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Report from the National Workshop on Local Data Collection for Development of Local Action Plans for Roma Integration 30-31 January 2013, in Tirana, Albania

On 30-31 January 2013, BPRI hosted a national workshop on the collection of local data for development of Local Action Plans (LAPs) for Roma Integration in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in Albania (MoLSAEO). All together 14 local Roma specialists, coaches and representatives from civil society and MoLSAEO gathered to discuss the participation of Roma and Egyptians in local decision-making and inclusion of their priorities in the LAPs for municipalities and communes in Albania.

Background

Currently, none of the local self-government units (LSGU) in Albania have designed a Local Action Plan to guide policies, projects and activities targeting Roma and Egyptian communities. BPRI project identified the need to promote this approach in six LSGUs in Albania, namely the Municipality of Lezha, Municipality of Gjirokastra, Municipality of Pogradec, Municipality of Lushnje/ Saver, Shushice Commune and Grabian Commune.

Objective of the workshop

The main objective of this workshop was to apply in practice the regional good practices by supporting local governments to prepare Roma Local Action Plans and facilitate their implementation. By bringing together Roma local experts with MoLSAEO, this workshop served to:

- 1) Unify the methodology for development of Roma Local Action Plans in the Municipality of Lezha, Municipality of Gjirokastra, Municipality of Pogradec, Municipality of Lushnje/ Saver, Shushice Commune and Grabian Commune. These LAPs will be in line with the Albanian *National Strategy on Improving Roma Living Conditions*, the OSCE *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*¹, the *National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2010-2015*, the *Operational Conclusions coming from the Seminar on Inclusion of Roma and Egyptian Communities in the Framework of Albanian European Integration Process* and other relevant national and international strategic documents.

¹ The OSCE Action Plan is available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/17554>.

Best Practices for Roma Integration
Supported by OSCE participating States



Project funded by the EU

Implemented by



- 2) Coach the local experts who are based in the municipality/commune on Action Plan development and data collection (i.e. determining the number, social status and priority problems of the local Roma/ Egyptian community, as a base for developing LAPs).
- 3) Support the local experts to follow up with the municipal/ commune representatives regarding the establishment of a working group for developing LAPs.
- 4) Facilitate working group meetings for drafting the LAPs, how to report to the staff of municipality/ commune and to the Roma Technical Secretariat.

Development and Findings

This workshop is one of the steps in the process of developing Roma Local Action Plans and the gathering is important so that the Roma specialists can also learn from each other and support each other. The advantage is that the Roma specialists come from the Roma settlement and know the situation inside out; the challenge is however, that they are not so experienced in drafting plans or using computers.



Arben Rushiti, the local Roma specialists from Pogradec said: *“This experience is not only new for us, but it is as well for our respective municipalities and communes. We are working and learning at the same time. At the beginning, preparing a Local Action Plan seemed very ambitions to me and I didn’t know if I could manage. But we are doing it, step by step with the support of our coaches and by learning from each-other.”*

The next steps will be to develop the plans further and discuss the draft with the Roma or Egyptian community before finalization. The final draft will be provided to the municipal council for adoption.



It is beneficial that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is also included at an early stage. As Ilda Bozo, Director of Strategy Coordination Directory, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in Albania stated: *“Development of Roma Local Action Plans is very important as they address concrete needs of the particular Roma community. We have to be committed to not only develop these policy*

documents, but also to implement them”, she announced at the workshop.

The Roma experts presented their findings regarding the data which is essential for the development of the local plans. The data gathered in the seven priority areas - housing and infrastructure, education, employment and social security, health, social inclusion

and equal opportunities and cultural heritage, should enable a good starting point for the working groups in regards to understanding the priorities of interest for the local community.

Methodology and high priorities identified in each of the LSGUs:

Under the guidance of coaches and the supervision of the BPRI Project Officer, the local experts have been identifying the priorities of their respective communities with the use of a settled methodology which was designed and approved by both local authorities and local Roma communities. At the beginning they determined the number, social status and priority problems of the local Roma/ Egyptian community, as a base for developing Local Action Plans for Roma. Priorities identified are as following:

1- Lezha municipality:

- Upgrading houses in uninhabitable conditions
- Vocational training for unskilled job-seekers
- Employment
- Education

2- Lushnje municipality:

- Support to communities to be eligible to access social housing
- Support to get the official legal documentation over residences and houses
- Education
- Vocational training for unskilled job-seekers

3- Grabian Commune:

- Upgrading houses in uninhabitable conditions
- Upgrading overall infrastructure in Roma and Egyptian neighbourhoods

4- Gjirokaster municipality:

- Providing adequate housing to homeless Roma families
- Improving road conditions
- Connecting water and sewage system
- Establishing artisanal vocational trainings
- Assisting with civil registration the cases of unregistered children who recently returned from Greece

5- Shushice commune:

- Upgrading houses in uninhabitable conditions
- Improving road conditions
- Education

6- Pogradec municipality:

- Support to get the official legal documentation over residences and houses
- Support to communities to be eligible to access social housing
- Employment
- Education.

The municipal/ commune representatives established working groups for developing Roma Local Action Plans in each of the 6 LSGUs. The working groups are composed of 12 members in each of the municipalities and communes. They include the Mayor/Vice Mayor, representative from the Local Employment Office, Social Administrator from the local Office of the Social Services, representative of a local Roma NGO and two

representatives from the Roma community, representatives from the Office of Education, local Office of Civil Registration, local Housing Office, local Public Health Institution, and the local Chamber of Commerce /local businesses. Members of the working group are expected to assist, facilitate and provide their contribution through concrete engagement in the drafting process of the Local Action Plan for Roma.

Local experts co-ordinated working group meetings for drafting the LAPs and reported to the Roma Technical Secretariat and BPRI project.

This initiative aims to promote co-operation among all stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of Roma integration measures in Albania, as well as to promote the principles of good local governance.

Follow up actions

- The priority areas of the LAPs will fit with the priority areas of the National Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion;
- Focus of the LAP in each of the LSGUs will be given to the priority needs of these communities. Each LAP will be specific and different in each LSGU, depending on the priorities of that certain area;
- LAP duration will be 2013-2015;
- Related to the inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in the LAPs, it will be relative as per the population of each LSGU. In areas where the number of Egyptian population is considerable and they have real concerns, they will be included in the LAPs;
- Follow up meeting with NGOs TLAS and ARSIS to discuss areas where civil registration is problematic such as the Gjirokaster municipality;
- Local experts will submit all the data collected by the end of the first week of February 2013;
- By the second week of March 2013, each municipality/commune will finalize their Local Action Plan;
- By the second week of April 2013, the Local Action Plans will be submitted for approval of the respective Council of municipality/ commune.