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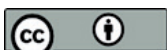
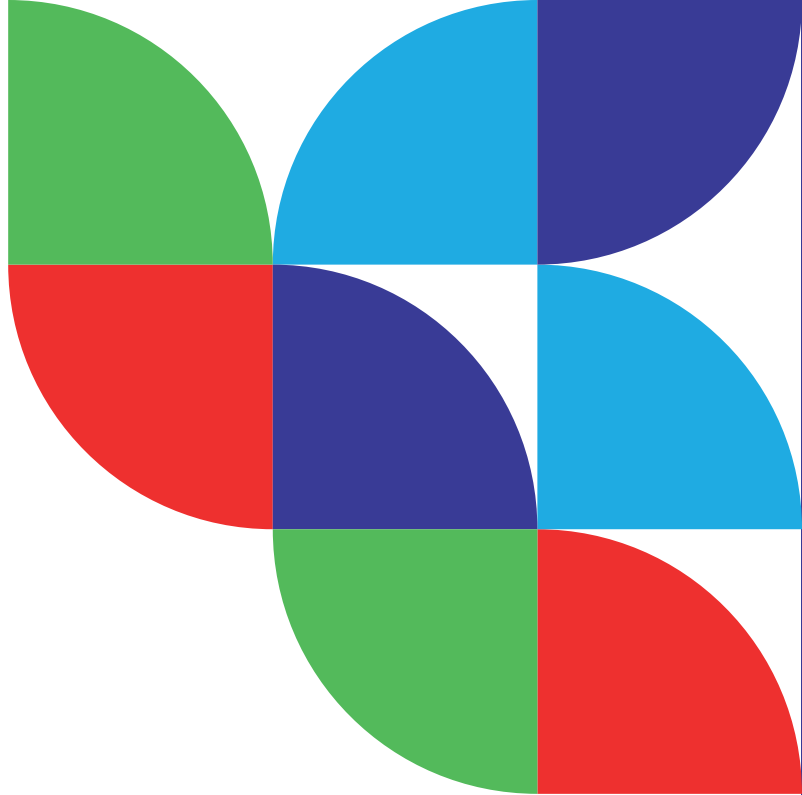


2022 MOST
ROMA
FRIENDLY
MAYOR
AWARD

Romani people are
European citizens.

**Equal and
Diverse!**





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Brussels: Directorate of Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, 2022

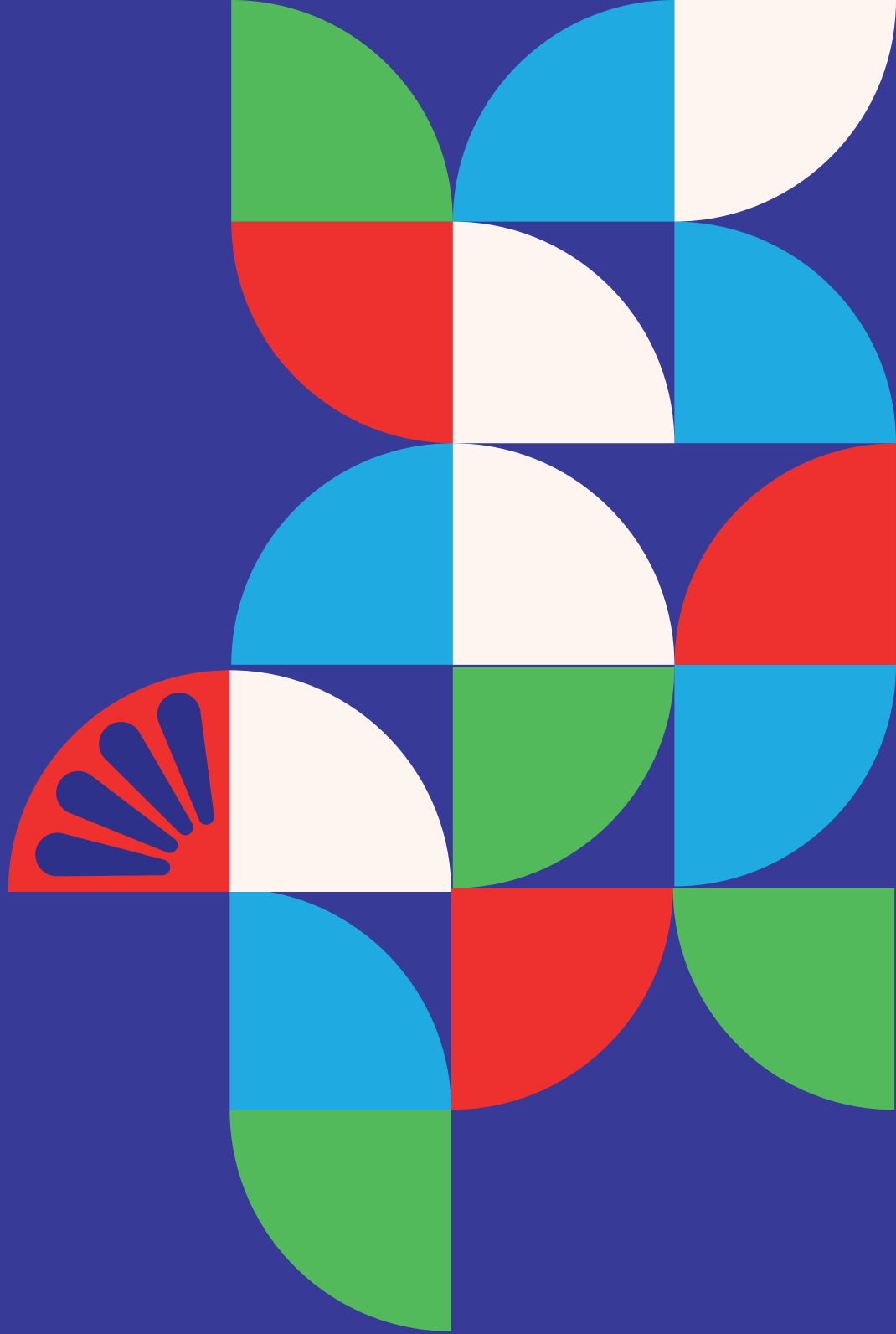
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Foreword

Olivér Várhelyi

European Commissioner for
Neighbourhood and Enlargement

The **Most Roma-Friendly Mayor Award** sends a message of solidarity, empathy and inclusion. This award **recognises** those **local authorities** who believe in their citizens and treat them equally. It aims to change attitudes towards Roma inclusion and features local authorities who give power to Roma communities and listen to their needs. The award is organised as part of the regional project of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance 'Romani Women power of change in the Western Balkans and Turkey'. The project is led by Roma Active Albania with financial assistance from the European Union, and it supports the network of Roma civil society organisations in the enlargement region.

Over the last three years, we have made important steps in the integration of Roma communities in the enlargement region. In July 2019, prime ministers from the Western Balkans adopted the Poznan Declaration on Roma integration, committing to achieve specific targets by the time of accession in the fields of education, employment, health, housing, civil documentation, and inclusion of the Roma dimension in the green and digital agendas. In October 2020, the EU adopted a 10-year strategy on Roma inclusion, equality and participation that includes a full chapter on the enlargement region. Roma inclusion is also covered in our regular discussions with the different governments and in the negotiations of Chapter 23 'Judicial and fundamental rights'.



These are all steps in the right direction, but we still have a long way ahead of us and the local authorities have a key role to play. The European Union will continue to work with the Western Balkans and Turkey both in the political and financial assistance areas to get real results for Roma people.

I think having the award ceremony during the **European Parliament Romani Week** is especially important. Not only does this brochure acknowledge the selected mayors' outstanding work in breaking barriers between local authorities and Roma communities, but it also shows policymakers, activists and experts that a change is possible.

I am truly inspired by this year's winners' dedication to empowering and mobilising Roma communities and strengthening their ability to engage in dialogue with public authorities. I am proud of every single one of them, and I hope that this award inspires others to follow their example.

Gledian Llatja

Mayor of Elbasan, Albania

Around 2 800 Roma live in the Municipality of Elbasan, Albania. Although children go to the same schools and follow the same education programme as other local children, unemployment is a high concern: about 90 % of Roma adults have difficulty finding work.

In recent years, however, under the direction of Mayor Gledian Llatja, the municipality has put a number of activities into place to promote and improve integration. New structures and a new local plan for Roma and Egyptian minorities are playing a key part in enabling Roma people to live in full harmony with the rest of society.

In particular, an increase in the number and quality of partnerships with civil society stakeholders and donors are helping to ensure that Roma people are actively involved with community decisions at every stage. The municipality has been able to improve dialogue and, through co-financing, to increase the range of services to meet the demands of the Roma community. In particular, community work and employment training programmes have led to dozens of people finding employment.

As Mayor of Elbasan, Gledian Llatja has communicated directly with the Roma community, which has enabled him not only to identify their needs, but to plan a series of activities and value-added projects especially for them – such as the Donate for the Path to Knowledge initiative, which directly addresses the needs of Roma children. Not only does it provide material resources for education but also clothing and entertainment, and an improvement of sanitary conditions.



"During my daily work I make sure that Roma communities are interested and involved in our activities"

Gledian LLATJA



Ljubiša Petrović

Mayor of Bijelina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bijelina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, approximately 223 Roma families with about 830 members live in the city permanently, while it is estimated that another 100 Roma families migrate seasonally.

Since taking over the position at the end of 2020, Bijelina's Mayor, Ljubiša Petrović, has shown a great personal and professional interest in the problems facing the local Roma population.

With his support, Bijelina city actively supports and promotes the education, employment and civic participation of Roma people by opening up space for their voices to be heard. The National Minorities Office ensures that representatives of minorities, including the Roma community, are able to communicate their needs and exercise their rights, and Petrović himself regularly holds meetings with Roma and pro-Roma associations.

By including Roma people in activities related to policymaking and implementation, the Bijelina Municipality has been able to offer direct support to the Roma population in the areas of housing, education and employment, as well as promoting the cultural heritage of Roma.

But the fight against antigypsyism also plays an important role. Under Petrović's mayorship, Bijeljina's local action plan has recognised antigypsyism as a key cause of Roma exclusion and marginalisation, ensuring that the city will monitor the situation, promote affirmative action and actively support inclusion.

With his friendly and accessible approach, Petrović shows Roma community members that they are, without exception, residents of the city of Bijeljina.





"We take care of every citizen in the city of Bijelina, so that no Roma may feel excluded"

Ljubiša PETROVIĆ

Ardian Gjini

Mayor of Gjakova, Kosovo*

Of the 94 556 inhabitants of the Municipality of Gjakova, 7 % are from minority communities. That is why, when he became mayor of Gjakova at the end of 2017, Ardian Gjini committed to being the mayor of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, and gives priority to issues and requests that come from minority communities.

This responsiveness was vital when, in 2021, heavy rains flooded the homes of dozens of Gjakova citizens. The municipality, led by Mayor Gjini, helped to move 11 Roma families to the military airport in a life-saving emergency evacuation.

Infrastructure in Roma communities has been an important priority, and several of the partnership strategies put into place by the city under Mayor Gjini's leadership have enabled improvements through co-financing. These include improvements to sewage, waste collection and even tree planting.

There have been significant advances in education, both in the enrolment of children in school, and the support children from minority communities receive, with more than 200 school bags and materials distributed. In the Ali Ibra neighbourhood, extra money has been allocated to the local community centre, and five scholarships have been made available only to students from minority communities.

As well as approving and promoting local strategies, Mayor Gjini has spent considerable time supporting Roma families. He does this not only directly, by visiting communities and organisations to meet citizens, but through involvement with wider campaigns, such as a national antigypsyism awareness campaign on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

* 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.



"The most important part of the efforts is to feed the ambition of the community members themselves to become educated, capable, to generate their own revenues, and to feel good"

Ardian GJINI



Ivan Vuković

Mayor of Podgorica, Montenegro

Montenegro's capital city Podgorica has the biggest Roma community in the country. However, although Roma people belong to a significant minority population in Montenegro, they share the same problems as those elsewhere: low education and employment levels, and social marginalisation.

Under the leadership of Mayor Ivan Vuković, however, Podgorica has made considerable improvements to its support for the Roma community, particularly its most vulnerable members. Throughout his term of office, which started in 2018, Mayor Vuković has insisted that the city should focus on improving living standards for its Roma population. His words are supported by concrete investments in services, infrastructure and housing, which include making municipal land worth €4.5 million available for 171 housing units, and granting a 10-year right of use on a plot of land, free of charge, for the construction of a Roma cultural centre.

Alongside local NGO Help (Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe), the city has also invested, and continues to invest, in on-the-job training, internships and other employment activities.

However, it is in the field of mediation that the city has excelled. Through the project 'Social inclusion of Roma and Egyptians through mediation', Podgorica is developing a network of qualified Roma and Egyptian mediators who will share best practices. This will enable community fieldwork to support Roma individuals and families in the access to public services, including healthcare.

Mayor Vuković's aim is the authentic inclusion of Roma community members in the life of the city and, eventually, authentic representation within the local parliament.





"We offer the possibility of internships and open the perspective for employment of the young Roma population. Thanks to that, I am proud to have two young Romas on my team"

Ivan VUKOVIĆ

Maksim Dimitrievski

Mayor of Kumanovo, North Macedonia

Kumanovo, the largest municipality in North Macedonia, is a multi-ethnic city which includes 2 795 Roma inhabitants. As mayor of Kumanovo, Maksim Dimitrievski has been working to support the Roma community by bringing change to social life, improving living standards and promoting the achievements of Roma citizens. His aim for the city is a positive co-existence and the inclusion of all ethnic communities in decision making at a local level.

To achieve this aim, Mayor Dimitrievski and the city ensure that representatives from the Roma community take part in Council committee discussions, and the Council already has one Roma councillor. Roma is represented as an official language in Kumanovo, and it is the only municipality to offer a translation service: a Roma translator who helps members of the Roma community to access services.

The Municipality of Kumanovo, together with its representatives, also participates in the National Platform for Roma Integration in the Republic of North Macedonia, specifically in the areas of housing and employment.

Throughout the year, Mayor Dimitrievski visits the Roma community to discuss their needs and problems. Under his leadership, the Kumanovo Municipality organises Roma cultural events, supports children from Roma communities in and outside of school life, and supports the community with solutions relating to all areas of education, housing, health, employment and anti-discrimination. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this included the distribution of support packages to Roma settlements.



"This award that I received as a mayor, a friend of the Roma community, is an incentive for me and my associates to work for the promotion of Roma rights"

Maksim DIMITRIEVSKI



Vladan Jeremić

President of the Municipality of Zvezdara, Belgrade, Serbia

Targeted education and employment services, a skilled Mobile Team for Roma Inclusion, and a hands-on approach have been the key to Roma integration in Zvezdara, a municipality in the city of Belgrade, Serbia.

The city's institutional framework for Roma inclusion, which was developed with the help of several Roma associations and representatives, has been in place for six years. Since the framework was designed, the continued participation and dialogue between the municipality and Roma communities has led to complete strategies, and local action plans, which address the community's priorities directly and efficiently.

Mayor Vladan Jeremić visits the Roma community every few weeks to speak directly to Roma people and ensure that the city's ongoing improvements to communal infrastructure in the Roma settlements are on track.

Support for Roma communities over recent years has included food and hygiene packages for the most vulnerable families, education and employment training, and improvement of infrastructure to improve living conditions.

A skilled Mobile Team – composed of representatives of the Roma community, the Center for Social Work Zvezdara, the National Employment Service (Zvezdara branch), the Red Cross in Zvezdara, pedagogical and health assistants – take part in every Roma-oriented project, of which there have been about 10 in the last seven years.

Together, these strategies ensure that everyone is heard and that constant progress can be made towards Roma integration.





"I am especially proud of what we have done to improve the education of adults through adult education institutions"

Vladan JEREMIĆ

Recep Gürkan

Mayor of Edirne, Turkey

It is estimated that between 20 000 and 25 000 Roma people live in the central district of Edirne, northwest Turkey, with some neighbourhoods inhabited by more than 90 % Roma.

The municipality, led by its mayor, Recep Gürkan, has shown consistent efforts to improve conditions for the Roma community through ongoing engagement and an inclusive, participatory approach.

Field research prioritises the support needed in neighbourhoods with a large Roma population and, as a result, the city has already provided hundreds of house repairs and supplies to people in need.

However, the Edirne Municipality has also built long-term solutions into its work and culture. For example, because unemployment is seen as the greatest social problem in the area, the municipality has employed more than 330 Roma, who form 21 % of the municipal workforce.

One of the main activities in recent years has been to empower Roma women through skill development and employment. As part of the wider ROMACTED programme, the Edirne Municipality interviewed Roma women and found that, when activities and training courses are held during work hours, it can cause worries about income and job losses. For many, the need for childcare was also limiting participation. What is more, these difficulties in accessing self-improvement activities also caused a lack of self-esteem.

The municipality combated these issues by providing an easily accessible and secure environment for women to participate in activities and training courses, and has opened several new daycare centres.



"Our city is one of the cities with a high Roma population. This is richness."

Recep GÜRKAN



