

Pursuant to Article 38, paragraph 1 of the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 30/18),

the Government hereby adopts

STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA 2022–2030

1. INTRODUCTION

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025¹ was adopted on 3 March 2016 as a continuation of the previous Strategy for Improving the Status of Roma 2009–2015.

The Republic of Serbia passed the Law on the Planning System² in 2018, defining the form, content and other characteristics of the country's planning documents.

In 2019, the Republic of Serbia joined the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within EU Enlargement Process³ (hereinafter referred to as the Poznan Declaration). The European Union (EU) adopted the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030 (hereinafter referred to as the EU Roma Strategic Framework).⁴

In view of the changed context and the above new documents, the existing Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 had to be reviewed and aligned with the Law on the Planning System and the Regulation on the Policy Management Methodology, Policy Impact Assessment and Content of Individual Policy Documents⁵. The Strategy was also aligned with the Poznan Declaration and the EU Roma Strategic Framework.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue launched an initiative to review the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 as the relevant proponent, under Article 29, paragraph 1 of the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia. In line with the above documents, the 2022-2030 period was defined as the Strategy implementation period.⁶

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2022-2030 (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy) was coordinated by the Expert Group of the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter referred to as the Coordination Body).

The Expert Group comprises officials of:

¹ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 26/2016 Available at: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2016/26/1/reg>

² Official Gazette of the RS, No. 30/2018

³ Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/5276e54b1a08c61969fea63c0dd27f13.pdf>

⁴ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0620&qid=1615293880380>

⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 8/2019

⁶ Article 11 of the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia stipulates that, as a rule, a strategy is to be adopted for a period of five to seven years. The phrase 'as a rule' indicates that the stipulated validity period can be deviated from. The validity period of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma was set so as to coordinate it with the validity period of the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030 and the 2030 Agenda.

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development;
- Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure;
- Ministry of the Interior;
- Ministry of Finance;
- Ministry of Justice;
- Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government;
- Ministry of European Integration;
- Ministry of Culture and Information;
- National Council of the Roma National Minority;
- Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit⁷;
- Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities;
- Republic Policy Secretariat and
- Civil Society Platform.

The Expert Group is led by Ninoslav Jovanovic, state secretary of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. The Ministry's Department for Improving the Status of Roma provides technical support to the Coordination Body and the Expert Group.

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2022-2030 was drafted based on an analysis of the available documents and the current context. The Coordination Body and the Expert Group obtained the opinions of all relevant institutions, as well as a wide circle of civil society organisations and the Roma community in the Republic of Serbia, drawing up the final version of the Strategy based on these opinions and submitting it to the Government for adoption.

The Strategy is based on the existing strategic, legal and institutional resources. The institutional resources for drafting, implementing, monitoring and assessing the Strategy include the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy,⁸ the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and its minister, who acts as a National Roma Contact Point, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, the relevant ministries in charge of policies of interest to the implementation of strategic measures, independent national institutions for equality and human rights as well as statistics, local self-government units, the National Council of the Roma National Minority of the Republic of Serbia and numerous international and domestic civil society organisations and in particular Roma civic organisations.

In this sense, the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma⁹ 2022-2030 represents the Government's official policy on Roma in the Republic of Serbia.

⁷ Submitting the opinion called for by the proponent, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia stressed that it was due to end its programmes on 31 December 2021 and that, at this point, it was not certain if it would continue its work. The plan is to institutionalise a part of the Unit's functions next year by setting up a relevant department within the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs.

⁸ It was set up under the Government's decision to establish the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025, Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 17/17, 84/20 Available at: <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/odluka/2021/62/7/reg>

⁹ All terms in the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 are used in masculine grammatical gender and refer to persons of both sexes. The shorter variant 'Roma' is also used. The gender-sensitive terminology is not used in translation, if it is not used in the original. The term 'Roma' is an umbrella term covering diverse groups including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanishals, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom and specific nomadic populations.

2. PRINCIPLES

The goals and measures proposed under the Strategy are based on the following principles:

- Public authorities' responsibility and capacity for achieving strategic goals;
- Solidarity with socially disadvantaged persons and groups;
- Inclusion and empowerment leading to human safety, economic growth and promotion of human rights by adapting environments and systems and supporting people and groups;
- Combating exclusion leading to losses in the state's social capital and inflicting real damage on excluded persons and groups;
- Elimination of social inequality, i.e. fight against antigypsyism as a form of racism and discrimination;
- Poverty reduction as a prerequisite for exercising human rights;
- Human rights as an overall approach to achieving the Strategy goals, with a special focus on the right to equality, participation, education, housing, work, health care and social protection;
- Roma's full participation in all policy stages relevant to them and in particular this Strategy;
- Affirmative measures addressing actual inequality, which are limited in nature (limited in time or implemented until the equality goal is achieved) and which are not considered discrimination against other people;
- Respect for Roma identity, i.e. implementation of measures having a positive effect on the preservation and promotion of Roma culture, history, language and other aspects of Roma identity;
- Diversity in the Roma community is also taken into account in order to address in an appropriate manner special challenges facing women, children, LGBTI persons, the youth, the elderly and others;
- Budgetary support to the implementation of the Strategy and cooperation with donors supporting social inclusion of Roma;
- Localisation of measures, i.e. adapting to the local context and supporting the local participation in the policy cycle relating to Roma.

3. INFORMATION ABOUT THE RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS AND THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELEVANT TO THE STRATEGY

The Strategy is based on international legal documents and national regulations governing the areas covered by it. They include the following: justice and protection of human and minority rights, inclusion and equality of Roma in society, equality and non-discrimination, education, employment, housing, health, social protection and civil status.

3.1. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL BASIS

The Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within EU Enlargement Process (Poznan Declaration)¹⁰, adopted by the Western Balkan heads of government, sets specific objectives as the minimum to be achieved before EU membership and provides

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/5276e54b1a08c61969fea63c0dd27f13.pdf>

general guidelines on how to achieve these objectives. The Declaration sets the following objectives:

Employment:

To increase the employment rate of Roma in the public sector to the rate proportional to the participation of Roma in the overall population;

To increase the employment rate of Roma to at least 22 per cent;

Housing:

To legalise all settlements where Roma live wherever possible;

To provide permanent, decent, affordable and desegregated housing for Roma living in substandard settlements that cannot be legalised for justified reasons;

Education:

To increase the enrolment and completion rate of Roma in primary education to at least 90 per cent;

To increase the enrolment and completion rate of Roma in secondary education to at least 50 per cent;

Health:

To ensure universal health insurance coverage among Roma of at least 95 per cent or to the rate equal to the rest of the population;

Civil registration:

To insure that all Roma are registered in the civil registries;

Non-discrimination:

To strengthen the government structures to protect against discrimination and establish a specific sub-division for non-discrimination of Roma within the formal non-discrimination bodies to process complaints by Roma, provide legal support to alleged victims and identify discrimination schemes, including institutional and hidden discrimination.

The Poznan Declaration calls on the member governments to establish mechanisms for monitoring, statistics included, to strengthen the role of National Roma Contact Points, to ensure appropriate funds from public and donor funding and establish formal mechanisms for joint involvement of the local governments and the Roma communities.

Under the Poznan Declaration, the governments made a commitment to continue and enhance efforts for full equality and integration of Roma, notably through implementation and follow-up to the Operational Conclusions of the Seminars on Inclusion of Roma. Moreover, the governments undertook to use the available data (including the results of the 2017 Western Balkans Regional Roma Survey¹¹) to formulate evidence-based Roma integration policies, to establish proper mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Roma integration policies, to ensure to strengthen and support National Roma Contact Points, to develop, adopt and implement regional standards on public budgeting related to Roma integration for mainstream and targeted policies, to use and increase the public budgeting, both

¹¹ Regional Roma Survey, UNDP/World Bank /European Commission, 2017, available at: https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Factsheet_SERBIA_Roma.pdf

central and local, reaching out to the Roma communities to achieve the above mentioned objectives, to use available donor funding, including Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to advance the status of Roma, and to establish formal channels and mechanisms for joint involvement of the local governments and the Roma communities in policy formulation, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of the efforts undertaken to achieve the objectives of this Declaration.

3.1.1. UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations (UN) system for the protection of human rights includes declarations, covenants and conventions, constituting the main body of international law, as well as the treaty bodies monitoring the implementation of these documents, the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council and the activity of the Council's special procedures. The implementation of the UN human rights instruments is monitored by the UN committees giving targeted recommendations for the improvement of human rights in a given state through constructive dialogue with the member states¹². The Government of the Republic of Serbia has set up the Council for Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations of the UN Human Rights Mechanisms¹³.

Bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)¹⁴, the states must respect, protect and ensure fundamental human rights, defined in more detail under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)¹⁵ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)¹⁶. These covenants guarantee to all the right to equality, legal protection, freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, security of person, to be recognised as a person before the law and acquire a nationality, to participation in public life, as well as to adequate living standards, work, social security, protection of the family and children etc. A state is under the obligation to ensure gradually (progressively) full exercise of all rights guaranteed to all, starting with the minimum rights which it has to ensure immediately and without any delay.

Other UN instruments relevant to the Strategy include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,¹⁷ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,¹⁸ the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁹ and

¹² The overview of the latest recommendations is available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/RSIndex.aspx>

¹³ Information available at: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/savet-za-pracenje-un-preporuka.php>

¹⁴ Available at: <https://www.poverenik.rs/images/stories/dokumentacija-nova/medjunarodna-dokumenta/SLOBODAN-PRISTUP/UJEDINJENE-NACIJE/Univerzalnadeklaracijacir.pdf>

¹⁵ Law on Ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Official Journal of the SFRY, No. 7/71; information available at: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/medjunarodni-ugovori-icescr.php>

¹⁶ Law on Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Official Journal of the SFRY, No. 7/71; available at: https://www.poverenik.rs/images/stories/dokumentacija-nova/medjunarodna-dokumenta/SLOBODAN-PRISTUP/UJEDINJENE-NACIJE/zakon_o_ratifikaciji_medjunarodnog_pakta_o_gradjanskim_i_politickim_pravima_1.doc

¹⁷ Law on Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Official Journal of the SFRY, No. 31/67, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images_files_Konvencija%20o%20ukidanju%20svih%20oblika%20rasne%20diskriminacije%20UN.doc

¹⁸ Law on Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Official Journal of the SFRY – International Treaties, No. 11/81, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images_files_Konvencija%20o%20eliminisanju%20svih%20oblika%20diskriminacije%20zena%20UN.doc

¹⁹ Law on Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Official Journal of the SFRY – International Treaties, No. 15/90 and Official Journal of the FRY – International Treaties, Nos. 4/96 and 2/97, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images_files_Konvencija%20o%20pravima%20deteta%20UN.doc

numerous other documents.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000) including among other things eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promotion of gender equality, reduction of child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV, malaria and other diseases, which are also the National Millennium Development Goals of the Republic of Serbia, are especially important.²⁰

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda is a document defining a global development agenda for the post-2015 period. In the next 15 years, the signatory states (the Republic of Serbia being one of them) are expected to mobilise all resources to eradicate poverty, combat inequality and find answers to climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals target many social needs including food, health, education, equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and renewable energy, decent work and economic growth, and sustainable cities and communities.²¹

3.1.2. COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1951)²² is a document laying down the principles of modern democracy in Europe – the rule of law and universal protection of human rights and individual freedoms. Article 14 of the Convention prohibits discrimination, whereas Protocol 12 defines in more detail the prohibition of discrimination in the human rights protection system.

The European Social Charter²³ of 1961 is also referred to as the ‘Social Constitution’ of the Council of Europe. Under the Charter, the states are under the obligation to create conditions enabling all to earn their living in an occupation freely entered upon, to receive a fair remuneration for their work without any discrimination and to have the right to social protection, health care, adequate housing conditions and protection against poverty and social exclusion.

The Council of Europe²⁴ has adopted also numerous recommendations, declarations and resolutions, focusing in particular on defining the Roma rights (education, health, housing, work and economic empowerment etc.) and general policies aiming to promote the status of Roma, their social inclusion and prevention of discrimination. The recommendations for the elimination of racism and discrimination against Roma, adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in connection with the problems encountered by Roma in exercising their rights on the local level - the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities [*sic*] - are also important. Finally, the documents on inclusion, discrimination against children, migrants and asylum seekers and the legal and general status of the Roma in Europe, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly, should also be pointed out in connection with the Council of Europe’s standards on the promotion of Roma status.

²⁰ Adopted by the Government in 2006 (see: https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Nacionalni%20milenijumski%20ciljevi_1.pdf)

²¹ For further information on Serbia’s sustainable development goals, see: <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/>

²² Law on Ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Official Journal of Serbia and Montenegro – International Treaties, Nos. 9/03, 5/05, 7/05 – corrigendum, and Official Gazette of the RS – International Treaties, No. 12/10, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images_files_CoE_Evropska%20konvencija%20za%20zastitu%20judskih%20prava%20i%20osnovnih%20sloboda.doc

²³ Law on Ratification of the Revised European Social Charter, Official Gazette of the RS – International Treaties, No. 42/09, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images_files_Revidirana%20Evropska%20socijalna%20povelja%20SE.doc

²⁴ The documents on Roma adopted by the Council of Europe and its bodies are available in English at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/adopted-texts>

The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma²⁵ stresses that anti-discrimination legislation and social inclusion represent the main levers in promoting Roma status. The adoption and effective implementation of “anti-discrimination legislation, including in the field of employment, access to justice, the provision of goods and services, including access to housing and key public services such as health care and education” and the adoption and effective implementation of “criminal legislation against racially motivated crime” constitute the foundations of active policy on Roma. Under the document standards, social inclusion should be ensured through effective and equal access to the following: a) education, b) employment and vocational training, c) health care system, d) housing and accommodation services etc.

3.1.3. EUROPEAN UNION ACQUIS²⁶

In 2011, the European Commission adopted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020, which focused on eliminating the socio-economic exclusion of Roma in the EU and enlargement countries by promoting equal access to public services. Two years later, the European Council adopted a recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states, providing guidelines for more successful implementation of national strategies.

The EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030²⁷ (hereinafter referred to as the Framework) sets more ambitious, measurable targets, focusing on inclusion, antigypsyism as a form of racism and the negative effect of COVID-19. The Framework puts the main focus on combining Roma inclusion in mainstream policies with targeted measures.

The goal of the Framework until 2030 is to help promote equality and combat the exclusion of Roma, with their active participation in the process. To achieve the goal, the initiative set seven objectives, which support and reinforce each other. They include the following three horizontal objectives, linked to three main political priorities (goals) of the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation:

1. **EQUALITY:** To fight and prevent antigypsyism²⁸ as a form of racism and discrimination;
2. **INCLUSION:** To reduce poverty and exclusion to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population;
3. **PARTICIPATION:** To promote participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust.

²⁵ CM(2010)133-final, 20.10.2010, available in English at:

[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?Reference=CM\(2010\)133-final](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?Reference=CM(2010)133-final).

²⁶ The EU Roma integration goals and the Council’s recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states are crucial for the EU accession countries as well, especially as the recommendation constitutes an integral part of *Acquis Communautaire*. Consequently, the enlargement countries should also align their current strategies with the EU Roma integration goals and should take targeted measures to bridge the differences between Roma and the rest of the population regarding access to education, employment, health care and housing, as well as intersectoral measures concerning ID documents and the strengthening of local and regional authorities’ participation and dialogue with civil society organisations.

²⁷ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0620&qid=1615293880380>

²⁸ The term ‘antigypsyism’, used by the European Commission, was translated into Serbian as ‘ciganizam’ as proposed by the Expert Group of the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 and, consequently, this term will be used in the text below to describe a specific form of racism against the Roma people.

The four sectoral objectives emphasise the continuing relevance of the Framework's four policy areas. As regards education, employment, health care, housing and essential services, all three horizontal objectives are relevant (ensuring the fundamental equality, socio-economic inclusion and participation of Roma):

1. To increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education;
2. To increase effective equal access to quality and sustainable employment;
3. To improve Roma health and increase effective equal access to quality health care and social services;
4. To increase effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services ²⁹.

Each Framework objective is quantified on the EU level by adequate indicators and their baseline and target values. In the equality area, the indicators include discrimination experience and ethnic distance (towards neighbours). In the inclusion area, all indicators are compared to the values in the general population. The main indicator is the poverty rate in general and among children, while the indicators by sector include the following: 1) education: early childhood education and care participation rate, secondary school completion rate, school segregation rate (the last indicator is not compared to the general population); 2) employment: (gender desegregated) employment rate and the NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate among young people; 3) health care: life expectancy at birth; 4) housing: housing deprivation, overcrowding and access to tap water in a dwelling. The participation indicators include the following: number of civil society organisations involved in policy monitoring, number of national bodies for the implementation of different policies which include also Roma members, number of reported discrimination cases and participation of Roma in elections (candidates, turnout).

The document gained in its political importance following the adoption of the European Council's conclusions of October 2020, underlining the need to renew and step up the commitment to Roma equality. The commitment should place special focus on non-discrimination, which includes the fight against antigypsyism and improvement of socio-economic inclusion.

Furthermore, as for national strategies, the recommendation is that they should reflect the needs of specific groups and diversity within the Roma population, that they should ensure the Roma people's inclusion in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national strategies, that the goal-setting, data collection, monitoring and reporting process should be improved and that the main policies should be more sensitive to the equality and inclusion of Roma.

Acting in line with the 2030 Agenda, the European Commission presented the Reflection Paper: Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030³⁰. The document highlights four pillars on the path to sustainability:

1. From linear to circular economy;
2. Sustainability from farm to fork;
3. Future-proof energy, buildings and mobility, and

²⁹ E.g. tap water, adequate sanitation, waste collection and management, environmental protection services, electricity, gas, access to transport, financial services and digital communications (as per Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights). The operational objective under this sectoral objective includes promotion of environmental justice and fight against environmental deprivation (see Annex 2 COM (2020), 620 final).

³⁰ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf

4. Ensuring a socially fair transition.

The fourth pillar emphasises that technological, structural and demographic changes in a globalised world are transforming the nature of work. In line with the EU social protection model, transition to sustainable economy should leave no one and no place behind. Social investment must remain among the top priorities, including education, training and lifelong learning, working conditions, health and long-term care, social inclusion and minority rights, gender equality and rural development.

Antigypsyism as a form of racism should first be recognised and then condemned as an existing trend on the national level in many countries. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 defines a series of measures for this fight using EU legislation as well as other instruments, including cooperation with member states and in particular national law enforcement bodies, the media and civil society and use of the current and future EU instruments. The Action Plan provides for the following: better implementation of EU legislation, closer coordination, fair policing, intensified action on the national level, greater diversity of the EU staff, informing the public and eliminating all racial and ethnic stereotypes in the media, education, culture and sport, as well as better collection of data based on ethnic or racial origin.

The Operational Conclusions of the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia seminar, held once in two years, and the Report on the Operational Conclusions are important documents. The Operational Conclusions of the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia seminar for the October 2017-October 2019 period and the Technical Meeting for the October 2019-October 2021 period and reports on the implementation of the Operational Conclusions for the above periods, which constitute the basis for the overview and analysis of the present situation by area (Chapter 3 of this document), are relevant to the Republic of Serbia and were therefore used in drafting the Strategy.

3.2. NATIONAL LEGAL BASIS

3.2.1. Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

The Constitution defines the Republic of Serbia as a state with fundamental values including social justice, civil democracy and human and minority rights (Article 1). Special attention is paid to national minorities to ensure the exercise of full equality (Article 14), the equality of men and women is guaranteed (Article 15), discrimination is prohibited (Article 21), as well as incitement to racial, ethnic and religious hatred (Article 49), children exercise human rights (Article 64), while the minorities are guaranteed the following: a) full exercise of individual and collective rights, enabling them to decide or take part in decision-making directly or via their elected representatives (national minority councils) on certain issues relating to their education, culture, information and official use of language and script (Article 75); b) full equality and prohibition of discrimination (Article 76); equality in administering public affairs (Article 77); prohibition of forced assimilation (Article 78); the right to preserve their specificity, i.e. the right to protect and preserve their cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity (Article 79); the right to cooperate with their compatriots (Article 80) and develop the spirit of tolerance (Article 81). The Constitution articles guaranteeing dignity and development of individuals (Article 23), promoting respect for diversity (Article 48), and recognising the citizens' right to participate in the management of public affairs (Article 53), the right to work

(Article 60), the right to special protection of the family, mother, single parent and child (Article 66), and the right to health care (Article 68), social protection (Article 69) and education (Article 71) are also vital for ensuring the inclusion of the Roma people.

Finally, in terms of regulation of the implementation of Roma inclusion it should be pointed out that, under the Constitution, state authorities (Articles 97, 99 and 123) and authorities of the autonomous provinces (Article 183) and local self-government units (Article 190) have shared competence over policy implementation.

3.2.2. LAWS

In addition to the Constitution, a series of laws constitute the basis for different aspects of this Strategy, including the following:

The Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities³¹ recognises minority status, stipulating that state authorities may define and take measures “for the purpose of securing full and effective equality among the persons belonging to national minorities and the citizens belonging to the majority” and for the purpose of “improving the status of persons belonging to the Roma national minority” (Article 4).

The Law on National Councils of National Minorities³² enables Roma and other national minorities to elect directly their national council (National Council of the Roma National Minority) to exercise their right to self-government and take decisions relating to their right to education, culture, information and official use of language and script.

The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination³³ governs the general prohibition of discrimination and defines the forms and cases of discrimination, as well as the methods of protection against discrimination.

The Law on Social Protection³⁴ defines social protection as an organised social activity of public interest aiming to provide support to and empower individuals and families to lead independent and productive lives in society, and to prevent and eliminate the consequences of social exclusion (Article 2), while its goals include achieving/maintaining the minimum material security and independence of individuals and families in meeting their subsistence needs, ensuring availability of social services and exercise of relevant rights, creating equal opportunities for independent life and encouraging social inclusion (Article 3). “Every individual and family requiring social assistance and support to overcome social and life difficulties and create the conditions needed to meet their basic subsistence needs” are entitled to social protection (Article 4). Social services are the activities of providing support and assistance to individuals and families in order to improve/preserve the quality of their lives, to eliminate or alleviate the risk of unfavourable living circumstances and create an opportunity for them to live independent lives in society, while the right to different types of material support is granted to secure the existential minimum and support the beneficiaries’ social inclusion (Article 5). Under Article 7 of the Law, institutions and other organisational entities providing social protection i.e. social services should cooperate with pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools, universities, health care institutions, police, judicial and other

³¹ Official Journal of the FRY, No. 11/02, Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 72/09, 97/13, 47/18

³² Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 72/09, 20/14 – US and 55/14

³³ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 22/09

³⁴ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 24/11

state authorities, territorial autonomy bodies, i.e. local self-government units, associations and other legal entities and natural persons.

The Law on the Financial Support to Families with Children³⁵ provides for financial support to families with children, including the following: improvement of conditions needed to meet the children's basic needs, special incentives for child birth and support to underprivileged families with children, families with children with developmental disabilities and children without parental care.

The Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System,³⁶ the Law on Pre-School Education,³⁷ the Law on Primary Education,³⁸ the Law on Secondary Education,³⁹ the Law on Higher Education,⁴⁰ the Law on the Schoolchildren and University Students' Living Standards⁴¹ and the Law on Textbooks⁴² guarantee the development of the Roma people's inclusive education. Several articles of the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (3, 4, 6 etc.) clearly point out the values, goals and methods of including Roma in education.

The Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance⁴³ defines the 'hard-to-employ' category of persons as unemployed persons who due to their medical condition, insufficient or inadequate education, social or demographic characteristics, regional or occupational mismatch between labour market demand and supply or other objective circumstances find it hard to find employment. Among other things, the Law is based on the principle of affirmative action focusing on hard-to-employ persons. Under the national employment action plan, defining specific active employment policy programmes and measures to be implemented in a given year, hard-to-employ persons are to be given priority in active employment policy programmes and measures or special active employment policy programmes and measures are to be designed and implemented for specific categories in order to improve and encourage their employment. The amendments to the Law have made it possible to align it with the Law on the Planning System, i.e. instead of the national employment action plan, adopted annually, the key document making the defined strategic employment policy framework operational is the 2021-2023 Action Plan for the implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the 2021-2026 period, specifying employment policy measures and activities to be implemented in the above period, as well as active employment policy measures, hard-to-employ categories of persons etc.

The Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities⁴⁴ and the Law on Public Administration⁴⁵ guarantee equal access to jobs, stipulating that care be taken when employing persons as public authorities that ethnic composition, gender representation and the number of persons with disabilities reflect as much as possible the population structure.

³⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 113/2017, 50/2018, 46/2021, 51/2021, 53/2021, 66/2021

³⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 88/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019, 6/2020

³⁷ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 18/2010, 101/2017, 113/2017, 10/2019

³⁸ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 55/2013, 101/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019

³⁹ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 55/2013-15, 101/2017-19, 27/2018-3 (other law), 6/2020-24, 52/2021-3

⁴⁰ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 88/2017-41, 27/2018-3 (other law), 73/2018-7, 67/2019-3, 6/2020-3 (other law), 6/2020-20 (other law), 11/2021-3, 67/2021-3 (other law), 67/2021-7

⁴¹ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 18/2010-54, 55/2013-38, 27/2018-22 (other law), 10/2019-8

⁴² Official Gazette of the RS, No. 27/2018-13

⁴³ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 36/2009-195, 30/2010-145 (other law), 88/2010-186, 38/2015-24, 113/2017-192 (other law), 113/2017-274, 49/2021-3

⁴⁴ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 11/2002-1, RS 72/2009-221 (other law), 97/2013-75 (US), RS 47/2018-23

⁴⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 79/2005-3, 101/2007-4, 95/2010-7, 99/2014-11, 30/2018-3 (other law), 47/2018-7

The Law on Spatial Planning of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2020⁴⁶ identifies Roma settlements as the most vulnerable settlement category, defining models of their social and economic integration and improvement of living conditions of the people who live there. Spatial and urban planning, building land development and use and structure construction are governed by the Law on Planning and Construction⁴⁷.

The Law on Housing and Building Maintenance⁴⁸ introduces a number of institutes relevant to the exercise of the Roma minority's right to adequate housing and in particular housing support and defines procedures of eviction and relocation to adequate accommodation, which is especially important to the exercise of the right to housing by Roma families living in substandard settlements.

The Law on Health Care⁴⁹ guarantees social care for health under equal conditions in the Republic of Serbia, including the provision of health care to the Roma people who have no permanent or temporary place of residence in the Republic of Serbia due to their traditional lifestyle.

The Law on Health Insurance⁵⁰ provides for compulsory health insurance of the Roma people who have no permanent or temporary place of residence in the Republic of Serbia due to their traditional lifestyle, if they do not meet the eligibility requirements to be granted insured person status on other grounds (personal status – employment, pension recipient or the insured person's family member).

The Law on Patients' Rights⁵¹ guarantees equal access to health care services to patients being provided with health care, without any discrimination based on their financial status, place of residence, type of disease, time of access to a health care service or any other form of diversity which can be the cause of discrimination.

The Law on Public Health⁵² governs the securing of the public interest in the health sphere through activities aiming to preserve the population's physical and mental health, the living and working environment and in particular the health of sensitive social groups. Public health institutes cooperate with other public health system participants in adopting and implementing public health promotion programmes and health education activities.

The Law on Youth⁵³ defines the measures and activities undertaken by the Republic of Serbia, the autonomous province or the local self-government unit in order to promote the social status of young people and create conditions for addressing their needs and interests in all areas of interest to them.

⁴⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 88/2010-4

⁴⁷ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 72/2009-105, 81/2009-76 (corrigendum), 64/2010-66 (US), 24/2011-3, 121/2012-14, 42/2013-37 (US), 50/2013-23 (US), 98/2013-258 (US), 132/2014-3, 145/2014-72, 83/2018-18, 31/2019-9, 37/2019-3 (other law), 9/2020-3, 52/2021-22

⁴⁸ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 104/2016-6, 9/2020-3 (other law)

⁴⁹ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 25/2019-40

⁵⁰ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 25/2019-3

⁵¹ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 45/2013-19, 25/2019-3 (other law)

⁵² Official Gazette of the RS, No. 15/2016-25

⁵³ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 50/2011-3

The Criminal Code⁵⁴ governs through criminal law protection from domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual abuse of children, racial and other discrimination, human trafficking, trafficking in children for adoption purposes, slavery and other criminal offences committed against extremely vulnerable persons and in particular children.

The Law on Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages⁵⁵ provides for normative preconditions for entry in a register of births, regardless of whether it concerns a child whose parents' identity is known, a child whose parents' identity is unknown, a child without parental care or an adopted child and regardless of whether this data is reported to the relevant registrar within the time frame for entry in a register of births set by law or upon its expiry.

The Law on Social Cards⁵⁶ defines the setting up and management of a single Social Card Register, its content, manner of access, data processing and storage, as well as other issues relevant to its setting up and management.

The Law on Legal Aid⁵⁷ defines legal aid provided to citizens as its beneficiaries and ways in which it can be accessed or provided. The Law applies to legal aid beneficiaries not exercising the right to legal aid under other laws. The purpose of the Law is to enable effective and equal access to justice to every individual.

The Law on the Rights of Provisional Care Beneficiaries in the Social Protection System⁵⁸ defines the exercise of rights by provisional care beneficiaries in the social protection system, including provisional care beneficiaries in social protection institutions which are being deinstitutionalised, placement principles and procedure, preparing beneficiaries in social protection institutions which are being deinstitutionalised for a life in the community, as well as protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect, the beneficiaries' other rights and obligations when using provisional care services until the creation of conditions for a life in the community and procedures to be followed during incidents constituting an immediate threat to life or safety of beneficiaries and other individuals.

The Law on Migration Management defines migration management and sets the common migration policy priorities and goals, but it also establishes better coordination between public administration bodies in the sphere. Under the Law, local self-government units are under the obligation to set up a local Migration Council, which monitors and reports on migrations in a given municipality/town and proposes programmes, measures and activities to be undertaken for the purpose of efficient migration management. Also, the Law provides for emergency reception and provision of food and accommodation to returnees under the Readmission Agreement⁵⁹.

In addition to the laws, the Strategy is based on and implemented together with the strategies of the Government of the Republic of Serbia⁶⁰ in various other areas relevant to the Roma

⁵⁴ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 85/2005-30, 88/2005-51 (corrigendum), 107/2005-171 (corrigendum), 72/2009-53, 111/2009-36, 121/2012-3, 104/2013-3, 108/2014-3, 94/2016-7, 35/2019-3

⁵⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 20/2009-30, 145/2014-72, 47/2018-8

⁵⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 14/2021-3

⁵⁷ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 87/2018

⁵⁸ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 126/2021

⁵⁹ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 15/2009

⁶⁰ The strategies of the Government of the Republic of Serbia are available at: <http://www.gs.gov.rs/lat/strategije-vs.html> or

population, including non-discrimination, education, employment, public health, social and other housing, safety, gender equality etc.

3.2.3. STRATEGIES

The Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2030⁶¹ was adopted with a vision of education development emphasising the recognition and strengthening of an inclusive approach to education and the provision of systemic support to students during their education, with the focus on students from non-stimulating environments and sensitive social groups. Securing equality in the exercise of the right and access to education for all children, students and adults, based on social justice, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, was defined as the first general principle of overall education in the Republic of Serbia. For an education system to be available, just and open, it is of utmost importance to set up new and improve the existing support mechanisms, laying a special emphasis on the specific features of different sensitive groups (students from families with low socio-economic status, children with developmental and physical disabilities, the Roma population and in particular Roma girls etc.). This will involve providing teaching assistants wherever necessary, the obligation to identify students at risk of dropping out and offer support to identified students, training teachers to carry out these activities, establishing procedures for cooperation between school administrations and schools in order to monitor students whose families are involved in internal seasonal migrations, establishing procedures to ensure the schooling of children temporarily residing in other environments, developing new scholarship criteria under which socio-economic status has a higher coefficient than the achievement criterion, and promoting inclusive pre-school education within the intersectoral early intervention system.

The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia was adopted for the 2021-2026 period⁶², its goal being to establish stable and sustainable employment growth based on knowledge and decent work. The measures defined under the Employment Strategy concern the implementation of active employment policy measures, ways of how to improve it, development of new measures and better monitoring of the situation and trends in the labour market and of measure outcomes and effects. Special measures are planned to improve the status of Roma, taking into account their share and other features indicating their unfavourable position in the labour market. The 2021-2023 Action Plan defines the measures for improving the status of unemployed Roma in the labour market, for including them in functional adult literacy programmes and motivation and activation training, for reaching out to them and informing them about the measures and services of the National Employment Service, and for including multiply vulnerable Roma in the measure package, encouraging entrepreneurship with additional support and mentorship.

The Public Health Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2018-2026⁶³ describes public health challenges in the country as numerous and links them to the effects of the economic crisis, population migrations and growing inequality, pointing out that leading diseases and injuries are connected with social and economic determinants of health, i.e. that they are disproportionate in the poor and vulnerable population, contributing to inequality in the health sphere.

<https://rsjp.gov.rs/cir/dokumenti-kategorija-cir/djp-cir/>

⁶¹ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 63/21

⁶² Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 18/2021 and 36/2021 – corrigendum

⁶³ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 67/2018

The Strategy for Permanent Improvement of Health Care Quality and Patient Safety⁶⁴ defines as its objective the obligation to promote cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in order to improve access to and the availability of health care to particularly sensitive population groups, the Roma people included.

The National Social Housing Strategy⁶⁵ provides for the development of the housing sector by: a) strengthening legal, financial and institutional capacity for social housing, b) increasing the range and diversity of the housing offer, c) increasing the financial availability of housing to low- and middle-income households, d) restoring confidence in residential tenancy in all forms of ownership, e) setting standards for residential construction and improvement of the existing housing and establishing instruments to prevent and reduce homelessness, and f) improving housing conditions of the people living in informal (substandard) settlements.

The Anti-Discrimination Strategy⁶⁶ is the country's first strategic document on the fight against discrimination addressing the discrimination issue in a comprehensive way. The Strategy provides for a system of policy measures and instruments aiming to prevent and reduce all forms and special cases of discrimination, especially discrimination against specific persons and groups based on their personal characteristics.

The National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030⁶⁷, aiming to bridge the gender gap and secure gender equality as a prerequisite for society's development and improvement of the everyday life of women, men, girls and boys, identifies the Roma women as a vulnerable group that is especially at risk of multiple discrimination.

The Strategy for Returnee Reintegration under the Readmission Agreement⁶⁸ includes the following areas: development of an institutional framework for the reintegration of returnees, creating conditions for their primary reception and increasing the local communities' capacity for their reintegration into society.

Moreover, the following documents are also important as the Strategy basis: the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 22/15), the Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Human Trafficking, Especially the Trafficking in Women and Children, and Victim Protection 2017–2022 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 77/17), the Strategy for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2020-2023 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 80/20), the General Protocol on Protection of Children from Violence and special protocols to this effect, the General Protocol on Procedure and Cooperation of Institutions, Bodies and Organisations in Situations of Violence against Women in Family and Partner Relationships and special protocols of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior to this effect.

⁶⁴ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 15/09

⁶⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 13/12

⁶⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 60/13

⁶⁷ Available at: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/doc/konsultacije/090821/Polazne-osnove-za-Predlog-strategije-o-RR.pdf>

⁶⁸ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 15/09

4. PRESENT SITUATION

In 2011, 147,604 Roma citizens were enumerated in the Republic of Serbia, accounting for 2.1% of the population in the country⁶⁹, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija excluded, and this figure is used as a point of reference when planning strategic measures⁷⁰. According to methodologically verified reports and indicators, the majority of Roma are faced with social exclusion and poverty and are the target of overt or, more commonly, covert discrimination⁷¹.

The Regional Roma Survey in the Western Balkans, conducted in 2017⁷², revealed that marginalised Roma are still faced with limited access to opportunities in all aspects of human development, ranging from fundamental rights, via health, education, housing and employment to living standards. According to the Survey, there is a large gap between Roma and their non-Roma neighbours in the Republic of Serbia, especially as regards young people. The chances of Roma boys and girls aged 18-24 being employed, educated or trained are almost twice lower (27%) than those of their non-Roma peers (58%). This has lifelong implications, because it blocks their future chances of finding decent jobs. The chances of Roma aged 15-64 being employed are almost twice lower than those of their non-Roma neighbours. As for education, in 2017, only 17% of Roma children aged 3-6 were enrolled in pre-school institutions and schools, while a large majority of the Roma children did not go to school.

It should be pointed out that the Republic of Serbia registers the second-largest gap between the Roma and non-Roma population in the Western Balkans. As for primary education, the situation is slightly better and, although higher enrolment is a sign of progress and the enrolment rate is the highest in the Western Balkans, 1 in 6 Roma children of compulsory school age are still outside the education system. Despite significant improvement, over one third of Roma aged 18-21 have no primary education.

In contrast, nearly all their peers in the neighbouring non-Roma population have achieved this level of education. As for two-year postsecondary and higher education, the Republic of Serbia registers the largest gap between the Roma and non-Roma population in comparison to all other Western Balkan countries. The higher education completion rate among Roma only amounts to shocking 1% compared to 23% among their non-Roma neighbours. The employment rates registered among the Roma in the Republic of Serbia are lower than those

among their non-Roma neighbours. In 2017, only slightly over one fifth of Roma aged 15-64 were employed compared to 40% of their non-Roma neighbours in the same age group. Only

⁶⁹ The 2011 Population, Household and Housing Census, Volume 1: *National Origin*, Serbian Statistical Office, Belgrade, 2012

⁷⁰ The number and geographical distribution of Roma should be treated with caution. Compared to previous censuses, Roma register positive population growth (the 1991 Census put the number of Roma at 140,237, while in 2002, the number of Roma enumerated in the census amounted to 108,193). However, that growth is not only determined by natural population growth but also by a different census methodology, as well as a higher number of displaced Roma people from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. Consequently, one should take into account the fact that the number of Roma in the Republic of Serbia is estimated at between 247,591 (Goran Basic, Bozidar Jaksic, *Art of Survival: Where and How the Roma Live in Serbia*, IFDT, Belgrade, 2005) and 600,000 (Ana Popovic, Jelena Stankovic, University of Nis Faculty of Economics, 2013. (<http://www.eknfak.ni.ac.rs/dl/FINALLY/Nacionalni-izvestaj-Srbija.pdf>), as well as the problems of ethnic mimicry and statistical neglect of the actual number of Roma (Estimates and official numbers of Roma in Europe, Council of Europe www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma).

⁷¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Serbia* (E/C.12/SRB/CO/2), 2014.

⁷² Regional Roma Survey, UNDP/World Bank /European Commission, 2017.

one third of Roma in this age group participated in the labour market in 2017, which is a drop of 52% compared to 2011. The gap between the two population groups has doubled in the past five years.

In the health care area, the good thing is that the majority of Roma have health insurance, but the percentage of Roma of 16+ years of age who say that they did not have access to health care services when they needed them is still much higher than among their non-Roma neighbours, amounting to slightly over one fourth. Still, certain improvement was registered compared to 2011.

In the housing area, the Roma's access to electricity and tap water increased in 2017, while the gap between them and their non-Roma neighbours narrowed. At the same time, failure to collect waste was still a serious problem affecting a large percentage of the Roma population living in marginalised communities.

Nearly all Roma in the Republic of Serbia now have documents showing that they have registered as citizens. In 2017, about 99% of Roma were entered in registers of births, while 94% of Roma of 16+ years of age had ID cards. The data obtained from the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, which in cooperation with the Ombudsman and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Serbia-based office, tried to solve the issue of legally invisible persons and help them exercise the right to be entered in registers of births, shows that significant results were achieved in the domain in the previous period. The cooperation continued by monitoring the situation in order to deal with individual cases, resulting in the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding in order to address potential problems encountered by the Roma people in exercising the right to be entered in the registers of births and other rights related to their personal status, focusing in particular on newborn babies to prevent the risk of statelessness. Also, the procedural instructions to be followed in cases of newborn children whose parents have no ID documents were adopted on 16 December 2020 to enable entry in the registers of birth. The instructions were adopted by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. The instructions channel the actions of authorised officials of health care institutions, registrars, police officers and the staff of centres for social work in cases when a newborn child's parents have no ID documents for the purpose of entering the child in a register of births.

The UNDP's follow-up survey has revealed that the position of Roma women in the Western Balkans is in particular difficult. On average, nine out of ten young Roma women are outside the employment, education or training system, two out of three Roma women have no money of their own, while one out of two employed Roma women have no health or pension insurance. The Republic of Serbia registers the second-highest number of early marriages among Roma women in the Western Balkans, with the Republic of Albania registering the highest number. Forty per cent of Roma women aged 20-49 in the Republic of Serbia say they married before they were 18 compared to 9% of non-Roma women in their neighbourhood, which means that on average one out of three Roma women married before they were 18.

Under the legal norms of the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence of Citizens⁷³, the Rulebook on the Application Form for Registering Permanent Residence at the Address of an

⁷³ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 87/11

Institution or a Centre for Social Work⁷⁴ and the Rulebook on Registration and Deregistration of Permanent and Temporary Residence of Citizens, Registration of Temporary Residence Abroad and Return from Abroad, Passive Status of Permanent and Temporary Residence, Forms and the Recordkeeping Method⁷⁵, the adoption of which was initiated by the Ministry of the Interior, all citizens of the Republic of Serbia, including the Roma population, registering the highest number of persons without documents, are enabled to have their residence registered at the address of a centre for social work or an institution in which they have been permanently placed, under a competent authority's decision to this end, subject to notification of the centre for social work/institution of the fact that a citizen's residence will be registered at its address. In the period between 2015 and 1 November 2021, the Ministry of the Interior issued decisions establishing that the residence of 2,968 persons, most of whom live in informal settlements, will be registered at the address of centres for social work, after which these persons were issued with ID documents. A considerable segment of the Technical Meeting on Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (2021) dealt with the summing up of the results achieved by the Ministry of the Interior, with further activity being focused on the implementation of the established procedures, i.e. the registration of permanent residence at the address of centres for social work.

For the above reasons, gender equality, security, readmission, COVID-19 and other crisis situations appear in the Strategy as cross-cutting issues in addition to those identified by the EU framework and described in detail in the following chapter.

The collection of data on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to work, housing, social protection, health care, education and employment, is crucial for improving access to these rights for all, the Roma people included.

4.1. OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION – HORIZONTAL (CROSS-CUTTING) ISSUES

4.1.1. FIGHT AGAINST ANTIGYPSYISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Antigypsyism is a specific form of racism, an ideology based on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism feeding on historical discrimination and manifesting itself in violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most evident forms of discrimination. This type of racism against persons or communities stigmatised as 'Gypsies' by individuals or groups in society is not legally recognised and prohibited in the Republic of Serbia.

Dehumanisation and reducing persons and groups to 'Gypsies' constitute the key elements of antigypsyism. 'Gypsies' do not exist. It is a construct present in some people's minds. This construct, which has a highly negative connotation, is pinned as a label on some persons and communities, with the Roma people being the commonest, though not the only victims of this construct. 'Gypsies' in that construct are considered to be inferior people, because of which they are not morally entitled to human rights. Such dehumanisation is not based on misconceptions or ignorance, it rather legitimises an artificial and invented construct, which justifies abusive and even violent behaviour of the majority towards 'Gypsies'. Quite frequently, instead of referring to problems faced by Roma, reference is made to 'problems with Gypsies' due to their

⁷⁴ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 113 of 30 November 2012

⁷⁵ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 68 of 1 August 2013, No. 106 of 5 December 2013, No. 3 of 15 January 2016

alleged ‘Gypsy’ identity (character) and lifestyle. The ‘Gypsies’ in the racists’ construct are filthy, dishonest, irresponsible, incompetent and in every other way bad and undesirable people. Naturally, Roma are none of that and have really nothing to do with such a construct. The prejudice against and stereotypes, negative narratives and false information about Roma are widely spread in society and in particular pronounced in times of crises.

Despite the established legal and institutional non-discrimination framework, it is hard to assess whether discrimination against Roma has decreased in the past five years due to the limited data. One of the reasons for debatable statistical and other data on Roma is that they conceal their national origin and try to assimilate to avoid discrimination.

Even though discrimination has been recognised as the main factor of the Roma’s exclusion, inequality and generally unfavourable status in society, the Strategy has not specifically addressed this phenomenon although it has dealt with it in some areas.

Over a period of six months (until April 2021), the Ombudsman received 14 complaints filed by Roma, acting as a mediator in the forced removal of 65 mainly Roma families from the Viaduct informal settlement in Resnik and the Rakovica Selo suburb. In the same period, the Equality Commissioner received 33 complaints against discrimination based on ethnic origin, of which figure 24 were filed by Roma, some of them collectively.⁷⁶

The data shows that about 24% of Roma believe that they have integrated into society, 20% of Roma believe that covert segregation and discrimination exist, while about 31% believe in the existence of overt segregation and discrimination.⁷⁷ Some 40% of Roma say that they are faced with discrimination, hate speech and threats not investigated or sanctioned, with the perception of institutional discrimination being widely spread in the Roma population and being primarily reflected in the difficulties encountered in accessing the right to social protection and the officials’ discriminatory language.

In the May-October 2020 period, the Equality Commissioner received a total of 72 complaints against ethnic discrimination in different areas, of which figure as many as 63 complaints were filed by Roma.

The Equality Commissioner conducted a survey, releasing a publication called Roma Community’s Perception of Discrimination⁷⁸, from which the information below has been taken. In 2019, discrimination based on national or ethnic origin was not one of the commonest reasons for submitting complaints to the Commissioner (accounting for 6.8% of the total number of complaints filed on various discrimination grounds), but the largest number of the complaints against discrimination based on national or ethnic origin, namely 64%, were filed due to anti-Roma discrimination, as in the previous years.

According to the survey results, poverty, i.e. income status, is considered one of the main reasons for anti-Roma discrimination. From the Roma community’s perspective, securing subsistence by joining the labour market on an equal footing is a prerequisite for education, believed to be the key to general equality. Almost all Roma respondents (94%) have heard of

⁷⁶ Report on the implementation of the Operational Conclusions from the Technical Meeting on Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia for the October 2019–October 2021 period. (Report on the Operational Conclusions, October 2021) available at: http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Izvestaj_o_sprovodjenju_operativnih_zakljucaka_sa_seminara_Socijalno_ukljucivanje_Roma_i_Romkinja_oktobar_2019-oktobar_2021.pdf

⁷⁷ The Ombudsman’s Special Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma with Recommendations, Ombudsman, 2019, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6359/ZAstitnik%20socialno%20ukljucivanje%20roma%2020191129c.pdf>

⁷⁸ Roma Community’s Perception of Discrimination, February 2021, Equality Commissioner, available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PERCEPCIJA-ROMSKE-ZAJEDNICE-O-DISKRIMINACIJI_final_compressed.pdf

the term 'discrimination', which they most frequently identify with injustice and associate with their overall position in society and, typically, with disparagement, disrespect and humiliation, harassment, violence and poverty. And yet, this does not mean that they are well-informed, given that a large number of the respondents are not familiar with the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and the Equality Commissioner as an institution.

About half of the respondents (55%) believe that the attitude towards Roma in the Republic of Serbia is the same as towards other citizens, which is a position held in particular by educated persons, persons with regular income and men. One in three respondents (35%) believe that the attitude towards Roma is not the same as towards other citizens, i.e. that Roma are in a less equal position than other citizens. This view is predominant among less educated persons, middle-aged persons and Roma women. The two results suggest a correlation between the perception of discrimination on the one hand and education, employment and regular income on the other.

One in four survey respondents (26%) believe to have personally experienced discrimination, while one in two respondents (54%) say that neither they nor their family members have been discriminated against. The majority of the respondents who believe that they have personally experienced discrimination feel that just because they belong to the Roma people they are denied their rights and services by local government and other public institutions (64%), centres for social work (61%) and when seeking employment (60%). The respondents have been least exposed to discrimination in schools and day-care centres (9%), at work (9%) and in restaurants (15%).

The survey has revealed that as much as 41% of citizens believe that public institutions are not available to Roma as much as to other citizens; in the past five years, only 26% of Roma families have felt that their position has somewhat improved, whereas 74% of them have felt no improvement in their living conditions.

The survey findings show that other identities in correlation with the national identity are believed to be crucial for the feeling of social exclusion. Three personal characteristics, including poverty, party membership and national origin and religion, dominate the perception of discrimination.

The survey results lead to the conclusion that, in order for the Roma people to achieve full equality and equal opportunities, it is vital to take an integral approach to the issues of poverty and social exclusion, which means that lasting results can be achieved only through joint action of all institutions directly responsible for the inclusion and securing of equality of the Roma community.

While over the past 12 months about 7% of women aged 15-49 in the general population felt to be the target of discrimination and harassment, as much as about 13% of Roma women felt this way. Usually, the reason for it was their ethnic or immigrant origin (about 13%), religion or beliefs and gender (2% respectively). The Roma women in urban settlements, unemployed Roma women and women aged 35-39 were usually the victims of discrimination.⁷⁹

The minority status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia was formally recognised under the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in 2002 and mainly focused on their cultural autonomy. The Law mainly provides for opportunities to develop culture, education, provision of information and official use of minority languages. However, it is very

⁷⁹ Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women: Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Serbian Statistical Office and UNICEF, 2019 (MICS 2019), available at: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/16056/file/MICS%206%20Istra%C5%BEivanje%20vi%C5%A1estrukih%20pokazatelj%20za%202019.%20godinu.pdf>

hard to apply some provisions in the case of Roma. To secure their fundamental equality, a certain degree of social solidarity has to be achieved in addition to continuing institutional support to their inclusion and the political will. The measures combating antigypsyism as a form of racism and discrimination against Roma have to be improved and policies of integrative multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue designed. The policies in question should be implemented in all segments of society in which inclusion and civic equality are treated as the key values and principles.

Roma and their culture are treated as something making impossible their inclusion in the community, their equal and successful education, their employment etc. Such a view reflects a negative attitude towards Roma, disregarding everything else. Namely, a group's culture is interlinked with the majority group's positions on the minority group, so that they share that responsibility. This means that Roma as well as the majority and other communities are equally responsible for the Roma culture. What Roma need is the conscious public interest regulation in the sphere of culture and participation in decision-making on all issues related to cultural development. Consequently, Roma urgently need to design their own cultural policy. Cultural policy is usually focused on three main tasks including preservation of cultural heritage and cultural identity, development of modern artistic creation and encouraging the availability of cultural goods and the citizens' involvement in cultural life.

To encourage social support to the measures for Roma inclusion, programmes and activities, based on which more positive social attitudes to the protection of human rights, diversity and interculturalism would be formed, have to be developed under education, culture and information policies. The potential of the Roma culture as part of the European and Serbian culture should be used in the current legal and institutional conditions as an instrument for overcoming prejudice against the Roma people. Culture is important to strengthening social ties and eliminating discrimination and should be embedded in all inclusive policies. In the process, the role of a state designing and channelling policies is crucial but insufficient. For this reason, support should be expanded through the activity of civil society which does not only include civil society organisations (but also religious communities, culture and sports associations etc.).

4.1.2. POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Poverty and social exclusion are major horizontal issues, as per the recommendations of the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030. To step up social inclusion across all areas and all levels in the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to make a commitment to fight persistent discrimination, including antigypsyism as a form of racism, and to improve the inclusion of Roma in education, employment, health care, social protection and housing. The Roma people should be involved from the design to the implementation of measures. At the same time, the diversity and needs of specific groups within the Roma population should be taken into account when developing measures and activities.

According to the Report on the Analysis of Long-Term Poverty, conducted by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit⁸⁰ in the Republic of Serbia, a significant part of the

⁸⁰ [Analysis of Long-Term Poverty in the Republic of Serbia.pdf \(socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs\)](#)

population is faced with long-term poverty, with the number of people living in such circumstances increasing every year. Long-term poverty is defined as a trend in which the persons' available income is below the at-risk-of poverty threshold both during the survey year as well as the preceding two out of three years. The data on the long-term poverty rate in the Republic of Serbia has been available since 2013, because the country joined the relevant survey at a later stage. In the three-year period in which the survey was conducted, the long-term poverty rate went up e.g. from 16.7% in 2016 to 19.6% in 2018.

Among European countries, the Republic of Serbia registers the highest long-term poverty rates together with Romania and the Republic of North Macedonia. Based on the 2018 population figures for the Republic of Serbia, the number of persons affected by long-term poverty is estimated at 1,368,590. The percentage of people faced with long-term poverty in the Republic of Serbia is twice higher than the EU average, which is a challenge as this number is on the rise, while at the same time none of the analysis have tried to explain the causes of long-term poverty. A high number of people affected by long-term poverty and an increase in that number every year suggest that the measures taken by the Republic of Serbia to reduce poverty are not efficient enough. Studying and understanding the characteristics of households and persons most linked to different patterns of long-term poverty can help formulate effective and more successful measures to reduce long-term poverty in the coming period. Poverty reduction measures can include several major lines of action aiming to increase the social inclusion of people faced with long-term poverty. Ensuring greater and easier access to the labour market should be the first line of action. Measures to this end should include the following:

- free training in jobs in short supply;
- benefit mechanism including compulsory professional development and vocational retraining organised by the National Employment Service;
- identification strategies (based on e.g. newly-introduced social cards) and adapted informing (preserving the autonomy of a person affected by long-term poverty in decision-making in order to preserve their motivation and self-esteem);
- tailored career guidance which will lead to permanent decision-making and adequate choices by persons affected by long-term poverty.

Another line of development can include measures related to the education system including the use of developed models preventing the dropping out of school in the Republic of Serbia, strengthening the transition to secondary school and developing career guidance and adapted professional orientation for students at risk. These measures would include the introduction of compulsory secondary school with developed support mechanisms to secure full coverage by secondary education, which would have to provide additional financing (e.g. transport to secondary school and in some cases scholarships for the most vulnerable students so that they could have the basic conditions to attend secondary school).

The third set of measures should ensure that social transfers are better targeted, which includes data integration by means of social cards, development of predictive models based on large datasets which differentiate between different groups of beneficiaries and the greatest deviations and which are sensitive to different household types (e.g. higher-income households, households with lower-quality jobs, farming households, households with several children and, most importantly, zero-income households).

4.1.3. PARTICIPATION

The National Roma Strategic Framework should place a strong focus on inclusion in the following policy areas crucial for Roma: education, employment, health care, social protection and housing. The fight against discrimination and antigypsyism as a form of racism should play the pivotal role as an intersectoral priority in every area, complementing the inclusive approach, together with the participation of Roma. This joint focus should ensure that Roma have efficient access to economy and social justice as well as equal opportunities in all areas.

Participation, i.e. involvement, is a very important horizontal issue, which must be present in every area of the Roma people's social life. In shaping public affairs, participation is a precondition for equality and inclusion, promoting democratic and efficient governance.

The Roma people's involvement and empowerment for active participation makes it possible for them to get involved and act in new ways for the purpose of social inclusion. Participation and empowerment are the principles and processes for improving the people's living conditions and life outcomes.

Support to the prominent Roma people's participation in policy-making on local, national and EU levels is a precondition for the fight against social exclusion. Civil society organisations led by Roma and pro-Roma organisations are in particular important players in the process.

In the implementation of the Strategy, participatory models, which will ensure the participation of all local, provincial and national stakeholders and mandatory participation of Roma, will be encouraged. These models and structures could later be used to monitor and evaluate the implementation of this document. The EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030 gives the following recommendations:

- To capacitate and engage civil society organisations in EU-wide coordinated Roma civil society monitoring of Roma integration policies;
- To ensure participation of Roma CSOs as full members in national monitoring;
- To organise commissions for all programmes dealing with the Roma communities' needs;
- To double the percentage of Roma filing complaints when they experience discrimination;
- To encourage the participation of Roma in political life on local, national and EU levels (in member states with a significant Roma population) and to ensure that they register as voters, vote and run as candidates.

The National Roma Strategic Framework should define the minimum mandatory aspects and channels of the Roma people's participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring, as well as the EU funds programming, including written participation protocols defining the mandate (scope and nature of engagement), composition (principles for the selection of members), work methods and expected results of the bodies' consultations and participation in order to ensure effective cooperation, trust and responsibility.

Also, opportunities for empowering Roma communities on the local level should be created in order to enable the community to influence social and political changes explicitly and in a

targeted way. The community's mobilisation should be treated as a deliberate inclusive and participatory process involving Roma, local authorities and organisations.

Furthermore, in line with the recommendations, it should be ensured that the Roma people are represented in all their diversity (including nationals and non-nationals, marginalised and integrated persons, women, children and young people) in politics and consultative processes. Naturally, to secure the Roma people's better participation in social processes, initiatives for the involvement of more Roma experts, who will act as mediators and help deal with the constant lack of trust between Roma and the majority community, should be improved – this refers to encouraging still further stronger mechanisms for Roma inclusion on both national as well as local levels.

To ensure participation, influence should be exerted on the promotion of cooperation in the civil society sector between Roma-led and other organisations focusing on support to Roma, especially those focusing on the rights of children, young people and women. To launch different projects, EU and other funds providing regular support to capacity-building should be actively used in addition to domestic funds.

The insufficient number of Roma-led umbrella organisations for permanent consultations and participation in political discussions has also been identified as a problem and, consequently, the existing organisations' capacity should be strengthened and Roma empowered to form sector-specific associations on the national level. They should be awarded basic institutional grants from the national government or through funds supporting civil society.

The Republic of Serbia should work on further empowerment and strengthening of confidence of prominent Roma to secure their participation in all stages of creating policies, including Roma, economic and cultural policies. Their involvement should be promoted in such a way as to make them feel that this is where they belong as full-fledged members of society. The empowerment and capacity-building of Roma, civil society and public authorities must be secured, building cooperation and confidence between stakeholders as well as the Roma and non-Roma communities.

4.2. OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION BY AREA

4.2.1. EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for exercising many other human rights. It is necessary for overcoming poverty, recognised as the dominant problem facing the Roma minority. Education is vital for the Roma community's full social inclusion.

The Equality Commissioner's survey on the Roma people's perception of discrimination⁸¹ has revealed that 88% of respondents believe that education plays the most important role in securing equal status in society. However, 47% of respondents believe that Roma do not use educational opportunities sufficiently, whereas 48% are undecided about exercising the right to education. Special privileges when enrolling in secondary school and university are backed

⁸¹ Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/istrazivanje-percepcija-romske-zajednice-o-diskriminaciji/>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

by 92% of respondents.

Pre-school education (PSE), i.e. day care centres for children aged 6 months to 5.5 years, is not compulsory, however, it largely helps children attending them to be successful in their education. In the Republic of Serbia, affirmative measures for enrolment in pre-school institutions are implemented. According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MESTD), in the 2019-20 work year, a total of 63.9% of children from sensitive social groups (10.5% of children from poor families, 7.4% of children from the Roma community and 46% of children from rural areas) attended PSE. Eighty per cent of Roma children (aged 5.5-6.5) were included in the compulsory preparatory pre-school programme. A training course for directors of pre-school institutions (PSI), enabling them to take exams to obtain a licence (project component 2), was developed as part of the Inclusive Pre-School Education project, implemented in the 2019-2022 period and financed with a World Bank loan, with 128 PSI directors completing the training. Moreover, 17 training courses, organised for day-care teachers from 23 pre-school institutions, were attended by 446 day-care teachers, and the proposed Pre-School Curriculum Instructions and the Rulebook Specifying Conditions for Different Forms and Programmes of Education and Other Forms of Work and Services of Pre-School Institutions⁸² adopted. The Rulebook defines in more detail the conditions for different forms and programmes of education and other forms of work and services of pre-school institutions. LSG support was ensured to increase the coverage of children by PSE by building new day-care centres or reconstructing and converting the existing ones, as well as awarding grants to LSGs (project components 1 and 3). A continuing media campaign is being conducted to encourage parents to enrol their children in PSI (project component 3). To support the improvement of pre-school education quality, 56 pre-school institutions in the poorest municipalities were provided with furniture and didactic and ICT equipment.

The project called Support to Pre-School Education System Reform in Serbia (SUPER – IPA 14) supports the building of the local self-government units' professional capacity for pre-school education planning and management, the strengthening of the pre-school practitioners' professional competencies for quality inclusive pre-school education, and the improvement of the pre-school education legislative framework, in line with the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System, the Law on Pre-School Education and the Fundamentals of Pre-School Curriculum. The planning of activities and work modalities were adapted to the newly-arisen situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to MESTD data, the following activities were carried out by April 2021:

- Guidelines for Local Strategy Development and the Action Plan for Strategy Implementation were developed, as well as the Guidelines for the Alignment of the Document on Public Pre-School Institution Network with the Strategy for the Promotion of Pre-School Education in the Local Community, and the Guidelines for Communication and Transparency of the Importance of Pre-School Education for Local Self-Government Units;
- 42 LSGs drew up the initial drafts of local strategies for the promotion of pre-school education in the local community, 2 LSGs (Bajina Basta and Svrlijig) adopted local strategies, the Svrlijig LSG adopted the Document on Public Pre-School Institution Network, in the Osecina, Razanj and Bac LSGs, the public hearing of local strategies was underway, 8 LSGs (Srbobran, Coka, Zabalj,

⁸² Official Gazette of the RS, No. 26 /2013

Dimitrovgrad, Babsunica, Knic, Rekovac, Koceljewa) failed to submit draft local strategies.

- A one-day online training course for day-care teachers was designed (<http://super.europa.rs/>).

Primary education is compulsory and available to all, without any discrimination. The available data shows that 90% of children of primary school starting age get enrolled, with the percentage of enrolled children in the Roma community still amounting to about 85%. The attendance rate is higher among both children of primary school age in the general population (99%) as well as their Roma peers (93%). The biggest problem is the primary school completion rate, amounting to 99% in the general population and only to 64% in the Roma population (the upward trend has stalled over the past few years) and even less among multiply vulnerable Roma children. In addition to insufficient coverage of Roma children and their not being sufficiently prepared to start school, including their insufficient mastery of the language used in class, the main challenge when enrolling them is that one in three children are enrolled (usually one year) later than they should have been. Roma children often skip classes or terminate their education for good, especially during the transition from the the first cycle to the second, at which point 10% of Roma children discontinue their education. Also, the Roma children's educational achievements are lower than those of other students. The reasons for such a state of affairs are numerous, ranging from poverty, poor mastery of the language used in class, via discrimination, to the teachers' being insufficiently trained for specific methods of work with children who are from sensitive social groups and who are without the necessary family support. A number of Roma children also have to earn money or have family obligations hindering their studies.

According to the Ombudsman's Special Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma⁸³, headway has been made in preventing the enrolment of Roma children in the so-called 'special schools' and ensuring that they are included in regular education, to which the measures implemented to include Roma children in the pre-school curriculum have doubtless contributed. However, there are still cases in which children are enrolled in 'special schools' without any reason and it is estimated that if they were provided with additional support, they could enrol in regular schools. Moreover, the segregation of Roma children in education still persists as a problem. According to the Ombudsman, the data collected from school administrations shows an alarming trend, indicating that segregation is increasing rather than decreasing. Namely, the adoption of the Amended Law on the Education System, allowing parents to enrol children in schools they like rather than the schools in the territory of the local self-government unit in which they reside, encouraged the trend of non-Roma parents not enrolling their children in schools attended by a large number of Roma children in some communities. From the segregation of Roma children in separate classes, we have now reached the point when we have, in conditions of inclusive education, the negative trend of 'ethnically pure schools', which are the result of ethnic distance and prejudice against the Roma people rather than the Roma parents' wish that their children attend classes in separate schools in the Romany language. In such cases, segregation is intensified by other parents' tendency to avoid sending their children to 'Roma schools'. The problems facing segregated schools with a large number of Roma children include bad working conditions, low-quality teaching, other students dropping out of school, low status of the teaching staff among their colleagues and in the local community, and insufficient support

⁸³ Ombudsman's Special Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma, 2019, available at <https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6359/ZAstitnik%20socialno%20ukljucivanje%20roma%2020191129c.pdf>, accessed on 19 November 2021.

by other institutions and local self-government, which significantly reduces the quality of education of Roma children.

MESTD takes measures to reduce and eliminate segregation, investing in such schools' resources by procuring IT equipment and ensuring their participation in national and international projects so that students could achieve successful results in different competitions, while by investing in the teaching staff, the education quality has been improved in comparison to some other schools in the local community.

Secondary education is not compulsory, but under international human rights standards it should be made available and accessible to all with appropriate funds. The secondary education coverage rate amounts to some 95% in the general population, amounting only to some 30% in the Roma community, although both populations are registering an upward trend. According to the 2021 EU Progress Report for Serbia⁸⁴, headway was made in the enrolment of Roma children in secondary education (from 22% in 2014 to 28% in 2019). MICS 2019 shows that the rate of transition to secondary schools amounts to 52.6% among Roma students, while the secondary school completion rate amounts to 61%, of which Roma girls attending secondary schools account for 27%.

The implementation of affirmative measures has so far resulted in the enrolment of a total of 12,427 Roma students (of whom girls have accounted for 55%). In the 2018-19 school year, 2,220 Roma students (of whom girls accounted for 56%) were enrolled, in the 2019-20 school year 2,209, while in the 2020-21 school year 1,894 students were enrolled. The Gender Equality Index (0.89) shows that the secondary education of Roma girls is still a challenge. The secondary school completion rate amounts to nearly 98% in the general population, amounting only to 61% among Roma, which is the result of challenges similar to those faced in primary education: lack of other types of financial (accommodation, scholarships) and non-financial support (assistance in learning), discrimination and insufficient teacher capacity. A rise in the number of students enrolling in and completing secondary school is in particular evident. The preliminary data of the latest 2019 MICS 6 shows that 27% of Roma girls and 50% of Roma boys go to secondary school, which is an increase compared to 2015, when only 15% of Roma girls attended secondary school. The implementation of measures for the reduction of the school dropout rate and segregation should be stepped up, especially on the local level.⁸⁵

Monitoring education reform, MESTD developed new teaching and learning programmes in the Romany language with elements of ethnic culture for all primary school forms, with the Roma National Council taking part in the process. These programmes were adopted by the National Education Council. The following four textbooks, printed for the Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture optional programme for forms 1-4, are listed in the Catalogue of Textbooks in Minority Languages for Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education for the 2020-21 school year (<http://www.mpn.gov.rs/udzbenici/>): Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture, primary school fourth form reader in Romany; Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture, primary school third form reader in Romany; Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic culture, primary school second form primer for classes in Romany, and Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture,

⁸⁴ Available at https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/godisnji_izvestaji_ek_o_napretku/izvestaji_ek_oktobar_21.PDF, accessed on 16 November 2021.

⁸⁵ Available at: https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/godisnji_izvestaji_ek_o_napretku/izvestaji_ek_oktobar_21.PDF, accessed on: 20 November 2021.

primary school first form picture book. In the 2020-21 school year, 2,467 students (1,163 girls and 1,304 boys) in 68 schools were enrolled in the Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture optional programme. A total of 55 teachers were hired to teach the programme, while in October 2021, the building of the teachers' competencies continued in the Training of Teachers of the Romany Language with Elements of Ethnic Culture, held for 30 participants, future Romany language teachers, by the Institute for the Promotion of Education in partnership with the Centre for Education of Roma and Ethnic Communities.

Granting scholarships is of utmost importance as a measure of support to Roma education. Over the past five school years, a total of 5,419 scholarships have been awarded to Roma students, with the scholarships awarded to girls accounting for 65%. In the 2020-21 school year, 1,213 pupils received scholarships. The Instructions on How to Prevent Early School Leaving with Recommendations and Proposed Measures for Dropout Prevention were drawn up by the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation as part of the 2014 IPA project called EU Support to Roma Students to Continue Secondary Education and submitted to secondary schools and regional school administrations. The Instructions were preceded by a qualitative analysis of effects of the measures of support to Roma students implemented so far in order to prevent early school leaving and increase the primary and secondary education completion rate.

Table 1. Number of students with scholarships and secondary school leaving rate by school year

School year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Secondary school leaving %	7%	3%	1%	2.4%	3.5%	2.3%
Number of students with scholarships	525	516	498	500	312	503

Source: Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation

The survey data shows that the secondary school leaving rate is decreasing and that systemic support measures in education have yielded results reflected in the greater motivation of students with scholarships for work, learning and school attendance and their wish to continue their education.

Mentoring support constitutes a major stimulus to remain in the system, because of which MESTD has continued to hire 200 mentors.

Teaching assistants (TA) as a measure of support to Roma education

The Rulebook on Teaching and Andragogical Assistants⁸⁶ defines the hiring of teaching assistants to provide assistance and additional support to groups of Roma children and students in pre-school institutions and schools. Teaching assistants provide also support to school and day-care teachers, staff members and parents. The teaching assistants' work is standardised – a school can hire teaching assistants when there are at least 20 students who need additional support in education, while the work with 35 Roma students constitutes a full teaching load. In

⁸⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 87/2019

the 2020-21 school year, a total of 260 teaching assistants were hired, 219 in primary schools and pre-school institutions, while 41 assistants were financed by local self-government. They are all equipped with internet cards and laptop computers. The Ministry is taking active steps to expand the teaching assistant network. For the 2021-22 school year, new jobs have been created for 21 teaching assistants, of whom 20 will work in primary schools, while for the first time a teaching assistant will be hired to work in a secondary school. However, according to the Ombudsman, the number of teaching assistants in pre-school institutions has not risen so that greater funds should be ensured to increase their number in order to further reinforce the already improved inclusion of Roma children in the pre-school curriculum. MESTD is intensively working on the initial training of day-care teachers in Serbian and Romany, in partnership with the Mihailo Palov Pre-School Teacher Training College in Vrsac.

Support to Roma Students in Distance Learning

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, support was provided during distance learning by taking individualisation measures and procuring equipment in cooperation with various donors. With the support by the Roma Education Fund and the Open Society Foundation, 550 IT devices were procured and distributed to schools attended by Roma students, who did not have the IT equipment needed for distance learning. Over 2,000 devices were provided to 30 most vulnerable schools attended by Roma children as part of the Bridging the Digital Divide in Serbia for the Most Vulnerable Children project, co-implemented by MESTD and UNICEF and financially backed by the EU, including 1,890 tablets, i.e. 63 tablets per school to be used by students, while each of the 30 selected schools also received between one and three laptop computers. Two hundred and fifty computers were ensured for and distributed to teaching assistants to improve the approach to distance learning for Roma students. Under the project, funds (EUR 5,000) were ensured for schools to set up learning clubs enabling students to learn online. In June and August 2021, 12 schools covered by the project carried out summer school activities. The summer school activities covered 360 students, mainly those in forms 5-8 with failing grades or those who completed the relevant form but were believed by their class and other teachers to have a lot to catch up in their studies (because they failed to attend online or regular classes).

To map the situation in the distance learning area, MESTD conducted a survey called Monitoring Ways of Participation and Learning of Students from Sensitive Groups During Distance Learning as a Form of Education (June 2020)⁸⁷ in cooperation with UNICEF. According to reports submitted by schools (95%), 7.8% of the total number of students belong to sensitive social groups. The survey data, which sheds light on the Roma students' situation as well as needs, is used for further support planning. Of the total number of students, 1.20% do not have adequate Internet access, while 0.80% do not have adequate devices needed to access the Internet. On the other hand, of the total number of students in the Republic of Serbia, 30.72% of Roma students have no Internet access, while 19.94% have no adequate devices (TV sets, smartphones, tablets, computers). For the students who during the state of emergency in the 2019-20 school year and during the 2020-21 school year were not at all in a position to attend online classes and take mock and final exams in the 2019-20 school year, printed teaching materials and materials for both mock as well as final exams were prepared and distributed. The data obtained during the survey shows that the proportion of Roma students in this teaching method amounts to 1.87% compared to the total number of students for whom printed materials were prepared. During the state of emergency and the 2020-21 school year, teaching assistants, who support Roma students requiring this kind of support in

⁸⁷ Available at: <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/izvestaj-o-ukljucenosti-ucenika-iz-osetljivih-grupa-u-obrazovno-vaspitni-rad-tokom-nastave-na-daljini/>

primary schools, provided adequate support to distance learning by carrying out a series of activities including the following:

- help with homework in 63.81% of cases;
- in 55.71% of cases they cooperated with teachers preparing teaching materials, which they then distributed;
- in 50% of cases they helped students master and use information and communication technologies.

The majority of the teaching assistants are in contact with students whom they support at least three times a week, while during the 2020-21 school year they were in daily contact with them. Communication is conducted via phones (81.43%), Viber and WhatsApp (69.52%), social networks (42.38%) and e-mail (15.42%). During the state of emergency (March-June 2020), teaching assistants communicated with their students' parents at least twice a week, providing them with the necessary information about distance learning. Teaching assistants continue with their regular activities and knowledge transfer, adapting them to epidemiological conditions, supported by MESTD which provides IT equipment and Internet cards, which makes it possible for them to be available in the field.

Some textbooks approved under earlier teaching and learning programmes contain negative stereotypes about Roma, including discrimination elements. The anti-discrimination regulations in the education field include the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System, the Law on Textbooks, the Rulebook Specifying the Discrimination Identification Criteria and the Rulebook on How an Institution Should Proceed in Situations of Suspected/Identified Discriminatory Behaviour and Harm to Reputation, Honour or Dignity of an Individual. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development recognises the significance of efforts made to identify and prevent discrimination in education, taking proactive action in informing parents and the general public about it and in building the teaching staff's competencies in the area. In cooperation with the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy and GIZ, two brochures and a guide for parents and teaching staff were designed:

- Brochure for parents: Prevention, Protection and Procedure in Situations of Discrimination in Education⁸⁸ and
- Guide for the Staff: From Identification to Action - a Guide on Prevention and Response to Discrimination for the Staff of Education Institutions.⁸⁹

The drafting of a Guide on the Operationalisation of the Rulebook on How an Institution Should Proceed in Situations of Suspected/Identified Discriminatory Behaviour and Harm to Reputation, Honour or Dignity of an Individual is underway as part of efforts to prevent segregation and implement desegregation measures.

The number of young Roma people managing to enter higher education is small (less than 2% according to the figures released to date, all other data is owned by universities) despite the affirmative measures for their enrolment in higher education. One of the reasons for the small number of Roma students is the lack of adequate additional support measures in secondary education and when preparing for and enrolling in universities. The number of students who have so far affirmatively enrolled totals 1,743 (girls account for 51%). In the

⁸⁸ Available at https://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura_CIPv05-final-za-roditeljeB.pdf, accessed on 20 November 2021.

⁸⁹ Available at https://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura_CIP_-05-final-za-zaposleneB-1.pdf, accessed on 20 November 2021.

2018-19 academic year, 115 Roma students received scholarships, while 17 loans were granted as well, whereas in the 2019-20 academic year, 120 students (58 boys and 62 girls) got enrolled.

The National Roma Council's data shows that in the 2021-22 school year, 195 recommendations for the enrolment of Roma students in higher education institutions were issued, with 128 students enrolling in them, while in the 2020-21 school year 238 recommendations were issued and 157 students got enrolled.

Table 2: Affirmative Measures for the Roma Students' Enrolment in Higher Education Institutions

SCHOOL YEAR	ISSUED RECOMMENDATIONS	ENROLLED WITHIN THE QUOTA	Not enrolled within the quota
2019-20	141	87	54
2020-21	238	157	81
2021-22	195	128	67

Source: National Roma Council of the Republic of Serbia

The lack of highly educated professionals in the Roma community proves to be a limitation when implementing a large number of employment incentives targeting Roma children and young Roma people. Moreover, the creation of conditions for equitable education will make it necessary to ensure a higher number of Roma day-care and school teachers and professionals in pre-university education so that Roma children and youth could be reassured that there is room for them in the education system.

The most important effects of the implemented support measures in education include a larger coverage of Roma children by the education system and reduced discontinuation and early school leaving rates. The data provided by the Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women: Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6, 2019⁹⁰) includes the following:

- 7.4% of Roma children under 5 attend PSE (51% boys, 49% girls);
- 80% of Roma children attend the Preparatory Pre-School Programme (PPP) (52% boys, 48% girls);
- 85.4% of Roma children enrol in PS (49% boys, 51% girls), of whom 80.8% have attended PPP;
- the gross PS eighth form enrolment rate is 62%, while the PS completion rate is 64%;
- the dropout rate has decreased by 7%
- the rate of transition to secondary school is 52.6% for Roma students, while the SS completion rate is 61%.

Education challenges: The practice of enrolling Roma children in schools for children with developmental disabilities (so-called 'special schools') is still present – Roma account for 18% of the total child population of 'special schools' (IPSOS, MESTD and UNICEF, 2016 survey). Roma children are also segregated in certain regular schools and classes, which is proving to

⁹⁰ Serbian Statistical Office and UNICEF

be a growing trend. The negative stereotypes about the Roma people are widely spread in society and among the education staff, appearing even in education materials, which results in different forms of indirect or direct discrimination. The pre-school education coverage rate is only 7.4% among Roma children compared to 60% in the general population. The rate of coverage of Roma children by the preparatory pre-school programme, which is compulsory, is increasing and amounts to 80%, but it is still lower than that registered in the general population, which amounts to 93%. The primary school completion rate for the total number of enrolled students is only 64% among Roma children (compared to 99% in the general population), with the majority of the Roma children, namely 10% of them, discontinuing their education during the transition to the second cycle. The secondary school completion rate for the total number of enrolled students amounts only to 61% among Roma (compared to 98% in the general population). Less than 2% of Roma are included in higher education (according to the figures released to date, all other data is owned by universities). Fifty-three per cent of adult Roma have no primary education or have incomplete primary education, while 33% of them have only primary education. Roma are faced with bigger challenges in distance learning and education in crisis situations. MESTD's conclusion is that a lot has been done in the implementation of the Strategy in the education area up to now.

4.2.2. EMPLOYMENT

The labour and employment area is of particular importance to the Roma population as on the one hand labour (means of earning wages) leads to greater economic independence and higher personal and family living standards, whereas on the other hand employment helps reduce poverty and social exclusion of Roma and helps increase their participation.

Moreover, the improvement of the Roma employment policy framework reduces discrimination in the labour market. In the previous period, the labour and employment area was aligned with international standards, the EU standards and conditions, and trends and characteristics of national labour market indicators.

In conditions when due to the modernisation of work process and the lack of knowledge and skills which are in demand as a result of the development and transfer of new technologies (which have had a significant impact on changes in the workforce demand structure) a significant number of unemployed persons are faced with a more difficult access to the labour market and job insecurity, the prevention of exclusion, i.e. encouraging people's inclusion and remaining in the labour market (also by improving their employability and investing in their knowledge, skills, competencies, motivation and mobility in the labour market), is crucial for fighting poverty and reducing social deprivation in the Republic of Serbia.

The Roma minority's joining the work process and the working environment changes the positions of that environment, convincing it that the inclusion of Roma is economically justified, i.e. the promotion of good practices prevents further prejudice against them and stereotypes about them, which helps reduce discrimination in this area.

The above is especially important in the case of multiply vulnerable Roma subgroups (Roma women, residents of informal settlements, internally displaced persons, big families with a large number of children...) given that an individual's vulnerability deepens with the number of vulnerable groups they may simultaneously belong to.

In February 2021, the Government adopted the Employment Strategy of the Republic of

Serbia 2021-2026⁹¹. The 2021-2023 Action Plan for Implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021-2026⁹² was adopted in March 2021. The Action Plan defines categories of hard-to-employ persons to be given priority in active employment policy measures in the projected three-year period, including unemployed Roma persons.

According to the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, the national labour market indicators show some moves in the right direction in the past few years, which is also consistent with the positive trend of macroeconomic indicators. Measured by the baseline indicators of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the labour market showed the signs of significant recovery in the 2015-2019 period – the unemployment rate decreased, the employment rate increased, the number of employed persons was higher and, as a result, the number of persons engaged in the labour market (active persons) was also higher, while the number of unemployed and inactive persons dropped. The total number of the working-age people (15-64) was reduced by 249,000 in 2019 as against 2015. At the same time, the number of persons active in the labour market rose by 46,000, while the number of inactive persons dropped by some 295,000. The number of employed persons registered an increase of 262,000, while the number of unemployed persons decreased by 216,000.

Even though certain headway was made with respect to the Roma status in the labour market in the previous period, the causes of their finding it hard to get a job should be addressed in future through coordinated action within several systems in order to improve their extremely unfavourable socio-economic status ultimately.

Over the years, the registered unemployment of Roma showed moderate growth, with the number of unemployed persons rising from some 22,000 in 2013 to some 26,000 in late 2019. In the previous period, the National Employment Service (NES) carried out activities encouraging Roma to become active and register with NES, this being one of the goals of the Employment Strategy and the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma.

Even though the Roma status in the labour market is still unfavourable, the positive thing is that the inclusion of Roma in active employment measures grew parallel to the increase in the number of registered unemployed Roma. The majority of the Roma who are fit for work are without the adequate level of education needed to join the labour market successfully. Although there is no official data on the Roma people's average income, it is estimated that the number of Roma living in absolute poverty is rising. It is important to note that the coverage of Roma by the National Employment Service records is still insufficient and that Roma are traditionally hired to do jobs belonging to the 'grey zone', as well as that the number of Roma employed in the public sector and in particular public administration is extremely low.

The official data on the Roma status in the labour market is for the largest part unavailable – the only available data is the absolute number of unemployed persons registered with the National Employment Service⁹³. According to the NES records as at 30 November 2021, the number of unemployed Roma persons totalled 28,254 (of which figure Roma women accounted for 14,390). Also, according to the NES records as at 30 November 2021, a total of

⁹¹ Available at:

http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/dokumenti/strategija_zapo_ljavanja_u_rs_za_period_2021._do_2026._godine.cid74576, accessed on 19 November 2021.

⁹² Available at: http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/15/15766_akcioni_plan_za_period_od_2021._do_2023._godine.pdf, accessed on 19 November 2021.

⁹³ NES data as at 30 November 2021.

6,125 Roma persons (of whom 2,589 were Roma women) were employed in the 1 January-30 November 2021 period. Table 3 shows the skill level and age structure of Roma persons according to the NES data as at 30 November 2021.

Table 3: Unemployment/Employment of Roma registered with NES

Unemployment/ employment of Roma registered with NES	Unemployed persons registered with NES as at 30 November 2021		Number of persons employed in 1 Jan.-30 Nov. 2021 period	
	TOTAL	WOMEN	TOTAL	WOMEN
SL I	24,889	13,098	3,360	1,411
SL II	393	142	134	49
SL III	1,713	542	1,212	398
SL IV	1,044	502	1,062	543
SL V	16	2	15	1
SL VI - 1	37	20	56	36
SL VI - 2	54	35	86	52
SL VII - 1	105	48	196	98
SL VII - 2	2	0	1	0
SL VIII	1	1	3	1
Total	28,254	14,390	6,125	2,589
15 - 19 years of age	1,739	870	469	144
20 - 24 years of age	2,739	1,418	937	332
25 - 29 years of age	3,257	1,647	934	389
30 - 34 years of age	3,484	1,821	781	345
35 - 39 years of age	3,365	1,760	773	377
40 - 44 years of age	3,446	1,821	701	348
45 - 49 years of age	3,241	1,721	640	311
50 - 54 years of age	2,863	1,434	407	184
55 - 59 years of age	2,412	1,151	307	119
60 - 65 years of age	1,708	747	176	40
Total	28,254	14,390	6,125	2,589

Source: National Employment Service

There is no accurate data on the proportions of unemployment of the Roma minority in the Republic of Serbia. In view of the legal provisions banning discrimination when seeking and finding jobs, stating one's national or ethnic origin is not required, i.e. it is just a piece of personal information registered based on a person's statement.

The Roma minority finds it hard to find employment and access the labour market for a number of reasons, the key identified reasons being unfavourable educational structure, lack of work experience, knowledge and skills, frequent low motivation to join the formal labour market as well as extreme discrimination and stereotyping when it comes to their employment.

The data on registered unemployment in the 2015-2019 period shows that the average number of unemployed Roma registered with the National Employment Service (NES) went up by some 3,800 persons, as well as that their proportion in overall unemployment

increased. However, it should be stressed that the increase in the Roma people's unemployment does not necessarily have a negative connotation, because in the previous period NES carried out activities to encourage them to become active and register as unemployed persons, which increases their chances of being included in active employment policy measures and being employed:

Table 4: Roma registered with NES in the 2015-2019 period

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	Number of persons, annual average				
Unemployed persons	743,158	713,153	650,573	583,099	529,508
Roma	22,437	25,126	26,537	26,099	26,266
Proportion in the total number of unemployed, %	3.0	3.5	4.1	4.5	5.0

Source: National Employment Service

The 2020 data shows that 27,595 persons who stated that they belonged to the Roma minority registered with NES⁹⁴. Of this figure, 50.2% were women.

A high proportion of unskilled and low-skilled persons amounting to 89.5% is the main characteristic of the educational structure of this category of unemployed persons. Ten per cent of Roma have secondary education, while only 0.6% of Roma have higher education. In terms of age, young people under 30 years of age account for 28.3%, persons aged 30-49 account for 48.6%, while 23.1% of unemployed Roma are 50 years of age or older. Long-term unemployed Roma account for 68.4%.

More than 11,000 Roma registered with NES are beneficiaries of financial social assistance who are fit for work, i.e. about 42% of the total number of the Roma registered with the National Employment Service are beneficiaries of this entitlement, which is yet another proof of their unfavourable socio-economic status.

Low participation of Roma fit for work in the formal labour market

What is characteristic of unemployed Roma is their low level of education and long-term unemployment spanning several years, because of which they are not competitive in the labour market. Long-term unemployment also contributes to their dependence on benefits, passivity and involvement in undeclared work. Making young people aged 18-24 active constitutes a big problem. In the Roma community, 73% of young people in this age group are not included in the education, employment or training system, with the percentage amounting to 42%⁹⁵ in the non-Roma population. The unemployment rate for the 15+ age group amounted to 9.0% in 2020, while according to the Labour Force Survey data for the third quarter of 2021 (released on 30 November 2021) it amounted to 10.5%.

The listed reasons for the Roma minority's low participation in the formal labour market include low or insufficient level of being informed and not being familiar with regulations, rights and available incentives (not including the system of social protection and family care), especially when it comes to the residents of informal settlements, who constitute one of the

⁹⁴ As at 31 October 2020

⁹⁵ Regional Roma Survey, UNDP/World Bank /European Commission 2017.

most vulnerable subcategories of the Roma population. The Roma population is also faced with the problem of not having the necessary ID documents, without which Roma cannot apply to be registered as unemployed persons or exercise the rights in other systems.

The Roma people's passive attitude and generational dependence on social protection benefits, coupled with their work in the grey economy, reduce their motivation to join the labour market actively. Their extreme mobility and decades-old exclusion from the life of the 'regular' community have resulted in its being unacquainted with the specific features of the Roma population's identity and heritage, giving rise to prejudice, stereotypes and stigmatisation. However, without any reliable data on the number of Roma who are fit for work but not present in the formal labour market, it is not possible to start analysing the reasons for and characteristics of the low rate of their economic activity with any certainty, using empirically based data.

Functional illiteracy, early leaving from the formal education system and low level of acquired skills

The Roma people's illiteracy is registering a downward trend, but as it amounts to 10% it is still far above the national average of 2%. One third of Roma (31%) have not completed primary education, one third have completed primary education, 12% have completed secondary education, whereas only about 1% of Roma have two-year postsecondary or higher education. Eighty per cent of women in Roma settlements are literate. Nineteen per cent of the literate women stated that they had secondary education. Fifty-nine per cent of the women in Roma settlements cited primary education as the highest level of education achieved, demonstrating to be literate (i.e. they could read the statement shown to them), while 10% of women with the same level of education could not read the statement. Ten per cent of women stated they had no education, failing to demonstrate any literacy (they could not read the statement shown to them), while 2% of women belonging to the same category could read it.⁹⁶

As for the coverage of unemployed Roma by additional education and training programmes, aiming to help them acquire work experience and to train them for independent work in their trades, the data of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs shows that in 2020, 759 unemployed Roma (465 women) registered with NES were included in measures of additional education and training:

- Professional practice - 10 persons (9 women);
- My First Salary Programme encouraging youth employment - 33 persons (20 women);
- Trainee programme for unemployed high-skilled persons - 43 persons (22 women);
- Trainee programme for unemployed middle-skilled persons - 58 persons (34 women);
- Acquiring practical knowledge for unskilled persons, surplus employees and long-term unemployed persons - 12 persons (6 women);
- Training to meet the labour market needs - 5 persons;
- Training at the employer's request - 12 persons (10 women);
- Functional basic education – 586 persons (364 women).

The implementation of the programmes depended on the unfavourable epidemiological situation as well as the fact that, according to the educational characteristics of registered

⁹⁶ Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women: Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Serbian Statistical Office and UNICEF

Roma unemployment, unskilled and low-skilled persons account for 89.4%, while the proportion of high-skilled persons only amounts to 0.6%.

The Roma's proportion in undeclared work of 71% represents the biggest challenge in their employment, compared to 17% registered in the general population. The Roma people usually do jobs related to waste collection and management, seasonal farming and construction work, sale of goods in open markets and on the streets, but they also work as musicians and cleaners of residential buildings and business premises (which is especially characteristic of women). A large number of Roma often move from one place to another due to their economic activity, which affects their access to other rights such as the right to education and health care. It is in particular important to treat this trend as a potential within the green agenda of the Republic of Serbia.

A part of the Roma population is faced with the problem of not speaking the Serbian language or of having learned it insufficiently. This usually refers to internally displaced persons and returnees under the Readmission Agreement, as well as Roma who were not covered by the primary education system or who left it at an early stage. The language barrier makes it difficult for them to exercise their right to work, to access information and to get informed in a timely manner.

One of the reasons why early school leaving is a widespread trend in the Roma population is that Roma children, usually boys from families experiencing severe deprivation frequently discontinue their schooling in order to earn money by working in informal economy (collecting recyclable materials, working as flea market or street vendors, washing cars) or by begging, which is a form of economic exploitation. On the other hand, girls usually discontinue their schooling to help keep households and take care of younger children. These reasons have a direct impact on the Roma population's presence in different forms of juvenile delinquency and socio-pathological behaviour.

Functional illiteracy and the low level of skills acquired in the formal education system are the reason why the proportion of unemployed Roma in additional adult education programmes and measures (enabling basic functional literacy) is high, why they are primarily focused on job skills training programmes i.e. the programmes enabling them to acquire the skills needed to do specific jobs and work tasks (e.g. practical skills training programme), and why their participation in work experience acquisition programmes for persons with at least secondary education (e.g. professional practice programmes) is low.

The lack of skills which are acquired in the formal education system reflects directly on their inability to develop further and acquire additional knowledge, skills and competencies which are in demand in the labour market (e.g. training to meet the labour market needs), dictates their inclusion on a larger scale in short-term action and recruitment programmes (public works) and limits their access to better quality jobs.

The low level of education reflects also on the success, sustainability and growth of good individual business ideas. Encouragement of entrepreneurship and self-employment should include more intensive support to potential or newly-established Roma entrepreneurs in order to reduce the number of unsuccessful entrepreneurial businesses. Also, a large number of good ideas are never acted upon because Roma cannot meet the requirements related to collaterals.

In view of the above mentioned, measures and activities for improving the quality of the Roma

population's human capital and its more active and better-quality participation in the formal labour market, i.e. the creation of a stimulating environment and development of missing support system services, are crucial for the Roma people's being more competitive in the labour market and for their economic empowerment and independence, which in turn leads to a higher degree of socio-economic participation and helps build quality social and workforce capital.

Due to the extremely unfavourable educational structure of the Roma population, its awareness of the importance of education must be raised and efforts stepped up to prevent early primary and secondary school leaving, especially by Roma girls, in order to improve generally their chances of actively joining the labour market on an equal footing.

During the previous period, Roma accounted for more than a half of all participants in adult literacy programmes, better known as the Second Chance programmes. Functional basic adult education (FBAE), ensured through cooperation between the National Employment Service and educational institutions aims to improve the Roma population's educational structure through the functional basic education of adults within a three-year cycle. Further implementation of FBAE and inclusion of a larger number of persons in it remain a priority in the coming period.

Active employment measures

When drafting this Strategy, according to the data obtained from the National Employment Service (NES), active employment policy measures implemented during 2020 covered 3,264 unemployed Roma (1,534 women), who account for 5.02% of the total number of the unemployed included in the measures. As for the active job searching measures, 1,583 unemployed Roma (739 women) were included, while 759 unemployed Roma (465 women) were included in additional education and training programmes, 597 unemployed Roma (230 women) were included in the employment subsidies programmes, and 325 unemployed Roma, of whom 100 women, were included in the public works programme. Information from the National Employment Service records as at 30 November 2021 on the number of persons included in the active employment policy measures in the period from January through October 2021 shows that of the total of 111,229 persons included in the active employment policy measures, 6,033 (5.42%) were of Roma nationality, of whom 2,793 (46.3%) were women.

The NES submitted the data for the period of January-October 2021, according to which 6,033 Roma (of whom 2,793 Roma women) were included in active employment measures. In that period, 319 Roma (141 Roma women) underwent active job searching trainings for skilled persons, 1,799 Roma (882 women) underwent motivation and activation trainings for non-skilled and low-skilled persons. Education services at the NES Business Centre were provided to 668 Roma (257 women). What is important is that Roma were engaged in the traineeship measures for highly educated youth, and in that period 35 Roma (of whom 20 women) benefited from these measures. Moreover, in the period January-October 2021, one Roma woman was included in "My First Salary" programme, while 386 Roma (226 Roma women) were included in the formal adult education programme. In the same period, labour market trainings were completed by 11 Roma (two women), while seven Roma (four women) were included in the trainings requested by employers. In the same period, 436 Roma men and 190 Roma women were included in public works. Self-employment subsidies were granted to 362 persons of Roma nationality, of whom 153 were women. A significant increase in the number of Roma included in the active employment policy measures is noticeable.

Pursuant to the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance, the NES and the unemployed shall stipulate an individual employment plan not later than within 90 days from the entry into the unemployment records, and this plan shall be adapted to the labour market needs and the characteristics of the unemployed individual at least once in six months. The individual employment plan shall be the main instrument in working with the unemployed and a basis for their inclusion in the active employment policy measures. The individual employment plan shall define the occupations for which the NES will serve as an agent, the activities that the person will undertake and the measures in which this person will be included for purposes of employment or increasing their employability. At the same time, during the interview with the employment counsellor, unemployed persons shall be informed of their rights and obligations pursuant to the Law.

“My First Salary” programme, which is aimed at stimulating youth employment, is an additional intervention-based programme of support designed to activate youth on the labour market and provide them with an opportunity to acquire additional knowledge, skills and competences for independent work. This programme was established under the Government Regulation of 13 August 2020 and is being implemented with a view to providing training for independent work to 10,000 persons of up to 30 years of age with secondary or higher education who are registered with the NES and who have no prior working experience, i.e. whose prior working experience is shorter than the duration of this programme (9 months). The programme is being implemented with private or public sector employers. Associations with legal entity status, i.e. those registered with the Business Registers Agency, are also eligible to participate in this programme.

On /translator’s note: date is missing/ 2020 the NES issued a special Public Call to the Unemployed Persons of Roma Nationality for Allocation of Self-Employment Subsidies. During 2020, 202 self-employment subsidies for Roma employment (75 Roma women) were allocated.

The current active employment measures are not yielding satisfactory results with Roma. Unemployed Roma are mostly beneficiaries of functional literacy, adult education and public works programmes, while being less involved in training programmes organised at employer’s request. Roma mostly do not meet the requirements for more attractive active employment measures, such as apprenticeship, trainings aimed at meeting labour market needs, trainings in digital skills, etc. Low inclusion of Roma in subsidised employment programmes is the result of a low level of education and qualifications of unemployed Roma, the same amount of incentives for any type of unemployed persons, and prejudice at the employer’s. The Roma are a specific target group within the active self-employment measures, i.e. within the set of entrepreneurship related services, but this measure is underutilised due to high and maladapted eligibility criteria. The Action Plan 2021-2023 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2021-2026 identifies the Roma as a specific target group and envisages the following measures: formal education of adults; motivation and activation trainings; informing Roma on the services and measures provided by the employment services; set of measures for multiply vulnerable unemployed persons; and entrepreneurship with additional support and mentoring. There are no funds specifically earmarked for the implementation of these measures for the Roma.

Roma are mostly excluded from policy development, implementation and monitoring in the area of employment since they are not engaged in central and local institutions dealing with this matter, including the employment services, and they are seldom meaningfully consulted on

these policies.

Active employment measures at the local level are implemented through various projects. The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, together with GIZ, is implementing the “Inclusion Initiative Phases II and III, as part of the (GIZ) project “Inclusion of Roma and other marginalised groups in Serbia”. The support to Roma and other marginalised groups is implemented in 9 selected LSGs (Valjevo, Pozarevac, Sombor, Vrsac, Bac, Kraljevo, Raška, Apatin and Novi Pazar) through increasing employability per public call for grant allocation. The GIZ project “Inclusion of Roma and other marginalised groups” (worth EUR 15,500,000) is aimed at improving the framework for implementation of the “Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025”; the project “Employment Opportunities for Roma”, implemented in partnership with the GFA and in collaboration with the “Know How Center” civic association: the activities of dissemination of information, mobilisation, selection, mentorship support and employment (training in the premises of a known employer) or self-employment (start-up for procurement of equipment, tools and materials) continued during September. The project “Support to Employment of Returnees, Roma and other Marginalised Groups”, implemented in partnership with the GFA and in collaboration with the “Initiative for Development and Cooperation” civic association: the activities of dissemination of information, mobilisation, selection, mentorship support and self-employment (start-up for procurement of equipment, tools and materials) continued during September. The Roma Education Fund is working on reducing the gap between the Roma and non-Roma in terms of participation in and completion of good quality education, improving Roma students’ transition from one education level to another, education and promotion of durable systemic change and desegregation in the education systems in the Western Balkan countries and the Republic of Turkey.

The Ministry of European Integration completed the process of signing the Financial Agreement for the second part of the IPA 2020 Action Programme, whose adoption enabled the funding of the assistance programme for the recovery of the Republic of Serbia from the effects of COVID-19, as a support to employment and employability of Roma and further development of social and economic infrastructure. The consultation process within the new IPA multi-annual financial perspective 2021-2027 has also continued on the topic of support to employment, social protection and finding housing solutions for Roma in the Republic of Serbia.

In addition to this, it is necessary to continue the inclusion of Roma in motivation and activation trainings to boost their motivation and competences for active job searching and their inclusion in other active employment policy measures, particularly those focusing on additional education and training. Even though the percentage of Roma included in the ‘financial measures’ within the active employment policy in the period from 2015 through 2019 increased from 5.5% to 8.2%, but it is still necessary to keep insisting on their greater inclusion, given the fact that they are hard to employ due to various factors.

In order to ensure this, members of the Roma population have been identified as a priority category for inclusion in the active employment policy measures. Same as before, special emphasis will be placed on promoting entrepreneurship by issuing a special public call to unemployed persons of Roma nationality, i.e. for starting their own business, and on providing additional mentorship support to increase the chances of sustainability of the business started. In collaboration with civil society organisations, particularly those recognised by the Roma population, efforts will be invested towards reaching out to the Roma who are outside the institutions of the system, i.e. those who are not registered with the

National Employment Service or those who belong in the NEET⁹⁷ category, in order to identify, register, activate and support them through the available active employment policy measures. For multiply vulnerable Roma, their inclusion in the set of measures will be enabled in order to provide a comprehensive response to multiple obstacles they are faced with.

In the previous years, civil society organisations have become an important actor on the labour market. They have a particularly important role when it comes to reaching out to inactive persons who do not approach the institutions for assistance in employment, providing career guidance and counselling services, or working with multiply vulnerable persons because they have good access to specific categories of unemployed persons. Civil society organisations are continuously enhancing their own capacities and broadening their services through implementation of project activities with bilateral and multilateral donor support. Therefore, it is necessary to additionally support and strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations, while in the process of amending the legal framework on employment, it is necessary to consider introduction of the status of an employment activity stakeholder for civil society organisations and the manner, the terms and the reach of such an introduction.

Insufficient readiness of employers to employ or hire Roma

According to a survey on discrimination in employment, conducted by the Equality Commissioner⁹⁸, 34% of Roma believe that employers do not hire them just because they are Roma.

Roma encounter the largest barriers in the recruitment phase (60%) - four times more often than at the workplace itself (15%). However, a relatively small number of employed Roma have an impact on a lower percentage of the perception of workplace discrimination. Three-quarters of them believe they are not getting a promotion at work due to their lower level of education. Measures aimed at facilitating Roma employment are supported by 96% of the respondents.

There is direct or indirect discrimination also when it comes to starting employment, and at work, as well as when it comes to maintaining employment. The system of addressing the cases of discrimination is a burden to the alleged victims of discrimination.

According to a 2017 regional survey on Roma⁹⁹, only 21% of Roma are employed, while the national average is 55%. Key barriers to Roma employment in the private sector include low level of education and qualifications, discrimination, social exclusion of Roma in general (the distance of economic activities from the settlements, lack of contact and information, etc.).

As for employment in the public sector, despite the constitutional obligation, it is estimated that Roma account for less than 0.1% (far below 2.1% of representation of Roma in the population). However, a monitoring system or equal employment measures do not exist in the public sector.

⁹⁷ NEET (“Not in Education, Employment or Training”) refers to a person who is unemployed and not acquiring education or vocational training.

⁹⁸ Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/istrazivanje-percepcija-romske-zajednice-o-diskriminaciji/>, accessed on 20 November 2021

⁹⁹ Available at:

<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/sr/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%99%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B5/>, accessed on 19 November 2021

In a bid to eliminate prejudice about actual opportunities for Roma and their work potential, and increase Roma employment and financial independence that would contribute to improving their living conditions and standard of living, financial measures are also being designed and implemented within the employment system in order to boost Roma employment.

Bearing in mind the above characteristics/factors that impact the status of Roma on the labour market (which is considerably more unfavourable in comparison to the general population), i.e. the need to provide additional systemic assistance and support, Roma, as a category of hard-to-employ persons, have priority in terms of inclusion in the active employment policy measures or they are one of the stipulated categories of unemployed persons for whose employment employers can get certain subsidies (subsidies for employment of unemployed persons from the hard-to-employ category).

However, data shows that the current measures have failed to lead to the desired effects, i.e. that the available systemic incentives are insufficiently utilised by employers. The causes of employers' insufficient interest in hiring Roma (with or without financial support from the government) are being considered, analysed and debated by various stakeholders and they must be viewed in the context of the aforementioned problems and barriers, as well as challenges on the labour demand side (the level of investment and economic activities as the main drivers of job vacancies, completion of the process of restructuring socially-owned enterprises, i.e. the beginning of the public sector rationalisation), i.e. on the labour supply side (Roma population's lack of competitiveness in terms of acquired qualifications, additional knowledge, skills and competences that are in demand on the labour market).

The applicable legislation of the Republic of Serbia guarantees that everyone shall have the right to work, free choice of occupation and availability of employment under equal opportunities and equal terms. How much are these principles of applicable legislation applied when it comes to the Roma population or, in other words, is there any direct or indirect discrimination with respect to starting employment, promotion at work or maintaining employment, and to what extent. These are the issues of special importance for the process of building the Republic of Serbia as an inclusive society based on equal opportunities for all.

People in the Republic of Serbia seldom use judicial recourse for dispute resolution of cases of discrimination in employment (including the Roma population). Experience from the practice of non-governmental organisations and legal aid clinics shows that the causes of Roma not approaching judicial authorities are the result of the lack of financial resources, the lack of trust in the institutions of the system, long duration of litigations and the uncertainty of their outcomes. When it comes to non-judicial methods of dispute resolution, there is no data from the Republic Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes on the share of the Roma population in the filed applications initiating proceedings concerning discrimination.

Insufficient representation of Roma in employment and local economic development policies

Recognising the need for 'modernisation' of the employment policy and matching it with local labour market needs, with the passing of the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance the process of decentralisation of the employment policy has been launched; opportunities have been created for a more significant involvement of local self-government units in the processes of local employment policy making and implementation thereof (as a system of organised activities) aimed at improving the effects of the services delivered and the measures applied, while observing the specificities, the needs and the opportunities of the local labour market. Since unemployment and social exclusion are the consequences of broader

social and economic problems, which call for integrated and/or combined solutions and involvement of a broader spectrum of stakeholders, local employment councils have a specific role and importance – they represent ‘partnerships based on community needs’ and the fora where local labour market problems and opportunities are identified and analysed, i.e. where ways of boosting the employment policy efficiency and achieving social cohesion by combining approaches that are characterised by a greater degree of joint participation.

However, inclusion of the Roma population in local employment policy measures implemented on the basis of local employment action plans (whose implementation may also be supported by funds from the state budget) is extremely low. Most common reasons why planning and implementation of the local Roma employment policy are not at the necessary level include the lack of a systemic approach to the issues of the local Roma population, insufficient cooperation with civil society organisations that advocate improvement of the status of Roma, the lack of formal monitoring and methodology for monitoring the implementation of the measures at the local level, as well as the lack of financial resources.

All the problems that are constraining a more complete representation and activation of the Roma population on the formal labour market are part of a wider, multi-dimensional and unfavourable social status of the Roma community in the Republic of Serbia. To that effect, the segments of employment and economic empowerment should be viewed as contributing factors to the overall improvement of the status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, which is crucial for achieving full inclusivity, participation and democratic character of modern society.

Since the focus of implementation of the objectives and measures of improving the status of Roma is placed on the local level, the issue of employment status of Roma coordinators and other local mechanisms, i.e. the concepts such as health mediators and teaching assistants, need to be resolved by means of job classification.

The challenges in the area of employment: The information obtained during the drafting of the Strategy indicates that it is still necessary that the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the National Employment Service and other relevant institutions, should actively monitor, implement, improve and promote the policies and measures aimed at boosting Roma employability and employment: subsidies for hiring hard-to-employ persons, public works, apprenticeship, traineeship programme, functional primary education of adults, and trainings organised at employer’s request. Specific actions need to include implementation of special-purpose open calls for allocation of subsidies for self-employment of Roma, while securing long-term monitoring and mentoring, and adapting the criteria for obtaining the subsidies to the capabilities of the Roma community, in line with the available budget for active measures for the labour market and targeted programmes linking education (vocational and academic) with specific employment opportunities.

Moreover, there is still a need to organise programmes and paid apprenticeships, internships and other forms of acquiring work experience for young Roma in the institutions at the national and local levels. This is particularly important for young highly educated Roma. There is a need to prompt more intensive cooperation between local self-government units and competent ministries and institutions to initiate measures that will contribute to employment of Roma at all professional levels in the institutions at the local and national level through

affirmative actions which are provided for in the Law on Employees in the Autonomous Provinces and Local Self-Government Units and the Law on Employees in the Public Services.

There is a problem of the lack of local mechanisms in the area of employment, like for instance: employment mediators who would, in collaboration with the NES, reach out to potential beneficiaries, collect data, disseminate information, motivate and monitor the employment of Roma. It is also necessary to keep implementing the activities (through dissemination of information on the rights and provision of support for access to all the available services) aimed at increasing motivation for inclusion of unemployed Roma in the labour market, particularly those of working age who are recipients of financial social assistance. It is still necessary to disseminate information on the ground and these activities require an even greater involvement of civil society organisations.

4.2.1. HEALTH

Per 2011 Population Census, Roma account for about 2.1% of the population in Serbia (49% women) and they were identified as one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of the degree of social exclusion and poverty rate. General demographic data indicates that Roma are a young population (more than 50% of them are younger than 25 years of age), but the mortality rate in this population is higher than in other ethnic groups – their average life expectancy is 12 years shorter than the average in the Republic of Serbia¹⁰⁰.

The mortality rate in the Roma population is higher than in other national minorities. Infant mortality and child mortality in Roma children up to five years of age is approximately two times higher than the average mortality rate in the Republic of Serbia. The estimated infant mortality rate in Roma settlements is 13 per one thousand live-born children, which is two times higher than the national average, while the likelihood of a child dying before it reaches the age of five is about 14 per one thousand live-born children. Full immunisation coverage of children in Roma settlements (aged 24-35 months) was 63% in 2019, as compared to 80% in the general population. Sixty-nine percent of children (aged 24-35 months) in the general population received all vaccines on time, whereas in Roma settlements, this rate is only 35%. According to the available data, 16.9% of girls in Roma settlements got married before the age of 15, while 57% of them did so before the age of 18. The fertility rate in Roma women is 3.1%, but it is accompanied by a high childbearing rate in the adolescent population - 157 (while, in the general population, this rate is 22 for girls in the 15-19 age group). Abortion during childbearing age of 15-49 was experienced by 30.6% of women of Roma nationality.

Estimates regarding the health status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia are insufficient and they are not carried out on the basis of data collected in a systematic and planned manner. Research has confirmed a causal link between the quality of life and health of Roma because, as compared to the rest of the population of the Republic of Serbia, Roma live in significantly worse housing conditions. The health of Roma is generally improving, at least judging by scarce data whose availability is not regular, as the data in the healthcare system is not collected in a manner that would allow its analysis/disaggregation by ethnic affiliation. This is the result of the work of health mediators whose employment status has not yet been resolved in a satisfactory manner.

¹⁰⁰ Mirosinka Dinkic, Kosovka Ognjenovic, Siobhan McClelland, Impact assessment of the healthcare policy measures on the access to healthcare by the Roma population, the Serbian Government Team for the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Belgrade, 2009

According to international human rights standards, the right to health is not limited to the right to healthcare alone, as it also includes all those socio-economic factors that are essential for a healthy life. International law treats these factors as socio-economic determinants of health, which comprise nutrition, housing, drinking water, adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment. Hence, in order to work towards improving Roma health, work also needs to be done towards improving the socio-economic determinants, which is one of the tasks of this Strategy.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, one can assume that a multiple increase in the risk of discrimination, widespread social and economic marginalisation and social exclusion has occurred; and new risks have emerged, particularly impacting the poorest strata of the Roma community lacking sustainable income and access to basic living conditions (clean water, electricity, sewage, etc.). During June 2020 civil society organisations engaged in the promotion and protection of the rights of Roma in the Republic of Serbia participated in a survey of the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Serbia on the rights of Roma. The main risks that Roma had been faced with in their everyday lives prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which were listed by 84.21% of civil society organisations participating in the survey included access to work and sources of income, and the same percentage of civil society organisations also listed the risks of access to adequate housing, including access to clean water and electricity, while 78.95% of CSOs indicated the risk of poverty and the risks in the area of access to information and communication. As many as 73.68% of CSOs recognised that Roma people were facing the risk in the area of access to healthcare, 68.42% of them listed risks in the areas of social protection, access to personal documents and access to justice, while 63.16% of them indicated the risks in the area of inclusive education¹⁰¹.

Most CSOs (94.74%) agree that some groups of Roma citizens were under additional risk of increased vulnerability due to the restrictions that were in place during the state of emergency. The respondents listed as specially vulnerable groups residents of informal settlements with no access to clean water and electricity; persons engaged in collection of recyclable material, seasonal work, trade, selling products at green markets; and musicians, who were left without basic income due to restrictions of movement and measures aimed at protecting public health; legally invisible persons who were not recipients of humanitarian aid from the state because they were not registered by the centres for social work; children due to aggravated or hindered access to inclusive and quality education; Roma women due to increased risk of violence, giving birth at home during the state of emergency and outside the health system, increased workload in the household and loss of jobs during the pandemic; Roma persons with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas, due to the lack of the support by the system, and Roma above 65 years of age who do not receive pensions or social assistance and have no access to soup kitchens.

Most Roma, i.e. 93% of them, have health insurance, which is 4 percentage points less than in the population of other nationalities.¹⁰² However, the Ombudsman report indicates that as many as 18% of Roma do not have health insurance cards.¹⁰³ An earlier report has stated that

¹⁰¹ Available at: http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Posledice_Kovid-19_na_polozaj_osetljivih_grupa_i_grupa_u_riziku.pdf, accessed on 20 November 2021

¹⁰² Regional Roma Survey, UNDP/World Bank /European Commission, 2017

¹⁰³ Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma with Recommendations, Ombudsman, 2019, available at:

Roma are pointing to an unfavourable treatment and discrimination in healthcare, but this phenomenon is most often unreported to competent institutions. The Ombudsman indicates that 8% of Roma believe they have been discriminated against during a medical check-up, 5% during treatment in hospital, and 4% during medical spa treatment.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, 28% of Roma believe their medical needs are not met, including treatment and provision of medical devices they need, as compared to 16% of respondents in the general population. Only about 60% of Roma, as compared to 73% of respondents in the general population use preventative healthcare services. Fifty-two percent of Roma assess their own health as good or very good, unlike 56% respondents in the general population.¹⁰⁵ According to many indicators, the health status of Roma is objectively at a slightly lower level than that in the general population.

In the period from 2002 through 2016, the life expectancy at birth rose from 69.7 to 73.0 years for men and from 75.0 to 78.0 years for women. The infant mortality rate dropped from 10.1 in 2002 to 5.4 in 2016, whereas in the Roma population this indicator dropped in the 2005-2014 period from 25.0 to 12.8. The child mortality rate below five years of age dropped from 11.5 in 2002 to 6.1 in 2016, whereas in the Roma population the value of this indicator was halved in the 2005-2014 period (from 28.0 to 14.4).¹⁰⁶

As for reproductive health, the fertility rate in Roma women is 3.5%, while in the general population it is 1.6%. The birth rate in the adolescent population aged 15-19 is 163 births per 1,000 Roma women, where an increase was registered, was compared to 12 births in the general population, where a decline was registered. About 62% of women in the general population use contraception, similarly to Roma women where this rate is 60%. However, the rate of women in the general population aged 15-49 who have had an induced abortion is 11%, as compared to 28% of Roma women. Almost all women in both populations have given birth in a medical institution. The percentage of women in the 15-49 age group who had entered into marriage before the age of 15 is about 1% in the general population, as opposed to as many as 16% of Roma women.¹⁰⁷

Full immunisation coverage of children in the general population by the age of 12 months is 87%, by the age of 12-23 months 89%, and by the age of 24-35 months 81%. As for Roma children, these rates are 58%, 70% and 63%, respectively, which indicates that the national immunisation coverage for Roma children is still lower, even though the coverage of children of up to one year of age has slightly improved.¹⁰⁸

The most significant results in the area of healthcare were achieved thanks to the health mediators programme. According to the 2021 Report on Operational Conclusions, the health mediators who are in direct contact with the Roma community are active in 70 municipalities, assisting Roma with access to healthcare and other public services and providing them with information on health prevention. The status of health mediators in the healthcare system has not yet been permanently resolved.

Unfavourable living conditions in Roma communities are an aggravating factor when it comes

<https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6359/ZAstitnik%20socialno%20ukljucivanje%20roma%2020191129c.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma with Recommendations, Ombudsman, 2014, available at:

<https://www.pravamanjina.rs/attachments/IZVESTAJ%20ZG%200%20SPROVODJENJU%20STRATEGIJE.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Regional Roma Survey, UNDP/World Bank /European Commission, 2017

¹⁰⁶ Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2018–2026: “Official Gazette of the RS”, No. 61/2018-6, available at: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2018/61/1/reg>

¹⁰⁷ Доступно на: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/publikacije/mics6-istrazivanje-visestrukih-pokazatelja-za-2019-godinu>

¹⁰⁸ Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/publikacije/mics6-istrazivanje-visestrukih-pokazatelja-za-2019-godinu>

to health status. Socio-economic factors of health comprise nutrition, housing, drinking water, adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and healthy environment. To that effect, the healthcare sector is closely related to other sectors, particularly to housing and employment.

Collection, processing and availability of data on Roma in the healthcare sector need to be systematised and organised.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Civic Association of Health Mediators, is implementing the project “Health for All - Improving and Supporting the Work of Health Mediators with Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups in Roma Settlements during the Emergency Situation - the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The project is aimed at assisting Roma families during the pandemic, working with women who have just given birth and newborn babies suspected of having COVID-19, working remotely with pregnant women and young children; In collaboration with the Red Cross, the health mediators have distributed parcels with children’s games and printed materials on prevention and procedure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact with 1,108 pregnant women was established, 1,577 children were vaccinated and more than 800 persons were referred to COVID-19 outpatient clinics.

The health mediators participated in the programme run by the Ministry of Health, the Belgrade City Secretariat for Social Protection and the Association of Health Mediators, which is aimed at registration and organising the vaccination of 1,650 Roma in 17 Belgrade municipalities.

The health mediators actively participated in setting up the teams for registration and vaccination of the population with special focus on the Roma population in 70 local self-government units.

The immunisation coverage of Roma children is approximately the same as that in the general population only with regard to the BCG vaccine before their first birthday: 94.3% in Roma and 98% in the general population. However, the coverage with other vaccines in later age of newborns is decreasing, and thus the number of immunised children aged 12-23 months who received the third dose of the OPV vaccine is only 61%, the DTP vaccine 64.5%, while the percentage of children aged 24-35 months who received the MMR1 vaccine by their second birthday is 63.3%, which means that they are considerably lagging behind the general population where immunisation coverage against measles, mumps and rubella is 93.4%. The data shows major inequality in terms of full immunisation coverage of children because only 12.7% of Roma children received all recommended vaccines during the first year of their lives (and the MMR vaccine by the end of the second year), as compared to 70.5% of children in the general population.

A survey of women’s reproductive health has shown that the fertility rate in Roma women is 3.1%, but it is coupled with a high birth rate of 157 births in the adolescent population, whereas with most girls aged 15-19 this rate is 22. Experience with abortion in the reproductive age of 15-49 was reported by 30.6% of women, while in the majority population of women this rate is 14.6%. As for contraception, traditional birth control methods are used more than modern methods of protection against unwanted pregnancy, while contraceptive pills are used by only 1.2% of Roma women. According to recent data, 99% of Roma women have given birth in a hospital. What is still a negative indicator is a high rate of early marriages, which also has an impact on reproductive health. As for girls in Roma settlements, 16.9% of them marry before the age of 15, while 57% of them do so before the age of 18, as compared to young women in the majority population, where this rate is 0.8% for the younger

age group of girls or 7% for older age group of girls.¹⁰⁹

If the overall adult population of the Republic of Serbia is taken into consideration, cardiovascular diseases, malignant tumors, diabetes, obstructive pulmonary disease and other diseases have been prevalent in the national pathology for many years. During 2011 the structure of the leading causes of death in the Roma population was almost identical with the average structure in the Republic of Serbia. The Roma morbidity rate relative to the majority population is significantly higher only in case of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (6.4%). Still, the most frequently occurring diseases in the adult Roma population include: cardiovascular diseases 10.47%, diabetes 3.03%, asthma 1.92%, malignant diseases 0.72%, and addiction diseases 1.20%.¹¹⁰

A recent survey has shown that Roma (31%) misjudged their health status as compared to others (12%). The use of primary healthcare services was also higher in Roma (18%) as compared to others (11%). Roma respondents used preventative healthcare services in primary healthcare centres less frequently (30%) than other respondents (39%). Roma women (38%) used gynecologist's services in primary healthcare centres less frequently than other respondents (33%). Visiting nurses from primary healthcare centres less frequently visited Roma women (32%) for pregnancy check-ups, as compared to visits paid to other pregnant women (56%), and the same goes for postpartum visits paid by staff from primary healthcare centres to Roma women (81%), than to other women (96%). In the information segment, the survey has shown that Roma are most often unaware of patient's rights protection option. A total of 52% of Roma and 73% of other respondents have stated that they are unaware of the existence of a complaints box in primary healthcare centres.

A survey of protection of patients' rights and the level of discrimination against Roma patients in the healthcare system was conducted during 2012. This survey showed that there were cases where doctors had referred Roma patients to private clinics, as well as cases of discrimination of Roma on the grounds of their last names on their health insurance cards. The survey also indicated problems in communication between the medical staff and Roma patients.¹¹¹

Most Roma have health insurance (93.4%), including their family members (94.1%). Given the fact that this figure was more researched in the settlements where health mediators are actively operating, it may be assumed that the rate of health insurance coverage of Roma is still lower than the above data shows.

Most Roma have health insurance on unemployment grounds, i.e. based on disadvantaged social status, and they are least insured on grounds of employment or for being pension beneficiaries. Only a slight number of Roma have exercised this right on the basis of their declarations of affiliation with the Roma nationality, i.e. on the basis of a stipulated affirmative measure (Article 16 of the Law on Health Insurance). The most accessible type of healthcare for Roma is the one provided in primary healthcare centres. Almost 80% of respondents are treated in primary healthcare centres, and according to their statements, when necessary, visiting doctors and nurses make house calls. A considerably lower number of respondents -

¹⁰⁹ http://webzrs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/userFiles/file/MICS/MICS%20GLAVNI%20NALAZI_srp.pdf ; <http://www.care.rs/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Socijalna-analiza.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Health, http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9785_file4_dragan-djordjevic--romske-zdravstvene-medijatorke-%25Bcompatibility-mode%25D.pdf

¹¹¹ Protection of Patients' Rights – Equal treatment of all patients, Legal Scanner, Belgrade, 2012

38.9% of them, have used hospital treatment, while tertiary healthcare services, medical spa treatments and medical aids were available to merely 6.7% of respondents. Most respondents could not afford to buy prescribed medicines unless the medicines concerned were on the list of medicines exempted from co-payments. Nevertheless, despite their disadvantaged situation on multiple grounds, Roma have not filed complaints with any of the branches of the Republic Health Insurance Fund, nor with the Directorate of the Fund. The situation in primary healthcare centres is identical.¹¹²

The results achieved in terms of partial improvement of Roma health and availability of healthcare and health insurance coincide with the recruitment of health mediators, who paid 37,502 initial visits to Roma families in the period from 1 January 2009 through 31 May 2014 and registered 140,408 citizens of Roma nationality - 46,453 women, 43,201 men and 50,754 children. They also paid more than two hundred thousand visits to families who needed assistance with obtaining personal identification documents, exercising their right to health insurance, inclusion in the healthcare system (check-ups with a gynecologist, choosing a GP, immunisation of children and choosing a pediatrician), enrolling children in school, exercising the right to various types of assistance (one-off financial assistance, Red Cross assistance, child allowance, scholarships, etc.), and another 170,278 visits to families or family members to deliver health education through a planned interview. According to the Ministry of Health data, the health mediators secured personal identification documents and health insurance cards for 16,330 citizens; assisted 28,003 Roma citizens with choosing their GP; had an impact on the increase of the number of immunised children (30,018) and adults (2,719) and on improvement of health check-ups for 4,500 pregnant women and women who have just given birth; assisted 11,177 women with choosing their gynecologist, and assisted with covering 12,617 Roma with regular medical check-ups.¹¹³

The challenges with respect to the exercise of Roma rights to healthcare are impacted by multiple causes. Roma do not use the available mechanisms whereby they would seek protection of their rights – they do not file complaints with protectors of patients' rights, the Equality Commissioner or the Ombudsman, and they do not initiate proceedings before courts.

The reasons for this include insufficient knowledge of Roma about the competences of these authorities and their insufficient presence in Roma settlements, while the biggest obstacle is their lack of trust that the system is going to protect them from discrimination and other barriers to their accessing those rights. In this context, it is necessary to act simultaneously towards addressing these causes by empowering Roma and strengthening their capacities also through consistent use of the principle of accountability of the institutions that are obliged to make this access to rights possible.

4.2.2. HOUSING

There is a significant difference between the housing conditions of Roma and the general population. Roma settlements are spatial urban and non-urban (rural and suburban) units

¹¹² See: *The Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation...*, 2013; The analysis of the main barriers to and problems with Roma access to the rights to health and healthcare, PRAXIS, Belgrade, 2011

¹¹³ Programme "Implementation of the Roma Healthcare Action Plan" 1802 project 0006, Performance results of health mediators in Roma settlements from 1 January 2009 through 31 May 2014, the Ministry of Health website with the data from 25 June 2014, <http://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/showpage.php?id=73>

mostly populated by members of the Roma national minority, and they are often seen also as places of spatial and social segregation of Roma. Surveys¹¹⁴ have shown that almost the entire population living in Roma settlements use basic, improved sources of drinking water (98%), while 86% of them use basic sanitation services. The share of the population in Roma settlements using the drinking water from the water supply system to which their apartment or house is connected is 78%.¹¹⁵ Still, a large number of Roma households in substandard Roma settlements lacks access to electricity; 32% of substandard Roma settlements are not connected to the power grid, while 38% of substandard Roma settlements are not connected to the water supply grid.

In the period between March and September 2020, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Unit, conducted the “Mapping of substandard Roma settlements by risk and access to rights at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic”. A total of 702 substandard Roma settlements located in the territory of 94 LSGs with 167,975 residents were mapped. The data collected covers access to clean water and sanitation, health risks in the given epidemiological context, performance of activities with heightened health risks, and access to electricity and sustainable income sources. The data was obtained from the Roma inclusion mechanisms that were put in place at the level of local self-government units and from representatives of civil society organisations.

Table 5: Mapping of substandard Roma settlements by risk and access to rights at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic

Number of LSGs where substandard Roma settlements are located, which lack access to clean water or such access is not regular	51 LSGs/159 settlements
Number of LSGs where substandard Roma settlements are located, which lack access to electricity or such access is not regular	35 LSGs/64 settlements
Number of LSGs where substandard Roma settlements are located,	82 LGSs/457
which lack access to the sewage network or such access is not regular	settlements
Number of LSGs where substandard Roma settlements are located, which lack access to clean water, electricity or sewage network or such access is not regular	13 LSGs/44 settlements

Source: The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Unit

According to the mapping results, 159 substandard settlements (22.65% of the total number of those mapped) lacking access to clean water or where such access is not regular are located in the territory of 51 LSGs; 64 substandard settlements (9.12% of the total number of those

¹¹⁴ Report “The status of vulnerable groups in the process of accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, Situation overview: The status of Roma”, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2021

¹¹⁵ MICS 6 - Multiple indicator cluster survey of the status of women and children in Serbia 2019, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF

mapped) lacking access to electricity or where such access is not regular are located in the territory of 35 LSGs; 457 substandard settlements (65.1% of the total number of those mapped) lacking access to the sewage network or where such access is not regular are located in the territory of 82 LSGs; and 44 substandard settlements (6.26% of the total number of those mapped) lacking access to clean drinking water, electricity and sewage network or where such access is not regular are located in the territory of 13 LSGs.¹¹⁶

In Roma settlements, 42% of households rely on clean fuels for cooking (most of them use electric stoves – 39%), while 58% of them use environmentally polluting fuels, i.e. most of them use manufactured solid fuel stoves. Only 13% of households in Roma settlements use solid fuels to heat their homes, of which 9% use central heating. As many as 86% of them use environmentally polluting fuels (mostly wood – 85%). Ninety-eight percent of households in Roma settlements use electricity to light their homes. In total, only 12% of households in Roma settlements use clean fuels for cooking, heating and lighting, unlike the national sample where this rate is 52%.¹¹⁷ There is a difference also in terms of spatial features of housing units and comfortable housing. The average number of persons per room used for sleeping in Roma settlements is 2.6, as compared to 1.5 in the general population. Moreover, Roma households are living in much worse conditions than the general population. A comparison of housing conditions between Roma and non-Roma households shows that about 73% of Roma have less than 10 m² per household member, as compared to about 26% of the non-Roma population, while 28.2% of Roma households do not have a shower unit in their home, as compared to 3.1% of non-Roma households. About 86 percent of the population in Roma settlements is living in households that use improved non-shared sanitary facilities. In other settlements, the population mostly uses covered privies (37%), whereas flush toilets connected to the sewage system are most commonly used (65%) in urban settlements. In the poorest of households, nearly 60% of the population use a covered privy, while 7% of them have no sanitary facilities.

Table 6: Housing characteristics

Characteristics:	General population (% of households from	Roma settlements (% of households from
	the sample)	the sample)
Shower unit	96.9	71.8
Leaking roof	14.6	50.1
Damp walls, floors or foundation	19.6	68
Rot in window frames or floor	13.7	41.8

Source: Multiple indicator cluster survey of the status of women and children in Serbia 2019, Serbian Statistical Office and UNICEF

¹¹⁶ Available at: http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Mapiranje_podstandardnih_romskih_naselja_prema_rizicima_i_pristupu_pravima_sa_narocitim_osvrtom_na_COV_ID-19.pdf, accessed on 16 November 2021

¹¹⁷ MICS 6 - Multiple indicator cluster survey of the status of women and children in Serbia 2019, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF

Roma who are dispersed among the general population outside Roma settlements are also faced with poor housing conditions. Multi-generational poverty, very low income and poor employment are additional obstacles for Roma to be able to work independently on improving their housing conditions, while housing costs (including social housing costs) are often so high that they jeopardise their ability to meet their other basic needs in life or lead to large debts for electricity, utility and heating bills, etc. Poor housing conditions and the lack of basic infrastructure adversely impact the health of all household members, especially children. It should be underscored once again that housing conditions and economic affordability of housing solutions are among the basic prerequisites of the right to adequate housing.

This results, *inter alia*, in segregation of Roma settlements, lack of their development and poor provision with infrastructure, lack of appropriate urban development plans, unregulated property status of the dwellings and land, poor quality of the housing stock, looming threat of eviction, inadequate treatment coupled with human rights violations during resettlement of informal Roma settlements, etc.

The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure has been monitoring the implementation of IPA programmes (IPA 13, IPA 14, IPA 16 and IPA 18) whereby a number of dwellings had been constructed or refurbished; support was provided for development of technical and planning documentation for substandard settlements; and expert support was provided to local self-government units in legalisation of housing facilities. Furthermore, as part of the implementation of these projects, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure is supporting the LSGs in preparing the design and technical documentation for the development of municipal infrastructure with a view to ensuring access to basic services (water, electricity, sanitation, etc.) to the residents of substandard Roma settlements, and also in preparing local action plans and annual operational plans.

As for the housing records, it is noteworthy that there are no comprehensive records of all the dwellings, regardless of whether they are privately or publicly owned. Complete and unified records that would include not only the basic information on an apartment, but also the information on its owner and its actual use (without specifying whether the apartment is being 'informally' rented), whether it is connected to the water supply/sewage system, district heating, power supply, whether it is occupied by a so-called 'protected tenant' or whether it is a case of illegal construction, informal or substandard settlement, are not possessed by any administrative authority or public enterprise.

Data on housing programmes/projects

The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure has continuously been monitoring the moving out and resettlement procedures, in accordance with the Law on Housing and Building Maintenance ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 104/16). On 27 August 2020 the Government adopted a conclusion approving the company "Corridors of Serbia" Ltd. Belgrade to construct a section of the E-75 and E-70 motorway, Belgrade Bypass, section: Dobanovci-Bubanj Potok, Sector B6, "Strazevica" tunnel — interchange "Bubanj Potok" from km 588+916.30 to km 598+489.89, and allowing initiation of the expropriation procedures, i.e. the administrative transfer of housing and ancillary facilities in the temporary

Roma settlement in the cadastral district of Rakovica Selo, in Belgrade's municipality of Rakovica, which are visible in the satellite images of the territory of the Republic of Serbia from 2015, in accordance with the terms stipulated in the Law on Legalisation of Constructed Objects ("Official Gazette of the RS", Nos. 96/15, 83/18 and 81/20 – CC). The Government agrees that for the settlement of property relations for the purpose of construction of the section of the E-75 and E-70 motorway, Belgrade Bypass, section: Dobanovci-Bubanj Potok, Sector B-6, "Strazevica" tunnel — Interchange "Bubanj Potok" from km 588+916.30 to km 598+489.89, in the temporary Roma settlement in the cadastral district of Rakovica Selo, in Belgrade's municipality of Rakovica, which had emerged due to the construction of the "Blue bridge", the factual property status of standard dwellings of 28 m², which the competent municipality had awarded to them for temporary use shall be recognised and that for this purpose they shall be entitled to receive compensation for the surface area they had been awarded in the amount of the construction value of the property as assessed by a certified construction expert, which shall be increased in accordance with the criteria stipulated in Article 51 of the Law on Expropriation ("Official Gazette of the RS" 53/95, 23/01 – FCC, 20/09, 55/13 – CC and 106/16 – authentic interpretation), to which by the City of Belgrade had previously issued its consent. The Government agrees that the persons who had extended the dwellings they had been awarded for temporary use, as referred to in item 2 of this conclusion, shall also be entitled to compensation in the amount of the construction value of those extensions as assessed by a certified construction expert. The Ombudsman, acting as an intermediary, has been monitoring the process of moving out the residents of the Rakovica suburb which is located on the site where the construction of this section of the international E-75 motorway is planned. The Ombudsman had also acted as an intermediary during the resettlement of 65 families who lived in the "Vijadukt" informal settlement in Resnik, located on the site where the construction of the motorway was planned. This procedure was completed in early January this year.

In the period from 15 April through 15 May 2021 the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, carried out the process of reporting by towns and municipalities in the Roma Inclusion Monitoring Database for 2020. The data on the measures of social inclusion of Roma in 2020 on the level of town and municipalities was entered into the database by 116 LSGs in the period from 15 April through 15 May 2021. The data overview was also provided on the basis of relevant reports and mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2016-2025: the Operational Conclusions stipulated at the Seminar on Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, the Recommendations on the implementation of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and the Regional Cooperation Council Report on the implementation of the Strategy Action Plan. The Roma Inclusion Monitoring Database is an important tool for efficient policy implementation on the national and local levels, which ensures data storage, safekeeping and reading all in one place. It contains statistical and text-based data on the Roma inclusion measures of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Health, the National Employment Service, the Serbian Statistical Office, as well as data from local self-government units. The data in this database can be found on the following webpage: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

IPA 2013 - Within the project "Durable housing solutions and physical infrastructure

improvement in Roma settlements” (which was implemented in 13 LSGs¹¹⁸), a total of 200 housing units occupied by more than 750 people were constructed and refurbished. Through the construction of municipal infrastructure, living conditions for more than 5,000 Roma were improved. The value of the project is EUR 7.5 million. IPA 2014 - The project “Improving the socio-economic living conditions of the Roma population” (The contract value is EUR 2,811,410 and includes the drafting of design and technical documentation and urban development plans for more than 100 substandard Roma communities. The project is implemented in 115 settlements in 35 local self-government units.¹¹⁹ Through this project, the GIS database within the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure is also being updated.

IPA 2016 - The project “EU Support to Roma Inclusion - Strengthening local communities towards Roma inclusion” is funded by IPA 2016, the funds are managed by the EUD to the Republic of Serbia, the beneficiary is the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and the implementing partner is the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. Within Component 1, approximately EUR 1.32 million has been allocated for three sets of activities: 1) developing capacities and competences of the Roma population for joining the labour market; 2) capacity-building of local self-government units and local partners from the public, civil and private sectors for designing and introducing employment measures and programmes on the local level in line with the local labour market needs; and 3) supporting Roma inclusion through inter-sectoral partnership on the local level, including cooperation with public, civil and private sector entities. Within Component 2, approximately EUR 660,000 have been allocated for draft projects on stimulating positive action by the local community towards the Roma population to prevent discrimination, with a special focus on children and youth at risk of social exclusion, women, persons with disabilities, and elderly persons. Within Component 3, a methodological approach has been designed to improve the legalisation of substandard Roma settlements in the Republic of Serbia, which is being actively piloted in 10 local self-government units. Moreover, contracts have been signed with 12 LSGs on co-financing the drafting of technical documentation. Through the implementation of Component 3, prerequisites for implementation of future housing support projects/programmes are being fulfilled, particularly through the adoption of urban development plans for substandard Roma settlements. A total of 11 urban development plans were adopted, and here it is important to note that the adoption of all planning and technical documents is taking place with maximum involvement of the residents of informal settlements themselves, which ensures sustainability of the planning solutions in terms of reducing conflicts on the premises and more efficient process of settling the property relations as an essential precondition for implementation of future individual housing support projects. The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities has carried out analyses and developed a number of publications and guidebooks on resolution of housing issues. Some of these publications are the following:

- “Legalisation of housing facilities in substandard Roma settlements in Serbia - the

¹¹⁸ Odzaci, Stara Pazova, Opovo, Lebane, Ub, Svilajnac, Loznica, Boljevac, Novi Pazar, Nis, Cacak, Prokuplje, Smederevo

¹¹⁹ **Component 1:** Zemun, Stari Grad, Odzaci, Bac, Vranje, Novi Sad, Smederevo, Vladicin Han, Pozarevac, Nis, Novi Pazar, Veliko Gradiste, Vrsac, Opovo, Novi Beograd, Valjevo, Vrnjacka Banja, Apatin, Bela Palanka, Pozega, Crveni Krst Nis, Kraljevo, Zvezdara, Zabalj; **Component 2:** Pirot, Kragujevac, Koceljeva, Prokuplje, Sabac, Bor, Doljevac, Backa Palanka, Novi Sad, Lebane, Smederevska Palanka, Subotica; **Support to mobile teams and local multi-sectoral coordination bodies for managing local Roma inclusion policies:** Arandjelovac, Becej, Vrsac, Doljevac, Lebane, Loznica, Mladenovac, Pirot, Smederevska Palanka, and Surdulica; **Support to development of LAPs for the social inclusion of Roma:** Vlasotince, Pozarevac, Koceljeva, Nis, Aleksinac, Bor, Krusevac, Sombor, Backa Palanka, Odzaci; **Support to legalisation of Roma settlements:** Sombor, Vrsac, Paracin, Pozarevac, Leskovac, Mladenovac, Surdulica, Lebane, Pirot, Aleksinac; **Co-financing the drafting of design and technical documentation:** Sombor, Pecinci, Mladenovac, Veliko Gradiste, Kucevo, Aleksinac, Leskovac, Surdulica, Vranjska Banja, Lebane, Bela Palanka, and Bojnik

- situation analysis and challenges”, 2019¹²⁰
- “A Guide to legalisation of family homes in Roma settlements in Serbia”,¹²¹ 2020, in Serbian and Roma languages
- “A Handbook on housing support in local self-government units”¹²², 2020
- “The instruction on preparation of housing support programmes for legalisation of housing facilities”¹²³, 2020.

In addition to these public sector projects, housing support to Roma has also been implemented by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) non-governmental organisation, partly with support through donations from other countries, and partly through the involvement of the housing support beneficiaries themselves. The model of working with the Roma national community, which was developed by EHO, includes provision of expert and financial support to poor Roma families (1) in the procedure for legalisation of dwellings in substandard settlements; (2) in improving housing conditions (through adaptation, rehabilitation, reconstruction and construction of dwellings) through ‘controlled construction’ in which the Roma community is actively involved in the settlements where the local self-government unit has confirmed that, under the applicable planning documentation, they can stay on the existing location; (3) in the construction of small-scale basic municipal infrastructure (mainly water supply); and (4) in the drafting of the planning documentation for a micro location/settlement, if this is required for the provision and urban development of the settlement. Some of the most significant project results in the 2007–2017 period include: 65 dwellings in six settlements were legalised; technical documentation was submitted and the procedure for resolution of property relations was initiated for 54 settlements, and two plans for subdivision of land were also developed. According to the model of ‘sustainable renewal of Roma settlements’, implemented in partnership with 17 municipalities in the Republic of Serbia, 1,068 bathrooms were built, 60 houses were reconstructed and 37 ‘core houses’ were constructed. Support was provided to 1,165 families (5,260 persons) in total. This model is cost-effective and thus affordable to vulnerable groups, as well as sustainable because even after the project support is finished, they will continue to improve their housing conditions with their own investments.¹²⁴

IPA 2018 – The project “The European Union support to social housing and active inclusion” is aimed at enabling construction, purchase and reconstruction of social apartments and houses for 421 families with approximately 1,500 members in 19 towns and municipalities in the Republic of Serbia. The objective of this programme is to contribute to increased social inclusion of women, men, girls and boys who are living in poverty and who are excluded from society, and enable them to live a life in dignity and actively participate in society. Apart from members of the Roma national minority, women victims of violence, persons with disabilities and children without parental care can also apply for this programme. In addition to housing solutions, assistance in the area of education, employment, self-employment and access to social services is also provided, thus ensuring sustainability of the assistance programme for families who are living in inadequate conditions and who are at poverty risk. The programme is implemented by the United Nations Office for Project

¹²⁰ Available at: [1561976390_Ozakonjenje stambenih objekata u romskim podstandardnim naseljima - analiza stanja i izazovi - I.Miscevic.pdf \(skgo.org\)](#)

¹²¹ Available at: [1601538888_Legalizacija 29092020 final v2 bleed 3mm PRESS ISBN.pdf \(skgo.org\)](#)

¹²² Available at: [516 \(skgo.org\)](#)

¹²³ Available at: [1629713310_Uputstvo za ozakonjenje A4 -final web.pdf \(skgo.org\)](#)

¹²⁴ “Handbook on housing support in local self-government units”, SCTM, 2020

Services (UNOPS), in partnership with the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry of European Integration. The project is worth EUR 27 million and its implementation period is 36 months. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, with the support from the European Union Delegation (EUD) and UNOPS, implementation of a donation in the form of medical equipment, engagement of medical staff and provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable citizens was funded by the project. As part of this programme, the publication “A Holistic Approach to Social Housing” has won the third prize in the ‘Publications’ category at the 30th International Urban Development Show in Nis. Another publication “The Guidelines for Drafting Local Housing Strategies” has also been developed.

In 2020, RSD 122 million (of which RSD 12.2 million for housing of internally displaced Roma) was provided for improving the living and housing conditions of internally displaced persons (150 packages of construction material and purchases of 32 rural houses). About 650 IDPs are currently residing in informal collective centres. When it comes to returnees repatriated on the basis of readmission agreements, RSD 2 million was spent and 4 returnee families were supported with allocation of construction material in 2020. Of the total number of returnee beneficiaries of housing aid, about 75% are members of the Roma community.

The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit supported six LSGs (Novi Sad, Surcin, Ruma, Negotin, Raska and Zitiste), which were selected through public call, in drafting local action plans. The draft local action plans in all six LSGs were completed in mid 2021. Local action plans were adopted in the municipalities of Surcin, Zitiste and Raska, while the adoption of the documents by city/municipal councils in other towns/municipalities is also expected in the coming period.

The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, in its planning and implementation of budgetary and donor funds, makes sure that these programmes cover those local self-government units with a large number of internally displaced persons living in their territory. Internally displaced Roma are eligible to apply for all programmes of improving living conditions of internally displaced persons. In 2019, around RSD 27 million from the budget of the Republic of Serbia were provided for and spent on improving the living conditions of internally displaced Roma while in displacement (for distribution of aid for improvement of living conditions intended for completion or adaptation of dwellings or for adaptation of a rural house with a yard, or for purchasing a rural house with a yard). Even though Roma account for 10% of internally displaced persons, they account for about 30% of the total number of beneficiaries of the programme of addressing housing needs of the internally displaced persons. The Commissariat is monitoring the implementation of the allocated funds and it is on this basis that it takes care of further needs of the beneficiaries. In 2020 the funds envisaged in the state budget for improving the living and housing conditions of internally displaced persons amounted to RSD 270 million. Amidst the newly-arisen pandemic situation, this item in the state budget was reduced by RSD 148 million, which means that, this year, some 220 families will be left without assistance in resolving their housing issues. As compared to the reduced budget, around RSD 122 million was provided in 2020 for improving the living and housing conditions of internally displaced persons through distribution of 150 packages of construction material and purchases of 32 rural houses.

Based on the assessments and actual needs, each year the Commissariat for Refugees and

Migration earmarks funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia for implementation of the programme of incentives and measures for returnees under the Readmission Agreement in the form of distribution of packages of construction material, purchases of rural houses or pre-fabricated houses, and distribution of economic empowerment packages. In 2019, Commissariat, using the funds from the state budget, issued three Public Calls to LSGs having returnees under the Readmission Agreement who are in need in their territory. Thereby, support was provided to a total of 12 local self-government units with 15 approved projects. Assistance was provided to 28 families through purchases of 11 rural houses, distribution of eight packages of construction material and allocation of nine sets of income-generating activities. Of the total number of returnees, about 75% are of Roma nationality. By the end of the reporting period in 2020, no public calls were issued to LSGs having returnees under the Readmission Agreement who are in need in their territory. The budget for this activity was reduced to RSD 2,000,000 amidst the newly-arisen coronavirus situation.

Support was also provided through the IPA 2014 project “Improvement of living conditions of IDPs and returnees under the Readmission Agreement in Serbia and support for sustainable return to Kosovo and Metohija”. The project is implemented by NGOs and 21 local self-government units in collaboration with the Commissariat. The value of the component of the project implemented by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is EUR 175,000 and it refers to housing and economic empowerment of internally displaced persons and returnees under the Readmission Agreement. Housing assistance to 273 IDP and returnee families is also planned through purchases of pre-fabricated houses, purchases of rural houses and distribution of packages of construction material. Moreover, allocation of 182 economic empowerment sets is also planned. In the reporting period, 31 rural houses with a yard (to 25 IDPs and 6 readmission returnees), as well as 32 pre-fabricated houses (to 22 IDPs and 10 returnees), 189 packages of construction material (to 175 IDPs and 14 returnees), and 164 sets of income-generating activities (to 140 IDPs and 24 returnees) were allocated.

Significant funds, from the state budget and the donors, for addressing the housing needs of refugees, have failed to yield a major impact on the status of Roma, given their negligible share of the refugee population. On the other hand, the funds for improving the status of internally displaced persons from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, including Roma, were limited. To that effect, as the priority in addressing the housing needs is given to multiple-member and multi-generational families living in substandard settlements, this makes Roma IDPs eligible as a priority group. However, the lack of appropriate construction documentation often hinders the use of these limited resources for addressing the housing needs of Roma. Thus far, the most efficient forms of implementation of projects of this kind have been the projects addressing the problem of entire substandard settlements, like the project of construction of apartments for Kostolac 1 and 2 in the municipality of Pozarevac, Blazevo in the municipality of Brus, Stari Aerodrom in Kraljevo, Sjenica and the Mahala settlement in Nis, where local self-government units had been involved in their implementation and provided the land equipped with infrastructure and urban planning documentation, and subsequently took care of sustainability of the housing solutions. Regrettably, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration does not keep records of national affiliation of housing solution beneficiaries and therefore the share of Roma beneficiaries can only be estimated.

The housing problems of Roma indicate that there is no urban planning documentation in the local self-government units, which would serve as a basis for improving the housing conditions of the Roma national minority. Furthermore, the quality of existing urban development plans is

inadequate. Half of the registered Roma settlements in the Republic of Serbia are only covered by the municipal spatial plan, 19% by the general plan, 21% by general regulation plans, and 10% by detailed regulation plans. For the settlements covered by the municipal spatial plans or general plan, direct implementation is possible with the application of the Rulebook on general rules on subdivision of land, regulation and construction,¹²⁵ but only for those settlements that are not densely constructed (suburban or rural settlements) and if they are intended for residential purposes. The lack of proper urban planning documentation is a major obstacle to legalisation of buildings, which deepens the problem even further because even in those cases where a housing solution is adequate in all other respects, the fact that the building itself cannot be legalised brings into question the legal certainty of the property as an important element of the right to adequate housing. Moreover, a part of the adopted urban development plans provide for removal of Roma settlements from their current locations, rather than their improvement. This is in direct contravention of international law that stipulates that the removal of a settlement is a measure that should only be applied on exceptional basis and when it is absolutely necessary. The participation of Roma in the drafting of urban development plans is very low, which is the result of an underdeveloped participatory planning practice in the Republic of Serbia, even in case that the result of the planning is a decision to remove a Roma settlement, which is another form of violation of international human rights law.

Unregulated property status of the plots of land and buildings is seen as the most common cause of other problems that Roma are faced with when exercising their right to adequate housing conditions. This is the consequence of a situation where Roma built their own houses but at the same time they were not registered as owners of the plot of land or the house, or where these houses were built on publicly-owned land or the land owned by different legal entities (privatised or public enterprises, etc.). Moreover, the owners with title deeds for the house or the land mostly did not apply for construction permits for subsequent extension or replacement of the old house with a new one, so the factual state of affairs may significantly differ from the one registered in the property cadastre. There is no data as to how many Roma have filed legalisation applications since local self-government units do not keep records by national affiliation. Some data from a 2015 research shows that in 80% of Roma settlements in the Republic of Serbia, legalisation was underway for less than 30% of housing facilities. The situation is made even more difficult due to the fact that the deadlines for filing legalisation applications have expired. Furthermore, other problems include the complexity of the legalisation procedure, the set construction and technical characteristics of the dwellings which are occupied by the poorest and which exceed the prescribed height, and high legalisation costs (for the drafting of technical documentation, land surveyor services, payment of fees, etc.), which many Roma families cannot afford to pay on their own.

Moreover, local self-government housing departments lack clearly defined legal obligations to determine and implement housing policy measures and consequently an obligation to earmark funds in the local budgets to address housing issues of the poor.

Local self-government representatives are still very poorly aware of the measures of improving the housing of Roma, which are provided in national documents. Roma housing issues on the local self-government level are handled by various departments, mainly those in charge of social affairs, and considerably less by urban development and housing departments,

¹²⁵ *Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 22/15

construction directorates, housing agencies, etc. Some local self-government units still lack sufficient capacities for drafting plans; there is a lack of appropriate methodology for rehabilitation and consolidation plans; there have been numerous amendments to the legislation that impacted the change in the planning procedures and competences; there is a lack of motivation as the continuation of the activities would imply implementation of plans through infrastructure construction programmes for which local budgets lack funds. According to a survey conducted by the Ombudsman,¹²⁶ local self-government representatives believe that they lack sufficient professional capacities for adoption of planning documents concerning informal settlements where the Roma population resides, while according to the more recent surveys, their motivation is low when it comes to initiating procedures for resolving property related issues due to the accompanying costs that both them and members of the Roma community would have to bear but cannot afford.¹²⁷

Furthermore, there is still no data in the Republic of Serbia on the housing needs of Roma, both Roma individuals and households, or to what extent Roma are the beneficiaries of various forms of subsidies for housing costs, and the same goes for the entire population of the poor in the Republic of Serbia.

There is no targeted research on discrimination of Roma in their exercise of the right to housing. The main reason for this is insufficient level of development and often even the weakening of the institutions on the local level that specifically deal with housing issues and monitoring of housing needs of the poorest strata of the population who need housing support the most. Since 2009 to date, 17 local housing agencies have been set up to deal with this issue, but they often lack capacities.

As a result of the lack of provision of substandard Roma settlements with adequate municipal infrastructure and other services, a significant percentage of dwellings is not connected to the municipal infrastructure. A more comprehensive study of substandard Roma settlements in the Republic of Serbia was conducted in early 2015, which laid the groundwork for setting up a GIS database for substandard Roma settlements. Thereby, the records on the number and location of informal settlements in the Republic of Serbia have been established for the first time, which allows for planned earmarking of funds towards addressing these issues (the drafting of this regulation had been pending for several years). The database is at the the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure - Housing Law Department, which should regularly update the data, provide links to other public databases (like the real estate cadastre in the database of the Republic Geodetic Authority and the Serbian Statistical Office, etc.), continuously monitor the state of Roma communities and prepare periodical reports. One should bear in mind that some data that is relevant for the planning of strategic measures in the area of housing was not covered by the surveys that were conducted, such as data on the Roma settlements in rural areas or data on housing conditions of poor Roma who are dispersed among the general situation, living in individual apartments or small groups of housing units.

Low provision of settlements with infrastructure, irregular disposal of solid municipal waste from the settlements, as well as specific problems with high groundwater levels and the risk of

¹²⁶ Ombudsman “Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025”, 2019

¹²⁷ “Systemic Barriers to Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women at Local Level - Situation Analysis”, ROMACTED Programme, 2020

effusion of unregulated flows, etc. may lead to serious health problems of residents of these settlements. The issue of connection of the dwellings to the infrastructure is related to its construction and the legality of the constructed network and facilities, which are the basis for subsequent registration of the works performed in the name of relevant utility companies, and, therefore, the drafted urban development and planning documentation and regulated property status of the land on which the infrastructure works were performed are the prerequisites for implementation of these measures. The process of connecting the dwellings to the infrastructure is also problematic due to high costs of connection fees, the lack of funds in the poor households to pay the bills and the lack of adequate interior installations in the houses themselves.

Bad quality of the existing dwellings, the dwellings being physically unsafe and uncomfortable for living: In the territory of the Republic of Serbia, around 40% of dwellings in Roma settlements are made of weak materials or materials not suitable for construction. In the territory of the Autonomous Province, this rate is even higher - 63% of dwellings, although one should bear in mind that this also includes houses made of traditional materials whose quality is not necessarily bad. According to the data from the 2011 Census, slightly more than 6,300 housing units of poor quality in which the head of the household is of Roma nationality were built in the Republic of Serbia, which is about 20% of the total number of housing units where the head of the household. What also contributes to poor housing conditions is the lack of interior installations, toilets and bathrooms, as well as insufficient number of rooms and overcrowded housing space. Poor construction quality of the dwellings is a major obstacle to their legalisation. Moreover, the procedure for obtaining permits for the construction and/or extension of sanitary facilities or rooms of modest dimensions is very complex, lengthy, expensive and identical to the procedure for construction of a new building, which is why these permits are almost never obtained for this kind of construction works, regardless of whether they are performed by the residents themselves or through a housing support programme. From the international law and human rights perspective, it is stipulated that, in order to be deemed adequate, a housing unit must provide protection from cold, humidity, heat, rain, wind and other health threats.

The lack of development and shortcomings of social housing: There is a low number of implemented housing programmes and projects aimed at meeting the housing needs of Roma living in unlivable and unsafe apartments or in settlements that cannot be improved. The inclusion of Roma in social housing programmes most frequently occurs in Belgrade and mainly applies to families who were subject to enforced resettlement from large informal settlements "Gazela" and "Belvil". Both of these settlements were resettled as part of major development projects funded by EU institutions. However, there is no sufficiently well-designed and strategic approach to addressing housing problems of Roma through housing programmes that would not be reactive. Moreover, there are no initiatives aimed at providing adequate accommodation for individuals and families (seasonal workers and their families) that migrate to cities for economic reasons from time to time. Furthermore, the existing forms of social housing are not affordable to low income households, including Roma ones. It is estimated that about 5% of Roma in the Republic of Serbia reside in publicly owned apartments. The number of Roma who have moved into social apartments which were built in the previous decade is alarmingly low, which is also due to the eligibility criteria which are unattainable for poor families from the Roma national community. There are about 90 Roma families in Belgrade who had previously been accommodated in container settlements and who later moved into city-owned social apartments. However, some of these families cannot afford to pay the housing costs that are too high for their income, so they are under constant threat of

eviction due to unpaid debts. Internally displaced Roma, who are mostly accommodated in collective centres, have a slightly easier access to the social housing programme under protected conditions and they account for 7.7% (the total of 55 Roma families and 204 persons) of beneficiaries of these apartments in various cities in the Republic of Serbia. However, the coverage of internally displaced Roma living in informal settlements with housing assistance programmes implemented by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is very low.

It is worth mentioning that in 2014 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requested that the Republic of Serbia expand its social housing capacities to low income persons and implement measures whereby Roma access to adequate and affordable housing would be provided. The options suggested by this Committee included improvement of conditions in the existing settlements and construction of new social housing units.¹²⁸ In 2011 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended to the Republic of Serbia to develop social housing programmes for Roma and step up efforts against housing segregation of Roma. The problem here are the capacities of LSGs since the implementation of most of the measures that are envisaged is supposed to take place on the local level, but without the transfers provided from the national level, it is hard to implement these measures or they are implemented through donor-funded projects.

Resettlement of informal Roma settlements is mostly carried out through evictions. Reports by domestic and international institutions and organisations stress the inadequateness of the procedures that were applied during the resettlement of informal Roma settlements – without timely notification of the tenants, without providing any accommodation for them, or accommodating them in non-residential metal containers in segregated container settlements where access to basic services is not provided, or without providing the support that stimulates social inclusion. Another significant problem that is getting increasingly prominent includes stereotypes and negative public opinion against resettlement of Roma and refusal of the majority population to accept Roma moving into their own neighbourhoods.

There is a general lack of knowledge of human rights standards on the part of local self-government units implementing the resettlement and evictions. They are mostly unaware that the measure of resettlement of a settlement may only be used in exceptional situations when no other solution is possible, and that the solution should mainly be sought in the upgrading of the existing settlement so that it could be deemed adequate by international standards. In 2011 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination instructed the Republic of Serbia, *inter alia*, to make sure that all future resettlements are eviction free.

Given the fact that the period until the adoption of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2016-2025, was marked by poor, fragmented and uncoordinated implementation of the measures in the area of improving Roma housing, which were planned in national or local documents and actions plans,¹²⁹ and although in the period between 2016 and 2021 major efforts were exerted to improve coordination, it is visible that the housing situation for Roma is considerably more difficult than for the rest of the population.

¹²⁸ E/C.12/SRB/CO/2 paragraph 31

¹²⁹ Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025.

4.2.3. SOCIAL PROTECTION

Everyone has the right to subsistence and human dignity, which cannot be ensured without the right to minimum material support for persons living in deprivation and poverty and facing challenges in meeting their basic needs. Inability to meet one's subsistence needs poses a barrier to exercising other rights: the rights to education, health and employment.

Under Article 69 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, citizens and families in need of societal assistance are guaranteed the right to social protection based on the principle of social justice, humanism and respect of human dignity. This provision has been operationalized by the Law on Social Protection, governing financial benefits that are key for the poorest families and, consequently, for a large number of Roma families. The Law on the Financial Support to Families with Children is also important as it governs child allowance. Barriers in accessing the right to financial assistance were facing the residents of informal settlements who did not have a formally registered place of residence. With the enactment of the Amended Law on Non-contentious Procedure and the supporting by-laws, this formal, legal barrier was eliminated¹³⁰ to a certain extent by allowing them to register residence at the address of a centre for social work, provided that there was no other ground for registration. Access to financial assistance remains difficult and the documents to be collected in order to initiate the financial assistance claiming procedure require certain knowledge of the social protection system, a minimum level of education that the applicants from this target group often lack, and some cash that they do not have. According to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the document collection procedures for the purpose of exercising the right to financial social assistance and other rights have been simplified for the Roma with the enactment of the Law on e-Government (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 27/18) and the application of the Law on the General Administrative Procedure (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 18/16 and 95/18), which envisages that the documents will be obtained through official channels.

Financial social assistance (FSA) is designed as a social protection tool to be triggered after all other support mechanisms have been exhausted and it belongs to a group of non-contribution-based social benefits. The FSA is granted subject to means testing, primarily with the aim of reducing poverty. Under the Regulation on Receipts and Incomes of Relevance for Claiming the Financial Social Assistance (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 36/11), incomes include all receipts, including those from unregistered activities (income from lost pay as determined based on the findings and report of the centre for social work), and do not include social benefits such as child allowance, parent allowance, attendance allowance, receipts from schoolchildren and university students' living standards schemes, and other. To minimise demotivation for employment, families where most members are fit for work cannot exercise this right for more than nine months in a calendar year. The Regulation on the Inclusion Measures for Beneficiaries of Financial Social Assistance¹³¹ specifies the forms of activation, such as inclusion in the processes of formal and informal education, employment, medical treatment and community work. The centre for social work (CSW) concludes an agreement with the fit-for-work beneficiary (individual activation plan), specifying activities and obligations of the beneficiary and providing for a possibility to reduce the FSA amount or terminate the right to FSA in case of unjustifiable failure by the beneficiary

¹³⁰ *Review of the Procedure for Subsequent Civil Registration*, PRAXIS, 2015.

¹³¹ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 112/14

to fulfil obligations under the agreement. The FSA falls within the competence of the Republic and is financed from the national budget, whereas the right is administered by the municipal/city centres for social work. With regard to work activation of the FSA beneficiaries and the statement that adequacy improvement reduces motivation for work in the formal sector, especially for families with children, it should be noted that an *ex-post* assessment of the Regulation on the Inclusion Measures for Beneficiaries of Financial Social Assistance adopted in 2014 by the Government is currently underway and will give precise information about the measures impact. The Law on Social Cards is expected to start to apply in March 2022; having precise information about beneficiaries' general social status will enable improved care planning for beneficiaries, especially fit-for-work FSA beneficiaries.

Information from the 2019 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6) on the situation of women and children shows that five out of six Roma households (83%) live in the conditions of pronounced material deprivation (3 or more factors of material deprivation).

The most important cash benefits targeting the poor in the system of social and child protection in the Republic of Serbia are the financial social assistance, child allowance and one-time assistance. All households in the Roma settlements are aware of at least one cash benefit, while 84% of households benefit from some of them. The rate of FSA coverage of the Roma population at risk is quite significant. In 2019, one in two households in the Roma settlements received financial social assistance, 61% receiving child allowance and 6% one-time assistance. The highest percentage of children receiving child allowance come from Roma households living with three or more material deprivations (77%), whereas the percentage of child allowance beneficiaries in households living without or with one material deprivation is 64%. Of the parents who did not apply for child allowance, parents in most of the households (72%) either knew or were told they were not eligible. For 11% of parents of Roma children, it was reported that the administrative procedure was overly complicated or excessively costly. The respondents did not know how to apply for over 8% of children from the poorest households in the Roma settlements. More than one half of the members of households aged 5–24 years who attend primary or higher levels of education received a kindergarten subsidy, scholarship, student loan or some other form of material assistance for schooling in the school year 2019-20.

The earmarked transfers, which serve as a funding source for community-based services in underdeveloped communities, saw a significant decline in 2021 compared to previous years and amounted to RSD 556 million (about RSD 700 million in the preceding years).

According to the Republic Institute for Social Protection, which receives data from the social protection institutions, a total of nine children were registered as victims of child labour in the second half of 2020: seven boys and two girls. All were Roma children, aged 2-14 years.

International Labour Office (ILO) is implementing in the Republic of Serbia a project titled “Measurement, Awareness Raising and Policy Engagement to Advance Fight against Child Labour and Forced Labour”. Within the scope of this project, the Serbian Statistical Office developed a Child Labour Questionnaire to be used as a part of the Labour Force Survey to collect data about child labour in the Republic of Serbia.

The past surveys¹³² showed that a FSA beneficiary's employment in the formal sector is

¹³² Survey “Mechanisms for Inclusion of Financial Social Assistance Beneficiaries in the Formal Labour Market” by the Social Policy Centre and GIZ, available at : <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz-sr-istrazivanje-o->

worthwhile for individuals and families without children. Families with children, particularly single-parent families, receive somewhat higher support through social benefits and, therefore, are less incentivised to accept employment. The pay that can be earned in the informal sector together with the social benefits renders incentives ineffective, while families with children even find themselves in a better position if all adult members are unemployed. This survey states that the situation in the Republic of Serbia is not such that employment can be incentivised by reducing social assistance. The financial social assistance (FSA), even if taken in aggregate with the child allowance, does not enable one to move out of poverty. However, it should be taken into account that the adequacy improvement aggravates inactivity trap and reduces motivation for work in the formal sector, especially for families with children.

The legal aid was regulated in the Republic of Serbia with the enactment of the Law on Legal Aid. However, the initial law implementation assessments conducted in early 2021 by the civil society organisations¹³³ have shown that the most vulnerable groups of population did not have equal access to justice for vulnerable people in the first year of implementation of the Law on Legal Aid. A survey conducted by Praxis with the support of the UNHCR has shown that only 32% of cities and municipalities set up a legal aid service and that 18% of local self-government units received no legal aid applications, whereas the number of filed applications did not exceed ten in one year at 32% of local self-government units. The fact that the persons deciding on applications are the same persons who provide legal aid in two-thirds of local self-government units is also problematic. An extremely low number of persons at risk of statelessness managed to receive legal aid as envisaged under the Law. The survey has shown that these citizens hardly ever managed to independently claim legal aid, without expert support by lawyers from civil society organisations. A study by A11 Initiative had pointed to the inaccessibility of legal aid to most vulnerable internally displaced persons: they lack adequate information as to how they can access legal aid; the procedures are not available and transparent; and their applications often receive verbal rejections. Moreover, the legal aid application form has been identified as a particular issue making access to legal aid more difficult, as it is not clear and aligned with the needs and education level of some of the most vulnerable citizens. Therefore, sufficient support for initiating the envisaged support procedures of the social protection system, most common being financial social assistance, care allowance and child allowance, is clearly still lacking for the poorest families. A significant number of the poorest Roma families remain deprived of access to material support and, consequently, of access to education, health care and other entitlements, in violation of their fundamental rights.

Under the Instructions on the Operation of the Centre for Social Work-Guardianship Authority in Protecting Children from Child Marriage, all centres for social work have an obligation to maintain record of beneficiaries who were at risk of child marriage or in a child marriage situation with respect to whom the CSW took measures and provided services from within the scope of its authorities. In 2020, the CSWs identified 191 children (11 boys, 180 girls), of whom 141 were victims of child marriage, while the other 50 cases concerned children for whom the CSWs were *ex officio* requested by the court to issue expert reports in the proceedings for consent for minor to marry). Of this number, 17.3% of children were without parental care. While the identified children were predominantly aged 16 and 17

[mehanizmima-za-ukljucivanje-u-formalno.pdf](#), accessed on 16 November 2021.

¹³³ A11 Initiative <https://www.a11initiative.org/prva-godina-primene-pokazala-da-zakon-o-besplatnoj-pravnoj-pomoci-onemogucava-jednak-pristup-pravdi-za-najugrozenije/> and Praxis http://www.praxis.org.rs/images/praxis_downloads/IZVESTAJ_ZAKON_O_BESPLATNOJ_PRAVNOJ_POMOCI_PRVA_GODINA.pdf

years - 70% (134 children), 57 children who were below the age of 16 (30%) was not a negligible number. The information about their nationality shows that child marriages prevail among children of the Roma nationality, with 102 children (53.4%) of the total number of children.

Civil registration is another area which has marked a steady improvement, although the pace of the trend has seen a significant decline. Work on this issue needs to continue in order to completely eliminate the risk of statelessness and statelessness as such by 2024.

Living in absolute poverty increases the risk of leaving school, which evolves into the risk of unemployment. Especially vulnerable in this respect are children who live and work in the streets. This group of children who are marginalised on multiple grounds and often extremely marginalised and who live in deep poverty are exposed on a daily basis to multiple risks to life, health and proper growth and development. In his annual reports, the Ombudsman stated that the position of children who live and work in the streets had not changed and that no strategic activity had been undertaken to prevent and control their living and working in the streets, improve their position, and reduce and eliminate factors of risk to their life and work.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs participated, in partnership with the International Labour Office, in the preparation of the following documents: Child Labour: Prevention, Identification and Intervention, Methodology Instructions for Social Protection Practitioners and Assessment Triangle (on the topic of child labour), Guide to the Application of Child Labour Indicator for the Social Protection System, and the Instrument for Psychosocial Assessment of Children at Work - IPAC (ILO, 2014), within the project "Measurement, Awareness Raising and Policy Engagement to Advance Fight against Child Labour and Forced Labour" in the Republic of Serbia. With the establishment of the Ministry of Family Care and Demography, the child marriage issue has fallen within the purview of this ministry – the Law on Ministries (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 128/20).

Another area of particular relevance to promoting the exercise of rights and inclusion of Roma in the Republic Serbia is social support services. The children of the Roma nationality are over-represented in the restrictive forms of care, such as residential institutions for children. The share of Roma children in foster care is also higher than that of general population. The MICS6 data shows that extreme poverty coupled with other forms of vulnerability and discrimination (disability, the Roma origin) increases the risk of child neglect. This is why it is important to develop preventive services of support to families living in multiple deprivations, which has not been appropriately done as far as Roma families are concerned. This is also evident in connection to day-care community-based services, such as day-care centres for children with developmental disabilities, where there is generally a big demand-supply gap, rendering from time to time these services inaccessible to the Roma children. The most common reasons include lack of transport, lack of proactive measures for inclusion of the most vulnerable families and, very often, negligence and discrimination. The pilot services designed so as to involve work with families living in multiple deprivation and at risk of child displacement from the family in the Republic of Serbia do not form part of the formal care system.

Case workers at the centres for social work should play an important role in achieving greater inclusion of the Roma population. Their networking and the role of coordination is essential when the aim is to ensure social inclusion of an isolated family from the Roma national

community. The case management mechanism, and case conference practice in particular, ensures proactive approach by key stakeholders in the community to supporting an excluded family or individual. This role of the centre for social work is crucial and is a good way to improve collaboration with the National Employment Service and other stakeholders who can promote the position of Roma in the labour market. The duty of social workers to provide support to parents so that their children would regularly attend school and exercise the rights they are eligible for (child allowance, transport to school) is of special relevance.

Finally, the improvement of the position of Roma in the social protection system and promotion of their social inclusion are directly related to the data that is not officially collected and to the regular monitoring of the progress of Roma inclusion, which is not performed.

Full application of the measures envisaged under the Law on Social Protection and other regulations is a precondition for the implementation of other strategic measures, as a large number of Roma live below the poverty line, which makes them completely excluded from the societal flows; consequently, they need incentives and support to become included in education and labour and to exercise other rights. Considering its role in the system, social protection enables such support, as its activities cut across all strategic areas: education, housing, employment and health care. These objectives can be achieved by providing material support to individuals and families in need of such support and by providing social services. The social protection measures eliminate the consequences of social exclusion. With the provision of social services, the beneficiary receives assistance to become included in social activities and to contribute to their own and their family's wellbeing through own work or activities. Furthermore, social services assist the beneficiary to network with people from their community and help the development of the environment of support and assistance in the beneficiary's community. Social services contribute to the inclusion of beneficiaries, i.e. they help the beneficiaries to develop behaviours that improve their relationships with other people; cope with difficulties of life; and accept positive social values and norms.

The social protection rights are exercised through the centres for social work, whose professionals need to recognise the difficulties a person is facing in performing daily life activities and managing their life and, based on such an assessment, refer the beneficiary to use a specific social service. Therefore, the centres for social work need to build their capacities in order to efficiently provide services to persons of the Roma nationality and develop measures in local self-government units for achieving the strategic objectives. In addition to the centres for social work, local self-government units, which provide conditions for the provision of support services, are another important factor in one's exercising of social protection rights.

Taking advantage of the capacities of these social protection resources and of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the role of the social protection in improving the effectiveness of the strategic measures is:

- to increase accessibility to benefits, services and programmes of the social protection system;
- to increase accessibility to services and programmes of other systems: education, housing, employment and health care;

for vulnerable members of the Roma national community and their families.

These objectives will be achieved through direct participation of the social protection activity owners in the work and activities of the LSG teams responsible for the Strategy

implementation and through the CSW's reaching out to the beneficiaries of measures and services.

The social services system is open and has the capacity to accept new services and programmes, and the existing services and programmes are intended for beneficiaries having different characteristics and needs. The system of social services and programmes can be expanded by designing new ones to meet the needs of the members of the Roma national community and their families. The design and roll out of new services is based on a proactive role of the centres for social work and their collaboration with other policy stakeholders in the local community.

While local self-government units can organise legal aid service¹³⁴ to efficiently address the said difficulties, this institute is not appropriately and effectively set up in the local self-government units and does not protect the best interests of citizens, especially of those who are, like Roma, ignorant law-wise. By advancing cooperation with local Roma coordinators and local CSOs representing the interests of Roma, efficient action could be taken in the local community to ensure quality provision of the existing services and identification of needs for new services and programmes targeting the Roma.

The Law on Social Protection sets forth that local self-government units fund the following from their budgets: day-care community-based services, services for independent living (other than supported housing for persons with disabilities), counselling & therapy and social & educational services, other social services in accordance with the needs of the local self-government unit, one-time assistance and other forms of assistance, programmes advancing social protection in the local self-government unit, innovative services, and other. However, local self-government units rarely monitor the needs of their residents. As a result of underdeveloped community-based services, citizens are forced to use the existing, often inadequate and unreasonable, services, thus partially meeting their needs. The services that would fully correspond to the interests of citizens who have found themselves in the state of social need are lacking in most local self-government units. The measures specifically designed to address the issues facing the Roma are rare.

The mechanisms enabling the Roma population to become more included in the social support system need to be improved and the family promoted as the best framework for the care for this vulnerable group. Highly vulnerable families, with no housing, income or property, whose members have no personal documents, and which are multiple-member and multiple-generation families can serve as a criterion for emergency intervention. Emergency intervention may take form of social benefits (increased financial assistance or one-time financial assistance, in-kind assistance, assistance with fuel in wintertime, assistance with construction material to improve housing conditions and other). Also, children, young people, women and victims of domestic violence can be the reasons for emergency intervention, urgent provision of care, initiation of relevant court proceedings, expansion of shelters for children, youth, adult and elderly persons, establishing a number of safe houses, developing the services of day-care centres, and other.

Memorandums of understanding between the social inclusion of Roma policy stakeholders on

¹³⁴ Law on Local Self-Government, *Official Gazette of the RS*, Nos. 129/07 and 83/14 and 101/16, 47/18 and 111/21, II Local Self-Government Units, paragraph 2.1.1, Art. 20, item 31.

the national level need to be formulated to ensure successful continuation of collaboration between the centres for social work and the National Employment Service in connection with the provision of integrated social services to fit-for-work Roma who are beneficiaries of financial social assistance to promote their employment, and the collaboration between the centres for social work and police stations to facilitate and expedite Roma residence registration, pursuant to Article 11, paragraph 2 of the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence (permanent residence registration at the address of the centre for social work).

In accordance with Article 11 of the said Law, the citizens of the Republic of Serbia can register their permanent residence on the grounds of a home ownership right, lease agreement or other legal ground. If a citizen cannot register permanent residence on either of the said grounds, a relevant authority will issue a decision determining their permanent residence at the address of:

- 1) their permanent dwelling, subject to fulfilment of other legal requirements;
- 2) permanent residence of their spouse or unmarried partner;
- 3) permanent residence of their parents;
- 4) the institution of their permanent placement or the centre for social work in whose area they are located, subject to notification by the citizen to that institution or the centre for social work that that citizen's address will be the address of the institution or the centre for social work.

According to the Procedural Instructions of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of 19 June 2013, following the receipt of a filled-in form from a relevant home affairs authority, the centre for social work initiates *ex officio* the proceedings for consent to register address. An officer of the guardianship authority has a duty to promptly verify such a form by affixing their signature and official seal and to return it to the home affairs authority where the residence registration is taking place.

It should be noted that while the centres for social work maintain records of beneficiary ethnic/national origin, experience has shown that the beneficiaries' declarations of their national origin do not give a sufficient indication of a precise number and make-up of beneficiaries, due to voluntary nature of the declaration; hence, imprecise insight into the needs of beneficiaries of the Roma nationality remains an issue. However, the fact that Roma are recognisable by their unfavourable social and economic position should serve as a basis for the design of appropriate programmes, based on which the centres for social work would develop services to meet the needs of this marginalised beneficiary group.

In addition to insufficient number of professionals at the centres for social work and the staffing needs in the social protection area, the staff need to be sensitised to the issues facing the Roma national minority, and further trained and educated to work with vulnerable groups; to master the negotiation and representation skills; and to work under pressure and in stressful situations. Furthermore, anti-discrimination training needs to be implemented to raise awareness among staff members of the issues facing the Roma national minority, and a rulebook on operational procedure in cases of discrimination needs to be adopted.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs needs to continually monitor the activities of the centres for social work, taking timely and appropriate measures, offering assistance with their activities and detecting shortcomings. All of these measures in correlation with affirmative actions taken under other policies would help to improve the status of Roma.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs is currently working on the Draft Amended Law on Social Protection, Draft Strategy for Social Protection in the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026, Draft Strategy for Deinstitutionalisation and Development of Community-based Social Services 2021–2026, Draft Action Plan for the period 2021 - 2023 implementing the Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Gender-based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025, Draft Amended Regulation on Earmarked Transfers in Social Protection, and other.

5. DEFINING THE DESIRED CHANGE

5.1. VISION

In the Republic of Serbia in 2011, 147.604 Roma were enumerated, of whom 75,042 were men and 72,562 women. This number of Roma accounts for 2.1% of the population in the territory of the Republic of Serbia,¹³⁵ excluding the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, which is a reference figure for the purposes of strategic measures planning,¹³⁶ although, the estimates by different organisations indicate that the number of Roma living in the Republic of Serbia is far higher. This is also a growing population (growth index of 136.4) and relatively ‘young’ compared to the general population, i.e. has a large proportion of young people.

According to the methodologically verified reports and indicators, most of Roma are facing social exclusion and poverty and are exposed to overt and, more often, covert discrimination.¹³⁷

The vision of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2022– 2030 focuses on deeply rooted inequality facing the Roma in society despite some progress that has been achieved under the previous Strategies. With its vision, this Strategy aspires to eradicate inequality and turn around the present situation. Therefore, the vision of the Strategy is:

The Republic of Serbia is a society where Roma exercise all human rights without discrimination.

¹³⁵ The 2011 Population, Household and Housing Census, Volume 1: *National Affiliation*, Serbian Statistical Office, Belgrade, 2012.

¹³⁶ The discussion of number and territorial distribution of Roma should be approached with caution. Compared to previous censuses, the Roma have marked positive growth of population (there were 140,237 Roma, according to the 1991 Census, whereas 108,193 Roma were enumerated in the 2002 Census). However, this growth is not solely due to birth rate, but also due to different census methodologies and increase in the number of Roma IDPs from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Methoija. Consequently, one should bear in mind the fact that the estimated number of Roma in the Republic of Serbia ranges between 247,591 (Goran Basic, Bozidar Jaksic, “Art of Survival: Where and How the Roma Live in Serbia,” IFDT, Belgrade, 2005) and 600,000 (Ana Popovic, Jelena Stankovic, University of Nis Faculty of Economics, 2013. (<http://www.eknfak.ni.ac.rs/dl/FINALLY/Nacionalni-izvestaj-Srbija.pdf>), and the issues of ethnic mimicry and statistical neglect of the actual number of Roma (Estimates and official numbers of Roma in Europe, Council of Europe www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma).

¹³⁷ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Serbia* (E/C.12/SRB/CO/2), 2014.

The vision puts emphasis on the importance of observing the human rights guaranteed to all people in the Republic of Serbia, Roma included. It rests upon the human rights-based approach, as a comprehensive approach in response to negative social phenomena, such as discrimination. Also, a discrimination-free society means that Roma and non-Roma population are equal in every aspect of life. Therefore, this Strategy does not focus solely on Roma and advancing the status of Roma, but rather on the society as a whole which should change so as to include Roma as equal people.

6. GOAL

Along the lines of the EU Roma Strategic Framework, the Goal of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma 2022-2030 is:

To improve the quality of life of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, by respecting human and minority rights; eliminating discrimination and antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and achieving greater social inclusion across all segments of the society.

Considering that the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030¹³⁸ states inclusion, i.e. reduction of poverty and social exclusion to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population, as a horizontal cross-cutting objective, this topic is integrated in the Strategy Goal.

The achieving of the Strategy Goal is divided into priority areas:

- Fight against antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and discrimination
- Poverty and social exclusion
- Participation
- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Housing
- Social Protection

A detailed baseline assessment has been made based on the available data and a brief review of the past achievements, objectives are set and strategic measures described for each of the above priority areas. Also, outcome indicators and performance indicators, including defined baselines and targets wherever possible, have been given.

Indicators for the Goal:

- Life expectancy of Roma
Baseline: 62.2 years, Target: 65 years (SSO, PHI)
- Percentage of Roma households living in pronounced material deprivation (3 or more material deprivations)
Baseline: 2019: 83% (SSO, MICS 6), Target: 2030: 70% (SSO)

¹³⁸ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0620&qid=1615293880380>

7. OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES

The Strategy has seven objectives in the key areas which contribute to achieving the Strategy goal. They are the following:

Objective 1: Lower level of discrimination and antigypsyism as a form of racism against the Roma national minority.

Measure 1.1. To improve and fully implement the legal and institutional framework in order to ensure prevention of and protection from discrimination and antigypsyism, as a special form of racism.

Measure 1.2. To empower Roma to access rights and preserve identity.

Measure 1.3 To raise awareness of the public, public services in particular, of the importance of the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism, as a special form of racism.

Objective 2: Improved participation of Roma in all social processes.

Measure 2.1. To encourage participation of Roma, especially women and youth, in social, cultural and political life.

Measure 2.2. To enhance the capacities of and cooperation within the civil society.

Objective 3: Developed education system as an inclusive, intercultural, non-discriminatory and safe environment for Roma and all other children, with ensured full inclusion in pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, and provided support to functional education of adult Roma, including the enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of mechanisms for the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism, as a form of racism.

Measure 3.1. To support full development of Roma children from deprived communities by delivering programmes for parents and children aged up to 3 years in the family, community and pre-school institutions, and to make available pre-school programmes for children aged 3-5.5 years (full-day, half-day).

Measure 3.2. To reduce education gap by full Preparatory Pre-School Programme coverage of the Roma children aged 5.5-6.5 years (full-day or half-day).

Measure 3.3. To increase compulsory primary education coverage of students who are members of the Roma national minority by implementing the existing regulations on primary school entry and consistently preventing unjustifiable admission to special primary education specifically of children living in Roma settlements and in conditions of poverty.

Measure 3.4. To enhance the competencies of students and adults who are members of the Roma national minority for entry in the labour market and higher education by taking affirmative measures in the secondary and higher education, and to reduce dropout rate.

Objective 4: Increased access to viable and quality employment for the Roma people.

Measure 4.1. To implement and apply affirmative measures for employment of Roma in the public sector.

Measure 4.2. To develop new and consistently implement the existing Roma employment programmes.

Measure 4.3. Full and viable institutionalisation of the local mechanisms for Roma inclusion.

Measure 4.4. To fight antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and discrimination in employment.

Measure 4.5. To legalise work of Roma in the informal sphere, especially that of collectors.

Objective 5: Improved health of Roma, including equal access to quality health care services and enabled full exercise of the right to health without discrimination, especially in the situations of crisis, in the health care system of the Republic of Serbia.

Measure 5.1. To expand and develop public health programmes.

Measure 5.2. To develop and implement informational and educational programmes targeting Roma, majority population and persons engaged in the health care system.

Measure 5.3. To regularise health mediators' employment status and increase the number of Roma employed in the health care system.

Measure 5.4 To make the health care system and health care services available to Roma without discrimination, with a view to reducing inequality in health.

Objective 6: Improved housing conditions for the population of Roma nationality.

Measure 6.1. To legalise buildings that meet basic living standards.

Measure 6.2. To improve substandard buildings to meet basic living standards.

Measure 6.3. To provide municipal infrastructure to substandard Roma settlements.

Measure 6.4. To address the housing needs of homeless persons, internally displaced persons and persons of the Roma nationality who must be relocated.

Objective 7: Improved access to social benefits and social services for the Roma people.

Measure 7.1. To enhance the role and capacities of the public sector to develop and implement social policies, benefits and services appropriate to the needs of individuals and families.

Measure 7.2. To increase the level of information provided to Roma about the possibilities of claiming social benefits and using social services.

Measure 7.3. To improve the system of reintegration and social inclusion of returnees, including a large number of Roma, under the Readmission Agreement.

8. MEASURES

Objective 1:

Lower level of discrimination and antigypsyism as a form of racism against the Roma national minority.

To achieve Objective 1, a legal and institutional framework needs to be set up to strongly control antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma, to empower Roma by strengthening their identity and access to rights, and to raise awareness of the general population, public services in particular, of the importance of fight against antigypsyism, as a special form of racism, and discrimination. With this in mind, the measures for achieving this objective have been grouped as follows, and the tables below show the defined performance indicators, baselines and baseline years, and targets for 2030, for each of the measures.

Objective 1 outcome indicators are the following:

- Percentage of Roma who report being faced with discrimination, hate speech and uninvestigated and unsanctioned threats
Baseline 2020: 40%, Target: 2030: 10% (*Ombudsman)
- Percentage of Roma who believe they have discrimination experience

Baseline: 2020: 26% (*Equality Commissioner¹³⁹)

Target: 2030: 13% (*Equality Commissioner)

- The proportion of the general population who feel uncomfortable having Roma neighbours

Baseline: 2019: 19% (*Equality Commissioner¹⁴⁰)

Target: 2030: below 10%

Measure 1.1. To improve and fully implement the legal and institutional framework in order to ensure prevention of and protection from discrimination and antigypsyism, as a special form of racism.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue

The government structures for the protection from discrimination need to be strengthened and specific bodies for the protection of Roma from discrimination need to be established within the formal anti-discrimination bodies to manage Roma complaint cases, provide legal aid to alleged victims and identify discrimination patterns, including institutional and covert discrimination.

Measure 1.1. Performance Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
The law recognises and sanctions antigypsyism as a form of racism	2021: No	2023: Yes
Number of new departments for fight against antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma established in public institutions and bodies	2021: 0	2022/2023: 1 2024-2030: 2
Number of complaints dealing with discrimination of members of the Roma national minority	2020: 94 * Regular 2020 Annual Report of the Equality Commissioner	2022/2023: 100 annually 2024-2030: 150 annually
Number of (alleged) victims who received legal aid	1.10.2019-October 2020: 3340 *Operational Conclusions Implementation Report for the period 2019-2021	2022/2023: 4000 In 2030: 6000

Measure 1.2. To empower Roma to access rights and preserve identity

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, National Council of the Roma National Minority of the Republic of Serbia

This measure seeks to build capacities of Roma through cultural, informational and

¹³⁹ Roma community perception of discrimination, Equality Commissioner, 2021 http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PERCEPCIJA-ROMSKE-ZAJEDNICE-O-DISKRIMINACIJI_final_compressed.pdf

¹⁴⁰ Report on Public Opinion Poll: Citizens' Attitude towards Discrimination in Serbia, Equality Commissioner, 2019. Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/izvestaj-o-istrazivanju-javnog-mnjenja.pdf>

educational activities, which will increase the level of information about rights; enhance access to rights and services, primarily to those of the public sector; and strengthen cultural and national identity and self-awareness of the Roma. The acknowledgment of notable Roma in the areas of culture and arts is essential in this process. Further, cultural institutions modelled after the existing institutions of other national minorities (institutes, culture clubs and other) need to be established in order to preserve Roma cultural identity and cultural heritage. Considering that the Roma culture, as part of the European and Serbian culture, has been identified as a potential to be used within the existing legal and institutional framework to overcome the prejudices against Roma, the use of the existing capacities and opportunities is another important direction in which activities for the preservation of the Roma culture as an integral part of the Serbian cultural scene need to be planned. To that end, it would be useful to examine the possibilities offered by Article 12 of the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities which states, “Museums, archives and institutes for the protection of cultural monuments established by the Republic, autonomous province or a local self-government unit shall provide for the presentation and protection of cultural and historical heritage of special importance to the national minorities in the territories they are competent for. The presentation of the cultural and historical heritage which has been found, in accordance with a special law, to be of special importance for national minorities shall be decided with the participation of representatives of their national councils. Cultural institutions established by the local self-government unit which is in terms of the law governing local self-government deemed to be a local self-government unit with ethnically diverse population shall ensure that their activity plans include contents, measures, activities and events which preserve and promote cultural identity and traditions of the national minorities traditionally inhabiting the territory of the local self-government unit.

The activities of the media offering contents in the Romani language are very important for the implementation of this measure and these media need to receive support in this regard. Nevertheless, all media need to be encouraged to develop affirmative attitude to Roma and programmes in the Romani language, in the communities with a significant percentage of members of the Roma national community. The Roma will thus gain better access to rights and public services, and be far better informed about their rights. The legal aid system will engage in this programme to support access to justice in other areas.

Measure 1.2. Performance Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of Roma cultural institutions ¹⁴¹	2021: 1 (*RCC Nis)	(2030): 3

¹⁴¹ Article 12 of the Law on Public Services (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 42/91, 71/94, 79/05 – other law, 81/05 – other law corrigendum, 83/05 – other law corrigendum and 83/14 – other law) and the Law on Culture, Article 23 Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 72 of 3 September 2009, 13 of 19 February 2016, 30 of 23 March 2016 – corrigenda, 6 of 24 January 2020, 47 of 10 May 2021, 78 of 3 August 2021.

Number of projects/programmes of cultural institutions established by local self-government units with ethnically diverse population whose territory is inhabited by a representative number of Roma that preserve and promote cultural identity and traditions of the Roma national minority.	To be determined	At least 50 on an annual level
Defined list of prominent Roma artists and cultural workers, which is periodically updated.	To be determined	At least 100 on an annual level
Number of media predominantly offering contents of relevance for the Roma or in the Romani language.	2020: 26 media offering contents in the Romani language *Media in the national minority languages, OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2020	2030: 50 media offering contents in the Romani language
Number of programmes and projects which inform and educate Roma about the access to rights and preservation of identity	To be determined *CSO, LSG	2030: At least 10 annually
Number of supported projects/programmes presenting the Roma culture and traditions in an affirmative way and helping to fight antigypsyism and discrimination.	To be determined * CSO, LSG	2030: At least 10 annually

Measure 1.3. To raise awareness of the public, public services in particular, of the importance of the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism, as a special form of racism.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, National Academy of Public Administration.

The third measure under Objective 1 aims to impact public services and the wider community. This measure targets the overall population of the Republic of Serbia and will be managed by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. Work will be done to eliminate prejudices and stereotypes prevailing in the general population of the Republic of Serbia, impact the media so as to minimise negative and increase affirmative narratives in their contents, raise awareness of diversity and tolerance, support the gatherings of different communities, and suppress hate speech by public condemnation. The Ministry will develop a training programme for civil servants dealing with fight against antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and will work with public institutions to put in place regulations and measures in response to antigypsyism and discrimination, in cooperation with the National Academy of Public Administration.¹⁴² The Ministry will work

¹⁴² Article 976 of the *Law on Civil Servants* stipulates that the General Training Programme, *inter alia*, includes the subject of human rights protection. This training programme, in terms of paragraph 7 of the above Article, shall be prepared, implemented and developed by the National Academy of Public Administration, and adopted annually by the Government upon proposal by the National Academy of Public Administration and subject to the prior opinion of the High Civil Service

on establishing historical facts, support research work about Roma, and work on the publishing of important information. This programme is planned to include the Strategy coordination and monitoring.

Measure 1.3. Performance Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of people (general population) who were involved in any way in the prejudice reducing activities	To be determined	2030: At least 2%
Number of supported media contents promoting Roma tolerance and identity	To be determined	2030: At least 100 on an annual level
Number of public condemnations of hate speech against Roma	To be determined	2030: At least 20 on an annual level
Number of trained civil servants, re. protection from discrimination and antigypsyism as a specific form of racism	2021: 0	2022-2023: 200 2024-2030: 1000
Number of institutions with regulations and measures against antigypsyism as a form of racism	To be determined	2030: All ministries and LSG
Number of civil servants training programmes accredited by the National Academy of Public Administration, re. awareness raising and elimination of antigypsyism and discrimination against the Roma	To be determined	2022-2030: At least 5

Objective 2:

Improved participation of Roma in all social processes

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue

To achieve Objective 2, work needs to be done, in implementing the Strategy, to encourage Roma, especially women and youth, to take part in the social, cultural and political life. Furthermore, Objective 2 will be achieved by enhancing capacities of and cooperation within civil society. This measure will ensure that Roma engage in policymaking through active participation in the formulation and monitoring of legislative and policy documents. Another important way is to encourage networking and engagement of Roma-led civil society organisations with the national platforms for cooperation both within the civil sector and between the civil sector and government. With this in mind, the measures for achieving Objective 2 have been grouped as follows, and the tables below show the defined performance indicators, baselines and baseline years, and targets for 2030, for each of the measures.

Objective 2 outcome indicators are the following:

- Percentage of Roma who stated that they had voted in elections
Baseline: to be determined, Target: 2030: to be determined (REC, RNC)
- Number of active Roma-led civil society organisations
Baseline: to be determined,¹⁴³ Target: 2030: 300 (BRA)

Measure 2.1. To encourage participation of Roma, especially women and youth, in social, cultural and political life

Participation of Roma in social, cultural and political life will be encouraged both through informative, educational and empowerment activities on an individual level and through the civil sector activities and support to the civil sector so as to further strengthen civil society organisations and promote social dialogue about the social inclusion of Roma. As far as participation in policy processes is concerned, Roma need to be informed and educated about the rights of political participation and the ways in which they can participate in order to make informed decisions and increase own inclusion policy processes, giving them greater legitimacy. Gender perspective and empowerment of women will be accorded particular attention within this measure.

Measure 2.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of Roma-led civil society organisations actively participating in the civil society platform of the MHMRSD	To be determined	2022-2023: At least 20 2024-2030: at least 10 on an annual level
Representation of Roma men and women in the political decision-making bodies on the local, provincial and national levels	To be determined *Data of LSG & national and provincial authorities and institutions	2030: 2,1% (at least 30% women)
Number of local interethnic relations councils having the participation of the members of the Roma national minority	To be determined	2025: All LSGs that meet the requirement from the Law on Local Self-Government, based on the 2021 Survey data

¹⁴³ Currently, only the number of registered organisations dealing with Roma issues is available. According to REF (https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/country_strategy_srpski_09_05.pdf) that number was above 300 in 2019; however, not all are active. It needs to be determined how many of these organisations are actually led by Roma and which ones are active (this can be done through the Civil Society Platform).

Number of local self-government units having active mobile teams for Roma inclusion	2020: 50 *Database for monitoring Roma inclusion measures, 2020	2030: 100
Number of young Roma participating in different activities	To be determined	2030: At least 2%
Number of Roma culture projects implemented by civil society organisations	To be determined	2030: At least 10 annually
Number of Roma culture projects/programmes targeting women, children and young people	To be determined	2030: At least 10 annually

Measure 2.2. To enhance the capacities of and cooperation within the civil society

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue

The role of the civil society organisations, especially Roma-led ones, needs to be promoted as relevant for empowering the Roma national community and increasing the legitimacy and equity of policies that directly or indirectly impact the lives of Roma. Increased CSO participation in the policy formulation and implementation processes is essential, in addition to the services they provide to their beneficiaries.

Measure 2.2. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of Roma-led civil society organisations	To be determined	2030: 20% more than in 2021
Number of legislative and policy documents formulated and monitored with active participation of Roma-led civil society organisations	To be determined *Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue	2022-2030: All legislative and policy documents concerning Roma, directly or indirectly

Objective 3:

Developed education system as an inclusive, intercultural, non-discriminatory and safe environment for Roma and all other children, with ensured full inclusion in pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, and provided support to functional education of adult Roma, including the enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of mechanisms for the fight against discrimination and antigypsyism, as a form of racism

To achieve Objective 3, the measures of support to full development of Roma children from deprived communities through programmes for parents and children aged up to 3 years to be delivered in the family, community and pre-school institutions and of making available pre-school programmes for children aged 3-5.5 years by organising full-day and half-day care centres need to be realised in implementing the Strategy. The activities that will help to realise the measure of education gap reduction by full coverage of Roma children aged 5.5-6.5 years with pre-school preparatory programme will also be implemented. Objective 3 will be further achieved through measures encompassing the activities that will help to increase compulsory primary education coverage of students who are members of the Roma national minority by implementing the existing regulations on primary school entry and consistently preventing unjustifiable admission to special primary education specifically of the children living in Roma settlements and in the conditions of poverty. The activities that will help to enhance students and adults' competencies for entry in the labour market and higher education, by taking affirmative measures in the secondary and higher education, and to reduce drop-out rate will be implemented within the scope of Measure 3.4 of Objective 3.

With this in mind, the measures for achieving Objective 3 have been grouped as follows, and the tables below show the defined performance indicators, baselines and baseline years, and targets for 2030, for each of the measures.

Objective 3 outcome indicators are the following:

- Rate of primary school entry by Roma
Baseline: 2019: 85.4% (SSO, MICS 6) Target: 2030: 100% (SSO)
- Transition rate to secondary school
Baseline: 2019: 52.6% (SSO, MICS 6) Target: 2030: 80% (SSO)
- Two-year post-secondary and university education completion rate
Baseline: 2017: 2% (Regional Survey on the Status of Roma in the Western Balkans, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank) Target: 2030: 4% (SSO and MESTD)
- Participation of adult Roma in education and training
Baseline: 2017: 73% in the system (Regional Survey on the Status of Roma in the Western Balkans, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank) Target: 2030: 90% in the system (RNC)

It is important to note that, as in other areas, parents do not have an obligation to make a declaration of their national affiliation and that, consequently, education institutions do not collect national affiliation data. Articles 175 and 176 of the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 88/17, 27/18 – other law, 10/19, 27/18 – other law and 6/20) provide for setting up of the education unified information system (EUIS) and roll-out of a single education number (SEN) that remains assigned to a person throughout all levels of that person's formal education and is key to interconnecting the data about the child, student and adult in the EUIS. This mechanism will enable tracking of children in the system, and monitoring of support measure impacts. The educational achievement monitoring system will be greatly improved with the setting up of the EUIS. Inclusion of Roma students in the education system is assessed based on either the share of Roma population or an assumption made based on socio-cultural characteristics of families. Some of

the data is obtained by monitoring the application of affirmative measures upon admission to secondary schools and higher education institutions of the Republic of Serbia and by granting scholarships to students of Roma nationality.

Measure 3.1. To support full development of Roma children from deprived communities by delivering programmes for parents and children aged up to 3 years in the family, community and pre-school institutions, and to make available pre-school programmes for children aged 3-5.5 years (full-day, half-day).

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

This measure will encourage national and local institutions, LSG included, to direct their efforts towards increasing the early education programme coverage of children of Roma nationality through the child and family support and, above all, towards increasing Roma inclusion in the formal system of pre-school education at as young an age as possible.

Measure 3.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Percentage of children of Roma nationality aged 36–59 months who attend early childhood education programmes	2019: 7.4% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 60.6%
Number of local self-government units where programs for parents and children aged up to 3 years are delivered in the family, community and pre-school institutions on an ongoing basis	2021: to be determined *Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, ECEC project	2022-2030: At least 80
Support coverage of families from the Roma national community through programmes for parents and children aged up to 3 years delivered in the family, community and pre-school institutions	2021: to be determined *Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, ECEC project	2022-2030: At least 70%

Measure 3.2. To reduce education gap by full Preparatory Pre-School Programme coverage of the Roma children aged 5.5-6.5 years (full-day or half-day).

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

The implementation of this measure is primarily the responsibility of the MESTD, but also of LSGs and CSOs as partners, and of other local and national institutions that need to provide conditions for full compulsory preparatory pre-school programme coverage of Roma children through coordinated intersectoral cooperation.

Measure 3.2. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Percentage of children of Roma nationality who attend Preparatory Pre-School Programme (PPP)	2019: 80% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 100%

Measure 3.3: To increase compulsory primary education coverage of students who are members of the Roma national minority by implementing the existing regulations on primary school entry and consistently preventing unjustifiable admission to special primary education specifically of children living in Roma settlements and in conditions of poverty.

Institution responsible for the implementation measure: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

The implementation of this measure is primarily the responsibility of MESTD, but also of LSGs and CSOs as partners, and of other local and national institutions that need to provide conditions for full compulsory primary education coverage of children of the Roma nationality through coordinated intersectoral cooperation. Moreover, work will be done to reduce the practice of unjustifiable enrolment of Roma children in schools for the education of children with developmental disabilities down to the level which approximately corresponds to the share of Roma children in the total population of children of a relevant age.

Measure 3.3. Indicators	Baseline	Target
Percentage of Roma children who enter primary schools	2019: 85.4% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 100%
Gross rate of Roma children entering the 8th grade of primary school	2019: 62% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 100%
Primary school completion rate	2019: 64% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 100%
Dropout rate reduction on an annual level	2019: 7% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2022-2030: 7% on an annual level
Proportion of Roma students in schools for education of children with developmental disabilities	2016: 18% *IPSOS, MESTD, UNICEF, 2016	2030: 2.1%

Measure 3.4: To enhance the competencies of students and adults who are members of the Roma national minority for entry in the labour market and higher education by taking affirmative measures in the secondary and higher education, and to reduce dropout rate.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

The application of affirmative measures is essential for increasing the mobility of Roma students and adults in the education system up to the level of higher education, which will, consequently, increase their competitiveness in the labour market. This measure is directly related to the objective in the area of employment, hence, coordination of activities and monitoring of the activity implementation data will be needed. Dropout rate reduction activities need to be intensified, especially on the local level, by providing support to the local mechanisms for support in the education system. The training and professional competency programmes will, *inter alia*, reduce the percentage of Roma who are not included in the systems of education, employment and training.

Measure 3.4. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Rate of transition to secondary school for Roma students	2019: 52.6% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 80%
Percentage of Roma girls and boys who attend secondary education	2019: 27% (girls) 30% (boys) *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 50% (girls) 60% (boys)
Secondary school completion rate	2019: 61% *MICS6, 2019, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 98%
Rate of transition to higher education institutions for Roma students	2016: 2% *MESTD	2030: 15%
Two-year post-secondary and university education completion rate	2017: 2% *Regional Survey on the Status of Roma in the Western Balkans, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank	2030: 4%
Percentage of Roma who are not in the education, training or employment systems	2017: 27% *Regional Survey on the Status of Roma in the Western Balkans, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank	2030: 10%

Objective 4: Increased access to viable and quality employment for the Roma people

To achieve Objective 4, the measures pertaining to the increase of Roma employment rate up to minimum 25%, in accordance with the Poznan Declaration, need to be realised in implementing the Strategy. Furthermore, employment of Roma in the public sector needs to be encouraged so as to reach the state where representation of Roma employed in the public sector is proportionate to the share of Roma in total population. Of high importance are the activities to be implemented within Measure 4.3. that concern full and viable institutionalisation of the local mechanisms for Roma inclusion (Roma coordinators, health mediators, teaching assistants, Roma inclusion mobile teams and other). This area will also encompass the activities pertaining to the fight against antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and discrimination, in order to train and sensitise staff in the public and private sectors and to reduce discrimination in employment of the members of Roma national minority. Objective 4 outcome indicators are the following:

- Roma employment rates
Baseline: 2017. 21% * Regional Survey on the Status of Roma in the Western Balkans, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, Target: 2030: 25%.¹⁴⁴ (SSO and NES)
- Roma employment rate in the public sector
Baseline: to be determined, Target: 2030: equal to the share of Roma in the total population according to the 2022 Survey. (SSO and NES)¹⁴⁵

Considering that these indicators derive from the Poznan Declaration and in view of the fact that the official national source of statistical data does not publish Roma employment data or the data about Roma employment in the public sector, the Action Plan for the implementation of this Strategy needs to envisage mechanisms to monitor this data, to ensure that the achievement of the set targets is monitored on an empirical basis.

Measure 4.1. To implement and apply affirmative measures for employment of Roma in the public sector

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

This measure will be realised through employment stimulation programmes, entailing sensitisation of public sector employers and application of affirmative employment measures, especially in case of educated Roma (with special focus on the representation of women).

Measure 4.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of institutions that have implemented affirmative measures for Roma employment	To be determined	In 2030:150

¹⁴⁴ In accordance with the Poznan Declaration, available at: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/5276e54b1a08c61969fea63c0dd27f13.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ In accordance with the Poznan Declaration, available at: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/5276e54b1a08c61969fea63c0dd27f13.pdf>

Measure 4.2. To develop new and consistently implement the existing Roma employment programmes

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

This measure will be realised by applying active employment policy measures, but also through numerous Roma employment promotion activities, targeting employers and general public. In addition, coordinated action of all systems, CSOs included, should ensure greater availability and better visibility of employment programmes that are reaching out to different groups in the Roma population (youth, women, educated persons, persons with different levels of qualification...) in an adequate and targeted manner.

Indicators for Measure 4.2.	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of new Roma employment programmes	2021: 0	2030: at least 5 new programmes

Measure 4.3. Full and viable institutionalisation of the local mechanisms for Roma inclusion.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

This measure is of exceptional importance as it impacts more than one area: it increases formal employment of Roma across all sectors, the public sector in particular, and, on the other hand, increases efficiency and viability of the local mechanisms for social inclusion of Roma (Roma coordinators, health mediators, teaching assistants, Roma social inclusion mobile teams and other). All relevant institutions on the national and local levels need to round off the legal framework in a systemic and coordinated manner in order to fully and viably address the employment status of the local mechanisms for social inclusion of Roma.

Measure 4.3. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Required documents for full and viable institutionalization of local mechanisms (health mediators, Roma coordinators, teaching assistants, Roma social inclusion mobile teams) are adopted	2021: No	2022-2023: Yes

Measure 4.4. To fight antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and discrimination in employment

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

This measure envisages activities that aim to sensitise and educate public sector employees and employers, and thus help understand the phenomena of antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma, especially in the area of employment. This measure can be realised through activities and various innovative projects dealing with the fight against antigypsyism, as a form of racism, and discrimination in employment on all levels. International and national donors can be engaged in the realisation of this measure so as to ensure full implementation of the activities to be envisaged under the action plan.

Measure 4.4. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of training courses for public sector employees	To be determined	By the end of 2030: At least 10% of the total number of employees are educated
Number of employer sensitisation training courses	To be determined	By the end of 2030: At least 10 on an annual level

Measure 4.5. To legalise work of Roma in the informal sphere, especially that of collectors.
Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

This measure needs to envisage activities to round off the legal framework in order to legalise the activities of Roma involving informal jobs and work, and in particular collection of recyclables, in a manner that is sustainable and favourable for business operators.

Measure 4.5. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Required documents for full and viable institutionalisation of local job-finding mechanisms (individuals and CSOs) are adopted.	2021: No	2025: Yes

Objective 5: Improved health of Roma, including equal access to quality health care services and enabled full exercise of the right to health without discrimination, especially in the situations of crisis, in the health care system of the Republic of Serbia.

To achieve Objective 5, the measures aiming to expand and develop public health programmes to include all Roma in the Republic of Serbia and to implement activities helping to inform and educate Roma and sensitise majority population and persons engaged in the health care system need to be realised in implementing the Strategy. Furthermore, active steps will be taken within the scope of Objective 5 to regularise health mediators' employment status. The measures and activities to be implemented also pertain to the development of the health care system and health care services and improvement of the service accessibility to Roma, without discrimination, with the view to reducing health inequalities.

Objective 5 outcome indicator is the following:

- Universal health coverage for Roma
Baseline: 93.4%, Target: 2030: at least 95% or up to the coverage level in non-Roma population (RHIF, Ministry of Health)

Measure 5.1. To expand and develop public health programmes.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Health

Public health programmes are implemented through the activities of the public health institutes and the activities of health care institutions on the local level. The public health plans of the local self-government units with Roma population need to recognise Roma as a particularly vulnerable group, while public health programmes need to envisage activities targeting the Roma.

Measure 5.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of public health programmes targeting the Roma	2021: to be determined	2030: All LSG with Roma population

Measure 5.2. To develop and implement informational and educational programmes targeting Roma, majority population and persons engaged in the health care system.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Health.

Informational and educational programmes entail activities of the health care institutions on the national and local levels, including informative and educational campaigns, work of health mediators and community nursing services, partnership with CSOs, and training programmes to further sensitise staff in the health care system and prevent discrimination against Roma in the health care system.

Measure 5.2. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of informative and educational programmes targeting Roma	No data	2022-2030: At least 1 national on an annual level
Number of informative and educational programmes targeting majority population	No data	2022-2030: At least 1 national on an annual level
Number of informative and educational programmes targeting persons engaged in the health care system	No data	2022-2030: At least 1 national on an annual level

Measure 5.3. To regularise health mediators' employment status and increase the number of Roma employed in the health care system.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Health.

The employment status of health mediators will be regularised in the same way and with the same aim as stated under Measure 4.3. Also, the activities of additional formal and informal education of health mediators can be implemented within the scope of this measure.

Measure 5.3. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of employed health mediators whose employment status has been fully regularised	2021: 0 *Ministry of Health	2030: At least 250
Number of health mediators in LSGs	2021: 75 health mediators in 59 LSGs *Ministry of Health	2030: At least 250 in 80 LSGs

Measure 5.4. To make the health care system and health care services available to Roma without discrimination, with a view to reducing inequality in health.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Health.

Activities that will ensure accessibility of the health care system and health care services to every individual from the Roma community and the use of the services without discrimination need to be implemented within the scope of this measure. Also, these activities will lead to reduced inequalities in health, improved health, reduced death rate and longer life expectancy of the Roma people.

Measure 5.4. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
% of Roma who believe that their health care needs are not satisfied	2014: 28% *Ombudsman	2030: 10%
Modern health care coverage of Roma women during the first trimester of pregnancy	2019: 84% *MICS6, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 97%
Vaccination coverage of Roma children aged 24-35 months	2019: 63% * MICS6, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 80%

Objective 6:

Improved housing conditions for the population of Roma nationality

To achieve Objective 6, work needs to be done, in implementing the Strategy, to legalise buildings and substandard buildings that are meeting the basic living standards. Furthermore, activities aiming to provide municipal infrastructure to substandard settlements need to be implemented. The activities helping to realise the measure of addressing the housing needs of homeless persons and persons of the Roma nationality to be relocated are also important.

Objective 6 outcome indicator is the following:

- Percentage of legalised substandard Roma settlements
Baseline: no data, Target: 2030: at least 70% (Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure)

Measure 6.1. To legalise buildings that meet basic living standards.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure.

The activities of setting up a unified database and providing data access to all stakeholders; and putting in place a functional mechanism for continuing data update need to be envisaged within the scope of this measure. Furthermore, the activities of addressing the housing needs are directed towards legalisation of Roma dwellings, including the access to municipal infrastructure and adequacy of housing conditions.

Measure 6.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of families of members of the Roma national community whose housing needs have been fully addressed in terms of legalisation, access to municipal infrastructure and adequate housing conditions.	To be determined	2030: 10,000
Number of legalised Roma dwellings	To be determined	2030: 10,000

Measure 6.2. To improve substandard buildings to meet basic living standards.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure.

Wherever possible, all informal Roma settlements need to be legalised. However, activities need to be implemented to provide permanent, appropriate, decent, accessible and unsegregated housing for the Roma living in informal settlements which cannot be legalised for justifiable reasons.

Measure 6.2. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Access to drinking water – percentage of households	2019: 98% *MICS6, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 100% (equal to the values for general population 2019)
Basic sanitation – percentage of households	2019: 86% *MICS6, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 98% (equal to the values for general population 2019)
% of population living in households that use improved non-shared sanitation facilities	2019: 86% *MICS6, SSO and UNICEF	2030: 98% (equal to the values for general population 2019)

Measure 6.3. To provide municipal infrastructure to substandard Roma settlements

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure.

The activities of providing municipal infrastructure to substandard Roma settlements, primarily drinking water, electricity, sewage system, etc. will be implemented within the scope of this measure.

Measure 6.3. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of substandard Roma settlements where entire municipal infrastructure has been constructed and infrastructure services provided to buildings by 2030	No reliable, consolidated data	2030: 400

Measure 6.4. To address the housing needs of homeless persons, internally displaced persons and persons of the Roma nationality who must be relocated

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure.

The activities focusing on providing housing to homeless persons, internally displaced persons and the Roma who must be relocated for whatever reason and who are in need of

housing will be implemented within the scope of this measure. These activities can include purchase of houses and apartments, social housing, refurbishment of the existing buildings and other.

Measure 6.4. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of LSGs where programmes and projects have been implemented to address the housing needs of homeless persons, internally displaced persons and returnees, and persons of the Roma nationality who must be relocated	2021: to be determined *Source CRM	2030: all LSGs

Objective 7: Improved access to social services, and accessibility and effectiveness of cash benefits for poverty reduction and increased social inclusion of Roma in the local community.

To achieve Objective 7, the role and capacities of the public sector need to be enhanced, but also those of the CSOs and the private sector entities engaged in the social protection system. The efforts to enter all Roma in civil registers and ensure accessibility and effectiveness of cash benefits for poverty reduction and increased social inclusion need to be supported. The planned activities need to particularly target specific groups of the Roma population (children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, returnees, internally displaced persons, etc.).

Also, activities need to be directed towards continued work on addressing the status issues of the members of the Roma national minority by making registration at the address of a social protection institution (CSW or residential institution) unless residence can be registered on some other ground. The Ministry of the Interior will be involved in the implementation of these activities. Indicators for Objective 7 are the following:

- Percentage of Roma entered in the civil registers
Baseline: no data, Target: 2030: 100% (Central Population Register)
- Percentage of households in substandard Roma settlements using some of the cash benefits.
Baseline: 2019: 84% (SSO, MICS 6), Target: 2030: 70% (SSO)

Measure 7.1. To enhance the role and capacities of the public sector to develop and implement social policies, benefits and services appropriate to the needs of individuals and families.

Institution responsible for the implementation the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

The activities of this measure need to support the adoption of required laws, by-laws and other documents (planning documents) of relevance for poverty reduction and increase of social inclusion of Roma at the national level. The activities of this measure pertaining to

continuing collection of data about the social benefits and services granted to Roma should result in the improved records of the social protection system.

This measure seeks to strengthen the role of local self-government units in recognising the needs of Roma through multisectoral approach and formulation of local social policies. The action plan needs to envisage activities targeting specific groups in the Roma population in response to the issues stated in the description of the present situation: child, early and forced marriages; domestic violence and partner violence; child labour and forced labour; street children; and human trafficking. Also, activities increasing the accessibility to other systems' services and programmes, such as education, housing, employment and health care (prevention of dropout and early school leaving, services of support to families with children/family outreach workers, etc.) need to be implemented. In this respect, we need to rely on mobile teams' activities in the municipalities where they have been set up and to encourage their setting up in the LSGs where they do not exist. The activities of this measure aim to improve employees' professional competencies for the work with Roma and competencies for the implementation of measures and activities seeking to ensure care for the Roma population, by advancing the practice of cultural competence in the social protection system, attending accredited training courses and in other relevant ways. Also, local social services need to be further developed so as to include Roma, specifically by making use of transfers to local self-government units earmarked for the development of community-based services. This measure seeks to enhance Roma awareness of the financial social assistance, as a poverty reduction measure. Furthermore, the activities of FSA beneficiary activation and simplification of legal aid procedures need to be implemented.

Measure 7.1. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Required laws, by-laws and other documents (planning documents) of relevance for poverty reduction and increase of social inclusion of Roma at the national level have been adopted	Baseline: to be determined	2030: All required documents are adopted and implemented
Number of LSGs whose local planning documents include special social protection measures and programmes targeting the Roma	Baseline: to be determined *Sources: LSG, Database of Roma social inclusion measures, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities	All LSGs having local planning documents

Number of LSGs providing local social services that include Roma, returnees under the readmission agreement and others	Baseline: to be determined *Sources: LSG, Database of Roma social inclusion measures, Standing Conference of Towns and	All LSGs with Roma national minority
Number of accredited training programmes re. strengthening competencies for work with members of the Roma national community, in the database of the Republic Institute for Social Protection	Baseline: to be determined Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection, Social Protection Chamber	2030: 5
Number of delivered accredited training programmes and other expert meetings that pertain to strengthening competencies for work with members of the Roma national community	Baseline: to be determined Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection, Social Protection Chamber	By the end of 2030: 35 (at least 5 annually)

Measure 7.2. To increase the level of information provided to Roma about the possibilities of claiming social benefits and using social services.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs

Within the scope of this measure, work needs to be done to inform and raise awareness of Roma about the possibilities of claiming social benefits and using social services. Activities can focus on campaigns and promotions in the local community, including promotions of access to social services. Within the scope of this measure, activities leading to improved material situation of the Roma population can be implemented, by promoting cash benefits in order to reduce poverty. To increase the level of information provided to Roma and accessibility of social benefits and social services, emphasis needs to be placed on the relevance and roles of the private sector, civil sector and the media, which all need to be engaged in the activities. Further, the activities can relate to improving the records of the granted social benefits and social services targeting the Roma.

Measure 7.2. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
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Number of projects implemented to inform the Roma about the social benefits and social services on the national and local levels	No data Sources: LSG, CSW, Database of Roma social inclusion measures, SCTM	At an annual level 2022-2030: Number of CSO and LSG which have implemented the projects
Number of conducted local and national surveys of all relevant issues facing the Roma national community that pertain to the claiming of social benefits and using of social services, to ensure quality analysis and consistency of practice in planning and improving the position of Roma community;	No data Sources: MLEVSA, RIPS, PIPS, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Social Protection Chamber, CSO, international organisations and other.	On an annual level 2022-2030: At least one survey annually

Measure 7.3. To improve the system of reintegration and social inclusion of returnees, including a large number of Roma, under the Readmission Agreement.

Institution responsible for the implementation of the measure: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs.

The activities that need to be implemented within the scope of Measure 7.3. pertain to the strengthening and activation of the LSG migration councils, which are a statutory obligation under the Law on Migration Management¹⁴⁶. Consequently, activities that need to be implemented include the collection and analysis of the data relevant to Roma and returnee migration management; setting up of a monitoring system; and coordination of government authorities and migration CSOs. The activities of development and implementation of local action plans for returnee integration/migration management, including special measures targeting Roma returnees are also significant. Furthermore, the activities of providing information to returnees about their rights and obligations need to be implemented.

¹⁴⁶ Official Gazette of the RS, No. 107/12

Measure 7.3. Indicators	Baseline and baseline year	Target 2030
Number of LSG where local action plans for integration of returnees/migration management, including special measures targeting Roma returnees, are developed and implemented	Baseline: to be determined *CRM, LSG	All LSGs
Number of distributed newsletters about the rights and obligations of returnees under the readmission agreement	Baseline: A total of 1000 newsletters about the rights and obligations of returnees under the readmission agreement were distributed in 2020. *CRM ¹⁴⁷	Target: 2030: All covered returnees

9. STRATEGY MANAGEMENT

Roma Status Improvement Section was set up at the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue to serve as a technical support to the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025. Its task was to revise the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and align it with the current EU Roma Strategic Framework and the enacted legislation of the Republic of Serbia, in collaboration with the Coordination Body Expert Group. The Coordination Body Expert Group will manage the implementation of the Strategy, in cooperation with all stakeholders.

The brunt of responsibility for the implementation of individual measures under the Strategy lies with the public authorities on the national and local levels, depending on their respective competences for individual measures and activities. This model will ensure effective and efficient Strategy management; monitoring of strategic measures implementation and regular reporting about the Strategy implementation; submission to relevant authorities of proposals for amendments to ineffective measures; initiation, preparation and establishing of cooperation with other government authorities; contribution to the amending of regulations relative to the implementation of strategic measures; cooperation with and provision of relevant expert assistance to local self-government units in connection with the Strategy implementation; and support to the assessments of socio-economic position of Roma in local self-government units, as a basis for developing local policies for the improvement of the position of Roma.

¹⁴⁷ [https://kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracioni%20profil%20Republike%20Srbije%202020%20FINAL%20\(1\).pdf](https://kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracioni%20profil%20Republike%20Srbije%202020%20FINAL%20(1).pdf)

Particular care must be taken to ensure participation of the representatives of the Roma national community in the bodies responsible for the monitoring of the Strategy implementation process and coordination of the social inclusion of Roma activities. In addition, the inclusion of the representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority in the Republic of Serbia and civil society organisations in the Strategy implementation process and the process of monitoring and evaluation of the measures envisaged under the Strategy must be ensured.

The Strategy, i.e. most of the strategic measures, is implemented in the local self-government units. According to the population census, Roma live in 92 local self-government units; their number varies from municipality to municipality and, consequently, strategic planning of inclusive measures requires that this number be estimated in relation to absolute and relative shares in the total population of a local self-government unit. The past experience has shown that the position of Roma was successfully improved in the local self-government units which had a body to deal with the Roma population on the local level, whereas most local self-government units failed to undertake activities to integrate Roma and achieve objectives of the previous strategy document and action plans.

In its opinion on the Draft Strategy, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration stated that a representative of the Commissariat needed to be formally involved in the work of the Coordination Body and the Expert Group.

10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION, AND REPORTING

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2022–2030 and the supporting action plans, as policy documents, will be implemented through measures and activities defined and elaborated in greater detail in these documents. Their implementation will be the responsibility of the government authorities having authority over specific measures and activities.

The Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025 is responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the planned measures and activities under the Decision Setting up the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025.¹⁴⁸ Pursuant to this Decision, the following persons are appointed to the Coordination Body: 1) Coordination Body Chair: Ana Brnabic, Prime Minister, 2) Coordination Body Deputy Chair: Gordana Comic, Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 3) Coordination Body members: Novak Nedic, Government Secretary General; Darija Kisic Tepavcevic, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs; Branko Ruzic, the First Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development; Zlatibor Loncar, Minister of Health; Sinisa Mali, Minister of Finance; Tomislav Momirovic, Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure; Marija Obradovic, Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government; Jadranka Joksimovic, Minister of European Integration; Maja Popovic, Minister of Justice; Dalibor Nakic, President of the National Council of the Roma National Minority; Dragana Jovanovic Arijas, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit manager, 4) Coordination Body Secretary: Aleksandra Novikova

¹⁴⁸ [Координационо тело \(minljmpdd.gov.rs\)](http://minljmpdd.gov.rs)

Milojkovic, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue.

The Coordination Body meets at least once every six months. It has a duty to report to the Government about its activities semi-annually. In the process of implementing the measures and activities, relevant ministries and institutions other than the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue are also participating in the implementation of this Strategy, subject to their competencies, considering that certain measures call for intersectoral cooperation.

The Coordination Body has a task to coordinate and steer the activities of the government authorities and monitor whether the defined measures and activities for improving the status and social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia are implemented in accordance with the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016 -2025. The Coordination Body initiates the development of strategy documents and preparation of annual and other reports about the implementation of strategy documents, considers all issues, and coordinates and steers the work of national authorities, LSG authorities, public enterprises and other organisations established by the Republic of Serbia and local self-government units in connection with the activities of improving the status and social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia falling within their purview. The tasks of the Coordination Body are the following: to improve interdepartmental cooperation with regard to social inclusion of Roma; to propose measures to address emergency situations which may result in additional vulnerabilities of Roma; to propose ways of realising and implementing the planned, as well as extra, measures and activities helping to improve the position and achieve greater social inclusion of Roma; to promote cooperation with international organisations and civil society organisations on the issues of relevance for inclusion of Roma; to promote participation of Roma in all processes of inclusion measures planning, implementation and monitoring; to develop social dialogue and fight against antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma.

The monitoring of measures and activities through quantitative and qualitative indicators to be defined in the action plan will be performed by the Expert Group of the Coordination Body for Improving the Status and Social Inclusion of Roma and Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia.

The Expert Group comprises the representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Ministry of European Integration, Ministry of Culture and Information, National Council of the Roma National Minority, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Public Policy Secretariat and Civil Society Platform.

In addition to monitoring, the Expert Group is tasked with the preparation of annual reports on the implementation of measures and activities, while it is the task of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue to make the reports publicly available, in accordance with the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia. The Coordination Body receives the Strategy implementation reports on three levels: local self-government units, ministry/other central institutions, and the Serbian Statistical Office.

The Expert Group as a rule meets once every 60 days: – to exchange information about the

achievement of objectives and implementation of the measures and activities seeking to improve the status and social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia; – to discuss issues in connection with the implementation of the Strategy and other issues concerning the promotion of the status and social inclusion of Roma and to propose solutions aimed to improve the situation in this area; – to prepare and regularly update information about the measures, activities and impacts of improving the status and social inclusion of Roma; – to exchange information with international organisations whose programmes/projects focus on advancing the status of Roma. The Expert Group can meet on an *ad hoc* basis in case a situation aggravating the position of Roma or other circumstances calling for urgent response need to be addressed.

Under the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, the document proponent will report to the Government about the outcomes of the action plan implementation no later than 120 days after the end of each calendar year after the action plan adoption date. Also, the final Strategy implementation report will be submitted no later than six months after the end of the Strategy application period.

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2022–2030, as a policy document, is also monitored through the Information System for policy planning, monitoring, coordination and reporting. The Information System is a unified electronic system wherein the planning system participants enter the contents of their policy documents and mid-term plans and execute reporting, in compliance with the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia. It is maintained by the Government through the Public Policy Secretariat in order to ensure a link between the contents of policies and mid-term plans of the budget beneficiaries responsible for the implementation of policy measures and their respective financial plans. Pursuant to Article 47 of the Law on the Planning System, this Information System will provide for timely reporting about the achieved objectives and monitoring of the performance evaluation indicators.

To measure the impacts, i.e. to evaluate the Strategy outcomes, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue will arrange for three *ex-post* assessments – the first one at the end of the second year of implementation of measures and activities, the second in 2026, and the third in 2029 or 2030, as the last year of the Strategy period. In terms of the Law on the Planning System and the Regulation on Policy Management Methodology, Policy Impact Assessment and Content of Individual Policy Documents, *ex-post* assessment includes the monitoring of policy document implementation and performance evaluation; hence, the planned assessments will rely on the annual reports of measure and activity implementation, but also on the policy document impact monitoring.

The implementation of measures and activities and the achievement of the goal and objectives will be monitored based on output indicators (measures), outcome indicators (objectives) and impact indicators (goal) to be stated in the Strategy and the Action Plan. The annual reports on the implementation of the Strategy action plans will be prepared by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in partnership with the RCC.¹⁴⁹¹⁴⁹

The assessment of the measure and activity achievements and the assessment of outcomes and impacts will be based on various statistical and other data of the institutions engaged with the

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020>

Expert Group, the data arising from different international surveys conducted with the participation of the Republic of Serbia, and the data and analyses from within the scope of surveys and reports to be produced by domestic and international institutions, organisations and bodies. The EUIS will be an important source of data.

11. ESTIMATION OF THE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

All institutions responsible for the measures and activities will plan budgetary funds for their implementation in accordance with the projections and within their means and limits set for every budget beneficiary by the Ministry of Finance in the process of budget preparation and adoption.

To consolidate spending and ensure prudent fund management, in the course of the first two years after the Strategy starts to apply, the Government will review spending of all funds on all government levels and of the international development assistance funds earmarked for the social inclusion of Roma, and an improved funding model for the measures envisaged under the Strategy will be proposed based on this review.

Further to the Operational Conclusions of the seminar on social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (June 2021), the European Commission will continue to support the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and its Action Plan, and to provide strategic, expert and financial support to the initiatives, measures and programmes advancing the status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia.

Also, further to the Operational Conclusion of the seminar on social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (June 2021), the Government of the Republic of Serbia, line ministries and the Ministry of European Integration, in its capacity as NIPAC Technical Secretariat, and institutions responsible for international assistance coordination will endeavour to ensure continuing support to the social inclusion of Roma by presenting quality projects focusing on priority areas of Roma integration. The earmarked transfers, assisting local self-government units in developing community-based services will be the sources of regular funding.

Other international donors and financial institutions, including the World Bank, the German Government, the Swiss Government and others will be the source of funding. In addition, a funding source for a group of activities will be determined in the course of the Strategy implementation.

12. ACTION PLAN

The first action plan for the Strategy implementation for the period 2022 – 2024 will be adopted within 90 days after the adoption of this Strategy. The application periods of the action plans following the 2022 – 2024 Action Plan will be determined by the relevant proponent. In preparing the Action Plan for the implementation of this Strategy, an estimate of the required funds, including the sources of funding, will be made for each measure.

13. FINAL PROVISIONS

The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 26/16) will cease to apply as of the publication date of this Strategy.

This Strategy will be published on the Government web page, the web page of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, and e-Government portal, within seven business days from its adoption date.

This Strategy will be published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia.

05 Number: 90-311/2022

In Belgrade, 3 February 2022

G O V E R N M E N T

Correct copy
authenticated by
SECRETARY GENERAL

Novak Nedic

PRIME MINISTER

Ana Brnabic /signed/

14. LIST OF ACRONYMS

BRA – Business Registers Agency
GIZ – German Organisation for International Cooperation
PHCC – Primary Health Care Centre
EUD – EU Delegation
IPA – Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
EUIS – Education Unified Information System
LSG – Local Self-government Units
SEN – Single Education Number
MHMRSD – Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
MLEVSA – Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
MCI – Ministry of Culture and Information
MESTD – Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
MI – Ministry of the Interior
PHI – Public Health Institute
NES – National Employment Service
RNC – National Council of the Roma National Minority of the Republic of Serbia
PD – Persons with Disabilities
PS – Primary Schools
CSO – Civil Society Organisations
FIA – Financial Impact Assessment
PSE – Pre-School education
PSI – Pre-School Institutions
REF – Roma Education Fund
REC – Republic Election Commission
SSO – Serbian Statistical Office
SCTM – Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SSS- Standardised Set of Services
SS – Secondary Schools
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOPS – United Nations Office for Project Services

RISP – Republic Institute for Social Protection

RCC – Regional Cooperation Council

PISP – Provincial Institute for Social Protection

CSW – Centre for Social Work