

Roma Integration 2020

2ND TASK FORCE MEETING

20-21 September 2017, Belgrade

:: REPORT ::

The Task Force of the Roma Integration 2020 project is a body steering the project implementation within the wider process of the EU enlargement process. It is comprised of the designated National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs) from each participating economy, two Roma civil society representatives and one representative of the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat, the European Commission and the Open Society Foundation. The functioning of the Task Force is regulated by its Rules of Procedure (see [Annex I](#)). The Second Meeting of the Task Force took place from 20 to 21 September 2017 in Belgrade.

This report is reflecting the content and conclusions of the Task Force meeting by agenda items:

Day I, 20 September 2017

1. Opening and Tour de Table
2. Roma Integration 2020 implementation
3. First Annual reporting cycle experience
4. EU Framework for NRIS up to 2020
5. Roma Integration 2020 Evaluation of Phase I
6. Needs assessment and Calendar of Activities 2017-2018

Day II, 21 September 2017

7. Budgeting for Roma integration policies

1. OPENING AND TOUR DE TABLE

Mr Orhan USEIN, Team Leader of the Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 Action Team opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the Task Force. He recalled that the official language of the Task Force is English, and that translation in the languages of the participating economies will be provided this time on exceptional basis, given the contributions expected from each participant during the discussions. He informed that Turkey will not be present at the meeting, though it will provide comments in writing on any decisions taken, if it deems necessary. He reminded of the Rules of Procedure of the Task Force.

The list of participants at the Task Force meeting is as per below:

National Roma Contact Points

Ms Ina KOKHEDIMA (Replacing Ms Merita XHAF AJ), Specialist for Roma and Egyptian community, Directory of Social Inclusion, General Directory of Social Policies, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Albania.

Ms Saliha DJUDERIJA, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina accompanied by Mr Adnan JASIKA, Senior Associate for the development of projects within the competence of the Secretary with a special assignment, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees.

Mr Samka IBRAIMOSKI, Minister without Portfolio in charge of implementing the Strategy for advancing the position of Roma of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accompanied by Ms Senada LAMOVS KA, Advisor, Cabinet of the Minister without portfolio and Ms Maber a

KAMBERI, Head of the Sector for Coordination and Technical Assistance, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Mr Habit HAJREDINI, Director, Office for Good Governance/Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo.

Mr Leon GJOKAJ, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Minority Rights of Montenegro.

Ms Nina MITIC Assistant Minister, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy of Serbia, accompanied by Ms Danijela LAKATOS, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy.

Civil Society Representatives

Mr Osman BALIC

Ms Xhesika KORA

European Commission

Mr Morten JUNG, Senior Advisor to the Director of Directorate D Western Balkans, DG NEAR

Ms Dorthe Helene VEDEL FORS, Assistant to the Adviser in charge of coordination of Roma policy, DG NEAR

Open Society Foundations

Ms Neda KORUNOVSKA, Team Manager, Roma Initiatives Office

Regional Cooperation Council

Ms Gordana DEMSER, Legal and Political Advisor/Head of Office of the Secretary General

Technical support to the Task Force was provided by the Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 Action Team:

Mr Orhan USEIN, Team Leader

Ms Aleksandra BOJADJIEVA, Policy Expert

Ms Alenka VERBOLE, Policy Expert

Ms Rada KRSTANOVIC, Administrative Assistant

The agenda of the meeting was adopted unanimously. The Agenda is attached in [Annex II](#).

Mr JUNG welcomed the participants on behalf of the EU. He congratulated the participating partners for the good work accomplished so far in such a short time, placing Roma Integration in the perspective of the EU integration process.

He further underlined that:

- The importance of the integration of Roma in the context of the enlargement process has been reconfirmed in the European Commission President JUNCKER's "State of the Union" address highlighting homework and progress necessary on fundamental rights;
- Integration of Roma is a challenge for the enlargement region, hence the importance of the Roma Integration 2020 (RI2020) project - which provides a platform for cooperation in the region;

⁷This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- The work on Roma integration as supported by the RI2020 is part of the enlargement process, preparing the participants to assume the same obligations regarding Roma that apply to the EU Member States (MS), according to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies;
- While all participants have strategies and action plans in place, the focus should now be on their implementation;
- The format for monitoring and reporting within the RI2020 project is in line with the EU standards, and should continue to be followed;
- Budgeting of Roma integration policies is essential; Ministries of Finance (MoFs) need to be on board in the overall process; while funds are available, the challenge is to develop good national policies and programmes that make a difference on the ground; therefore, all relevant sectoral policies should take account of Roma specific issues when planning and budgeting;
- The enlargement region should be closely associated with the EU's Roma policy framework where it belongs and not be seen as a third party, and make their input to the post-2020 vision;
- The European Commission is committed to work with the NRCs and continue supporting this RI2020 platform, given its importance for the benefit and relevance for the whole region.

Ms KORUNOVSKA stressed that the OSF is committed to integration of Roma for more than 30 years, as democratic societies need to fit all citizens and ensure decent life for all, including vulnerable groups and Roma. The RI2020 builds on the lesson learnt from the Roma Decade, which put in place the institutional framework and dialogue on Roma integration, but with limited impact on the ground and with the policy isolated from the mainstream processes. Therefore, the RI2020 core is in mainstreaming Roma integration while ensuring institutional integrity, coordination and outreach of public services equally to all. The key is not to leave Roma behind on the path to EU. She also stressed that the OSF has provided for the participation of civil society and for their constructive dialogue with the governments.

2. ROMA INTEGRATION 2020 IMPLEMENTATION

Mr USEIN thanked the NRCs for their cooperation since the launch of the RI2020 project, and commended on their commitment and achievements. He reminded of the First Task Force meeting last year where the reporting template was adopted and recalled the mandate, objectives, modus operandi and activities of the RI2020 project.

Presenting the main achievements of the RI2020 project and the effective implementation of the planned activities, the following points were made:

- ***Institutional structure***: NRCs and inter-ministerial bodies (IMBs) are appointed; there is need for strengthening their capacities through bilateral dialogue and demand driven interventions; IMBs need to include representatives from ministries of finance and state statistics;
- ***Strengthening capacities***: is demand driven (governments are encouraged to make requests to the RI2020 for capacity building), and so far has been done on budgeting; further interventions will be done on monitoring and other relevant areas;
- ***National Platforms (Public Dialogue Forums)***: they reflect on the past (presentation of the monitoring reports) and define priorities for the next budgetary year; this year's platforms have been firmly correlated with the Roma Seminars by also reflecting on the implementation of the operational conclusions; they also mirror the National Platforms in EU Member States;
- ***Policy Recommendations***: policy papers, including action plans and budget proposals have been produced based on the discussions at the National Platforms and other project activities; the results are that action planning is improved and majority of policy recommendations have been adopted / considered for adoption;
- ***Regional cooperation***: monitoring and reporting standards have been agreed at the first Task Force meeting; further work on defining regional standards on budgeting Roma policies will follow;

- **Regional Workshops:** two workshops have been held on monitoring and reporting, and on public budgeting for Roma policies;
- **Regional streamlining:** Roma integration has been incorporated in regional cooperation on non-discrimination in employment, monitoring of the SEE 2020 Strategy (Balkan Barometer), etc.

Summarizing the achievements and challenges, Mr Usein underlined the success in promoting structured dialogue on Roma integration through the National Platforms, transposing policy recommendations formulated within the RI2020 into actual commitments, regionally adopting and nationally piloting the monitoring and reporting standards. As key issues for further engagement, he highlighted the need to advance the budgeting processes and practices, resolve specific issues in the institutional setup in some of the economies and strengthen the role of the NRCs, further improve the monitoring process by officially engaging the state statistics.

For more details please see Mr USEIN's presentation in [Annex III](#).

Further, Mr Usein has given a regional overview on the main achievements and challenges of the participating economies, based on their 2016 monitoring reports. Progress is evident in education, notably in inclusion to preschool education and somewhat in desegregation and special schools. Nevertheless, on-going projects need to be translated into institutional solutions.

The issue of undocumented Roma is progressively being solved and the number of undocumented persons currently is at the minimum. Discrimination and prejudice towards Roma that prevails (including in education) and the increasing hate crimes and hate speech have to be addressed.

Set-backs in employment and housing are noted throughout the region. In employment, the affirmative measures should be long-term and provide for sustainable employment, while social entrepreneurship should be further promoted.

In housing, laws on legalization may work for the benefit of Roma, but there is a risk of Roma being excluded and thus may create adverse impact. As the area of housing is expensive, integral approach for full social inclusion is recommended. Some databases on the situation of Roma in housing exist, and serve as good examples.

In health, the key responsible institutions should do much more to comply with their obligations and significantly improve their reporting.

At a more general level, the NRCs should be better acknowledged, respected and strengthened, as well as the IMBs. Budgeting of Roma policies, including control of spending, reporting, and mainstreaming into general policies, remain challenging. Impact assessment demonstrated through hard statistically disaggregated data has to be improved through official engagement of state statistics.

FOLLOW UP:

- RI2020 project activities should continue to be implemented with the planned dynamic and through jointly agreed content by the Action Team, the NRCs, the Commission and OSF; NRCs will propose content and activities as needed;
- Institutional setup issues will be further discussed and resolved through bilateral dialogue among the Action Team and the NRCs, including by taking steps to formalize the monitoring and reporting standards and strongly involving state statistics and officials responsible for budgeting;
- The correlation of the National Platforms and other RI2020 project activities with the Roma Seminars and the resulting operational conclusions should be further strengthened;
- RI2020 will focus on improving the budgeting standards and practices throughout the region during the following period of implementation;
- RI2020 will consider increasing its focus on the challenging priority areas of employment and housing and provide for more corresponding content into the project activities.

3. FIRST ANNUAL REPORTING CYCLE EXPERIENCE

The National Roma Contact Points presented the 2016 monitoring reports. Discussion evolved around experiences, challenges, lessons learnt, recommendations for improvements on the monitoring template, implementation pace of strategies/action plans, impact of policies, prioritization of Roma integration within mainstream policies, the institutional structures for Roma integration policies, timing of the reports, integrated monitoring feeding different reporting requirements (including for the implementation of the Roma Seminar Conclusions) and the possibility to use digital platform.

Albania: Thanked the RI2020 for all the support. The template was found challenging, in particular the impact assessment part. The economy has no disaggregated data on Roma and Egyptian population. The only official data for Roma and Egyptian are those from the 2011 Census that show only total numbers. For the purpose of the 2016 report, the data produced by the 2014 Soros Foundation survey were used. More reliable data should be provided from the next year, for which Albania needs the support by the RI2020. This is also relevant for the pre-screening process on human rights, where the gaps in the Albanian legislation compared to the EU should be identified and eliminated.

The training on Roma and Egyptian sensitive budgeting and the regional workshop on budgeting were mentioned as positive and useful exercises. The need for developing a methodology that could be used across the region was stressed. It is hoped that RI2020 project will continue to work on this issue. Albania is a model economy for gender equality budgeting and is determined to become also one for Roma sensitive budgeting.

The report on the implementation of the National Action Plan showed that the civil registry was the most successful area of implementation in 2016, with 463 Roma and Egyptian being registered successfully. In education, 55 Roma and Egyptians received scholarships. Many Roma and Egyptians received health cards for universal coverage which guarantee free access to health services. Support to NGOs to train Roma as health mediators has been provided. In employment, 69 Roma and Egyptians have been enrolled in vocational training, and the law on social enterprises recognizing Roma and Egyptians as specific beneficiary group has been approved by the government and awaits adoption. With regards to housing, the new Law on Social Housing was mentioned that is awaiting the final approval in the Parliament. The Law foresees obligation of local authorities for relocation of Roma and Egyptians to decent housing and guarantees 5 percent of the social housing to be reserved for Roma and Egyptians.

Questions were raised by the civil society representative on how the government determines the national budget and donors' contribution and whether the existing law was used to resolve cases of undocumented persons? Ms KOKHEDIMA clarified that the reporting template shows both sources of funding, but at the moment, because of the structural changes including the merge of ministries of finance with two other ministries, comprehensive information on the budgeting cannot be shared. She also confirmed that the existing laws were applied for undocumented persons.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The process of collecting data encompassed numerous bodies coordinated by the NRCP with the expert working group of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees and the Board for Roma of the Council of Ministers. The reporting process is seen as very important, the institutions have increased their responsiveness, and the impact assessment is considered as a key mechanism to determine the success of the policy. It shall be used as a model for other policies as well.

Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Template as an annex to the Action Plan and it will be published in the Official Gazette which will allow for all stakeholders to be informed of their obligations.

The funds for the implementation of the Action Plan are divided into budget allocated by the Council of Ministers through an intervention grant and (semi-defined) funds sought from donors. The most important improvement with the new action plan is that the budget is realistic. It is also important to work on developing regional projects, possibly through coordination and facilitation provided by the RI2020.

Quality and availability of disaggregated data is a challenge. NGOs and IOs did not provide sufficient information, which should be improved. Lots of funds have been invested, including EU funding, however the benefit for Roma is not specifically measured. Efforts were made to convince other

stakeholders to share their data with the NRCP. The replication of the exercise on mapping the needs of Roma was announced.

An important achievement has been the approval of the Action Plan (2017-2020), although still covering employment, housing and health, but not education that is treated separately and in a way insufficient to reduce the gap. Bosnia and Herzegovina has seven local action plans (to be increased to 15 next year) and is trying to secure funds for implementation. Local governments and communities lack understanding on the affirmative measures approach which represents an increasing need to treat more vulnerable groups jointly with Roma.

Efforts are being made to use the existing indicators to show the socio-economic gaps between Roma and other communities. Another challenge is the relevance of data, particularly for cases of Roma “invisible” to the system, such as those not registered as unemployed. The government will collaborate with NGOs to identify additional indicators for Roma integration. The initiative to integrate the monitoring system and thus facilitate the reporting process of the institutions is supported.

The NRCP of Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed that the monitoring and reporting template should remain as it is, adding that it is necessary to plan an approach that works for all the vulnerable groups, and stressed that the situation of Roma has changed over the years. Resolving the issue of undocumented persons and the progress in housing in the economy were particularly mentioned. It was also stressed that the operational conclusions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are strongly related to the economy’s strategy and action plan and to the Roma Integration 2020.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: There is political will to promote Roma integration, but allocation of appropriate budget is a challenge. Currently the 2018 budget is being planned. It is planned that the reporting template shall be approved by the government and become obligatory. The 2016 Report has not been submitted, but will be completed as soon as possible pending gathering the necessary data. The process of data collection started and the challenges observed so far are the lack of data: baseline, and disaggregated by sex; as well as on budget. The National Statistic Office will start research in 2018 to address all the indicators which will allow also for collection of data on Roma.

Although the report has not been submitted, information was shared on the implementation of the action plan in 2016, including: 500 Roma children included in preschool and taught by Roma teaching assistants; 650 scholarships to Roma secondary school students and 250 to university students are provided by the Ministry of Education along with tutorship and mentorship; 12 Roma Information Centres are functioning; Conditional Cash Transfer is a mainstream measure for socially deprived families that receive additional cash transfer if children are regular at school, and Roma benefit from this measure; 130 Roma are employed in the public sector; employment in the private sector has not moved forward significantly, but the plan is to extend the active employment measures with specific measures for Roma; 150 persons received documents, 550 still remain undocumented (work to improve the situation is ongoing); the Roma health mediators programme is ongoing, but institutionalization is still pending; 12 local action plans including budget are adopted for integration of (Roma) refugees.

Kosovo*: The 2016 report is available on the website. A particular problem is to unify the report for the three communities: Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. It was proposed to add an introductory part in the report to allow elaboration on priorities, as well as to disaggregate data by age, with particular intention to assess the situation of children. In each of the relevant line ministries a focal point has been designated as responsible for implementation of the 2017 Strategy and Action Plan.

Reference was made to collection of data i.e. on education, where different structures including ministries and national statistical office successfully collaborated, while employment on the other side has been a burning issue. A need was expressed to collect data from the local level. On a positive note, there is cooperation with the NGOs - the monthly meetings of the inter-ministerial body are combined with consultative meetings with 18 NGOs. There are also coordination meetings with donors, two held in the previous year and four per year expected from the next year. The main challenge has been that the implementation of the action plan has only started in 2017, but some efforts were made before that and these are included in the report.

Progress has been made in education with programmes and curriculum in Romani language and in fighting discrimination.

Mr USEIN stressed that the engagement at the local level is crucial, but RI2020 deals with the central government, while other initiatives, such as EU funded ROMACTED[†] implemented by the Council of Europe exist to engage local level. The use of the term Roma as an umbrella term used by the international community, including the EC, was explained. He added that Kosovo* can, at its discretion, use disaggregated data for three communities.

Montenegro: The NRCP stressed that Roma integration requires a multi-sectoral and long-term approach and that many significant changes were made in Montenegro, including the adoption of the 2016 National Strategy and its Action Plan with indicators and budget. He informed that the quarterly meetings of the Commission for Monitoring of the Implementation take place. Besides representatives from ministries, Roma civil society and the Roma National Council have each one seat in the Commission. There are several local action plans. The 2016 Report can be found on the website, and the operational conclusions adopted with difficulties are simultaneously monitored.

In education, the number of Roma has increased four to five times (depending on the level) compared to 2001/2002 (1.7% of the total in primary education are Roma, and 0.4% in secondary are Roma; the number of Roma students is doubled, now at 20). The government provides scholarships in the amount of 60 EUR in secondary and 150 EUR in university education. There are no unemployed Roma with university education and affirmative measures for employment of persons belonging to ethnic minorities exists, although employment in the public sector is challenging (data collection on this issue is ongoing according to the law obliging institutions to ensure proportional representation of ethnic minorities). Housing interventions supported by IPA led to dismantling the two biggest refugee camps, but the domicile Roma complaint for not benefiting from housing programmes.

The issue of institutionalizing teaching assistants was raised, and the NRCP ensured that it is planned for the next year and that the Ministry of Education has planned a budget for 20 teaching assistants. Furthermore, the issue of informal Roma settlements was raised in relation to the pending Law regulating illegal buildings. It was clarified that the mentioned Law concerns all the illegal constructions, and that it is expected to become effective from 2018, guaranteeing that no one shall be left roofless.

Serbia: Thanked the RCC RI2020 for the support. According to the NRCP, Serbia has a good framework for Roma integration, including the Roma integration strategy and action plan, action plan on minorities and action plan on Chapter 23, as well as an internal action plan of the government that is currently being revised and shall include Roma issues. The adoption of the action plan was difficult as the budgeting was done according to the principles required by the EC.

The NRCP sent the reporting template to all the relevant institutions with instructions to fill it in, but some institutions were not able to complete it, and sent narrative contributions instead. The cooperation was assessed as good with the exception of the Ministry of Health. Statistical data, particularly from MICS (multiple indicator cluster survey) were included, as well as data from a local level database managed by the state statistical office that was analysed with the help of the consultant engaged by the RI2020. Statistical and budget data are particularly challenging, and the government requests assistance for the next year reporting.

On the issue of undocumented persons, the NRCP explained that the law on registering residence has been changed to allow for registration at the address of the social centres. This allowed 20 000 persons to register to receive citizenship status. The law on non-judicial settlement of cases also assisted in resolving the issue.

The civil society representatives had several comments regarding Serbia, including the fact that the institutional structure (including official documents and designated persons and bodies) has become too complicated and unclear, both for the Roma integration policy and the Chapter 23 action plan. It was noted that readiness, competence and professional seriousness of the responsible officials is needed to make changes, and that implementation is a must.

Following the presentation of the participating NRCPs, the Task Force meeting continued with a discussion and decisions on the monitoring and reporting standards. It was concluded that the monitoring and reporting template is adopted as final without any changes. It was further discussed and agreed that the monitoring and reporting process within the RI2020 shall be used to serve other

[†] ROMACTED - Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level, is a Joint Programme between the European Union (DG NEAR) and the Council of Europe.

reporting obligations on Roma integration of the government, including towards the EU and other international bodies. To achieve this, the RI2020 project shall provide additional technical and expert support to the governments to build their capacities to use the monitoring and reporting process as an integrated mechanism for reporting on the integration of Roma.

It was agreed by the participants that the examples of Bosnia and Herzegovina which adopted, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia which announced adoption of the template as official part of the strategy / action plan, will be followed by all the participating economies.

On the topic of the timing of reports, it was agreed that the annual reports will be submitted by the end of June each year. It was further agreed that the part of the report elaborating the measures undertaken by the governments shall be updated with available data by December each year, covering the ongoing year, thus ensuring relevant input to the EU reporting process and facilitating the drafting of the report due the following June.

Further, the NRCPs discussed the initiative of the RI2020 to establish a regional online platform for monitoring and reporting. Explanation was provided that such practice is already in place within the EU, and that it will bring the countries closer to such EU practices. A number of issues were raised in regards to this initiative, including the need to clearly define the persons authorized to upload data taking into account their roles and responsibilities within the public administration, the need to clarify when and who is confirming the data as final for a specific period, the need to store data periodically to track progress, and the need to harmonize such regional online platform with the existing national online platforms, such as the RomAlb in Albania and the GIS in Serbia. The RI2020 Action Team Leader explained that the idea for a regional online monitoring and reporting platform is at its beginning stage, and that all the raised issues and any other issues raised by the NRCPs shall be duly taken into account during the discussions leading to a possible development of such platform.

Furthermore, Mr Jung spoke of the EU reporting database in place as of 2017 that could be used by the RI2020 participating economies and could be seen as a part of the accession process. He suggested organizing a workshop jointly with the EU to look at how reporting mechanisms evolved in the EU learning from its experiences and mirroring it in the region.

FOLLOW UP:

- The Task Force decided that the monitoring and reporting template is adopted as final without changes and that the reporting deadline is June each year covering the previous year and an update with available data for the part on implemented measures shall be provided by December each year covering the current year;
- The participating economies agreed to follow up on the decision on the regional monitoring and reporting standards by officially adopting/recognizing the template as part of their strategies / action plans;
- The RI2020 project shall provide further technical and expert assistance to the governments to ensure practical implementation of the monitoring and reporting standards and use it as integrated mechanism catering for all the relevant reporting requirements on the integration of Roma;
- The RI2020 project shall explore ways for further streamlining with the EU reporting system by drafting a proposal for a regional online reporting platform in consultation with the NRCPs and in line with the EU reporting system, possibly also by organizing experience sharing activity for the enlargement region to understand better the EU reporting platform.

4. EU FRAMEWORK FOR NRIS UP TO 2020

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 - part referring to the enlargement region - was recalled to start the discussion on the future of this EU policy.

It was explained that an input from the NRCPs from the enlargement economies is expected as part of the consultation process of the assessment and the planning of the future of the EU Framework, particularly in the sense of the changes needed for the enlargement region to fully benefit from this EU policy.

The idea to draft a joint declaration/statement on behalf of the Western Balkans and Turkey that would recognize the need for continuous work on Roma integration was reiterated. The NRCPs were encouraged to consider committing to continue with their efforts to integrate Roma through all-inclusiveness of national and local institutions, mainstream approach, monitoring and reporting, financial commitments for the action plans, as well as to consider requesting for cooperation with the EU Member States, and commitment to cooperate with CSOs and with IOs.

Ms VEDEL FORS provided further elaboration on the topic. She referred to two policy documents: the 2011 Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020 and the 2013 recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. In relation to that she informed that the EU asked for a respective mid-term evaluation. She expressed hope that the Western Balkans and Turkey will contribute to the post 2020 Roma integration Agenda. She has also informed of the on-line consultation (with deadline 25 October 2017) and added that all NRCPs were invited to contribute. She further informed that DG JUST will launch an external evaluation on 2011 EU Framework in the Member states and the enlargement region. She shared that the next EU Roma Platform will take place from 27 to 28 November and all NRCPs will receive an invitation.

It is foreseen that by January/February next year, draft conclusions of the evaluation will be available. The NRCPs were invited to be involved in the foreseen consultation meeting/process to provide their input to EU policies relevant to the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The 3rd EU Roma week will take place at the end of March, where participation of NRCPs is strongly encouraged. She supported the proposal for the possible joint Declaration which would contribute to the EU policies.

The discussion that followed focused on brainstorming on what the EU Framework for NRIS means for the non EU countries, what needs to be changed and how the enlargements region could benefit from the EU policy.

The RI2020 team noted that such document may be seen as a positive contribution of the region, and that an action plan on drafting the declaration is needed in order to consult all the relevant parties until signature. The participating economies underlined the importance by which the non-EU countries show their will to work closely with the EU and promote stronger cooperation on Roma.

It was agreed that the region has a lot to offer and supported the idea of closer cooperation with the EU Member States in implementation of the EU Framework. The representatives of the European Commission emphasized the need to consider the EU agenda in terms of determining when and where the region can launch its document to get maximum political back up and visibility. It was further proposed that the NRCPs should initiate and the RCC headquarters should take political lead in discussing this matter with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Euro-Integration/National IPA Coordinators.

FOLLOW UP:

- RI 2020 to take the lead on drafting a joint document and coordinate consultations with the NRCPs on the document. The EU agenda should be considered in terms of the proper timing. NRCPs to initiate and RCC headquarters to coordinate the consultations at higher political level.

5. ROMA INTEGRATION 2020 EVALUATION OF PHASE I

Mr USEIN recalled that the RI2020 will end in 2018 and reminded the Task Force members of the possibility for its continuation with a Phase II. He encouraged the participants to provide their feedback on achievements so far, modifications needed, activities that may be increased, decreased, dropped or added.

The NRCP of Bosnia and Herzegovina proposed that the format of the project is retained and all the activities and technical support are continued until the practices and procedures are well established in the countries. This includes budgeting and action planning support, regional workshops and meetings, monitoring and reporting, national platforms.

The second phase of the project may also focus more on the implementation of the policies through expert support. Exchange of practices and policies with EU Member States may be introduced. Improving the participation of the civil society with a view to use the potential of the NGOs for the implementation of the policy shall be explored with the second phase of the project.

The expert support should continue in the limits of what is possible. Monitoring and evaluation of Roma integration policies is still a challenge for the economies, thus there is a need for continuous support. Partnerships with other programmes and projects should be established in order to use the existing technical and expert support. The government appreciates the flexibility of the team and the ability to adjust and cater to its demands. Furthermore, it was proposed that the RI2020 project is used as a platform to include the integration of Roma in the planning of IPA and development of IPA funded projects. In this sense, it was also proposed to work on the capacities of the NRCPs to work with the IPA programming departments.

The NRCP from Kosovo* agreed with the previous discussion. It was further noted that the National Platforms produce important initiatives with the civil society that need to be developed and followed up. Regarding the Task Force, it was proposed that the cooperation, communication and dialogue are increased. The regional meetings and trainings were particularly noted as useful with a recommendation to continue and possibly increase. Mechanisms for cooperation with the civil society should be also developed both at national and regional level.

The delegation from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia added that the dialogue should be maintained, particularly through the regional workshops that are useful, contribute to the regional standardization that may be transferred to national level, and provide for capacity building.

The implementation and coordination of the action plans and local action plans is assessed very difficult thus expert support from the project team was proposed in this regard. The Task Force meetings were also assessed as useful. It was proposed that monitoring and budgeting should remain in the focus of the project. The specific context is that there are a number of relevant priorities other than the integration of Roma, thus funds allocated for the later are insufficient and the NRCP needs support in promoting this priority higher on the political agenda. It was proposed that the ministries of finances are involved to make sure there is proper budgeting. The country also announced a regional round table on undocumented people organized with the OSCE, and invited NRCPs to participate and RI2020 to support this regional cooperation.

The NRCP of Montenegro supported the project and expressed satisfaction from the support received through the project with a recommendation to continue.

The representative of Serbia recommended that the National Platform serving to prepare for the Roma Seminar should continue. As for the regional workshops, the representative informed that there was great interest from public officials for participation. It was also suggested that national replication of the regional workshop was useful and should be considered to continue. Finally, it was noted that Serbia's strategy was for the period up to 2025, thus the country would need continuous support beyond 2020.

Mr Jung complimented the flexibility of the project in the sense that it relates closely to the agenda set by the beneficiaries themselves. It was also highlighted that the project serves as an interface between the region and the EU. Expert support and training is obviously welcomed and follow-up in practical terms is a good proposal. This should also take into account the activities of the ROMACTED project, as well as other EU funded initiatives (including TAIEX, Twinning, and input to the country progress reports). It is crucial to do timely and detailed planning, in particularly when it comes to support from national and regional IPA programmes on integration of Roma. NRCPs were thus encouraged to do their own part in the dialogue with the ministries of finance, departments for IPA programming, and other important stakeholders.

FOLLOW UP:

- The Action Team should include the NRCPs inputs and proposals into the proposal for the Phase II of the Roma Integration 2020 project
- RI2020 to support the regional cooperation on undocumented persons initiated by the NRCP from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

6. NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CALENDAR OF UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

The discussion first focused on the needs of the participating economies for technical and expert assistance by the RCC RI2020 project.

- **Albania:** Expressed the need for expert/technical assistance to complete the impact assessment part of the report.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Requested a national donor conference; capacity building on prioritizing; following up on specific topics raised through national and regional activities; continued work with the consultant engaged by the RI2020 on monitoring and reporting; training on IPA programming (TAIEX) including consultations with the civil society.
- **Kosovo*:** Assistance at the municipal level on how to budget for the National and Local Action Plans.
- **Serbia:** Requested capacity building on developing specific indicators and calculating budget spending for Roma for the public servants at the ministries and local governments.
- **The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:** Requested expert help on monitoring, including budget spending; donor coordination in the area of housing at national level; support for the next year budgeting and cooperation with the ministry of finance; joint capacity building for IPA and Roma integration departments from the ministries on IPA regional and national programming for Roma integration.
- **Montenegro:** Requested that the regional online reporting platform is developed, providing for analysis of implementation progress; capacity building on budgeting; support with monitoring budgetary spending for Roma integration, particularly in the case of mainstream measures.
- **CSOs:** Required training on monitoring Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) related procedures, monitoring IPA spending and other budgeting procedures.

Mr USEIN reminded that the TAIEX expert pool could be used for securing expertise. He reiterated on the RI2020 mandate focusing on monitoring and developing proper and realistic budget. He encouraged the NRCPs to formulate requests focusing on these two areas.

Ms KORUNOVSKA informed that civil society coalitions will also report on progress and that the OSF is supporting in each of the participating economies shadow reports on the implementation of the action plans, as well as public investments to determine whether reforms are reaching Roma at the same level as the rest of population. The idea is that in the future, the civil society reports shall be discussed jointly with the annual report by the government at the Public Dialogue Forum organized within the Roma Integration 2020 project.

In the second part of the discussion, the calendar of activities for 2017 was discussed and agreed upon as follows:

- **Regional Donor Coordination Conference** “Filling in the Budget Gaps in Roma Integration Policies”. It was agreed to postpone this workshop to 2 November 2017 in Tirana.
- **Regional Workshop on Anti-Gypsyism**, Berlin, Germany, 12-13 December 2017.
- **Public Dialogue Forums:** Bosnia and Herzegovina - 25 September 2017; Kosovo* - 17 October 2017; The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - beginning of November 2017.
- **Regional conference on people without documents** (supported by the OSCE Mission to Skopje) Skopje, 30 October to 1 November 2017.
- **RCC Streamlining:** Balkan Barometer launch event - 9 October 2017;
- **EU/international participation:** EU Parliamentary Hearing on Roma in the Western Balkans - 11 October 2017; and EU Platform on Roma Integration - 27 to 28 November 2017.

The Roma Integration 2020 Action Team presented the Task Force with the planned calendar of activities for 2018 as follows:

- **Regional workshops:**
 - o Integral approaches to housing for Roma - May 2018;
 - o Access to jobs and decent work for Roma - November 2018;
- **Public Dialogue Forums** should be organized between June - October 2018;
- **Country consultation meetings** - January/February 2018; May/June 2018 and October/November 2018;

- **National workshops on monitoring and budgeting** for Roma Integration should be organized between March - October 2018 in order to align with appropriate budget calendars;
- **3rd Task Force meeting** - December 2018;
- **RCC Streamlining:** Regional Conference on Education - February 2018;
- **EU/international participation:** EU Roma Week in Brussels - March 2018.

The Task Force endorsed the proposed calendar and the National Roma Contact Points agreed to specify the dates for the 2018 Public Dialogue Forums as soon as possible.

Ms VEDEL FORS suggested that a regional workshop is organized on how to use the results of the surveys and analyses performed by the UNDP and World Bank on behalf of the Commission, DG NEAR, on Roma statistics and returnees. This might be carried out in cooperation with the UNDP and WB.

Ms KORUNOVSKA will provide more information on the two OSF initiatives - the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture and the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative.

FOLLOW UP:

- Continue the technical and expert support, including national trainings on monitoring and budgeting;
- Implement project activities according to the agreed calendar of activities;
- National Roma Contact Points shall specify the dates for the 2018 Public Dialogue Forums as soon as possible and inform the Action Team;
- Explore possibilities to discuss the results of the 2017 UNDP/WB Roma survey in cooperation with the UNDP and WB.

7. BUDGETING FOR ROMA INTEGRATION POLICIES

Ms Mila JEZDIMIROVIC, RI2020 budgeting expert has led an interactive training session which encompassed the presentations by the National Roma Contact Points on the 2017-18 budgeting cycle, as well as the budgets planned for Roma integration policies. Further, the participants discussed the possibilities to include budgeting experts in the inter-ministerial bodies on Roma Integration on a regular basis. Discussions on how to proceed with the Roma Sensitive Budgeting (based on good practices from Gender Sensitive and Environmental Friendly Budgeting processes) were conducted as part of the module.

The first session focused on advancement of the process of Roma budgeting at the regional level. The expert provided arguments for why Roma budgeting can be seen as an advantage in the EU accession process. She discussed the challenges that include lack of capacities to access the funds as well lack of knowledge and capacities in public administrations. As the main argument for budgeting Roma integration, the expert highlighted that the majority of Roma are unemployed thus not contributing to the public budget, and are often social welfare beneficiaries which means they receive passive assistance. Integration policy may serve to reverse this and ensure Roma contribute to the public budget.

In this regard, participants discussed that there are many unemployed Roma not registered as such, which represents an obstacle in targeting unemployed Roma through the traditional public services. Ms JEZDIMIROVIC stressed that the ministries of finance guard the national budget, but funds should be available for obligations accepted for a given year, including for the implementation of the NRIS.

The second session focused on priorities and proposals on how to promote Roma integration budgeting. Ms JEZDIMIROVIC spoke of sources of financing and special strategies to assess the financial impacts. She stressed that it is useful to have multi-annual certainty for getting funds when talking to the Ministry of Finance and that Action Plans should be seen as legally binding. It was observed that the participating economies with programme budget can earmark funds for Roma integration, while those following line budgets face difficulties to do so, but that the means exist if the budget experts are involved to explain how it can be done. All participating economies need to improve the budgeting process for Roma integration.

Further steps as relevant to the budgeting were summarized. The RI2020 participating economies need to:

- meet unified international standards for budgeting as per EU Strategy 2020,
- ensure legislative framework and harmonization of regulatory framework,
- train civil servants to be able to address international and donor requests in budgeting for Roma integration,
- develop a unified, standardized regional methodology for budgeting for Roma integration adjusted to national budget structures,
- establish a joint expert working group to work on regional standards, facilitated by the RI2020 project.

Mr USEIN explained that the overall objective is to develop a manual to be used throughout the participating economies on how to draft Roma sensitive budgets (in line with experiences on gender budgeting), as well as explore whether there are legislative changes needed to enforce Roma integration related policies. Participants discussed that certain laws will need to be amended and political factors should be taken into consideration. EU is encouraged to be more rigorous vis-à-vis candidate countries concerning Roma integration. A need was expressed for experts that will help within the economies to consolidate the national budgets on Roma integration. A two track approach is needed, producing the regional guidelines and at the same time working with consultants on its application at the national level. A concern was raised as to defining budget for integration of Roma within mainstream measures. Furthermore, it was proposed that a regional strategy on Roma integration is developed, including budgeting, that would help address the issue of national budgeting.

The upcoming Regional Donor Conference was also discussed, and NRCPs were advised to prepare presentations. The RI2020 has encouraged the NRCPs to go through the Action Plans for 2018, identify gaps in finance for the period 2018-2020. The presentation should focus on up to three top priorities on thematic areas difficult to finance from the national budgets: housing and unemployment. NRCPs should describe in detail what is expected as a result and how each priority should be implemented. The modus operandi of the conference was also presented. Participating economies and donors will have opportunity to discuss their priorities and see where common ground can be found.

FOLLOW UP:

- NRCPs to prepare for the Regional Donor Conference by identifying the funding gaps and defining up to three priority measures in the areas of housing and employment;
- The RI2020 Team to take the lead and facilitate the development of regional budgeting standards through a working group supported by budgeting experts; and undertakes additional activities to support the budgeting process at national and regional level.

The second Task Force meeting of the RI2020 project concluded on 21 September 2017 at 13:30.