**Key findings for Roma of the 2020 Report on North Macedonia**

**Fundamental rights**

* Improve community services to identify children at risk and to support children victims of violence, Roma[[1]](#footnote-1) children and adults, and children with disabilities, including by improving inter-agency cooperation.

**Freedom of expression**

* Data on vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities or children from the Roma community need to be further improved to allow for solid policy analysis. Further efforts are needed in raising awareness on violence against children and increasing the professionals’ capacity to identify and report violence against children. Stakeholders should make the best interest of the child their guiding principle.
* The deinstitutionalization process is under way and conditions for children settled into community-based care homes are generally satisfactory. This process has led to the closure of three residential institutions. Ensuring quality of service delivery through effective monitoring is essential. Additional community services are needed to identify children at risk and to support Roma children and children with disabilities who are victims of discrimination and segregation.
* Roma inclusion is receiving increased attention from both the national and the local authorities, though much still needs to be done. Implementation of the Roma inclusion policies is slow and lacking sufficient capacity for implementation, coordination and monitoring. The government has increased funding for Roma integration policies but poor absorption of funds remains a problem.
* Roma people have limited economic opportunities and many fail to earn a living. Only 3% of those benefiting from active labor market policies are Roma. The housing situation is dramatic, with a high proportion of Roma living in illegal settlements and/or substandard and unhygienic environments. The Law on persons without regulated civil status, enabling access to mainstream services for the 750 Roma identified to be without an ID document, was adopted but its implementation is hindered.
* The Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process (Poznan Declaration) was endorsed by the government, but no steps have been taken to implement it. The 2019 Roma Seminar conclusions are yet to be implemented.
* Despite the existence of legal frameworks protecting human rights, Roma are often victims of racism, discrimination and segregation. Systematic measures to address the issue of street children are lacking, and child beggars including young mothers and babies are recorded on the streets. There is no comprehensive approach on Roma asylum seekers and returnees. The Ministries of Health and Education continue to support Roma mediators. Effective actions for capacity building helped Roma NGOs to develop a strong core of well-trained activists ready to handle challenges in their communities. The authorities, in cooperation with donors and civil society, acted during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the most vulnerable, including the Roma. The Roma community is particularly vulnerable in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and it is essential to guarantee full access to heath services in order to control the spead of the virus. Overall, many Roma continue to live in poverty, and face unemployment and substandard living conditions. Their access to education, housing, health and employment and justice remains a concern. Roma children are especially at risk, as poverty and discrimination act as further barriers to receiving education.
* Kosovo Roma refugees estimated at 343, remain in limbo, with an uncertain status. Except for a limited number (16) of recognised refugees, the rest have either subsidiary protection (198) or no status (129), and are just tolerated in the country. After two decades of living in the country, with various statuses, they need the authorities to find a sustainable solution.
* A new Law on foreigners entered into force in May 2019. Among other benefits it grants long-term residence to people who have enjoyed international protection, thus facilitating their local integration. However, they must still present proof of regular income and a registered place of residence to benefit from this provision. Given the extreme vulnerability of some applicants, there is a risk that this new provision remains only theoretical. Such requirements are especially difficult for Kosovo Roma who are still under subsidiary protection. Their status is reviewed every year and prevents them from acquiring long term employment.
* Building on the results of the previous summits with the region, the Western Balkans summit in Poznan focused on strengthening regional cooperation in the fields of economy and trade, the digital agenda, connectivity, security, fight against corruption, promoting reconciliation and youth. The summit endorsed a number of achievements in these fields, in particular the Clean Energy Transition Declaration signed in Podgorica, the Regional Roaming Agreement signed in Belgrade, a substantial connectivity package and the Roma Integration Declaration. It was also the occasion to kick-start the preparation of a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Bulgaria and North Macedonia are co-chairing the Berlin Process in 2020, aimed at stepping up regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

**Chapter 19: Social policy and employment**

* Continue to implement activation measures for long-term and low-skilled unemployed people, including women, persons with disabilities and Roma;
* The employment of Roma, the long-term and low-skilled unemployed and persons with disabilities is supported by the guaranteed minimum assistance scheme introduced by the Law on Social Protection and expected to bring further reduction of poverty through higher coverage and larger benefit.
* The Employment Service Agency’s capacity should be strengthened by recruiting additional staff, especially in light of the increased and diversified workload created by the newly adopted policy measures. Although the number of Roma benefiting from active employment measures increased, it is still 10 times lower than for non-Roma beneficiaries. The criteria for participating in active employment schemes should be reviewed to ensure increased participation of vulnerable people, including Roma.
* Roma and persons with disabilities remain at the highest risk of poverty.

Chapter 26: Education and culture

* Improve access to quality education for all, in particular preschool enrolment, children with disabilities and children from Roma communities.
* Children and students from Roma communities continue to face barriers to regular and quality education and training. The new Law on Primary Education considerably strengthens the legal requirements for inclusive education. However, government investment is also needed. As of January 2019, the cost for 400 Roma children enrolled in early childhood education and care is covered by the state budget through block donations to 20 municipalities. Separation along ethnic lines in education and training continues. Barriers to integrated education and training remain significant.
* On health inequalities, the programme for active healthcare allows several target groups to access healthcare, including the Roma community, people living in remote areas, people living with HIV/AIDS, drug users and people with disabilities. The same programme also helps providing contraceptives to women from socially vulnerable groups, although distribution is done via hospitals. However, the government still needs to adopt a new multiannual strategy to combat HIV.
1. In line with the terminology of European institutions the umbrella term ‘Roma’ is used here to refer to a number of different groups without denying the specificities of these groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)