



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
MISSION IN KOSOVO**

**Implementation of the Action Plan on the Strategy for the
Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
Communities in Kosovo**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Action Plan: Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009-2015

AOGG: Advisory Office on Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues

Committee: Inter-Institutional Steering Committee

Commission on Culture: Commission on Culture and Information

CRPK: Civil Rights Programme in Kosovo

MCR: Ministry for Communities and Return

MCYS: Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports

MESP: Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning

MEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

MLGA: Ministry of Local Government Administration

MLSW: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

MoH: Ministry of Health

MIA: Ministry of Internal Affairs

OCA: Office for Community Affairs

OPM: Office of the Prime Minister

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Strategy: Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, 2009-2015

Working Group: Technical Working Group

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews initial activities undertaken by Kosovo institutions - at the central and local levels - to implement the measures foreseen by the Action Plan on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities (2009-2015). The report is based on regular monitoring activities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission in Kosovo (OSCE) aimed at promoting and protecting human and communities rights. In order to gather the necessary information, the OSCE conducted interviews with representatives of the relevant ministries, governmental offices, municipal officials, and international and local stakeholders working to support the integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The report covers the period from December 2009 to September 2010. Events such as the long-delayed closure of the lead-contaminated Česmin Lug camp in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, which had been inhabited by Roma and Ashkali displaced persons, have been included despite falling outside this reporting period.

The report finds that, although steps have been taken, Kosovo institutions fall short of fulfilling their commitments to create appropriate conditions for the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. At the central level, following the establishment of mechanisms for co-ordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan, several ministries have taken actions in their respective sectors. Positive developments are observed mainly in the field of regularization of informal settlements and support for return and reintegration, as well as in the protection and promotion of cultural identity of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. However, significant obstacles remain for the full implementation of the Action Plan, mainly due to lack of full political engagement, insufficient allocation of resources and lack of adequate communication between central and local level institutions. Increased efforts should now be undertaken if all goals of the Action Plan are to be achieved by 2015. At the local level, some municipalities have taken positive steps towards fulfilling the goals outlined by the Action Plan. Yet, the role and engagement of many municipalities has remained marginal. In many cases, civil society actors rather than municipalities have taken a lead role through engaging the community and striving to fulfil the goals outlined in the Action Plan.

Based on the findings, the report provides a series of recommendations calling on the responsible institutions to demonstrate their commitment towards improving the conditions of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and their integration into society. To this end, actions aimed at empowering and resourcing the mechanisms established to guide and assess the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan should become a priority of the Kosovo government. Moreover, information campaigns to ensure that municipal officials, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and the general public are fully aware of the Strategy should be implemented without delay.

2. INTRODUCTION

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians belong to the most vulnerable communities in Europe¹. Their situation is of particular concern in Kosovo, where they are amongst the most disadvantaged groups. The Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities have traditionally lived in Kosovo, with estimates rising up to 150,000 persons belonging to these communities prior to the conflict in 1999.² Today, between 35,000 and 40,000³ Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are believed to reside in Kosovo.

On 24 December 2008, the Kosovo government approved the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities,⁴ covering the period from 2009 until 2015. (Strategy).⁵ One year later, in December 2009, the government endorsed the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities, 2009-2015 (Action Plan), detailing concrete measures to be taken by relevant central and local level institutions as well as a timeline and budgetary estimates for their implementation.⁶

The Strategy contains an analysis of the conditions and the specific challenges faced by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo whereas the Action Plan outlines concrete measures to be taken to address the challenges identified. The activities proposed in the Action Plan fall into four main categories. Firstly, the document calls for a set of surveys, evaluations and research studies aimed at filling the gap of quantitative and qualitative data on all life aspects of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Secondly, positive actions and policies are outlined to improve the socio-economic and representative status of the three communities and to remedy the deeply-rooted social exclusion they have been experiencing to date. Thirdly, information-sharing as well as awareness-raising activities are foreseen targeting the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as well as civil servants and the public at large, aimed at accelerating the process of social inclusion. Finally, the Action Plan places a special emphasis on the promotion of the three communities' heritage, culture and identities.

The Strategy and its Action Plan aim at fostering the integration of the three communities in the key sectors of education, employment and economic empowerment, health and social

¹ Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo 2009-2015, page 5: "It is well known that throughout Europe, Roma (and Ashkali and Egyptians) have been subject to discrimination for centuries. Even today they face discrimination and racial stereotypes and are in the narrow cycle of discrimination, poverty and exclusion, and remain one of the most vulnerable minorities in Europe".

² See Council of Europe, Report to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, Parliamentary Assembly: *Situation of Longstanding Refugees and Displaced Persons in South East Europe*, Doc. 11289 rev. 24 May 2007.

³ Office of the Prime Minister, *Strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo*, December 2008, p. 7.

⁴ Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians identify themselves as three distinct communities. However, as they experience similar challenges to their enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, broadly common policies aimed at improving their living conditions have been developed by international and local stakeholders.

⁵ The Strategy has an education component that was adopted in July 2007 and covers the period from 2007 to 2017.

⁶ The development of the Strategy was a common effort of the Office of Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister, relevant Ministries, the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, as well as representatives of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The OSCE also contributed to the drafting and reviewing of some of these aspects. The Strategy and the Action Plan are available at the following link: <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/zck/?page=2,128> (accessed 7 April 2011).

affairs, housing and informal settlements, returns and reintegration, registration, participation and representation, security, police and justice as well as media, culture and information. Gender and anti-discrimination, as crosscutting themes, are anchored in all abovementioned sectors.

3. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The effective implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan is to be ensured by relevant ministries, municipalities and relevant offices within the Office of the Prime Minister, in close co-operation with relevant local and international partners. The Action Plan foresees the establishment of a **Technical Working Group (Working Group)** and an **Inter-Institutional Steering Committee (Committee)** tasked to oversee the co-ordinated efforts of the government to implement the policy framework for the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The **Working Group**⁷ is meant to co-ordinate governmental and donor investments on funding priority matters and is chaired by the Head of the Advisory Office on Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues (AOGG)⁸ under the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). The Working Group is also mandated to draft bi-annual and annual reports documenting progress in the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan. Established on 23 July 2010, the Working Group has fallen short of respecting the requirement set by the Action Plan to meet no less than four times per year, while failing also to prepare the mandated bi-annual report.⁹

The **Committee** is a political body set up to ensure co-ordination between the government and non-governmental sectors in the implementation of activities envisaged by the Action Plan and is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister.¹⁰ The Committee held its inaugural meeting on 8 July 2010, seven months after the endorsement of the Action Plan, without the representative of the Communities Consultative Council¹¹ who was only appointed in September 2010. The main outcome of this first meeting included a set of recommendations

⁷ The Working Group also includes representatives of the Office of Communities Affairs, the Ministry of Communities and Return, the Agency for Co-ordination of Development and European Integration, the Gender Equality Agency, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, as well as external donors.

⁸ The AOGG is operational within the Office of the Prime Minister since March 2002 and is mandated to mainstream the promotion and protection of human rights across policies and activities of the government of Kosovo.

⁹ In the second meeting held by the end of March 2011, the Working Group reported to be in the process of drafting the annual report on the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan, to be further discussed at the following meeting.

¹⁰ The Committee also includes the Head of the AOGG, the Director of the Office for Communities Affairs, one representative each from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, the Ministry of Health, a representative appointed by the Communities Consultative Council, the Ombudsperson and one representative for each of the three communities.

¹¹ The Communities Consultative Council (Council) operates within the Office of the President of Kosovo. It is composed of communities' and government representatives with the aim of furthering communities' and their members' access to and participation in the political, economic and social life in Kosovo. It provides a mechanism for regular exchange between the communities and the government, and gives the communities the opportunity to comment on legislative or policy initiatives prepared by the government and to seek to have their views incorporated in initiatives specifically affecting communities. The Council includes 28 members, out of which 20 represent non-Albanian communities and the other members represent relevant ministries, the Office of the President and the Office of the Prime Minister and the Assembly of Kosovo.

for improving co-ordination among relevant ministries, information sharing and outreach to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and reporting about the implementation of relevant activities. In March 2010, the AOGG announced the criteria and the procedures for the selection of members of civil society from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. On 26 May 2010, the government appointed members from the NGOs “Iniciativa 6”, “Qendra e Komitetit Ashkali”, and “Fahri Vraniqi” to represent the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities respectively. Doubts have been voiced by some community members about the transparency of the selection procedures and the legitimacy of the selected representatives, but no formal complaints have been submitted.

The approval of the Action Plan in December 2009, which was too late for funds to be allocated for its implementation in 2010,¹² meant that relevant ministries and municipalities could not adequately plan to begin its implementation in a timely manner. Moreover, the establishment of the Working Group and Committee to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan occurred only in the second half of 2010, negatively affecting the start of the process. Nonetheless, some measures at both central and local levels were implemented and are reviewed below.

3.1. CENTRAL LEVEL

The Action Plan emphasizes the fundamental role of central level institutions as responsible for the implementation of the measures aimed at promoting the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo. Besides the oversight and co-ordination role assigned to the OPM, the Action Plan gives specific roles to several ministries in accordance with the sectors of their competence. Following this, several ministries began to take steps to start with activities related to the implementation of the Action Plan. Modest progress has been noted in the implementation of initiatives in the areas of return, regularization of informal settlements, culture and education. By comparison, no significant developments have occurred with regard to employment and economic empowerment, participation and representation, as well as security, police service and justice. The main efforts taken by the central level institutions are reviewed below.

The **OPM**, through the **AOGG** and the **Office for Community Affairs (OCA)**¹³, remains central to ensure efficient co-operation among relevant institutions, necessary to implement the Strategy and its Action Plan. Between February and March 2010, the two Offices, in co-operation with the OSCE, organized five regional roundtables¹⁴ to raise awareness on the Action Plan among relevant municipal institutions and communities representatives. The events attracted approximately 300 participants who discussed municipal responsibilities relating to the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan and possible means of co-operation to maximize the efforts of all stakeholders. The OCA has also been active in the protection and promotion of the rights of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

¹² Law No. 03/L-048 on Public Financial Management and Accountability, 15 June 2008. The deadline for the submission for approval of the Kosovo Consolidated Budget is 31 October.

¹³ The Office for Community Affairs (OCA) is established within the Office of the Prime Minister with the mandate to contribute in the co-ordination of government’s efforts to implement the legal framework on communities’ rights and to ensure that governmental policies and actions adequately meet the needs and interests of communities.

¹⁴ The roundtables were held between 22 February and 3 March 2010 in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Pejë/Peć, Prizren and Istog/Istok.

through the implementation of projects targeting the most vulnerable socio-economic cases, and by allocating funds to mark the holidays celebrated by these communities. However, more could have been done to ensure the dissemination of information through the relevant line ministries and municipalities, a crucial aspect of the leading role assigned to the OPM.

The Action Plan identifies the **Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)**, the **Ministry of Health (MoH)** and the **Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW)** as the three key institutions responsible for the implementation of the goals envisaged in the **education** sector. These ministries are responsible for promoting an inclusive and high quality education system based on fairness, equality and respect for diversity, thus contributing to the full integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in society. In June 2010, the MEST endorsed a curriculum in Romani language, making Romani grammar and Roma culture and history an optional subject during the school year 2010/2011.¹⁵ On 2 July 2010, the MEST launched a three-month tender for the development of relevant textbooks, which expired on 2 October 2010. This meant that the publication would take place after the start of the school year. Although the MEST identified 25 teachers for Romani grammar, culture and history, no specific training has been delivered to support them in their duties, while only four awareness-raising meetings took place in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Prizren municipalities to encourage parents to enrol their children in the specialized subjects. Roundtables targeting parents on their responsibilities regarding compulsory education have been held in co-operation with the Kosovo Parents Education Committee in some municipalities¹⁶ while targeted support has been offered to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children with specific language and learning challenges.¹⁷ As part of the MEST policy addressing all primary school children, 3,399 Ashkali, 1,067 Egyptian and 941 Roma pupils were provided with free schoolbooks for the year 2009/2010. According to MEST officials, for the same school year, 158 pupils and 44 students from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities received scholarships in the amount of 150 Euro each as a result of a project implemented in co-operation with the **Ministry for Communities and Return (MCR)** and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Despite the positive steps outlined above, there are no examples of developed or implemented activities regarding access to pre-primary school, organization of catch-up classes, or summer schools. Similarly, no workshops or training for teachers were organized, and, although foreseen in the Action Plan, no training programs for parents and teachers on identification and prevention of possible cases of segregation and discrimination were delivered.

Within the **health and social affairs** sector, the Action Plan calls for improving the social and health status, service quality and access to the health and social system without discrimination for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. In order to achieve this goal, the Action Plan assigns a leading role to the **MoH** and the **MLSW**, while the **Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP)** is in charge for the promotion of a healthy

¹⁵ On 21 June 2010, the MEST issued Administrative Instruction No. 7/2010 endorsing the Romani curriculum within the Kosovo institution's education system.

¹⁶ Prizren, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Pejë/Peć.

¹⁷ Out of 36 returnee children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities identified by MEST, 16 children participated in the Albanian language classes provided by MEST. In addition, MEST identified five children with special needs from these communities throughout Kosovo, and drafted individual plans offering them support in pilot projects for the school year 2010/2011.

environment and sustainable sanitary conditions. Yet, the only activity specifically carried out to improve access by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians to social welfare and health services is the establishment of a technical working group within the MoH. Foreseen under the Action Plan, the technical working group is mandated to collect information on the health conditions of members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Yet, the working group met once during the reporting period and none of the foreseen activities, including the publication of the survey and the creation of a database of the communities' needs, were implemented – reportedly due to financial constraints within the MoH. As of July 2010, the MLSW provided social assistance support to 2,252 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families, including an exemption from paying electricity bills up to a certain amount.¹⁸ In the period January-June 2010, twenty Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families benefited from an emergency assistance scheme worth 100-300 Euro per year, which is provided in cases of natural disasters and extremely difficult living conditions. Additionally, the MLSW provided accommodation for a week to 47 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian persons, as well as transportation to the municipality of origin to 74 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian persons who were forcibly repatriated.

With regard to **housing and informal settlements**, the Action Plan seeks to improve the quality of life and to provide sustainable solutions for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities living in informal settlements, collective centers and in inadequate housing conditions. The Action Plan assigns key roles in this sector to the **MESP, the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA)** and **the MCR**. In order to promote the regularization of informal settlements, mainly inhabited by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, the MESP initiated in March 2010 the drafting process for the Strategy on Identification and Regularization of Informal Settlements¹⁹, in line with the Action Plan and several other local and international instruments.²⁰ A positive example of an ongoing regularization is the project in the Ali Ibra/Kolonija settlement in Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality, which aims at improving the living conditions of 140 Egyptian, Roma, Ashkali, Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian families living there.²¹

In order to establish optimal conditions to enable **return and reintegration**, including **repatriation**, of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, the Action Plan entrusts key roles to the **Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)**, the **MCR**, the **MLGA**, the **MESP** as well as the **OPM** through its **AOGG** and the **OCA**. The MCR has proved to be among the most active institutions in relation to the implementation of the Action Plan, successfully meeting its obligation to systematically collect requests for voluntary returns in a database. Moreover, since the adoption of the Action Plan the MCR contributed, through its

¹⁸ Following an agreement between the MLSW, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and the Kosovo Energy Corporation, families who are included in the social assistance scheme are entitled to a subsidy of up to 500 KWh of energy per month.

¹⁹ The draft Strategy on Identification and Regularization of Informal Settlements, developed by a working group set up by MESP, was presented on 10 March 2011, to remain open for the following 30 days for public comments. The document is available on the website: http://www.ks-gov.net/mmph/new_web/dph/Strategjija_dhjetor_shqip.pdf (accessed 7 April 2011).

²⁰ See Law No. 03/L-106 Amending Law on Spatial Planning No. 2003/14, 25 November 2008. See also the *Vienna Declaration on National and Regional Policy and Programs on Informal Settlements in South-Eastern Europe*, Ministerial Conference on Informal Settlements in South Eastern Europe, Vienna, 28 September – 1 October 2004.

²¹ The project is jointly supported by the OCA, Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality and Caritas Switzerland. The project, expected to be finalized by mid 2012, aims at resettling the beneficiaries from socially owned land to 3.85 hectares of municipal land allocated by the Gjakovë/Đakovica municipal assembly and to support their education and economic integration.

budget and with the support of donors, to the organization of return activities including the refurbishment or reconstruction of houses for approximately 160 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families. Other supporting activities included the delivery of support packages and the implementation of small scale projects aimed at improving the sustainability of returns projects. In addition, 511 displaced Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (160 women), participated in Go-and-See Visits, 608 (135 women) in Go-and-Inform Visits²² and 173 (21 women) participated in municipal working groups in their municipalities of origin.²³ Other activities included the allocation of 50,000 Euro for the implementation of a project aimed at regularizing the informal settlement of Ali Ibra/Kolonija in Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality, mainly inhabited by the Egyptian community, and the donation of 200,000 Euro, in co-operation with the OCA, for housing support in the Dubrava neighbourhood in Ferizaj/Uroševac. The MCR also encouraged Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality to grant a 99-year land allocation in the Roma Mahalla to the Roma and Ashkali residing in the lead contaminated camps in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë.²⁴ However, no specific budget resources have been allocated to offer medical treatment to the residents exposed to lead once the relocation to the southern part of town is completed.²⁵ The MCR also advocated for finding a sustainable solution for the displaced Roma currently residing in the camp in Leposavić/Leposaviq municipality, who have not received any such assistance to date.

Most significant challenges remain when it comes to providing sustainable solutions for repatriated persons from western European countries. As for this, the MIA has not yet established a case management database for forcibly repatriated persons. An inter-ministerial co-ordination board,²⁶ mandated to oversee the implementation of the Revised Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons,²⁷ has been established at the level of permanent

²² Go-and-see visits provide displaced persons with the opportunity to gather first-hand information on the conditions in their place of origin and to directly interact and engage with the receiving community to make an informed decision about returns or other durable solutions. They are invited to visit their homes and meet with neighbors, community members and local institutions as part of an organized visit to discuss issues of particular interest, such as housing reconstruction assistance, employment and income generation opportunities, security and freedom of movement, social welfare and pensions, education and other public services. Go-and-inform visits are conducted in the location of displacement, during which the displaced communities receive information about the situation in their places of origin and potential return sites, including socio-economic conditions, security, freedom of movement as well as on the return procedures and support mechanisms available to them. See also UNMIK/PISG Revised Manual on Sustainable Return, July 2006.

²³ Such activities were carried out by the MCR in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, and the Danish Refugee Council.

²⁴ On 6 April 2010, the Prime Minister issued a letter to all mayors requesting “to allocate land on long term use for returnees and international returns projects for 99 years as foreseen by law, in order to guarantee sustainability of the returns process”. On 16 July 2010, the MCR sent a letter to the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica mayor inviting him to allocate land for 99 years in the Roma Mahalla for the residents of the lead contaminated camps in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. However, the municipality failed to make the commitment.

²⁵ The United States Agency for International Development and the European Commission Liaison Office in Kosovo funded two programs aimed at the closure of the lead contaminated camps of Česmin Lug and Osterode, in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. On 1 February 2011, the ceremony marking the closure of the Česmin Lug camp was held, while the remaining 39 Roma and Ashkali families in Osterode camp are expected to be resettled to Roma Mahalla by the end of July 2011.

²⁶ The co-ordination board does not target specifically the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, but the needs of all the repatriated persons.

²⁷ Government of Kosovo, Revised Strategy for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, April 2010.

secretaries within the ministries, but it does not include representatives of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Finally, the Action Plan assigns a role to the **Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)** in the protection and promotion of **cultural identity and heritage** of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. As envisaged by the Action Plan, the MCYS established the Committee on Culture and Information²⁸ (Committee on Culture) with the aim of increasing participation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in policy-making processes and the implementation of policies in the field of culture. Efforts have been undertaken also to increase the representation of the three communities within the MCYS.²⁹ In addition to this, the MCYS awarded five projects to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian non-governmental organizations for an overall amount of 5,650 Euro and provided funds for 17,144 Euro to projects aimed at promoting the cultural identity of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.³⁰ In July and August 2010, the Deputy Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports visited some municipalities with the aim to facilitate co-operation between central and local level institutions and emphasized the importance of supporting these communities also in the fields of culture, youth and sports.

3.2. LOCAL LEVEL

In co-operation with and in support of the central level, municipalities are the key local institutions responsible for the implementation of strategies, policies and programs devised by the Action Plan. Yet, at the municipal level, awareness concerning the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan is very limited, indicating a lack of co-ordination among all the stakeholders and lack of communication between the central- and local-level institutions.³¹ No official instructions have been provided to the local-level institutions regarding the implementation of these documents. Furthermore, municipalities were not requested to allocate funds for the implementation of the Action Plan in their budget plans for 2011. Therefore, none of the municipalities has submitted to the Ministry of Economy and Finance specific requests related to the implementation of the Action Plan. It is reasonable to infer that this absence of funding is hampering the implementation of budgetary activities for the year 2011 and may show a lack of will by Kosovo institutions in respect to the commitments made in endorsing the Strategy.

Despite this lack of awareness and co-ordination, however, several municipalities have independently and pro-actively taken positive steps toward fulfilling the goals outlined by the Action Plan, which are described below.

In regards to **participation in the education system**, the Action Plan aims at bringing about a significant improvement for members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. In

²⁸ The committee was established by the MCYS Decision No.1377/2010 and met for the first time on 24 June 2010. It is composed of six members including one representative for each of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and three officials from the MCYS.

²⁹ The Committee on Culture selected three students from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities for a three-month internship in different departments of the MCYS.

³⁰ MCYS, *Work Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo by Central Level Institutions*, objective 2: "promotion of cultural identity of three communities through protection of cultural heritage and support of cultural activities".

³¹ Some municipal officials asked the OSCE field teams to provide them with copies of the Strategy and the Action Plan, as they reported that they had not received them.

a number of cases,³² local level institutions have made some inroads toward achieving this aim. For example, municipal officials in co-operation with or supported by local and international organizations have conducted campaigns aimed at increasing school attendance of Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian pupils and preventing absenteeism through the establishment of formal channels of communication between the schools and the families.³³ However, much still remains to be done. For instance, at the time of reporting, there have been no specific actions taken to promote access to schools for Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian girls.

In relation to **employment and economic empowerment**, the main goal of the Action Plan is to improve the economic situation of the communities through developing policies to facilitate their access to the labour market. A small number of municipalities have implemented employment initiatives targeting these communities.³⁴ Furthermore, a number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are employed in public utility companies where their salaries are jointly paid by the municipality and external donors.³⁵ With regard to **health and social affairs** local-level institutions were somewhat more proactive. For example, a number of municipalities organised awareness campaigns,³⁶ while some others conducted field visits to settlements inhabited by these communities, or have health centres located in or nearby the settlements providing support on a daily basis.³⁷ Furthermore, following up on a number of recommendations made by community representatives, and in order to improve the living conditions in the settlements inhabited by the Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities, a number of municipalities implemented infrastructural projects targeting those specific settlements.³⁸ In relation to **housing and informal settlements**, the Action Plan strives to find housing solutions for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities living in collective centres and in inadequate housing conditions. Yet, at the time of reporting, only Istog/Istok and Klinë/Klina municipalities had established working groups to assess the living conditions of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, while only Istog/Istok had produced a report with recommendations on necessary steps to improve them.

³² Positive developments have been observed in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Istog/Istok, Klinë/Klina, Prishtinë/Priština, Shtime/Štimlje, Obiliq/Obilić, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, and Rahovec/Orahovac municipalities.

³³ This has been achieved through a number of activities such as door-to-door campaigns and printing and distribution of leaflets.

³⁴ Rahovec/Orahovac municipality informed that in autumn 2009 an agreement signed with a private company allowed for the seasonal employment of 50 persons, both male and female, from the Ali Ibra/Kolonja settlement, while an identical agreement is expected to be signed also this year. In the Prizren region a number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are employed by a cleaning company. In Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/Obilić, Istog/Istok, and Novo Brdo/Novobërdë a number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are employed in reconstruction works of houses in settlements inhabited by these communities.

³⁵ In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the public utility company “Uniteti” has employed 20 Roma and Ashkali residing in the Roma Mahalla with the support of the Danish Refugee Council. In Istog/Istok, within the framework of the “Return and Reintegration Project” sponsored by UNDP, some Egyptians were employed in the reconstruction of houses in village of Serbobran/Srbobrane.

³⁶ The awareness campaigns were not specifically targeted at the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities but the entire population.

³⁷ Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Lipjan/Lipljan, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Klinë/Klina, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Istog/Istok, and Gjakovë/Đakovica.

³⁸ For example, Ferizaj/Uroševac municipality built a new health care centre and constructed a sewage system in the Sallahane/Salahane and Dubravë/Dubrava neighbourhoods, predominantly inhabited by Ashkali; roads were asphalted and sewage systems repaired in Gjilan/Gnjilane and Viti/Vitina; basic medication was provided to the *ambulanta* (health centre) in the Roma Mahalla in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and doctors have been made available three times per week.

With reference to **returns and reintegration**, including repatriation, the Action Plan urges the responsible municipal institutions to cooperate with the central level in order to strengthen the system of collecting and processing information on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as well as to devise relevant policies and to ensure effective services to address the needs of repatriated persons. However, there has been little progress at the local level to develop and implement policies, strategies and programmes aimed to specifically address the needs of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian displaced persons. Access to property and property repossession remains challenging and continues to hamper the return process, as the lack of adequate property titles amongst many Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians is still prevalent.³⁹

Municipalities have not taken actions to address the specific needs of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians forcibly **repatriated** to Kosovo - mainly from Western European countries - to ensure their equitable access to services. Again, this is mainly the result of a general lack of communication between the central- and the local-level institutions, the latter often unaware of their responsibilities deriving from both the Action Plan and the Revised Strategy for Re-integration of Repatriated Persons. In general, municipal officials do not consider repatriated persons as a separate category and fail to adopt relevant policies or programs. Against this backdrop, the situation is of particular concern when it comes to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, due to the difficulties they face when it comes to **civil registration**. Very little has been implemented with this regard, although the Action Plan specifically urges the municipalities to encourage and accelerate the process of registration through awareness-raising campaigns and the declaration of the month of free registration foreseen in the Action Plan.⁴⁰ At the time of writing only three municipalities had declared the month of free registration⁴¹ and only two municipalities⁴² had established review boards to enable individuals without any documents to register.

Areas such as **participation and representation, culture, media and information** have been mainly neglected by local level institutions with no significant actions implemented by municipalities.

On a positive note, **civil society** actors have taken the lead in some municipalities by drafting local action plans and engaging in consultative processes with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities' representatives, media, and municipal officials, in order to spearhead the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan.⁴³ A number of positive initiatives promoting access to civil registration amongst Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

³⁹ For example, despite efforts by the OPM and the MCR, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality did not allocate land for 99 years for the relocation of the Roma and Ashkali from the lead contaminated camps in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë and Leposavić/Leposaviq municipality to the Roma Mahalla in the southern part of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

⁴⁰ The Action Plan instructs that "all municipalities declare once a year the free of charge civil registration month, for unregistered persons and children born outside the health care system".

⁴¹ Ferizaj/Uroševac, Štrpce/Shtërpçë and Prizren. According to the chairperson of the Communities Committee in Suharekë/Suva Reka this municipality also declared the month of free registration but the information was not confirmed by the Civil Registration Center. While Ferizaj/Uroševac and Štrpce/Shtërpçë municipalities do not have data on the results of the initiative, in Prizren no members of the Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities applied for registration.

⁴² Istog/Istok and Klinë/Klina.

⁴³ In Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Lipjan/Lipljan, and Prizren. The drafting of local action plans has been generally initiated and supported by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, with the involvement of local non-governmental organizations, municipal officials and community representatives.

have also been developed and implemented by civil society organisations. The Civil Rights Program in Kosovo (CRPK) has been instrumental in supporting local level institutions in facilitating civil registration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities have also been able to access civil registration for free in all municipalities through the support of CRPK, or by the municipality itself in cases where the person is exempt from paying a fee due to being a social case. In other cases, civil society actors have co-operated and supported municipal officials to conduct campaigns aimed at increasing school attendance of Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian pupils.⁴⁵ In those municipalities where civil society took the lead, positive evidence of community engagement and mobilisation around the Strategy and its aims was noted. This represents a positive development in an otherwise disappointing picture of engagement at the municipal level.

4. CONCLUSION

The Strategy and its Action Plan are sophisticated and ambitious policy documents aiming at the full integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo based upon the principle of equality. However, their implementation, both at the central and local level, lags behind the commitments set forth in the Action Plan. The institutional framework put in place to ensure the implementation of the Action Plan has not been able to fully perform its co-ordination and oversight role, and only modest achievements have been reached by the key relevant ministries. However, few efforts have been made by central level institutions to ensure that municipalities are adequately informed about the content and measures foreseen by the Strategy and Action Plan, while relevant co-ordination mechanisms have failed to ensure formal communication between central- and local-level institutions. Consequently, municipalities remain uninformed about their responsibilities because of a lack of central-level instructions outlining procedures and assigning clear responsibilities.

The late adoption of the Action Plan in December 2009 did not allow ministries and municipalities to allocate funds from the Kosovo Consolidated Budget for its implementation in 2010. In addition, the ministerial and municipal representatives interviewed for this report have not indicated their intention to request specific funds for the implementation of the Strategy for 2011, casting further doubts about its sustainability.

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representation is ensured in all the mechanisms established to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan, but doubts about their effective capacity to represent their communities have been raised by some community members. The perceived lack of consultation amongst communities during the development phase of the Action Plan undermines their commitment towards the implementation of relevant actions and leads to a lack of ownership on the part of the communities.

The implementation of initiatives and measures in the areas of return and reintegration, culture, and education are positive developments towards ensuring the sustainable integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo. Noteworthy, the closure of the lead-contaminated Česmin Lug camp in the northern part of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë waited for more than eleven years, represents a fundamental achievement in regard to the protection of the

⁴⁴ Activities implemented by CRPK include awareness raising campaigns on television and radio or through door-to-door visits, meetings, printing and dissemination of leaflets, brochures, and posters.

⁴⁵ In Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Istog/Istok, Klinë/Klina, Prishtinë/Priština, Shtime/Štimlje, Obiliq/Obilić, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, and Rahovec/Orahovac municipalities.

rights of these communities. In addition, there are signals that sustainable solutions will also be found for those Roma and Ashkali who live in displacement in the still existing camps in northern Kosovo and who suffer from a high level of lead contamination.

On the other hand, there is an urgent need to ensure that the implementation of the Strategy will include those sectors that have been almost completely neglected so far. Serious and concrete efforts need to be undertaken to address the economic situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, to increase their participation and representation in public life, and to ensure full and unhindered access to personal documents, health care services, housing and property. Particular attention should be given to returnees and forcibly repatriated individuals to ensure their sustainable reintegration.

The Strategy and its Action Plan represent important steps in building a stable multi-ethnic society, where the rights of all are recognized and upheld. The limited degree of their implementation remains a strong reminder that much work remains to be done to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable communities in Kosovo.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above, the OSCE advises the relevant stakeholders to consider the following recommendations.

To the OPM and the line ministries:

- Renew the commitment made to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the Strategy and its Action Plan by ensuring that the necessary political will and resources are allocated and made available at all levels of government.
- Allocate appropriate resources from the Kosovo Consolidated Budget and implement without further delay those activities that do not require financial resources.
- Support the work of the Committee and the Working Group as the main mechanisms for the co-ordination of the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy and its Action Plan with particular attention to community participation.
- Improve the communication between local- and central-level institutions to guarantee a sufficient level of co-ordination among all institutions and stakeholders involved.
- Identify the most urgent needs of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities by ensuring resources to complete data-collection activities already initiated while engaging in similar exercises in the neglected sectors.
- Engage in those sectors that have been largely neglected, such as participation and representation, employment and economic empowerment, and ensure full and unhindered access to personal documents, health care services, housing and property.
- Ensure the sustainable return or relocation of all Roma displaced in the lead-contaminated camps in northern Kosovo and provide adequate health treatment
- Ensure implementation of the MEST-endorsed curriculum in Romani language through provision of textbooks and training of teachers.

To the Committee and the Working Group:

- Ensure monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan through mandated progress reports.
- Improve co-ordination and communication among relevant ministries as well as among other institutions, donors and civil society.

- Undertake activities to increase awareness about the Strategy and its Action Plan among all relevant actors as well as the general public.

To municipal officials:

- Proactively seek out information and support from the relevant line ministries regarding the municipal responsibilities foreseen in the Strategy and Action Plan.
- Ensure that sufficient funds are allocated for the implementation of prioritized activities foreseen in the Action Plan during the mid-year review of municipal budgets in June 2011, while allocating adequate resources for their continued implementation in the 2012 budget.
- Promote dissemination of the Strategy and the Action Plan among the relevant municipal officials, especially to the municipal offices for communities and return, and undertake initiatives to reach out to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities to ensure their awareness and participation.
- Declare once a year the free-of-charge civil registration month for unregistered persons and children born outside the healthcare system.
- Co-operate with and support civil society in its efforts toward community engagement and mobilization around the Strategy and the Action Plan.
- Support the development of local action plans for the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan at the municipal level.

To the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities' representatives:

- Seek out information about the content of the Strategy and the Action Plan and promote awareness, advocacy and action toward their implementation within institutions, civil society organizations and within the communities themselves.

To international agencies:

- Encourage and support Kosovo institutions to promptly and fully implement the Strategy and Action Plan.