



**ENHANCING CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN DIFFERENT ACTORS FOR
BETTER INTEGRATION OF THE ROMA MINORITY AND THE EGYPTIAN
COMMUNITY**

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Hotel Tirana International*

The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) and the Center for Economic Social Studies (CESC), based on their mission to encourage and contribute to better respect for the rights of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community, on February 25, 2009, organized a round table discussion on ***“Enhancing constructive dialogue between different actors for better integration of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community.”***

The table saw the presentation of ***final conclusions drawn from meetings, forums, and training courses conducted during 2008*** in the municipalities of Elbasan, Korçë, and the district of Fier. Participants included representatives of the municipalities, communes, educational directories, police directories, local organizations, donors, and representatives of the Roma and Egyptian associations. The following conclusions are their contributions. The purpose of the events was to find effective forms of cooperation in order to improve the living conditions of these communities and to become more familiar with recommendations in this area, particularly those of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Albanian legislation, and relevant strategies.

Some of the main conclusions and suggestions that emerged from the above events are listed below:

- In general, ***the sensitization and attention of state authorities, both at the central and local level, has increased regarding respect for the rights of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community.*** A series of legal and institutional reforms have been undertaken to ensure better protection of the rights of these communities.
- To improve the living conditions of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community, projects by local institutions and different civil society actors with support from various donors, are underway at the municipalities of Elbasan, Korçë, and the district of Fier. ***Knowledge about and the implementation of positive models in this area is essential.***
- ***Participation of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community in local governance is low.*** Education is an important element in this regard. In spite of all efforts to school children, there are still problems with their educational level and, therefore, with their employment and enjoyment of other services. ***It is necessary to review the legal basis that would enable the free supply of textbooks for children in need and social assistance for the families targeted at children’s education.*** Also, it is necessary to increase information about minority rights and their integration, by appreciating the traditions, culture, and their values in a society.

- Housing, employment, education, enjoyment of social and health services, and infrastructure conditions in the areas where there is a concentration of these minorities, remain a problem of concern. ***It is necessary to review the legal basis in order to enable persons in need from these minorities to benefit from social apartments***, look at the possibility of facilitating the enjoyment of social welfare, encourage their participation in local government bodies, and find forms to encourage businesses to employ minority representatives, improve the infrastructure of areas with concentrations of these minorities.
- In order to increase minorities' access to employment and the local government, ***it is necessary to make legal stipulations of positive measures (e.g. in the form of quotas)*** that would facilitate their competition for some jobs. Professional training and courses should be offered at areas inhabited by these minorities and facilitate their attendance.
- It is necessary to find legal solutions to the registration of children born out of the country, registered with different names, of children no longer living with their parents.
- ***Implementation of the national strategy “For the improvement of living conditions of the Roma minority” at the local level encounters difficulties.*** The strategy ***needs to be updated***, obtaining the input from all actors active in this area; ***establish concrete, clear, and measurable objectives, deadlines for their realization, and the necessary funds*** that would be allocated from the state budget and those to be covered through contributions by foreign donors. It is necessary that ***the National Strategy be translated into concrete action plans at the local level.***
- The principle of decentralization requires a new division of duties and responsibilities between the central and local governments, therefore, it is ***necessary that more decision making competencies be transferred to local government bodies.*** It is necessary for the government to support social programs drafted by local government bodies.
- At the local front, a coordinating role should be assigned to the County Prefect. The prefect has the necessary authority to monitor the implementation of the Strategy by central and local government bodies and to invite different NPOs to cooperate at the county level.
- ***Empowering and boosting the professional capacities of organizations and associations that represent the Roma minority and the Egyptian community remain priority issues***, which should be receive special attention. Familiarization by the Roma minority and the Egyptian community of their legal rights and of the competencies of state institutions would help encourage their active role and lobbying power toward local government bodies for the improvement of the situation of respect for their rights.

- *Cooperation between local government bodies and local and foreign NPOs is important in avoiding overlapping in projects and initiatives and the coordination of efforts* in this area.

Invited to the round table discussion were high-level representatives of responsible state institutions, different civil society actors, local and foreign organizations contributing to this area, Roma and Egyptian associations, as well as media representatives. based on the participants' discussions, the discussion is an instrument for encouraging cooperation in the future, the more realistic and objective assessment of forecasts, and for raising the awareness of state institutions and the civil society about the need for coordination between them for better respect of the rights of the Roma minority and the Egyptian community.

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