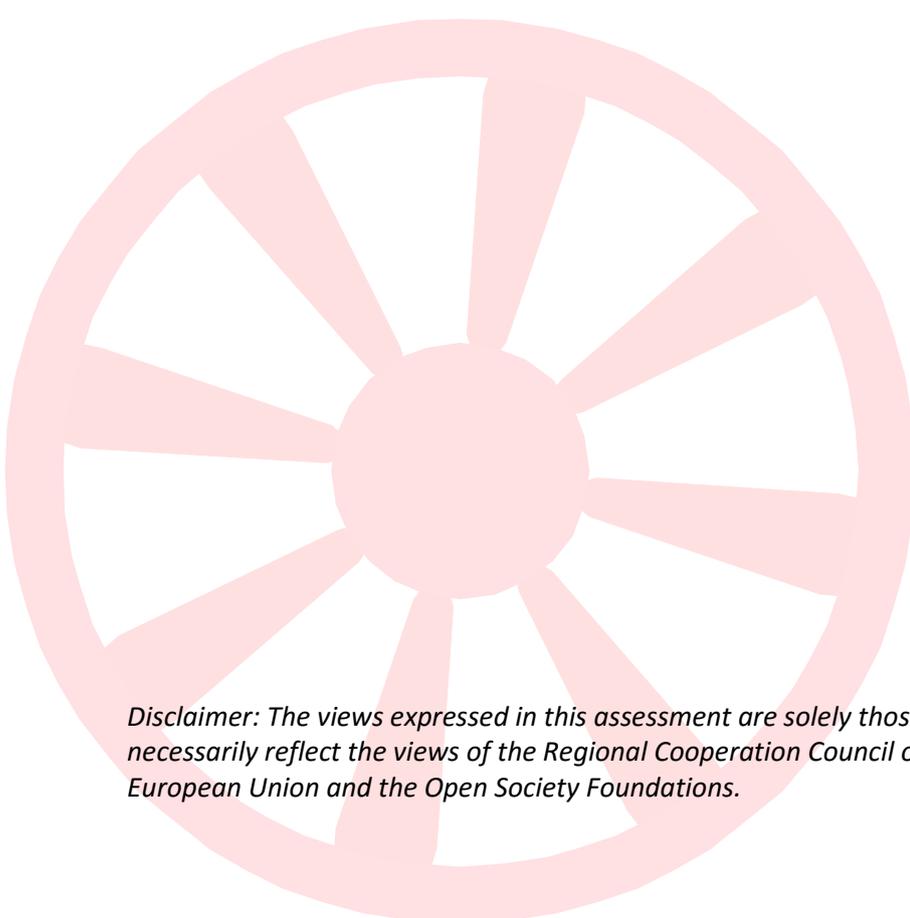


THE VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Roma Women in the Republic of Serbia 2016 - 2025: Implementation and Priority Measures for 2017 - 2018

:: POLICY RECOMMENDATION PAPER ::



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.

Background

The Republic of Serbia adopted the “Strategy for social inclusion of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2025” on 03 March 2016. It envisages adoption of an accompanying biannual action plan for 2016-17 within 90 days from the adoption of the strategy, which has been postponed and is expected to be finalized by the end of October 2016. The action plan is expected to include priority measures from the Strategy for the period it covers, accompanied by milestones, budget, division of responsibilities and monitoring indicators.

In addition to the Strategy and Action Plan, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has taken up the responsibility to implement the operational conclusions from the “Social Inclusion Seminar: Roma Issues in the Republic of Serbia” of 11 June 2015 and the measures targeting Roma of the “Action Plan for Chapter 23” adopted by the Government on 27 April 2016

The Roma integration 2020 project provides technical and expert assistance to the governments of the Western Balkans and Turkey to plan, implement and monitor their public policies targeting Roma, with particular focus on budgeting and mainstreaming. The Action team of the Regional Cooperation Council implementing the project organized a Public Dialogue Forum hosted by the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia. The forum took place on 13 October 2016 at the National Assembly and brought together Assembly members, key state institutions, Roma civil society and other interested parties to discuss priority measures to be included in the Action Plan prepared for the implementation of the Strategy for social inclusion of Roma for 2017-18.

This policy recommendation paper reflects the discussion of the Public Dialogue Forum and proposes priority measures to be included by the Government in the Action Plan 2017-18 for the implementation of the Strategy.

Policy recommendations

Establishing accountable and transparent management, development and implementation of sustainable measures on local level, inclusive budget and effective participation of Roma community in all the phases of planning and implementation are sine qua non for the Strategy’s success. In line with the participants’ discussion at the public hearing, measures proposed for 2017-18 that the relevant institutions should consider to include in the Action Plan are the following:

Education

- Establish new pre-school facilities to increase the number and percentage of Roma children aged three to five included in pre-schooling.
- Support and initiate programmes for early childhood development, including integrated, specialized and additional programmes in pre-school education aiming to include at least 40% of Roma children in early childhood development programmes.
- Increase the number of enrolled in first grade and decrease the number of dropouts at fourth and eighth grade of primary education for Roma children, particularly girls, through developing the system of support in education.
- Implement consistently and develop further affirmative measures for enrolment in secondary and tertiary education along with in-education support measures.
- Develop efficient anti-discrimination activities in education.
- Regulate the status, institutionalise the work and ensure professional development of pedagogical assistants.

Housing

- Improve the living conditions in Roma settlements by developing urban plans and documentation and improving communal and social infrastructure, or by relocation of inhabitants to adequate social housing.
- Propose Law on Housing consistent with international standards.
- Formulate within a law all the possibilities for legalization of individual housing units within sub-standard settlements that can be retained (instead of dismantled).
- Regulate by law the existing sub-standard Roma settlements that can be retained or provide locations for their relocation for settlements that must be dismantled, according to the law.
- Fully inform, consult and support Roma on procedures and possibilities for resolving their housing issues.

Employment

- Implement programmes that link education (vocational and tertiary) with corresponding employment, in a coordinated manner.

- Analyse local labour market and propose adequate measures that would most successfully result in employing Roma on local level.
- Intensify employment of Roma in the local and state public sector according to the regulation governing minority participation in the public sector.
- Intensify the process of adopting legislation regulating social entrepreneurship, with a view to enhance the possibilities for accessing the job market and the employment of less employable unemployed, including Roma.
- Regulate the status and institutionalize the work of all types of Roma mediators (local, health, teaching, mobile teams) which link Roma population with the public services.

Healthcare

- Improve children's health by ensuring timely healthcare for infants, support to the family, and vaccination of children.
- Increase the quality of healthcare services and develop anti-discrimination measures in exercising the rights to healthcare and health insurance.
- Promote healthy lifestyles.
- Regulate the position and ensure regular employment status of the "Roma mediators" in the healthcare facilities.
- Provide assistance to Roma to obtain prescribed medicine and therapy when needed.

Social protection

- Improve the work of social centres by creating support networks in the local community for efficient and comprehensive work in the Roma community, including by employing competent Roma in the social centres.
- Improve children and family social care, including by financial aid envisaged by the law.
- Provide support to children living or working on the streets.
- Set up data collection and management system.

Local self-governments

- Regulate by law and institutionalize the work of local Roma coordinators.
- Regulate officially sustainable institutional mechanisms, mandate and measures responsible for the implementation of the Strategy in the local self-government units.
- The Assemblies of local self-government units should adopt action plans for Roma inclusion consistent with the National Action Plan.
- The budgets of local self-government units should ensure inclusive budgeting of measures and activities envisaged by the local action plan.

Institutional structures and mechanisms

- Establish the coordinative body as envisaged in the Strategy (eliminate duplications).
- Ensure outreach to Roma and benefit of Roma from mainstream and targeted measures.
- Ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of Roma in the whole policy cycle.
- Adjust measures to most vulnerable groups among Roma and make sure they benefit.
- Clearly differentiate responsibilities of state and local government to discontinue practice of transferring responsibilities.
- Technically, financially and otherwise assist local self-governments to implement measures.
- Ensure anti-discrimination mechanisms respond to discrimination against Roma and establish additional mechanisms as needed.
- Adequately budget measures at state and local level and ensure technical readiness for absorption of IPA funds.