

Report on the “Open Day” events in six local self-governments in Albania

In co-operation with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, BPRI organised a campaign for the promotion of human rights, including a series of “Open Day” events and a door-to-door campaign in the Roma and Egyptian communities. These events were organized in the following local self-governments:

- Municipality of Pogradec on 18 October 2012
- Municipality of Gjirokaster on 27 November 2012
- Commune of Grabian, 19 December 2012
- Municipality of Lushnje, 13 February 2013
- Municipality of Lezhe, 22 February 2013
- Commune of Shushice, 28 February 2013

In each location, Ms. Irma Baraku, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, and the mayor signed a Memorandum of Understanding expressing their commitment and close bilateral collaboration to ensure protection from discrimination. Every local self-government assigned an Anti-Discrimination Focal Point who will liaise with the Commissioner’s office, refer any alleged cases of discrimination, and organize periodic Open Days in the future. The following persons were appointed as Anti-Discrimination Focal Points:

- Ms. Eriselda Cefa, Chief of Cabinet, Lushnje municipality,
- Ms. Arta Shajko, Head of Social Aid Department, Gjirokaster municipality,
- Mr. Fatjon Ballabani, Commune Lawyer, Grabian commune,
- Ms. Yllka Brahim, Head of Social Aid Department, Lezha municipality,
- Ms. Natasha Kanina, Director of Community Services, Pogradec municipality, and
- Mr. Ali Petani, Finance Specialist, Shushice commune.

“Open Days” took place in public locations including local schools, the “Shejta Mari” community centre in Lezha and the History Museum of Lushnja, local cinema in Pogradec, etc. Members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, as well as the majority population, attended these open meetings. Over 600 members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, municipal representatives, teachers, and general population attended the six “Open Day” events.

BPRI Roma and Egyptian Co-ordinators mobilized Roma and Egyptian community members to participate in the Open Days, and they also distributed brochures produced by the OSCE Presence in Albania containing information on the law and mechanisms of protection from

discrimination. In total, 180 Roma and Egyptian households received the brochures during the door-to-door campaign¹.

Some of the issues raised were:

- The fact that no Roma woman is employed in the city cleaning services;
- Discrimination in healthcare services;
- The Law on Soft Loans is discriminatory towards Roma and Egyptians who cannot fulfil the criteria for benefiting social housing
- The urgent situation of 17 Roma and Egyptian families sheltered in a very dangerous building in Lezha;
- The problem of 30 Roma families in Saver (commune of Lushnja) who are in the process of privatization and legalization of housing;
- Civil registration problems;
- Discrimination in the classrooms;
- Lack of access to disability programmes.

In addition to these local activities, BPRI also supported the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination to produce a short TV video about its services (available at: http://bpri-odihr.org/17/items/TV_video_AD.html). Approximately 973,800 viewers throughout Albania saw the video, representing 40 per cent of the total viewers of these TV stations on the given days.

BPRI and the Commissioner will follow up on these cases. Many participants did not fully understand the concept of discrimination and are not sure what type of problem they can report. Follow-up activities for awareness raising about discrimination and relevant legislation will need to be undertaken. Many participants also emphasized their poverty, inadequate housing conditions, lack of property ownership papers, unemployment and other issues as obstacles in realizing their rights.

¹ 50 households in Pogradec, 60 in Gjirokaster, 20 in Grabian, 30 in Lushnje and 20 in Shushice.