



Best Practices for Roma Integration
Good Practice Protocol for
Roma Integration



Funded by the EU



Best Practices for Roma Integration (BPRI)

GOOD PRACTICE PROTOCOL FOR ROMA INTEGRATION

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Introduction

This document has been produced in the framework of “Best Practices for Roma Integration” (BPRI), a project implemented by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the Western Balkans in 2012-2013 with funding from the European Union (EU) and OSCE participating States. Targeting Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, the project seeks to provide assistance toward delivering on commitments to improve the situation of Roma that these states have made within the OSCE and as they move towards joining the EU.

BPRI has four main components:

1. Participation in political and public life and decision-making
2. Support to governments for legalization of housing and settlements

3. Combating discrimination and promoting visibility for Romani communities
4. Regional co-operation.

The purpose of this document is to support the sharing and replication of good practices in multi-sector municipal collaboration for the integration of Roma¹ in local planning and decision-making in the Western Balkans. To this end, the document draws on BPRI’s Regional Report on Anti-Discrimination and Participation of Roma in Local Decision-Making and on the mapping of municipalities undertaken in 2012.² Applying broad principles of good practice in the integration of Roma to a systematic approach aimed at units of local self-government and divided into three main phases, the protocol provides guidance on concrete

1 Throughout this document, references to Roma are intended to apply equally also to Ashkali and Egyptians.

2 See *Regional Report on Anti-discrimination and Participation of Roma in Local Decision-Making* (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2013); and *Report on the Mapping of Municipalities on Roma Integration* (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2012).

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

steps to be taken by local authorities within each phase. This common protocol can therefore serve as a source of inspiration for units of local self-government interested in establishing lasting co-operation with the local Romani communities to which they are accountable.

The approach outlined in this protocol seeks to promote sustainable local-level good practice through an initial emphasis on building the capacity of Roma interlocutors drawn from the local community and creating formal structures in such a way as to enable Roma to play an active and stable role in designing relevant policy measures. Subsequent steps of the process emphasize systematic monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that the effects of policy implementation are taken into account in adjusting existing policies and/or developing new policies. The protocol also seeks to align policy for addressing the needs of local Roma communities with local self-government units' resources, as well as to possibilities for increasing available resources.

Without denying past and present differences within the Western Balkans, the situation of Roma in various jurisdictions throughout the region is marked by significant similarities. Due to various difficulties in accessing quality education, the average level of education of Roma is lower than that of the general population, leaving Roma poorly equipped to participate in a competitive labour market even in the (hypothetical) absence of discrimination. As a result, Roma tend to fill occupational niches generally viewed as undesirable within the general population, performing part-time, seasonal and/or unskilled labour. The disadvantaged position of Roma in the area of health is illustrated by a life expectancy considerably shorter than that of non-Roma. The dwellings of Roma households are often illegal structures located in de facto segregated settlements, lacking in basic infrastructure and with poor access to

public services. While the situation of Roma with respect to representation in elected bodies shows more variation within the region, the degree to which Roma are represented is generally higher at the local level than at the central level, with Roma women's participation in public life at both levels lower than that of Roma men. In sum, complex and long-standing marginalization makes the integration of Roma a litmus test for compliance with human rights standards, as well as for accession to the EU.

The role of democratic local self-government in ethnically mixed localities

Bearing in mind that Roma almost invariably constitute a minority of the inhabitants of the local self-government units in which they live, the integration of Roma in local planning and decision-making is a specific form of good governance in an ethnically heterogeneous environment. The objectives of local policy in such an environment can be grouped under three broad themes, as shown below.

Theme 1: Security

1. Prevention of local inter-ethnic conflict
2. Prevention of extremism, discrimination and exclusion, working to break down anti-minority sentiments and guaranteeing public order

Theme 2: Harmony

1. Enacting consensual democracy at the local level
2. Balancing the socio-cultural and political interests of majority and minority ethnic communities
3. Co-operation and reciprocal checking and balancing among competing political forces
4. Realization of rights to cultural autonomy (e.g., cultural institutions, information outlets, education in mother tongue)

5. Cultivating the loyalty of minority communities through pragmatic service provision

Theme 3: Support

1. Active participation of minority communities in local public life
2. Uniform budgetary planning based on minority communities' needs
3. Promoting socially useful economic activity

General principles

While this protocol focuses primarily on participation in local planning and decision-making, it is based in broader principles of good practice in the integration of Roma which should be incorporated in any policy toward Roma. These principles include the following:

- * *Explicit (but not necessarily exclusive) targeting of Roma.* This principle is based in recognition of the fact that the needs and concerns of Roma as a vulnerable group must be taken into account from the beginning of policy design.
- * *Contribution to integration and mainstreaming.* Whereas policies aimed at Roma are necessary, it is at the same time crucial that such policies improve access to services used also by non-Roma rather than creating parallel services.
- * *Attention to issues of gender and participation of Roma women.* Key to securing genuine and meaningful participation of Roma in decision-making at the local level is ensuring the full and equal participation of Roma women in all governance processes. Inclusion of Roma women in decision-making at the local level is also a crucial step in addressing the phenomenon of compound marginalization by ensuring that the concerns of Roma women – who experience various forms of discrimination on the basis of both their ethnicity and their gender

– are addressed in the planning and implementation process.

- * *Co-ordination and coherence with other policies at local and central levels while taking into account local needs.* Clear links among similar policies at multiple levels are valuable for avoiding duplication and for ensuring effective use of resources. Local policies targeting Roma should take into consideration strategies and action plans for Roma adopted at the central level.
- * *Addressing multiple aspects of a given issue in a holistic approach.* Closely related to the previous two principles, this principle takes into account the complex nature of the marginalization of Roma, which calls for links across policy areas.
- * *Producing multiplier effects.* Wherever possible, activities should be designed in such a way as to bring about improvements beyond the circle of direct beneficiaries or in thematic areas other than those targeted by the activities. For example, initiatives focused on the economic empowerment of adults have potential to contribute to improving children's access to education.
- * *Securing equitable representation.* Governments should create conditions for minority communities to participate in public affairs and public administration at both the central and local levels in reflection of the diversity of the population. To this end, ways should be found to promote the recruitment and retention of persons belonging to minority communities in the public sector.
- * *Promoting growth in the pool of capable interlocutors.* The degree to which the knowledge of members of local Roma communities can be applied in developing and implementing appropriate policy is integrally linked to the capacity of those supplying the knowledge. While some

building of this capacity can be accomplished in the short term through targeted training programmes with local Roma activists and through community development work, long-term capacity building is a function of raising the level of education of the Roma population as a whole.

- * *Systematic monitoring and evaluation.* The effectiveness of policies aimed at Roma should be measured in terms of appropriate indicators against ethnically and gender-disaggregated baseline data collected, processed and maintained in conformity with European standards on personal data protection. In addition to being monitored on an ongoing basis, policy implementation should be subject to regular professional external evaluation. The performance criteria applied in the evaluations should be targets set at the time of policy adoption, with corrective measures designed when evaluation findings deem them necessary.

Steps toward integration of Roma in local planning and decision-making

The principles outlined in the previous section should be applied together in any consideration of policy toward Roma. Sustainable Roma participation in planning and decision-making at the local level further requires a systematic approach. The three main phases of this process are:

1. Preparing the ground for Roma civil society and local administration to work together;
2. Developing local policies for and with Roma; and
3. Implementing practical policies.

Further, it is useful to think of the second and third phases of the process as a cycle in which experience in policy implementation provides the basis for refining existing policies and developing new ones. Integral to these phases

and to the cycle they form are monitoring and evaluation.

The specific steps which local self-government units can take within each phase toward integration of Roma in local planning and decision-making comprise the remainder of this document.

Phase 1: Preparing the ground for Roma civil society and local administration to work together

Taking into account the marginalized situation of Roma populations, the initial step toward sustainable Roma participation in local planning and decision-making is the identification of Roma interlocutors to work together with local self-government units in developing and implementing relevant policies. The inclusion of Roma women among the interlocutors is crucial for ensuring that issues of gender receive adequate attention in the subsequent phases of the process.

- * With regard to civil society, there is a need in the first instance to ascertain whether the work of existing Roma organizations reflects the interests of the local Roma community. Where this is the case, local authorities should make efforts to build the capacity of the organizations as necessary for the organizations to function as able partners. Where this is not the case, local authorities should consider providing support for the establishment of an adequate platform bringing together Roma activists with representatives of locally-based public institutions in the areas of culture, education, media and social protection, as well as representatives of the local self-government unit itself.
- * Where they exist within the local administration, mediators between local Roma communities and official institutions (e.g., co-ordinators for issues affecting local

Roma, health mediators, teaching assistants) have an important role to play. Where mediators are themselves Roma, they can serve as interlocutors from local Roma communities. Where mediators are non-Roma, they can contribute to identifying Roma interlocutors and work together with Roma in developing and implementing local policies.

Regardless of whether Roma interlocutors come from civil society or from the local administration, the basis for identifying them should be their track record in working for the good of the local Roma community.

Phase 2: Developing local policies for and with Roma

Once appropriate interlocutors have been identified from all quarters, the next step is to enable them to play an active role in designing measures to benefit local Roma communities. Sub-steps in the development of local policies for and with Roma include formation of an inter-ethnic advisory body and the drafting of practical policy documents.

To secure co-ordination of relevant policies early in the design phase, a multi-sector advisory body on ethnic communities and inter-ethnic relations should be formed and endowed with a legal status requiring that the body be consulted regularly and its input taken into account in decision-making processes. This body should bring together representatives of Roma civil society organizations and of all other ethnic communities present in the local self-government unit, as well as representatives of the local administration responsible for the areas of culture, education, healthcare, local economic development, media, public safety, social protection and urban planning. The equitable representation of women in this body should also be ensured.

Inter-ethnic bodies formed around local needs and supported by local self-government units have potential not only to increase the participation of local Roma (among others) in decision-making, but also to improve the quality of inter-ethnic relations in general. The marginalization of Roma calls for targeted measures. The design of such measures in turn requires a situation analysis of the local Roma population to identify priorities and provide a baseline for measuring progress. In addition to the situation analysis, a realistic internal assessment of the budgetary, human and technical capacities of the local administration should be conducted with an eye to ensuring that policies adopted to address identified priorities can actually be implemented.

In order to address the complex and long-standing marginalization of Roma effectively, local policies should generally prioritize the following areas (listed in alphabetical order):

- * Civil registration;
- * Cultural integration;
- * Education;
- * Economic empowerment and employment;
- * Living conditions in Romani settlements;
- * Public health; and
- * Effective participation of Roma in the public sector.

Local policy documents such as action plans in the areas listed above not only provide an indication of the priority placed by local authorities on the integration of their Roma constituents, but also constitute a way to operationalize strategic documents adopted at the central level while adjusting them to local circumstances. Such documents should be drafted by working groups consisting of three types of stakeholders:

- * Representatives of the relevant bodies of public administration;

- * Representatives of Roma civil society organizations; and
- * Mediators between local Roma communities and official institutions.

Phase 3: Implementing practical policies

Meaningful participation in local planning and decision-making requires not only that local Roma communities are involved in developing local policies that target them, but also that the policies are implemented in such a way as to bring concrete improvement in the communities' everyday life.

Securing implementation of policies in turn requires that the policies be adopted by elected local assemblies together with adequate funding clearly indicated in dedicated budget lines. Required funding beyond that available from the local budget can often be secured from external sources such as the central budget or donors. In the long term, however, policies which prove successful in improving the situation of local Roma

communities should be funded on an indefinite basis from the local budget.

Changes in the situation of local Roma communities resulting from the implementation of policies should be monitored on a continuous basis by the working groups that generated the policies and measured on a regular basis through objective external evaluations against the baselines set as part of the situation analysis undertaken in Phase 2, as described above. Information on the implementation and results of policies should be presented and discussed in elected local assemblies in addition to being brought to the attention of the general public. Closing the circle with the previous phase, this information should subsequently be fed back into the process in the form of adjustments to policies and/or the development of new local policies for and with Roma.

The steps toward integration of Roma in local planning and decision-making are summarized in the graphic below.



