

The situation of Roma in the Western Balkans: summary of the 2011 Progress Reports

Croatia

The commitment to the rights of minorities continues to be expressed at the highest level and cooperation between representatives of minorities and the government remains good. There have been improvements in (particularly pre-school) education and the infrastructure of some Roma settlements.

However, the Roma still face discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health, employment and adequate housing. Segregation persists in some schools and progress on enrolment in education has been modest. Extremely high unemployment persists, but here there is scope for improved take-up by the Roma of measures in their favour. For many Roma there is the persistent problem of their unresolved status, which creates difficulties when it comes to the provision of services.

FYROM

Some progress can be reported in the area of Roma inclusion. Enrolment rates of Roma children in secondary and university education steadily increased; changes were made in the law on social protection in order to address the over-representation of Roma in schools for children with learning disabilities. The health mediator programme was initiated in 8 municipalities and some active labour market measures targeting Roma continued to be implemented. Financial support for Roma programmes was maintained at the 2009 and 2010 levels.

However, no measures were taken to systematically address the issue of personal documents, which represents a major obstacle to accessing social, housing and health benefits. The pace of implementation of the Roma Strategy and the action plans in the framework of the 2005-2015 Decade of Roma Inclusion continued to slow down. There are no clear evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in place and insufficient funds and administrative capacity have been allocated for the implementation of the Action Plans. Furthermore, high unemployment rates persist and lead to precarious housing and living conditions, poor health as well as low school attendance, low income and high mortality rates. Allegations of police brutality and excessive use of force continued.

Albania

The Roma still face very difficult living conditions and frequent discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health, employment and adequate housing; progress is uneven and implementation generally is slow. The legal framework has not been enhanced.

A number of Roma still lack official registration, despite campaigns and awareness raising programmes. As regards education a quota for Roma taking up higher education has been implemented, but a programme aimed at improving school attendance of children was hindered by implementation flaws and pre-school enrolment remains lower than average (although preparatory classes for those children are developed). Implementation of the Strategy on improving Roma living conditions continues to be slow, due to inadequate resources and lack of coordination. A general lack of awareness at local level persists and there is an excessive reliance on civil society and international donors for the provision of critical social services. Serious concern arose over the forcible removal by citizens of ca. 45 Roma families from their settlement close to Tirana station.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The legal framework for the protection of minorities is largely in place, but little progress was made in its implementation. Some progress was achieved as regards the Roma, but they continue to be the most vulnerable minority. Measures are needed to help those at risk of statelessness, with the situation of women and children being particularly difficult; the lack of registration excludes the latter from enrolment in education and from health insurance and makes them vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Four action plans under the Roma Strategy are in place. Progress was made in the implementation of those on housing and employment, but there is little to report on the action plan on health and the effective implementation of the one on the educational needs to be stepped up; sustainability in implementing all four plans should be further addressed and coordination between the different levels of government reinforced. Limited steps have been taken by Cantons and municipalities to adopt, analyse and revise by-laws and introduce provisions to protect the Roma in the areas of employment, health, housing and education. The State-level social inclusion strategy for 2008-13 has not yet been adopted. Participation in the decision-making process remains very low.

Montenegro

Progress on inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) persons remains limited, despite continuing efforts by the authorities in cooperation with relevant international organisations and civil society. Efforts have been made to implement the strategy for 2008-2012 to improve the RAE population's status with the support of a monitoring commission involving RAE representatives.

Progress has been made to facilitate civil registration, but lack of proper registration continues to affect a large number of RAE persons. Illiteracy remains widespread; strategies to improve pre-school and secondary education enrolment and financial support for RAE students need to be strengthened and better coordinated. Discrimination is prevalent in access to employment, despite incentives for employers; offered vocational trainings are not fully adapted to needs and possibilities. Recruitment of RAE graduates in the public sector is at an early stage. Furthermore, problems still exist as regards satisfactory living conditions and access to social and health care. Efforts to fight child begging and domestic violence need to be intensified. No progress has been achieved regarding political representation of RAE persons.

Serbia (from the 'Analytical Report')

Serbia is actively taking part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015. A national strategy for the improvement of the status of Roma and a related action plan were adopted in 2009; education, health and employment policies and measures are largely in place. Infant and child mortality has been halved in the past five years and measures in the education sector have resulted in a significant improvement. A system of health cards has been put in place. Awareness-raising activities for Roma inclusion have continued. A series of measures were taken between May and September 2011 aiming at alleviating obstacles to registration of and improving access to basic rights.

However, implementation of the legislation and policies currently in place needs to be strengthened and funding increased. Widespread discrimination and marginalisation of the Roma continue. They have been the subject of several ethnically motivated attacks or threats over the past years. The rate of employment is very low. Women and children are subject to often unreported exploitation and family violence. There is still no systematic approach to the relocation of illegal Roma settlements, resulting in serious violations and breaches of basic human rights.

Kosovo

Mixed progress has been achieved. In October 2010, the lead-contaminated camp at Çesmin Lug/Česmin Lug was closed and its residents along with families from Osterode were resettled. The government has promoted civil registration. A report on the implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of RAE communities was published and Kosovo participated in the Roma Decade steering committee as an observer.

However, Osterode camp has not yet been closed because land for its remaining residents has not been allocated. Kosovo still lacks a comprehensive plan to regulate informal RAE settlements and the lack of civil status registration remains a serious obstacle to access to services. Reintegration of repatriated RAE is a concern. The authorities need to increase their commitment to address access to education, healthcare, housing and social protection.

DROI Secretariat