

Review of the Fulfillment of Obligations from the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2021-2025

According to the results of the 2023 Population Census, the total number of Roma in Montenegro is **5,629**, which accounts for **0.90%** of the total population, while the number of Egyptians is **1,655**, or **0.27%** of the total population. The Romani language is spoken by **4,658 people**, making up **0.75%** of the total population. The combined number of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro is **7,284**, representing **1.17%** of the total population.

Overall Fulfillment of Obligations by Year (Implementation of the Action Plan for the Social Inclusion Strategy of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025):

- **2021:** 74.29%
 - **2022:** 63.5%
 - **2023:** 66.3%
 - **2024:** 84.9%
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Review of Key Achievements in 2021

- The **Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports** provided **complete sets of textbooks** for all primary school students in the **2021/2022 school year**. Additionally, free transportation was secured for approximately **600 primary school students** from the Roma and Egyptian communities in **Podgorica, Nikšić, Berane, and Cetinje**.
- A **scholarship competition** was announced for the **2021/2022 academic year**, awarding **scholarships to 180 high school students and 12 university students** from the Roma and Egyptian communities. The competition was open from **September 1 to October 18, 2021**.
- **One high school student and four university students** benefited from **free accommodation** in student dormitories during the **2021/2022 school year**.
- **43 social inclusion associates** were trained in employment, social, and healthcare inclusion, with **34 of them securing employment**. These associates were integrated into local institutions such as the **Employment Bureau, Social Welfare Centers, and Health Centers**.
- **Food and hygiene aid distribution:**
 - **786 food and hygiene packages**
 - **255 baby supply packages**
 - **340 diaper packages**
 - **29 emergency aid packages** distributed to families in the **Konik** area.
- Due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, field vaccination was **not conducted**. Instead, vaccinations were administered at **health centers**.

- **Three seminars** on the **"Role of Healthcare Workers in Combating Human Trafficking"** were held (one in-person and two online) for medical professionals from **central, northern, and southern regions** in **November and December 2021**.
 - The **Civic Alliance**, as a **UNHCR partner**, provided **free legal assistance** for:
 - **26 individuals** in procedures before the **Kosovo Embassy**
 - **36 individuals** in procedures before the **Serbian Embassy**
 - **132 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons** received free legal aid.
 - The **Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights** supported **185 projects** with a total funding of **€1,066,000**. Of these, **13 projects** focused on **protecting and realizing Roma community rights** (7%), totaling **€93,200** (9%).
 - The **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights**, under **Article 32ž** of the **Law on Non-Governmental Organizations** ("Official Gazette of Montenegro," No. 039/11 and 037/17), supported **21 projects** with a total funding of **€319,850**.
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Child and Arranged Marriages

- **Accredited training** titled **"Basic Training for Social Workers, Expert Associates, and Members of Multidisciplinary Teams for the Prevention and Suppression of Child Arranged Marriages"** was conducted in **three sessions** in **2021**, involving **46 social workers**.
- The **Center for Roma Initiatives**, in collaboration with **relevant institutions**, conducted educational activities involving **direct engagement with children, parents, and the community** on the **prevention of child marriages**. As a result:
 - **42 workshops** were held for **362 children** (215 girls and 147 boys) aged **12-18** and **261 adults** (165 women and 96 men) from the Roma and Egyptian communities.
 - Workshops focused on **child marriage prevention, the benefits of education, and reporting mechanisms** for suspected **arranged child marriages**.
 - Interactive **video materials and real-life case studies** were used to facilitate discussions.
- A **two-day accredited training session** was held under the title **"Basic Training for Expert Associates and Multidisciplinary Team Members for the Prevention and Suppression of Child Arranged Marriages"**, attended by **20 participants**, including **14 Roma and Egyptian social inclusion mediators** and **six expert workers** from social welfare centers (**social workers, psychologists, and pedagogues**).
- **Temporary accommodation for street children** was provided as part of the **Drop-in Center** social service. The shelter is intended for children **living in extreme poverty** in the capital city, who rely on **public kitchens** and live in **substandard housing conditions**.

- In **2021, 82 children** participated in **education, socialization, and personal development** programs.
 - Each child attended the center **once per week**, receiving **support tailored to their developmental stage**.
 - Programs were designed for **primary school children**, categorized based on their **specific support needs**.
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Review of Key Achievements in 2022

- **Montenegro hosted the third ministerial meeting on Roma integration** as part of the **implementation of the Poznań Declaration**, aimed at improving the **status of Roma communities in the Western Balkans**.
- The **Government of Montenegro** appointed **Mr. Sokolj Beganaj** as the **National Coordinator for Monitoring the Implementation of the Roma and Egyptian Social Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025**.
- **International Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day (August 2)** was commemorated with a **visit by Montenegrin government and civil sector representatives to Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland**.
- **Training sessions** were held for **government officials** on combating **anti-Roma discrimination**, under the theme **"Social Equality of Roma and Egyptian Community Members"**.
- **Judiciary and state prosecutors** received **specialized training on "Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in the Fight Against Anti-Roma Discrimination"**.
- A **working group** was established to **develop an accredited program for combating anti-Roma discrimination**.
- The **Education Program for Acquiring Key Skills in Romology** was launched, completing the first two modules:
 - **1) Roma Identity and Identity Dilemmas**
 - **2) Roma Culture**
- In **celebration of International Roma Language Day**, the **Roma Culture Festival** was held in **Podgorica**.
- The **National Program for the Transformation of Informal Employment of Roma and Egyptians** was initiated.
- The **Education Program for Acquiring Key Skills in Secondary Raw Material Collection** was completed.
- A **meeting on improving Roma and Egyptian budget allocation at the local level** was held.

- A request was submitted to the Ministry of Finance to allocate budget reserve funds for the construction of new housing units for residents of the Riverside settlement in Berane and their relocation to another site.
- **Legalization support** was provided for **Roma and Egyptian families** whose homes met **legalization criteria**. A commission was formed to select **18 families** for assistance.
- **Education Statistics for the 2022/2023 School Year:**
 - **Preschool Education:** 202 Roma and Egyptian children enrolled (**92 boys, 110 girls**).
 - **Primary Education:** 1,833 Roma and Egyptian students enrolled (**950 boys, 883 girls**).
 - **Secondary Education:** 214 high school students enrolled (**122 boys, 92 girls**).
 - **Higher Education:** **14 university students** applied for **scholarships**.
 - **Transportation:** Free transportation was provided for approximately **600 primary school students**.
- **Child Vaccination:** Vaccination campaigns for **Roma and Egyptian children** were conducted across **multiple health centers in Montenegro**.
- **Pregnancy and Parenting Schools:** Programs were made available to the **entire population**, including **Roma and Egyptian women**.

REPORT ON IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE "MY LIFE" CAMPAIGN

- **Project Name:** *Campaign on Child/Arranged Marriages, Domestic Violence, and Begging*
- **Donor:** The project was co-financed by the **EU and the Government of Montenegro** within the framework of the **EU-Montenegro Employment, Education, and Social Protection Program (SOPESS 2015-2017)**.
- **Project Value:** €265,000
- The **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro** implemented the **"My Life" campaign** from **March to December 2022**, addressing issues of **early, forced, and arranged marriages, domestic violence, and street begging** within the **Roma and Egyptian communities** in Montenegro. The project was conducted in **11 municipalities: Podgorica, Nikšić, Herceg Novi, Tivat, Budva, Bar, Ulcinj, Cetinje, Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, and Berane**.
- The **primary goal** of the project was to **raise awareness among Roma and Egyptians**, particularly **youth and their parents**, regarding these three critical issues. Additional objectives focused on **local institutions, municipal officials, social work centers, schools, health centers, police, employment bureaus, and Red Cross representatives**, aiming to **find more effective solutions** to these challenges at the **local level**. A **media component** targeted the **wider public**.

Campaign Implementation

Two campaigns were carried out:

1. **Awareness-raising campaign** targeting the **Roma and Egyptian (RE) community and local institutions**
2. **Public informational and promotional media campaign** targeting the **general public**

Under the first campaign:

- **Eight workshops** were organized for the **RE community**, focusing primarily on **youth**.
- **Eleven workshops** were conducted for **local institutions**, including:
 - Municipal representatives
 - Social Work Centers
 - Police
 - Health Centers
 - Employment Bureaus
 - Primary and Secondary Schools
 - The Red Cross
- **Six three-day forums/panels** were held with participation from representatives of the **above-mentioned institutions, NGOs, the Roma Council, and the RE community**.

Media Component

- A total of **147 media publications** were directly related to the **"My Life" campaign**, along with **155 additional media reports** on the topics of **child marriages, domestic violence, and street begging**.
- **12 media events** were organized.
- **15 television appearances** were made.
- **32 television and radio reports** were broadcasted.

Within the **"My Life" campaign**, the following cultural activities were also implemented:

- **Roma Culture Festival**
- **"My Life" Exhibition** showcasing successful **Roma individuals worldwide**
- **Performance of the newly established Roma folk dance group "Amaro Chelippe / Naše igre"**, featuring traditional **Roma attire and dance styles from Montenegro**

Additionally, the project included:

- **Two creative workshops on video production** for Roma and Egyptians
- **A video competition** with prizes
- Development of a **mobile application** called *"My Life"*
- Various **research studies** and **numerous public events**
- **Design, production, and distribution of promotional materials**, including:
 - *"My Life"* and *"Roma Culture Festival"* brochures
 - Posters for the *"My Life"* campaign and the *"Roma Culture Festival"*
 - Promotional items such as mugs, tote bags, and t-shirts
- **Over 40 video films, TV spots, video jingles, and an animated campaign video** were produced.
- The **renowned Roma jazz and soul band "KAL"** was the **official music group of the campaign**, performing at multiple concerts in Montenegro to promote the *"My Life"* campaign. The band also created **music and audio branding** for the campaign.
- On **social media platforms** (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), the campaign **posted over 200 updates**.
- **Daily press clipping and media monitoring** were conducted in Montenegro, ensuring **regular updates** on topics related to **early/forced/arranged marriages, domestic violence, and street begging**, as well as **Roma and Egyptian culture and inclusion efforts**. Reports were **regularly sent to the mailing list** in coordination with the **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights**.

The **Project Steering Committee**, which met **four times** during the campaign, consisted of representatives from:

- The **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights**
- The **Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP)**
- The **Ministry of Finance**
- The **Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare**
- The **Ministry of Education**
- The **Roma Council**
- The **EU Delegation to Montenegro**

Additionally, **training sessions** were conducted for **medical professionals** on their role in **combating human trafficking**, with a focus on the **importance of a sensitive approach to potential victims** from the **Roma and Egyptian communities**.

Review of Key Achievements in 2023

- The **discrimination rate against Roma and Egyptians** remains high at **21.3%**, although it has **decreased by 0.9%** compared to 2020, when it was **22.2%**.
- **Ethnic distance** towards the **RE population** has also decreased, with an indicator value of **0.356** in 2023, compared to **0.55** in 2021.
- A **licensed and accredited program** titled "**Combating Anti-Gypsyism and All Forms of Discrimination Against Roma and Egyptians**" was completed, with **implementation planned for 2024-2025**.
- **August 2 – International Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day** was commemorated with a **visit by 10 students from Montenegro to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Center**, organized by the **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights** in cooperation with NGO "**Walk with Us – Phiren Amenca**".
- Between **October 5 and October 27, 2023**, a **Roma Holocaust Exhibition** was organized in **Podgorica**, attended by **1,500 visitors**.

Culture and Language

- A CEDEM study on [discrimination patterns in Montenegro \(2022\)](#) found that **discrimination against the RE population was 32.1%**, a **1.2% decrease from 2020 (33.3%)**.
- The **Center for the Preservation and Development of Minority Cultures of Montenegro** published a **Romani-Montenegrin / Montenegrin-Romani Dictionary**, authored by **Dr. Hedina Tahirović-Sijerčić**, with **300 copies distributed nationwide**. The dictionary was **promoted in Podgorica and Cetinje**, attended by **50 people**.
- **November 5 – World Romani Language Day** was celebrated with a **Roma Language Academy event at KIC "Budo Tomović" in Podgorica**, attended by **400 participants**.

Education and Employment

- **295 RE children** enrolled in **preschool** (*151 boys, 144 girls*).
- **1,809 RE students** enrolled in **primary school** (*921 boys, 888 girls*).
- **191 RE students** attended **high school** (*103 boys, 88 girls*).
- **18 RE students** enrolled in **university**.
- The number of **Roma and Egyptian mediators in education, employment, healthcare, and social protection** increased by **47**.
- **Paid internships** were provided for **three RE individuals in Nikšić Municipality**, with **one candidate offered permanent employment**.

- By **May 2023**, work began on the **National Program for the Transformation of Informal Roma and Egyptian Employment**.
- **More than 95% of Roma and Egyptian individuals** now have **regulated health insurance**.
- Since **2009**, a total of **15,273 applications** for **permanent residence or temporary residence (up to three years)** were submitted by **displaced and internally displaced persons**. As of **December 30, 2023**, **15,161 applications** had been processed, while **112 applications** were still pending.

Review of Key Achievements in 2024

- **Training on Recognizing Anti-Roma Discrimination** was organized in **Budva** for members of the **Roma and Egyptian (RE) community**, focusing on **discrimination awareness and reporting mechanisms**.
- A **comprehensive anti-discrimination program**, with a **special focus on anti-Roma discrimination**, was developed in cooperation with the **NGO "Walk Together"**. **Trainer training** for program implementation is expected soon.
- The **radio program "Glas Roma" (Voice of Roma)** was broadcast **23 times** throughout the year, airing **every Monday at 18:05**.
- The **television program "Savore"** was aired **20 times** on **RTCG's first channel**, every **Monday at 11:00**.
- The **Roma.net** online publication received **€9,227.20** in funding from the **Fund for Promoting Media Pluralism and Diversity** in **2024**.
- **Support for NGOs** through **public funding calls** was provided.
- In **2024**, a total of **221 projects** were supported with a funding amount of **€1,591,125.00**. Of these, **21 projects (9.50%)** focused on **Roma and Egyptian national communities**, receiving a total of **€136,350.00 (9%)**.
- The **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights** allocated **€500,000.00** for **33 projects** aimed at **improving the status of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro**.
- **Three minibus vehicles** were donated for **the transportation of Roma children** in honor of **International Roma Day**.
- All **Roma and Egyptian families living in poverty** in **Pljevlja Municipality** were identified. With financial support from the **international organization "Help"**, families were provided with **drinking water, heating fuel, and essential household supplies**, significantly **improving their living conditions**.
- **Humanitarian aid packages (food and hygiene supplies)** were distributed to **48 families** lacking access to **social protection services** due to missing **documentation**.
- Through the **Family Center**, **diapers** were distributed, benefiting **180 children**.

- **240 students** received school supplies, and **100 students** received school backpacks.
- The **Municipal Red Cross Organization in Tivat** continuously provided **clothing, baby packages, food, and hygiene products** throughout **2024** to **15 Roma and Egyptian families** not registered in official records, significantly **improving their living conditions**.
- The **Second Session of the Roma Parliament** was held in the **Montenegrin Parliament**.
- The **Proposal Report on the Implementation of the Roma and Egyptian Social Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025 for 2023** and the **2024-2025 Action Plan** were **adopted**.
- The **first official interpreter for the Romani language** was appointed in Montenegro.

Census Results 2023

- The **2023 Population Census** recorded **5,629 Roma**, representing **0.90%** of Montenegro's total population, and **1,655 Egyptians**, accounting for **0.27%**.
- A total of **4,658 individuals (0.75%)** speak the **Romani language**.
- The combined **Roma and Egyptian population** in Montenegro stands at **7,284**, representing **1.17%** of the total population.

Housing and Infrastructure

- The **Council of Europe** approved a project to finance the legalization of **50 informal housing units** used by **Roma and Egyptians**.
- The **social housing settlement in Pljevlja – Trlica** was **renovated**, including **ten individual housing units**.
- By decision of the **Capital City**, the **Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care, and Demography** was granted **three buildings in Vrela Ribnička**, for which the Ministry allocated **€150,000**, and **HELP** provided an additional **€200,000** for renovations.
- A **Feasibility Study on Social Housing for Roma and Egyptians** was completed for **eight municipalities (Bar, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Budva, Herceg Novi, Kotor, Nikšić, and Ulcinj)**.
 - The study was conducted in cooperation with the **Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care, and Demography**, the **Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation**, the **Council of Europe**, the **German humanitarian organization HELP**, and the **Institute for Projects, Analysis, and Studies (IPAS)** from Nikšić.

Education

- **312 RE children** enrolled in **preschool education (163 boys, 149 girls)**.
- The preschool **attendance rate** for Roma and Egyptian children **increased from 16% in 2021 to 57.69% in 2024**, a **41.69% increase**.
- **1,794 RE students** enrolled in **primary school (910 boys, 884 girls)**.

- The **primary school completion rate** for Roma and Egyptian students **increased from 56% in 2021 to 86.46% in 2024**, a **30.46% rise**.
- **193 RE students** enrolled in **secondary school** (*103 boys, 90 girls*).
- The **secondary school graduation rate** among Roma and Egyptians **rose from 3% in 2021 to 22.79% in 2024**, an increase of **19.79%**.
- **18 RE students** enrolled in **university** for the **2024 academic year**, receiving **scholarships**.

Employment and Social Inclusion

- **New social protection positions** were **established in social work centers** for **Roma and Egyptian social inclusion associates** in:
 - **Podgorica (2 positions), Nikšić (1), Bar (1), Berane (1), and Bijelo Polje (1).**
- The **role of these associates** is to **assist Roma and Egyptian individuals** in **accessing social and child welfare services**.
- The **2025 Budget** has **allocated funds** to maintain these positions.

Employment Statistics

- **125 unemployed RE individuals** received **employment mediation services** (*62 women – 45.92%*).
- **16 RE individuals** (*3.16% of total 506 unemployed individuals*) participated in **public work programs**.
- **3 RE individuals** (*1.42%*) participated in **adult education programs**.
- **3 RE individuals** (*1.25%*) completed **on-the-job training with employers**.
- **Revised internal organizational acts** included:
 - **Social inclusion associates in healthcare: Nikšić, Bijelo Polje, and Ulcinj health centers.**
 - **Bijelo Polje Health Center** created a **"Mediator/Associate"** position.

Legal Assistance and Documentation

- **5 individuals** received **assistance from the Embassies of Serbia and Kosovo** in Montenegro.
- **43 individuals** received **legal or financial assistance** for **residence status regularization** in Montenegro.
- **43 information sessions and visits** were held.
- **9 individuals** were identified and **supported in registering with civil registries**.
- **112 individuals** received **legal aid**.
- **68 individuals** obtained **personal identification documents**.

- As of **2024**, **42 applications for temporary and permanent residence** remained unresolved due to **missing documentation from the applicants' countries of origin**.
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Arranged Marriages

Summary of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights' Efforts in Combating Arranged and Child Marriages

Since **2010**, the **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights** has been actively engaged in **combating arranged and child marriages**, particularly within the **Roma and Egyptian communities in Montenegro**. Efforts have included:

- **Workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns** throughout the country.
- **Financial support for NGOs** implementing **projects aimed at preventing arranged marriages**.

A particularly significant initiative was the **2022 project**, co-funded by the **European Union and the Government of Montenegro**, under the **EU-Montenegro Program**, with a total budget of **€265,000.00**.

The **"My Life" campaign**, focusing on **arranged marriages, domestic violence, and street begging**, aimed to **empower communities and educate them about children's rights**.

Moving forward, the Ministry, in cooperation with **institutions, international partners, and civil society**, will **continue planning and implementing measures** to **eradicate child and arranged marriages**, ensuring a **better future for vulnerable children**.