ROMA INTEGRATION 2020
Regional Cooperation Council

DATA COLLECTION TO MONITOR THE DECLARATION OF WESTERN BALKANS PARTNERS ON ROMA INTEGRATION AND EU ENLARGEMENT

:: CONCEPT ::

The Prime Ministers from the Western Balkans adopted the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process on 05 July 2019 in Poznan, as part of the Berlin Process. The Declaration sets concrete targets in the areas of employment, housing, education, health, civil registration and non-discrimination that the economies of the Western Balkans are committing to achieve prior to their membership within the European Union.

In order to monitor the progress towards the achievement of the set targets, within the Declaration, the Prime Minister "commit to establish proper **mechanism for monitoring and reporting** on the implementation of the Roma policies, including **data relevant to measure the achievements of the objectives** set forth in this Declaration, by designating the national statistical offices as key responsible institutions for data collection in accordance with their programs."

Collecting data on the situation of Roma has always been a challenge, not only in the Western Balkans, but also across Europe and beyond. There are a number of obstacles to this end, but the most prominent are:

- Ban on collecting data with ethnic identifier(s).
- Not recording ethnicity of Roma when ethnic data are collected.

The ban on collecting data with ethnic identifier(s) exists in a number of European economies, but fortunately not in the Western Balkans economies. In all of the economies covered with the Regional Declaration, collecting ethnic data is not only allowed, but necessary for the implementation of numerous legal provisions, primarily regarding minority rights. The restriction hereby is only in the obligation for the institutions to collect data via **voluntary declaration of ethnicity of the persons**.

In some cases this legal provision is formulated restrictively, banning mandatory collection of ethnic data, effectively preventing forceful collection of ethnic data, but not banning collection of ethnic data altogether. Some institutions in the region, however, interpret this provision as a ban on collecting ethnic data altogether. There is even a case where one and the same institution interprets this provision in the two opposite directions for two different issues. [1]

All of the economies in the region **include ethnic identifiers in the census**, which greatly facilitates establishing monitoring mechanism. The key challenge in this regard is that Roma are allegedly underreported. Of course, this claim cannot be proved with official data, but besides the Roma political representatives and civil society, also certain institutions responsible for implementing activities from the Roma integration strategies testify that the number of Roma according to the census is lower than the reality, as there are far more Roma beneficiaries for certain measures than expected according to the census number. There are two major issues contributing to the underreporting of Roma in the census: there are Roma reluctant to declare their ethnic identity as Roma, and there are alleged instances of enumerators recording different ethnicity in the census form than the one declared by the enumerated person. Lacking other solutions, any mechanism for collecting data about the integration of Roma will need to rely on the voluntary self-declared ethnicity of Roma.

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[1] One of the ministries in the region responsible both for employment and social protection collects ethnic data regarding employment, but refuses to collect ethnic data in social protection referring to the Constitutional provision banning mandatory collection of ethnic data.

The existing statistical data collected with the census may be very beneficial for establishing a survey sample (in case a survey is conducted), providing certain data relevant for Roma integration that are collected with the census, matching administrative data with census data if needed in order to provide cross-reference analysis for certain relevant indicators, etc.

Furthermore, the economies are collecting data with ability for ethnic disaggregation in a number of areas and for a number of indicators relevant for the Roma integration, both including some administrative registers and some statistical exercises. However, there is no systematic way of gathering and analysing the available data. This is evident from the regular annual reports compiled by the governments in the Western Balkans on the integration of Roma submitted to the Roma Integration 2020. The last chapter of the report is asking the governments for impact assessment (statistical data) of their policies for Roma integration. This section is, as a rule, mostly empty, indicating the lack of a mechanism to provide such data on regular basis from the official sources, even for some of the data that are possibly readily available or at least available in a certain form.

Based on this assessment, the Roma Integration 2020 launched an initiative with the government of the Republic of North Macedonia for collecting relevant data to monitor the progress in Roma integration. The initiative is launched given the favourable circumstances: ongoing technical support to the statistical system provided through IPA funding, political will and initiative expressed by the Minister without portfolio responsible for Roma integration, leading role of the economy in the regional process resulting in the Declaration, significant volume of existing administrative and statistical data with ethnic disaggregation possibility, professional readiness by the statistical agency, and initiative and support by the Roma Integration 2020.

The initiative consists of several steps:

1. Establishing a **working group** consisting of representatives from the various institutions involved in the Roma integration policy, with the leading coordination role by the Minister without portfolio and leading professional role by the State Statistical Agency, to define the **content of a specific research on Roma integration** (need for data).
2. Developing **detailed methodology of the research**, consisting of defining the sample and sampling method, defining the "research passport" (**metadata**) with information on all the indicators, along with their definition, method of obtaining, and other relevant information, defining the method of obtaining the data (using both administrative registers and a survey component), developing the database and the analytical procedures, the survey instrument, training procedure for data collectors, etc. This step will be implemented by the experts engaged through the IPA funding and the State Statistical Agency, in cooperation with the other leading partners.
3. **Piloting** the research (including a field survey) and producing the **results** of the survey, along with a brief **assessment** of the survey with recommendations for its **improvements** if necessary.
4. **Adopting the statistical research** as part of the regular statistical programme of the economy, as a regular statistical exercise that will be conducted each 2 or 3 years.

It is important for the research content to include the key indicators needed to monitor the trends regarding the achievement of the objectives set with the Regional Declaration. As a minimum, the indicators should, therefore, include:

1. Employment:
    a. Employment rate
    b. Employment rate in the public sector
2. Housing
    a. Legal (or illegal) housing units rate/number
    b. Social housing use rate/number (or homelessness rate)
3. Education
    a. Primary education enrolment rate
    b. Primary education completion rate

    c. Secondary education enrolment rate
    d. Secondary education completion rate

4. Health
    a. Universal health insurance coverage rate

5. Civil registration
    a. Number of unregistered persons (citizenship and/or birth)

6. Non-discrimination / anti-Gypsyism
    a. Discrimination experience rate (as proposed by FRA or another relevant indicator)

Besides these indicators, it would be important for the governments to produce and use other data relevant for their Roma integration policies. For the set of such additional indicators various proposals may be taken into consideration, including the adopted regional monitoring template (Roma Integration 2020), the indicators proposed at EU level (by FRA led working group), the regular regional survey (conducted by the UNDP, the World Bank and the European Commission), etc. The aim should be to feed the Roma integration policies in the economies in the region, which are mutually interrelated and include, besides the Regional Declaration, the national strategies and action plans, the joint operational conclusions and other related processes.

Regarding the methodology of collecting the necessary data, appropriate methods shall be proposed by the experts funded by EU and the statistical professionals. It is important to highlight that this statistical exercise should, to the extent possible, rely on the data that exist and are regularly officially collected. Furthermore, the following principles shall guide the exercise:

- Replicability (the exercise must be formulated as a time series)
- Comparability (the selected indicators, their definitions and methods of collection should be comparable internationally and regionally – follow international statistical standards)
- Applicable (it should be realistic to conduct the research and produce the data in the Republic of North Macedonia, but also potentially across the region).

Once the methodology is prepared and the statistical exercise is piloted in the Republic of North Macedonia, the detailed elaboration of the exercise should be presented to the other governments in the region, with the proposal to conduct similar processes and establish a repetitive statistical exercise for collecting data on Roma integration in each economy.

At the regional level, the Roma Integration 2020 may continue to function as a catalyst for the annual reporting of the governments, and may extend this function with a proper regional mechanism for gathering, systematising, saving and publishing analytics based on the nationally collected data, at the regional level. Such function may be developed either in line with the online reporting method of the European Commission (DG Just) if such method is elaborated and able to incorporate the region, or as a separate regional online reporting platform.