



SECTORS "EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY" and "ROMA INTEGRATION" Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the Sector Working Group (SWG)

Venue: Cisco Webex Meeting, hosted by Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA)

Date: 16 November 2020, Monday, 11:00 - 12:45

Meeting moderated by Ms. Kirkovski, SEA/ NIPAC representative, Head of Department.

Invited 110 attendees, 78 attendees were present during online plenary meeting.

Introductory Notes

➤ The Head of Department in SEA, Ms. Kirkovski, welcomed the members of the Sector Working Group and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss indicators and targets of key thematic priorities set for 2027 under Window 4 Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth, Thematic Priority 1 Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, as well Roma integration. She informed that the IPA III programming for financial perspective 2021-2027 started back in May 2020 and the first phase was completed thus far, i.e. drafting of the Action Fiches for 2021 and 2022 which are being assessed by DG NEAR for their relevance. Once feedback is received, the second phase of programming would follow by drafting the action documents and the third phase which is maturity assessment of the proposed actions. Interventions planned in IPA III Strategic Response document should be flexible in order to allow proper, relevant and mature projects to be proposed under 2021-2027 period. Finalisation of the Strategic Response with its indicators and targets would allow at the same time finalisation and putting in motion of the performance assessment framework by the Government.

➤ The Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Ms. Shahpaska, pointed out the challenges and consequences of Covid-19 pandemic upon the economic and social well-being of citizens. Unemployment rate increased to 16.7 %, for the first time since 2011, as 17,690 people lost their jobs in the second quarter of 2020. She stressed that economic impacts of COVID-19 expected to create further vulnerability and push more people into poverty, including children. However, this situation would have been much worse, if the Government had not taken measures from the crisis outset, including financial support to affected companies and individuals to keep the economy alive. The latest fourth package of economic measures "Covid 4", among others earmarked 27 million EUR for the most vulnerable individuals. Social dialogue also proved to be an important and effective mechanism for policy responses to the crisis.

The minister briefly referred to the main policy developments since the establishment of the new Government, emphasising the amendments to the Operational Plan for Active Employment Programs and Measures and Labour Market Services for 2020, preparation of new Law on Labour Relations, the progress in setting up now community-based social services and kindergartens, re-enactment of the Law for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, adoption of the Law on Prevention of Gender-based and Family Violence by the Government and introduction of a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on Roma integration policies in line with the Poznan Declaration on Roma Integration.

Ms Shahpaska concluded that while economic and social measures to remedy the crisis took priority, structural reforms addressing human capital and governance reforms were needed for recovery and EU accession. She recognised the importance of the EU assistance as an important catalyst of changes and stressed that the areas of interventions proposed for IPA funding over the period 2021-2027 reflect the commitments to the key reforms and that they would contribute to the national development and growth in the post-pandemic period and beyond.

➤ The Minister of Education and Science, Ms. Carovska, addressed the conclusions from previous meeting and informed that MES finalized all recommendation for IPA III Strategic Response, as well more important the revision of indicators was done having a basis for their measurement and following the progress while reporting. In this Covid-19 school year Plan and several protocols are adopted for reopening of the schools starting from October 1st that assured safe start of the school year. She reported on preparation and implementation of school year in a combined model (physical presence by pupils in the lowest level of grades in primary schools, 1st to 3rd Grade pupils are attending classes with physical presence, with given option to attend online classes Secondary schools 90% through online presence and 10% through national television service, as well following the learning process of each student/ pupil). Laws on primary and secondary education were amended, protocols prepared and measures adopted by the Government successfully implementing, as well on university and high-school education and attending of dormitories by using vouchers. National integrated platform for e-learning set and process of scaling of teacher-student communication ongoing. The platform contains: Video material, tutorials and manuals. During September trainings for all teachers were organized by implementing cascade model. An educational TV show with the teaching materials is broadcasted on the National TV Station in order to reach all children. Concept for inclusive education is adopted as well Concept for Development of a System on Distance Learning in Primary and Secondary Education (adopted July 2020) and Concept on National Assessment in Primary Education (adopted June 2020)



The Government offered vouchers for covering 50% of the costs of the training for all young people that will attend training for digital competences. As well, information sent to Government for transition of VET centres from local to central government in order to prepare them for further better financing and functioning as regional VET centres as possibility to further develop new model of VET centres, 8 profiles for formal VET education adopted and 8 more for non-formal and informal VET education were under preparation. Draft Concept for operationalisation of the future Regional VET Centers is prepared. MES and UNDP were preparing activities for completion of primary education for woman adults are undergoing in prison in Skopje and Prilep and minors in Tetovo, Youth detention center in Volkovija – municipality of Brvenica. In order to improve the quality of education, formal schooling and learning for elderly in the prisons training for prequalification and further improvement of the skills of the prisoners are ongoing. Additionally, she highlighted that the MES expressed interest to participate in new IPA III programming for Erasmus+ programme and European corpus of solidarity the new programming period 2021-2027.

- The Head of Cooperation in the EU Delegation, Mr. Bertolini, highlighted several points. IPA III Strategic Response is a national document which includes potential areas to be supported covering a period of 7 years (2021-2027) and uses some measurable indicators and targets agreed by national institutions to measure the achievement of objectives. The strategic documents are not written in stone, they could be modified during a 7-year period, but everything supported financially has to be included in these programming documents. They should also serve other donors to complement and to find a way to support the country in its reform processes. It was pointed out that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to the explanations on the indicators and to hear the comments. The comments could be given in written in a week time after the meeting.

Presentation of IPA III Strategic Response for (key areas of interventions and targets on indicators)

- Ms. Slavkoska, IPA Coordinator in MLSP, noted that since last SWG meeting, the key areas of interventions were defined and comments on technical level were taken in consideration, while special attention was put on setting indicators and targets for 2027. IPA III Strategic Response consisted of two parts, first part reflecting the national strategic context and the coherence of the sector strategies with the EU's enlargement policy and the second part as core part was focusing on priorities, objectives, interventions, indicators and targets. The Revised Employment and Social Report Programme 2022 together with all relevant strategies fit in IPA III programming framework as they all address the objectives linked to better education, fostering labour market and productive job creation, combating poverty and social exclusion.

The Strategic Response has four key thematic priorities. Roma issues were addressed horizontally across all four key thematic priorities and it is reflected in the choice of indicators and to some extent embedded in key areas of interventions. The presentation covered the two thematic priority objectives linked to raising employment level and the quality of jobs and productivity and reducing the poverty and social exclusion. Seven areas of interventions are foreseen in the area of employment (thematic priority 2.1), part of them offering systemic support (modernise employment legal and policy framework, improve safety and health at work standards, enhance social dialogue) and another part providing support to unemployed and companies. The performance will be monitored on the basis of eight indicators, seven being key labour market indicators based on Labour Force Survey and one indicator dedicated to Roma employment. 2027 targets were set on the basis of the forecasts made in June 2020 using the so called simulation cohorts model and based on the participation levels since 2020 and the projected GDP growth after the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Thematic priority 2.2 Reduce poverty and social exclusion has seven areas of interventions ranging from completion of the social reform, investing in stronger social services, especially in poor quarters or less developed/rural areas, to strengthening anti-discrimination and gender policies. Progress will be measured on the basis of the poverty indicators of the SILC survey. Targets were set on the basis of modelling that takes into account employment, rise of pensions and social transfers. Almost all indicators are sex disaggregated. Three indicators of this group are linked to Roma (material deprivation rate, overcrowding rate and access to computer). Source of verification for the Roma indicators is the regional survey which measures the situation of Roma population compared to neighbouring non-Roma population. Members of the SWG were acquainted with the baselines and proposed targets for 2027 for the key indicators.

- Ms. Popovska, IPA Coordinator in MES, underlined the importance of education matching the labour needs clearly shown in this document and having indicators showing this connectivity. New aspects from Covid-19 situation brought an aspect of importance how important is the education to be reflected and adapting to be upcoming changes. Indicators presented in this document under Thematic priority 2.3 To ensure comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated modern education, covers broaden and inclusive areas of interventions in education sector. Under thematic priority of education, there are 10 planned areas of interventions and 18 indicators to measure the progress, having in mind all levels of education need to be encompassed in order to having reflective policies. It was mentioned that bigger number of 5 Roma indicators is encompassed.

Short presentation was on the defined indicators and targets foreseen to be achievement up to 2027 through the set of areas of interventions under thematic priority objective due to ensure comprehensive, inclusive, and integrated quality education. It was referred and elaborated each intervention and their relevance. Targets were set on the basis of modelling that takes into account relevant baseline data, benchmarks from the region and EU targets combined with the relevant policy interventions and budget allocations. Almost all indicators are sex disaggregated.



When setting of indicators and targets, it was noticed that the country was not behind EU benchmarks and regional level. 18 indicators defined in IPA III Strategic Response due to education interventions, aligned with performance assessment framework and national strategies. It was presented each indicator, baseline and target set up to 2027, as well pointing out on ongoing and foreseen legal and systematic reforms. A point was given that sources of verification are agreed with relevant sectors and confirmed with State Statistical Office (SSO).

Discussion

Albert Memeti, Romalitiko posted several questions in the chat linked to Roma, such as "How we can calculate the Roma Employment rate, when in the LS (note. Labour Force Survey) there is no variable for ethnicity. How you plan to calculate the Roma Employment rate? Can we incorporate variable for ethnicity in all employment indicators, which will mean under each mainstream indicator we will have specific target for Roma community... The question also relate to Indicator 6 and Indicator 7 for Roma population for the Theme: Poverty and social exclusion."

MLSP representatives (A.Slavkoska, M. Kamberi, Lj. Popovska) responded that the labour related statistics on Roma is not easily available and the MLSP had relied on regional survey conducted in 2011 and 2017, which is repeated each fifth year. The SSO and MLSP will start data collection and calculation of a set of indicators on Roma linked to the so-called Poznan Declaration. To this end, Regional Cooperation Council engaged an expert who will work together with SSO on creation of indicators for monitoring the results of implementation of national action plans for Roma. These data would be generated every second year. New data will be calculated from new Roma national survey in 2022 or 2023. For the time being, the MLSP had to rely on the regional survey as the most reliable source (The link to this Roma survey was provided in the footnote of the Strategic Response; <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets.html>)

A question raised in chat in relation to indicator 'Roma students attending segregated school' to which schools the indicator is referring. Explanation given on the need for immediate re-reonization on municipal level and there are primary schools which are segregated, giving the examples of primary schools in municipalities of Bitola and Shuto Orizari. It was pointed out that the problem occurred in previous two years in relation to unwilling of parents of Macedonian students to enrol their children whereas Roma students learn. The percentage given would be on national level.

It was asked if 40% of schools in the country were segregated and for this high percentage should be given a source of verification to establish the baseline. Elaboration was provided on the importance of having a baseline on reliable source of verification and further setting a target.

Additional explanation was given on the methodology for calculation of these indicators coming from UNDP, WB and EU regional survey done periodically. These indicators were looking at the areas where Roma people live and gave an idea on the situation at national level for Roma community. It was compared wellbeing of Roma people to what it was a living condition of people in close neighbouring area in order to have better perception of people who were not in best condition compared to others. The indicators in this survey show that Roma people were more discriminated in certain areas compared to other communities. Its methodology was relatively robust, sample was sufficiently large and representative and it might be read in that way.

Additionally, it was requested and proposed explanations for each indicators and baseline under tables to be given clearly.

It was stressed this probably was most clearly prepared strategic response document compared to other sectors and pointed out that there was a footnote for each indicator and baseline giving exact source of information and its methodology for calculation.

Additionally, for each and every indicator, there will be an explanation in the Performance Assessment Framework.

Lucien Aegerter, Swiss Embassy stressed the importance of including the social policy question in the thematic priority "Raising employment level and the quality of jobs and productivity" and in particular the point on modernization of the legal and regulatory frameworks of the labour and employment policy. He highlighted the importance to look into the incentive framework under the social policy and social assistance. This issue could be seen as critical one - receiving social assistance creates incentives structure that might be counter-productive for attracting people to switch from grey into regular labour market. Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) was developing new cooperation programme in the country starting in January 2021. Many of the priority areas covered in the Strategic Response would be provided with a complementary support and hence coordination and collaboration were important. SDC priorities of cooperation programme will be shared early in 2021 and efforts will be made to best align, to have synergy, complementarities and to benefit the most.

MLSP representative, recognised the relevance of the comment and confirmed that it should be addressed whenever changes were made in social protection or employment area. In social protection area, the MLSP committed to continue implementing the reform which would embrace an evaluation of effects of the social reform in terms of dis(incentives) it causes to the labour market. Aspects of incentives were embedded in the areas of interventions under two key priority areas.



↻ Natasha Buleska, USAID complemented on everybody involved in preparation of the SR, especially for putting in place clear and ambiguous indicators and targets. She supported the idea of adding definitions of indicators so that everybody could understand what they mean. She was interested in the frequency of revision of the targets. In relation to adjusting the targets, Ms Buleska suggested that the targets in some areas could be more ambitious. The gender aspect was missing: for example youth employment rate was expected to rise, both for males and females, but for females it was set to rise by only 0,3 percentage point, while for men by 6 percentage points; she hoped gender consideration to be taken in account for forecasting activities to elevate the situation and not merely follow the past trends. She believed that the impact of Covid-19 should be visible in the SR. She further shared the findings of the USAID project implemented with four chambers of commerce that roughly 40 thousands persons have lost their jobs due to Covid-19. The Government adopted job retention measures and measures for the most vulnerable mainly aimed at companies (and indirectly at employees). Nevertheless, the Strategic Responses should foresee measures for up-skilling and re-skilling of job-seekers who recently lost their jobs to prevent them from becoming dependant on social welfare and long-term unemployed. USAID had recently had the strategic cooperation document approved covering the 2020-2025 period which might be presented in another meeting of the SWG, once it get published; it has three development objectives: economic competitiveness increased, youth contributions to society increased, and corruption reduced, and is expected to provide complementarity with the other assistance.

EUD acknowledged comment on gender. Most actions related to Covid-19 impact were also addressing gender issues and room for improvement of measures due to gender related aspects could be re-considered. MLSP was intensively working on measures for alleviation of Covid-19 economic and social impact and to support people who lost their jobs with around 10 million EUR implemented by ESARNM, as well measures would be developed in forthcoming years to overcome the consequences.

↻ Harald Fugger, Social Attaché from the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, Austria was interested whether the impact on Covid-19 crisis was considered in the indicators. He underlined that cooperation with MLSP and the Ministry of Health will continue as regards to bilateral activities by implementing projects and programmes (i.e. project for implementation on supported employment service for youth, social services and reconciliation work-family for women and men) that will contribute to the targets. The Memorandum of Understanding with the MLSP is about to be renewed.

Again it was mentioned that Covid-19 expected impact was considered when the targets were set, especially concerning unemployment and indirectly employment rates. As regards the participation/ activity rate, the assumption was that Covid-19 would not change behaviour of the population on labour market on short-term, but if this situation would continue on a long-run the things might worsen. These targets were modest and conservatively set given the whole situation. In relation to gender aspects, more ambitious targets were set for unemployment rate, aiming at narrowing the gender gap. That was less possible as regards the employment rate, because mathematically it is residual between the participation and unemployment rate and because participation for women was rather low compared to men. Forecasts were showing worsening of the employment situation for women at labour market and the MLSP applied adjustment to the employment rates targets to divert the negative trends.

Additional information was given that Covid-19 impact was already considered while setting the targets and education sector had shown flexibility regarding ruling the school year, shortening of the programmes, focusing on on-line distance learning, etc. In relation to up-skilling and re-skilling actions, it could be seen in the areas of interventions and new Law on Adult Education would encompass informal education and learning as a possibility for everyone in this regard.

↻ Donors were encouraged to use SWG as a platform for sharing their development cooperation programmes and ensuring complementarity and synergies of actions.

It was proposed that the next SWG meeting is used for presentation of the plans for actions of other donors. MLSP and MoES will re-launch data collection of donor activities in the sector and a simple IT tool was under development to facilitate donor data collection.

↻ As to the frequency of revision of indicators and targets, it was explained that each indicator and target has its set of methodology of calculation, individual frequency of data collection and presentation of the latest information. It might happen that some indicators of the performance assessment framework (PAF) might be revised once a year, while others once every two years.

Fabio Drago, expert explained that links to most indicators could be found in footnotes of the Strategic response and most of them were part of PAF. Those not included would be added to the PAF. Updating of data would depend on the institutions in charge for providing data and most indicators would be updated once a year and relatively small number of them on two, three or five years (indicators about Roma community). Some indicators in PAF would be automatically updated.

The moderator shared her concerns on the number of 19 indicators under thematic priority of education not undermining their relevance and asked if possible to reconsider and streamlined them again.

↻ A question was raised by Herald Fugger regarding the second chance programme. A young lady (NEETS) involved in supported youth employment project, wished to complete second chance programme, but was required to pay 10 EUR per exam for several exams, which seems to be a high threshold for someone without finances to afford.



Second chance is an area of interest for the MES, but it is also part of Youth Guarantee Strategy of the MLSP as an opportunity for completion of education for each person who had not finished high school. Minister Carovska informed that the MES was developing new Law on adult education in which second chance would be integrated.

- Ms Kamberi, MLSP suggested to organise a separate meeting and reconsider once again the indicators and targets for Roma.
- Mr. Bertolini, EUD acknowledged the quality of discussions in the SWG as well as the good preparation of the documents. More donors intervening and more pro-activeness from donors' side would be welcomed. Civil society should be more active. Indicators about Roma were quite developed. However, if there was a problem to any indicator, it should have been raised. If the indicator would be added, it should be methodologically solid, have a baseline and targets.

Minister Carovska thanked to counterparts involved in drafting the document and agreed that important comments could be shared in this mature phase. However, formulation of indicators should be kept for which the Ministry identified administrative data from national institutions and SSO. It was pointed out the need for having separate working meeting for inclusion of education in IPA III programming and next SWG meeting could be devoted to monitoring and reporting on progress.

Minister Shahpaska, noted that in light of the second wave of Covid-19 crisis, Social Protection Law and Child Protection Law were amended to help vulnerable groups and to provide easy access to guaranteed minimum assistance and educational assistance. She underlined the importance of the work undertaken and the discussions about indicators.

Conclusions

- Members of the SWG may provide written comments to the latest version of IPA III Strategic Response 2021-2027 by 23 November 2020. Comments should be sent on e-mail to the IPA Coordinators in MLSP and MES, Ms. Slavkoska and Ms. Popovska.

Annexes:

- Annex 1 Agenda
- Annex 2 Draft IPA III Strategic Response for EESP + Health
- Annex 3 MLSP presentation

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