



Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia

Latvian Roma Platform meeting

SUMMARY REPORT

PLACE AND TIME: Riga [in „Astor Riga Hotel”, adress: Zigfrīda Annas Meierovica bulvāris 10, Rīga, LV-1050; auditorium „Akadēmija”], 29 May 2017, 10:00 a.m. – 15:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS:

- State and local government representatives, and Members of the Council supervising the implementation of Roma integration policy measures
- Participants of the Network of regional experts on Roma integration issues,
- Roma NGO, activists and community representatives,
- The staff and experts of the project “Latvian Roma Platform I: Dialogue, Cooperation and Involvement”.

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1. LATVIAN ROMA PLATFORM MAIN RESULTS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE MEETING

1.1. Main results of the Latvian Roma Platform project

THE MAIN IMPLEMENTED EVENTS:

- 3 regional expert meetings and the best practice visits to municipalities (Jurmala, Daugavpils and Jelgava) has been organized and implemented. The final report on the best practices, identified problematic issues and the possible solutions for future work has been prepared. 88 persons including Roma involved in these meetings.
- 4 practical workshops "Improving social situation of Roma families at the local level" have been organized and implemented in order to improve knowledge of municipalities' specialists and Roma civil society how to provide better access of Roma to social services and supporting programs provided by municipality, and to ESF funds. The summary report about the identified Roma integration problems (during the workshops) and the possible solutions using the existing European Social Fund support programs and activities has been prepared. 123 persons including Roma involved in these meetings;
- 3 educational lectures on Latvian Roma culture and history have been prepared and realized; the exhibition "Roma Holocaust in Latvia (1941 - 1945)" has been exhibited at 3 municipalities; an informative booklet on Roma genocide in Latvia during the World War II has been prepared and published; 153 persons including Roma participated in these lectures and exhibition open events.
- One day training for Roma activists and representatives of Roma NGO to improve their skills of project designing and implementing has been organized. During the training 14 Roma NGOs representatives and activists have improved their skills of the elaboration of the project application. In the result of the training the practical guidelines for Roma NGOs and activists on project elaboration, implementation and evaluation, as well as partnership development were worked out (28 pages).

THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS:

- Cooperation and dialogue between Roma civil society, state and local government institution representatives and social partners has been promoted.

- A large number of persons involved (both Roma and non-Roma) and their effective participation in the Roma community support has been provided.
- Awareness of the representatives of local government institutions (teachers, library specialists, social workers) and Roma as well as non-Roma NGOs representatives about Latvian Roma culture and history, especially about the Roma genocide during the World War II in Latvia has been raised.
- Coordination of the implementation of the set of policy measures on Roma integration has been implemented at the national, regional and local level.

1.2. Conclusions and recommendations provided by facilitators and experts of Roma Platform project activities (based on the final reports of project activities). Major initiatives to be implemented in municipalities with a population of Roma community

- to provide Roma teacher assistants for educational institutions with a significant number of Roma pupils;
- to provide support staff for Roma children in schools (services of a psychologist, a speech therapist and a social teacher);
- to provide service of Roma mediator in local municipalities (Valmiera, Ventspils, Jelgava, Riga, Dobeles, Jurmala, Limbaži, Vilpurga);
- to impose liability on a municipal employee to specialize in working with the Roma community (especially in the municipalities where Roma mediator or teacher assistant is employed);
- to educate municipal employees who work with the Roma persons, and to encourage them to follow the principle of "similar for the similar", providing communication and information in an accessible way, understandable language;
- to provide a day care center available for Roma people, in municipalities where live significant number of Roma and such day center is possible to establish (for instance, in Valmiera, Ventspils, Jelgava, Daugavpils, Dobeles);
- to organize motivational activities for Roma in order to improve their civil participation and activity (NGO membership, involving in inter-cooperation and intercultural dialogue projects etc.);
- to raise awareness of pedagogical staff on the creation of a tolerant and inclusive environment in educational institutions;

- to organize practical educational events for Roma community on practical key issues (for example, how to find a job, raise your self-esteem);
- to provide free access to the non-formal education activities and organize events for Roma children to promote their general development (workshops, summer camps, excursions, etc.);
- to provide Latvian language free lessons and organize practice-based Latvian language training (for example, written language is taught together with the profession);
- to encourage the development of innovative and practical support instruments for eliminating Roma unemployment (for example, State Employment Agency recommendation letter to the potential employer);
- to popularize social entrepreneurship and other methods to boost employment;
- to popularize examples of good practice in various areas.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LATVIAN ROMA PLATFORM ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR THE NEXT YEARS PERIOD

Latvian Roma Platform participants developed recommendations and practical suggestions in three thematic groups:

Group No 1 - Roma mediators

Group No 2 - Roma involvement mechanisms in European Social Fund (ESF) support activities

Group No 3 - Roma cultural activities to strengthen intercultural dialogue

2.1. The workgroups results

GROUP NO 1 - ROMA MEDIATORS

Objective: to provide and develop supporting activities for Roma mediators in Latvia.

Problem issues:

- What are the mediator's main operational objectives and tasks in municipalities?
- What knowledge and skills is it necessary for mediator to learn before practical activities?
- What are the main cooperation partners of mediator?
- What kind of cooperation models between mediator and municipal institutions are the most effective?

THE WORKGROUP SUGGESTIONS:

The goal of Roma mediator activities: to promote cooperation between Roma families and representatives of various municipal institutions, to foster opportunities for Roma integration and social inclusion, including better access of Roma to the services provided by the municipality.

⇒ The main tasks:

- to find "a trust person" who supports Roma community/ families;
- to promote setting up a cooperation network with employees from various municipal of institutions in order to solving problematic issues regarding Roma inclusion;
- to identify and summarize the needs and problems of the Roma (using questionnaires/ surveys, etc.);
- to gather Roma statistical data on Roma situation at the local level;
- to foster participation of Roma in the ESF supporting activities as well as in labor market.

⇒ The preferred cooperation partners:

- educational institutions;
- social service providers;
- State Employment Agency departments/ branches;
- entrepreneurs/ employers;
- Roma and non-Roma non-governmental organizations;
- crisis centers, religious and charity organizations.

⇒ The necessary skills and knowledge:

- the Roma language and the State language;
- at least basic education (written and reading skills);
- good communication skills;
- a tendency to professional development (to improve level of education; improve various skills; involving in project activities).

GROUP NO 2 - ROMA INVOLVEMENT MECHANISMS IN ESF SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Objectives:

- to promoting Roma as one of the target groups involvement in different ESF supporting programs activities, for example,
- to reduce Roma children early school drop-out risks (in the framework of the Program “Support for reducing early school leaving” (coordination by the State Education Quality Service));
- to work with vulnerable young people in *NEET** situations (in the framework of the project “Know and Do” to motivate and activate young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (coordination by the Agency for International Programs for Youth));
- support for the long-term unemployed people (in the framework of the project “Support for long-term unemployed persons” (coordination by the State Employment Agency));
- to organize anti-discrimination events, etc. (in the framework of the project “Implementation of anti-discrimination and social inclusion services for people at risk of social exclusion and discrimination” (coordination by the Society Integration Foundation))

Problem issues:

What actions should be taken to increase the involvement of municipal institutions in existing and planned support programs focused on Roma social inclusion?

THE WORKGROUP SUGGESTIONS:

- ⇒ Roma mediator/ support person regularly informs Roma families and local Roma people about the support mechanisms, especially ES supporting measures, using a language which is understandable for Roma people, and offers appropriate assistance;
- ⇒ to address social media in the Roma language for ensure better involvement in ESF supporting measures;
- ⇒ to consider the possibility of organizing special measures for the care of Roma children (babysitting) when their parents are involving in the project/ fund activities.

GROUP NO 3 - ROMA CULTURAL ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Objective: Latvian Roma mutual cultural cooperation and collaboration between the Roma and the majority society.

Problem issues:

- What kind of events are necessary to be organized?
- Who is responsible/ is able to take the responsibility for organizing events?
- How to disseminate good examples?

THE WORKGROUP SUGGESTIONS:

- ⇒ to organize Roma culture days at the regional level; the local government (cultural department, social integration department, etc.) takes responsibility for their implementation;
- ⇒ to encourage the development of Roma amateur teams in the regions, including financial provision to these teams provided by the local government (for example, supporting Roma amateur collective manager);
- ⇒ to organize Roma culture activities in schools (dances, games, songs);
- ⇒ to enhance cooperation among the Roma folk collectives from other regions as well as develop cooperation with the Latvian and other ethnics minority collectives;
- ⇒ to organize the Roma young talent event (with prize fund);
- ⇒ to organize Roma culture days in Latvia; as well as participation of the Latvian Roma amateur collectives in national festivals, for example, at the Latvian Culture Festival funded by the Ministry of Culture (and other cultural events);
- ⇒ Roma mediator informs the Roma families about the opportunities to get involved in culture activities/events.

2.2. Practical solutions for development of the Roma integration policy

➤ Objective: to ensure and develop operation of Roma mediators

- allocation of appropriate funds from the local governments to support activities of Roma mediators;
- organisation of Roma mediator trainings;
- development of the list of responsibilities and working tasks for Roma mediators;
- development of the practical handbook/guidelines for Roma mediators;
- collection and dissemination of the good practice of Roma mediation;
- organization of experience exchange events (national and international level).

➤ Objective: to develop Roma access to education and to promote teachers' cooperation with Roma parents

- education of Roma parents on issues about the necessity of education and provision them with information in a appropriate way about the benefits which can be obtained if a person has a certain level of education;
- the creation of recourse centre for Roma pupils and their parents in educational institutions where is relatively high number of Roma children;
- providing Roma teacher assistant positions at pre-schools and primary schools;
- development of motivation programs and recommended measures for Roma students (e.g. visits vacancy market);
- to provide after-school activities for Roma students at schools where they can do their homework and prepare for tests;
- to improve the Roma student monitoring process carried out by the Ministry of Education and include this monitoring with new elements, e.g. information about what a student can do after finishing a particular educational stage.

➤ Objective: to ensure Roma children's rights

- to examine Roma children living conditions by involving centre for children's right protection and family courts in order to draw attention to the Roma families which are facing social problems and poor socio-economic conditions;
- to provide Roma children's rights to use the potential by organizing special events for developing children's talents;
- to develop and provide support measures for the new mothers – students with the aim to encourage them to obtain primary education.

➤ **Objective: promotion of Roma employment**

- to organise practical meetings with entrepreneurs in order to encourage potential employers to cooperate with Roma;
- to foster cooperation among Roma mediators and employees from the municipal social affair departments and the State Employment Agency; Roma mediators summarize information about the job opportunities for Roma and disseminate it in an accessible way for Roma potential employees (using appropriate informative channels and language);
- to provide mentors for unemployed Roma persons during the job interviews in order to reduce employers' negative attitude;
- to make the links between the educational institution and the prospective employers already during the process of studying.

➤ **Objective: strengthening and promotion of understanding Roma history and culture**

- topics about the Roma genocide in Latvia (1941-1945), inclusion of the topic in school curriculum;
- development and dissemination of material on Roma culture especially in educational institutions to ensure multicultural approach (for example, to publish Roma fairytales, traditional songs and legend book).

2.3. Suggestions for Latvian Roma Platform activities

➤ **At the nation level – to strengthen and develop the Latvian Roma platform:**

- to continue develop regular dialogue between all stakeholders involved in the process of implementation Roma integration policy ;
- the updating of the Network of regional experts on Roma integration issues – involvement of new municipalities (especially in Riga region);
- to research Roma people's individual needs and the appropriate support to face their needs;
- to support for improving Roma NGO skills of development and implementation of projects;
- to develop effective ways for exchanging practices and positive cooperation;
- to foster dialogue between Roma and entrepreneurs/employers.

➤ **At the municipal level – services are chosen and adapted from the general offer**

- to educate and inform the members of the Network of regional experts on Roma integration issues on Roma social and culture issues;
- to activate and engage Roma youth (to organize joint activities for Roma and non-Roma youth in order to develop intercultural dialogue and to motivate Roma youth to get involved in the municipal youth centre activities, etc.);
- to adapt education and social services to support Roma community;
- to research ways and methods of information exchange and to use them to reach Roma people more efficiently;
- to popularize the good practice.

12 JUNE 2017

*The summary report was elaborated by:
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This project is co-financed within the framework of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union

The report has been prepared within the confines of the project Latvian Roma Platform I: Dialogue, Cooperation and Involvement No JUST/2015/RDIS/AG/NRP2/8793 with the financial support of the European Union Program "Right, equality and citizenship 2014 – 2020". The Ministry of Culture is responsible for its content and it does not reflect the opinion of the European Commission.