

REGIONAL CONFERENCE “FILLING IN THE BUDGET GAPS IN ROMA INTEGRATION POLICIES”

REPORT

Meliha Kozaric Fanning



TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|--|---|
| Table of Content | 1 |
| 1. Introduction and Background..... | 3 |
| 2. Discussion Highlights | 4 |
| 2.1. Panel I: Employment measures effective for Roma | 5 |
| 2.2. Panel II: Integral approach to housing for Roma..... | 6 |
| 3. Recommendations | 7 |
| 3.1. General recommendations and conclusions | 7 |
| 4.2. Specific recommendations regarding employment and housing.. | 9 |

© RomaIntegration2020, 2017

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this assessment are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Regional Cooperation Council or of its participants, nor of the European Union and the Open Society Foundations.

Ruzveltova 61, Belgrade, Serbia
P: +381 11 4046 891

romaintegration2020@rcc.int
M: + 381 63 1094 191

www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020
F: + 381 11 404 68 94





1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Regional Conference “Filling in the Budget Gaps in Roma Integration Policies” was organized in Tirana, Albania for the representatives of the governments from the Western Balkans and Turkey, bilateral and multilateral donors, international financial institutions and Roma civil society organizations. The conference was held on November 10th, 2017 and was attended by over 80 participants.

The conference was organised on the premise of ensuring decent living conditions for Roma men and women in the region, which can only be achieved if proper public and donor funding is allocated to implement the Roma integration strategies and action plans, particularly those ensuring adequate and sustainable housing conditions and employment opportunities. Thus, the focus of the conference was placed on the key priorities of Roma integration in the priority areas of employment and housing.

The purpose of the conference was threefold:

- to identify common objectives, measures and activities in the priority areas of Roma employment and housing;
- to understand better the priorities of governments and donors in Roma integration planned activities; and
- to initiate dialogue among governments and donors on possible cooperation in the future activities related to Roma integration.

The Regional Cooperation Council’s Roma Integration 2020 Action Team conducted detailed Donor Mapping Analysis and “Analysis of the priorities and budget of the official Roma integration policies in the areas of employment and housing in the Western Balkans and Turkey” prior to the Conference in order to prepare for a productive discussions among the participants and meet the purpose of the Conference. The report is available online.¹ The key documents used in preparation for the Conference were the official Roma integration policies of the economies with emphasis on the employment and housing priorities. Further, the invitations for attendance were sent to those donors and international financial institutions that have track record in assisting Roma integration and have regional presence.

The conference was divided into five parts:

- Opening remarks
- Presentation “Matching the needs of the regions with priorities of donors”
- Panel I: Employment measures effective for Roma
- Panel II: Integral approach to housing for Roma
- Conclusions and recommendations

¹ All the documents related to the conference are available at:
<http://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/news/279/filling-in-the-budget-gaps-in-roma-integration-policies>





This report will provide discussion highlights and final conclusions and recommendations.

2. DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Mr Goran Svilanovic opened the conference and emphasized in his introductory remarks that the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) offers a platform for discussion between governments and donors and that the next donor coordination meeting will be held in Sarajevo early next year, which could be an opportunity for the governments to follow up activities and coordinated initiatives for discussions with donors on Roma integration programmes.

Some of the Balkan Barometer findings were also presented during the introductory session, which reflect business community attitude toward employing Roma men and women. According to Balkan Barometer, some 16% of SEE business leaders would not hire a Roma person regardless of their job qualifications while another 19% are unsure either way. Around 55% of employers in the region believe that employing Roma would have negative effects on selling company's goods and services or on the working atmosphere in the company. The difference in hiring practices between different sized companies is especially striking when polled on the likelihood of hiring Roma - larger firms are much more likely to recruit employees from within the Roma community.

The representative of the European Union Delegation to Albania, Mr Stephen Stork, Head of Operations I, emphasized the importance of the Roma integration agenda, which is high on the political agenda of the EU. The European Union is using a range of instruments to assist Roma integration, which are available to the governments in the region, such as the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II), the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument (TAIEX), the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), the Institutional Capacity Building instrument and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The governments in the region were invited to draw funds and assistance from these instruments in order to fill in some of the funding gaps.

Representatives of the governments in the region informed the participants at the conference on their activities regarding Roma integration and governments' commitment to implement the National Roma Integration Strategies and their corresponding Action Plans (APs), and also presented some of the positive results achieved and the challenges that still exist in this regard.

The analysis of the priorities and the budget of the official Roma integration policies in the areas of employment and housing conducted by the Regional Cooperation Council were presented for the Western Balkans region. The analysis of financial gaps indicates that the current Roma employment and housing gaps amount to, in total, 56,240,637.42 EUR at regional level, out of which 10,931,600.42 EUR is an employment gap and the remaining 45,309,037.00 EUR is required for housing interventions. This amount was calculated based on the





budgets presented in the Actions Plans of the Western Balkans ranging from 2016-2021, depending on each economy’s individual planning framework. Should gaps be filled in, and total budgets implemented as planned, it is assessed to result in 2,209 Roma men and women employed for a year and 1,625 Roma families provided decent housing.

2.1. Panel I: Employment measures effective for Roma

The presentations of the panellists and subsequent discussions in the area of employment highlighted the following:

- All the governments in the region are committed to providing funding for Roma employment. There are slight variations among governments in percentages of funding planned for the different measures, including direct subsidies/ employment incentives and various forms of professional vocational education and intermediary measures, such as employment in public institutions and internships in public and private entities;
- The employment financial gaps are perceived as significant by donors present at the conference, especially when compared to their current priorities as defined in individual donor strategies;
- The participants to the conference stressed that vocational trainings should be “on the job” trainings with financial incentive to attendees of such programs to ensure their continuous participation and some level of income;
- Incentive schemes are needed but should be combined with mentoring and monitoring mechanisms to ensure sustainability of interventions (longevity of jobs);
- It may be required to increase incentives to private sector employers to employ Roma under government subsidy programs;
- There is a discrepancy between official policies (strategies and action plans) and their implementation;
- There is discrimination and prejudice toward Roma, which represents the major challenge to Roma men and women seeking employment, but also to governments that are attempting to spend their committed funds through employers’ subsidy schemes;
- The incentives for start-up companies often do not ensure sustainable employment to Roma families due to the lack of knowledge and skills among the Roma entrepreneurs on matters such as finance, equipment handling, markets, but also due to prejudice. The only sector where Roma operate as informal entrepreneurs predominantly is the recycling sector;
- There are positive examples, such as in the case of Montenegro, which secured jobs for all Roma who graduated from high schools and universities and in Serbia where the number of Roma attending schools is increasing.
- Discrimination and prejudice is identified as crosscutting issue for Roma integration. Participants offered different ideas as to how to deal with discrimination, ranging from public information campaigns to applying legal sanctions;
- Participants suggested, in relation to promoting Roma rights and integration, that participation of Roma representatives in the governments should correspond to the percentage in the population;





- Roma women and girls are especially disadvantaged in terms of employability and employment and donors present in the region are committed to addressing this challenge (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and Austrian Development Agency);
- The participants suggested that private sector companies should be invited for discussion and promotion of employment opportunities.
- The sustainable employment is a process and it requires not only employment incentives and vocational education but also longer term technical assistance and monitoring.

The conclusions of this panel may be summarised as follows:

- The vocational education programs are as important as the incentives/subsidies for employment. It is considered that the results of the government measures for Roma integration in the area of employment would be more sustainable if Roma men and women gain specific skills in demand at the labour market and functioning literacy to remain employed after the completion of the measures. Furthermore, appropriate monitoring mechanisms and on-the-hob mentoring are missing and need to be introduced.
- Discrimination and prejudice exists among employers towards employing Roma people. Thus, it is necessary, in parallel with active employment and employability measures, to implement promotion campaigns and share positive stories with private sector companies, as well as to introduce a range of other anti-discrimination measures in the employment sectors to prevent and protect Roma from discrimination. Roma civil society organisations consider this aspect as an area where they could get involved more pro-actively.

2.2. Panel II: Integral approach to housing for Roma

The presentations of the panellists and the subsequent discussions on housing highlighted the following:

- The funding for housing has either remained steady or increased in the Western Balkan economies over the years, primarily thanks to the donor funding (IPA in particular) but significant financial gap still remains;
- Despite the efforts of the governments to support social housing projects, there is resistance by non-Roma to have Roma living in their proximity. The issue of discrimination exists in this priority area as well;
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Albania and the Regional Housing Programme (RHP) were presented, including their activities in the area of housing. It has to be noted that the Regional Housing Programme assisted only those Roma registered as internally displaced persons and the programme is soon to be completed.
- It was emphasized by the participants that some of the implemented housing projects targeting Roma have not been completed. For example, building infrastructure has not been completed in a number of places;





- The participants agree that it is easier to monitor Roma housing projects on local level and that local governments are key to the implementation;
- It was emphasized and agreed among all participants that provision of housing for Roma is only sustainable if tenants have source of income, enabling payment of utilities and maintain the housing unit;
- Informal settlements, unresolved ownership rights, poor quality of structures and communal infrastructure exist in all the economies and there seems to be lack of ideas to address those issues. Measures exist for free legal aid to Roma, but it is not clear how effective these measures are or how many ownership issues have been resolved to date;
- The issue of reports on Roma forced evictions was raised, but this issue was not resolved during the discussions;
- It was pointed out by the participants in the conference that mechanisms of coordination between different levels of governments within each economy and coordination with Roma representatives and Roma civil society organisations are missing and that this may be one of the reasons for the modest results;
- It was also stressed that the systemic solutions are missing. Housing, education and employment measures for Roma should be implemented through integrated programmatic approach.

The conclusions of this panel may be summarised as follows:

- Housing programmes for Roma have to employ integral approach, providing proper communal infrastructure and employment or income generation opportunities for Roma families;
- Housing programmes for Roma should be tied to specific localities (local governments) for monitoring of the progress. Better coordination should be established between central and level governments, and with the Roma representatives. There is a need to report on the results of the implementation of such programmes and react timely to correct any errors in the implementation;
- The legal property issues and informal settlements are among the priorities to be addressed in the near future.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter represents reflections of the author on the main objectives of the conference. In addition to this, specific recommendations are provided for the areas of employment and housing, under a separate heading.

3.1. General recommendations and conclusions

The objectives of the conference are fully achieved in terms of identifying “Common objectives, measures and activities in the priority areas of employment and housing of Roma” and in terms of better understanding of the priorities of the governments and the donors in the planned activities for integration of Roma.





After all the representatives of the governments participating in the panels presented the status of the implementation of their official Roma policies and subsequent discussions took place. It was evident that there is a need to develop closer cooperation between the governments in the region in regards to the integration of Roma, as well as with the donors.

The objective of initiating dialogue among governments and donors is partly achieved, due to the fact that not all donors that were invited were able to attend and that this was the first conference that brought regional government representatives and donors together. In this regard, further efforts need to be made. Significant progress was made in learning that donors are guided by their strategies that set objectives for time periods that do not necessarily correspond to the financial planning procedures of the governments. This may result in limited capacity of donors to engage with the governments in the implementation of the specific Action Plan for Roma integration. The donors expressed their commitment to Roma integration, but within the strategic objectives and programmes that are already planned. The European Union is committed to Roma integration; the activities under the IPA I were presented, but also those committed under the IPA II. In terms of possible cooperation between governments and donors, this conference represents only the beginning of such cooperation and a number of follow-up and specific actions are required in order to develop future cooperation among governments and donors. Tangible input and information will be required from the Roma civil society organisations in order to match the funds to the needs.

Private sector companies, as mentioned during the conference in several occasions, especially larger ones with corporate social responsibility embedded into their core values and marketing strategies may be an additional contributor to the implementation of the employment and housing measures, whether through business (employability and employment related) or charitable community activities (housing and communal infrastructure).

General recommendations are as follows:

- Initiate and maintain joint forum of government representatives and Roma civil society organisations with facilitation by the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team to exchange best practices and lessons learnt, initiate new activities and programmes and discuss challenges ahead;
- Prepare priority programs at regional level (it can be at the level of each economy but with common objective) and present these to donors that are already committed to support Roma integration, but to other donors as well;
- Develop better coordination and monitoring mechanisms;
- Strengthen cooperation and dialogue between central governments, Roma representatives, civil society organisations, and local governments in the form of quarterly meetings devoted to monitoring of the progress. Invite donors that implement Roma integration projects to such meetings. This is recommendation to individual governments;
- Familiarize with existing strategic plans of donors and advocate for future support in the implementation of specific measures that require donor assistance and support, particularly through internal coordination;





- Governments should organize meeting with employers once a year, in cooperation with Roma representatives and with pre-developed proposals for vocational educational trainings and employment of Roma. This activity should be implemented in cooperation with Roma civil society organisations and supported through the Roma Integration 2020 project.

4.2. Specific recommendations regarding employment and housing

The low level of interest among employers to hire Roma men and women is a twofold challenge as highlighted during the conference discussions:

- a. Lack of skills among Roma that are in demand in highly competitive labour markets; and
- b. Discrimination and prejudice among employers towards employing Roma.

These challenges can be resolved only if governments work together with Roma civil society organisation, employers and donor community to develop joint approach towards Roma integration, comprehensively tackling both the challenges. The immediate measures/ programmes that could be applied to resolving these challenges are:

- Affirmative measures and incentives to employ Roma men and women with either secondary education degrees in demand or high education degrees, as the first group to be provided with income; Roma men and women who hold secondary and university degree education and are unemployed should be registered at the employment offices and given priority for employment, including and primarily in the public sector.
- Affirmative measures and incentives to public bodies in local communities with significant Roma population to employ Roma men and women;
- Incentive programs combined with vocational trainings and professional education provided for Roma men and women committed to improving their lives. This type of program could be implemented in cooperation with larger companies that have embedded corporate social responsibilities into their core business principles and marketing strategies. The programs can be funded by the governments in cooperation with donors/companies, or through other modalities that are most suitable for each economy. Such programs should be monitored by Roma civil society organisations and governments/ employment offices;
- Ensuring, through adequate policies/ decrees and decisions, that a percentage is reserved for Roma with no education or basic skills to participate in public works and that they are paid for their work (public park maintenance companies, public infrastructure works, and similar);
- Supporting and implementing promotion campaigns that are: informing society on positive examples of Roma and their contribution to the community; informing society on Roma culture and language; promoting Roma cultural events; informing Roma of their rights and obligations in the society, work place, schools and in general; promoting work and education as an absolute “must” for future development of Roma people, regardless of their origin or residence.





- In order to ensure sustainability during and after the implementation of any employment measure, monitoring and mentoring mechanisms have to be improved. Since governments usually stay within their mandate to provide policy framework and funding, this challenge can be overcome through active cooperation with Roma civil society organizations and outsourcing, which have to be trained previously in both monitoring and mentoring (which could be supported through technical assistance).

The significant housing financial gap and current challenges of legalisation and sustainability of housing for Roma (i.e. no income - no possibility for maintenance and upkeep of the housing unit) can be overcome gradually if the following measures are implemented:

- Introduction of additional requirement from central to local governments where the housing projects are implemented to monitor and report on the living conditions of Roma and the changes achieved with the programmes; The local governments should be given a task to report regularly on the implemented housing measures and the immediate needs of Roma; Scheduled visits by either Roma civil society organizations and/or Social centre employees to Roma families will provide government not only with accurate information on the living conditions of any Roma family, but it will also enable the government to distribute more effectively the existing funds and/or seek additional funding.
- Cooperation of the responsible ministries with the local governments that have significant Roma population on the possible joint projects and solutions to ensure not only housing but full integration as well.
- Enabling legalization and formalisation of Roma housing units and properties wherever possible, along with improvement of the infrastructure and housing in the settlements.
- Collection of information on housing needs for Roma at the level of local government with the assistance of Roma civil society organisations, and reporting template developed by the governments; This activity will enable the governments to have precise information per each community on the financial needs for housing and to determine if donor support is required and to which extent.
- Design of integral projects - housing and employment for Roma as pilot initiatives.

Finally, overall coordination and communication between governments, Roma civil society organisations and donors in the region has to be maintained. Regular donor coordination meetings should be held to provide synergies and thus ensure more effective implementation of the Action Plans for Roma integration, to exchange good practices and to develop comprehensive reporting and monitoring mechanism.

It is recommended to the governments in the region to jointly design one to two programmes that would have similar targets at regional level and would address common employment and housing priorities within the region.

