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| cid:image001.jpg@01D58358.7C0EE7D0  **The Republic of Serbia**  **Deputy Prime Minister**  Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure  Nemanjina 22-26  11000 Belgrade  Serbia | cid:image001.png@01CE5625.7E1558F0  **THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION** |

**REPORT ON THE SEMINAR ON THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE ROMA**

**The Deputies’ Club, Belgrade, 23 October 2019**

The fifth Seminar on the Social Inclusion of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia was organised on 23 October by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in partnership with the European Commission, at the Deputies’ Club in Belgrade. At the European Commission's recommendation, in addition to the plenary addresses and discussions, the concept of the Seminar included the work in six thematic groups (1. Education: Actions taken, challenges and priorities for the next two years; 2. Employment: Undertaken activities, challenges at the local and national levels and priorities for the next two years; 3. Social protection and health care, including the rights of the child and domestic violence; 4. Housing: Relocation/legalisation of Roma settlements; 5. Personal documents and the status of displaced persons and returnees in the readmission process – challenges and possible solutions, anti-discrimination; 6. Cross-cutting issues) aimed at the preparation of the draft Operational Conclusions for the period 2019–2021. This approach enabled a broad consultative process with the relevant stakeholders and a constructive inter-sectoral dialogue.

The Seminar was attended by 140 representatives of:

* the Government of the Republic of Serbia (the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of European Integration, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture and the Media, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Office for Human and Minority Rights, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, the Coordination Body for the Social Inclusion of the Roma in the Period 2016–2025, the National Employment Service, the Republic Institute for Social Protection, the AP Vojvodina’s Office for Roma Inclusion) and local government units (the Municipality of Odžaci);
* the Roma National Minority Council;
* independent institutions (the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality);
* civil society organisations (the Standing Conference of Roma Citizens’ Associations, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, the Association of Health Mediators, the Association of Roma Co-ordinators, the Association of Pedagogical Assistants, the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, the Roma Forum of Serbia, the A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, Daje, Indigo, the Roma Women’s Association of the Braničevo District, the Education Centre for the Roma and Ethnic Communities, Praxis, Bibija, the Roma Women’s Network, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, the European Roma Police Officers, the Youth Integration Centre, the Housing Centre, Roma World, Adra, Romanipen;
* donors and international organisations (the European Commission, the EU Delegation to Serbia, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, GIZ, OSCE, REF, UNICEF, the UN Human Rights Office, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, UNOPS, UNDP, the Open Society Foundation, Save the Children, the Regional Cooperation Council’s Roma Integration Team, Help, the World Bank).

The Seminar’s opening speech was given by Ms Marta Garcia Fidalgo, Roma Policy Coordinator of the EC Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, in which she reminded the attendees that Roma community was the largest ethnic minority in Europe and that Roma social inclusion was critically important in the accession process. Ms Garcia Fidalgo encouraged all competent institutions to cooperate intensively at the national and local level, since Roma inclusion was a process that required the efforts and contributions of all relevant stakeholders. In addition to the Chapter 23, which is significant in the context of the EU accession, Serbia is also signatory to [the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process](https://www.rcc.int/docs/464/declaration-of-western-balkans-partners-on-roma-integration-within-the-eu-enlargement-process), adopted in Poznan, which obliges us to maintain and enhance our efforts towards full equality and social integration of the Roma. Ms Fidalgo stressed that the EU would continue to support Roma social inclusion in Serbia through the IPA funds, while it was important that Serbia ensured the sustainability of the initiatives such as the mobile teams, scholarships and housing projects.

Mr Dalibor Nakić, President of the Roma National Minority Council, underlined the importance of acting locally, as well as the considerable contribution of pedagogical assistants, Roma coordinators, health mediators and mobile teams. The Roma National Minority Council attaches great significance to the upcoming 2021 Population Census, since it is vital to determine the accurate number of the Roma living in Serbia, which would inform the creation of the government and social policies targeting the Roma as a vulnerable population group. Mr Nakić emphasised the necessity of strengthening the ethnic identity and preserving the Romani language and culture, since culture was the most powerful tool in the fight against stereotypes. To that end, the Roma National Minority Council established the Roma Cultural Centre in Niš, while the process of establishing the cultural centre in Pančevo is underway.

Ms Zorana Mihajlović, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma for the Period 2016–2025, stated that many activities aimed at Roma inclusion were being implemented in various spheres of social life; however, the challenges still persisted. It is particularly important in the upcoming period to devote effort to Roma employment, especially by institutions at the local and national levels. The President stressed that Roma social inclusion was important for the progress of our society, that equal conditions had to be ensured for all people regardless of their religious and/or ethnic background, as well as that we had to keep fighting against the stereotypes that still existed in our society.

*Introduction into the work of thematic groups* (Moderator: Ms Dragana Jovanović Arijas, Manager of the Serbian Government’s Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit

The speakers were:

* Ms Nina Mitić, Assistant Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, said that the Seminar was a good verification mechanism for everything envisaged within the government policy measures, and an opportunity for the representatives of the Roma community to get involved in the creation, implementation and modification of Roma social inclusion measures. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs is responsible for two out of the five areas (employment and social protection) recognised in the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period 2016–2025, as well as for anti-discrimination as the cross-cutting component. Ms Mitić stated that the number of the Roma on the National Employment Service register had for several years been constant at about 25,000 and that it was necessary to additionally motivate young Roma people to actively search jobs in the formal labour market. Moreover, the social assistance measures that had been recently improved targeted the poorest population groups, and Roma families were the principal beneficiaries of this type of support.
* Mr Nenad Ivanišević, member of the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma for the Period 2016–2025, stated that the ultimate goal of social inclusion of one of the most vulnerable population groups in the Republic of Serbia had to be the resolution of their daily problems, which *inter alia* entailed the cooperation with the representatives of the local governments throughout Serbia. Mr Ivanišević also emphasised that, in 2019, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts celebrated thirty years since the establishment of the Board for the Study of Life and Customs of the Roma, stressing as very important that the Romani culture and tradition were studied in Serbia at such a high level.
* Mr Andrija Djurić, Roma Coordinator in the Municipality of Odžaci, presented a project worth € 1,050,000, which had been implemented by the Municipality of Odžaci with the IPA 2013 financial support. The project resulted in the construction of 34 housing units, including the missing infrastructure, street lights and water supply network in Deronje-Čerga settlement. The Municipality of Odžaci also participates in the ROMACTED programme, implemented by the Council of Europe, which enables further work with the beneficiaries and the inclusion of the residents of the settlements in the decision-making process.
* Ms Danijela Janković, representative of the Office of Human and Minority Rights, presented the Analysis of the Operational Conclusions, prepared by the Office for Human and Minority Rights for the fifth Roma Inclusion Seminar. The Analysis provides an overview of the past seminars, with the idea of summarising all information about the number of organised seminars, their participants, the institutions that participated in reporting, as well as a reflection on the most significant results and the greatest challenges in the Roma inclusion process. Ms Janković said that the monitoring of the operational conclusions was not the objective *per se*, but rather the means to enable better policy design, ensure policy transparency and responsibility and to monitor the Roma inclusion policy in a coordinated and systematic manner.
* Ms Marta Garcia Fidalgo, Roma Policy Coordinator of the EC Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, concluded the introductory panel with the recommendation that the work of the thematic groups should be based on ambitious, yet realistic objectives achievable in the next two-year period. With that respect, [the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process](https://www.rcc.int/docs/464/declaration-of-western-balkans-partners-on-roma-integration-within-the-eu-enlargement-process), adopted in Poznan, provides clear guidelines about the desired objectives in the upcoming period, although it is necessary to establish a connection between the objectives, on the one hand, and the measures and activities contributing to those objectives, on the other.

*Work in thematic groups*

Following the Seminar’s opening and introductory session, further work was organised in six thematic groups to evaluate the results achieved in the previous period, identify the key challenges and formulate the draft operational conclusions for the next two-year period. Each thematic group had a facilitator (representative of a ministry/institution) and a rapporteur (representative of the non-governmental sector and/or member of an international organisation).

1. Education: Actions taken, challenges and priorities for the next two years (facilitator: Ms Snežana Vuković, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development; rapporteur: Mr Adi Sinani, Roma Education Fund).

The key recommendations in the education area refer to the increased coverage of Roma children by preschool education, most notably the Preparatory Preschool Programme; enhanced competences of pedagogical assistants, increase of these positions in preschool institutions and primary schools, as well as the introduction of the mechanism for monitoring the pedagogical assistants’ work; increased number of scholarships for Roma secondary school and university students; non-quota-based enrolment in the universities founded by the Republic of Serbia for all Roma students who complete four-year secondary schools and pass entrance examinations.

2. Employment: Undertaken activities, challenges at the local and national levels and priorities for the next two years (facilitator: Mr Goran Gležnjić, National Employment Service; rapporteur: Ms Aleksandra Bojadjieva, Roma Integration 2020 Action Team, Regional Cooperation Council).

The thematic group that reviewed the area of Roma employment highlighted the following key activities: hiring of Roma workers in the institutions at the national/local level, including the resolution of the status of Roma coordinators, pedagogical assistants and health mediators; introduction of the Roma health mediator programme in employment as the link between the Roma community, on the one hand, and employers and employment institutions, on the other; transformation of undeclared labour into declared without the loss of social protection rights; continued provision of purpose-specific subsidies for hiring Roma persons, with the modification of certain criteria, while ensuring long-term monitoring and the mentoring system for the beneficiaries.

3. Social protection and health care, including the rights of the child and domestic violence (facilitator: Mr Dragan Knežević, Ministry of Labour, Employment; Veteran and Social Affairs, Dragan Djordjević, Ministry of Health; rapporteur: Prof. Snežana Simić, PhD, public health expert, Mr Danilo Ćurčić, A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights)

The principal recommendations for the social protection area are: pilot a local mechanism of social protection mediators, with donor support, as a link between the Roma community and social protection institutions; intensify the work of internal local units for the provision of support and assistance to children working and/living in the streets; develop programmes aimed at decreasing the number of child and forced marriages; stimulate the development of local social services financed by respective cites and/or local governments, in particular the drop-in centres, by providing regular funding sources and extending the drop-in network;

The key recommendation for the area of health care refers to the resolution of health mediators’ status, which includes the selection of the optimum model of institutionalisation of health mediators based on the approval of the line ministries and the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy; increase of their number, to ensure that all municipalities in Serbia where the Roma account for more than two percent of the population have a health mediator, which would entail an increase from the current 85 health mediators to 100; development and accreditation of health mediator education and training curricula for secondary schools of medicine in Serbia (the health mediator occupation has been included in the National Qualifications Framework).

4. Housing: Relocation/legalisation of Roma settlements (facilitator: Ms Svetlana Ristić, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure; rapporteur: Ms Zlata Vuksanović Macura, PhD, expert in the field of housing)

The principal recommendations of this thematic group are as follows: GIS database update, i.e. the enhancement of the existing geographic information system for substandard Roma settlements; preparation of the typology analysis of substandard Roma settlements; development of the planning, design and technical documentation for the municipal infrastructure in the settlements; preparation of the guidelines for resolving the ownership relations as a precondition for the legalisation of structures, including the transfer of ownership of the public land (including the land of public enterprises) to private persons – residents of the Roma settlements; development of the methodology and instructions for the enforcement of eviction and relocation measures in conformity with the law and international standards, with active participation of all stakeholders.

5. Personal documents and the status of displaced persons and returnees in the readmission process – challenges and possible solutions, anti-discrimination (facilitator: Ms Olivera Vučić, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration; rapporteur: Ms Marija Ristić Milovanović, Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation)

The working group concluded that significant progress had been achieved with regard to personal documents and birth registration. The new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Ombudsman and the UNHCR, which envisages the implementation of the activities aimed at identifying any problems the Roma are facing in the exercise of birth registration rights, as well as other civil status rights, with a special focus on the new-born children in order to prevent the risk of statelessness.

As regards the integration of the returnees under the Readmission Agreement, the recommendation is to improve the coordination of local stakeholders’ efforts, which entails joint activities of local migration councils, mobile teams or members of the Roma community in the local government units where mobile teams have not been formed.

The working group also recognised the need to monitor the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, which should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice, as well as the necessity of cooperation among the relevant ministries, institutions, international organisations and the civil sector, and of building the LGU capacities for the provision of free legal aid.

6. Cross-cutting issues (facilitator: Mr Nikola Radojlović, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs; rapporteur: Ms Vera Kurtić, Council of Europe)

The key recommendations of this thematic group referred to the need to enable ethnicity-based data disaggregation in the Database for Monitoring Roma Inclusion Measures, as well as in all other relevant systems and records; adequate and timely preparation for the Population Census and the organisation of a campaign to encourage the Roma to declare themselves as members of the Roma community in the Population Census; ensuring an adequate system for monitoring the cases of discrimination and violence against the Roma, including the prevention measures; establishing the Roma Cultural Institute following the model of the existing cultural institutes of other ethnic minorities in Serbia;

*Discussion after the work in thematic working groups* (Moderator: Ms Dragana Jovanović Arijas, Manager of the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit)

* Mr Petar Antić from the GIZ insisted that the certificate of ethnicity, issued by the Roma National Minority Council (RNMC), should not be requested as one of the required documents when applying for scholarship, since that was against the law. He proposed that recommendations issued by RNMC or the relevant civil society organisations be used as an alternative.
* Ms Anita Antić from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MESTD) clarified that the application for scholarships, envisaged under the IPA 14 programme, required parent statements, while the RNMC was represented in the selection committee.
* Mr Božidar Jovanović from the GIZ highlighted a number of important subtopics in the area of education, such as the recognition of degrees and the inclusion of returnees in the education system; the need to expand the network of pedagogical assistants and the system for monitoring their work; the provision of scholarships to Roma students in the first year of studies, as well.
* Ms Jelena Tadžić from the UNDP stated that 100 employed Roma, as proposed under one of the operational conclusions, was not enough considering the size of this ethnic minority group. She also argued that the focus should be on the educated members of the Roma community.
* Mr Robert Bu from the GIZ reflected on the significance of local government units’ (LGU) participation in upgrading the living conditions through donor- or state-funded programmes. It is not enough to just motivate the LGUs, but rather to insist on their responsibility to participate by providing funding and the fundamental infrastructural preconditions (access to water supply, sewage, electricity etc.). He reminded the attendees that the pertinent experiences and models existed and should be used in an optimal manner. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of enhancing the cooperation between the LGUs and the local representatives of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration in order to strengthen the coordination at the local level and promote the social inclusion of returnees.
* Mr Dejan Marković from the SCTM drew attention to the fact that the local action plan (LAP) was the right mechanism for planning in advance the LGU participation in the improvement of Roma housing conditions.
* Mr Danilo Ćurčić from A11 proposed that one of the operational conclusions be updated so as to focus on the proportion of the Roma population in various housing solutions provided by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration for internally displaced persons and returnees under the readmission process.
* Mr Nikola Radojlović from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (MLEVSA) underlined the importance of the timely preparation for the Population Census in terms of motivating as many Roma as possible to declare their ethnicity.
* Mr Dragan Gračanin from the Council of Europe emphasised the importance of sensitising the institutions, in particular the judiciary, and introducing the concept of “antiziganism” to them, with a view to ensuring the security of the Roma community and promoting Roma equality.
* Ms Jadranka Ivković from the Open Society Foundation indicated the need to conduct an analysis of segregation in education, as well as to develop various desegregation courses of action / models, given the difference between the contexts in schools and local communities. She also reminded the attendees of the efficiency and effectiveness analysis of the institutional mechanism for managing the Strategy, envisaged in this document for this particular period.
* Mr Božidar Nikolić from the Association of Pedagogical Assistants stressed the importance of analysing more thoroughly the phenomenon of early, child and forced marriages in order to avoid stereotypes that such marriages were exclusive to the Roma community.
* Ms Mirjana Maksimović from the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia (EUD) stated that the final formulation of the operational conclusions must be concrete, measurable, time‑bound and must clearly specify the competences. She said that the draft operational conclusions did not address the issue of Roma coordinators and mobile teams, which were the key mechanisms for the implementation of all measures at the local level.
* Ms Chloe Berger from the European Commission agreed with Ms Maksimović’s remarks and added that the Action Plan for the Strategy, which was still not adopted, corresponded in terms of its timing with the implementation of the new operational conclusions, so that it was meaningful to ensure that these two courses of action were aligned.

*Closing remarks and conclusion*

Mr Nenad Ivanišević, member of the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma for the Period 2016–2025, highlighted the importance of responding to cases of discrimination, as well as of ensuring active Roma participation in all processes at the national and local levels.

The closing remarks were made by Ms Marta Garcia Fidalgo, Roma Policy Coordinator of the EC Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, in which she welcomed the willingness of all relevant stakeholders to participate in the dialogue. Ms Fidalgo stressed that the draft new operational conclusions for the period 2019–2021 must be aligned with the objectives specified in the [Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process](https://www.rcc.int/docs/464/declaration-of-western-balkans-partners-on-roma-integration-within-the-eu-enlargement-process), adopted in Poznan, as well as that they had to be endorsed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Seminar, organised biennially since 2011, is an opportunity to reach an agreement, in the form of operational conclusions, about the future priorities in the field of social inclusion of one of the most vulnerable population groups in the Republic of Serbia. The responsibility of periodical reporting on the implementation of the adopted operational conclusions rests with the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit and the Office for Human and Minority Rights.