

# **Lessons Learned on the Prospect of Roma Women and Girls in Vocational Education and Training and their Employability**

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This document is developed for The Roma Education Fund (REF) within the framework of the project “Education, Employment, Partnerships and Gender Equality: A Winning Formula for Roma in VET” (hereinafter Project), funded by Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with funds of Austrian Development Cooperation, and implemented by REF, in cooperation with project partners Roma Versitas Albania and Roma Versitas Kosovo.

### **Roma Education Fund**

The Roma Education Fund (REF) is an international foundation established in 2005 and dedicated to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. With an active and growing network of representative offices across Central, Eastern, South-Eastern Europe and Turkey, REF provides grants and scholarships to entities and individuals who share its belief in quality, inclusive education and desegregated schools and classrooms.

### **Roma Versitas Albania**

Roma Versitas Albania (RVA) was established in 2016, and focuses on three milestones, education, employment and advocacy. It is engaged in increasing Roma student capacities for education and the number of Roma graduates who get employed through advocacy initiatives, as well as in increasing the participation of highly educated Roma in public administration, and building a nucleus of Roma professionals, intellectuals and leaders successful in their careers, who also contribute to Roma development on the local, national and international level.

### **Roma Versitas Kosovo**

Roma Versitas Kosovo (RVK) was established in 2017. It aims to improve retention, performance, and timely graduation of Roma students at the tertiary level in Kosovo by providing academic support and capacity building to students. It focuses on promotion of education, academic support and development, cultural heritage, and the involvement of young people and communities in local integration processes in both regional and European level.

## **Austrian Development Cooperation**

Austrian Development Cooperation supports countries in Africa, Asia, South Eastern and Eastern Europe in their sustainable development.

The Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and International Affairs plans the strategies. The Austrian Development Cooperation implements programmes and projects together with public institutions, civil society organizations as well as enterprises.

**DISCLAIMER:** Attitudes and opinions presented in this Manual belong to the Author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Roma Education Fund and Austrian Development Cooperation.

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## Introduction

This “*Lessons Learned on the Prospect of Roma Women and Girls in VET and Their Employability*” publication is developed for The Roma Education Fund within the framework of the project *Education, Employment, Partnerships and Gender Equality: A Winning Formula for Roma in VET*, funded by the Austrian Development Agency and implemented by REF, in cooperation with project partners RomaVersitas Albania and RomaVersitas Kosovo.

This document is part of the gender equality output of the project, which is focused on empowering stakeholders to prevent discrimination and discriminatory stereotypes towards education and employability of Roma girls. This publication is a part of the previously realized project activities which aim to ensure gender sensitive project intervention in Albania and Kosovo, namely, an accompanying document to the *Gender Analysis of Roma women and girls in VET*, whose aim was to provide the project staff, partners and stakeholders with necessary inputs and foundational information on relevant gender concerns for systematic mainstreaming of gender into project activities.

The publication is as well intended to be used as an advocacy and visibility tool for indirect target groups (schools, employers, public institutions) with the aim to promote success stories for employers and to encourage role models for girls and women in the Roma communities. The publication should also be a learning document for REF and its partners, as well as all stakeholders of the project.

Findings on obstacles and opportunities for better access and full integration of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in education and labor markets in Kosovo and Albania identify manifold and diverse factors. These obstacles are intertwined and mutually reinforced in most cases in such a way that they prevent minorities from entering education and employment and benefiting fully from them. To all of them WinForVET project has responded with precisely tailored interventions aimed to remove the barriers for beneficiaries, empower them and facilitate their access to education and employment. Findings on opportunities have also determined that varied opportunities were identified and seized over the course of project implementation to secure both greater inclusion of Roma, Askhali and Egyptian people in VET and employment, and their greater benefitting from them.

The abundance of implementation experience and in-depth insights has enabled identification of several valuable key lessons learned on the prospect of full integration of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in education and labor market in Kosovo and Albania, with special focus on women and girls.

The “*Lessons Learned on the Prospect of Roma Women and Girls in VET and Their Employability*” publication provides key recommendations for future work regarding the work with Roma Egyptian and Ashkali communities for the public sector, VET providers, business sector, other CSOs, as well as for implementing partner organizations.

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ADA - Austrian Development Agency

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

GPA - Grade Point Average

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

REF - Roma Education Fund

RVA - Roma Versitas Albania

RVK - Roma Versitas Kosovo

ToT - Training of Trainers

VET - Vocational Education and Training

WinForVET - Abbreviated name of the project “Education, Employment, Partnerships and Gender Equality: A Winning Formula for Roma in VET”

## **Background Information**

### **Overview of the Project**

The Roma Education Fund<sup>1</sup> is an international foundation established in 2005. With an active and growing network of representative offices across Central, Eastern, South Eastern Europe and Turkey, REF provides grants and scholarships to entities and individuals who share its belief in quality, inclusive education and desegregated schools and classrooms. REF's mission and ultimate goal is to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this, the organization supports policies and programs that ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems, through scholarships, grant making, research and advocacy activities. The objectives of REF include:

- Expanding Romani children's access to quality early childhood education and care;
- Improving primary education outcomes for Romani children aged six to fourteen;
- Boosting academic performance and graduation rates from secondary education for Romani pupils;
- Supporting access to tertiary education, improving graduation levels and strengthening the identity of Romani university students;
- Expanding employment opportunities for young Romani adults.

REF has implemented the project "Education, Employment, Partnerships and Gender Equality: A Winning Formula for Roma in VET" - WinForVET project<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter: Project) in the period May 1, 2020-June 30, 2023. It is funded by the Austrian Development Agency<sup>3</sup> and implemented in cooperation with project partners Roma Versitas Albania<sup>4</sup> and Roma Versitas Kosovo<sup>5</sup>. The Project's overall objective is to contribute to social inclusion and poverty reduction of Roma in Albania and Kosovo\*<sup>6</sup> through the support of vocational education and training, facilitation of access to the labor market and empowering stakeholders to take measures to support the transition of Roma to employment.

The activities and outputs of WinForVET project with over 400 direct beneficiaries are clustered into two main areas:

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<sup>1</sup> Roma Education Fund homepage <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/>

<sup>2</sup> WinForVET project on REF's Web-site <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/winforvet-project-offering-vocational-training-for-roma-secondary-schoolers-and-unemployed-young-adults-in-albania-is-more-than-essential-at-this-moment/>

<sup>3</sup> Austrian Development Agency homepage <https://www.entwicklung.at/en/>

<sup>4</sup> Roma Versitas Albania homepage <https://romaversitasalbania.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Roma Versitas Kosovo homepage <https://www.romaversitas.org/>

<sup>6</sup> \*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- Education – increased access to vocational education for Roma youth and young adults, through scholarships for VET secondary school students and VET short-term courses, mentoring and tutoring, development of individual needs assessments and personalized career development plans, professional skills development, cooperation and partnership with schools and other institutions, and improving access to education and employment for Roma girls, boys, women and men;
- Employability – improved employability for Roma youth and young adults, through job placements, paid internships, soft-skills trainings and workshops on various employment-related skills, mentoring, development of individual needs assessments and personalized career development plans, professional development and partnerships of civil society, public and private sector institutions for Roma workforce inclusion aimed at influencing policy changes for improving access to education and employment for Roma girls, boys, women and men.

The project has also performed substantial research work and published the following documents:

- Two Country Assessment Research documents for Albania and Kosovo<sup>7</sup> were produced containing overviews of both countries' situational, legal, and institutional framework of VET education and development.
- Two Gender Analyses of Roma women and girls in VET for Kosovo and for Albania<sup>8</sup> were also conducted and published. They contain analyses on the position of Roma women and girls, as well as men and boys in VET, seeking to identify both obstacles and opportunities which women and men encounter in the pursuit of education in Albania and Kosovo. The analysis informed the project about the strengths and weaknesses in addressing gender equality through activities and monitoring of gender mainstreaming throughout the project.
- Manual for planning and implementation of gender mainstreaming into project interventions ‘Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality’<sup>9</sup> was published containing steps of the gender mainstreaming process, the background of trends and an overview of the current state of affairs in achieving gender equality in target countries, as well as context for understanding the gender aspect in project interventions.
- Manual was accompanied by training of trainers ‘Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality’ for the project management team and local staff of the project partners, aiming to give the teams the knowledge and tools to raise the level of awareness, sensitivity and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/ref-published-two-country-assessments-on-vocational-education-and-training-among-roma-ashkali-and-egyptians-in-kosovo-and-albania/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/winforvet-project-puts-a-strong-accent-on-gender-mainstreaming-read-the-newly-published-gender-analyses-of-roma-girls-and-women-in-vet-in-albania-and-kosovo/>  
<https://www.romaeducationfund.org/winforvet-project-puts-a-strong-accent-on-gender-mainstreaming-read-about-three-core-gender-related-activities/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/winforvet-project-puts-a-strong-accent-on-gender-mainstreaming-read-about-three-core-gender-related-activities/>



adherence to the Project's gender equality outcome among the primary and indirect target groups.

### **Data Collection and Methodological Framework for the Publication**

Obtaining and processing data for this publication was done in the form of research using two sets of data:

- 1 Review of available documents (desk review) and
- 2 Collecting new data, using various techniques depending on the selected source.

Firstly, the Consultant carried out an extensive desk research of available project documents (project proposal and plans, quarterly and annual reports, activity reports, needs assessments, capacity assessments, website and social media channels contents, other project products such as work documents and visibility materials, reports and evaluations for distinct project events, etc.). A special focus of desk research was on documents directly linked to Lessons Learned publication ('Gender Analysis of Roma Women and Girls in VET in Albania' and 'Gender Analysis of Roma Women and Girls in VET in Kosovo'; 'Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality' Manual and ToT curriculum and materials; Country Assessment Research for Albania and Country Assessment Research for Kosovo). Some additional documents and other sources relevant to the prospect of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in VET and their employability from each country were used from additional, outside sources (in addition to REF's sources). This publication relies significantly on publications produced previously through the Project and also uses the data collected during previous research. Detailed analysis of all collected documents was performed.

Secondly, a new set of data was collected from representatives of all relevant stakeholders: project management teams, partner organizations, project beneficiaries, mentors, VET service providers, employers, and various state and local institutions. Short, preliminary interviews were first conducted with project partners and management to determine which key informants will be available and which techniques would be best suited for them based on their preferences and technical options. The data of this type were then collected through individual and group (semi)structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. These meetings were held in-person and online, in Serbian, Albanian, or English language, with great assistance from project partners. In total, 68 respondents from both countries were included.

All collected data were afterwards processed and further in-depth analyzed in order to compare the assumptions posed at the beginning of the Project and the actual situation at the end, to identify lessons learned, opportunities and obstacles faced by the Project, methodologies and approaches that worked well, and Project's challenges.

This publication was prepared in the period March 1 – April 30, 2023.

## **Findings**

### **Obstacles and Opportunities**

Obstacles for better access and full integration of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in education and labor market in Kosovo and Albania are manifold and diverse. In fact, they are intertwined and mutually reinforced in most cases in such a way that they prevent these minorities from entering education and employment and benefiting fully from them.

#### 1. Poverty and Unemployment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians

One of the most significant and impactful obstacles for young Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali in pursuing quality education and subsequent satisfactory employment is poverty and subsequent low employment rates in their families. Namely, due to living in societies with an already relatively low socio-economic standard and employment rate<sup>10</sup>, conditions for these minority groups are much worse<sup>11</sup>. Around half of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali are unemployed. If employed, they earn significantly less than the majority population, often work in the informal sector, or are self-employed in low-profile occupations; and many of them are recipients of social assistance.

As a result of such circumstances, most Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali families struggle or cannot afford at all to invest in quality, lengthy education for children and internships which could lead to better paid, stable jobs. Additionally, paying for necessary books, educational materials and ICT equipment, transportation costs, and in some cases, expensive professional courses, would be impossible for most of these families. While some VET schools have provisions for scholarships, books, accommodation, and even clothing, it is not the case with all of them and this shouldn't be the decisive factor in choosing the schools.

*“One of my main challenges during the program was purchasing necessary books for my profession. From my first year until my third, I had to search for support from CSOs as my family's financial situation made it difficult for me to afford the books”, - beneficiary from Albania*

WinForVET project interventions such as scholarships, paid internships, cost reimbursements and provision of ICT equipment precisely targeted these financial obstacles and contributed to overcoming them thus enabling beneficiaries to access education and employment opportunities.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Kosovo still has the highest unemployment rate in Europe, and Albania more than twice higher than overall unemployment rate in the EU. <https://viborc.com/unemployment-rates-in-europe-per-country-latest-data-for-2022/> <https://viborc.com/unemployment-rates-in-europe-per-country-latest-data-for-2022/>, and very similar stands for the respective poverty rates <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/poorest-countries-in-europe>

<sup>11</sup> Gender Analysis of Roma Women and Girls in VET in Albania, REF, 2021, <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/REF-Gender-Analysis-VET-in-Albania-May-2021.pdf> and Gender Analysis of Roma Women and Girls in VET in Kosovo, REF, 2021, <https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/REF-Gender-Analysis-VET-in-Kosovo-May-2021.pdf>

*“This program was a definite help for me since my family's financial situation is not favorable”,  
- beneficiary from Albania*

Poverty also affects educational and professional choices in a more indirect way, regarding the duration of available educational courses. Shorter lasting schools are preferred, because they mean a shorter period of extra expenses and quicker employment. With limited information on professional prospects and career guidance, this can lead to choosing the shorter lasting schools which might have lesser chances of securing employment at all or being permanently limited to ones with lesser payments.

*“While I have a great appreciation for professional schools, the main difficulty I am experiencing is the duration of the VET school, longer the duration of the program, more expenses appear - four years instead of the usual three in high school. This extra year...means additional expenses and pressure from family members who expected me to secure employment quickly”, - beneficiary from Albania*

Experience in the previous years of the project implementation have demonstrated that these types of financial and material support were a necessary condition for breaking the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion and aiding access of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali to education and subsequent employment and remain needed for the future. Moreover, since scholarships were modest (about 40 euros monthly), the practice has demonstrated that more substantial payment would be more enabling for students from minority communities.

## 2. Marginalization of Communities

Marginalization of minority communities *is* the form of discrimination, but it is discussed here separately because it has very specific significant adverse effects on their access to education and employment.

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are the most disadvantaged ones in Kosovo and Albania. Areas where they reside are often marginalized socially, physically and infrastructurally. Many of them live in settlements with poor infrastructure, even related to basics, such as water, sanitation and electricity, and in houses that are in deplorable condition. This usually also means a greater distance of these settlements to centers with education and employment opportunities, worse and fewer roads, less public transport, inadequate transport lines (that operate too late, too early, or too rarely), etc. Physical seclusion brings about unequal social and economic opportunities in the areas where they live and poses barriers that lead to their exclusion from all areas of life including education and employment.

*“One obstacle that reduces the chances for Roma to find employment in my case is distance. My intern lives in a village and could not adjust to the schedule of my hair salon. Since I work two shifts, one in the morning and another in the afternoon, the timetable became a problem. Therefore, I hired another girl who could adjust to my schedule and is from the local area” – employer from Albania*

Long distances from places of work and education and poor transport connections additionally open the issues of safety (especially for young girls), high travel expenses, long absence from

homes, concerns about the meals of the young, additional expenses for food, or even inability to get to school or work on time.

*"Commuting to school is difficult. The school organizes transportation to get to practice. We get up early and travel by bus. Sometimes we get up at 5 AM to go to practice" - beneficiary from Kosovo*

*"Lack of access to transportation is the obstacle that prevents employers to employ Roma. Majority of Roma neighborhoods are in areas with limited access to transportation... this can make it difficult for individuals to travel to work or for employers to reach potential employees" – employer from Kosovo*

Intervening in the marginalization of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities can only be a major long-term endeavor, attainable only through complex strategies. Therefore, it was not among the activities of the project specifically, but it remains needed in the future as the necessary part of the integration of these communities into majority society, while the project can be viewed as a contribution in that direction.

As for targeted project interventions, activities such as connecting beneficiaries with schools and employers that organize transport themselves or provide cost reimbursements, as well as counseling and advising parents and encouraging and motivating beneficiaries were helpful in overcoming this obstacle. This kind of assistance continues to be needed in the future, and is even necessary in cases when their lack can cause loss of other project benefits for beneficiaries, for example, loss of a job or school drop-out if people cannot commute as required. At the same time, more sustainable solutions, independent of the project, should be researched such as car-pooling, line-taxis, community-organized transportation, widening the network of employers so that they geographically match realistic opportunities of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities for commuting, etc.

### 3. Discrimination

Discrimination still stands as one the most important obstacles for greater inclusion of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in education and employment. Even if the brutal forms of physical violence and legal prohibitions are no longer existent, more "subtle" forms such as the surprise of employers that they are good workers and the need for them to prove that they will not perform poorly at their job *are* forms of discrimination. Some other forms of discrimination include silent ignoring, social distance, avoidance by customers, expecting the worst from them, preferring non-Roma workers, lower expectations and criteria for minority students in schools, neglecting and ignoring in social situations, patronizing attitude and tone and many others.

Aforementioned marginalization of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities is a very important contributing factor that leads to scarce social contacts with majority population and makes the fertile ground for harmful ethnic stereotypes and discriminatory practices. It makes additional obstacles for schools and especially employers who are ready to include minorities because majority population students, other workers and especially majority population customers tend to

discriminate Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali, creating a whole set of new challenges for inclusive schools and businesses.

*“I honestly learned that they are hardworking, capable and willing to work if given the opportunity. So, like most, these values must be shown, they must be seen, as we also have cases in which there are businesses that do not want to hire because they support their opinions on stereotypes” – employer from Albania*

WinForVET project has done a lot to mitigate and overcome all mentioned forms of discrimination by reaching out to VET schools and employers, raising their awareness, sensitizing and preparing them for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali students and workers, mediating, monitoring and intervening with various forms of support whenever needed. It continued with connecting people from communities with schools and employers, preparing and supporting them all the way. This has been an ongoing process with multifold interventions that facilitated the inclusion of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali in education and employment and is still very much needed for the future especially since discriminatory attitudes are among the decisive factors making a difference between starting inclusion and full, sustainable integration.

*“From this experience, I’ve learned that there is a high need to work with the youth of Roma community and to build great communication and trust, so they can know that they can rely on someone and that they are supported and not discriminated” – employer from Kosovo*

The project partners have also been constantly engaged in anti-discrimination activities through communication, advocacy, publishing, promoting, cooperation, networking activities in local communities and society in general. Given the identified level of stereotypes about Roma, these activities remain necessary in the future, too.

The consequences of living in a society surrounded by negative stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes and practices are dire and deep for minority communities. This often causes demotivation, discouragement, lowering of self-esteem, fear, shame, disempowerment, feelings of rejection and decisions to give up. Rejection and negative views are even accepted by some Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, especially the youth, showing how non-resilient the community is to discrimination.

*“Through this project, I have come to the realization that all individuals are equal and should be treated as such” – beneficiary from Albania*

The project has also dealt with this side of discrimination through constant mentoring, consulting, advising and supporting of beneficiary students and workers, helping them overcome this barrier on the situational level and this is still very much needed in the future. Remedying the consequences of discrimination on the individual and the level of community remains a significant far-reaching intervention into resiliency building and empowerment that could be expanded in the future.

#### 4. Gender Inequalities

Gender inequalities remain prominent in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and an important factor for fewer chances of education and employment for girls and women. Although gender inequalities exist in the majority population too, they are even more pronounced in minority

communities. From enrollment rates in basic education, through drop-out and finishing rates, unemployment and earnings, unfavorable influences affect girls and women more at every step.

Based on initially performed gender analyses and gender mainstreaming commitment, the project has addressed identified gender inequalities stemming from deeply rooted gender roles and power dynamics that impact both men and women in the domain of education and labor. Extensive interventions were done throughout the project from using gender-desegregated data, monitoring trends in gender norms, to in-depth analyses of gender dynamics. Stakeholders were informed, sensitized and empowered to prevent discrimination and discriminatory stereotypes towards education and employment of girls and women; girls and women were consulted, supported and empowered; role models for gender equality were promoted as well as success stories. All of these activities had a clear positive effect on gender balance in the Project as well as on diminishing harmful gender norms and they remain necessary in the future, too, with a prospect of expanding gender-related interventions.

*“We broke down the barrier because previously female children were not educated, and after the war, work on this issue suddenly began. I am one of those who started the initiative to really educate female children and I have been working in an educational center for 14 years” – mentor from Kosovo*

In overall, a slight loosening of strict gender attitudes and norms is observed as the minority communities became more open and susceptible to allowing and supporting girls to get an education and pursue employment. At the same time, more girls and women see their future as well-educated and employed individuals.

*“There are challenges such as prejudices from the community and the mentality of the family that might prevent girls from working after finishing school, but I personally plan to continue my education and work even after getting married” – beneficiary from Albania*

## 5. The Most Vulnerable Subgroups within Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali Population are Difficult to Reach

There is a great diversity among Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities. Remote or close, rural or urban, more or less integrated, secluded or open, poor or well-off, etc. some of the sub-groups are especially vulnerable and difficult to reach and include even in the project aimed at mitigating vulnerability and enabling integration.

Special attention in this respect should be paid to minority youth and adults without finished elementary school which disqualifies them from any prospects for decent employment as well as from programs for professional education, even startup support. This is especially difficult for elderly people without basic education because it is highly unlikely that programs for them will emerge.

The second significant especially vulnerable sub-group encompasses people with insufficient language skills. This is a particularly important issue in Kosovo, especially for those communities who live in areas with Serbian majority and have finished education in Serbian language, since

they do not speak majority language (Albanian). Additionally, as a consequence of political differences their acquired diplomas are not recognized within Albanian-speaking Kosovo educational system, which prevents them to continue education there, receive assistance from that system or seek any employment. RVK has provided them with language courses, lobbied with VET providers to provide them with Serbian-speaking professors, when possible, advocated with relevant institutions to include them in existing programs, etc. Still, this remains an unsolved political issue with long-reaching consequences for the target groups.

For some Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali there is also an issue of conflicting regulations such as, in some cases, people who are receiving social assistance are not allowed to go to public VET schools that are funded from the same budget, and these barriers have been tackled both on policy and individual level by the project.

Especially vulnerable groups identified by this project are also unregistered children, people with health issues that cannot be employed, those from small municipalities that have no VET schools in their territory and those over 30 since they are excluded from educational programs for youth.

Additional obstacles stem from major ones that were listed above, either as their consequence, or as a result of confluence, compound effects of main obstacles. These also strongly prevent Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people in full access to and full benefitting from education and employment:

- There is a gross lack of information, knowledge and understanding of available options in education and employment and the ways of accessing them which prevents Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian youth and their families to make informed choices in their best interest. They also lack information on job openings and subsidies for business-owners or agricultural producers which prevents them from accessing those too.
- Many Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians although unemployed, are not registered as active jobseekers because they are unaware of possible benefits of registration, which prevents them from receiving information on job openings and different assistance in looking for a job.
- In some cases, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians lack awareness of the importance of education and proper employment, so they believe that education and employment will not benefit them sufficiently and give up on them in advance. This negative trend is receding but still is not completely eradicated.
- On the general level of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, there is a lack of positive role models demonstrating how well-educated and formally employed members of the community can steadily prosper, especially for women and girls. Instead, there are a lot of examples of the exact opposite – how insufficiently educated cannot find formal employment with sufficient earnings, how discriminatory society rejects them and how they give up. Additionally, for those who decide to get educated there is a lack of role models of different professions, especially those outside of stereotypical gender roles.
- Most VET and employment offices do not employ Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people, not even as the front-liners for contact with beneficiaries which lessens the sensibility and acceptability of these offices for minority groups. Consequently, the level of confidence in

formal employment institutions for aiding their employment further deteriorates.

- Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people are frequently earning for a living in the informal sector, deeming it acceptable, familiar and well-known, simpler and safer way of work, since they do not have basic education, information, role models for other choices, close potential workplace or confidence; or because they earn more that way, are discouraged by discrimination and lack of employment prospects.
- Majority of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people, young students and job seekers lack necessary ICT equipment, steady internet and mobile network access as well as all the skills needed to timely and easily follow classes online, learn or finish homework, follow job openings, find information on calls for or on financial support for students and unemployed, efficiently follow and search social media and other platforms or the official websites etc. Some don't even own mobile phones, but use parents' devices only for a short time daily, or like some girls, only under supervision. Moreover, they are unaccustomed to extensive use of technologies and when given the small opportunity, they cannot quickly benefit fully from it, continuing to prefer in-person communication. In the era of digitalization, this issue is the same as the lack of basic life skills and means of communication.

*"Meetings with the mentor are on social networks, and for us, it would mean more to see each other in person. It's easier to work in-person and we can communicate better than through messages" – beneficiary from Kosovo*

- There is an important underdevelopment of life skills - skills that are necessary for success in modern society. Due to the unfavorable educational and social environment, most project beneficiaries did not have the chance to learn them and therefore show a lack of basic skills from this set such as self-awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, leadership and responsibility, social and cross-cultural skills, initiative and self-direction, productivity and other. This particular lack of skills seems to some employers as the cultural barrier or cultural difference in work ethic and attitudes towards work, and makes minority candidates less acceptable for hiring.

*"I found out that there is a lot of potential to Roma youth, because they are multi-lingual speakers and very skilled but they have a high need to widen their horizons of knowledge and skills to have easier transition to the job market" – employer from Kosovo*

- Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian youth often have gaps in education and insufficient general knowledge in comparison to majority population which makes it harder for them to pass mature exams, reach the GPA required for university studies and continuing education. They have to put in much more effort to keep up with their peers and make up for gaps and for this reason, educational support is of great importance for them and could prevent drop-out.

*"I did not face any major problems during the VET term so far, but I found professional subjects to be challenging. However, with hard work and dedication, I overcame these obstacles, and now I am working as a waiter, which is going well" – beneficiary from Albania*



- The motivation of students is sometimes relatively low as a result of various factors ranging from financial difficulties, insufficient educational support, the experience of discrimination, commuting and safety issues, low awareness of the importance of education, and many others. It, therefore, remains necessary to work on motivating students and removing external barriers that weaken their motivation to prevent drop-outs.
- Insufficient family support for education and employment of their children. Since their parents usually lack education, information or connections in the wider society, they cannot provide needed support for children in education and employment, neither in advice, nor in directions, or as a support in homework. Therefore, direct contact with the families of students and support of families remains crucial, since they are the decision-makers in the family and can decide to stop the student's education if they fail to see the purpose or perceive it to be in opposition to their values.
- In comparison to majority population, there is insufficient educational support for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students from the entire immediate environment. Coming from underdeveloped communities there is a low chance that someone from the neighborhood or extended family could assist them with all educational needs. Private tutoring is unavailable for financial reasons at least, if available nearby at all. Schools usually will not commit enough extracurricular hours for this kind of support to be sufficient, etc. This leads to minority students often lagging in school achievements and struggling on their own unless the CSOs intervene.

*“We can get a lot of help just by asking! If children had something like this before, they would have finished school too. We can learn anything if we ask and if we are interested” – beneficiary from Kosovo*

To all of these barriers WinForVET project has responded with precisely tailored interventions that removed the barriers for beneficiaries, empowered them and facilitated their access to education and employment.

The project has also noted and successfully addressed several possible external, contextual factors that influence adversely education and employment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people, and which act as barriers since these communities don't have the capacities to overcome them without assistance as majority population does: COVID-19 crisis, lack of career counseling, insufficient links between VET and the labor market, weak SMEs and insufficient support for them, unfavorable overall economic situation, high unemployment rates, generally low salaries, migration of minorities to EU countries, lagging institutionalization of good practices and policy influencing.

## **Opportunities**

Over the course of project implementation various opportunities were identified and seized to secure both greater inclusion of Roma, Askhali and Egyptian people in VET and employment, and their greater benefitting from them:

- Relatively stable context conditions (apart from mentioned COVID-19 crisis) – governments at national and local levels, political situation, relevant national and international policies and key stakeholders have enabled the project to smoothly operate according to plan and produce foreseen results and impacts in both countries.
- Key (public sector) stakeholders were open to cooperation and their necessary participation in project implementation was significant both on national and local levels. A number of key MoUs were signed with them in both countries. In some cases, it was noted that there is no sufficient capacity, especially in local level institutions, to implement functional social inclusion mechanisms in education and employment, nor information and understanding of difficulties faced by students from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and therefore, the project partners were assisting them with these challenges.
- General acceptance of gender mainstreaming and gender equality as values and goals of their work by most institutions and policymakers were an opportunity for project partners to improve cooperation with them on these issues. Work on their understanding of gender dynamics, especially in minority communities, and addressing their not well-developed practices in gender transformative actions was also required.
- The existence of a multitude of different policies and regulations for the improvement of access to and benefits of education and employment of minorities was an opportunity seized by project partners to mediate and facilitate beneficiaries' access to them. There was also a need to steer policies towards better implementation and advocate for adjustments in cases when they were unfunctional (such as the inclusion of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali in public institutions, subsidies, start-up quota and tax relief for companies that hire employees from these communities) or counterproductive (such as designing new educational programs in high schools and VETs, conditioning social assistance with withdrawal from VET and some employment schemes).
- The existence of other initiatives and projects for the advancement of education and employment of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali, national, local and international ones, was a considerable opportunity for project partners to develop cooperation, network and coordinate with them to achieve synergistic effects or join forces on common tasks, or just to refer project beneficiaries to them.
- The shortage of workforce as a consequence of high rates of migration to Western European countries was noticed in both countries by the project staff. It gives the opportunity to Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali community to ease their access to the labor market. By monitoring the trends in demands of certain profiles, the project could facilitate their application and selection of VET courses.
- Multiple private businesses suitable for employment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian workers of given profiles were open for cooperation and their participation in the project enabled successful implementation of this component. In most cases, it was needed to work on promotion, awareness-raising and advocacy to achieve employment, too. Also, it was noted that all of them are struggling to adapt to various challenges and with the lack of subsidies.

- Significant opportunity for advancing the employment of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali was identified in the potential for their self-employment. This option still has to be examined in more detail to design future support interventions with the most chances for success that would embed existing provisions for entrepreneurs suitable for these communities. Additionally, businesses owned by Roma, Egyptian, or Ashkali are not well-developed, and they are facing additional difficulties in competition with the majority population owned ones, wherefore specific support in that respect will be needed.
- The most important opportunity seized by the project with success was the engagement of local mentors and tutors, people from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, who reside in those communities and are well-known and regarded. This has enabled project to bring the change “from within” and position mentors as key change agents in the communities. This position has also enabled mentors to monitor the situation with beneficiaries and their progress, but also the wider situation in communities, to reach out to new potential beneficiaries through their work, and to act like role models, promoters, information bearers, etc. Respect in the communities has enabled them also to advise parents in the best interest of children and to mediate potential issues with VET providers.

## SUCCESS STORY

### *Sofijana Ajeti, Ferizaj, Kosovo*

*Sofijana was a WinForVet beneficiary for academic year 2020/2021. She is an outstanding student with a dream to become a medical doctor and help people regardless of their race, religion or gender. This is her story:*

*“When I heard about Roma Versitas, I did my best to find more information about this organization. And I discovered that many young Roma had benefited from its services. Then it came to my mind, why don’t I benefit from Roma Versitas in the future. I consider myself an introvert and I don’t like to express my feelings. People from Roma Versitas told me: you must feel free to speak. When you are in school, speak up, do not be afraid, and say what you have to say! I was told that I have a habit of being quiet, and it helped me a lot to learn to speak up. For the last seven months, Roma Versitas has helped me a lot, especially the mentor. She is really good, all the time she was speaking to me and advising me for the future.”*

## Lessons Learned

- Major obstacles that strongly prevent Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian in fully accessing and fully benefiting from education and employment remain the same structural ones that were present for decades – exclusion, discrimination, poverty, lack of education, marginalization of entire minority communities. They create the self-perpetuating vicious circle that prevents Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian from advancing and developing on individual and community level. Moreover, through interaction and mutual reinforcement, they continue to create an endless stream of subsequent barriers in all spheres of life.
- Direct work on these issues is necessary, regardless of how unattainable and far-reaching it seems now. Given their structural and systemic nature and long-time perseverance, only the

long-term, continuous, strategic approach to breaking these key barriers for integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians can be effective in order to finally and permanently break the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion. Without such an approach in focus, furthermore, all the other interventions could become unsustainable. Now, other interventions not tackling major barriers are only bridging activities until essential integration is reached, because they could not be sufficient by themselves. And with their ending, which has to come at some point if they are project-based, even the lesser barriers which they did tackle could naturally and soon deteriorate to their previous level.

- To successfully tackle major barriers, long-term strategic advocacy is necessary for bringing about meaningful substantial public policies for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in education and employment. And such policies are the only way to create real change in their lives. Evidence-based public policies that are managed in a participatory way are needed but are still not in place. Pro-form, low-impact, limited participation of CSOs, usually only in the creation of policies does not suffice. It has to expand to more meaningful civic participation throughout the management cycle of public policies from creation and implementation to monitoring, evaluation and learning. To ensure such full implementation of public policies, advocacy must be long-term and strategic. It should gather various local and non-local agents and stakeholders that will act in continuity until they succeed. Since public policies are changing slowly in the region and achieved advances often deteriorate without sustained pressure, strategic partnerships and strong thematic long-term coalitions that surpass the lifespan of a single project are needed. Therefore, advocacy efforts, rightly initiated by projects, need to be taken over by local leaders and carried on continuously, while the role of project holders during the life cycle of the project should also be to build the local infrastructure, partnerships, network, coalitions, and capacities for that.
- As the faces of discrimination change, to be able to precisely tailor effective interventions, the approach to tackling it needs to change as well. Although the brutal forms of physical violence and legalized racial prohibitions are practically nonexistent anymore, novel, more “subtle” forms are still present and still have their dire exclusionary and disempowering effects. Levels of awareness of different forms of discrimination are not sufficient. The general public i.e. the majority population, is grossly unaware of discrimination; but so are also some stakeholders relevant to the integration of minorities e.g. some employers and institutions. They particularly struggle to recognize forms that are not openly violent as actual discrimination and to distance themselves from all negative racial stereotypes. It is therefore needed to continue efforts on fighting discrimination – awareness raising in the general population, capacity building of relevant professionals, advocacy and measures for preventing and stopping the discrimination. In that way, it becomes important to update the research on contemporary manifestations of discrimination and racial stereotypes, reassess their multi-faceted effects on minorities, to publish and disseminate them so that further antidiscrimination measures, together with partner organizations’ communication about them, can be tailored precisely to current manifestations and the characteristics of target publics.
- It is important not to omit working with the other side of discrimination – Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali people affected by negative racial stereotypes and discriminatory acts and practices that can make them struggle to integrate or even give it up entirely. Implementation experience

from the project has demonstrated that they lack awareness, information and understanding of the phenomena; often do not recognize its effects and have insufficient capacities to cope with them as well as to deal with discriminators. Supporting those discriminated against, empowering them and entire communities, is a starting intervention. Further steps need to include resiliency building both on the individual and the level of communities.

- The role and contribution of the beneficiaries can be much more engaging. As the project has established, most of the beneficiaries remain passive, although responsive to the project activities, especially the girls. Contrary to the widespread misconception, this, in most cases, is not an actual lack of interest, but the result of disempowerment, lack of self-esteem and social skills. Therefore, there is a need to enable more active roles of beneficiaries. In that sense, the multifarious support and empowerment of beneficiaries is a cornerstone and the basis for the effectiveness and sustainable benefits of all the other project interventions and the means to achieve their more active role in the project. Given their social and economic exclusion, marginalization and relative powerlessness and high vulnerability, Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali, especially the girls, can hugely benefit from continued and expanded mentoring, tutoring, counseling, outreach, informing, promotion and other empowering interventions. Especially the group and in-person activities, leadership assignments (even the small ones as group leaders, presenters, time keepers, alumni liaisons, etc.) with targeted additional trainings and support can provide them with opportunities to practice and gradually accommodate themselves in a safe environment to taking-up active and even leading roles in appropriate activities. These types of interventions have a lasting impact and are recognized as crucial and life-changing by beneficiaries. Moreover, when conducted over a longer period and with clear goal, they could transform passive beneficiaries into future role models and change agents in their communities; the benefits of which continue much longer after the lifespan of any project.
- Direct work with communities, families, and especially the parents is an indispensable component of the project that advances the education and employment of their youth. Given the strong family ties, a sense of loyalty to the family and the fact that parents deciding on life choices of their children is a frequent norm in Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali families, influencing them could prevent transgenerational transmission of old models of life. Work with communities and families on one hand is needed to support and empower them, to enhance their development as a part of the immediate environment of project beneficiaries. On the other hand, it is important in order to prepare them to be cooperative and supportive of new trends, to be willing and capable to back young people all the way through their education and employment, especially girls and young women. Promotional, awareness raising, and informational interventions in communities, individual counseling and advising of parents are the interventions of choice with this aim.
- Comprehensive, multicomponent, versatile support to the education and employment challenges of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian is the well-chosen approach of this project. It is the best response to manyfold, intertwined, mutually reinforcing obstacles minorities face. Basing project interventions additionally on individual development plans, with special attention to gender aspects, enabled the assistance to be tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of each beneficiary so that it produces maximum effects. In such a way, the high adaptability, and flexibility of the project are embedded in its very design and enable its effective

implementation. In continuation, it will be needed to further build on, refine and elaborate project interventions based on careful monitoring of obstacles that arise for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in all spheres of full socio-economic integration into society.

- The gender component has proven to be highly important and effective in the project. A lot was done on advancing gender equalities of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women and girls over the course of project implementation. All planned interventions have proven to be successful and efficient, but working on them has opened a whole new horizon of gender issues still unaddressed: uneven burden put on women during emergencies, female health, unpaid work, lack of female role models, roles of boys and men in gender equality, inheriting traditions, women's agency, bodily autonomy, changing trends in gender attitudes in minority and majority populations, etc. This poses the need to expand and deepen the interventions addressing new issues, as well as to continuously update and enrich gender analyses in order to secure always relevant interventions. Furthermore, this leads deeper towards the root, structural causes of gender inequalities and designing ways of addressing them.

## *SUCCESS STORY*

*Kimeta Gashi, Fushe Kosove, Kosovo*

*Kimeta is one of WinForVet outstanding beneficiaries. The young girl had finished secondary school and attended training for chef assistant at the Professional Training Institute. This is her story:*

*“I received support from my parents and family regarding my education. For me, the kitchen is important. I love being in the kitchen, exploring new recipes with the help of my mother. I have already finished secondary school and, I see doing an internship right now as a big plus. This is what I love doing because now my future employment is easier than it was before. What I would love in the future is to have a place to launch my business. Be my own boss.”*

- In the next phase, more systemic and strategic dealing with gender issues is needed to ensure that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities. The new project cycle provides the opportunity to fully mainstream gender, from the use of gender analyses data in designing specifically targeted interventions that are gender-responsive, through setting gender-sensitive indicators and monitoring and evaluation plan from the beginning to gender-sensitive budgeting.
- In order to implement interventions for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women and girls in education and employment successfully, all engaged staff should have strong gender mainstreaming capacities and sensitivity to spot and tackle gender issues in direct contact with beneficiaries and communities and provide continuous support in that respect too. This also extends to relevant stakeholders – policymakers, decision-makers, institutions on the national and local level, employers, schools, VET providers, partners, etc. They do not always have sufficient capacity and sensibility to identify existing gender issues, particularly not in the

context of minority cultures and communities, attribute them correctly to gender oppression, and design and/or implement interventions in a manner that would advance gender equality.

- The issue of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian women and girls in education and employment is an intersectional one. Several axes of oppression may intersect in the lives of Roma women and girls to make their choices and options more difficult. They are Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian, but also women, which adds an additional source of disadvantage, marginalization and discrimination. Then, their different class, culture, religion, etc. add more layers of disadvantage and provide further grounds for inequality, creating compounding experiences of discrimination and influence adversely how they participate in education, employment, and in wider society. As a rule, these identities operate together, exacerbating one another as well as increase the injustice in the lives of Roma women. And as a rule, each woman has her own complex mix of identities, shaped by several factors at the same time, which lead to a very unique set of opportunities and barriers in VET and employment for her. The opportunities and barriers in accessing VET and employment are significantly different for varied sub-groups in this population. Roma girls from traditional, secluded, poor rural settlements and young Egyptian women from urban non-segregated decent-living settlements have very different considerations when deciding on their education and employment. Or, in some cases, some of them even do not have the option to decide for themselves, exactly because of these differences. For this reason, there is a need to adopt the intersectional approach acknowledging different realities of different sub-groups of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali girls and women and design interventions based on it.
- Gender-sensitive and specifically designed empowerment of girls and women is an indispensable and foundational intervention for all work with them. Given the social and economic exclusion, high rates of poverty, and relative powerlessness and high vulnerability, Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali girls mostly have no other choice than to rely on their community and follow very restrictive traditional rules and roles. This demonstrates how intersectional inequalities deprive them of important life opportunities. Other cultural characteristics – strong family ties and a sense of loyalty to the family - also contribute to the enforcement of these rules. Therefore, the interventions aiming at the empowerment of girls that are rooted in their communities and offer assistance “from within” are so needed. Empowerment of girls and women is thus a necessary component of every program aiming at sustainable improvements in the field of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali education and employment. What’s more, as the Project has confirmed, these types of interventions have a lasting impact and are recognized as crucial and life-changing by girls and women.

## ***SUCCESS STORY***

### ***Blerina and Diku Kallo, Elbasan, Albania***

***Blerina and Diku are a young adult Roma couple from Elbasan. They are married and have children. Blerina works as a cleaning lady, while Diku does not have a certified profession yet. They both want to embrace a career and increase their chances for better-paid jobs. Therefore, the WinForVET project supported Blerina to become a hairstylist and Diku, a gypsum specialist.***

*This couple is a great role model for many young Roma couples. They support each other and are open and active members of their communities.*

- An especially devastating part of traditional gender norms is gender-based violence, which is an underlying and recurrent issue that influences the education and employment of Roma girls and women. This research has shown, although violence was not a topic in focus, that it is widely present and influential in Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities as well as highly normalized i.e. believed to be normal and acceptable. What's more, there is a heightened vulnerability to GBV of female Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women, a lesser chance of reporting, as well as inadequate and insufficient legislation and service provision even if they do. Such a situation calls for addressing this issue by every intervention that aims to be at least gender sensitive and advocating for interventions of other actors that would do so too.
- There is a continuing lack of reliable, representative data on Roma women in VET and employment necessary for creating successful interventions. Assessments and analysis showed that data is lacking in literally every aspect of this issue and there are no mechanisms in place to collect them in an adequate way in the future. There is a need for publicly available, ethnic and sex-disaggregated, reliable, representative and comprehensive data, sufficiently specific and disaggregated in necessary details regarding Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali employment, education and VET, gender, and especially the intersectionalities and in-depth issues. This lack of data is preventing the creation of evidence-based policies, projects and interventions and, due to it, there also are no baseline values with which achieved results of existing interventions could be compared. Therefore, it additionally makes monitoring and evaluation of existing efforts incomplete and not fully conclusive. The lack of data is so massive that it requires civil society organizations to fill it in – collect, publish, share and disseminate them, but also to advocate for it with state actors and raise awareness of its importance in society.
- All the interventions for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women and girls in VET and employment are highly affected by broader social context and should take it into account. Firstly, it is a hard reality that the interest in VET depends on realistic prospects for employment based on it, since this connection is not guaranteed in the broader country context of the VET system. Girls and women are aware of this, and they express clearly that their interest in VET is not for the sake of education, but only if it gives them a realistic chance for employment. Thus, interventions for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women and girls in VET and employment should be viewed in that context and interventions should contain connections with employment. Also, all of these interventions happen in the broader context of society where there is a weak labor market, low employment rates, and slim chances for decent employment and earnings. Girls and especially women are aware of this, and it demotivates them from pursuing education and employment, knowing that their chances to secure a decent living in this way are minimal. For this reason, interventions for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women and girls in VET and employment should be viewed in this context too, and interventions should incorporate prospects for making a decent earning and living based on VET. And finally, all these interventions happen in broader society with a high level of prejudice, marginalization, exclusion and discrimination against Roma, which additionally



denies them already scarce chances for decent employment. For this reason, interventions should carefully select realistic and acceptable employment opportunities to connect with VET, while at the same time advocating for greater inclusion of Roma into the labor market.

- Awareness-raising campaigns should be organized for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities on the importance of VET, education and employment, with a focus on women, to inform them about the opportunities offered by VET programs, the qualifications they receive, and opportunities in the job market, the advantages of higher education and formal employment. Success stories and positive role models from WinForVET Project and other projects should be widely shared.

## SUCCESS STORY

### *Fabjan Ymeri, Durres, Albania*

*“Greetings, my name is Fabjan Ymeri. I am 19 years old from Durres. I have completed the Vocational Education School at Beqir Ceta for Electro-Mechanics. After finishing elementary school my wish was to attend a vocational school. During the time I was in elementary, I used to practice a lot of experiments with my toy cars. After a while, I realized I had skills for the branch I picked in VET. I choose vocational education because, in my opinion, is more reasonable in professionally building a person for future employment. It provides one with plenty of employment opportunities and professional growth. The electricity branch attracts me the most, especially electric installation because it brings satisfactory incomes. In about five years, I see myself running a small company of electricians in Albania and maybe offering services abroad too. This reason has motivated me to pursue higher studies in Air Conditioning Systems at the University of Aleksander Moisiu in Durres. I personally suggest to all youngsters to pick vocational education because it combines practical work and theory at school. Such a model encourages practical skills for the labor market.”*

- VET trainings should be matched with the needs of the labor market and the target group. Still, the training sector is providing training to more people than the job market can absorb, not sufficiently matching the type of market needs and not offering novel more prospective profiles. In addition, training profiles are not always matched with the target group. Vocational schools should offer profiles that are suitable for men and women, in accordance with the cultural context. According to data, the trainings provided for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian women are reinforcing the stereotypes that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities can only do basic jobs which are confined to traditional gender niches.
- The project is still necessary and relevant because what was achieved will not continue without it. The context has not changed significantly in this project period, so the project is still needed because it provides key enablers and removes key barriers to greater inclusion of minority communities in education and employment. It functions as a clasp pin that connects existing resources in communities, adds necessary ones that are missing, and directs them towards achieving positive changes for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali in VET and employment. With the absence of structural systemic changes that can take over this function, the project will be

needed for a long time. This requires a long-term strategic commitment that surpasses the life span of any project and is on the organizational level of project partners. Therefore, a part of the project's exit strategy should be formulated to include strengthening partners' capacities to take up such a task independently. This should at a minimum include strengthening of management on an organizational and strategic level in all its components, particularly in sustainability, advocacy and partnership building. Particularly beneficial in this respect is teaching organizations how to utilize self-assessment and self-learning tools as the engines of development for their future. Additionally, the main REF office and REF Country Facilitators can support partners in this process.

## SUCCESS STORY

### *Shpetim Hysen, Korca*

*My name is Shpetim Hyseni. I am 29 years old, born in Korça. Some time ago, I used to volunteer in a Christian organization as a team leader of a group of youngsters from the Roma community. We used to organize various activities and summer camps together. I recall it as a joyful experience! I finished VET school in hotel management and tourism, but my passion is carpentry. I chose to apply to the WinForVET scholarship to improve and certify my knowledge and skills as a carpenter and furniture craftsman. I love being a carpenter because it is an art on its own. I can combine these two skills, carpentry and hotel management and tourism, to work as an interior designer for hotels, restaurants and offices. Maybe after five years or more, I want to see myself owning my furniture showroom. I wanted to share my story with you because I believe in the phrase from "Zero to Hero". I am someone who started from zero. I used to work for low wages in a few furniture shops. Later, I decided to work alone, just with a screwdriver in my pocket. Step by step, I saved some money from which I could purchase essential tools. The Roma Versitas Albania, through WinForVET project, has recently provided me with a supply fund. I bought equipment and gradually responded to my client's needs. In short, I want to raise awareness that nothing is impossible to achieve. You first need willingness and passion to embrace a profession or a skill. The rest requires hard work and persistence."*

## **Recommendations**

### **For the Public Sector:**

- Advocate for public and available ethnic and sex-disaggregated, reliable, representative and comprehensive data sufficiently specific and disaggregated in necessary details regarding Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians' employment, education and VET, gender, and especially the intersectionalities
- Advocate for an intersectional approach to different sub-groups of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and design policies based on it
- Advocate for evidence-based policymaking, i.e. based on continuous research and reliable data on all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and gender-related policies
- Advocate for full and transparent implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian-related policies and gender-related policies
- Advocate for broad anti-discriminatory policies to create a context which enhances anti-discriminatory practices in the entire society
- Advocate with public institutions to become role models for nondiscriminatory practices and promote such examples, especially in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
- Advocate for engagement of staff from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population in public offices at contact points for work with them
- Advocate for gender mainstreaming at all levels, in all the policies, not only the specific gender policies
- Advocate for meaningful inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representatives in planning, monitoring and evaluation of relevant national and local policies as partners
- Continuously participate in planning, monitoring and evaluation of relevant national and local policies as a partner
- Advocate for improving living conditions of marginalized Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians settlements, including public transport connections
- Bring gender-based violence in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities to the agenda, starting with early marriages, and advocate for targeted interventions within relevant policies
- Advocate for establishing VET monitoring and evaluation system, with mandatory reporting at least by ethnicity and gender
- Advocate for greater inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in state kindergartens
- Advocate for improving quality, equity, and access at all levels of education for all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for non-segregation and nondiscriminatory practices at all levels of education for all Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for financial support for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in all levels of education including VET, with a special focus on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls and women
- Advocate for systemic provision of professional orientation and career guidance for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians at early educational levels

- Advocate for interventions targeted at narrowing gender gaps for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls and women in all aspects of education and employment
- Advocate for employment services to offer more interventions that assist Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian workers' access the labor market, overcoming sectoral and spatial mismatches, and increasing the outreach toward Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for the financial incentives for hiring Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for implementing broader affirmative action programs in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian employment
- Advocate for prioritizing job creation for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, with special attention to women
- Advocate for tax reduction in specific sectors, like waste collecting and recycling, farming and various services relevant for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

#### **For VET providers:**

- Advocate for greater inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian in VET services, with a special focus on the inclusion of girls and women
- Advocate for anti-discriminatory policies in VET services to create an educational context which enhances the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for the gender-sensitive municipal VET Action Plans for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
- Advocate with VET providers to ensure that they offer courses acceptable for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls, but ensure that those don't reinforce gender division of labor
- Strategically steer away VET providers from offering Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians only courses for basic jobs according to negative ethnic stereotypes, by raising their awareness and advocating for offering more versatile and courses for more advanced, professional jobs
- Provide VET services with labor market analysis and advocate with them for better matching of VET courses with labor market demand, with a special focus on women
- Advocate with VET providers for a stronger connection of VET with employment opportunities for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian to ensure that they have a prospect of decent employment based on VET, with a special focus on women
- Advocate for targeted VET measures and transition programs from education to employment or self-employment relevant for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

#### **For Business Sector:**

- Conduct information campaigns to increase employer awareness on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian employment and the best approaches to tackling it, with a special focus on the employment of women
- Advocate for greater inclusion and integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in employment, with a special focus on women

- Advocate for socially responsible practices of employers regarding the employment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Advocate for anti-discriminatory policies in businesses to create a work context that enhances the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
- Provide local businesses information on working with vulnerable groups, and encourage their engagement, with a special focus on working with women
- Advocate with employers for a stronger connection with VET to ensure that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians have a prospect of decent employment based on VET
- Initiate and support the establishment and maintenance of coordination of local VET services with employers
- Strategically steer away employers from offering Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians only the basic jobs according to negative ethnic stereotypes by raising their awareness and advocating for offering more versatile and more advanced, professional jobs
- Widen the network of employers, with an additional focus on geographically matching realistic opportunities of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali communities for commuting.

#### **For Other CSOs:**

- Advocate for gender mainstreaming at all levels of CSOs
- Advocate for shadow reporting regarding Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian employment, education and VET, gender, and especially the intersectionalities
- Advocate for publishing, sharing and disseminating relevant data regarding employment, education, VET and gender issues
- Form strategic thematic long-term partnerships, networks and coalitions for joint actions on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian employment, education and gender issues
- Strengthen local CSOs, especially community and grass-roots Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian CSOs.

#### **For Organizations That Work with Roma Egyptian and Ashkali Communities:**

- Systematically collect, publish and disseminate data, disaggregated per ethnicity and sex, sufficiently specific and disaggregated in necessary details regarding employment, education and VET, gender, and especially the intersectionalities, with a special focus on hard-to-reach sub-groups
- Continuously update and deepen gender analyses towards the comprehensive geographical and diversity coverage, and towards identification of root, structural causes of gender inequalities and design interventions addressing them
- Update the research on contemporary manifestations of discrimination and racial stereotypes, reassess their multi-faceted effects on communities, publish and widely disseminate collected data
- Fully mainstream gender at all levels of work with communities and at all stages of the management cycle – from gender analyses to gender-sensitive budgeting

- Aim for at least gender-sensitive interventions, and where possible, for gender-transformative ones
- Adopt the intersectional approach acknowledging different realities of different sub-groups of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, especially girls and women, and design interventions based on it
- Enable meaningful participation of community representatives in planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects through an advisory committee or similar mechanisms
- Support and strengthen the local community and grass-roots activism
- Work on building resilience to discrimination on an individual and community level through group and individual interventions
- Work on de-normalization and de-internalization of gender stereotypes and discrimination with communities, especially regarding gender-based violence, empowering them in this direction through group and individual interventions
- Continuously provide broadly conceptualized group and individual work with girls for their empowerment targeting their specific, high vulnerability
- Initiate self-help groups for girls and women targeted to reduce gender-biased social norms
- Establish and continually support and empower the group of beneficiaries - change agents in their communities
- Continue engaging and empowering people from communities that are role models and change agents that can bring changes “from within” to work in communities
- Continue providing financial and other material support for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in VET in sufficient amounts, regardless of the course length, with a special focus on girls and women
- Initiate and support the establishment of sustainable solutions for poor public transportation coverage of marginalized communities such as car-pooling, line taxies, community-organized transportation, etc.
- Continue working on awareness rising in communities and especially with families on the need for and importance of education and employment, with a special focus on girls and women
- Provide professional orientation and career guidance for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians at early educational levels
- Continue providing support for interested members of communities in VET enrollment, graduation, internship and employment, with a special focus on women and girls
- Inform, empower, and sensitize the community to different, non-traditional vocations for girls and boys
- Support girls and boys in transition to non-traditional vocations within VET and when seeking (better paid) employment, help them step out of traditional gender norms even when it is not in accordance with prescribed gender roles
- Organize childcare services within the family, and in the community to ensure that women will be able to attend VET courses and especially take up full decent employment based on VET, given their homemaking duties
- Provide counseling and additional educational support for inclusion into VET and the labor market, with a special focus on girls and women

- Provide life skills courses to beneficiaries with extensive opportunities for practice, such as community centers
- Strategically steer away Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians from looking only for basic courses and jobs according to negative ethnic stereotypes by raising their awareness and facilitating their access to more versatile and more advanced, professional courses and jobs
- Promote the positive success stories and role models of well-educated, employed and successful Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in their communities and in the broader society, with the inclusion of an established alumni network of beneficiaries, and with a special focus on women and girls' role models
- Establish a sufficiently comprehensive mechanism for supporting the self-employment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians encompassing capacity building, financial aid, facilitated access to relevant institutions and programs, hubs for entrepreneurs, and ongoing assistance.

### **For the Partner Organizations**

- Strengthen and support partners' long-term strategic commitment to work on issues of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian education, employment, and gender equality as a part of the project's exit strategy
- Strengthen partners' management capacity at the organizational and strategic level in all of its components, particularly in sustainability, advocacy and partnership building
- Capacitate partners for utilizing self-assessment and self-learning tools as the engines of development for the future
- Strengthen the gender mainstreaming capacities and sensitivity to gender issues of all partners' staff
- Strengthen the supervisory work with project partners with its main components being monitoring, feedback and learning.

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