

**Seminar on inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities
in the framework of Albania's European Union integration**

15 December 2011, Tirana

Operational conclusions

Cross-cutting Issues

- Important measures have been adopted until now towards enhancing inclusion of vulnerable groups, among which the Roma and Egyptian communities. The authorities are encouraged to make additional efforts towards implementation of existing policies including the Roma Decade Action Plan and the National Social Inclusion Strategy. There is a need to increase allocation of financial resources at national and local level. Specific budgetary allocations for the provision of critical services for Roma should be made. The inter-ministerial working group on Roma and inter-ministerial working group on social inclusion should be actively involved.
- Reinforcing the protection of human rights for Roma is among the key priorities of the Opinion on Albania's EU membership application and, as such, is necessary for further progress on the EU integration path. Albania is encouraged to make full use of financial instruments such as IPA in its efforts to achieve social inclusion of vulnerable groups. For instance, measures foreseen in preparation for the IPA Operational Programme for Human Resource Development should indicate as a priority social inclusion for all vulnerable citizens.
- The Roma Technical Secretariat as well as its mandate should be strengthened through allocation of additional human and financial resources in order to play its monitoring and coordinating role more effectively.
- Awareness of those responsible for implementation of policies at local level needs to be increased. Municipalities should allocate budget for implementation of specific policies. Local level action plans for implementing policies targeting the most vulnerable groups should be developed and responsibilities should be clearly devolved.
- Relevant services need to ensure that data collected by all responsible organisations is reliable and easily accessible by policy makers. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is encouraged to ensure effective running and sustainability of the Roma National Action Plan Web-based system developed in collaboration with UNDP to ensure effective data collection, reporting and management.

- Albanian authorities at national and local level should actively involve civil society organisations working with vulnerable communities and Roma and Egyptian organisations in policy making, implementation and monitoring at central and local level.
- Supporting programmes and measures implemented by the authorities at national and local level need to be systematically monitored, coordinated and evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency.
- Awareness-raising among the general public as well as private/public service providers to the issue of non-discrimination and living together is necessary to ensure social cohesion and to end all discriminatory practices. The Office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination should make further efforts to ensure the implementation of the Law on Protection from Discrimination in all areas with regard to the Roma and Egyptian communities.
- Media should be encouraged to offer more positive images of Roma and Egyptian persons, including through trainings for journalists on the topics of human rights protection, social inclusion and anti-discrimination.
- The role of public employees working in social services should be broadened, through modification of their job description and increased responsibility, to allow for their effective involvement with vulnerable families and children through community work and home visits. In this regard, The Albanian authorities should continue working in this matter with relevant stakeholders including civil society organisations, UN agencies and other international organisations.

Civil registration

- Albania needs to ensure that maternity wards and hospitals perform their obligations related to birth registration and reporting in an effective and systematic manner, liaising with Local Government Units and Civil Registry Offices, including in cases where the child is born to an unregistered mother. Special attention should be paid to children born outside maternity wards. No child should fall through the gaps and remain unregistered as birth registration is the gateway to access all social services and civic rights.
- Cases of children born outside the country and who have not obtained the necessary documentation need to be followed up actively by Consular offices, in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations, UN agencies and other international organisations.

- The Albanian local authorities and civil registry offices should engage with Roma associations and local communities to prevent early marriages in order to minimize cases of unregistered births.
- The Ministry of Interior, Civil Registry Office and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities should liaise with civil society organisations working in the field and community leaders to jointly organise information sessions to explain the benefits derived from registration and provide conditions for the identification of unregistered cases.
- The Law on free legal assistance needs to be effectively implemented and budget allocated for the State Commission on Legal Aid, ensuring access to justice for vulnerable groups and persons pursuing cases of subsequent registration. Individuals benefiting from free legal assistance should be exempted from expenses related to judicial and administrative proceedings.
- Civil registration should not be conditional to payment of local taxes. The cost of DNA testing for children to be reunited with their relatives should be covered by the State authorities.
- The financial scheme for early birth registration (before 60 days) should be effectively implemented and resources allocated accordingly.

Education

- Strong additional efforts need to be made in the field of education for vulnerable groups, in particular Roma and Egyptian children. There is a need to establish additional public integrated pre-schools and kindergartens throughout the territory and to employ additional teachers and teaching assistants to allow for closer tutoring of children in difficulty. The Zero drop-out policy for children of compulsory school age should be fully implemented.
- School directors and psychologists need to play an active role in ensuring the continued enrolment of children from vulnerable families. Schools should be made accountable for the children in their area and links with local child protection units should be established.
- Effective implementation of existing policies to foster education of Roma and Egyptian children should be ensured and shortcomings of these programmes addressed, such as for instance ensuring effective functioning of the system for the free disbursement of textbooks to children in need.

- The Ministry of Education and Science should provide further assistance to Roma and Egyptian youth to undertake university studies, among others through an effective implementation of the existing quota. The Ministry of Education and Science should also strive to employ Roma and Egyptian graduates as teachers in order to present positive role models for children of all backgrounds.
- Parents should be made more accountable for their children, for which community representatives and associations have a key role to play. Attendance of school-age children in educational institutions may be considered as one of the criteria for the disbursement of economic aid.

Social and health care

- Responsibilities of social workers should evolve from an administrative nature to the provision of field assistance to families and the performance of home visits.
- The Council of Ministers' decision regulating access to healthcare should be amended to allow universal access to free health care, including for persons not possessing the necessary documentation (including, for instance, street children, etc.).
- The local authorities, together with social services, need to take measures to effectively tackle the issues of child begging and street children through the drafting of specific action plans to address the root causes of the problem which stems from poverty.
- Albania should organise awareness raising campaigns on a range of issues such as hygiene, reproductive health, family planning as well as risks linked to early marriages and early pregnancies. Vaccination for all Roma and Egyptian children has to be ensured.
- Local authorities need to guarantee respect for existing regulations on waste treatment and to ensure that all municipal waste treatment plants are fenced off, so as to prevent the hazardous activity of waste collection from such plants, in particular by children.

Vocational Training and Employment

- Vocational training programmes should be oriented towards the interest of the trainees as well as the needs of the market. They should be provided with nationally recognised professional qualifications and access to the labour market in equal footing with rest of citizens

- Vocational education and training (VET) schools and centres should create a link with employers from both the public and private sector.
- The State should give the positive example to private employers by employing persons from Roma and Egyptian communities at all levels of responsibility at central and local level, targeting education, healthcare/social services and civil registration in the first place.
- Public Employment Offices need to play an active role in employment counselling and establishing links between vocational training centres and private employers.
- Through its Active Labor Market Policies and Active Labor Market Measures and public works, the Albanian government should mainstream employment active policies for Roma and Egyptian with a focus on salaried employment.

Housing and Infrastructure

- The local authorities should systematically organise consultations with affected communities prior to performing a relocation or eviction of informal settlements. In case of eviction, it should be an obligation for local authorities to provide substitute accommodation for all affected persons.
- The Albanian authorities, through coordination between central and local level, need to ensure that legal solutions and progressive practical are found for Roma and Egyptian communities currently living in informal settlements which are not eligible for legalization.
- Clear and realistic criteria enabling the most vulnerable groups to apply and transparent selection procedures for allocation of social housing need to be implemented in all municipalities. Specialised and diversified housing programs that respect the cultural diversity and avoid social segregation should be implemented gradually for vulnerable groups.
- The government should ensure the access to clean water and sanitation in areas where Roma and Egyptian communities are present.
- The government should ensure that the Roma families who were evicted from the Tirana train station area in February 2011 will receive adequate housing alternatives.