



Civil Society Monitoring Report

on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy
and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in

ALBANIA

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Prepared by a civil society coalition comprising the following organizations:

Roma Active Albania (lead organisation) ■ The Human Development Promotion Centre
O Avipe i Romegno ■ Romano Sezi ■ Roma Union of Berati



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Coordinated by

the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation
in cooperation with the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme
and the Roma Initiatives Office of the Open Society Foundations



Published by

Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation
Teréz körút 46.
1066 Budapest, Hungary
www.romadecade.org

Design and layout: www.foszer-design.com

Proofreading: Jessica Wolf

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ISSN: 2064-0706

All civil society monitoring reports are available at www.romadecade.org

This report was prepared by a civil society coalition comprising the following organizations: Roma Active Albania (lead organization), The Human Development Promotion Centre (HDPC), O Avipe i Romegno, Romano Sezi, Roma Union of Berati.

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The following organizations have been involved in the advising on the report: the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, the Central European University's Department of Public Policy, the European Roma Rights Centre, Habitat for Humanity, the Roma Education Fund, and from the Open Society Foundation: Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme, the Roma Initiatives Office, and the Roma Health project.

In the pilot year of 2012, the Decade Secretariat decided to support reports from civil society coalitions in seven countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) and the Roma Initiatives Office commissioned an additional report from the Czech Republic. In addition, the Decade Secretariat made a template public in order to encourage additional civil society actors to monitor the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies and Decade Action Plans.

In the reports, civil society coalitions supplement or present alternative information to Decade Progress Reports submitted by Participating Governments in the Decade of Roma Inclusion and to any reports submitted by State parties to the European Commission on implementation of their National Roma Integration Strategies. These reports are not meant to substitute for quantitative monitoring and evaluation by State authorities but to channel local knowledge into national and European policy processes and reflect on the real social impact of government measures. The civil society reports provide additional data to official ones, proxy data where there is not official data, or alternative interpretation of published data.

The project is coordinated by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation in cooperation with the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme and the Roma Initiatives Office of the Open Society Foundations.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Albania signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) 2006 and it is also actively participating in the political and economic dialogue to present its application to become a member of the European Union. Pre-accession financial assistance is provided to Albania by the EU, focusing on Justice and Home Affairs, Public Administration Reform, Transport, Environment and Climate Change, Social Development, and Agriculture and Rural Development. In addition, Albania participates in the EU cross-border programmes and Albanian civil society received financial support from the EU in the fields of justice, protection of vulnerable groups (disadvantaged women, children and the elderly, and minority groups) and environmental protection.

Roma communities are considered the most vulnerable minority group in Albania, facing widespread poverty, socio-economic marginalization and frequent discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health, employment and adequate housing. Roma are not recognized publicly as a distinct minority and they have the status of an ethno-linguistic minority. Regardless the Albania Constitution addresses all the basic principles of human and minority rights. Albania is also part of the main international treaties concerning human and minority rights.

Albania does not have a National Roma Integrated Strategy. However, several policy measures in favor of Roma Social Inclusion were undertaken by the Albanian Government. The National Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Living Conditions 2003-2013 was adopted in 2003 followed by the Decade Action Plan 2010-2015. The Roma Strategy addresses several broad fields such as education and training, cultural heritage and family, employment, poverty and social protection, health and housing, as well as public order, justice and civil administration. Nevertheless, its implementation was criticized for being slow, due to insufficient human and financial resources, inadequate institutional coordination at the national and local level, and deficiencies in the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Through the present report, the Albanian civil society coalition established for this purpose, aimed to assess national policy developments, evaluate the local impact of flagship initiative that promote Roma integration, explain through case studies why and to what extent certain government measures have been successful or not, and formulate recommendations on how to improve the implementation of above strategic documents.

Structural Requirements

Central and Local Government Institutions

The Technical Secretariat for Roma was established in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in 2004. In addition, an Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Roma was established in 2010. Roma NGOs are also invited to participate in the Working Group without decision making status. In practical terms, the role of the Working Group is to share information and promote coordination between all related Ministries. The Technical Secretariat lacks the necessary authority to coordinate policies across Ministries and to exert influence on authorities managing EU funds. The proposal to transform it into a National Agency is under discussion.

At the local level, a Coordination Comity for Programming, Evaluation and Coordination of Social Protection Services has been established in each Regional Council.¹ In addition, a Technical Group for Roma issues in the Regional Councils is composed of representatives of any administrative units that have Roma inhabitants, representatives of Regional Departments depending from Central Government, representatives of Roma NGOs, and other related local NGOs. These institutional structures at the local level are more involved in resolving Roma concerns on a case by case basis than in policy formulation, evaluation and monitoring.

Discrepancies

There are many strategic documents regarding social inclusion, gender and child issues, and trafficking that include objectives and measures generally related to the Roma community, Roma women and Roma children. At the same time, there are strategic documents and Action Plans regarding Roma community specifically. The many institutional structures are a “mirror” of these varying strategic documents. Very often, certain initiatives are influenced by the harmonization criteria of a Stabilization and Association Agreement. There is a need for a unified approach, first within EU-related institutions (optimized to the Albanian “size”, context and possibilities), and then for a more attentive decision-making process, so that the effectiveness and efficiency of decisions take into account applicable strategic documents as well as any related institutional structures.

EU Financing

In its efforts to achieve social inclusion of vulnerable groups, Albania was encouraged by the EU to make full use of financial instruments such as the Instrument for Pre Accession. In general, Roma community representatives are not invited to actively participate in programming such financial resources. It is the general opinion of the Roma that most financing addressed institutional support and not their real needs: alleviating poverty and improving living conditions.

Anti-Discrimination

Registration and Identity Cards

The Roma population in Albania has been estimated by different sources to be between 1,300 and 120,000 people. It was expected that the definitive number would emerge in Census 2011 but the final results declared by INSTAT indicated that the Roma community in Albania represent only 0.3% of the total population living in Albania (less than 8,500 people).

Roma are registered through Local Civil Register Offices. Some progress was made through certain amendments of existing legislation that facilitate the registration. Based on a Government Decree in December 2008, no-cost ID cards were also provided for about 5,000 Roma.

Anti-Discrimination and Racism

The anti-discrimination legal and institutional framework has been substantially improved in Albania. In 2010, the Law on Protection from Discrimination was adopted by the Parliament and it is in full compliance with four main related European Directives. The first positive result was the establishment of the Office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.

There is little evidence about Roma community benefits resulting from the implementation of Anti-Discrimination Law. The newly appointed Ombudsman has taken on a proactive role in the incidents involving 45 Roma families in Tirana in February 2011.² However, to date there is no evidence for a definitive

1 The Albanian local governance is realized through Regional Councils, Municipalities and Communes.

2 Roma families were removed by force by citizens from their settlement near Tirana train station. They have been assisted by the international community and non-governmental organizations, particularly with regard to the judicial follow-up of the case.

solution for this case, including provision of housing, appropriate actions in investigating the incidents, and identification and punishment of those responsible.

Institutional Discrimination

Government institutions failed to provide accurate statistical data for the Roma community and this represents a significant example of institutional discrimination of the Roma communities. In addition, there is no effective data collection, reporting or management of the Roma National Action Plan, there is no evidence of the allocation of financial resources at either the national or local level for anti-discrimination issues, and central and local government institutions are not pro-active in discouraging discrimination and investigating related incidents.

Anti-Discrimination Body

The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination is focused on three main functions: (i) Supporting the victims of discrimination through reviewing complaints, carrying out administrative investigations, imposing administrative sanctions, and representing complainants in court for civil cases; (ii) Monitoring implementation of the Law on Protection from Discrimination; and (iii) Preparing reports for anti-discrimination issues, proposing improvements to the legal framework and conducting public awareness campaigns. Despite being the very beginning of activity for this institution, the Commissioner does not seem to sufficiently encourage complaints or strongly investigate the presented cases. This is partially related to the low capacity of the Office and also probably to some political pressures. In addition, the Roma community has little knowledge about the new Law regarding both their rights and the procedures they are to follow.

EU Race Directives and Complaints

There are no visible gaps in the Albanian legislation vis-à-vis the EU Race Directive. The existing national, sector and cross-sector strategies prepared by government institutions also consider social inclusion components. The Law on Anti-Discrimination affirmed the right to complain to the competent court and to carry out criminal persecution complaints. To date, there are no reported discrimination cases presented for judgments in local courts or in the European Court of Human Rights. The very low number of complaints confirms the lack of the Roma community's awareness about their right to complain as well as their need for legal assistance in the case of discrimination.

Educational Level

Roma people are among least educated groups in Albania. It is a common perception that the gap between the education level of Roma and that of the majority of the population will inevitably show is very significant. Few Roma children complete compulsory education and consequently the general secondary education remains very low. The number of Roma children enrolled in the Vocational Education and Training system (VET) and tertiary education remains insignificant. Non-registration, non- or irregular attendance, and dropping-out are typical phenomena for Roma children. In addition, there is a lack of adequate statistical information so it is neither possible to provide standard data on Roma education, nor to identify clear targets related to education and to monitor the level of their achievement.

Extreme poverty is considered the main barrier to education. Other barriers include: very low interest of Roma parents (mainly due to the economic status of their families), migration, difficult access to school, discriminatory treatment of Roma children by their non-Roma friends and teachers, as well as Roma cultural traditions.

Employment

Employment/unemployment is the main concern of the Roma community in Albania and is directly related to the extreme poverty of Roma families. Their increasing poverty creates a vicious cycle for them: the poorer they become, the more difficult it is to find formal or informal employment. Many Roma people are not able to find employment due to lack of professional skills, fewer job opportunities after the structural changes of the economy, very poor adoption of the new labour market needs, discrimination by employers and lack of specific Governmental policies designed to address Roma unemployment issues.

The government provides economic aid and unemployment benefit to selected poor families and the unemployed. Currently, a very small number of Roma benefit from financial support. Many of them are excluded from receiving economic aid entirely and if they do, they don't receive it for as long as is necessary. This is mainly due to some eligibility criteria defined by the government institutions that are not properly harmonized to the Roma situation, and thus, which many Roma families in need cannot meet.

Healthcare

While it is difficult to find official data on the Roma people's healthcare status and access to healthcare, it is certain that the state of health of Roma in Albania has deteriorated to a greater extent than for the rest of the population during the transition period.

Compared to non-Roma, the Roma feel openly discriminated against by the health services providers. This is not only related to the common concerns of Albanian society about bribing doctors or nurses, but also takes into account many examples of direct or indirect discrimination regarding inappropriate treatment by healthcare providers, communication barriers and violation of healthcare rights that, together, make the health system and health-care facilities hostile places for Roma. Discrimination discourages Roma communities from immediately addressing their health concerns, and negatively affects the impact of the huge efforts made by NGOs to raise awareness to ensure that this community regularly attends the health checks to prevent diseases and protect their children.

One of the main concerns of Roma is lack of Health Insurance Cards. This is related predominately to employment factors: many Roma are either unemployed or they work without a valid employment contract. In either case they do not pay social security contributions and are thus ineligible for benefits. Roma living on a low income are usually unable to afford health insurance contributions. In addition, many Roma are not aware of the procedures that must be followed to obtain a Health Insurance Cards. Thus, Roma face an insurmountable barrier in access to healthcare; the high cost of medical services and medicines are unaffordable for most Roma families.

As a result, Roma are generally very negligent about their health and ask for medical assistance only at a very advanced stage of disease. Very often in these cases, they are obliged to borrow money from other Roma, which creates a domino effect of debt that results in total economic destruction. In the case of serious illness, health-care support by local and international NGOs represents the only hope for them.

Health-care services are provided free of charge for children. However, similar to their self-care, Roma parents seek medical treatment for their children only at an advanced stage of disease. In addition, many of Roma parents cannot afford to pay for the range of medicines or specific medical tests (mainly associated with hospital care) requested by medical staff but not provided for by public health institutions.

Housing

According to our survey, homelessness, rehabilitation of houses, legalization and property title issues, as well as poor infrastructure are considered by Roma communities as some of the most important concerns

to be resolved. There is a frequent lack of water supply, especially for Roma families living in segregated settlements at the outskirts of the cities or far from the urban areas. It is the same for sanitation conditions. Many Roma families live in areas without roads, or with unpaved roads, or roads in very poor conditions. They have electricity at home but there is no public lighting in the areas where they live. All these conditions have a clear adverse effect on their health and infections are very frequent especially in the children. In addition, because of their poverty, many Roma families living in Albania have migrated internally and other families returned from emigration, mainly from Greece, setting up informal settlements and slums in conditions of extreme poverty and lacking basic infrastructure. This physical separation of Roma migrants is generally a phenomenon of the last decade, which seriously limits their integration opportunities.

Roma families are almost always excluded from the social housing programs. Few of them can benefit from low-cost social housing because the majority of Roma are unemployed and/or do not have regular monthly income, which is a precondition of Banks for financing. Similarly, Roma are not considered a specific target group in the social housing rental program and Roma housing conditions are not properly quantified – families living in slums are not included in housing statistics, families without income are not included in the economic status and Roma families in general are excluded in statistics about social conditions. As a result, it is obvious that social housing programs only address housing problems of specific families in need and these programs are not dedicated to Roma families.

Based on these considerations, there is an obvious discrimination against the Roma community, manifested in very poor housing conditions, increased segregation, forced evictions as well as in the lack of property titles and legalization efforts that remain unfinalized. As a result, it is the general Roma perception that nobody is seriously committed to resolving their housing problems.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Rethinking Strategic Approach

It is important to understand that the Roma community continues to represent the poorest part of the Albanian population and is the most vulnerable minority in the country. As a result, Roma priority needs are not simply some general human rights questions and/or some minority rights questions and the progress cannot be measured only by the number of strategic documents prepared by the government institutions, the level of harmonization of some specific Laws with EU related standards, improvement of the related regulatory framework, promotion of the establishment of cultural centers, or establishment of some anti-discrimination institutions. The Roma need to be integrated into the Albanian society with adequate education, appropriate living conditions, and equal treatment by public services. While supporting Roma means, first of all, resolving such problems quickly, the general perception is that currently the attention of all local, national and international institutions is focused more in the anti-discrimination issues than on the real needs of this community.

Thus, the recommendation is to globally and locally rethink a Roma inclusion approach that progresses from a human rights-based model to a development-based approach. Local and international actions must be focused more on the real needs of the Roma community – that is, considering Roma inclusion as being primarily a question of alleviating poverty, increasing employment, combating illiteracy and improving living conditions.

The (Re)Starting Point: Roma Status and Priority Actions

After more than 20-years of post communist transition, local, national and international institutions have failed to provide a full database of Roma in Albania, despite several efforts and continuing financing. In absence of realistic information on Roma status, it is impossible to formulate adequate policies, to adopt effective strategies and to efficiently implement priority actions. It is also not efficient to provide financing for resolving Roma problems. As a result, it is strongly recommended to restart efforts by the collection of information; a specific registration of the Roma community seems to be indispensable and unavoidable. In addition, there is a need to redefine statistical programs in the Line Ministries and INSTAT in order to establish a full data gathering system and provide periodically reliable statistical data on the Roma community.

Many Government measures adopted to resolve Roma concerns are dispersed in several Laws, Government Decrees and/or Ministries' Guidelines and very often the Roma community does not really benefit from them. In the meantime, other important needs of the Roma community, including education, health-care, employment and housing, are not considered within the existing legal and regulatory framework regarding related sectors. It is strongly recommended that an umbrella Law for Roma inclusion is drafted through a large participatory process of Roma representatives and all related NGOs which would include specific measures regarding all Roma community concerns.

It is also recommended that an umbrella Action Plan on Roma Integration covering the period 2013-2020 is adopted. Realistic indicators of achievements and targets must be included in this Action Plan in order to create the groundwork for effective monitoring and evaluation of progress and of the real impact of the Government contribution.

Strengthening Government Institutions

The Technical Secretariat lacks the necessary authority to coordinate policies and actions across Ministries because of its actual status within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. It is recommended that it be transformed into a National Agency under the Prime Minister. In addition, there is need a to unify functions and structures of all units and people in charge of Roma, children, women, people with disabilities, and human trafficking issues in all central and local government institutions. It is recommended that all of them be included under the umbrella of the Social Inclusion Units for the main protected groups/categories. This necessary authority can only be brought about through human capital followed by binding procedures and financial inputs from the state budget.

The effectiveness of the institutions dealing with anti-discrimination remains low. There is a need for the Office of Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination to better implement its functions and demonstrate determination and independence in addressing complaints to both bring confidence to the Roma community and to encourage complaints. There is also a need to reinforce the capacities of this Office, especially in terms of methodologies for preparing monitoring reports on the implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Law. In addition, it would be imperative to provide the necessary financing resources in order for the Office to perform according to its responsibilities defined by Law.

Establish a Framework for Accountability

Apparently, the major part of domestic and foreign financing support for Roma people is soft support focused on strengthening the Roma community through training activities and public awareness campaigns, conducting anti-discrimination actions, strengthening cultural identity of Roma and support for cultural centers, harmonization of legislation with regards to human rights standards, and strengthening the related institutional capacity at the central and local levels. Indeed, all these issues are very important and need further attention. However, the hard support that addresses concrete needs, such as poverty reduction, education, employment, healthcare, and housing, is limited in humanitarian aid programs to pilot models of kindergartens and schools, isolated projects of housing rehabilitation, etc. In addition, there is no information on the efficiency of spending or on indicators of achievement, and there is low accountability of foreign financing.

There is a need to be focused more on hard support for resolving Roma priority concerns – for more transparent funding commitments and efficient spending with regards to this community. This implies full transparent interventions and reporting by all interested parties. This also implies drawing on different resources and blending strategies, including domestic financial resources for development, Foreign Direct Investments, public/private financing mechanisms, etc. In addition, considering the large number of international donor agencies interested in supporting Roma issues, it is recommended that a specific Donor Working Group for Roma issues be created according to the existing model of donor coordination established by the Department of Strategies and Donor Coordination in the Council of Ministers.

Increasing Educational Level

In order to increase educational level, it is recommended that early childhood development opportunities are improved by mapping and further expanding mainstream and integrated preschool facilities with the goal of including all Roma children in this level of education. It is also recommended that Roma children (and parents) be motivated to attend preschool education through providing transportation, clothing and food support.

There is a need for parents, together with school administrators and teachers, to support and encourage Roma children to remain in school by helping them to make up missed work, placing them in extra-help or special programs, and supporting them until they finish their basic education. Talented Roma pupils from

poor families can be supported with specially adopted scholarships to be able to continue their secondary and university studies.

In the basic education schools that Roma pupils attend, additional programs must be launched so that pupils can study after class, on school premises, with help from teachers. It is also recommended that second-chance opportunities be extended for youngsters who, for one reason or another, are struggling in school or have already dropped out. A more systematic, state-funded and donor-financed approach to small, community-based youth outreach or “drop-in” centers, part-time or evening schools, and supervised apprenticeship programs would not only encourage youngsters to drop back in, but also prevent at-risk pupils from dropping out.

Strengthening the cultural identity of Roma remains an objective that needs further attention and support, as it helps achieve a better integration of Roma pupils. Introducing some extracurricular activities that relate to history, culture, traditions and language of the Roma in Albania into the basic education system would serve that goal.

Employment – the Main Concern

To help Roma integrate into the labour market, it is of primary importance to increase opportunities for them through regular education and schooling. It is also recommended that free-of-charge training courses be provided to upgrade their skills in response to the changing demand for labour skills. Specific training policies and strategies based on specific Training Needs Analyses should be designed and implemented jointly with Vocational Training (VT) centers. In addition, it is recommended such measures are complemented by efforts that combine training programs with public work projects as well as social businesses promoting public-private partnership and Roma community members’ participation. Credit schemes can be also applied especially to support Roma who return from emigration.

It is recommended that employment promotion programs be drafted that specifically target the Roma population. Additionally, the National Employment Service must provide assistance to promote and facilitate such programs to ensure that unemployed Roma job seekers benefit from them. In the meantime, it is recommended that more awareness activities be implemented to increase information for Roma people on the necessity of registering as a job seeker and to what extent registration affects other important issues for them related in particular to social aid benefits and healthcare.

Considering access to this aid is mainly contingent upon some eligibility criteria defined by government institutions not properly harmonized to the Roma reality – criteria which many Roma families in need cannot meet – it is recommended that alternate criteria is drafted that specifically relates to the Roma community and does not prohibit them from benefiting from this assistance.

Insufficient Healthcare

To address Roma healthcare issues, there is a need for specific government policies regarding the provision of Health Insurance Cards and it is recommended that such cards be provided free of charge for a selected Roma target group not able to afford the related payment.

It is also recommended that regular visits are organized to Roma settlements and slums by mobile medical units to offer healthcare services to children, pregnant mothers and new mothers, as well as elders. In addition, specific actions are recommended to educate and raise awareness in Roma communities about the basics of various health conditions, targeted, in particular, to parents, women and new mothers, and children in schools.

Other specific recommendations are also suggested for consideration: addressing discrimination in healthcare; making sure that effective mechanisms to address violation of healthcare rights are available to Roma;

ensuring that there is a platform put in place for collecting feedback from Roma people on the health services, health policies and programs that target them; ensuring that this feedback is taken into account when designing such policies and actions and adopting them to the needs of the Roma people; and ensuring effective participation of Roma in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating health policies, programs, and actions targeting them.

Housing – the Second Main Concern

It is recommended that resolving Roma housing needs begins now with a general technical and independent evaluation of Roma housing conditions particularly including Roma homeless families, rehabilitation needs, and Roma families living in slums. In this regard, the Albanian Census 2011 has been a lost opportunity for Government institutions and international donors.

Thereafter, it is recommended that a Roma Housing Fund be established, which must finance, coordinate and managed all missed actions regarding Roma housing concerns.

Increasing Roma Participation and Awareness

Considering the low level of Roma participation in the policy making process, it is recommended that strategic documents and priority actions are discussed at the community level through regional round tables with participation of Roma community leaders and representatives of local Roma NGOs. The Roma participation is fundamental, first of all, in programming actions and monitoring the progress at the community level. Therefore, it is recommended that NGOs (including Roma NGOs) and government institutions consider actions to promote dialogue at the local level and submit their activities to the critical review of those intended to gain from them.

Successfully implementing Roma integration policies requires a common understanding of both the Roma community and non-Roma people on how the common benefits of Roma inclusion could be promoted through national and local awareness campaigns. In addition, there is also a need to promote awareness campaigns on anti-discrimination with a specific focus on the individual rights defined by Laws.

Finally, Roma university students must be encouraged to become organized in Roma Students Clubs in order to develop into some Roma intellectual representative bodies, protecting Roma rights, speaking and advocating on behalf of this community, and becoming excellent examples to be followed by all Roma community members.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Albanian Constitution
CoE	Council of Europe
CPD	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination
CS	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAP	Decade Action Plan
EA	Economic Assistance
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GoA	Government of Albania
HIC	Health Insurance Card
IPA	Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance
LC	Lower Cycle
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MoLSAEO	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
MoPWT	Ministry of Public Works and Transport
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NES	National Employment Service
NRIS	National Roma Integrated Strategy
NSIRLC	National Strategy for Improving of Roma Living Conditions
PCU	Program Coordination Unit
PR	Progress Report
RDE	Regional Department of Education
REO	Regional Employment Office
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SI	Social Inclusion
TS	Technical Secretariat
UC	Upper Cycle
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
USA	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VT	Vocational Training
WB	The World Bank
WG	Working Group

INTRODUCTION

The Roma community in Albania

Roma people live in almost all areas of Albania, but the strongest communities are situated in the Central and Southeast parts of the country, either in the big towns, on the towns' outskirts or in villages close to the respective towns. They are grouped in four Roma tribes – *Meckars*, *Kurtofs*, *Kabuzis* and *Cergars* – each having their own particular professions, more or less distinctive from one another: the Meckar tribe is involved mainly in agriculture and livestock breeding, the Kurtofs are inclined to small-scale trading and handicrafts, the Kabuzis are mainly musicians and artisans, and the Cergars men are travelers and traders while the women are usually fortune-tellers.

Roma in Albania do not have political representation in the form of political party. Nevertheless, immediately after 1990, three Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were established to represent Roma on the national level: the Democratic Union of Roma in Albania Amaro Dives, Rromani Baxt and Amaro Drom. Thereafter, other NGOs were established and currently there are approximately 20 of them.

Roma are not recognized publicly as a distinct minority in Albania. The Albanian Constitution (AC) of 1998 gave Roma the status of an ethno-linguistic minority. Nevertheless, the AC addresses the basic principles of human and minority rights.³ Article 3 states that the coexistence and understanding of Albanians about minorities is the basis of the state, which has the duty of respecting and protecting them. Article 15 states that fundamental human rights and freedoms are indivisible, inalienable, and inviolable and stand at the basis of the entire judicial order. Article 18 states that no one may be unjustly discriminated against for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education, social status or ancestry. And finally, Article 20 guarantees minorities full equality before the law their human rights and freedoms. They also have the right to freely express, without prohibition or compulsion, their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic belonging, as well as to preserve and develop it, to study and to be taught in their mother tongue, as well as unite in organizations and societies for the protection of their interests and identity.

At present, Albania is part of the basic international treaties concerning human and minority rights. In 1991, it ratified the United Nation (UN) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that, among other civil and political rights, guarantee ethnic, national and religious minorities the right to organize on a cultural, religious and linguistic basis. In 1996 Albania ratified the Council of Europe's (CoE) Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, providing for the respect of minority rights on an individual basis. During the same year, it also ratified the EU Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment. In September 1999, it ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which already had some minority-specific clauses with regards to education in the minority-language.

Albania does not have a National Roma Integrated Strategy (NRIS). However, several policy measures in favor of Roma Social Inclusion (SI) were undertaken by the Government of Albania (GoA). The adoption in 2003 of the National Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Living Conditions 2003-2013 (NSIRLC) has been one of the most important related decisions. This strategy addresses several broad fields such as education and training, cultural heritage and family, employment, poverty and social protection, health

3 Albanian Constitution, October, 1998.

and housing, as well as public order, justice and civil administration. The Strategy was praised for its comprehensiveness, and sensitivity for youth and gender issues; nevertheless, its implementation was criticized for being slow, due to insufficient human and financial resources, inadequate institutional coordination at the national and local level, and deficiencies in the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.⁴ The document was prepared in consultation with members of Romani NGOs. The general perception of the Roma people is that they are not participating in the policy-making process of their municipality and/or of the central government.⁵ The NSIRLC was followed by the adoption of the Decade Action Plan 2010-2015 (DAP) in 2010.

Despite these legal and institutional developments, the Roma community is considered by different studies⁶ and reports⁷ to constitute the most vulnerable minority group in Albania, facing widespread poverty, socioeconomic marginalization and frequent discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health, employment and adequate housing. Thus, their level of poverty is twice as high as ethnic Albanians, their unemployment rate is three times higher than the country average, and the income for about 37% of Roma families is less than \$100/month (compared to two per cent of non-Roma families with same monthly income). This is specifically related to the decline of Roma living standards during the post-communist transition: with the collapse and closure of state enterprises, coupled with lack of skills, low educational levels, and discrimination, the Roma moved from a state of a relative well-being to extreme poverty. They have been affected by the transition in a more significant way than other groups of the population.⁸ About 87% of the Roma population is unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their life right now, compared to 19% of the non-Roma population, and about 59% of Roma people do not have enough money for food, compared to 4% of non-Roma.⁹

The civil society monitoring report

In response to the EC's Framework for NRIS, EU candidate countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion were invited to update their NRIS and DAP according to the EU Framework, which involved civil society, including Roma organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the strategies.

Through the present report, the Albanian civil society (CS) coalition, which was established for this purpose, supplement and present alternative information to any reports submitted by the GoA on implementation of the DAP based on additional data that augments the official data, proxy data where there is no official data, or alternative interpretations of published data, aiming to:

- assess national policy developments that provide evidence for the government's overall performance especially regarding implementation of the policies during the year 2012;
- evaluate the local impact of flagship initiatives that promote Roma integration;
- explain through case studies why and to what extent certain government measures have been successful or not; and
- formulate recommendations on how to improve the implementation of NSIRLC and DAP.

The information has been completed by round table and focus group discussions with Roma community representatives in Tirana, Lezha, Fieri, Berati, Elbasani, Korca and Gjirokastra Regions. Representatives of the related Municipalities and Communes as well as of Regional Departments of Education (RDE), Regional Employment Offices (REO) and Regional Offices of the State Social Service were also contacted. In addition, a specific round table was organized with university students from the Roma community enrolled in different public and private universities.

4 EC, Progress Report, Albania 2010.

5 OSFA, A Comparative Study on the Factors Affecting the Degree of Roma Integration in Albania, Preliminary results, 2011.

6 De Soto, etc., *Roma and Egyptians in Albania From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion*, (World Bank Working Papers, 2005).

7 EC, Progress Report, Albania 2010.

8 De Soto, etc., *Roma and Egyptians in Albania From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion*, (World Bank Working Papers, 2005).

9 OSFA, A Comparative Study on the Factors Affecting the Degree of Roma Integration in Albania, Preliminary results, 2011.

The opinions of the Roma community representatives were collected through a national survey also conducted in Tirana, Elbasani, Korca, Fieri, Berati and Gjirokastra Regions, which represent the main Roma communities of Albania. The sample was comprised of 350 questionnaires (see Annex 1) which were geographically distributed according to the relative size of the Roma community.

EU perspective of Albania

Albania is actively participating in the regular political and economic dialogue with the EU under the Stabilization and Association Process framework. The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Albania was signed in June 2006 and entered into force in April 2009, after which Albania presented its application for EU membership on 28 April 2009. Following a request by the Council, the European Commission (EC) submitted its Opinion on Albania's application in November 2010. In December 2010, the Council endorsed the Commission's Opinion recommendations. In its conclusions, the Council noted that, in line with established practice, the opening of accession negotiations would be considered by the European Council once the Commission has assessed that the country has achieved the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria.¹⁰

Pre-accession financial assistance is provided to Albania by the EU under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The financial assistance is focused on Justice and Home Affairs, Public Administration Reform, Transport, Environment and Climate Change, Social Development, and Agriculture and Rural Development. In addition, Albania participates in the management and implementation of EU cross-border programmes within the Western Balkans, one bilateral cross-border cooperation programme with Greece, the EU trans-national programmes South East Europe and Mediterranean, and the Adriatic regional programme. Civil society has also received financial support from the EU in the fields of justice (including access to justice, fighting against corruption and monitoring/improving the living conditions in the detention system), protection of vulnerable groups (disadvantaged women, children and the elderly, and minority groups) and environmental protection.

10 EC, Albania 2012 Progress Report, Brussels, October 10, 2012 (p. 4).

1. STRUCTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Central government institutions

The Technical Secretariat (TS) for Roma was established in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO) as part of the Department for Monitoring Strategies. This office is composed of 3 people and one additional person it is expected to be appointed soon. The TS is in charge of monitoring implementation of the NSIRLC, coordination with all related central and local government institutions, and coordination with local CSOs and the related international organizations. One of the 3 employees in the TS is from the Roma community. While the TS staff is very active, the location of the TS allows it to monitor activities but it does not have enough power to shape policy frames, directions and programmes especially regarding the large number of central and local government institutions involved in resolving Roma issues.

Figure 1.

How do you evaluate the Government(s) efforts to resolve the main concerns of the Roma?

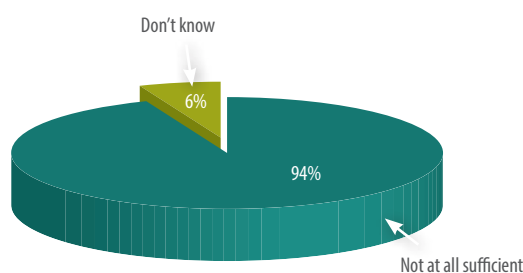
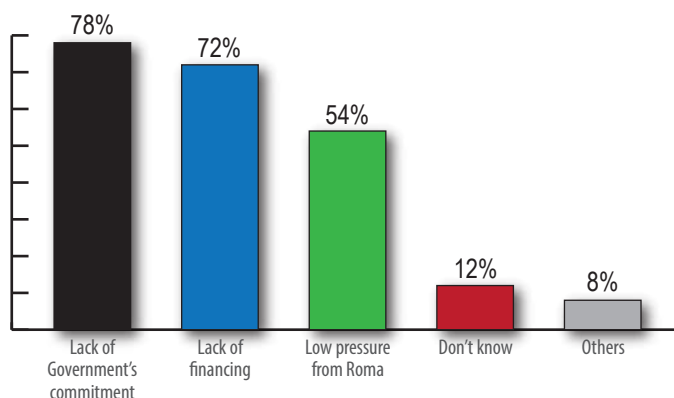


Figure 2.

If insufficient, what, in your opinion, are the main reasons?



In addition, the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (WG) for Roma was established in 2003, headed by the Vice Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and is composed of 10 other members representing the related Ministries at the Vice Ministers level. Roma NGOs are also invited to participate in the WG. The WG is organized into two meetings per year to analyze six-month reports prepared by the TS and discuss any important action regarding Roma community. In practical terms, the WG role is more focused

on information sharing and promoting coordination between all related Ministries. Unfortunately, Vice Ministers do not regularly participate in the WG meetings. In the last meeting of 13 December 2012, none of the Vice Ministers were present. In addition to the WG members, there are 11 “Contact Points” designated in 10 Ministries and in the Anti-Traffic Unit.

Despite the competency of the TS staff, this structure lacks the necessary authority to coordinate policies across Ministries and to influence authorities in managing EU funds. The proposal to transform it into a National Agency under the Prime Minister is under discussion. In addition, “Contact Points” in the Ministries are existing staff that are involved in Roma issues mostly without this function being included in their job description. There have been no specific budgetary allocations for the provision of critical social services for Roma and there is excessive reliance on civil society and international donors in this field.

Local authorities

At the local level, a Coordination Comity for Programming, Evaluation and Coordination of Social Protection Services has been established in each Regional Council. In addition, a Technical Group for Roma issues is composed of representatives from all administrative units that have Roma inhabitants, representatives of Regional Departments depending from Central Government,¹¹ representatives of Roma NGOs and other related local NGOs.

Generally speaking, all local institutional structures are more involved in the coordination of actions to resolve any case-by-case Roma concerns than in policy formulation, evaluation and monitoring. As a matter of fact, policy formulation is an exclusive function of Ministries and Regional institutions, while local government institutions are in charge of correctly implementing the policies and strategies adopted by the central government. As a result, they have no real voice at the policy level except in cases where they are invited to workshops organized by the Ministries to share opinions on the drafted strategies.

There are no local policies or local action plans with regard to the Roma community. Local aggregated statistical data on the Roma community are also totally missing. For the first time, a data collection system is under implementation – initially in four Regions,¹² which is supported by UNDP.

Coordination

The Inter-Ministerial WG for Roma and the Technical Group for Roma issues are in charge of coordination within different layers of governance. The TS is making coordination efforts between central and local government institutions. However, its authority to realize this coordination is very limited. In addition, a large number of international donor agencies are more and more interested in supporting Roma issues in Albania through their own projects or through international and/or local NGOs. Currently, the TS is organizing annual information meetings with them. There is a need to institutionalize and coordinate these efforts in order to avoid overlapping as well as to increase efficiency of potential financing.

Discrepancies

It is very difficult (and could be even considered premature) to discuss and evaluate the discrepancies between mainstream and targeted policies in Albania. The starting point could be the excessive number of strategic documents regarding social inclusion, gender and child issues, and trafficking that include objec-

11 Regional Department of Education, Regional Employment Department, Regional State Social Services Department, Department of Public Health, and Regional Department of Police are regional institutions independent of the Central Government Ministries.

12 Elbasani, Fieri, Durresi, and Tirana Regions.

tives and measures related to Roma community, Roma women and Roma children. While at the same time, the strategic documents and Action Plans specifically regarding the Roma community which are often amended or partially replaced by other suggested documents. The large number of related institutional structures also mirror of this phenomenon. Very often such the decisions for such initiatives are influenced by the harmonization criteria of SAA.

There is a need in this respect for a unified approach, first of all within EU-related institutions, tailored to Albania's size, context and possibilities, and then for more effectiveness and efficiency in the decision-making process with regard to the strategic documents and the related institutional structures. This is related, for instance, to the many strategic documents and Action Plans adopted by different Ministries for different sectors that imply Roma issues, which are often "imposed" by EU institutions or by EU technical assistance support under the stabilization and association process. There is a need for a synergetic approach in terms of priority measures and financial support. From an institutional point of view, the large number of institutions, structures and focal points regarding Roma issues do not result in either effectiveness or efficiency. For instance, it is questionable how effective it is to have an Ombudsman and a CPD Office as two separate institutions that do a similar scope of work.

Monitoring and evaluation policies

From a formal point of view, monitoring and evaluation functions are well defined in the existing institutional structures and there are examples of progress reports regarding implementation of the related strategies and Action Plans, as well as implementation of different related Laws. Very often these reports are full of descriptions of the activities but they lack analyses of outputs versus initial objectives. Both the Government reports on the implementation of DAP and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) reports on monitoring the Anti-Discrimination Law are typical examples of very generic reports.

In this respect, there is a need for at least two fundamental improvements:

- Completing Strategies and Action Plans with clear objectives and measurable targets; and
- Establishing a data collection system harmonized with above targets and developing a standardized reporting model in all reporting levels.

Budgetary resources

There is a general concern in Albania regarding the strategic documents and related Action Plans. "Traditionally" there is no costing-out of priority actions and there is no information on the budgets allocated to their implementation. As a result, the probability that strategies and Action Plans will be implemented is very low and they must rely, to a large extent, on external financing, including both local and international NGOs projects. There is a need for a fundamental change in this approach.

EU financial support

Albania was encouraged by the EU¹³ to make full use of financial instruments such as IPA in its efforts to achieve social inclusion of vulnerable groups. As a result, about 26 million EUR were designated to support the social development sector during the period 2011-2013,¹⁴ representing about 10% of the total budget allocated for Albania under IPA programme. Part of this budget is meant to support actions that prevent social exclusion and develop social inclusion policies/measures for the most vulnerable, notably the Roma

13 EC Delegation in Tirana, Seminar on Inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities in the framework of Albania's European Union Integration, Tirana, December 15, 2011.

14 IPA, Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document 2011-2013, Albania.

population and other minorities such as Balkan Egyptians, and also to promote equality between men and women as well as to strengthening fighting against discrimination.

IPA 2011 provided 1.5 million EUR to support Roma integration including one component to strengthen the capacity of the TS. In addition, IPA 2012 will provide financial support for the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly minorities such as Roma and Egyptians, through ad hoc interventions to increase the level of inclusiveness and also through projects funded via a call for proposals by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

In general, Roma community representatives (Roma NGOs and community leaders) are not invited to actively participate in programming such financial resources. The general opinion is that the major part of financing addressed mostly institutional support and not their real needs regarding poverty alleviation and improving living conditions. In addition, a more results-oriented responsibility must be developed by the EU-as-donor with regard to EU financing. For instance, the Census 2011 was financed and supported with technical assistance by the EU¹⁵ and the contested results regarding the Roma community were published by the Albanian National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and also included the EU logo.

15 The cost of the Census 2011 was covered by the European Union (about 9 million EUR) and partially by Swiss Confederation.

2. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Registration and identity cards

The Roma population in Albania has been estimated by different sources to be between 1,300 and 120,000 people. The big discrepancy between the two figures is due to the fact that, until 2011, no official census in Albania has ever mentioned the Roma. Thus, during the 1989 census, Roma fell into the category of “others” together with the Vlachs and other small minorities. Obviously, many of the Roma remained “hidden” in the figures of other ethnic groups registered in that particular census: Albanians, Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins. No data on ethnic groups were provided by the 2001 census.

The Minority Rights International Group estimated the number of Roma at between 90,000 and 100,000.¹⁶ Scholars, such as Poulton,¹⁷ Brunner¹⁸ and Bugajski,¹⁹ claimed the Roma number at 10,000, 60,000 and 100,000 respectively. The United States of America (USA) Department of State claimed that there are 100,000²⁰ Roma. Referring to the most updated estimations of the CoE of July 2012, the Roma population in Albania represents in average about 3.5% of the total population of Albania. The Albanian Roma NGOs' sources claimed that there are between 80,000 and 120,000 Roma. The Albanian NSIRLC indirectly referred to more than 25,000 Roma people. And, finally, the World Bank²¹ (WB) contended that Roma population in Albania could be estimated between 1,261 and 90-100 thousand people, representing 0.04% or 3% of the total Albanian population respectively.

Another Report²² clarifies that Albanian Roma people were first registered during a “census” of 1522 when approximately 1,270 Roma were estimated to live in the noted 374 campfires.²³ In 1930, according to a popular estimate, there were 20,000 Roma in the whole country. In 1980, it was estimated that there were 62,000 Roma in Albania. The Report also estimated that the growth rate of the Romani population is higher than that of Albanians. A recent mapping survey was conducted from April-November 2011²⁴ and has mapped 108 Roma communities. According to this study, the total number of Roma children in Albania is 6,304, representing about 43.3% of the total Roma population. This extrapolates to some 15,000 Roma people in total.

It was assumed that the issue of Roma registration would have been resolved through Census 2011 but the final results recently declared by INSTAT in December 13, 2012 indicated that the Roma community in Albania represents only 0.3% of the total population of Albania²⁵ (corresponding to less than 8,500 people!) an amount that differs greatly from all previously cited estimations. As such, Census 2011 failed to present relevant statistical data for the Roma community. In fact, a related Census 2011 monitoring report previously indicated concerns about the process of registration during Census 2011 implementation.²⁶ One week before finalizing the registration, one in three Roma families approached by surveyors asked not to be

16 The Minority Rights Group International, 1995.

17 Poulton, H, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, London, 1991.

18 Brunër, G. *Nemzetisegi kerdes es kisebbsegi konfliktusor Kelet-Europaban*, Budapest, 1995.

19 Bugajski, J. *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe*, NY, 1994.

20 US Department of State, *Albania Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, January 1997.

21 The World Bank, *Roma at a Glance*, April 2010.

22 Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe – Southeast Europe, *Roma of Albania*, August 2000.

23 It is likely that this figure is considered by the World Bank as an official figure (!).

24 The mapping survey was conducted by CESS under UNICEF financing. See: *Mapping Roma Children in Albania*, UNICEF November 2011.

25 Speech of the General Director of INSTAT on the CENSUS 2011 final results, Tirana, December 13, 2012.

26 HDPC, *Registration of Roma families support to CENSUS 2011, Final Report*, Tirana, December 2011.

contacted by recorders; 67% of them considered the questions included in the questionnaire as difficult to respond to, 40% of them did not consider the recorders to be clear, patient and calm; and in more than 50% of the surveyed families, recorders were not Roma or were not accompanied by Roma representatives.²⁷

Regarding the registration of Roma by the Local Civil Register Offices, some progress was made during the provision of new ID cards for the population. This is related to the following measures taken by the Albanian institutions:

- The General Directorate of the Civil Status considered suggestions of local NGOs proposed in 2008 to amend the existing Law "On the Civil Status"²⁸ in order to facilitate registration. After adoption by the Parliament, about 7,000 children have been registered, most of them Roma children;
- A 2009 Directive of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) further facilitated (liberalized) birth registration procedures for Roma children in consideration of their particular vulnerability to trafficking when they have no birth registration;
- Based on a Government Decree of December 2008, ID cards at no cost were provided for about 5,000 Roma.

Roma registration was also considered an important issue by the Roma DAP as part of the Social Inclusion (SI) and Equal Opportunities sector includes two main tasks:

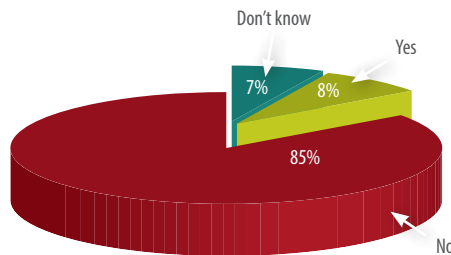
- Provision of ID cards free of charge to the Roma community; and
- Registration of Roma in the civil registry.

The total number of Roma population, the number of Roma equipped with ID cards, and the percentage of Roma unregistered in local civil registry, were identified as the main related indicators.²⁹ However, targets were not defined for this purpose and consequently the related statistical data are not available in the responsible Albanian institutions.

Roma registration has been the subject of analyses and recommendations by several EC Progress Reports. In 2009, the need for more attention to uncompleted registration of Roma minority was underlined; in 2010, the lack of accurate data on minorities in Albania was mentioned, along with the expectation to address this issue by the population Census 2011; in 2011, it was mentioned that although registration campaigns and awareness-raising activities have been held, a number of Roma still lack official registration; and in 2012, the administrative decisions to facilitate birth registration procedures and include optimal questions on ethnic origin in the population Census 2011 was regarded positively.

The barriers to Roma registration in the Local Civil Register Offices are very complex. Technical barriers (e.g. not having the requisite papers), lack of knowledge of system, emigration, and mobility of Roma families could be considered as some of the most important barriers.

Figure 3.
Are you informed about the existence of the Law on protection from anti-discrimination?



27 The survey comprised 870 Roma families in 13 Districts.

28 Law No 895, date. 10.10.2002.

29 MoLSA and UN Albania, Guidelines on Progress Monitoring and Reporting of the National Action Plan Indicators for Roma Inclusion Decade 2010-2015, Tirana, 2011.

Anti-Roma discrimination and racism

The anti-discrimination legal and institutional framework has been substantially improved in Albania. While almost all of the main anti-discrimination concepts developed by the EU Racial Equality Directive³⁰ were referred in the AC and in some related Laws, until 2009 there had been little progress in establishing a proper legal definition of discrimination or specific anti-discrimination legislation, (although some anti-discrimination provisions were included in some of the specific legislation).

In 2009, the Law on Protection from Discrimination was drafted in consultation with CSOs and, thereafter, in February 2010, the Law was adopted by the Parliament.³¹ The scope of this act is to assure every person has the right to:

- equality before the law and equal protection by law;
- equality of opportunity and possibility to exercise rights, enjoy freedoms and take part in public life; and
- effective protection from discrimination and from every form of conduct that encourages discrimination.

Figure 4.

Do you think that Roma are discriminated against in Albania?

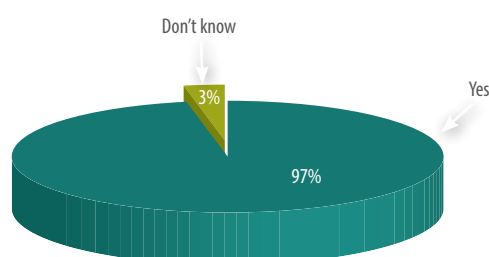


Figure 5.

If yes, who are the most discriminated?

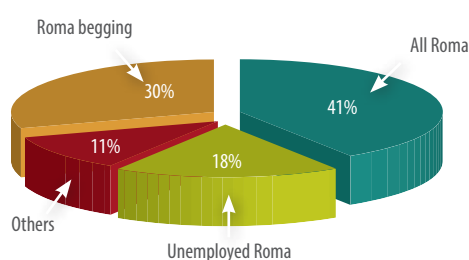
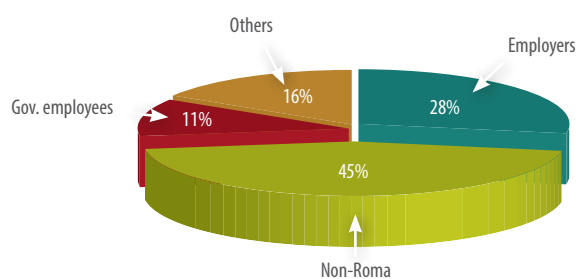


Figure 6.

If yes, by whom are they most discriminated?



30 Council Directive 2000/43/EC.

31 Law No. 10221, date 4.02.2010.

The Law clearly states the prohibition of discrimination, protection from discrimination, the ability to exercise the right to vote, the ability to be elected and to be appointed to a public duty, the freedom of conscience and religion, protection from discrimination in employment and education, as well as protection in the field of goods and services.

The Anti-Discrimination Law refers to and is in full compliance with four main related European Directives:

- Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 “On the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin”;
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 “Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation”;
- Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 “Implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services”; and
- Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 2006/54/KE of 5 July 2006 “On the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation”.

The immediate positive result of the implementation of this Law was the establishment of the Office of CPD. According to the Law, the CPD was appointed by the Parliament³² that also approved the organizational structure of the Office of Commissioner.³³ The CPD is not part of a political party and the appointed staff are not holding other positions in government institutions. The main functions of the CPD are focused on the review and investigation of the complaints of the subjects that claim to be victims of discriminatory behavior; monitoring perceptions on discrimination; and preparing monitoring reports on anti-discrimination and providing recommendations. The CPD may also impose fines from 10,000 ALL to 80,000 ALL³⁴ after analyzing complaints. An Action Plan to guide and facilitate the implementation of this Law has not yet been prepared and there is no evidence of budget allocations to support its implementation.

According to the Anti-Discrimination Law, every person or group of persons who claim that discrimination has been exercised against them may submit a lawsuit to the competent court according to the definitions of the Code of Civil Procedure for Indemnification or, as the case may be, to make a criminal denunciation on the responsible organization for criminal prosecution. The submission of a complaint before the commissioner is not a condition of submitting a lawsuit and it is not a liability for the injured person to turn to the court or to the Prosecution Office. An organization with a lawful interest – or the commissioner – may submit a lawsuit in the name of a person or group of persons, provided that the commissioner or organization has the consent, by special power of attorney or by declaration before the court of the person or group of persons injured by the discrimination.

There is little evidence on Roma community benefits resulting from the implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Law. The general public awareness actions to build understanding about Roma integration are more related to specific events than systemic ones, geographically focused in some re-

INCIDENTS INVOLVING ROMA FAMILIES

“The OSCE Presence in Albania, the US Embassy in Tirana and the EU Delegation to Albania understand that during the week of 20 February 2011 dozens of Roma families were violently removed from their settlements in central Tirana by unidentified persons who set fire to their shelters and chased them from their homes. We note that these actions resulted in some serious injuries and the displacement of large numbers of people, including many children. We note that Albania has formally committed itself to the objectives of the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The European Commission, in its Opinion on Albania’s membership application, identified the fight against discrimination and the protection of the rights of Roma as key priority areas needing particular attention from the authorities. In this spirit, we strongly urge the responsible authorities to take the appropriate action by investigating the disturbing February events in order to ensure that such acts are not repeated. We also encourage the authorities to take the appropriate action to provide necessary social assistance, including housing, to those people who have now found themselves homeless. The OSCE, the US and the EU align themselves fully with civil society representatives in calling for an end to discrimination and violence against Roma families and children.”

In Tirana on 16 March, 2011

32 Law No. 33, date 22.04.2010.

33 Law No. 34, date 20.05.2010.

34 The amounts are equivalent to 100 and 800 USD.

gions rather than countrywide, and specifically financed by international donor Agencies in the framework of their projects and/or local NGO projects. It is the same for efforts made to promote right awareness among Roma citizens. This is clearly evidenced by how little information the general public and Roma citizens have about the existence and provisions of the Law on Protection from Discrimination and their benefits from it.³⁵

The newly appointed Ombudsman has taken a proactive role in the incidents involving 45 Roma families in Tirana.³⁶ Eight Roma families took refuge for a week in the Ombudsman Office while others were sheltered by MoLSAEO in an emergency camp supported also by four NGOs. The Ombudsman informed all related central government institutions and Parliament and also conducted a public information campaign on the case providing recommendations on how to resolve this problem. During this time, Roma families benefited from Social Assistance and humanitarian aid.

However, to date there is no definitive solution for this case, including housing, appropriate actions in investigating the incidents, and identification and punishment of those responsible.

Institutional discrimination

Public authorities and public service providers in Albania do not recognize the existence of institutional discrimination of the Roma community and this is based on two main arguments:

- the adoption of the anti-discrimination legal framework in line with the EU-related standards is carefully validated and watched by international partners; and
- all government strategies and government programs could easily identify particular attention and specific support for ethnic minorities.

Free books for Roma children, second chance education program, inclusion of Roma in the employment promotion programs, free vaccination campaigns for the Roma community, and inclusion of Roma in the Municipalities' social housing programs are some examples for this argument.

However, despite 20 years of democracy, government institutions failed to provide accurate statistical data for the Roma community and this represents a significant example of institutional discrimination for the Roma. In addition, effective data collection, reporting and management of the Roma National Action Plan is non-existent, there is no evidence of allocation of financial resources at the national and local level for anti-discrimination issues, and central and local government institutions are not pro-active in discouraging discrimination and investigating related incidents.

Three other typical examples of institutional discrimination should be mentioned: (i) The incidents of February 2011 in Tirana have not been solved yet;³⁷ (ii) the violence of Tirana Municipality police in July 2012 against Roma that collect cans and plastic bottles from garbage bins; (iii) The case of the young Roma girl who, after finalizing university studies in two faculties, applied for jobs and was not yet employed because of prejudices about her ethnicity.³⁸

VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA THAT COLLECT CANS AND PLASTIC BOTTLES

Tirana Municipal Police exercised violence and exerted authority over some Roma transportation means, by considering garbage collection an illegal activity and ignoring that this is the only "employment" possibility for the Roma in Tirana. About 700 Roma families were affected by this case. Despite the protests of the Roma community and the commitment of the Ombudsman in an independent investigation, there was no legal solution. The chief of Municipal Police even refused to present explanations to the Ombudsman, totally ignoring it. According to some media reports that have been favoured by the Municipal Police, a private business was behind this case.

35 Based on the preliminary results of our survey.

36 This incident happened in February 2011. A group of citizens removed 45 Roma families by force from their settlement near Tirana train station. The affected families have been provided with alternative but somewhat inadequate temporary accommodations by the authorities in the form of tents in a remote area of the city. They have been assisted by the international community and non-governmental organizations, particularly regarding the judicial follow-up of the case.

37 In the Roma organizations understanding, there is some political pressure behind this case.

38 The case was published in media in December 20, 2012. The last application of E.Y. was in Pogradeci Municipality; she was announced as winner and thereafter the contract was refused and given instead to an under skilled candidate belonging to a majority.

Anti-discrimination body

Established in February 2010, the institution of CPD is focused on three main functions:

- Support to the victims of discrimination through reviewing complaints, carrying out administrative investigations, imposing administrative sanctions, and representing complainants in court for civil cases;
- Monitoring implementation of the Law on Protection from Discrimination; and
- Preparing reports for anti-discrimination issues, proposing improvements in legal frameworks and conducting public awareness campaigns.

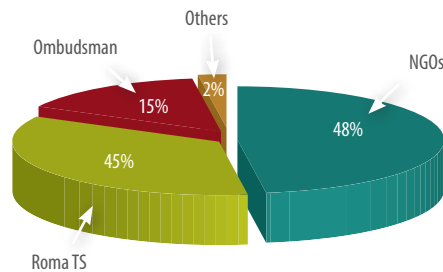
ROMA ORGANIZATION COMPLAINT FOR THE INCIDENT OF FEBRUARY 2011

The representative of the Roma Union "Amaro Drom" presented on March 28, 2011 a complaint to the Commissioner regarding the incident of February 2011 involving ethnic discrimination by a group of Albanian youngsters of which two have been arrested by the Police. After verifying the documents, the Commissioner considered the complaint invalid because the representative of the organization was not equipped with a special power of attorney required by Law. Subsequently, the organization withdraws the complaint.

The Institution of the Commissioner has already structured itself organizationally to include three directorates: A Directorate of Legal and Procedural Affairs and Foreign Relations; a Directorate of Inspection and Investigation; and a Directorate of Supporting Services. Part of this structure also includes the Public Relation Sector.

Regarding the first function, the total number of complaints during 2011 was 15, of which only eight were considered as complying with the Law. The CPD rejected four complaints, presented recommendations for one complaint and the three other complaints are under investigation. There was only one complaint regarding discrimination of Roma community (concerning the incidents of February 2011) that was rejected by the CPD for procedural reasons, which are likely to be barriers for Roma again in future cases. Although this was the first year of activity for this institution, the CPD did not seem to not sufficiently encourage complaints and investigate the presented cases strongly enough. In addition, the Roma community does not have enough knowledge about the new Law with regard to their rights and the procedures they need to followed.

Figure 7.
Which institutions help most to resolve Roma problems?



Regarding the second function, the CPD described the status of discrimination in Albania,³⁹ with particular emphasis on employment, education, and health. The findings are based on several documents prepared by local and international CSOs or by international institutions, as well as on a survey conducted by the CPD that included children and teachers in five basic- education and high schools in five Districts testing their knowledge about the Law on Protection from Discrimination. The report is poor and very general and there is a need to harmonize it with EU-related models. In addition, the evaluation of the implementation status of the Law on Protection from Discrimination is not included within the report.

39 Report of the Commissioner to the Albanian Parliament, February 22, 2012.

Regarding the third function, the CPD was active and presented reports in several national and international meetings,⁴⁰ provided opinions and comments on several drafts of Laws, and participated in awareness activities organized in cooperation with international organizations.⁴¹ These activities could be considered effective given that the annual budget of the Commissioner is limited to some 260,000 EUR of which about 70% is allocated for staff remuneration and only about 15% is allocated for services.

Despite these efforts, the results of our survey showed that none of the Roma respondents were aware of the existence of the CPD and the CPD was not recognized as an Institution that helps to resolve Roma problems.

EU Race Directives and complaints

There are no visible gaps in the Albanian legislation vis-à-vis the EU Race Directive.⁴² The right to equality before the law and the protection against discrimination for all people constitutes a universal right recognized by the AC and by the Law on Anti-discrimination. A general comparison between this Law and the EU Race Directive⁴³ is presented in the Table 1. In addition, the CPD was established in accordance with the directive to strengthen protection against discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin through the existence of a body with competence to analyze the problems involved, to study possible solutions and to provide concrete assistance to victims. The existing national, sector and cross-sector strategies prepared by government institutions also consider social inclusion components. This is specifically related to the strategic documents regarding employment, education, health, social services, Roma inclusion, anti-trafficking, etc.

Article 34 and 35 of the existing Law on Anti-discrimination affirmed the right of an individual or group of individuals who claims that they have been discriminated against, CSOs and the CPD, to complain to the competent court or to carry out criminal persecution complaints. Individuals and groups of individuals may proceed without previously reporting their discrimination case to the CPD.⁴⁴ To date, there are no reported discrimination cases presented for judgments in local courts or in the European Court of Human Rights.⁴⁵ The very low number of complaints confirms the Roma community's lack of awareness about their right to complain and also their need for legal assistance in the case of discrimination.

INCLUSION IN POLITICS

Roma inclusion in politics is out of the question. The establishment of a network of women in politics was supported in Korçe by the OSCE. I tried running as an independent member of the municipal council, to represent the Roma and Egyptian communities. Under the law, an independent candidate may be registered in the election in the event that the candidate can collect 700 firms (versus 300 signatures to be a candidate of a political party). I gathered 700 signatures, along with photocopies of identity cards for each. The Electoral Commission asked for the 700 people to present themselves for confirmation in the offices of the Commission and therefore gave a timeframe of four days (out of which one day was an official holiday). I had to send four buses per day to the offices. The first day I took 70 people. They said: ok, you may continue. The second day I sent 90 others. But there was nobody in the Commission offices and no one showed up all day. The third day they were off. On the fourth day I called it quits, as it didn't make sense. So I failed and I was not registered. After some time, the chairman of the electoral commission admitted in confidence that it was intentionally done because they were convinced that I'd win the election.

E.T. Korçe, February 2013

40 Example: Report in the Third Meeting EU Albania in the framework of the SAA; report in 79th Session of the Anti-Discrimination Comity in Geneva.

41 Example: Anti-discrimination campaign organized by OSCE in six schools of Tirana; cooperation with EU Info Centres in Tirana and Vlora for information sessions.

42 Council Directive 2000/43/EC of June 2000.

43 Council Directive 2000/43/EC of June 2000.

44 Segregation is not explicitly mentioned as a special form of discrimination, either in the Race Directive or in the Albanian Law.

45 Report of the Commissioner to the Albanian Parliament, February 22, 2012.

Table 1: General Comparison between EU Race Directive and Albanian Anti-Discrimination Law

Race Directive		Albanian Law	
Art.	Key concepts	Comment	Art.
2	Direct/indirect discrimination, harassment, victimization	All considered	3
3	Conditions for access to employment, to self-employment and to occupation, including selection criteria and recruitment conditions	All considered. In addition: obligation of the employer, duties of the CoM, MoLSAEO and Mol, the right of the employee.	12,13,14,15
	Access to all types and to all levels of education	Considered. In addition: duties of the MoES, director of an education institution.	17
	Employment and working conditions	Considered	12
	Membership in an organization	Considered. In addition: participation in politics	12, 9
	Social protection, including social security and healthcare	Not explicitly considered	
	Access to and supply of goods and services	Considered	20
8	The rule of burden of proof	Considered	36
11	Promoting the social dialogue	Not explicitly considered	
12	Encourage dialogue with NGOs	Not explicitly considered	
13	Designate an anti-discrimination body	Considered	21-32
15	Design and apply rules on sanctions	Considered	33, 34, 38

Roma children

A number of strategic documents adopted by GoA address children rights and some of them include specific measures regarding Roma children rights. The National Strategy for Children and the related Action Plan consider children as a particularly vulnerable group. Specific objectives and actions regarding education and social inclusion of Roma children are included in the Roma Strategy and in the related Action Plan. In April 2012, the National Strategy for Child Protection 2012-2015 and the related Action Plan were both adopted. In addition, a specific Joint Order of the Mol and MoLSAEO was issued in August 2012 that monitors the child labour phenomena.

WE DREAM, TOO

It is eight years that I am unemployed. I am paid 4,500 lek per month. I have never been offered a job during these eight years. Six of us that live in the same home. My wife and I are disabled, so we have no employment opportunities. We have four children, none of working age. How can we live, ea, and take care of their health? We live in a plastic barrack, which we don't legally own. We can easily be thrown out on the road by anyone, anytime. Of course, we dream. What do we dream about? To have a meal a day for our children and to live in a hut that is legally our own. This is Ronaldo, my faithful dog. Don't be afraid, as it doesn't bite. It is accustomed to people, as it plays all day with my kids. It goes out touring around the city and finds things to eat in the trash. This is its home; we made a wooden kennel, and I have even put a blanket for it so it won't feel cold. Why have we set this TV antenna to the kennel? The kids put it on; they even put a shoebox in there, supposedly acting as a television. I dream for my children to be like Ronaldo. Not as the footballer, of course, but as my dog. We are unable to realize these dreams. No one helps us.

Arben, Gjirokaster, February 2013

In April and November 2008, the Albanian Parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code, which now considers the exploitation of children and the use of children for pornographic materials a criminal offence. An integral Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child was adopted in November 2010 and further improvements to the Criminal Code are under discussion. The GoA made efforts to establish a national child protection system. Initially, the National Steering Comity for Child Labour Elimination was established in 2001 headed by the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO), which was followed by the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Comity for Children Rights in March 2007. In addition, the National Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and the National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child were established in 2011, as well as a special Anti-traffic Unit in the Mol. Thereafter, 10 Child Rights' Units were established at the Regional level,⁴⁶ and 62 Child Protection Units were established at the Municipality/Commune level. Two Government Decrees⁴⁷ provided specific rules for coordination and exchanging statistical information among the central and local government related structures.

46 Child Rights Units are established in the Regional Council of each Region.

47 Government Decrees issued in April 2012.

During 2011, 84 victims/potential victims of trafficking⁴⁸ were identified and supported by Residential Centers, 39 of which were children. A monitoring report on the progress of implementing the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child was carried out by the National Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in 2012. However, street children, child labour, and physical and psychological violence are issues of particular concern, requiring more systematic attention from the authorities. In addition, it is easy to see that there is some confusion in terms of the number of strategic documents, Ministries and institutional structures involved. There are too many strategies as well as too many central and local institutional structures whose effectiveness and efficiency is questionable.

Roma women

The National Strategy on Gender Equality and Eradication of Domestic Violence and the related Action Plan were adopted in 2007. A specific Law on Gender Equality was also adopted in July 2008 and a Unit on Domestic Violence was established in the MoLSAEO. In January 2009, the National Council of Gender Equality was established. In 2010, special units for dealing with cases of domestic violence were set up in police stations. These documents all address the overall gender issues in Albania relating to Romani women.

However, domestic violence still remains widespread and the protection of women against all forms of violence needs to be strengthened considerably in practice. The system of assistance to victims that is currently in place is not fully professional and still relies to a large extent on external financing.

Human trafficking

The National Comity for Combating Traffic of Human Beings was established in 2002, headed by the Minister of Interior.⁴⁹ In 2005, the Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator was established in the Mol. The administrative capacity of the Office has been improved and specialized training has been provided to relevant institutions at the local and national level. A Prime Minister Order for the establishment of a Regional Anti-Trafficking Committees was issued in June, 2006. The National Action Plan 2011-2013 to Combat Human Trafficking was also adopted in the beginning of 2011⁵⁰ followed by the adoption of the Standard Procedures for Identification of Potential Victims of Trafficking.⁵¹ Cooperation Agreements with neighbor countries have been signed and agreements with local NGOs and international organizations have also been finalized.

During 2011, the State Police identified 23 penal cases of human trafficking, 17 of which were for women trafficking (involving 24 authors; eight of them arrested), and six cases of children trafficking (involving 10 authors; two of them arrested). The Prosecutor's Office registered seven new cases during 2011. The First Grade Court finalized 13 cases, three of which were registered during 2011. The Appeal Court finalized 12 cases and the Haut Court of Justice, 17 cases, 11 of which were of women trafficking and six were of child trafficking.⁵² However, Albania continues to be considered a source country for human trafficking, particularly of women and girls for sexual exploitation. Children are also trafficked for begging and other forms of child labour and about half of Albanian trafficking victims are under the age 18.⁵³ The detection capacity remains low and very few trafficking cases are prosecuted.

48 There is no evidence that they were specific to Roma communities.

49 Government Decree No. 8, date 5.01.2002.

50 The action plan and an additional document regarding children's trafficking and child protection have been adopted by Government Decree No. 142, date 23.02.2011.

51 Government Decree No. 582, date 27.07.2011.

52 National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Report on the implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, Tirana, February 2012.

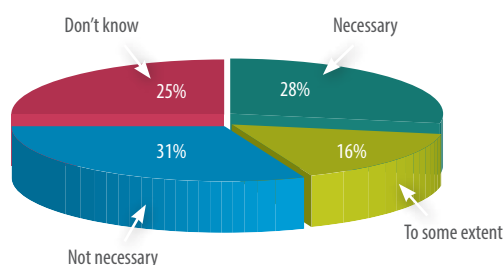
53 EC Progress Report Albania 2009.

3. EDUCATION

Discrimination in access to education

Due to the lack of adequate quantitative information on the Roma population living in Albania, it is possible neither to provide standard data on education attainment of Roma, nor to identify clear targets related to education and monitor the level of their learning achievement. As a result, the related official statistics from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) are missing. However, it is a common perception that the comparison between the level of education of Roma and the majority of the population will inevitably show a very significant gap between the two groups.

Figure 8.
In your opinion, is education necessary for your children?



While almost 100% of the Roma families would like very much for their children complete at least the basic education,⁵⁴ only few of them consider education necessary.⁵⁵ The main reasons for this are as follows:

- Education is not directly linked to their employment and they don't believe that education could alleviate their poverty;
- Parents need children to contribute in their day-to-day lives due to extreme poverty and lack of employment;
- Parents are not confident that their children will have the minimal skills needed to complete basic education;
- The very poor living conditions hamper children's ability to do homework, which is a big detriment to learning;
- Almost all parents are illiterate and would not be able to assist their children in doing their homework; and
- Parents are out of the home all the day to try and provide for their family and there would be nobody to take care of the younger children.

I'M A FOREIGNER IN MY OWN COUNTRY

I am a Roma student in the third grade of the Science faculty. My friends from class are often troubled by people's reaction when they recognize from my color that I am a Roma girl. "You must talk in English and we will present you as being Brazilian," they whisper in my ear. Very often, people in the street or on public transportation perceive me as foreigner. And when I start to speak, they look at me with suspicion because I speak excellent Albanian. Albanians feel better accepting me as a foreigner than as Roma girl.

In the evaluators' opinion, there is a need for a better and deeper understanding of the concept of school segregation vis-à-vis the Roma community in Albania. First of all, there is a general perception that neither

⁵⁴ The basic education in Albania is a compulsory one.

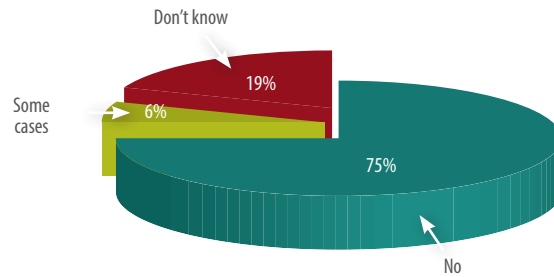
⁵⁵ Findings and charts are based on the results of the survey conducted in the framework of this report.

Government institutions nor the Roma community are in favor of school segregation. The question must be closely evaluated in relation to where Roma families are, which is often:

- Urban or rural areas where Roma families live in the same communities with non-Roma families;
- Urban areas with a high concentration of Roma inhabitants; or
- Suburban or rural areas where Roma live in settlements totally separated from non-Roma communities.

School segregation is non-existent for the first group, where Roma pupils are enrolled in the same schools and in mixed classes with non-Roma pupils. In the second group, school segregation exists somewhat: in these areas there are usually basic schools dominated by Roma pupils because of the high concentration of Roma inhabitants. This is especially true of the lower cycle (LC) of basic education⁵⁶ (see also 2.4.1). In the third group it is almost impossible to eliminate segregation, especially for pre-school education and for the LC of basic education because of the distance of mixed schools from the Roma settlements. The elementary school in *Stani i Moraves*,⁵⁷ close to city of Berati, where 169 Roma families live, is a typical example. There are only two *collective classes* only in this elementary school (grades one and three, and grades two and four, respectively) with 35 pupils in total and all of them are Roma because there are no non-Roma families in this area. This segregation was unavoidable because the distance to the closest mixed school would be impossible to get to by Roma pupils especially during the winter. As a result, this small elementary school was established upon several requests by the Roma community. This seemed the best course of action, according to both teachers of the school and Roma community representatives.

Figure 9.
Are there cases where Roma children are segregated in separate classes?



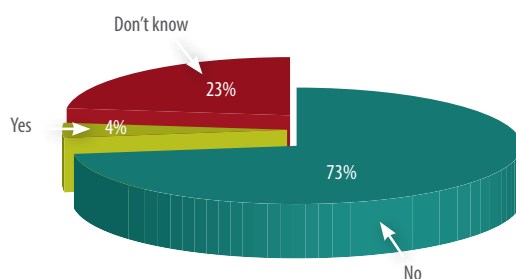
Baseline data on the share of Roma children in segregated schools/classes compared to the total number of Roma children enrolled in that respective level of education are not available. As a result, there are no quantifiable indicators to measure whether the share and number of children in segregated schools/classes has increased or decreased. However, at the local level, the Regional Department of Education's (RDE) records some information on the kindergartens and elementary schools in the areas with a high concentration of Roma families.

Discriminatory treatment of Roma children in school is not officially recognized considering that, in general, they are well accepted in all levels of education. However, there are many examples reported by Roma pupils and teachers themselves that could attract the attention of the Government institutions and the Albanian society as a whole. In several cases non-Roma parents prohibit their children from sharing the same desk with Roma pupils, which greatly influences the children's perception: non-Roma pupils for the first time are understanding that Roma pupils should not be their friends and Roma pupils for the first time are understanding that they are different from others and not accepted by others. Meanwhile, those parents respond very severely to teachers and school directors when they insist on not separating the pupils.

56 The basic education in Albania corresponds to primary education included in the International Standard Classification of Education, UNESCO 2011.

57 Avdul Avdia elementary school in Otlak Commune of Berati District.

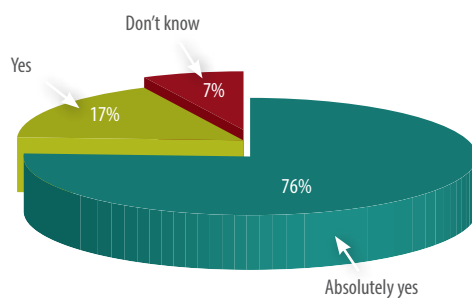
Figure 10.
Is there information on Roma history in textbooks?



The reform of the education system in Albania brought about significant qualitative changes regarding the structure and the content of the system, including curricula and teaching methods. However, to date there is no information on Roma history and culture introduced in textbooks. The Roma community was mentioned only as a linguistic minority, together with other ethnic and linguistic minorities,⁵⁸ in the part of the curricula that focused on human rights issues and did not provide specific information on the Roma community.

RDEs provided, at regular intervals, training for teachers on the new curricula and new teaching methods. Specific modules for teachers that have pupils from vulnerable groups, and especially Roma pupils are also included in these trainings. Additional trainings for teachers of Roma pupils are provided by NGOs under international donors' agencies financing.

Figure 11.
Do you think that Roma history should be included in textbooks?



The EU concerns about the education of the Roma community in Albania are systematically presented in EC Progress Reports (PR) especially during the period 2006-2012. The lack of access to education,⁵⁹ very low level of education and professional qualification,⁶⁰ low school enrolment rates of Roma children,⁶¹ discrimination regarding access to education,⁶² high drop-out rate,⁶³ and the lower preschool enrolment rate among Roma children compared to the rest of the population,⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ were the main problems identified by EC regarding Roma education. The GoA, largely committed to implementing the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, systematically amended its related strategies and legal and/or regulatory framework, making efforts to improve the situation. However, Roma access to education continues to be evaluated in the Progress Reports (PRs) as very low.

58 The Albanian legislation recognizes three national minorities (Greek, ethnic Macedonian and Montenegrin) and two ethno-linguistic minorities (Vlach and Roma).

59 EC Progress Report - Albania 2006.

60 EC Progress Report - Albania 2007.

61 EC Progress Report - Albania 2008.

62 EC Progress Report - Albania 2009.

63 EC Progress Report - Albania 2010.

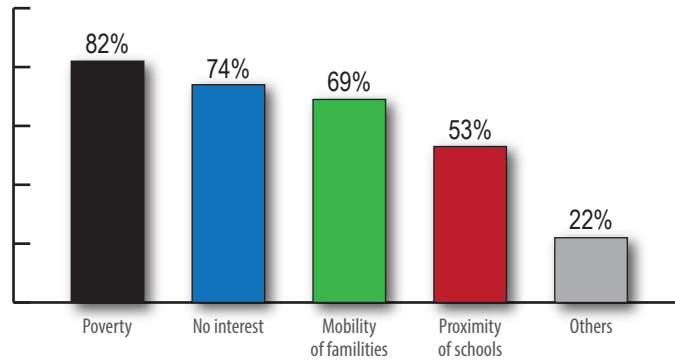
64 EC Progress Report - Albania 2011.

65 EC Progress Report - Albania 2012.

Pre-school and basic education

Roma people are among the least educated communities in Albania. Compared to non-Roma, the Roma illiteracy rate is estimated to be very high, especially for women. The empirical data show that about 40% of the Roma population is illiterate compared to 1.6% of the country average. The average number of years of school attendance for Roma are 5.6 years for males and 5.3 years for females⁶⁶ compared to an estimated 8.6 years for the country average. However, even the country average lags substantially behind Albania's neighboring countries, falling almost six years below the OECD average.

Figure 12.
Why is enrollment of Roma children in basic education so low?



The Roma's poor education may begin at the preschool level because children who attend preschool adapt better to the school environment when they go to elementary school and they face less difficulty absorbing new knowledge. Preschool education is also an important link to properly learning the Albanian language. Empirical data show that only about 27% of Roma children from three to six years old attend preschool. In some districts, such as Lezha, Peshkopia, Shkodra, Kavaja, and Peqini, preschool education for Roma children is almost inexistent. In general, the existing system is not able to cover the demand: according to the official data, in 2010 the network of preschool institutions represented 1,778 kindergartens and enrolled about 75,000 children⁶⁷. In some areas with high concentrations of Roma people, particularly in suburban Roma settlements, the public preschool system is non-existent, except for some kindergartens established by international humanitarian agencies that provide transportation, clothing and food to attract and motivate Roma children to attend preschool.

The low educational level is mainly related to the following:

- Extreme poverty is considered the main barrier to basic education: most Roma families cannot afford to educate their children. In addition, Roma children often suffer from malnutrition and consequently experience concentration difficulties during study hours;
- Very low interests on the part of Roma parents: this is mainly due to the families' economic status and to the low education level of the parents themselves;
- A large number of Roma families are obliged to move from one site to another, or abroad, for economic reasons. As a result, it is difficult for their children to continue classes when they return;
- The distance of the schools from their home, in some specific areas, present a potential obstacle for children to attend school – especially preschool – and the LC of the primary education system; and (v) Other less frequent reasons are related to the discriminatory treatment of Roma children by their non-Roma friends and teachers, and due to the language barriers.

Also important are barriers related to Roma cultural traditions (particularly to gender, language and nomadic traditions). For example, parents force marriage at early age, especially for Roma girls. This is the

66 CEES, Mapping Roma children in Albania, November 2011.

67 MoES, Statistical Yearbook, 2010.

reason that the number of Roma girls enrolled in school begins to go down once they complete the LC of primary education. In addition, parents take their girls out of school when they become 12 or 13 years old, to prevent them from socializing with boys.⁶⁸

The number of Roma children that complete compulsory education remains very low. Several factors could be considered but the very high dropout rate may be one of the main reasons. The dropout phenomenon is most typical for the upper cycle (UC) of the primary education. The lack of motivation is the most frequently mentioned reason that Roma children drop out of school. This translates into boredom, disaffection, and a perception that what the school offers is irrelevant to their present lives as well as their future aspirations. To be motivated, Roma children need incentive, inspiration, stimulation, and enthusiasm, as exists with children from non-Roma families. They also need drive, purpose, self-esteem and the sense of doing some worthwhile – something that classrooms and lessons mostly fail to provide them. Otherwise, they are easily disposed to drop out: some of them before the fourth year of primary education, most of them during the UC. In addition, there is no mother tongue instruction for Roma children, which further contributes to the high dropout rates.

Individual attention of the teachers also remains a very important factor of school dropout. In an education system where teachers, classrooms and supply closets are overburdened and under-resourced, Roma children are often ignored in class and passed from grade to grade with minimal learning achievement. Without additional support, Roma children disengage from class lectures and silently fall further and further behind as they pass through the system. These children eventually abandon the system and join the masses of primary school dropouts.

As mentioned before (see 4.2.3) the parents' interest in encouraging Roma children to complete basic education remains very low, mainly due to their need to engage children in economic activities (mostly informal child labour), making the pressure for children to drop out from school ever present. This is also very frequently related to the widespread tradition of early marriages of Roma girls. According to the findings of a recent study, 19% of all children (between 6 and 14 years old) in Albania are working, 91% of children (5-14 years old) are attending school and 20.5% of children (7-14 years old) are combining work and school.⁶⁹ The same study points to the high proportion of Roma among the street children and trafficking victims.⁷⁰

Enrolment in formal education and completion of schooling do not guarantee learning achievement and the hidden dropout phenomenon is very present among Roma children. Many of them fail to master basic reading, writing and math skills after four or more years of compulsory schooling. A key reason seems to be the organization of teaching around whole-class instruction, rather than teaching also to small groups and individual students, a hallmark of effective teaching. Being among the weaker students, Roma children are losing interest in the lessons, and slide into a state of disengagement from learning which untrained or uncommitted teachers tolerate – and even encourage – as long as the child does not become troublesome or unruly. These pupils do not physically drop out of school; they are present for the purposes of the roll call, but absent for the purpose of learning and instruction.

The second chance program was adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) some years ago, appointing teachers to be in charge of specific courses for Roma children in order to fill learning gaps in their basic education, encourage them to drop back in, and/or prevent them from dropping out. Despite the lack of systemic statistical data on this program, the general perception of Roma respondents is that it is a very useful and successful one that must be extended in all schools that include a larger number of Roma children.

68 UNDP, *A needs assessment study on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania*, February 2012.

69 United State Department of Labour, *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Albania*, October 2010, p.3.

70 *Ibid*, p.10.

Secondary education

The number of Roma students enrolled in general secondary education is very low. This is clearly demonstrated by Table 2 that includes data collected in 10 Albanian Districts.⁷¹ This phenomenon is primarily due to the very low number of Roma children completing basic education because of the low school attendance and high dropout rate. To date, there are no related formal statistical data or indicators so it is very difficult to quantitatively analyze this phenomenon.

In general, vocational education and training (VET) is not a favoured secondary education option in Albania, clearly demonstrated by the low rate of enrollment compared to the total number of pupils enrolled in traditional secondary education. While the national average of this rate is reported to be about 24% as compare to 40% of the national target for 2013, the values for 10 selected Districts seems to be significantly lower especially for Roma children (see Table 2). This is due to two things:

- Roma pupils have a total lack of interest in enrolling in VET schools (clearly indicated in the data presented in the Table 2);
- Almost all pupils of the rural areas have no access to VET because there are no VET schools in these areas (with the exception of a very limited number of unidentified pupils from villages close to the urban areas where VET schools are established). Thus Roma children living in rural areas are automatically excluded from VET.

Table 2: Data on secondary education, 2011⁷²

No	District	Roma in general secondary education as % of total pupils in general secondary education	Enrollment rate in VET as compare to the total pupils in secondary education in %	Roma enrolled in VET as % of total pupils in VET
1	Elbasan	0	15.2	0
2	Gramsh	0	0	0
3	Librazhd	0	3.6	0
4	Peqin	0	0	0
5	Lezha	0	0	0
6	Kurbini	0	0	0
7	Mirdita	0	0	0
8	Fieri	0.1	7.3	0.4
9	Lushnja	0	8.2	0
10	Mallakastra	n.a.	0	n.a.

The public vocational training (VT) system in Albania includes 11 VT centers that provide vocational training courses free of charge and/or with full or partial payment of tariffs established by the National Employment Service (NES). Table 3 includes some specific indicators for three Albanian Regions.⁷³ While the share of jobseekers trained in VT centers remains generally low in Albania, the share of Roma trained in VT centers is more insignificant as compare to the general indication that unemployment rate of Roma people is very high.

71 Out of 36 Districts in total.

72 HDPC, ILO, Data Collection on Vulnerable Groups at Risk of Labour Market Exclusion, Tirana, November 2012.

73 Out of 12 Regions in total.

Table 3: Data on VT, 2011⁷⁴

No	Region	Share of the Unemployed persons trained in %	Share of Job Seekers trained in %	Share of Roma trained in %
1	Elbasan	46	23	4.5
2	Fier	23	23	14.5
3	Lezhe	0	0	0

Tertiary education

The number of Roma students enrolled in the public and private universities remains very low. This is primarily due to the following:

- The number of Roma pupils completing secondary education is very low;
- As a result, there are additional barriers for Roma to achieve at high schools;
- Roma families tend not to support tertiary education because children who continue their studies are not available to provide income to the family if they're in classes;
- Roma families are not able to pay university fees or other related expenses for their children; and
- There is little information on scholarship programs for tertiary level Roma students.

In order to overcome the financial barriers, the Roma Education Fund extended the program of higher education scholarships to Albania in 2008. For the first academic year (2008-2009) only four applications for the Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program were submitted and all of them were approved. Every year the number of applications and granted scholarships has been growing gradually. The current academic year (2012-2013) saw 62 applications, of which 37 were approved and granted scholarships.⁷⁵

74 HDPC, ILO, Data Collection on Vulnerable Groups at Risk of Labour Market Exclusion, Tirana, November 2012.

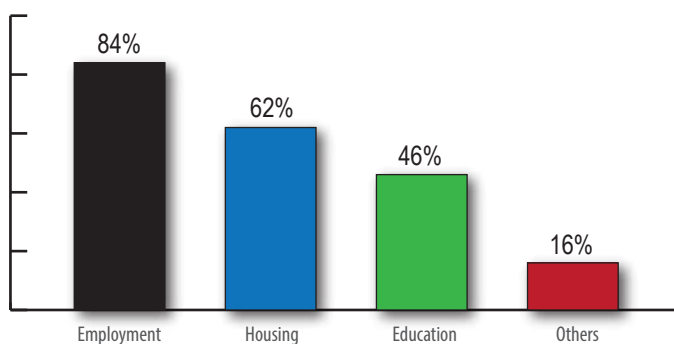
75 Roma Education Fund, Country Assessment: Albania, 2011.

4. EMPLOYMENT

Employment – the main concern

According to our survey, employment/unemployment is the highest priority concern of the Roma community in Albania. This is directly related to the extreme poverty of Roma families and their very poor living conditions. Their increasing poverty creates a vicious cycle for them: the poorer they become, the more difficult it is to find both formal and informal employment. However, there is no related statistical data on the labour market and its relationship to poverty. In the absence of formal data, certain questions were expressly included in the survey conducted for this report.

Figure 13.
Which Roma concerns should be given the highest priority?



The 350 interviewed families within this survey comprised an average 6.2 persons per household. On average, only 0.8 persons per household only were determined to be formally or informally employed. The other family members were children or unemployed adults. The average monthly income per person in the interviewed households was 1,356 ALL. This amount translates to approximately 45 ALL per person/per day or about 0.44 USD per person/per day. This makes it clear why employment is considered so important for Roma families.

The employment history of Roma people living in Albania is a very simple and traditional one: during the socialist period, Roma were employed in agriculture, state-owned handicraft enterprises, and in public service jobs such as street cleaning and gardening. During the transition, many Roma met difficulty in adapting to the new demands of the labor market because they lacked many of the required educational and vocational qualifications and expertise. They are now engaged in several forms of formal and informal labour. Formal employment is dominated by subsistence agriculture due to the very small plots of land, lack of infrastructure and irrigation, high maintenance costs, and high competition from imported agricultural productions. In addition, many Roma families have not gained any benefit from the distribution of land owner-

WE OWN NEITHER A PIECE OF LAND, NOR THE RIVER!

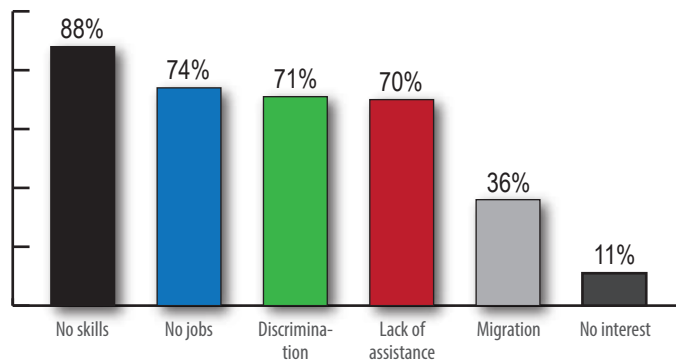
We are much worse than in the previous regime. Prior to 1990 the Gadje had the land, we had the river. The Gadje worked the land and lived on it. We used the willows and lived on handcrafting. After the 1990s, the state granted land to the Gadje. We didn't benefit from even a piece of land property. The state didn't even give us the river. The Gadje were given the River and the owners did not allow us to work with willows. We were completely left without employment opportunities. We do not do other work; we do not know how to do other work. It takes many years to develop a new tradition of employment. In spite of the vocational training we have attended, we are most keen on crafting baskets.

A. A. Gjrokaster

ship following the land reform during the early 1990s. The used clothes business is also a major income source for many Roma families despite the decline of the used clothes market in recent years due to lower demand, poverty, and competition.

Informal short-term employment is dominated by casual or temporary work, such as construction, basket weaving, metalwork, or horse dealing, as well as by musical performances in weddings and other festive ceremonies, handicraft trade, and begging in cities and villages. Most beggars are women or children up to the age of 12 who beg for money, used clothes, and food. Occasional work represents a very important opportunity for Roma people because it alleviates the effects of the high unemployment rates and raises the family income, thus creating a temporary buffer.

Figure 14.
Why is the Roma unemployment rate so high?



At present, many Roma people are not able to find employment. Their perception is that their employment status is worse than in the previous regime. Among the many reasons for the massive and long-term unemployment among Roma people, the following should be mentioned:

- Lack of professional skills: Roma educational and vocational qualifications decreased in value during the transition, and have generally remained low in comparison to those of Albanians;
- Lack of opportunities due to the structural changes of the economy and poor adoption to the new labour market needs: In spite of structural changes, Roma people continue to practice their traditional occupations to make a living and, as a result, most Roma are now ill-equipped to meet the new demands of the formal labor market;
- Discrimination by employees: the primary preferences for employment is given to non-Roma people; and
- Lack of specific Government(s) policies designed to address Roma unemployment issues.

Employment promotion policies

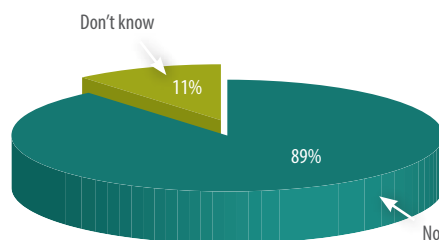
The Government policies to address unemployment issues in Albania are not specifically targeting the Roma population. Following are the main public employment promotion programmes adopted by the GoA:

- i) *Support to the unemployed job seekers with difficulties.*⁷⁶ Under this programme, employers providing employment to job seekers for at least one year receive up to 100% of the minimum wage for four months, and are reimbursed for 100% of their part of social insurance contributions. Eligible beneficiaries are long-term unemployed persons, people receiving social assistance, people receiving unemployment benefits, 18-25 year-olds who are entering the labour market for the first time, people over 45 years age who do not have any education

⁷⁶ Government Decree No. 48, date 16.01.2008.

- higher than the secondary education or its equivalent, people with disabilities, Roma people, and returned emigrants;
- ii) *On-the-job training for unemployed job seekers.*⁷⁷ Under this programme, employers who provide on-the-job training for unemployed job seekers are offered financial support in the form of training costs (up to 70% of the cost). In addition, job seekers participating in the trainings receive 50% of the minimum wage for the duration of the training. This program does not address specific target groups;
- iii) *Support to unemployed women.*⁷⁸ Under this programme, employers providing employment to marginalized female job seekers for at least one year receive 100% of the minimum wage for four months and 70% of their part of social insurance contributions. In the case of two-year contracts, employers received the minimum wage for six months and 85% of their part of social insurance contributions. Similarly, in the case of three-year contracts, employers received the minimum wage for four months and 100% of their part of social insurance contributions. The financing of this programme by the state budget ended in 2010. After that, the MoLSAEO specified that the target groups included in the “marginalized women”⁷⁹ would be previously trafficked women, women over 35-year-old, Roma women, disabled women and divorced women. In 2012, the GoA extended the number of target groups⁸⁰ to include long-term unemployed women, women over 50 years old and women returned from emigration.

Figure 15.
Are there specific Government policies that promote Roma employment?



One of the most important findings from analyzing these employment promotion programmes adopted by the GoA is the precondition for beneficiaries to be registered as unemployed job seekers in the local National Employment Service (NES) offices. While the Roma unemployment rate is estimated as being very high, the number of Roma registered is very low and many unemployed Roma are not registered. Roma community members admit that the main reason is that they do not believe that NES assistance will increase their chances of employment. Other reasons must be also considered:

- There is little information on registration procedures and criteria: Roma are not familiar with administrative procedures and their communication with the local administration is generally poor. On the other hand, the local administration is not specifically focused on assisting Roma people to become declared job seekers;
- Many Roma families are moving from one settlement to another mostly for economic reasons; and
- The perpetual issue of Roma not registering in the Civil Registration Office becomes a big obstacle for their registration as job seekers.

77 Government Decree No. 47, date 16.01.2008

78 Government Decree No. 632, date 18.09.2003.

79 Instruction of MoLSAEO, No. 76, date 14.01.2004 On the implementation of Government Decree No. 632.

80 Government Decree No. 27, date 11.01.2012.

Table 4: Labour Market Data⁸¹

No	Products	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
1	Unemployed Job Seekers (total)	142,871	141,700	144,766	142,761	143,002
2	Employed by NES (total)	10,261	12,611	11,907	12,317	12,749
2.1	Out of which: Employment Promotion program	2,100	2,188	2,020	1,757	1,170
2.2	Out of which: Roma people	51	13	36	135	140
3	Total trained in VT centers	7,029	7,577	6,611	8,485	8,531

The official statistical data (see Table 4) confirmed that the number of Roma employed through NES assistance is very insignificant: on average, there were 75 Roma job seekers employed each year. This is in line with the Roma perception of the low support provided by NES local offices. In addition, the very low number of Roma that attended VT courses offered by VT centers – on average 102 people per year – is considered a direct consequence of not being registered as unemployed job seekers. Finally, only about 9% only of the unemployed job seekers trained in VT centers ended up becoming employed. As a result, an average of only 46 unemployed Roma per year are employed after finalizing VT courses.

Figure 16.

Do you have any possibility to start a business in order to be self-employed?

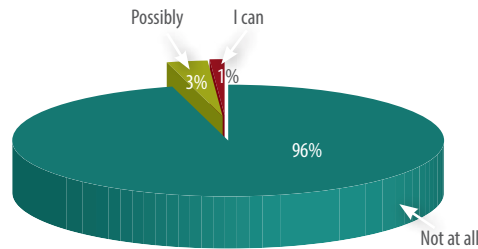
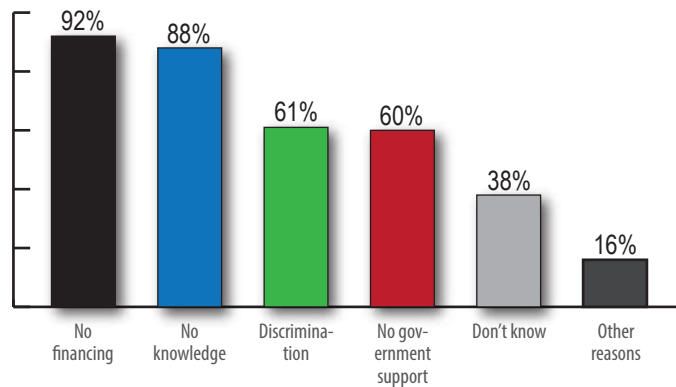


Figure 17.

If not, what are the main barriers?



Roma people are generally not informed about the necessity of registering as a job seeker and to what extent it may negatively affected other important issues for them such as unemployment benefits, social aid, their healthcare card etc. Central and local Government institutions, local NGOs and international donors' activities are not sufficiently focused on the Roma community's awareness about registration in the local NES offices.

There aren't many possibilities for Roma people to start a business and become self-employed. This was attested to by the large majority of interviewed Roma, who ranked the following reasons:

81 Source: based on Statistika ne vite, NES, 2012.

- The lack of financing is considered the main barrier because banks do not provide credit without collateral and the majority of Roma people do not have property titles;
- Most Roma lack the knowledge of how to start a business or how to find financing which is often a result of their lack of education;
- Due to the discriminatory attitude of non-Roma people toward the Roma, there is not a great deal of partnership development between Roma and non-Roma businesses, and these partnerships are critical for helping businesses develop.

Unemployment benefits

In Albania, families receiving no income from economic activities, social aid programs, or remittances from family members working abroad, are entitled to Economic Assistance (EA). EA programs mainly include Unemployment benefits and Economic Aid (*Ndihma ekonomike*). Generally speaking, the majority of Roma people are excluded from receiving different types of EA or from receiving this assistance for as long as is necessary.

The two main criteria for unemployed job seekers to receive unemployment benefits are:

- Their registration in the local office of the NES: many unemployed Roma are not registered as job seekers (see 5.2.2); and
- Payment of their social insurance contribution for a period at least 12 months before becoming unemployed: many unemployed Roma have been unemployed for a long time or have never been formally employed, so they have not contributed to their social security plans because they cannot afford to make this investment. As a result, many unemployed Roma do not qualify for unemployment benefits and only a very small number of them (estimates range from 0.3%⁸² to a maximum of 2%⁸³) receive unemployment benefits.

The government provides economic aid for selected poor families – those who are living in urban areas typically receive full economic aid, and those in rural areas generally receive partial economic aid. The annual budget for economic aid is planned by the central government for each Albanian administrative unit and the amount of the financial aid depends on the number of eligible families. The monthly amount paid to very poor families is far from meeting their everyday needs.

Currently, too many Roma are excluded from receiving economic aid entirely or from receiving assistance for as long as is necessary. This is mainly due to some of the eligibility criteria defined by the government institutions:

- Eligibility for financial assistance is conditional on the male head of household being present at the local social security office to collect monthly benefits. In many cases, however, long-term un-

AFTER EMIGRATION, NO ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS!

There are 13 of us at home, with no one at work. We don't have any income, or Economic Assistance. We did drudge work for ten years in villages in Greece, lived with whatever we could, worked like animals, but finally we returned to worse conditions than we lived in when we left. There is not any kind of work. We were five people in the family when we moved. Now we are 13. We got married and had children. No one considers us here. When we returned, the barrack we had left was not there; a new building had been built. We built ourselves this hut in the suburbs and live all together in a "room". We don't benefit from the Economic Assistance, as we brought from Greece a washing machine and a color TV. I found them in the garbage out there, from people that threw them away. Here, they say, if you have a washing machine or a TV you cannot receive Economic Assistance. Beni, my neighbor, brought a car from Greece, a rinky-dink old car. It requires the whole neighborhood to push it for the car to start. He cannot benefit from Economic Assistance as he owns a car. If one goes to Greece to beg, they cut the Economic Assistance benefit immediately, because then you are a "tourist" and have income. My eldest son is 19 years old, he is single and unemployed. He receives no Economic Assistance as he is single. When we are single they tell us we can't benefit from that scheme without first being married. When we marry they say, Why did you marry so early? It can't get any worse.

Iliri, 36 years old, Gjirkaster

82 UNDP, A needs assessment study on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, February 2012.

83 HDPC, ILO, Data Collection on Vulnerable Groups at Risk of Labour Market Exclusion, Tirana, November 2012.

employment in Albania forces many poor Roma to migrate abroad or to other Albanian regions for work and most of them must remain there for extensive periods of time;

- At present, only those unemployed less than one year are able to receive benefits. However, because long-term unemployment is frequent in Roma communities, the benefits run out before families can gain any kind of stable employment;
- The law stipulates that beneficiaries must have been registered at one given address since 1993, yet most Roma families moved in the early 1990s, thus rendering themselves ineligible for economic aid according to this criteria; and
- Other eligibility criteria are reported to be applied by the MoLSAEO not properly harmonized to the Roma situation.

5. HEALTHCARE

Insufficient healthcare

In Albania, it is difficult to find official data on the Roma healthcare status. It is, in any event, certain that the state of health of Roma has deteriorated to a greater extent than for the rest of the population during the transition period.⁸⁴ Empirical data⁸⁵ show that, generally speaking, chronic diseases such as cardio-vascular conditions, rheumatism, diabetes, and neurological and psychiatric diseases are widespread among the Roma population. Incidences of tuberculosis, syphilis, hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS are also greater among Roma than the majority of the population. In addition, a higher share of Roma households have family members who suffer from some kind of disability.⁸⁶ Besides cultural and socio-economic factors, this situation is due largely to the insufficient access to healthcare in terms of both quality and affordability of services.

Roma children and Roma women are the target groups most affected by insufficient health care. This fact is confirmed by the higher mortality rate and greater concerns for the health status of pregnant Roma women, as well as the irregularities in attending the health checks and ensuring children are vaccinated, especially in rural areas. The socio-economic factors, particularly including the low cultural and educational levels, very high unemployment rate, lack of basic economic resources, very poor living conditions, and the very young age get married and have their first child, are some of the main factors contributing to this situation. Many Roma families live in huts, tents or old houses where the necessary infrastructure is missing and some other residences lack potable water and sewage systems. The lack of water and toilets in several settlements keeps children from maintaining good personal hygiene and this is one of the causes for the spread of infections. Malnutrition and very poor diet typically characterized by irregularly food consumption and unbalanced nutrition are also factors accounting for the poor health situation of the Roma community.

On the other hand, Roma people clearly state that they feel openly discriminated against by the health services providers compared to non-Roma people. This is not only related to the common concerns of Albanian society regarding the bribes provided to doctors or nurses. It involves many examples of direct or indirect discrimination, according to the Roma. Discrimination negatively affects their communication with healthcare service providers, discourages them from immediately addressing their health concerns, and negatively affects the impact of the huge effort made by NGOs to raise awareness so that the community regularly receives health checks as the most efficient way to prevent diseases, decrease the health consequences of chronic illnesses and protect their children.

OPENLY DISCRIMINATED!

We are discriminated against by the personnel of the health sector. You might think we are being discriminated discretely; on the contrary, it is quite evident. Upon seeing us at their door, doctors and nurses kick us out, as they know we don't have either a health insurance card or money to bribe them. Only white Roma can benefit, as they can't be distinguished as Roma from their color, and subsequently they are not dispelled. We are violated at every step we take. When my wife was giving birth, I was told to donate blood, or they wouldn't give me our baby's birth act. So I left. Today we still don't have our son registered, in spite of him becoming three years old now.

J.B. – 24 years old

84 De Soto, H., Gedeshi, I., Roma and Egyptians in Albania, The World Bank, 2005.

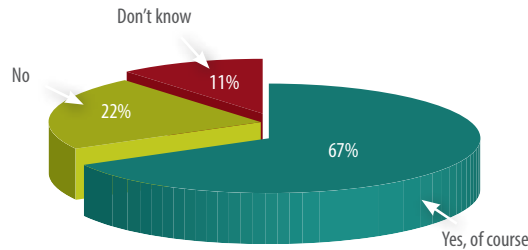
85 UNDP, A needs assessment study on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, February 2012.

86 *Ibid.*

While Roma people are less concerned about the violation of their right to medical information,⁸⁷ and confidentiality within healthcare, they clearly reveal through their examples their concerns regarding violation of other patients' rights starting from the most elementary one: appropriate treatment without prejudice by physicians and nurses. In addition, they have little information on the existing mechanisms for complaints and redress of violations. They moreover feel discouraged and don't believe in resolving such concerns.

Figure 18.

Do you feel any discrimination in the health service provided to you compared to non-Roma people?



From the institutional point of view, coordination among the healthcare sector and other related sectors, such as education, housing, and employment with regards to Roma healthcare is generally poor plus there are no mechanisms in place that could promote such coordination. This is particularly true of the coordination between central government institutions and those of local government.

The health insurance issue

In general, the health centres in villages and cities are not far from Roma settlements and the majority of Roma respondents in our survey admitted that their access to health centres did not represent a big concern for them in geographic terms. Their main concern is the lack of Health Insurance Cards (HIC). According to our survey, only one in five Roma respondents only confirmed that they have already their HIC. This situation is related to several circumstances:

- The poverty of Roma families who generally cannot afford to pay for health insurance contribution;
- The majority of Roma do not pay social security contributions (a precondition of HIC issuance) because they are either unemployed, or work in the informal market or in casual work, or they are self-employed.⁸⁸ Some studies indicate that about 93% of Roma do not pay social security contributions,⁸⁹ which results in their ineligibility for various social welfare schemes, including HIC;
- Many of those Roma individuals work without a valid employment contract and hence they do not pay social security contributions. The data show that about 96% of Roma who work do not have employment contracts;⁹⁰
- Some of the Roma families are not informed about the procedures that must be followed in order to obtain a HIC; and
- A small share of Roma families are not interested in being equipped with HIC.

In the urban areas, the provision of a HIC is related to the monthly payment of social security contributions which are associated with their tax payment. This could occur in the following ways:

87 In general, they think that such violations are less important for them than other forms of violations.

88 Unemployed persons are requested to pay a monthly lump sum as a self social security contribution in order to benefit HIC and the pension payment after retirement.

89 De Soto, H., Gedeshi, I., Roma and Egyptians in Albania, The World Bank, 2005.

90 *Ibid.*

- Directly by the enterprise, in cases where Roma employees are employed with regular contracts. In this case the contribution's amount is paid partially by the employer and partially by the employee;
- By self-contribution of unemployed individuals. In either case most Roma people are deprived of a HIC because only a few of them have regular contracts and they cannot afford paying for social security contributions out-of-pocket. As a result, neither case is considered reasonable by Roma people.

Figure 19.
Do you have a health insurance card?

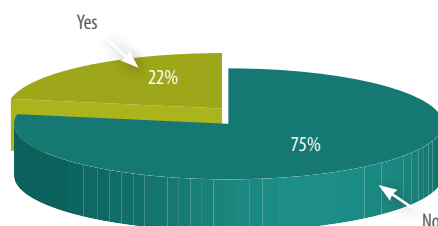
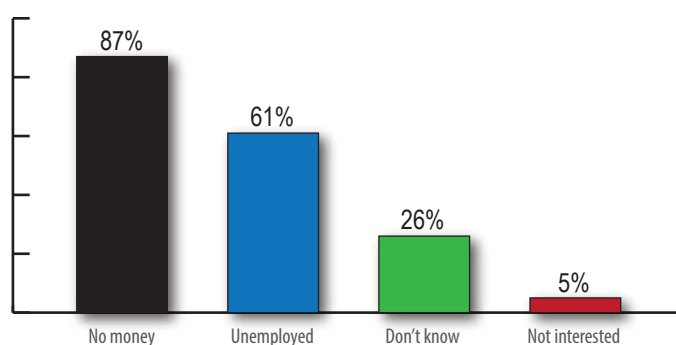


Figure 20.
If you have no HIC, what is the reason?



In the rural areas, the provision of HIC is associated with the payment of the land tax, which is too high for many Roma families and goes unpaid because of their poverty. As a result, many Roma people in these areas are not provided a HIC.

All Roma people, including those who already have a HIC, face an insurmountable barrier in access to healthcare: the high cost of medical services and medicines, which for most Roma families are difficult to afford. These costs are in addition to informal payments to doctors and other medical staff. Roma without HICs are obligated to pay for any health service, including health services provided by public health cen-

NO HEALTH INSURANCE CARDS!

We need to pay for our health care – in cash. Otherwise we are not seen by anyone. We have to pay for the visit to the doctor, pay for medications, pay admission to the hospital, pay the nurse, the cleaning, all of it. But we don't have any income because we don't work, we are not employed. Where can we find the money? Let's borrow some. If we are given loans, we need to work for years to repay them. But no one gives us loans anymore. The solution? We don't visit the doctors, we don't buy medications. Only when we feel the children are suffering, then we are forced to borrow. We only live for our children. If it comes to ourselves, the sacrifice is not worth it. One of the solutions is that we should have the health insurance card. In order to have a health insurance card, you must be employed or you must pay for it each month at the insurance office. We neither have a job nor money, so we do not have cards. The children should at least have it. Children can see a ward doctor free of charge, but when they need to undergo tests or need specific medications, the parent must pay. In addition to that, the kids are unregistered. So, we are lost in all ways.

L. H. – 34 years old

tres. Roma equipped with HICs must also pay extra for specialized services not covered by the HIC or not provided by public health institutions (for any number of reasons).

Provision of healthcare services and health insurance cards is free of charge for children, regardless of the employment status of their parents. However, there are two main concerns regarding children's healthcare:

- Because of their low cultural and educational level, mistrust in the healthcare system, degrading treatment by healthcare professional, communication barriers, etc., many Roma parents seek medical treatment for their children only at an advanced stage of disease. This is clearly confirmed by various testimonies and by and by the higher mortality rates among Roma children compared to non-Roma children;
- Many Roma parents cannot afford to pay for the range of medicines or specific medical analyses not provided by public health institutions, but nonetheless requested by medical staff. This is an issue especially in the case of hospital care.

Aware of their inability to pay the high costs of health services, Roma adults without HICs are very negligent about their health, asking for medical assistance only at a very advanced stage of disease. In these cases they are very often obliged to borrow money from other Roma, which creates a domino effect of debt that lead to a total economic destruction. In the case of serious illness, healthcare support by local and international NGOs represents the only hope for them.

6. HOUSING

Missing clear evidence

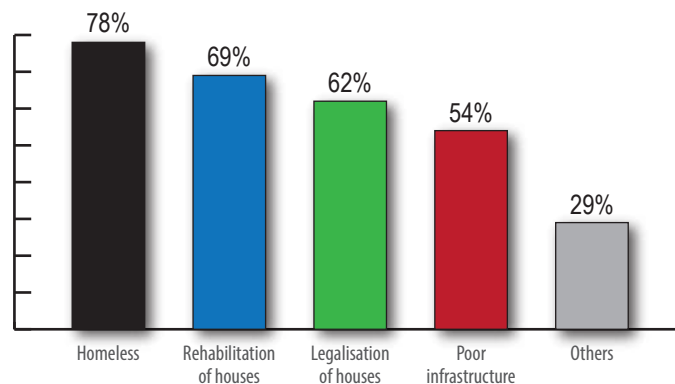
Housing is the second highest priority concern of the Roma community in Albania (see also 4.1). Homelessness, rehabilitation of houses, legalization and property title issues, and poor infrastructure are considered by Roma community as some of the most pressing problems to be resolved.

In terms of the housing situation, Roma households could be grouped into the following categories:

- Families living in their own houses with optimal housing conditions. These are mainly Roma families with an optimal economic status and/or living in the same areas with non-Roma people;
- Families living in their own houses that already have clear legal tenure, but live under poor conditions – houses in urgent need of improvement/rehabilitation and other related infrastructure;
- Families living in huts or tents built on “free land”, near roads or on river banks, without building permission. In some cases huts and tents are built on private land and they pay rent to the land owners. In both cases there is the potential risk of being violently removed from their settlements and remaining without shelter;
- Families living in slums that have already been legalized but who do not possess property titles because they could not pay the related fees;
- Families living in slums under temporary construction;
- Families with more than five members living in the same room; and
- Other families living in segregated slums without meeting the minimum standards of living conditions.

Figure 21.

What are the most pressing problems to be resolved regarding Roma housing?



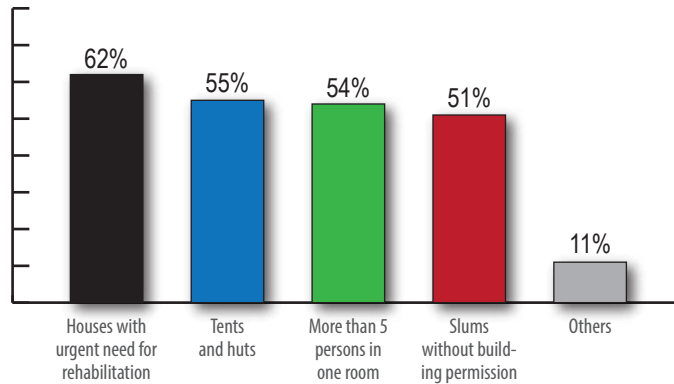
Meeting minimum housing conditions for Roma people was included as a primary objective in the NSIRLC. These objectives were to be met through the following steps:

- identifying of the families in need of housing, the size of families and their present living conditions;
- identification of houses in need of rehabilitation;
- identification of ownership rights of the land on which Roma have build their homes;

- estimating the needs for land and construction materials;
- encouraging the Roma community to contribute labor to the building and repair work; and
- constructing inexpensive modest homes for the Roma families currently living under the worst conditions.

Figure 22.

In your opinion, what are the housing conditions for the majority of Roma families?



WHERE TO END UP?

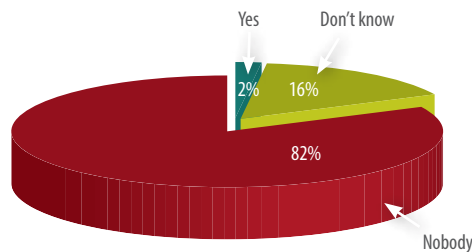
There are about 100 houses in this so-called neighborhood. We have built slums on the land of Tekke and Tekke owners do not say anything because they are religious. But we lack minimum living conditions: 100 families using a faucet that drips drops of water, no sewerage for the entire "neighborhood". Public lightning is missing throughout the neighborhood and at six o'clock we enter our homes as it is completely dark. Two days before the local elections of 2011, five lamps were quickly installed and it seemed to us as if we were really approaching Europe. We used to meet in the evenings all around the lamps and would sing and dance. It lasted only one day after the elections and then the lamps were removed by the municipality. Right after we came, some peasants followed from remote areas. They built houses and now there is a new neighborhood. The state has provided them with electricity, has set the sewerage and, close to election time, they paved the way. Very well made! A whole village comes to town, building without a permit in a city neighborhood. They met all their needs, including the legalization of their houses. Whilst us, we do not have anything, no job, no home, no electricity, we even lack the papers of our barracks (property titles). We can't pay for them. The newcomers want us away, claiming it is their land, showing us their papers of land property ownership. Where will we end up?

Thanasi, Gjirokaster

Homeless families, rehabilitation needs, Roma families living in slums, as well as other indicators of living conditions. In 2006, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MoP-WT) started in 2006 to do this evaluation in five Municipalities, but no follow-up measures were adopted and no results were demonstrated. The Albanian Census 2011 has been a good opportunity for a clear picture of Roma reality with regard to their housing conditions but any definitive conclusions are expected to be very questionable considering that quantitative data already published about the size of the Roma community in Albania is not accurate (see 3.1).

Figure 23.

In your opinion, is there somebody committed to resolving the housing problems of the Roma community?



The very poor living conditions of Roma are also related to their access to infrastructure. The lack of water supply is a frequent issue, especially for Roma families living in segregated settlements at the periphery of the cities or far from the urban areas. It is the same for sanitation conditions. Many of Roma families live in areas without roads, or unpaved roads, or roads in very poor conditions. They have electricity at home but there is lack of public lightning. The lack of water supply, the use of unchecked sources of water, and the very poor infrastructure, have a clear adverse effect on the health status of the Roma; infections are very frequent, especially in children.

This situation demonstrates that the NSIRLC objective regarding covering all Roma residential sites with a working water supply, sewage pipes and electricity was not achieved. In fact, the NSIRLC charged the MoPWT and local government institutions to jointly assess the needs for a water supply and sewage pipes, implement the necessary work to improve the situation, and improve hygiene and sanitation in the territory of the sites.

Based on these findings, there is an obvious discrimination against the Roma community as manifested in the very poor housing conditions and in their lack of home ownership. The Roma community shares this perception: the large majority of respondents admitted that nobody is seriously committed to resolving their housing problems.

Social housing programs

The Social Housing Programs⁹¹ in Albania are managed by a specific Program Coordination Unit (PCU) in the MoPWT and include two main components:

- The low cost social housing program; and
- The rental social housing program.

The low cost social housing program is implemented by the National Housing Agency under MoPWT and is financed by the state budget. The apartments are purchased on credit and paid for at monthly rates: the family needs to pay about 9,800 ALL per month for an apartment of 65 square meters. Eligible families are those with an income of least 30,000 ALL per month and no more than 50,000 ALL per month. The preliminary list of beneficiaries is drafted by the Municipality and then evaluated by the related Bank. The main precondition for financing in this case is the necessary minimum monthly income.

Considering that the majority of Roma people are unemployed and/or do not have regular monthly income, Roma families are almost entirely excluded from this program. The few of them benefitting from the program some years ago, are now facing payments difficulties and are at risk of being penalized by the Banks.

The rental social housing program⁹² addresses housing needs of citizens with very low income. In this case the apartment is owned by the Municipality and it is rented by the Municipality for a low monthly rent. The

SOCIAL HOUSING

I took a home loan in 1997 in the framework of the social housing program. At that time I was employed. Now I'm unemployed. We are seven in our family, living only on social assistance which amounts to 2,400 ALL per month. The monthly rate of the loan for the house is 12,600 ALL. In addition to that, we have to pay about 3,000 ALL for electricity and water supply, and we have to eat. Buying clothing is totally out of question. It is completely impossible to make such payments. The problem is that if we don't pay the loan installment for six months, we are sued in court. After that, the bailiff's office will execute the decision of the court and, after taking our house, they will throw us on the road, homeless. This is not only a problem for my family. Out of the four families that took a home in 1997, three families are being kicked out of their homes, as they cannot pay the loan.

R. S. Korce

91 A formal term utilized in the Albanian related legal framework.

92 This program, totaling 25 million EUR, is partially financed by the Council of European Bank (CEB) (15 million EUR) with the goal of constructing of 1,100 apartments.

maximum level of annual payment is defined by Law and may not exceed 4% of the construction cost of the building.⁹³ The monthly rent payment of each family should not exceed 25% of the monthly family income. If that is not possible, the Municipality subsidizes up to 50% of the monthly rent. Detailed evaluation criteria for applicants are adopted by the Municipality Council.⁹⁴

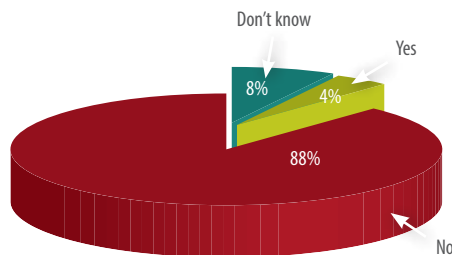
Thus, a typical example is the Elbasani Municipal Council's Decision, which defined the following main evaluation criteria:⁹⁵

- Housing status – 30 points in total, including lack of owned house – 7.5 points; housing at risk of collapse – 5 points; overpopulated house – 5 points; those obliged to handover their house to former owners – 12.5 points;
- Social conditions – 20 points in total;
- Social conditions – 20 points in total, including persons with disabilities – 4 points; orphans – 4 points; returned emigrants – 4 points; families of killed policemen – 4 points; victims of violence in family – 4 points;
- Economic status – 30 points in total divided in three categories of incomes: less than 80% of the average income, from 80 to 100% of the average income, and from 100 to 120% of the average income.

Based on this example, it is clear that Roma are not considered a specific target group in this program and Roma housing conditions are not properly addressed:

- The Roma families living in slums are not indicated in the housing status;
- Roma families are not included in the social conditions; and
- The economic status does not include families without income.

*Figure 24.
Are there specific housing programs for Roma people?*



The related Program Coordination Unit (PCU) of the MoPWT sent Municipalities the following suggestions to be considered:⁹⁶

- Families obliged to hand over their house to former owners 20 points in total;
- Housing at risk of collapse 10 points;
- Families with specific needs 20 points in total including retirees 5 points, disable persons 10 points and orphans 5 points;
- Families with financial difficulties 10 points in total including divorced families 5 points and families with more than 4 children 5 points;
- Families with housing needs 10 points in total including just established families 2 points, families of killed policemen 3 points, and Roma and Egyptians families 5 points;

93 They are all newly constructed units.

94 Based on the Law No. 9232, date 13.05.2004, On the social housing programs and Government Decree No 574, date 29.08.2012, Documents for application on social housing programs.

95 Decision No. 82, date 26.10.2012.

96 PCU Guidelines of 3.12.2012.

- Economic conditions 30 points in total divided in three categories of incomes: less than 75% of the average income, middle level, and maximal level.

The Roma community is not considered as a specific target group even in this example. Roma (or Egyptians) families receive 5 points out of 100 points in total; Roma are not directly considered in the criteria (i), (iii), and (iv); and are considered along with all families in need in the criteria (ii) and (v).

These administrative decisions clearly demonstrate that the social housing program is a general program that addresses housing problems of families in need and that it is not a program dedicated to Roma households. In addition, it has been shown that this program is also an instrument that addresses the day-to-day problems of the Government. The case of handing over houses to former owners could be presented as a typical example: immediately after the adoption of the Law for handover of houses to former owners,⁹⁷ the Government sought to resolve the impasse created through the social housing program giving this case more importance in evaluation. According to the survey results of a recent study,⁹⁸ about 15% of Roma respondents have applied for social housing, while 1.5% of them only report to have benefited from social housing programs.

While they are recognized as one of the poorest communities in Albania, living in very poor housing and infrastructure conditions, Roma people do not benefit at all from social housing programs. As a result, their integration opportunities are seriously limited by their physical separation from the non-Roma population.

97 Law No 82, date 13.09.2012.

98 UNDP, A needs assessment study on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, February 2012.

ANNEX: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

General questions

1.1 Are you informed about the existence of the Law on protection from anti-discrimination?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know

1.2 Do you think that Roma are discriminated against in Albania?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know

1.3 If Yes, who are the most discriminated?

1. All Roma 3. Roma women 5. Roma children
2. Disabled Roma 4. Unemployed Roma 6. Begging Roma

1.4 If Yes, by whom are they more discriminated?

1. Gov. employees 3. Non Roma 5. Non-Roma children
2. Employers 4. Teachers 6. Police

1.5 Which institutions help most to resolve Roma problems?

1. Technical Secret 4. Municipalities 7. Employment Offices
2. Ministries 5. RDEs 8. CPD
3. NGOs 6. Ombudsman 9. Social State Service

1.6 How would you evaluate the Government(s) efforts to resolve the Roma's main concerns?

1. Sufficient 2. Not at all sufficient 3. Don't know

1.7 If insufficient, what are, in your opinion, the main reasons?

1. Lack of commitment 4. Low pressure from Roma
2. Lack of financing 5. Low interest of local gov.
3. Lack of Strategies 6. Don't know

1.8 Which Roma concerns should be given the highest priority?

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Human Rights | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Roma Awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Education | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Living Conditions | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Women Rights | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Children Rights | <input type="checkbox"/> |

1.9 Please describe an example of discrimination that happened to you or to your family.

2 Education

2.1 In your opinion, is education necessary for your children?

1. No 2. Yes 3. To some extent 4. Don't know

2.2 Are there cases where Roma children are segregated in separate classes?

1. Some cases 2. No 3. Don't know

2.3 Is there information on the Roma history in textbooks?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know

2.4 Do you think that Roma history should be included in textbooks?

1. No 2. Yes 3. Absolutely Yes 4. Don't know

2.5 Why is enrolment of Roma children so low?

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. No interests | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. No textbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. No schools | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Mobility | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Low teaching quality | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Distance from school | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2.6 In your opinion, why are there so few Roma children in secondary education?

2.7 In your opinion, what should be done to increase the Roma enrollment rate in secondary and tertiary education?

3 Employment

3.1 How many people are in your family?

1. Adults 2. Children 3. Total

3.2 What are your sources of income and how much money do you earn/receive?

Monthly salary _____ ALL per month
 Economic Aid _____ ALL per month
 Unemployment Aid _____ ALL per month
 Remittances _____ ALL per month
 Informal employment _____ ALL per month
 Incomes from children _____ ALL per month
 Without regular incomes _____ ALL per month
 Begging _____ ALL per month
 Basket weaving _____ ALL per month

3.3 Why is the Roma unemployment rate so high?

1. Migration 3. No skills 5. Lack of assistance
 2. Discrimination 4. No jobs 6. No interests

3.4 Are there specific Government policies that promote Roma employment?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know

3.5 Do you have any ability to start a business and become self-employed?

1. Yes, I can 2. Possibly 3. Not at all

3.6 If not, what are the main barriers?

1. No knowledge 4. No financing
 2. No Gov. support 5.No local Gov support
 3. Discrimination 6. Don't know

3.7 What should be done to promote Roma employment?

4 Healthcare

4.1 *Do you feel any discrimination in the health service provided to you compared to non-Roma people?*

1. No 2. Yes 3. Don't know

4.2 *If Yes, please describe*

4.3 *Do you have a health insurance card?*

1. No 2. Yes

4.4 *If not, why?*

1. Not interested
2. No money
3. Unemployment
4. Don't know

4.5 *If not, please describe how you benefit from medical assistance?*

4.6 *Is there any health centre close to your residence?*

1. Yes 2. No

4.7 *In your opinion, what should be done to resolve the health care problems of the Roma community?*

5. Housing

5.1 *What are the most pressing problems to be resolved regarding Roma housing?*

1. Poor infrastructure
2. Legalization of houses
3. Homelessness
4. Lack of urban plans
5. Rehabilitation of houses
6. Impossibility of constructing a new house
7. Lack of credit financing
8. Impossibility of paying monthly rent

5.2 *In your opinion, what are the housing conditions for the majority of Roma families?*

1. Tent and huts
2. More than 5 people in one room
3. Houses with an urgent need for rehabilitation
4. Slums without building permission
5. Mixed areas with non-Roma
6. Optimal housing conditions
7. Their own houses, but with poor living conditions

5.3 *In your opinion, is there somebody committed to resolving housing problems for Roma people?*

1. Nobody 2. Yes 3. Don't know

5.4 *Are there specific housing programs for Roma people?*

1. No 2. Yes 3. Don't know

5.5 *In your opinion, what should be done to resolve the housing problems of the Roma community?*

6. Closing question

6.1 *Please provide any other opinions that you may have regarding the Roma community's concerns?*



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The following organizations have been involved in the advising on the report: the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, the Central European University's Department of Public Policy, the European Roma Rights Centre, Habitat for Humanity, the Roma Education Fund, and from the Open Society Foundation: Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme, the Roma Initiatives Office, and the Roma Health project.

In the pilot year of 2012, the Decade Secretariat decided to support reports from civil society coalitions in seven countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) and the Roma Initiatives Office commissioned an additional report from the Czech Republic. In addition, the Decade Secretariat made a template public in order to encourage additional civil society actors to monitor the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies and Decade Action Plans. In the reports, civil society coalitions supplement or present alternative information to Decade Progress Reports submitted by Participating Governments in the Decade of Roma Inclusion and to any reports submitted by State parties to the European Commission on implementation of their National Roma Integration Strategies. These reports are not meant to substitute for quantitative monitoring and evaluation by State authorities but to channel local knowledge into national and European policy processes and reflect on the real social impact of government measures. The civil society reports provide additional data to official ones, proxy data where there is not official data, or alternative interpretation of published data.

The project is coordinated by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation in cooperation with the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma programme and the Roma Initiatives Office of the Open Society Foundations.



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