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# POLICY PAPER

## Engagement of Roma communities with Local Government in Albania: Ways to move forward



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**Konrad  
Adenauer  
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## **Policy Paper**

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This policy paper is the result of the project “Working together and Joint Forces for Roma youth social inclusion through tailored policies and good practices on minority rights” supported by “Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rule of Law Program South East Europe” and implemented by the UET Centre for the period February – November 2016.

This project is in line with the UET Centre and Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) cooperation in the field of social inclusion of Roma communities.

Insights have also been provided by the Roma Focal Points in Tirana Municipality: Aurora Koçi and Behije Kodra; Roma Focal Points in Durres: Elson Korra and Rivald Korra; Roma Focal Points in Fieri Municipality: Renart Koçi and Eduart Koçi.

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## Executive Summary

This policy paper is presented in the framework of the project “Working together and Joint Forces for Roma youth social inclusion through tailored policies and good practices on minority rights” financed by “Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rule of Law Program South East Europe” and implemented by the UET Centre for the period February – November 2016. The project aims to mainstream minority rights at the work of policy makers at the local level through the direct engagement of the Roma communities as Roma Focal Point.

Project strives to increase the participation of the Roma communities in the local development agenda and to have strategic community development plans implemented in the municipalities of Tirana, Durres, and Fieri. While the government have succeeded in developing and adopting national strategies for improving the situation of Roma, there are substantive shortcomings with regard to their effective implementation, in particular at the local level. As the Roma participation in decision-making is in relatively low levels, this affects their inclusion in all spheres of life.

The project established Roma Focal Points network and developed some practical guides to prevent discrimination against the Roma communities as part of the decision making process at the local level. Roma Focal Points are mobilized into Municipalities to prioritize local needs and implement development initiatives (e.g. self-help activities related to education, health, protection from discrimination, and promotion of human rights) in close partnership with local authorities. The impact of the project is to increase the capacity of Roma and Egyptians to participate in local development and planning of local level institutions to address social inclusion.

The recommendations provided by this policy paper draw from the analysis of the current situation on the social inclusion of Roma communities, their engagement with and participation in local governance as well as the insights and findings from the Roma Focal Points at the Municipality of Fieri, Durres and Tirana. Main recommendations:

- Enhancement of institutional capacities at central and local level to cater for marginalised communities and to adhere to social inclusion;
- A discourse of social inclusion and empowerment;
- Participatory social service provision at local level;
- Knowledge and understanding on Roma communities;
- Capacity building for access to and quality social services;
- Advocacy and policy implementation;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Free legal aid.

Executive Summary .....	1
I. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Methodology .....	4
II. General Overview .....	6
2.1 Engagement of Roma communities at local level in Albania .....	6
2.2. Roma communities in Albania.....	8
2.3 Roma communities and social inclusion at 3 Municipalities as case studies.....	10
2.3.1 The case of Fieri Municipality .....	10
2.3.1.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Fieri Municipality.....	10
2.3.2 The case of Municipality of Durres.....	11
2.3.2.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Durres Municipality .....	11
2.3.3 The case of Municipality of Tirana .....	12
2.3.3.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Tirana Municipality.....	13
2.3 Good working practices of Roma youth on their involvement as Roma Focal Points at local level .....	14
III. Policy Challenges - Findings on current engagement of Roma at local level .....	16
IV. Recommendations.....	20
V. Bibliography.....	22

## **I. Introduction**

This policy paper is presented in the framework of the project “Working together and Joint Forces for Roma youth social inclusion through tailored policies and good practices on minority rights” financed by “Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rule of Law Program South East Europe” and implemented by the UET Centre for the period February – November 2016. The project aims to mainstream minority rights at the work of policy makers at the local level through the direct engagement of the Roma communities as Roma Focal Point. Project strives to increase the participation of the Roma communities in the local development agenda and to have strategic community development plans implemented in the municipalities of Tirana, Durres, and Fieri. While the government have succeeded in developing and adopting national strategies for improving the situation of Roma, there are substantive shortcomings with regard to their effective implementation, in particular at the local level. As the Roma participation in decision-making is in relatively low levels, this affects their inclusion in all spheres of life.

The project established Roma Focal Points network and developed some practical guides to prevent discrimination against the Roma communities as part of the decision making process at the local level. Roma Focal Points are mobilized into Municipalities to prioritize local needs and implement development initiatives (e.g. self-help activities related to education, health, protection from discrimination, and promotion of human rights) in close partnership with local authorities. The impact of the project is to increase the capacity of Roma and Egyptians to participate in local development and planning of local level institutions to address social inclusion. More concretely, the results of the project affecting Roma communities are as following:

- i. Improved and diversified employment promotion measures developed and provided to Roma youth aiming at enhancing their skills and employability chances;
- ii. Increased participation of Roma in local development processes;
- iii. Improved access to basic equitable, inclusive and decentralised services and integration in the Albanian society;
- iv. Enhance institutional capacities at the central and local level to address social inclusion of Roma.

During June-August 2016, priority was given to the internships programme. The key target group included 6 Roma youth living in the region of Tirana, Durres, and Fieri, who then completed their 2-month internships at the respective municipalities at the local level.

This policy paper makes an attempt to contribute to the discussion on the reformation of social inclusion in Albania at decentralized level (local government) and thus provide insights for the development of an integrated social inclusion strategy for Roma communities. It also relates to the important role of CSOs in society all the vertical way from central to local level and particularly their role with regard to Roma social inclusion, which is prescribed also by the Strategic Framework of the National Agency

for the Support of Civil Society and the Task Force of the National Council for Civil Society Development.

Given the precarious position of the Roma communities in Albania and increased attention to the importance of social integration and their impact, this paper offers an analysis advising the co-operation of national governments, local authorities, CSOs, other key players and of course Roma themselves in order to provide a sustainable solution for Roma communities.

Regarding the local level of the proposed action, Municipality of Fier designed the Local Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian Communities supported by the Council of Europe as well as introducing a Programme on Promoting Human Rights and Minority Protection. The Municipality has set up a position within the Directorate of Education, Youth and Communities covering Roma issues.

This policy paper analyses critically the current situation on social inclusion for Roma communities in the municipality of Fier, Durres and Tirana and provides recommendations on how to move forward. Outcomes of these analysis and recommendations could help both the local level structures and civil society to create a dialogue and open debate on social inclusion, which could influence policy and decision-making processes.

## 1.1 Methodology

The research questions to address the current social inclusion for Roma communities in 3 specific municipalities of Fier, Tirana and Durres addressed are:

- i. In what ways are the economic and social problems of Roma communities addressed in these 3 municipalities in terms of institutional structures, drafting of policies and functionality of procedures?
- ii. To what extent were the requests of the Roma communities reflected to the municipality working plans and local government political platforms?
- iii. To what extent were Roma involved in the development of local policies?
- iv. To what extent and in what ways local CSOs can participate in social inclusion at these 3 municipalities?
- v. What are the recommendations for these 3 municipalities to provide suitable social inclusion for Roma communities in terms of institutional structure, policy process, human resources and governance?

The Policy paper was developed through a consultation process including representatives of local institutions, civil society organizations, mainly Roma and Egyptians.

The methodology for Policy Paper development consisted of:

- Findings from for this Policy Paper have been informed by using a qualitative research methodology such as document analysis, informative interviews and reference to secondary resources through desk research.

- Findings, analysis and recommendations collected throughout Roma Focal Points interviews based at targeted municipalities.
- Feedback received throughout formal meetings organized during the project implementation as well as comments and recommendations received by Roma representatives.
- Field visits to the Municipality of Durres, Municipality of Tirana and Municipality of Fieri.

## **II. General Overview**

### **2.1 Engagement of Roma communities at local level in Albania**

The Albanian Government, in particular the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth has drafted the National Strategy on Social Inclusion 2015-2020. This strategy includes the National Action Plan respectively on Gender Equality, children, youth, women, victims of domestic violence and trafficking of human beings, Roma and Egyptian citizens, the LGBTI persons, persons with disabilities, elderly, HIV+ persons etc. Currently the governmental bodies are setting the new financial instruments, legal and administrative for a sustainable system of social service delivery. The above measures aim to comply with the standards and criteria set by the European Union.

The National Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020 introduces measures aiming to increase access to public services for Roma and Egyptians during the next five years by eliminating barriers and ensuring inclusive education, civil registration and access to rights, better health, increased welfare through formal employment as well as improvement of the housing situation and social care, resulting in the integration of Roma and Egyptian communities.

As regards to the Roma participation in advisory and management bodies at the central level, their participation is limited to the appointment of a Roma person to the State Committee on Minorities, an advisory body to the Government. However, measures have been taken to conduct consultation process with the Roma communities by the GoA and particularly by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and a National Roma Contact Point has been introduced. This is also in line with the European Union accession process.

Social inclusion actions in Albania have been targeting the empowerment of vulnerable groups in Albania and overall the reduction of poverty. Lessons learned from the Strategy on Social Inclusion 2007-2013, prepared the background for a finalized Policy Document on Social Inclusion 2015-2020. These documents target the most vulnerable groups with access to employment and labour markets; access to education system; access to health services; access to social housing; access to legal aid<sup>1</sup>.

Implementation of social inclusion policies is based on inter-institutional cooperation; inter-ministerial approach with coordination of institutional responsibilities. The policies and indicators depend on overall government objectives and the action plan depends on sufficient budgeting and timeframes. The objectives of the new policy document will improve the social status of vulnerable groups, in educational issues, in health, in housing, and access to justice employment

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth is working on drafting some action plans on target groups like: Roma and Egyptians, LGBT persons, People with Disabilities, Children, in order to have concrete specific measures and activities in each area, focusing

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<sup>1</sup> For more see the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth Policy Documents 2015-2020.



and addressing the recommendations in coherence with new Policy Document of Social Inclusion 2015-2020.<sup>2</sup>

According to the National Cross-sector Strategy of Decentralization and Local The Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania, 2015-2020 is a document developed recently by the Government of Albania and coordinated by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. This document is to be adopted by the government by the end of March 2015. The Action Plan was developed in close consultation with and owned by the respective line ministries, local government units, related governmental institutions, representatives of Roma and Egyptian communities and civil society organizations, experts, international organizations and other stakeholders. The Action Plan reflects a scaling up of measures already being implemented and also initiates new activities for promoting the integration of Roma and Egyptians, with committed funding from the State budget and funding gaps identified for the 2015-2020 period.

Following the achievement of the EU candidate country status in 2014, the Government of Albania intensified the reform processes necessary for its accession, including the promotion of equal access to services and rights to all citizens. In this context, special attention is paid to actions that can eliminate barriers that Roma and Egyptians face in accessing services; improve their living conditions and promote intercultural dialogue.

Decision of Council of Ministers no. 377, dated 11.06.2014 approved the establishment of the National Youth Service as a budgetary structure under the Ministry responsible for the implementation of youth policies and it will function through 12 Regional Youth Centres. Youth Regional Centres are planned to operate in every region of the country during the period 2014-2017 as direct units providing services to young people. The National Action Plan for Youth was designed, which includes the objectives of the Albanian government regarding youth and the concrete measure, which will be undertaken by the Ministries responsible for youth. The goal of the National Action Plan is to create more opportunities in education, employment, culture, health and full participation of young people in society and decision-making. The National Action Plan on youth approved by a Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 383, dated 06.05.2015 contains six (6) general objectives and twenty-nine (29) specific objectives, including indicators to monitor and evaluate and the detailed costs for each activity.

Considering the administrative and territorial reform, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in collaboration and support of different actors, donors and civil society has designed an integrated social service system at the decentralized level, making sure that a comprehensive reform of the social care sector takes place, to fulfil the social and economic rights of Albanian citizens in need of social protection and support, in compliance with the international human rights standards and the normative principles of the European Community. The proposed interventions are built on the premises that a comprehensive system approach requires simultaneous attention to the different

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<sup>2</sup> For more see the Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians Communities 2015-2020 of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

categories of human rights, high level strategic reforms, and functional social care services with clearly defined accountability at the local level. It is meant to improve the efficiency of the social protection system and the quality of social services for vulnerable families and communities, including children<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the legal provisions in force, we are all aware of that there is too much to do, to guarantee the rights, the integration and social involvement of Roma communities.

## 2.2. Roma communities in Albania

Roma are one of the minority groups living in Albania and are considered as a language minority. Unlike other ethnic groups, Roma and Egyptian communities do not have a particular historical homeland they can identify with, and therefore, no diplomatic representation or bilateral agreements to support them and promote long-term economic and cultural exchanges. Acknowledging the importance of a full Roma and Egyptian integration in the framework of the obligations set out in the Stability and Association Agreement with the EU, the Albanian government drafted a strategy for the economic and social integration of the Roma community (Government of Albania, 2003). In addition, in 2008 Albania became part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015), a 10-year endeavour for their integration into the European mainstream societies. There are no complete and accurate statistics regarding the number of the Roma population in Albania; however, according to the representatives of Roma organizations in the country, and studies made by independent institutions, the figures range from 90 to 120 thousand.

Moreover 42% of the Roma are unemployed and only 6% have a profession, and over 80% of the Roma and Egyptian families live in material deprivation (UNDP, 2012: 5). The main incomes of Roma families usually come from employment in low-skilled jobs, most often in the non-formal sector, such as the trade of used clothes and the collection of recyclable waste. Over 21% of Roma and 11% of Egyptian families live in shacks. Often, they lack access to potable water, toilet and sewage (UNDP, 2012: 6). These situations of discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalization, are largely intertwined, impacting on low education levels, and illiteracy leading to intergenerational vicious circles of exclusion.

Most of the Roma reside in urban and suburban areas of the cities. Some of the major problems faced relate to:

- Low level of education - low rates of registration in schools and the rapid spread of illiteracy within Roma.
- Poverty and unemployment - many Roma families live below the poverty line and unemployment rates in the Roma communities are much higher compared to the rest of the population.
- Poor living conditions - many Roma families lack safe housing, sanitary

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<sup>3</sup> For more see the Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians Communities 2015-2020 of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

- conditions or supply of potable water.
- Insufficient health services - some areas inhabited by Roma have no access to health service providers and/or the Roma population can not pay for health services or medicines.

<b>Education</b>	<b>Literacy (age 16+)</b>		<b>School enrolment (ages 7-15)</b>		<b>School enrolment (ages 16-19)</b>	
	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma
	65%	95%	48%	91%	13%	60%
<b>Unemployment and poverty</b>	<b>Unemployment (ages 15-64)</b>		<b>Unemployment (ages 15-24)</b>		<b>Income-based poverty</b>	
	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma
	23%	18%	37%	39%	37%	15%

**Table 1: Roma in Albania Survey (UNDP, 2012)**

The results of the Albanian census of 2011 include figures of 8,301 Roma and 3,368 Egyptians, amounting to 0.3 and 0.1 per cent of the total population, respectively<sup>4</sup>. Unofficial estimates of the number of Roma in Albania range from 80,000 to 150,000 (i.e., between 2.5 and 4.7 per cent of the total population), while Egyptian NGOs estimate Egyptians' numbers at more than 200,000 (5.2 per cent of the total).<sup>5</sup> Roma and Egyptians live throughout the country, with the largest concentrations in central and Southeastern Albania.

The general living conditions of the Roma are very similar in all regions where they are settled. Many areas inhabited by the Roma are informal and do not have essential facilities such as sewage systems, waste removal services, supply with potable water, or proper road infrastructure while most of the dwellings are transitory, unsafe and unable to sustain weather changes.

Roma and Egyptian communities are among the poorest; most marginalized and socially excluded groups in Albania. Studies show that the level of poverty among Roma is twice as high as the majority population. Low level of educational attainment, high unemployment rate, low monthly incomes, extreme living conditions and direct and indirect barriers in accessing public services are indicators that prevail in the majority of Roma and Egyptians.

<sup>4</sup> INSTAT, Population and Housing Census 2011, Part 1 (Tirana: INSTAT, 2012), p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> See Roma Education Fund, Country Assessment: Albania (Budapest: Roma Education Fund, 2011), p. 9, available at [www.romaeducationfund.org](http://www.romaeducationfund.org) (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

## **2.3 Roma communities and social inclusion at 3 Municipalities as case studies**

### **2.3.1 The case of Fieri Municipality**

The Municipality of Fier is situated in the western part of Albania, in south of Myzeqeja field and 18 km from the Adriatic Sea. The Municipality is bordered with the municipalities of: Divjakë, Lushnje, Roskovec, Mallakastër, Selenicë and Vlorë. Fier is one of the major urban centres in Albania and it is situated in an advantageous geographical position, surrounded by a rich historical heritage, including old ruins of ancient civilizations such as Apollonia, Bylis, Ardenica, etc). Before the Territorial Administrative Reform, Fier Municipality was composed of the city of Fier and 17 neighbourhoods with a total surface of 800ha and a population of 82.262 inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> After the implementation of the Territorial Administrative Reform in 2014, the territorial boundary of the new Municipality increased considerably. Actually, the new Municipality of Fier has a total area of 620 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 122. 475 inhabitants. It is composed of 10 administrative units: Fier, Mbrostar, Topojë, Dërmenas, Levan, Frakull, Cakran, Libofshë, Portëz dhe Qendër. Five out of nine of the new administrative units have a considerable number of Roma communities<sup>7</sup>.

#### **2.3.1.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Fieri Municipality**

Local Action Plan on Roma and Egyptian Communities is the response of Fier Municipality to the challenges that these communities are facing such as: civil registration, education and promotion of intercultural dialogue, employment, education and training, health care, housing and urban integration and social protection.

Statistics on the number of Roma living in Albania differ. However, according to representatives of Roma organizations and independent organizations, a variation of figures is noted among 90,000 and 120,000 people residing in urban and suburban areas of Albanian cities. According to the EU Progress Report 2014 Roma and Egyptian people continue to face very difficult living conditions and frequent social exclusion and discrimination, particularly regarding access to health care, social protection, education, employment and housing. Fier Municipality constitutes the municipality with the highest Roma population. Roma individuals are concentrated in 8 areas of Fier, namely in Driza, Roskovec, Baltez, Sektor/Seman, Levan, Ferme Clirim, Saver, Grabian and Mbrostar Ura.

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<sup>6</sup>General Regulatory Plan of Fier, 2015

<sup>7</sup> For more refer to the IRCA Publication on Provision of Social Services at Fieri Municipality for Roma Communities, published with the support of European Union Delegation to Tirana.

Data of the Administrative Units of Fier Municipality - (December 2015) <sup>8</sup>		
1. Mbrostar	80 families	450 people
2. Levan	270 families	1000 people
3. Qendër	352 families	1760 people
4. Dërmenas	285 families	900 people
5. Topojë	24 families	121 people

**Figure 2: Data for Roma communities in Fier Municipality**

### 2.3.2 The case of Municipality of Durres

Municipality of Durrës, historically also known as Durazzo and Dyrrachium, is the second largest city and a municipality of Albania. It is central on the coast, about 33 km (21 mi) west of the capital Tirana. It is one of the most ancient and economically significant cities of Albania. Durrës is at one of the narrower points of the Adriatic Sea, opposite the Italian ports of Bari and Brindisi. Durrës is home to Albania's main port, the Port of Durrës. Many roads and railways pass through Durrës and connect the northern part of the country to the south and the west with the east. Moreover, it is the starting point of Pan-European Corridor VIII, national roads SH2 and SH4, and serves as the main railway station of the Albanian Railways (HSH). The total population is 175,110 (2011 census), in a total area of 338.30 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.3.2.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Durres Municipality

There are around 127 Roma families living in Nishtulla area in Durres region. These families are established in the area over the last 60 years. The poorest families come from Fushe Kruja area. Around 40% of families live on the economic aid, while the rest of families survive collecting cans, recycling materials, selling second hand clothes and begging. Most of children attend school, however there are around 10-15% who do not frequent the school; instead they beg with their parents. There is a community centre in the area (supported by UNDP) and managed by Durres municipality and two local Roma organizations such as, Ushten and Alba Rom. They provide support and services to the community in the area. Terre des hommes provides support through the child protection

<sup>8</sup> For more refer to the IRCA Publication on Provision of Social Services at Fieri Municipality for Roma Communities, published with the support of European Union Delegation to Tirana.

<sup>9</sup> As per official documentation obtained in the site visit at Durres Municipality.

service established in Durres municipality and supports to vulnerable children and families through direct assistance, support to school registration, child care practices etc.

Durres municipality has undertaken some infrastructure rehabilitation in the area however there is a need to focus further on housing, improvement of infrastructure, employment and vocational training and access to services (social, education, health). A key focus in this area would be establishing opportunities for employment (as there is a good basis for establishing it because the community seems to be in a more stable situation and people have lived together for the last 60 years). A combination of vocational education, life skills development, illiterate classes and negotiation with the labour market associated with mentoring and coaching for the first six months of employment would be a good approach to employment program.<sup>10</sup>

Durres municipality (186 Roma families/ 1353 Roma inhabitants & 280 Egyptian families / 1400 Egyptian inhabitants)												
Area of Intervention	Roma		Egyptians		Female	No of unregistered Children	No of registered homeless	No of families benefiting social housing	No of Unemployed Job Seekers	No of employed	No of persons with health cards	No of children accessing primary education
	No of families	No of Inhabitants	No of families	No of Inhabitants								
Cezma e ferres (Administrative unit 7 and 8) Durres	1	3	250	1300	40%	4	2	0	50	30	120	80
Nishtulla Durres	120	900	10	40	60%	9	0	0	30	30	30	60
Kulle, Sukth	65	450	20	60	60%	7	0	0	10	2	16	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>1353</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>220</b>

**Table 3: Data for Roma communities in Durres Municipality**

### 2.3.3 The case of Municipality of Tirana

The structural organization of Tirana Municipality allows the implementation of social services and activities in line to the demands of Tirana citizens for these services, oriented by the needs of various social groups. Currently, this Municipality has established a structure for the drafting of local policies and the implementation and monitoring of social services. This structure is organized within the Directorate of Social Service and Housing. This directorate directly covers 8 types of social services. It should be stressed that none of these services address the Roma/Egyptian community directly. However, children day centres, community centres for the elderly and day centres for

<sup>10</sup> As per official documentation obtained in the site visit at Durres Municipality and interviews of Roma Focal Point.

disabled persons provide services that address, according to categories, also the Roma and Egyptian community.

#### **2.3.3.1 Roma communities and social inclusion in Tirana Municipality**

Shkoza is one of the most oppressed suburban areas of Tirana, where there are concentrated a considerable number of Roma families and children, migrated over 10 years ago, mainly from the suburbs of Elbasan, Peqin, Kavaja. There are around 60 families in Shkoza area. The main source of income for families is collection of recycling materials and selling of second hand clothes and begging. The situation of children is very difficult in this area as most of them do not attend school, are not vaccinated, some of them not registered and also they beg in the street. The overall rate of civil registration in Shkoze stands at approximately 50 %. None of the families is benefiting from economic assistance.<sup>11</sup>

Main local Roma organizations working in Shkoza are “Romani Kham” and “Romani Baxt”. Save the Children address issues of access to quality Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD). Romani children and their families in Shkoze benefit from supportive family and community child care practices, quality early learning opportunities and increased protection from risk. However, the community in Shkoza area is more stable and settled. The request from the community is to use the land and not own it so they could build their houses that could be safe. In addition, there will be a need for infrastructure upgrade and establishing a model of employment of the community combining life skill education, vocational education, job creation and mentoring.

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<sup>11</sup> As per official documentation obtained in the site visit at Tirana Municipality.

Tirana municipality (623 Roma and Egyptian families/ 1400 Roma inhabitants/ 1000 Egyptian inhabitants)												
Area of intervention	Roma		Egyptians		Female	No of unregistered Children	No of registered homeless	No of families benefiting social housing	No of Unemployed Job Seekers	No of employed	No of persons with health cards	No of children accessing primary education
	No of families	No of Inhabitants	No of families	No of Inhabitants								
Administrative Unit no. 1	52	200			50%	16	2	0	0	2= 1F+1M	9	20
Administrative Unit no. 4	149	664	141	350	60%			0	0	4=4F+1M	17	150
Administrative Unit no. 6	82	410	88	440	60%			0	0	1=1F	10	60
Administrative Unit no. 11	55	250	55	250	60%			0	90	2= 1F+1M	8	90
Total	338	1524	285	1040	57.50%			87 2015-2016	938=510F+428 M	9 emp 11 emp promotion/6	55	320

**Table 4: Data for Roma communities in Tirana Municipality**

## 2.3 Good working practices of Roma youth on their involvement as Roma Focal Points at local level

Six Roma Focal Points (RFP) conducted the Internship in Municipality of Fieri, Durrës and Tirana for 1 month each. RFPs during their internships assessed Roma Communities rights and express their needs in the municipal level, monitored Roma community access to public services.

Description of their duties and responsibilities:

- i. Review all existing national and local legal, policy and methodological sources related to social inclusion of Roma communities, (i.e. surveys, studies, reports, The Policy Document on Social Inclusion 2016-2020, the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020, Local Social Inclusion Action Plans of each municipality, and respective legal framework);
- ii. Collect information on the existing initiatives in Tirana, Durrës, and Fieri related to:
  - Involvement of community members in local decision making initiatives (setting priorities, lobbying etc.);
  - Community mobilization strategies;
  - Successful local participatory planning initiatives in regions other than those selected.



- iii. Assist local elders, community counselling forums and Roma community members to draft/revise Roma and Egyptian Community Development Plans as per the local needs aligned with regional and national priorities and in coordination with other related initiatives such as the territorial division;
- iv. Integrate Roma Local Community Development Action Plans with the existing Local Social Inclusion Action Plans, Local Social Care Action Plans and overall Local Development Strategies of each municipality, thus addressing the needs of Roma with those of all inhabitants rather than creating segregated strategies/ action plans;
- v. Provide guidance and assist local authorities (elders, planning and budgeting departments in four regions) to reflect the Roma community development plans in the annual municipal planning and budgeting;
- vi. Facilitate the dialogue between local government and Roma Community Counselling Forums, relevant CSOs through participatory planning and identification of local projects to be supported;
- vii. Facilitate consultation meetings among local stakeholders.

### III. Policy Challenges - Findings on current engagement of Roma at local level

In the framework of Albania's integration process to EU, the Albanian Government has already approved several documents such as the National European Integration Plan 2016-2020, Roadmap on Five Key Priorities, which define concrete measures for the implementation of this process. Five key priorities resulting from the high-level policy dialogue between the government and the EU include "effective measures to reinforce the protection of human rights, including of Roma, and anti-discrimination policies".<sup>12</sup> Accomplishment of Priority 5 of the Governments' Roadmap inclines the taking of these measures in many fields of specific policies for Roma/Egyptians, such as: civil registration, access to justice, education, intercultural dialogue, employment and capacity building, healthcare, housing and urban integration, and social protection.

Attention to issues of equitable participation in decision-making is enshrined in constitutions and in legislation on elections, minorities and gender equality in Albania, as well as in strategies and national action plans for Roma. Occasionally employment of Roma in local administrations as focal points for issues affecting local Roma populations is combined with the development and adoption of local action plans for Roma. Local focal points serve to facilitate access to mainstream services rather than to replace such access.

- Review all existing national and local legal, policy and methodological sources related to social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities, (i.e. surveys, studies, reports, The Policy Document on Social Inclusion 2016-2020, the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020, Local Social Inclusion Action Plans of each municipality, and respective legal framework);
- Collect information on the existing initiatives in Tirana, Durres, Shkodra and Berat related to:
  - Involvement of community members in local decision making initiatives (setting priorities, lobbying etc.);
  - Community mobilization strategies;
  - Successful local participatory planning initiatives in regions other than those selected.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> European Union, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2013/package/strategy\\_paper\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/strategy_paper_2013_en.pdf), p. 19 (Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016).

<sup>13</sup> National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2016-2020, The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Tirana, 2016.

The Albanian Government and Parliament have undertaken the Administrative and Territorial Reform in line with the national legal framework, Albania's international commitments to local government autonomy, and the best international practices for such a reform. The Administrative and Territorial Reform aims to increase the cost efficiency of local units, so that they can provide better services and make sure that citizens and communities enjoy more access to such services.<sup>14</sup>

Great fragmentation and the smaller units capacity regarding service provision have hampered the development of a democratic local government. The territorial consolidation shall enable the delegation of more services to the local government, which through larger local government units will have more capacity to exercise a greater range of functions and have a more opportunities to promote local democracy. The primary aim of this territorial consolidation is the establishment of economies of scale, absent up to now, which shall enable the larger local government units to provide more effective and cost-efficient services.

Social policies and interventions in Albania are characterized by an overlapping of authorities and competencies, which have resulted in a system that needs to be substantially reformed. This reform must solve all the challenges identified during the last 15 years and furthermore it has to be based on a highly detailed social and economic context, updated with the latest statistical and administrative data.<sup>15</sup>

There is large institutional ambiguity - although social care institutions were decentralized in 2006, they are still financially and operationally dependent on central government. In terms of social issues, the central government is responsible for developing policies and monitoring their implementation. On the other hand, local authorities reflect the objectives of the legislation on social inclusion, and the respective policies and procedures in their local strategies, programmes and budgets. The economic aid and other cash benefits are financed by the state budget, but they are transferred to the beneficiaries through local government units pursuant to the criteria defined at central level. On the other hand, they identify the persons in need of social care and services, by timely planning their needs followed by requests for funds.

The financial decentralization and the ability of local government units to develop and implement regional policies, and the cooperation of the latter with the civil society are some of the greatest challenges. The central government must support and guide local stakeholders in their new tasks related to planning, providing and managing social services, by making available for them adequate needs assessment tools, by planning social service decentralization, and monitoring the strategies at local level - a problematic link of strategy implementation in Albania.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> European Union, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2013/package/strategy\\_paper\\_2013\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/strategy_paper_2013_en.pdf), p. 19 (Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016).

<sup>15</sup> For more refer to the IRCA Publication on Provision of Social Services at Fieri Municipality for Roma Communities, published with the support of European Union Delegation to Tirana.

<sup>16</sup> For more refer to the Instrument of Pre-Accession II, 2014-2020.

There is the urge to further consolidate, clarify and divide the role between the central and local government on planning, financing, delivery and monitoring of social inclusion at bottom-up level and vice-versa for each service and targeted client. The unclear division of tasks, competences, responsibilities between the local and central government could jeopardize the system. The provision of specialized services for groups/individuals in need very likely will remain at the bottom of priority list of politicians.<sup>17</sup>

When it comes to the provision of public health services in Albania, several studies and reports, including feedback from meetings during the project, reveal that Roma citizens perceive themselves as being subject to discrimination. A large percentage of Roma people feel that differentiations are made in the provision of public health services such as medical services, housing, education etc., and this also leads to self-exclusion of Roma people from accessing public health services.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, further studies are needed to better explore the factors for Roma's low rate in seeking medical and education services.

CSOs working with the Roma and non-Roma must work more strongly and in a more coordinated manner to advocate together towards local government social services departments and agencies to guarantee access and equitable public service both for the Roma and non-Roma to ensure that access is provided in a non-discriminatory way to the most vulnerable, marginalized, poor people. CSOs should work with the Roma community to encourage reporting on corruption cases they face in the social services system. Furthermore there is a need for more educated young Roma community members in the field of social services including specialisation on employment, housing, education, medicine and healthcare management.<sup>19</sup>

The challenges faced by Roma and Egyptian communities can only be solved in an institutional and sustainable way by ensuring an intentional participatory process also including both local and central government. While there are some positive practices established in some municipalities, there is a need to leverage on such good practices and strengthen the dialogue between Roma communities and local government, as well as with central government

There is a need to develop a close discussion with several Roma and Egyptian organizations, youth groups, NGOs and wider civil society working in those areas. Such process will aim to promote open interaction, build ownership from all parties and ensure that the community has a strong saying in each stage of the process. As a result local community plans and actions are to be established that will serve directly to the needs of the Roma and Egyptian families. Bringing together state institutions, civil society organizations, and community leaders, to work towards promoting the economic and social empowerment of Roma and Egyptians, will foster long-term collaboration and sustainable change. This model of collaborative action will be timely and will inform the

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<sup>17</sup> For more refer to the Instrument of Pre-Accession II, 2014-2020.

<sup>18</sup> For more refer to the National Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2015-2020, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

<sup>19</sup> For more refer to the Instrument of Pre-Accession II, 2014-2020

new multi-sectorial strategy of decentralization, reform on social care services and approaches to social inclusion.

The establishment of the Regional Social Funds in the whole territory of Albania will remain in the focus for follow-up of the CSOs that provide social services. Policymaking and decision-taking bodies need to reassess the role of CSOs to provide services.<sup>20</sup> They need to undertake legal steps and allocate the resources to ensure sustainable partnership between the government and CSO sector at all levels. Particular emphasis should be on the financing of social services delivery CSOs with public funds. The CSOs should demand their right to be part of the decision-making and be sustainable partners in the planning and delivery of social services. The demand and efforts of the CSOs should be aimed at facilitating effective and equal access for all those who need appropriate services social care. This approach should be in tune with the challenges of social policy in Albania as follows:

- Effective intervention to ensure sustainable social protection;
- Further investment in skills development and human capacity in order to improve their ability to integrate into society and the labor market;
- Social protection systems to respond adequately to people in need.

Alternatively, municipalities themselves can choose to develop Local Action Plans for Social Inclusion or Social Protection, where the integration of Roma and Egyptians would represent a key objective but other groups could also be addressed. Municipalities also play a key role in the implementation of most of the National Action Plan measures across all sectors. Thanks to the increased responsibilities of local governments pursuant to the Decentralization and Administration and Territorial reforms, the ministries envision a closer cooperation with the municipalities in Action Plan implementation.<sup>21</sup> Further monitoring and research is needed to assess the progress in these areas.

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<sup>20</sup> For more refer to the National Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2015-2020, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## IV. Recommendations

The recommendations provided by this policy paper draw from the analysis of the current situation on the social inclusion of Roma communities, their engagement with and participation in local governance as well as the insights and findings from the Roma Focal Points at the Municipality of Fieri, Durres and Tirana. This policy paper is aware of the shortcomings in scope, methodology and data, and thus it does not seek to provide comprehensive and universal recommendations, but rather to contextualise them in lieu of the project developed by UET Centre and IRCA with the support of KASRLPSEE. In addition, the recommendations also reflect the insights and findings of the work on social inclusion and human rights done by the UET Centre and its partner in the past 5 years.

i. ***Enhancement of institutional capacities at central and local level to cater for marginalised communities and to adhere to social inclusion.***

The enhancement of institutional capacities both at the central and local level is key to the social inclusion agenda.

An institutional partnership platform should be developed to include all stakeholders: central government and public institutions, local government, CSOs, research centres, universities, Vocational and Educational Training centres and schools, activities, Chamber of Commerce, business and communities' members.

Roma policymaking should be guided by: a multi stakeholder approach, research based and participatory processes.

ii. ***A discourse of social inclusion and empowerment***

A thorough and meaningful public discourse on Roma issues needs to be conducted starting from mainstreaming Public Dialogue Forum on Roma communities and secondly, putting pressure on media to represent in an accurate manner the Roma issues and provide more media space for Roma issues (particularly the case with the Albanian Public Service Media).

Developing the capacities of Roma communities to establish their own media and use alternative media as participatory platforms to voice their perspectives and cover positive models by promoting the values of Roma communities, identities and culture.<sup>22</sup>

iii. ***Participatory social service provision at local level***

Local level government staff should be trained on intercultural dialogue and social inclusion in order to fight the structured and deep-rooted discriminatory practices. A regular public dialogue with the local Roma communities should be established or enhanced, where in place, which could lead to consultation processes for social service provision.

Local CSOs should be proactive and engage with the local level government but also with the local media and other stakeholder.

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<sup>22</sup> For more see the author publication on alternative media for social inclusion at [www.uetcentre.org](http://www.uetcentre.org)

***iv. Knowledge and understanding on Roma communities***

Both at central and local level a profound understanding of Roma communities' culture, complex identities, lifestyles and challenges are necessary in order to develop participatory practices in policy and decision-making.

Evidence based research on key issues such as employment, education, housing, social protection and cultural heritage should be used to inform local and central level policy.

***v. Capacity building for access to and quality social services***

Positive action should be promoted by CSOs for both Roma people and communities and local authorities to foster capacities for Roma inclusion in employment, education, health and housing, as well as their participation in decision-making processes.

***vi. Advocacy and policy implementation***

It is indisputable the important role that CSOs play for advocacy and monitoring to ensure efficient policy implementation in every field of development at global, national and local level. Nevertheless it is quite evident that CSOs continue to lack a harmonized approach to support access to social services of Roma population and are often driven by immediate needs of Roma population or availability of funds to support local initiatives in an uncoordinated manner.<sup>23</sup>

Roma Social Services Municipal working group should be established with a clear strategy, action plans and which has a space for real dialogue among civil society and representatives of the local government and Roma communities for advocating and stocktaking on progress made in implementing a local Roma social services action plan.

Advocate for rights to equal quality social services for Roma population at local level.

***vii. Transparency and accountability***

Transparency of funding both at the central and local government should be ensured as well as transparency on the part of civil society. Relevant stakeholders need to be taken accountable and regularly report on achievements, challenges and progress.

***viii. Free legal aid***

Provision of free legal aid for Roma communities and facilitation of justice access in order for Roma communities to be able to access all basic services such as registration, social benefits, health, employment and education.

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<sup>23</sup> For more refer to the IRCA Publication on Provision of Social Services at Fieri Municipality for Roma Communities, published with the support of European Union Delegation to Tirana.



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