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SAMITI I BALLKANIT PERËNDIMOR KUNDËR DISKRIMINIMIT RACOR

Western Balkan Summit Against Racial Discrimination

Summary Report

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1. Executive Summary

Brief overview of the Summit

The Western Balkans Summit Against Racial Discrimination, held on November 1st and 2nd 2023, brought together leaders and advocates to address the pervasive issue of racial discrimination, particularly concerning the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the region. The Summit emphasized responsive budgeting and governance, digital literacy, community-based services, and institutional mechanisms to drive systemic changes for these marginalized groups.

Through thematic sessions and discussions, the Summit provided a robust platform for cooperation, fostering the exchange of knowledge and good practices within the region. This collaborative effort aimed at finding effective modalities to prevent and combat racial discrimination, advocating for a comprehensive approach that champions equality in the Western Balkans.

The sessions highlighted critical barriers faced by these communities and proposed concrete steps to mitigate discrimination, aiming to pave the way for more inclusive and equitable societies in the Western Balkans. Additionally, the sessions not only highlighted critical barriers faced by these communities but also showcased success stories, emphasizing individuals or groups who overcame challenges. These stories served as powerful examples of resilience and the positive impact of addressing discrimination, inspiring hope for positive change and demonstrating that, with concerted efforts, communities can thrive in the Western Balkans.

The purpose of this comprehensive report is to provide governments and civil society with a substantive and actionable plan for addressing and ultimately eradicating racism in their respective countries. Serving as a synthesis of the major themes discussed during the Summit, the report delves into key insights, challenges, and best practices identified by participants. By distilling the wealth of information presented during the Summit sessions, the report aims to empower stakeholders with strategic recommendations and effective strategies to combat racial discrimination. It serves as a valuable resource to foster informed dialogue, promote collaboration, and inspire targeted initiatives that contribute to building more inclusive and equitable societies across the Western Balkans.

Overview of the Summit

The Western Balkans Summit Against Racial Discrimination united policymakers, community leaders, and advocates in a pivotal event addressing racial discrimination, particularly concerning the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. The Summit tackled key themes, including inclusive policies, institutional mechanisms, digital literacy, success stories, and community-based services. With a focus on responsive budgeting and governance, the Summit aimed for systemic changes impacting the lives of marginalized communities. Thematic sessions and discussions, enriched by diverse participants, delved into core issues, emphasizing community engagement, best practices in education, digital literacy, and effective institutional frameworks. The Summit marked a crucial step forward, fostering awareness and actionable measures against racial discrimination, spotlighting challenges and successes, and advocating for collective efforts toward inclusive societies in the Western Balkans.

Evolution and Purpose of the Summit

The Summit evolved into a critical forum, addressing the persistent discrimination faced by Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. Initially conceived as a collaborative platform, it transformed into a cornerstone event centralizing voices and emphasizing the urgency of addressing challenges. The Summit's purpose is not only to spotlight experiences but to strategize and implement initiatives, shifting from discussion to action. It calls for the implementation of laws, policies, and institutional mechanisms to safeguard rights and dignity, aiming for a more equitable, inclusive society.

Significance in Addressing Racial Discrimination

The Summit's significance lies in redressing historical and contemporary injustices faced by marginalized communities. Addressing racial discrimination is fundamental for social equity, justice, and unity in the Western Balkans. It recognizes systemic prejudices endured by these communities and emphasizes collective action to counteract discrimination. The Summit advocates for laws, policies, and institutional mechanisms ensuring equal opportunities, access to education, healthcare, and social inclusion. By fostering an environment of respect, it plays a crucial role in creating a society where diversity is celebrated, and the rights of all individuals are protected. The Summit aims to pave the way for a more inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious society within the Western Balkans.

Main findings and recommendations

Main Findings:

Responsive Budgeting and Governance: Across the Western Balkans, different approaches to responsive budgeting and inclusive governance have been observed. The investment in various sectors, including education and health (such as that of North Macedonia), reflects positive progress in the region. However, there is a need for improved community involvement in the budgeting process. Further inclusion of marginalized communities in budget allocation is necessary for comprehensive development.

Institutional Mechanisms and Policy Implementation: Efforts in establishing institutional mechanisms to combat racial discrimination have shown progress but face challenges. One notable finding from the discussions on institutional mechanisms and policy implementation was the emphasis on the importance of platforms like the National Platform for reporting cases of discrimination in Kosovo (https://www.raportodiskriminimin.org/). Participants highlighted the crucial role such platforms play in providing a confidential and accessible avenue for reporting discrimination incidents. A lack of awareness, trust, and access to reporting platforms remains an obstacle. Strengthening ties between ministries and community representatives, promoting transparency, and improving access to reporting mechanisms are crucial for effective policy implementation.

Digital Literacy and Barriers for Marginalized Communities: The digital divide is evident, with limited access to technology, economic disparities, and a lack of digital literacy being key barriers. Addressing this requires targeted solutions, such as tailored courses, infrastructure improvements, and a focus on increasing digital education for marginalized communities.

Success Stories and Best Practices: Various local initiatives have made strides in combating racial discrimination. Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia have witnessed impactful programs led by different organizations, including educational and community-based projects. These successes must be scaled and replicated, emphasizing inclusive policy design, active citizenship, and community mobilization.

Community-Based Services: Efforts in community service provision have highlighted significant challenges but also demonstrated the need for more youth engagement and empowerment. Media, educational support, and improved institutional representation within local offices are essential for creating sustainable change.

Main recommendations:

Community Engagement and Inclusive Policies: Encourage wider community involvement in the budgeting process, creating a more inclusive approach to allocation, ensuring equitable distribution and representation of marginalized groups.

Promote Trust and Awareness: Facilitate trust-building measures and increase awareness of the reporting mechanisms for discrimination. Enhance confidentiality and promote wider access to reporting platforms.

Digital Inclusion and Education: Focus on digital literacy programs tailored to the specific needs of marginalized communities, increase infrastructure accessibility, and provide tools to bridge the digital gap.

Scaling Best Practices: Scale and replicate successful community initiatives and best practices observed across the Western Balkans, emphasizing active citizenship and inclusive policy development.

Youth Empowerment and Institutional Representation: Strengthen institutional representation within local community offices, and increase youth engagement and empowerment for sustainable change.

Economic Empowerment and Employment: Encouraging and supporting employment opportunities, vocational training, and entrepreneurship among Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities can significantly reduce discrimination and promote economic independence. Addressing unemployment and economic disparities remains a crucial factor in the fight against racial discrimination.

Policy Implementation and Enforcement: Despite strides in policy formulation, enforcement mechanisms need strengthening. Instituting robust measures to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination laws and address systemic discrimination in various sectors like education, healthcare, and employment is crucial.

Media and Public Perception: Promoting positive narratives and accurate representation of marginalized communities in media can help combat stereotypes and misconceptions. Encouraging responsible reporting and positive portrayal can significantly contribute to changing societal attitudes and reducing discrimination.

2. Introduction

Background and Context

For the fourth consecutive time, Kosovo hosted the Western Balkans Summit Against Racial Discrimination. The background and context leading to the convening of the Summit against racial discrimination in the Western Balkans are rooted in the persistent challenges faced by the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

These communities have historically encountered social exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination, facing significant hurdles in accessing basic rights, education, employment opportunities, and healthcare. The Summit was a response to these deep-seated issues, stemming from centuries of prejudice, socioeconomic disparities, and institutional neglect that have affected these communities.

Numerous reports, studies, and observations consistently reflect the adverse impact of discrimination on the lives of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian populations, noting their disproportionately low educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and limited access to proper healthcare and housing. Despite efforts to address these issues, the persistence of discrimination underscores the necessity for a comprehensive, collective approach to create a more equitable society.

The context of the Summit is set against the broader backdrop of the Western Balkans' pursuit of greater social cohesion, equitable development, and respect for human rights. These goals align with international human rights standards and conventions, urging nations to uphold the rights of all citizens, irrespective of ethnicity.

Objectives of the Summit

Increasing Awareness: Heightening awareness about the detrimental consequences of racial discrimination within society is vital. By promoting understanding and recognition of the impact of discrimination, the Summit aims to sensitize individuals and communities, fostering a collective acknowledgment of the negative implications of such discriminatory behaviors. This increased awareness can drive societal empathy and a commitment to change.

Identifying Causes: Identifying and addressing the root causes of racial discrimination is crucial for effective intervention. Delving into the underlying reasons behind discrimination allows for a more targeted and systematic approach to devising strategies that tackle these issues at their source, thus working toward lasting solutions.

Discussion of Effective Strategies: Providing a platform for the discussion of effective strategies to combat racial discrimination is essential. This objective centers on exploring and sharing successful methods and interventions from various sectors, including governmental, civil society, and international organizations. Such discussions aim to encourage the adoption and implementation of best practices within the Western Balkans.

Exchange of Best Practices: Creating a space for the exchange of best practices and experiences allows participants to share successful initiatives and interventions. This exchange contributes to a cross-pollination of ideas and strategies, empowering participants with a range of effective tools to address discriminatory behaviors within their respective communities.

Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation: The Summit acts as a pivotal platform for open dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. It facilitates the exchange of ideas, fosters mutual understanding, and encourages cooperation among participants, enabling the creation of collaborative strategies to combat racial discrimination effectively.

Strengthening Networks: Strengthening networks of individuals and organizations committed to preventing and addressing racial discrimination is fundamental. This initiative encourages long-term commitment, collaboration, and information sharing among various entities, ultimately fostering a more robust and interconnected network focused on combatting discrimination and promoting equality.

3. Summit Progress and Highlights

Day 1: November 1st, 2023
Opening Ceremony: Summary of Speakers and Contributions

Mr. Habit Hajredini from the Office of Good Governance commenced the opening ceremony by commemorating the significance of the Western Balkans Summit Against Racial Discrimination, highlighting its emergence after the second annual Antigypsism Summit in 2021, a collaboration between civil society and the Prime Minister's Office. He underscored that the Government of the Republic of Kosovo was now hosting this pivotal Summit for the second time to address the critical issue of racial discrimination faced by the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. Amid setting the stage for the Summit's objectives, Mr. Hajredini then turned his attention to the esteemed guests in attendance, extending a warm welcome and expressing gratitude for their participation.

He emphasized the importance of their collective efforts in addressing racial discrimination and fostering inclusive solutions for the marginalized communities in Kosovo and the broader Western Balkans region.

Vjosa Osmani, President of the Republic of Kosovo: With an impassioned address, President Osmani stressed the significance of upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Emphasizing the values of inclusion, diversity, and multiethnicity, she acknowledged the unfortunate reality of racial discrimination within Kosovo. Calling for a collective effort, Osmani highlighted the need for extensive educational measures, heightened awareness, and open dialogue to combat discrimination, underlining Kosovo as a home for all and reinforcing an unwavering commitment to combat inequality.

Albin Kurti, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo: Aligning with the Summit's motto "Unity in Diversity," Prime Minister Kurti underlined the nation's resolute dedication to eradicating racial discrimination. Prime Minister Kurti's address during the Summit's opening ceremony resonated with a passionate commitment to overcoming the challenges faced by marginalized communities. His poignant narrative on the discriminatory experiences recounted by Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth emphasized the urgent need for action. Kurti's comprehensive overview of the government's initiatives and investments underscored their dedication to fostering opportunities in education, employment, and social inclusion. His call for unity and solidarity in addressing discrimination reflected a clear vision for an inclusive society, emphasizing that there is much work ahead to achieve these vital goals.

Mr. Christoph Fuchs, Chargé d'affaires a.i, Ambassador of Switzerland in Kosovo: Recognizing the significance of Roma integration within the Berlin process, Ambassador Fuchs commended Kosovo's efforts while acknowledging persistent social and institutional discrimination. Addressing challenges like low education levels, unemployment, forced marriages, and violence within communities, he advocated for the implementation of legal frameworks concerning antidiscrimination and employment. Fuchs underscored the importance of community empowerment, particularly focusing on children and women's rights.

Isak Skenderi, Executive Director of Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians: Skenderi passionately articulated that racial discrimination is not solely a minority issue but a societal challenge. Highlighting the prevalent antigypsyism, he urged immediate government action to combat discrimination. Through a poignant personal story, Skenderi emphasized the need for systematic monitoring, law approval, education for teachers, combating educational segregation, and increased investments. He stressed the importance of empowerment, capacity building, and self-organization among the Roma community.

Cultural Showcase: Exhibition of Art of artists from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities and children from the Day Care Center for children in street situation
The Cultural Showcase served as a poignant and impactful segment, highlighting the creative endeavors and contributions of artists hailing from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Communities within Kosovo. The exhibition space featured a diverse array of artwork, each piece expressing individual stories, cultural heritage, and aspirations of the community.

Artists showcased their talents, utilizing various mediums to encapsulate their experiences, struggles, and aspirations. Through vibrant colors, intricate designs, and emotional expressions, their artwork shed light on the cultural richness and diversity of these communities, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation for their unique perspectives.

One of the most touching and significant aspects of this showcase was the active involvement of children from the Day Care Center, specifically established to support and educate children in street situations. Their artworks, filled with youthful exuberance and raw emotions, provided a heartwarming and poignant display. These creative endeavors not only served as a platform for expression but also reflected the resilience and creativity of these children, offering a glimpse into their dreams, challenges, and experiences.

The showcase succeeded in not just displaying artistic creations but in creating a platform for the voices of marginalized communities, illustrating their cultural heritage, resilience, and potential. It served as a bridge, fostering empathy and understanding among the Summit attendees, encouraging a more comprehensive recognition of the talents and struggles of these often-underrepresented communities in Kosovo.

The Cultural Showcase stood as a testament to the power of art as a tool for expression, communication, and advocacy for social change and inclusivity.

Dita 2: November 2nd, 2023

• Breakdown of the panelists and moderators for each session
Welcome Words - Opening speech - Government actions to prevent and combat racial discrimination

Moderator: Ms. Mimoza Gavrani, Author and TV presenter

Mr. Albin Kurti, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo
Message Mr. Veljko Kajtazi, Member of the Croatian Parliament - Keynote speech - Addressing by video

Session 1: Roma Responsive Budgeting

Moderator: Ms. Sakibe Jashari, Project Officer, Council of Europe

Ms. Ljatifa Sikovska, Member of Parliament of North Macedonia
Mr. Sylejman Elshani, Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of Kosovo
Ms. Elizabeth Gowing, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Kosovo for Community Affairs
Ms. Nazmije Demolli Kastrati, Officer for protection against discrimination in Kamenica, Kosovo

Session 2: Institutional Mechanisms for Implementation of Laws and Policies Against Racial Discrimination

Moderator: Ms. Nora Xhuzi, Journalist

Mr. Habit Hajredini, Director of the Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues
Ms. Etleva Sheshi, Director of Social Protection and Gender Equality Policies, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albania
Mr. Sokolj Beganaj, Director, Directorate for the Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians, Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Minorities, Montenegro

Session 3: Digital Literacy: Examining the Barriers of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities

Moderator: Mr. Shpend Lila, Manager of Trainings, Events and PR at Innovation Center Kosovo

Mr. Stefano Gnocchi, Head of Section - Communities, Religious Cultural Heritage and the North, European Union Office in Kosovo
Ms. Cristina Marian, Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe
Mr. Adriatik Hasantari, Director at Roma Active Albania
Ms. Hana Qerimi, Co-Founder / CEO at Starlabs & Digital School

Session 4: Success Stories and Best Practices in the Fight Against Racial Discrimination - Experience from the Western Balkans

Moderator: Mrs. Albina Avdiu, Journalist

Ms. Brisilda Taço, Head of the Romano Kham organization in Albania
Ms. Sofije Toska, Project Manager, Kosovo Education Center
Ms. Marija Sulejmanova, Program Manager – Romalitico in North Macedonia
Ms. Fatmira Dajlani, Head of the organization Porta Roma for Integration in Albania
Mr. Edis Galushi, Teacher in Kosovo

Session 5: Community-Based Services

Moderator: Mr. Drin Ejupi, Journalist

Mr. Azem Haliti, Advisor to the Cabinet of the Mayor of Vlora on National Minorities
Mr. Lendrit Qeli, Office for Communities and Returns
Ms. Egzona Gashi, Coordinator, Day Care Center in Prishtina
Mr. Arbon Osmani, Director, The Ideas Partnership

Opening speech

The event moderator, Ms. Mimoza Gavrani, set the tone for the day by highlighting key aspects of the Summit. She provided an insightful overview of the discrimination situation facing the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans, shedding light on the urgent need for collective action to address these pervasive issues. Following that, she invited Prime Minister Kurti, the Summit's host, to talk about Government actions to prevent and combat racial discrimination.

Subsequently, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, took the stage, delivering a passionate speech emphasizing the critical need to defeat racism and confront discrimination, particularly concerning the Roma community. He underscored the 2022 Strategy's key component dedicated to combating discrimination, acknowledging that despite ongoing efforts, discrimination persists in Kosovo. Kurti outlined the government's initiatives aimed at better inclusion, specifically through programs like "Kosova Generation Unlimited" and "Super Puna."

He emphasized these platforms' focus on substance over titles, employing CV creation that disregards ethnicity, advocating that equality should be the starting point, not the destination. The Prime Minister urged a collective focus on shared values rather than divisions, acknowledging that while the desired level of discrimination elimination has yet to be reached, substantial ongoing efforts are being made. He expressed his personal commitment, stating, "That's why you have me as prime minister, and I am the chief servant for the biggest needs and violations."

Keynote speech

Following Kurti's address, a video message from Veljko Kajtazi, a Croatian Roma MP, resonated with calls for institutional recognition, notably proposing that the Kosovo Parliament recognize November 5th as the World Romani Language Day. Kajtazi emphasized the importance of Roma inclusion in institutions and presented successful investment strategies from Croatia that have significantly reduced problems within the Roma community. His final call to action stressed unity, cooperation, and the necessity for systematic investments to further support the Roma community's integration and well-being within society.

Thematic Sessions and Discussions

The thematic sessions and discussions held during the Summit were strategically organized to comprehensively address critical challenges confronted by the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans. These sessions aimed not only to shed light on the existing obstacles but also to showcase success stories within these communities. Each session was meticulously crafted around specific topics relevant to combating racial discrimination, ensuring a focused exploration of various dimensions and offering actionable insights and strategies. These thematic discussions provided a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted issues faced by these communities, fostering a holistic view that encompassed challenges and potential solutions.

The exchange of ideas, innovative approaches, and lessons learned from successful practices facilitated the formulation of recommendations and actionable strategies. Ultimately, this collective effort aspired to contribute to the fight against discrimination, promoting social integration and enhancing the overall well-being of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans.

These sessions acted as focused platforms for in-depth discussions, engaging experts, policymakers, representatives from relevant institutions, and community leaders. Each thematic session aimed to dissect key areas pertinent to the overarching theme of the Summit, exploring issues such as responsive budgeting, institutional mechanisms for policy implementation against discrimination, digital literacy barriers for these communities, success stories and best practices, and community-based services.

Key stakeholders moderated each session, fostering structured discussions among panelists and allowing open dialogues. Panelists brought their expertise and experience to the table, sharing insights, best practices, and challenges encountered in addressing discrimination and promoting the inclusion of these communities.

Undertakings of Kosovo

Kosovo has demonstrated a commitment to combating racial discrimination through various initiatives and efforts, as highlighted during the Summit. Prime Minister Albin Kurti emphasized the government's dedication to the fight against discrimination, particularly towards the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. The "raportodiskriminimin" platform, mentioned by Prime Minister Kurti, serves as a governmental tool addressing discrimination cases, exemplifying Kosovo's commitment to transparency and accountability. The government's programs, such as "Kosova Generation Unlimited" and "Super Puna," focus on the inclusion of marginalized communities, showcasing a proactive approach to uplift the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth.

Investments in learning centers, scholarships, and housing support, as outlined by Prime Minister Kurti, underscore Kosovo's tangible efforts to address socio-economic disparities. The government's engagement with international partners, exemplified by its collaboration with the Swiss Embassy, reflects a broader commitment to seek support and expertise in tackling discrimination.

Moreover, the establishment of institutions like the Technical Professional Group for protection against discrimination and the National Platform for reporting cases of discrimination (https://www.raportodiskriminimin.org/) demonstrates Kosovo's systematic approach to combat discrimination. These undertakings collectively illustrate Kosovo's multifaceted strategy, combining legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and targeted socio-economic initiatives to address racial discrimination comprehensively.

Likewise, Ms. Elizabeth Gowing - Adviser on Community Issues – Prime minister of Kosovo presented the undertakings that Kosovo government has done regarding the inclusion of the Roma Ashkali Egyptians e.g., employment through governmental platforms, e- platform on reporting cases on discrimination, assistance offered to new-born mothers, etc. She highlighted that Prime minister meets annually will all communities including Roma Ashkali Egyptian CSOs, activists and individuals and get the insights directly from the meetings. Ms. Gowing pointed that Office for Community Affairs (OCA) has a budget that aims at addressing community needs including Roma Ashkali Egyptian communities. The outreach meeting on the OCA call for projects included a considerable number of CSOs from the communities that were informed on the details of the project call.

4. Panel Session Outcomes

Panel 1: Topic: Roma responsive budgeting - Good practices and challenges in the two levels of governance

Key Findings:

• **Investment in Roma Inclusion:**
North Macedonia's commitment to Roma inclusion was highlighted, showcasing a significant investment in the Roma Strategy amounting to 1.5 million euros.

• **Government Initiatives and Programs:**
The Republic of North Macedonia introduced comprehensive strategies, such as the Integration Strategy and Action Plan until 2030, emphasizing efforts to improve education, health, and infrastructure within the Roma community.

• **Infrastructure and Community Support:**
Investments in cultural development, education, and health, including education in the Romani language, scholarship programs, health mediators, and infrastructure development in municipalities, were highlighted.

• **Community Consultations and Policy Building:**
Successful outcomes were linked to community consultations, where community needs were prioritized to shape government policies and budgeting.

• **Challenges in Representation and Inclusion:**
Identified challenges included the need for greater community representation in policy building and budgeting, particularly in addressing issues concerning child welfare, education, and employment opportunities for the Roma community.

Key Statistics:

• **Financial Investment:** North Macedonia invested 1.5 million euros in the Roma Strategy.

• **Educational Initiatives:** Over half a million euros were allocated for educational programs, focusing on promoting the Romani language and scholarship opportunities.

• **Infrastructure Development:** A total investment of 365,000 euros was directed towards information outlets and child inclusion programs, especially in preschool settings.

• **Community Support:** An allocation of 400,000 euros for projects related to Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro.

• **Local Youth and Community Initiatives:** In Kamenica, social assistance and health services benefited 250 citizens, while youth were represented in the Local Youth Action Council.

Paneli 2: Topic: Institutional mechanisms for the implementation of laws and policies against racial discrimination

Key findings

• **Policies and Mechanisms for Protection:**
The Poznan Declaration highlighted the obligation to create mechanisms for minority protection, emphasizing the establishment of structures to combat racial discrimination.

• **Trust in Institutions:**
Institutions noted increased trust among the communities; however, there are lingering prejudices and hesitations regarding reporting discrimination in governmental bodies.

• **Efforts in Combating Discrimination:**
Governments have implemented platforms, like Kosovo's discrimination reporting platform, offering confidential reporting for discrimination cases. However, rural areas and certain communities face limited access to these platforms.

• **Strengthening Community Capacities:**
Recommendations were made to create programs that increase stakeholder capacities related to antidiscrimination and develop programs to reinforce the community's position.

Key Statistics:

• **Budget Allocation:** Specific budgets for combating discrimination were not directly stated, but discussions focused on the implementation of mechanisms and programs instead of specific financial figures.

• **Investment in Programs**: Kosovo and Montenegro invested in projects and mechanisms aimed at reducing discrimination, without specific monetary figures provided.

• **Community Engagement:** Recommendations were made for increased participation of communities in the decision-making process and policy creation to address discrimination effectively.

Panel 3: Topic: Digital Literacy: Examining the Barriers of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities

Key findings:

• **Limited Access to Technology:**
Economic disparities, language barriers, and a lack of technological knowledge contribute significantly to restricted access to digital resources among the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans.

• **Infrastructure Development Needs:**
There's a recognized necessity for increased investment in digital infrastructure to provide essential tools and technologies that facilitate access to online resources and education.

• **Lack of Digital Literacy:**
Many individuals within these communities lack the necessary skills to effectively utilize digital tools, impeding their access to online educational and market opportunities.

• **Challenges in Creating Inclusive Policies:**
Crafting policies that cater to the diverse needs of these communities poses challenges, emphasizing the importance of making policies more accessible and accommodating to specific community requirements.

• **Strategies for Improvement:**
Recommendations include advocating for increased investments in digital infrastructure, providing tailored digital literacy courses, promoting digital citizenship, and addressing economic disparities and language barriers to enhance access to technology.

• **Role of Education and Capacity Building:**
Targeted training and skill development initiatives are essential to enhancing digital literacy and building capacity within these communities.

Key Statistics:

• **Access Barriers:** A significant percentage of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities face challenges in accessing digital resources due to economic disparities and language barriers.

• **Digital Literacy Rates:** Statistically, there is a considerable lack of digital literacy among these communities, hampering their ability to effectively use digital tools for education and accessing online opportunities.

• **Investment in Infrastructure:** Discussions highlighted the need for substantial investment in digital infrastructure to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to technology.

• **Policy Implementation Challenges:** The statistics revealed that creating inclusive policies that address the specific needs of these communities is a significant challenge, calling for more accessible and accommodating policies.

• **Proposed Solutions:** Various strategies were proposed, emphasizing the need for increased investments, tailored educational programs, and measures to address language barriers and economic disparities hindering technology access. Moreover, while digital transformation is essential for the efficiency of public services, it was discussed that Kosovo must be cautious not to exclude segments of the population lacking access to digital infrastructure. Maintaining a dual approach—both digital and physical options—ensures that public services remain inclusive, acknowledging the diverse needs and circumstances of all citizens. This balanced strategy guarantees that individuals without digital access are not marginalized, preserving their ability to access critical services through traditional, physical means. Kosovo's commitment to an inclusive approach, combining digital innovation with accessible traditional avenues, aligns with principles of equity and social inclusion.

• **Education and Skill Development:** Capacity building through education and targeted training programs is seen as a crucial factor in improving digital literacy within the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans. During the Summit it was discussed that Kosovo could draw valuable insights from the "Startup business initiatives from communities" program currently implemented in Serbia. This initiative, if adopted or adapted, could serve as a model to foster entrepreneurship and economic empowerment within marginalized communities in Kosovo, particularly the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian populations. The program's success in Serbia might provide a blueprint for similar initiatives that prioritize community-based startups, promoting self-sustainability and economic growth among these communities.

Paneli 4: Topic: Success stories and best practices in the fight against racial discrimination - Experience from the Western Balkans

Key findings:

• **Ghettoization Challenges:**
The Roma community in Albania still faces challenges related to living in segregated areas, demonstrating that ghettoization remains a persistent issue in some areas.

• **Election Exploitation:**
Roma communities are often exploited for political gain during election periods, showing a trend of temporary attention and support solely during political campaigns.

• **Discrimination Against Children:**
Discrimination against Roma children was identified as a significant concern, underscoring the necessity for more inclusive education and a reduced societal bias.

• **Role of Institutions and Education:**
Institutions and educational organizations have made significant contributions to improving community employment and addressing discrimination issues.

• **Empowerment Programs:**
Programs focusing on legal, political, and economic empowerment in the Roma community, such as in North Macedonia, showcase effective strategies for overall community development.

• **Community Representation and Inclusion:**
The importance of representation in decision-making institutions was highlighted, advocating for more inclusive participation and involvement in policy formulation.

Key Statistics:

• **Ghettoized Living Conditions:** Specific statistics showcased the prevalence of segregated living conditions for the Roma community in Albania, indicating a significant number living in such environments.

• **Exploitation in Elections:** Analysis of past elections revealed a pattern of exploiting Roma communities for political purposes, demonstrating how political support is temporarily provided during election times.

• **Discrimination in Education:** Statistical data indicated instances of discrimination against Roma children, emphasizing the need for more inclusive educational initiatives to combat societal prejudices.

- **Community Empowerment Impact:** Successful programs focusing on legal, political, and economic empowerment in North Macedonia displayed positive effects in community mobilization and capacity building.

- **Representation in Decision-Making:** Statistics related to representation in institutions underlined the importance of community inclusion in decision-making processes for improved policy formulation and implementation.

Topic: Community-based services

Key findings:

- **Talented but Hindered Communities:**
The Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities possess talents and capabilities; however, opportunities and resources are lacking, which hinder their progress and overall well-being.

- **Lack of Opportunities:**
Participants highlighted the significant lack of opportunities for these communities, emphasizing the need for more avenues for education, employment, and personal development.

- **Need for Institutional Representation:**
The lack of institutional representation and unclear guidelines on the ministries under which these communities are represented were identified as significant issues affecting their engagement and recognition.

- **Youth Engagement and Empowerment:**
A call was made for increased youth engagement and empowerment, stressing the importance of providing platforms and opportunities for the younger generation.

- **Media and Perception Challenges:**
Discussions underlined media issues, such as inadequate positive portrayal and coverage, as well as the tendency to generalize issues, which contribute to a negative perception of these communities.

Key statistics:
- **Opportunity Scarcity:** Statistics reflected the scarcity of opportunities available for the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, demonstrating a lack of educational, employment, and developmental prospects.

- **Lack of Institutional Representation:** Data illustrated the absence of clear guidelines on institutional representation, particularly within ministries, hindering effective engagement and representation.

- **Youth Engagement Needs:** Numbers indicated the requirement for better engagement and empowerment opportunities for youth within these communities to address issues related to skill development and personal growth.

- **Media Challenges:** Statistics highlighted the media's inadequacies in portraying these communities positively, resulting in generalizations and negative public perceptions.

Challenges and opportunities

The Panel Session Outcomes reflect both the challenges and opportunities in combatting racial discrimination in the Western Balkans. These sessions surfaced multifaceted challenges, including deeply entrenched societal biases, a lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and inadequate institutional structures. Key among these is the historical and systemic discrimination that remains pervasive, affecting Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in various spheres, from education to employment, access to justice, and political representation.

The discussions also revealed promising opportunities. The shared experiences from different countries highlighted the potential for positive change through community involvement, education, and the implementation of comprehensive policies and strategies. Collaborative efforts between local organizations, government entities, and international bodies were recognized as having the potential to bring about significant change. The emergence of success stories and best practices underlined the importance of grassroots initiatives and the need for more inclusive policies, digital literacy programs, and community-based services to address the multifaceted challenges faced by these marginalized communities.

The panel outcomes emphasized the need for targeted interventions that involve the communities, governmental bodies, and international organizations to foster tangible and sustainable change in the region.

5. Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings:

• **Persistent Discrimination:** There exists a prevalent issue of racial discrimination impacting the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans. The sessions and discussions unveiled deep-rooted discriminatory practices in various sectors, including education, employment, healthcare, and social inclusion.

• **Systemic Challenges:** The identified barriers include a lack of access to quality education, economic opportunities, and healthcare, resulting in social exclusion and limited participation in political and public life. Discrimination hinders the communities' progression and deprives them of essential resources and opportunities for growth.

• **Institutional Gaps:** While some governmental efforts have been made to address discrimination, significant gaps remain in policy implementation, institutional mechanisms, and budget allocations tailored to the specific needs of these communities. This lack of tailored strategies has perpetuated the marginalization and exclusion of these groups.

• **Digital Divide and Literacy:** Barriers to digital literacy and access to technology were highlighted as significant obstacles. Limited access to digital resources and educational tools created further disparities, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering community development.

Recommendations:

1. Empowerment Through Education: Prioritize and invest in educational programs tailored to the specific needs of these communities, including language education, vocational training, and the promotion of digital literacy. Addressing these educational gaps will foster empowerment and inclusion.

2. Policy Implementation and Resource Allocation: Develop and implement policies that specifically address the needs of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. This requires targeted budget allocations and institutional mechanisms that are responsive to the challenges faced by these groups.

3. Community Engagement and Representation: Foster inclusive platforms and programs that encourage active participation and representation of these communities in decision-making processes. Actively involve community members in policy formulation and execution.

4. Digital Inclusion Strategies: Design and implement strategies to bridge the digital divide by providing greater access to technology, training programs, and educational resources. Cultivate digital literacy to ensure equal opportunities and access to information.

5. Collaborative Efforts and Networking: Encourage collaboration among various stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, and international partners. Strengthen networks and coordination to amplify efforts toward eradicating racial discrimination.

6. Public Awareness and Sensitization Campaigns: Initiate public awareness campaigns to sensitize the broader society to the challenges and rights of these communities, fostering understanding and reducing prejudice and stereotypes.

7. Empower Community Participation in Policy Development: Encourage greater community participation and collaboration in developing policies and strategies aimed at addressing racial discrimination. Create platforms for meaningful engagement with representatives from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities to ensure their needs, concerns, and perspectives are incorporated into policy frameworks.

8. Strengthen Educational Initiatives: Place a strong emphasis on education by implementing tailored programs that support digital literacy, provide scholarships, and promote language rights for these marginalized communities. This could involve bolstering access to quality education, teacher training, and mentoring programs specifically designed to enhance educational opportunities for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children.

9. Foster Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Encourage stronger collaborations between governmental bodies, civil society organizations, and international agencies to support integrated solutions to combat discrimination. Establish platforms or councils that bring together various stakeholders to share experiences, resources, and expertise, facilitating the creation of more comprehensive and effective strategies.

6. Conclusion

• **Summary of the Summit's impact.**

The Summit has marked its profound influence in raising awareness, promoting dialogue, and facilitating necessary policy measures. The impact is demonstrated through several key areas:

Awareness and Understanding: The Summit significantly contributed to enhancing awareness of the detrimental effects of racial discrimination. By emphasizing these consequences, it has prompted a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

Policy and Strategy Development: Through robust discussions and knowledge sharing, the Summit generated effective strategies to combat racial discrimination. It encouraged the identification and targeted addressing of the root causes, providing essential insights into policy formulation and implementation.

Exchange of Best Practices: The platform served as an invaluable space for participants to exchange best practices and experiences. It facilitated the sharing of successful models, enabling attendees to learn from each other's experiences in the fight against racial discrimination.

Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation: One of the Summit's greatest impacts lies in its ability to foster dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government representatives, NGOs, and community members. This collaboration led to the creation of sustainable solutions and innovative approaches to address discrimination.

Network Strengthening: The Summit significantly contributed to reinforcing the network of individuals and organizations dedicated to preventing and addressing racial discrimination. This strong network further fortified the collective efforts and commitments in this area.

The way forward in addressing racial discrimination in the Western Balkans

The way forward necessitates a collective effort, sustained commitment, and active participation from all stakeholders involved in promoting a fairer, more just society, where racial discrimination is actively challenged and eradicated. The way forward involves several key strategies to create a more inclusive and equitable society for the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities:

Legislative Reforms and Implementation: A critical step forward is the consistent implementation of antidiscrimination laws across the Western Balkans. Strengthening existing legislation and ensuring that these laws are effectively implemented is crucial. This could include creating specific legal frameworks, policies, and strategies that safeguard the rights of these marginalized communities.
Action: Governments in the Western Balkans should actively promote and implement inclusive policies, addressing racial discrimination.

Community Empowerment and Engagement: Empowering and involving the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in decision-making processes is pivotal. Meaningful involvement in policy development, as well as active participation in all levels of society, will help ensure that their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

Action: Governments, with support from international organizations, should enhance and strengthen institutional mechanisms to effectively implement laws and policies against racial discrimination.

Education and Awareness Campaigns: A sustained effort to promote education and awareness about the negative impact of racial discrimination is essential. Educating both the affected communities and the wider society will help in dispelling stereotypes and prejudices, fostering a more inclusive and understanding environment.
Action: Governments, in collaboration with NGOs and international agencies, should invest in digital literacy programs tailored to the needs of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

Economic Opportunities and Social Integration: Creating economic opportunities through employment, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs will contribute significantly to reducing social disparities. Additionally, ensuring access to social services, healthcare, and housing will support the social integration of these communities.
Action: Civil society organizations, with support from the media, should actively showcase success stories and best practices in the fight against racial discrimination.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Continuous collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, international bodies, and community representatives is vital. Building strong partnerships will facilitate the exchange of best practices, resource sharing, and the implementation of more comprehensive and effective strategies to combat discrimination.
Action: Local governments, in cooperation with community leaders and NGOs, should establish and expand community-based services that cater to the specific needs of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms: Establishing robust monitoring systems and mechanisms to track progress and report incidents of discrimination is key. Transparent reporting and accountability ensure that actions taken against discrimination are measured and reported accurately.
Action: Governments in the Western Balkans, with assistance from international organizations and human rights watchdogs, should establish robust monitoring systems and mechanisms to track progress and report incidents of discrimination.

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