.

Second objective under the employment priority is to promote (social) entrepreneurship and self-employment of Roma. In 2018, 374 Roma owned businesses benefitted from tax reductions at the local level. No other support services for self-employment of Roma were implemented in 2018.

The Law on Social Entrepreneurship was adopted which aims to support and increase employment rates for vulnerable groups. The Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 56 defined disadvantaged groups according to the Law. Although Roma minority was not explicitly recognised, vulnerable Roma can fall under a number of categories recognised in the Decision.

The new law on employment foresees that part of employment related services can be outsourced to the civil society. It is considered that the civil society will be more effective and efficient in providing the outsourced services.

The [Roadmap](#) developed in 2019 sets the path towards increasing the employment rate of Roma. According to the 2017 UNDP Regional Roma Survey [results](#), the employment rate of Roma in Albania is 18% whereas 62% of them are engaged in informal work. The Albania agreed to set the target to increase the employment rate of Roma to 35% on the date of the EU Accession. This will be achieved by transforming undeclared work of Roma to declared work. In order to achieve sufficient formalisation of the undeclared work, appropriate policy and programmes for work formalisation

will be necessary. The Roma integration will support the formalisation of work of informal waste collectors in Albania. This concrete type of work was chosen as the UNDP study already shown that Roma predominantly engage in it. At the same time, significant number of measures in NAPIRE and 2018 Operational Conclusions relate to improving the position of and formalising the work of the waste collectors. Tirana municipality also previously piloted a project that engaged informal waste collectors in a recycling company. The existing experiences can be built upon. No new measures were implemented related to this matter in 2018, which emphasised the need to support the Government in this regards.

- To ensure employment of Roma according to the individualised approach, specific focus needs to be put to target Roma with additional support (based on needs) in existing and new mainstream employment services.
- The practice of decreasing taxes at the local level for Roma owned businesses should continue and be mirrored in remaining municipalities.
- No new activities to promote self-employment of Roma and provide them with necessary services were implemented in 2018. The issue should be accounted for in the following years in cooperation with the civil society. The civil society should propose self-employment programmes for the formalisation of different types of work that Roma already engage in.
- Specific budget funds should be earmarked for the implementation of self-employment programmes relevant for Roma as well as for the formalisation of their existing work.
- No new activities to promote formalisation of work of informal waste collectors were implemented in 2018. The Government should promote employment and formalisation of work of informal waste collectors in cooperation with the Roma Integration project.
- No activities to promote employment of Roma in agriculture and support Roma farmers were implemented in 2017 and 2018. The Rural Agricultural Development Agency should engage on the issue.
- Targeted effort is needed to promote employment of Roma under the Law on Social Entrepreneurship. The Government and the local level should devise new measures in cooperation with the civil society.
- To ensure good complementarity of activities implemented by the governmental institutions and those implemented by the civil society (under the new law on employment) - their coordination, cooperation and communication should be strengthened and formalised.
- Roma employment in the public sector should be promoted.
- Number of Roma employed in the National Employment Service remained the same in 2018. More Roma should be employed to do outreach and mediate for Roma to participate in the employment programmes and find employment.
- Quotas for Roma employment in the National Employment Service should be introduced in the systematisation when the institution is restructured during 2019.
- Employees of the National Employment Service and the vocational education system need continuous capacity building on the challenges and good practices for the integration and employment of vulnerable Roma, but also on communication with vulnerable job-seekers.
- The Government should continue lowering the cost of employment services to be able to offer them to wider population registered with the employment institutions.
- Solutions should be sought to target contractual relations of Roma participating in subsidised employment promotion programmes in private companies, so to ensure their long-term employment after the programmes end.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEALTH

The practice of providing Roma with free of charge health cards continued in 2018, with 31,121 new individuals benefiting from free health cards. The total number of Roma in possession of free health cards is reported as 61,475, which indicates that most (if not all) of the Roma community is now covered by health insurance.

The number of Roma mothers who received baby and mother care packages for the first three months of baby life increased from 2,059 in 2017 to 7,753 in 2018.

Through medical mobile teams, 16,650 Roma received information on physical, mental, reproductive health, child immunization, drug use and other issues, compared to 10,258 beneficiaries reported in 2017.

- The reported number of Roma benefitting from free health cards should be confirmed in 2019 report.
- More effort is required to prioritize Roma in medicine and nursing education, as well as to report on their enrolment and benefitting from scholarships.
- More Roma should be employed and/or included in the health sector. In 2018, no new Roma were employed in public healthcare and the decision on the position of healthcare mediators was not approved.
- The role and responsibilities of primary healthcare workers to identify Roma pregnant women and include them in guaranteed health services should be strengthened.
- The practice of training healthcare personnel on equitable service provision to people living on the street or in substandard housing (including Roma) should continue and the number of trained persons should increase.
- More action is required to prepare user-friendly healthcare promotional materials in Romani language.

ROADMAP & CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING AND URBAN INTEGRATION

More Roma families benefited from different types of housing support than in 2017. Information shows that Roma benefit of 21% of all social housing support.

In 2018, 127 Roma families benefitting from social housing programmes that were unable to comply with financial obligations were supported with employment promotion services. In 2017, 42 families were supported in such a way.

To implement local social housing programmes, 22 municipalities applied to the Ministry of Finance and Economy and obtained necessary funds. The total reported expenditure was 3,055,109.00 EUR. As a result, the report states that 424 Roma families benefitted from infrastructure, water supply, sewage and similar support. In relation to the issue, 21 local government officials were trained on the preparation of narrative and financial housing proposals.

The [Roadmap](#) developed in 2019 sets the path towards improving housing situation of Roma. According to the information received from the Government, 6,421 Roma families are in need of housing, whereas Albania agreed to set the target to lower the housing need to 500 families at the time of the EU Accession. This is to be achieved by legalising Roma individual housing and Roma informal settlements, but also through the provision of social housing support. [NAPIRE](#) and the Operational Conclusions include activities to promote legalisation of Roma informal settlements, and to promote integral approach to housing and employment. The Law on Social Housing additionally prioritised Roma in a number of ways. Considering all this, the Roma Integration and the Government of Albania agreed to support it with the technical assistance to: develop methodology of an integral approach, prepare a funding proposal for settlement revitalisation (in case legalisation is re-opened) or a social housing project, and to prepare methodology for the prioritisation of Roma according to the Law on Social Housing.

- Data on technical assistance to Roma to submit housing legalisation applications and procedures' facilitation should be provided.
- Data on pilot projects for urbanisation and integration of informal settlements is unavailable. The Government should cooperate with the Roma Integration project to address the issue.
- Social housing projects to construct housing for Roma in need should be planned and initiated, according to a holistic approach. The Government should cooperate with the Roma Integration project in this regards.
- Improving infrastructure should continue to be prioritised for Roma settlements in Albania.
- The number of Roma families benefitting from infrastructure, sewage and similar support should be further confirmed. The civil society challenged the Government presented information for certain municipalities.
- The issue of local governments not applying for central-level funding for local social housing programmes should be resolved. Continued capacity building at the local level is required,

together with increased political responsibility in case of no applications within the legal deadline.

- Legal solution should be sought to address the issue of discrimination in the housing sector, as Roma continue to be unable to enter rental contracts and benefit from the rent support.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND JUSTICE

Seven new legal aid clinics were established in 2018 with the donor support.

The process of increasing capacities of civil registrars to work with Roma has continued. As a result, 2,493 Roma were informed about procedures related to civil registration and change of residence, which is a significant increase compared to 1,082 informed people in 2017.

The capacities of multidisciplinary teams were also strengthened. In 2018, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for multidisciplinary teams that reflect the instruction on procedures for protection of vulnerable children were approved. As a result 337 multidisciplinary teams members were trained on the SOP.

In 2018, the Ministry of Justice provided information about free legal aid for proceedings related to the civil registration for children born outside hospitals; awarding custody in case of divorce; and other complex cases. In 2018, 167 Roma benefitted from such legal aid.

- More information is necessary on the number of registered persons/children compared to the number of those in need and for which civil registration procedures were initiated.
- Related to the civil registration abroad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should engage to provide information about Roma who benefit from reimbursements for fees charged by the Albanian consulates.
- Child protection units and other mandated bodies should provide data on the assistance provided to register Roma children born outside Albania.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Protection should report and engage to ensure that Roma benefit from court-mandated psychologist services in relevant judicial proceedings (divorce, child custody, restraining orders, parental responsibility, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

The legal framework for social protection was strengthened, as secondary legislation acts relevant for the Law on Social Services and the Law on Social Entrepreneurship were adopted.

Related to the Law on Social Services, the Social Fund was established and a basket of integral basic services was defined. The basket should meet the need to protect, rehabilitate, and integrate vulnerable individuals. The Law also increased role of the local level. The direct result was that 63 local mobile teams operated to identify problems in the field and provide support to Roma. At the same time, 16 Roma organisations signed memorandums of understanding with local governments and received licences to provide community services in 2018, which is above the target of 10.

The social protection secondary legislation package should be completed in 2019 including the methodology of financing social services through the Social Fund. New community services such as household assistance should start implementation in 2019.

In 2018, 1,161 Roma families benefitted from the economic aid scheme, compared to 1,024 in 2017.

- Criteria and modalities of disbursing economic aid should be reassessed to ensure that all funds are used. In 2018, funds in some municipalities remained unused although there are significant needs for the economic aid.
- While 1,046 Roma children regularly attended compulsory education, none of their families benefitted from the additional economic aid unlike in 2017. This practice should be restarted to motivate children and their families so that children stay in education.
- The Government should allocate sufficient funding for the implementation of the Law on Social Services considering the increased number of programmes and eligible beneficiaries.
- Capacity building of social administrators that need to facilitate Roma access to social services should be continued and accelerated.
- More effort is required to reintegrate Roma emerging from the Transit Center.