

# TO ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY

FOR KOSOVO ROMA, ASHKALI  
AND EGYPTIAN COMMUNITIES



**European Union**

Special Representative  
/ EU Office in Kosovo

## What can we do better?

When we think about Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, we think at the same time about the health of youngsters in Roma Mahala in Mitrovica, healed from the lead poisoning, and about the kids that still have to wash car glasses at Pristina crossings in order to survive. We think about great music of Kafu and his Gypsy Groove, but we think also about all of those who still can not use their own language in everyday situations.

Yes, the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are an added value to Kosovo's European identity and cultural heritage, but at the same time throughout Europe, Roma people are going through procedures which are not always at the level of our proclaimed European values.

So we should always ask ourselves and each other: **what can we do better?** I would like to call on all of us, national and international institutions, to assume our full responsibility and ownership in assisting the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and to engage more deeply in their social, economic and cultural development. It is always by the weaker member of the society that the true values and wealth of the society is reflected.

It is not only about the tolerance, it is about fundamental rights. It is not about fake charity, it is about real social struggles. It is not only about donors, it is also about our common honor.

Samuel Žbogar,  
Head of the European Union  
Office in Kosovo and European  
Union Special Representative

## 1. Minority Rights and Roma: an EU priority

**“Societies where Roma do well will be more cohesive and more prosperous too. There is no trade-off between economic efficiency and social equity.”**  
— Laszlo Andor

The EU places great importance on the full protection of human and minority rights. Crucial here are the European Declaration of Human Rights and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, for which the Council of Europe undertakes active monitoring.

In terms of specific minority rights issues requiring particular attention, the European Commission has responded to needs for determined action to address social marginalisation of the Roma community with the adoption of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 in April 2011. The EU Framework strongly encourages member states, candidate and potential candidate countries like Kosovo, **to adopt and develop a targeted approach to Roma inclusion by setting key goals in education, employment, health and housing.** The European Commission has also been proposing solutions to ensure that EU funds, including pre-accession ones, which can support Roma integration, are more effectively used as well as putting in place a robust monitoring mechanism to measure results.

Speaking at the 6th meeting of the **European Platform for Roma Inclusion** in Brussels on November 2011, Commissioner on Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Laszlo Andor, reminded participants that Roma inclusion is a challenge for the EU as a whole, but progress depends on national and local efforts:

“Societies where Roma do well will be more cohesive and more prosperous too. There is no trade-off between economic efficiency and social equity.”

“Many Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians remain marginalised and unable to fulfil their rights”

## 2. How did Kosovo perform to date in the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities?

Article 22 of Kosovo’s Constitution confirms the direct applicability of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report. Key mechanisms to provide for the protection and promotion of non-majority community rights include:

- the Consultative Council for Communities,
- the Assembly Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities
- and the Ministry for Communities and Returns at the central level, as well as
- the Communities Committees
- and Municipal offices for Communities and Returns at the local level.

Specific legislation relating to important aspects of community rights also covers the thematic issues of use of languages, education and anti-discrimination.

Recognised as three different minority communities in the Constitution, the three communities are recorded by the 2011 Housing and Population Census to be 8,824 (Roma), 15,436 (Ashkali) and 11,524 (Egyptian), a total of 35,784 people, just over 2 percent of Kosovo’s total population, although a somewhat weaker participation by minority communities in the

Census survey may mean that actual community sizes are higher.

Legally, these communities benefit from the range of legislative provisions for the protection and promotion of non-majority communities. In reality however, many Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians remain marginalised and unable to fulfil their rights – the three communities are arguably the most vulnerable in Kosovo. Across Kosovo these Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians live in the worst housing conditions, have little access to healthcare and education and face regular discrimination, as well as cases of open hostility.

Kosovo has taken several important steps towards the integration of its Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, often with the support of international organisations and donors. In 2008 work began on developing a strategy with the support of the OSCE, and by the end of that year Kosovo institutions adopted the Strategy for the Integration of Roma,

Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009–2015<sup>1</sup>. This document was followed by the adoption of an accompanying Action Plan, undertaken with the support of the Kosovo Foundation for Open

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Prime Minister, *Strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, 2009–2015*, December 2008; [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/zck/repository/docs/Strategy\\_for\\_the\\_integration\\_of\\_Roma,\\_Ashkali\\_and\\_Egyptian\\_communities\\_2009-2015.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/zck/repository/docs/Strategy_for_the_integration_of_Roma,_Ashkali_and_Egyptian_communities_2009-2015.pdf). The Strategy also has an education component that was adopted separately in July 2007 and covers the period from 2007 to 2017.

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Society and adopted a year later: the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009–2015<sup>2</sup>.

The above mentioned Strategy and Action plan is a wide ranging, inter-institutional, cross-sectoral policy document addressing nine key sectors in Kosovo’s commitment to integrate and include the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. These include:

- **education,**
- **employment and economic empowerment,**
- **health and social affairs,**
- **housing and informal settlements,**
- **returns and reintegration,**
- **registration,**
- **culture, media and information,**
- **participation and representation**
- **and security.**

The Action Plan details the role of the central level institutions in the implementation of the measures aimed at promoting the integration of the three communities and assigns specific roles to several ministries in key sectors in line with their competencies alongside municipalities in Kosovo. Given the broad range of sectors and

<sup>2</sup> OPM, *Kosovo Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009–2015*, December 2009; [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/zck/repository/docs/Action\\_Plan\\_on\\_the\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_Strategy\\_for\\_the\\_integration\\_of\\_Roma,\\_Ashkali\\_and\\_Egyptian\\_Communities\\_2009-2015.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/zck/repository/docs/Action_Plan_on_the_Implementation_of_the_Strategy_for_the_integration_of_Roma,_Ashkali_and_Egyptian_Communities_2009-2015.pdf).

inter-institutional involvement, implementation of the Action Plan is undertaken by the line ministries, executive agencies and municipalities, which have so far received significant assistance from a number of local and international partners.

There are two main mechanisms whose responsibilities for oversight and co-ordination of implementation Action Plan specifically outlines:

- 1. The Technical Working Group** has specific responsibilities for monitoring, reporting, co-ordinating and fund-raising, while
- 2. The Inter-Institutional Steering Committee** represents a higher level of political body and oversight.

Since the approval of the Strategy and Action Plan, key policy level activities have included a conference held jointly in May 2011 by the European Commission and the Office of the Prime Minister, which reviewed progress and made recommendations for future implementation, and the mid-term review process launched in October 2012.

### 3. The 2012–2013 Mid-term Review of the Strategy and Action Plan

The mid-term review of the Strategy and Action Plan was launched in October 2012 with a high-level meeting co-chaired by the Head of the EU Office to Kosovo / EU Special Representative and the Minister of European Integration. This launch meeting was followed by a series of subsequent meetings reviewing each of the nine sectors of the Strategy and Action Plan with technical staff from the Government and International Agencies to discuss improvement of indicators and re-prioritisation of activities. The mid-term review process is in its last stage, concluding with a second high-level meeting in July 2013 to present results and chaired once again by the EU Office / EUSR and the Ministry of European Integration.

The new monitoring framework to be launched as a key product of the mid-term review will assist in demonstrating progress as part of the Government's regular reporting, as well as creating evidence-based policies for targeted approaches to enhance integration of these three communities.

This mid-term review process has adjusted the monitoring of the Action Plan and prioritization of activities to enhance implementation. Technical support to the Office of Good Governance (OGG) from UNICEF has been key in improving practice and systems in this regard.

**“Together, partners in Kosovo have the obligation and the responsibility as duty bearers to ensure that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children are accorded their full rights and full respect to live in dignity”**, said the Head of the UNICEF Kosovo Office. The review has resulted in a revised monitoring framework to assess prog-

ress on an annual basis linked to routine data collection rather than ad-hoc and burdening data collection exercises. Reports on progress during 2009 and 2010 were available on only 75% of actions leaving one fourth without any commentary on developments.

To further compound this issue, the official reports produced by the Government on implementation of the Strategy and Action in 2009 and 2010 were largely in narrative format with limited technical or statistical information, making the collation of various reporting formats challenging to synthesize or compare. As such, the need for a uniform reporting format and adherence to the agreed format became clear. In terms of a monitoring system, the narrative reporting provides only a snapshot approach given the complete absence of baselines and targets to report progress against. In addition to ensuring current efforts are best targeted, improved reporting will provide for lessons learned to guide future work, and, in particular, the development of the next, the post-2015 policy commitments towards Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

The Action Plan includes financial estimates totalling over EUR 20,000,000 and while the earmarking of almost EUR 3,000,000 was announced for 2012 it is unclear how much of this budget has been spent on relevant activities, or whether continued financial commitments will be made and carried through into implementation over the coming years.

These limited financial inputs coupled with the challenges associated with monitoring the Action Plan reduce the ability of the Government to meet the needs of these marginalised communities. It is also important to point out that some municipalities have approved municipal action plans on the integration of the three communities but that there has been no separate budgetary allocation to support the implementation of these municipal plans.

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### 4. Clear commitments of the Government of Kosovo

The sectoral working groups which were established as part of the mid-term review also undertook a prioritization of activities of the Action Plan according to an assessment criterion based on the capacity for the remaining years of the Strategy. This criterion included whether the activity is currently in the relevant annual work plan for 2013 of the responsible institutions as well as the significance of lack of budget, human resources and political will affecting implementation.

This prioritization and monitoring framework are important elements to showcase the clear commitments of the Government of Kosovo to the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as a tangible response to the requirements of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) process and the visa liberalisation dialogue.

- **The Government would need to strengthen co-ordination and communication among relevant institutions, particularly between the central and local levels engendering a more genuine outreach to Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.**
- **There is a need to address the weaknesses in the functioning of institutional arrangements tasked with overseeing the implementation of this Action Plan and Strategy as well as the timely production of regular monitoring reports. The 2011 Annual Report was released in September 2012, too late to influence the 2013 annual work plans of Ministries.**
- **The numerous data collection, studies and assessments committed to in the Action Plan have not been undertaken, further challenging problems faced by these communities. The capacities of institutions to tackle these critical issues are limited.**
- **The insufficient allocation of human and financial resources at central and local levels needs to be addressed with sustained co-ordinated action rather than ad-hoc or isolated efforts.**

#### **Concerns about the limited level of implementation have been expressed by a number of actors.**

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo, which undertakes regular monitoring of human and minority rights in Kosovo through its network of field teams, produced policy reports in 2011 and 2012 reviewing Action Plan progress. The 2011 report concluded that “that in general Kosovo institutions had fallen short of fulfilling their commitments and called for increased efforts”<sup>3</sup>. The 2012 report reached similar conclusions, and expressed concern that at the Action Plan's mid-point so much remained to be done.

**Specific challenges identified by OSCE** included weaknesses in the functioning of the institutional arrangements set up for Action Plan co-ordination (the Technical Working Group and Inter-ministerial Steering Committee), as well as the poor quality of reporting and lack of information available on many areas of the Action Plan, and a continuing “lack of co-ordination and communication” among relevant institutions, and the stakeholders involved, in particular the three communities themselves<sup>4</sup>. Although the 2012 review report highlights some areas of progress and good practice<sup>5</sup>, it notes a lack of concerted or co-ordinated activity in the majority of areas and that the activities which do occur are in many cases provided on an ad hoc basis and through NGO or international donor programmes. Emphasising the need for increased political commitment at all levels, the OSCE's 2012 report underlines that “Kosovo institutions at all levels need to thoroughly assess and re-commit their staff and budgets to implement the activities pledged in the Action Plan by 2015”<sup>6</sup>.

3 OSCE, Contribution to the Progress Review of the Action Plan of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, 2009–2015, October 2012, p6; <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/94856>.

4 OSCE, Contribution to the Progress Review of the Action Plan of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, 2009–2015, October 2012, p5; <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/94856>.

5 Such as action to tackle civil registration obstacles, improve school attendance, find housing solutions and create conditions for sustainable returns and reintegration.

6 OSCE, Contribution to the Progress Review of the Action Plan of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, 2009–2015, October 2012, p5; <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/94856>.

## 5. What is the European Union doing for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo?

Since 2000 the EU has committed over 50 million EUR towards all minority communities in Kosovo in various programs addressing minority return and community stabilization. Of this amount some 25-30 % has addressed needs of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo.

### Some of the main sectors in this assistance can be briefly summarized as follows:

In partnership with the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society the EU has allocated 1 million EUR (IPA 2009) particularly to support the implementation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Strategy targeting two main areas:

- support to education (including pre-school education)
- and the promotion of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian culture and media.

This included the setting up of six learning centers in five municipalities (Prizren, Gračanica/ Gračanica, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjakovë/ Đakovica and Ferizaj/Uroševac) as well as 220 scholarships for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian secondary school and university students. The project ended on the 28th of February 2013 and it is encouraging that the above five municipalities have taken over financial support of these six learning centers.

**Return and reintegration of displaced persons** has been a key focus area. In an effort to facilitate the return of those displaced as a result of the conflict the EU has assisted Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families to return to Kosovo. One of the most notable in this field is the multi-sectoral resettlement project that facilitated Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families from lead contaminated camps of Cesmin Lug and Osterode to resettle to the Roma Mahalla in Mitrovica. Out of a total of 33 million EUR some 32 % were offered to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The IPA 2013 envelope of 3.33 million EUR will address the return and reintegration of Roma Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

**The Community Stabilisation Programme** targets those who never left Kosovo or those who returned and need additional assistance to reintegrate back in society. Over the years the EU has financed many projects benefiting minority communities in an effort to improve their socio-economic situation, create jobs and offer better living conditions. Through these projects more than 2,000 small-medium enterprises and community development projects were supported creating or securing some 8,000 jobs in minority areas.

Out of a total of 17.6 million EUR, 17-20% were provided to the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

## 6. EU requirements and recommendations for Kosovo institutions in relation to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

The integration of Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities is a priority in the **Feasibility Study of 10 October 2012** which assessed Kosovo's readiness to start negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA)

The 2012 Feasibility Study stipulates that:

“Kosovo also needs to progress on implementing the strategy and action plan for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, including through the allocation of necessary funds. Kosovo needs to increase the overall share of persons belonging to minorities in public administration”.

It also mentions Kosovo's application for the Roma Decade membership as a positive initiative, and notes that the EU Office in Kosovo will support and encourage its inclusiveness and participation in the process.

The integration of the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities has been clearly and consistently reported every year in the European Commission's Progress Reports. These documents have reported (and will continue to report) on the most salient issues affecting the vulnerability and difficulties faced by these three communities: access to education, housing/resettlement/return/integration, social protection, civil registration etc.

Since the launching of the Strategy and Action Plan in 2009 the EC's progress review has consistently made reference to the

implementation of these commitments, and to important developments, such as the closing of the lead contaminated camps in Northern Kosovo.

In January 2012 the EC launched a visa liberalisation dialogue with the Kosovo Government and in June 2012 handed over a roadmap towards a visa-free regime. In February 2013 the EC published a first report on Kosovo's progress in fulfilling the requirements of the visa liberalisation roadmap. Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and the strategy and action plan are included within the relevant section pertaining to Human and Fundamental Rights (Block 4). The 2013 Visa Liberalisation Roadmap Report indicates that the **"situation of these minorities' remains very poor. The implementation of this strategy and action plan remains limited"**.

Further, one of the report's recommendations is to: **"Implement and enforce the strategy and action plan on the integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities"**.

Kosovo authorities both at central and local levels will face increasing challenges in the years to come in accommodating and integrating members from the three communities who are repatriated from other countries in the region, i.e. Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav, Republic of Macedonia, and from Western European countries. In the above mentioned visa liberalisation report return figures to Kosovo show that between January and September 2012, 30% belonged to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. How Kosovo institutions respond to these challenges will be a key area of assessment for European accession processes.

"Kosovo authorities both at central and local levels will face increasing challenges in the years to come in accommodating and integrating members from the three communities who are repatriated from other countries in the region"

The EU welcomed the formal appointment in May 2013 of the Minister of European Integration as the Chair of the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan for integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. This provides a renewed political impetus to helping these communities. The EU also commends the municipal authorities in Kosovo that have adopted localized strategies in response to specific local needs, as municipalities are on the 'frontline' of problems afflicting these communities: regularizing informal settlements and improving access to education among other challenges.

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# Recommendations

The EU looks forward to the Government of Kosovo's completion of the mid-term review process and to the subsequent priority-guided and accelerated implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan, including regular reporting enhanced by indicator-based data analysis.

- Improving the government's capacities to formulate evidence-based policies, monitor progress and deliver tangible improvements in people's lives is of particular importance given Kosovo's European integration aspirations and the need **to align national statistics, monitoring and policy formulation with EU standards and requirements.**
- Further efforts towards enhanced integration of Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian communities will be an important factor for **monitoring progress related to the Visa Liberalisation process.**
- The EU and other key organizations from the international community encourage the Kosovo authorities to prioritize the implementation of the

remaining actions of the Strategy and Action Plan, including those requiring **increased budget allocations.**

- In order to achieve enhanced implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan, the EU strongly encourages Kosovo institutions **to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation and mechanisms with the line ministries**, between central and local levels, and with other governmental bodies. In this regard, and in line with key tenets of the European Platform, the EU calls on Kosovo institutions to engage more deeply with relevant civil society and representatives of Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian communities, seeking their genuine involvement in policy-making and implementation which affects them.
- Such progress and reporting, alongside the full involvement of the three communities, will be important to guide the development of **a post-2015 policy commitment** to Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

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- To align national statistics, monitoring and policy formulation with EU standards and requirements.
- To monitor progress related to the Visa Liberalisation process.
- To increase budget allocations.
- To strengthen inter-institutional co-operation and mechanisms with the line ministries.
- To guide the development of a post-2015 policy commitment.



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