

2019 NATIONAL PLATFORM ON ROMA INTEGRATION

16 September 2019, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ::

INTRODUCTION

The fourth National Platform on Roma Integration in Bosnia and Hercegovina was held on 16 September 2019, jointly organised by the Regional Cooperation Council's (RCC) Roma Integration Team (Roma Integration) and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) and National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The meeting gathered 34 participants including representatives of the Roma Integration 2020, relevant representatives of central and local governments, civil society, international organizations, as well as the National Roma Contact Point and her team. The presence of the EU Delegation was cancelled a day before the meeting.

The National Platform meeting was opened by Mr Orhan Usein, Team Leader of the Roma Integration 2020 of the Regional Cooperation Council and Ms Saliha Djuderija, Assistant Minister for Human Rights and Refugees and the National Roma Contact Point.

Mr Usein gave an overview on the ongoing and the upcoming activities of the RCC Roma Integration team 2020, mentioning the importance of the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process, the piloting of the Roma Responsive Budgeting, the meaning of the National platforms, and the Roadmaps, lately presented by Shejla Fidani, Policy Expert at the RCC's Roma Integration 2020 Action Team.

The working part included a presentation by Ms Saliha Djuderija NRCP, of the governmental annual report on the implementation of the Roma integration policy in 2018. No data on education were reported as the responsible institutions are not responsive.

Moderated by Mr Djuderija, the participants had plenty of time to discuss, give an overview and propose new ideas for improvement of the actions and programs related to Roma integration on central, local and cantonal level coordination.

As a novelty this year, the Roadmap 2019-2021 stipulating topics of technical assistance in the fields of employment and housing was presented and challenged a fruitful discussion.

Employment Presenters: Ms Shejla Fidani, Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration Project, Ms Ognjenka Spasojevic - Employment service of Brčko District Bosnia and Hercegovina ; Mr Emir Spahalic - Employment service of Federation Bosnia and Hercegovina ; Ms Snezana Borovcanin Employment service of Republika Srpska.

The housing panel followed up on the presentation of the Roadmap and the technical assistance planned for 2019-2021 for Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Presenters: Ms Shejla Fidani, Regional Cooperation Council's Roma Integration Project, Ms Aleksandra Jaric- Roma housing, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Mr Ljubiša Stanisic- The City of Bijeljina -Office for Minorities and Mr Medjid Bajric - Municipality of Kakanj.

This Policy Brief reflects the discussions and aims to assist the Government of Bosnia and Hercegovina in prioritizing, budgeting and formulating more effective Roma integration policies in the upcoming years. The findings will be incorporated in the technical assistance in accordance with the Roadmap 2019-2021.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2018-2019



Bosnia and Herzegovina has provided full support in the process of preparation of the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process adopted in the Western Balkans Summit in Poznan.

Within the frame of Roma integration policies, Bosnia and Herzegovina is participating in the Roma Responsive Budgeting Initiative led by the Roma Integration project. The Guidelines for Roma Responsive Budgeting were developed in 2018 within the inter-governmental working group that included Bosnia and Herzegovina governmental representatives. In 2019, civil servants were trained to perform Roma responsive budgeting of policies and action plans, based on existing evidences of Roma needs and policies' successes. At the same time, piloting phase of the Guidelines' application implemented by the Roma Integration is ongoing and will continue in 2020 with the municipality of Centar Sarajevo and the City of Bijeljina.

The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to recognize the integration of Roma as an important issue besides the challenges in terms of planning and programing. Important achievement is the continuity and revision of the Action Plan 2017-2020, based on realistic state budget, while calling international donors to join the financing efforts.

The 10 years investment on the Roma integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina is around 36 million BAM (Bosnian Convertible Marks) or 18,406,500 EUR including state and donor funds. The annual circle of investment is around 1 million EUR from the central budget and 1 million EUR from local level investments, mainly spent on housing, less on employment and health, and no data on education. Approximately, unofficial data states that in 2018 around 150.000 EUR were invested in the field of education and the amount includes the funds from the civil society too.

The budgetary practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot effectively be considered. This year 2019, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is functioning on a temporary budget. The Council of Ministers with a technical mandate makes a temporary financing decisions and the last budget cycle for October-December decision was brought through a telephone session. In this regard, as stated by the NRCP, officially the 1 million EUR for Roma integration were rejected from the Ministry of finance and Treasury.

This will have consequences in terms of the implementation of the planned programs for Roma integration and therefore the MHRR and the Roma Board will prepare a report to be delivered to the Council of Ministers, including critics and definition of needs that will incorporate the loss of this year actions. As a follow up, the MHRR has prepared all the necessary documentation and if the state budget is approved in 2020 there will be a ready ground for the implementation of the activities currently in pipeline.

When talking about realized funds, the highest amount is spent on housing 972.125 EUR (around 2 million BAM) in 2017-2018. Around 175.000 EUR in the field of health. 50.000 EUR for operational programs of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, including employment of one Roma coordinator. Around 330.000 EUR for employment. In the field of education still there is a slow dynamic and cooperation. In 2018, efforts were made to overcome the issue, as the Framework Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma 2018-2022 was adopted by the Council of Ministers.

During 2019, still in pipeline, the federal Ministry of Education has to accept a plan on Roma culture and tradition and preschool education that will be discussed with the cantons and all level implementing institutions. This way, the legal basis for Roma integration efforts in education and implementation and monitoring can be establish for the future.

According to the NRCP, Bosnia and Herzegovina has lack of data for comparative analyses in all fields, the actual available data are older than 10 years; this is not giving a clear picture when gathering data from the municipalities, the social centres, employment centres and its making difficult the process of assessment, monitoring and programmatic planning as well. For this reason the European Commission together with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had a data mapping plan (data for Roma, people with special needs, returnees, and refugees) but the implementation is facing obstacles from the Republic of Srpska that is not cooperative in establishing a system that gives an overview of data. The data mapping process needs to be introduced as soon as possible. Performing social mapping and establishing an effective system for monitoring social inclusion is necessary for evidence-based policy planning and prioritization.

Challenges:

- The lack of data (mentioned above) is not giving a real mapping of the needs and budget planning, whenever comes to donors or ministers request. It is impossible to address a real financial request nor to measure an impact of an implemented action.
- Some municipalities have mapped social data and they attract the donor funding, this is a step ahead of the programmatic plans of the MHRR and creates discrepancy in the planning between the central and the local level.
- The process for data mapping is ongoing and depends on the coordination and system approval from the governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Srpska and the cantonal government of District Brčko.
- The late and due reporting on budget spending from local level towards the NRCP is creating consequences in terms of the dynamic of good planning and even more on the monitoring and reporting processes requested by the European Commission.
- Continuous overdue instalment payment towards the employees from the side of the federal employment centre, the difficult methodology for applying and securing job places is not adequate and functional (application, transfer of funds, etc) and makes the measures from the action plan for employment unmeasurable.

Recommendations:

- There has been some monitoring done, but not an evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for Roma integration. Midterm evaluation is very much needed for defining the next priorities and improving the planning, especially in the field of employment. The request to support the evaluation is addressed to RCC.
- The work of the Board on Roma should be more intensive, proactive and help in programmatic planning and coordination between the NRCP and other institutions.
- For the next national platform and other relevant meetings, representatives from the government of the Republic of Srpska and the cantonal government should be invited.
- Caritas is calling on responsible budgeting for Roma and suggest the budget of 1 million EUR rejected this year to be remained for the next year (for which there is no official answer at the moment).
- Long term programmatic and financial planning for at least 3-4 year, can be taken in consideration to support the ongoing funding of municipalities that show good will and good practices on implementing Roma housing projects, as the current situation of no funding for 2019 is not in favour of anyone, but this is a complicated process in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the system and programing. Solution should be found on another targeted meeting.
- The municipalities who are not getting funding from the MHRR are not attending the meetings of this kind. It is strongly suggested their presence to be secured and called on responsibility to implement the measures envisaged in the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process.
- Based on realistic programmatic planning and financing the Action Plans for Roma Integration to be revised by the end of January 2020, integrating an action plan for education prepared and valid until 2022.
- Identify municipalities that express readiness to support Roma housing projects.
- It is a systematic mistake that every institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina, every social centre, employment centres and municipalities as a core bodies in realization of the Strategy for Roma integration, are working individually. There is urgency these institutions to start to coordinate their activities.
- There are enough financial means on local level but not spent. The revised Local Action Plans for Roma should be sustainable after few years of its implementation.
- The state budget for implementation of the Action Plans for Roma Integration to be increased and to follow the recommendations from the European Commission addressed to the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The social mapping agreed with the European commission should be harmonized with authorities from all levels, the municipalities to be informed on the starting process and a common understanding on the way and methods of implementation to be agreed with the Republic of Srpska.
- A separate meeting with the municipalities who are implementing the actions plans for Roma integration and the Ministry of human rights and refugees to be held.

- As the Board on Roma lacks initiatives to intervene, propose and coordinate, the MHRR is urgently calling and expecting from the Board on Roma to organize a thematic workshop and plan the post 2020 period.
- A process on informing and programmatic planning between all the municipalities and MHRR
- to be introduced as soon as possible as a practice to identifying local needs and obstacles in the fields of Roma integration and the Local Action Plans.

ROADMAP CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

To support the achievement of the [Declaration](#) stated goals and targets, the Roma Integration Roadmap 2019-2021 was prepared in cooperation of the line ministries and the Roma Integration project. The document envisages governmental priority areas and technical assistance to reach the desired targets. The document is based on available data, including the 2017 Regional Roma Survey. This is in line with the previous year recommendation to base policies on existing information. The anticipated technical assistance is entirely based on goals, targets, and measures from the [Roma Integration Strategy, 2018](#) and [2019](#) Action Plans,. The planned technical assistance together with the most important considerations and discussions takeaways from the National Platform are summarized below.

EMPLOYMENT

The 2017 UNDP Roma Survey shows that the employment rate of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina stood at 11%. The employment rate of their non-Roma neighbours was 27%, while the general employment rate was 40%. The Report based on the same Survey reports that 63% of Roma are engaged in informal work, whereas only 17% of non-Roma living in their proximity works in informal sector. Data from the employment institutes show that 2,645 Roma are registered as unemployed and need to be covered by employment programmes. The Government representatives estimated that the real number of unemployed persons is probably at least twice as high, as recognised in the Policy Brief from the 2018 National Platform.

Current employment programs do not achieve the desired results due to the various factors: low employers' interest in employing Roma, lack of coordination at the local level, lack of capacity to use self-employment funds, low qualifications of Roma registered as unemployed.

Most employment measures as foreseen in the Action Plan are not implemented, due to their inability to coordinate at central level.

To improve the situation, the Roadmap targets are set at increasing the employment rate of Roma to 34% at the time of the European Union (EU) accession, and to lowering the undeclared work rate to 38%.

Roma who currently engage in this work are in precarious situation as they earn minimum income, have no health and social insurance. There is little chance that they will be entitled to retirement pensions. The existing legislation does not recognise their work. Strict application of the current legislation would mean the end of work for the informal waste collectors, which would leave them without any source of income. At the same time, population that receives family support benefits is not inclined to formalise their work as their accumulated income would diminish (due to losing right to social benefits). To account for this situation, the formalisation needs to ensure that income after formalisation remains the same or is increased compared to the current one. Other benefits of the formalisation will be the possibility to receive pensions and the entitlement for credit and other support - as legal businesses.

To assist the Government to reach the Roadmap targets and contribute to the development of a comprehensive policy for the formalisation of undeclared work, the Roma Integration project agreed to support it with technical assistance to develop comprehensive programme for the formalisation of work of the secondary raw materials collectors.

In relation to the proposed measures, the National Platform did not discuss in details the formalisation programme needs but gave an overview of the current employment situation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the employment is regulated through the Employment Agency, from where every year funding is secured for the implementation of the employment Action plan for Roma. For 2018 according to Mr Zelimir Lalic, Head of the Department for National Minorities at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, around 185.000 EUR were spent,

and 133 Roma were employed. According to a research done by the Agency for employment, from around 990 Roma who have gone under employment training programs, around 30 % remained employed.

Based on the info proved by the director of the Federal institute for employment, around 300.000 EUR are underspent and therefore new models for reusing the funds should be proposed.

As presented by the speakers at the National platform:

In the Federal employment centre in 2018 employed were 85 Roma, 57 male and 28 female. Amount spends on employment measures for Roma is around 241.000 EUR.

In the Republic of Srpska, the total funding for employment of Roma is officially spent but abuse of the Roma ethnicity for benefiting other nationalities is reported and this practice should be stopped.

In district Brčko, there was a law implication which created a blockage for one year, but this is mitigated and 5 Roma are being employed.

Challenges:

- Before entering in the system as unemployed or job seekers, the Roma need to give a statement of their ethnicity. Sometimes this procedure is abused by the non Roma reporting them self as Roma in order to benefit the planed measures and sometimes the Roma are not willing to officially state their ethnicity.
- The target population is often without or with very low level of education which requires training and capacity building to perform work skills according to the standards and requests of the employers.
- The grey economy is not regulated. As the funds from the employment centres are very limited, many Roma are working without state benefits. The grey economy is giving people opportunity to earn more than what they can earn trough the employment programs of the job centres. Also, when a person is officially employed, the right on child benefit is lost.

Recommendations:

- By 2020 the goal is around 2000 people to benefit from employment training programs. The data show that around 600 people can be included in the program but their long term stability and employment after the training program is not guaranteed. This means that around 70% of the people, still belong to the group of socially excluded and their involvement should be taken in the next year planning.
- In district Brčko, 9% Roma are regular job seekers; there are and should be some regulative modifications that will easy the procedures for job search, the way of filling the application, both for the employers and for the job seekers (example: ensuring the employer to pay the full agreed amount to the employee must be a secured regulation and it's not for the time being).
- The amount of 2.500 EUR given on annual level for self-employment in district Brčko trough the employment centre, is very low and not sufficient for the young Roma who have ideas and want to start a business. This amount is not covering even the minimal tax. The project for self-employment is not rationale due to the mentioned low amount and it should be increased to approximately 6.000 EUR minimally, at least to allow the applicants to register and regulate the tax payments.
- Other suggestion is the self-employers to be released from tax and registration cost in the first year, their income progress to be measured and after that decision on being able and qualified as tax payers to be brought.
- The civil society must help in disseminating the info for employment options and existing measures, help in writing the application and coordinate data with the employment centres.
- The methodology for employers who are committed to employ Roma is not effective due to the system obligations and needs to be revised in term of timely salary payment.
- The methodology and the application for job applying within the job centres to be modified, better methodology for securing job places and for coordination on cantonal level to be proposed.

- Coordination between the three governmental levels and job centres is a must, discussing employment regulations and methodology definition has to be done in the near future, due to the inability this to be done on a central level.
- For next similar events, beneficiaries of the employment programs and employers to be invited to give aspect of functional and not functional models in order the job centres and institutions to develop more effective methodology.
- Business models and mentoring support to be provided for the start-ups and self-employers, long term models for sustainable employment to be developed.
- Based on the conclusions from the Roma seminar in 2018, establishing a working group for development of new measures for employment to be formed, coordinative meetings were held but due to unknown reason, the group is not functioning.
- Integrative approach that matches housing and employment, while starting with education, is a model that city of Bijeljina is piloting and should be a sample for all the other municipalities. (Example is mentioned in the housing description below).
- Modification of the regulation for self-employment can be and should be envisaged. The action needs a proper filed monitoring and systematic approach, to come up with a solution for effectiveness. The monitoring should determine if people are in reality getting salaries, if they are on real working places or if they are Roma. The civil society is criticizing that this measure is pretty much abused. People are fictively employed or have to give back to the employer the money received as salary.
- When it comes to the national level planning of employment projects, the centres for employment should take part as they have lots of data and can give direct feedback of the proposed project, the functionality and long term sustainability.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina to take in consideration the draft law on social enterprises and adopt a law that will give opportunities for the social enterprises, exempt from taxes, employing hard employable categories, Roma women and single mothers.
- The taxes for employers who will employ social disadvantaged people to be decreased to minimal while the salary to be increased from the minimal.
- The regulations and tax obligations are equal for the social enterprise and big business companies. It should be distinguish according to the employment purpose and the target group of employees.
- The lifelong learning law and its benefits to serve the Roma people and vulnerable groups should be discussed with the employment centres.
- The proposal for tax deduction requires changes in the employment law. At the moment there is no ground or basis for that, as all the measures are not directing and targeting only Roma, the proposal should be more inclusive.
- The Board on Roma to propose a good justification and initiate change in the law for self-employment and initiate a discussion on the law for social enterprise.

HOUSING

According the available information, up to date the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina supported construction of more than 1,000 housing provided to Roma families, while remaining 2,500 Roma families stay in need of housing. This was recognized in the 2018 National Platform and included in the corresponding policy brief document.

The housing situation of Roma in need will be resolved gradually in accordance with the dynamics proposed in the graph above. This way, 200 families will be without sustainable housing solution at the time of the EU accession.

Considering the many levels of governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, information on the possibilities to legalise Roma housing units and Roma settlements are currently not available. Unofficial information suggest that remaining illegal housing and settlements are not constructed on Roma owned land, and that legalisation costs remain overly high for vulnerable Roma to cover them. The social housing models implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be significantly improved by adopting holistic approach and desegregation measures.

In order to address the housing issue of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is necessary to: perform mapping of housing needs and possibilities to legalise Roma housing units and settlements; develop a holistic approach to housing and assess its applicability at the local level; and identify

municipalities that are ready to support Roma settlements legalisation and/or participate in holistic social housing initiatives for Roma.

In order to support implementation of the Action Plan and improving of the housing situation of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Roma Integration action will cooperate with the Government to:

- Support mapping of Roma integration needs in field of housing through the IPA funded mapping exercise. Based on the results of the mapping exercise, currently estimated housing needs and targets can be revised if necessary;
- Organise a housing conference that will propose a holistic approach to housing of Roma based on the comparison of lessons learned and methodology of housing projects and initiatives implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina thus far. The regional conference on holistic approach will be organised back to back with the national conference focused only on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The concept of holistic approach relates to the comprehensive social integration support that combines support in housing with the support in other areas (employment, education, social registration, public services, etc.) As a follow up after the event, the conference is scheduled for 5th of November 2019 in Sarajevo.
- Identify municipalities that express readiness to support Roma housing projects, based on the information collected through the mapping exercise and the housing conference. The mapping exercise and the conference will further show whether it is possible to pursue legalisation of Roma informal settlements and in which municipalities;
- Support the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to prepare at least one holistic housing proposal for donors in one (or more) chosen municipalities.

In the field of housing, even though progress can be seen in municipalities like Kakanj and Bijelina, still the number of those municipalities who are not ready to support Roma housing projects even besides the ministerial funds available every year from the MHRR, the European Delegations funds, donor funds, interest was not shown. From 24 municipalities only 7 answered to the invitation for the National Platform.

The budget for housing targeting Roma for 2018 was available for all municipalities across Bosnia and Herzegovina through an open public call by the MHRR.

For the period 2009-2018, 993 housing units were built from which 578 are built with ministerial budget, while 290 housing units were supported from the project Roma action 1 and 2 and 100 housing unit with the CD project. Around 19,940,400 EUR were dedicated for the housing purposes. During 2018, the projects from 2016-2017 were implemented with budget of almost 1 million EUR. 372 families have benefited from the action in terms of renovation and infrastructure.

In 2018, funds are granted to 13 municipalities for which 54 housing units have to be built, 34 of them are for social housing, 1120 people will be the beneficiaries of these projects.

The city of Bijeljina is investing in social housing. Many of the people in this municipality don't own or have any document that regulates their property rights. The solution for social housing and property right regulation came with the support from Hilswerk and the MHRR as donors. With the support of the Mayor of City of Bijeljina and the civil society organization Otaharin an idea to pilot housing and employment in parallel was well accepted and shows results. On the land where the housing units are built, in the near surrounding greenhouses are established to provide work for the Roma people who live in the housing units. Around 10.000 EUR from the ROMACTED project are secured and planned to be invest in electrical nets for the areas of action.

As a good practise, the municipal budget of the city of Bijeljina has increased from 25.000 EUR to 48.000 EUR requested for 2019-2020.

Municipality of Kakanj, has housing request from 71 families, mapping of the needs is set, by the end of 2019 will have new 50 housing units, and around 1 million EUR is needed to be invested. Every year, the municipality is asking around 50.000 EUR budget for housing purposes. Geo mechanic analyses of the ground where the Roma settlements are built have been done and around 99% of the objects in the Roma settlement are illegally built. The possibility for legalization of the settlement Varda is impossible due to the parcels where is built, the context of the ground, the construction material is mainly from cardboard.

Recommendations:

- A cross section of data for the number of built housing units, funding and number of beneficiaries to be prepared by the NRCP team. Info leaflets to be shared with all the interested parties.
- Besides the help from Caritas and Hilswerk as donors, municipality of Kakanj has needs for investments (due to the above mentioned reason). The Roma have expectations for improving their living conditions, every year on a waiting list are 20 families. The 50.000 EUR from the MHRR given to the municipality of Kakanj to be increased as they are not sufficient and don't match the needs of the families that rapidly increase by number.
- The legalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very expensive process for the Roma and the decision time of granting property documents is very long, new model to deal with the issue should be proposed.
- The social housing is a good investment but leads to segregation. The municipalities and the Government should take care the ethnicity of the inhabitants in the units to be diverse same as the location where they are built, to not be so isolated and populated with Roma only.
- The MHRR to organize a meeting with all the mayors, to see which municipality is interested to implement action plans for Roma and those who are not interested to give a justification for the denial. If the reason is lack of capacity to work on Roma integration, the civil society can give a hand and support the implementation.
- Clear data on housing to be provided as the data for budget approvals from 2016 until the realization in 2020 are not giving a clear picture on the discrepancy in between.
- RIC Kali Sara has long term experience in housing advocacy for relocation, legalisation, social housing, 4 or 5 methodologies on different housing approaches are developed and they need to be communicated and updated now.