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| **October, 2023** |

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Dokumenti i politikave "Situata e komuniteteve Rome dhe Egjiptiane që jetojnë në zonat rurale në Shqipëri, Gjetje dhe Rekomandime", i mbështetur nga We-Effect, synon të gjenerojë rekomandime politikash në fushën e zhvillimit rural me qëllim përmirësimin e mundshëm të formulimit dhe zbatimit të politikave që mbështesin fermerët rome dhe egjiptianë që jetojnë në zonat rurale në Shqipëri.

Ky dokument politik do të ndihmojë organizatën Amaro-Drom në përpjekjet e saj për avancimin e avokatisë drejt përmirësimit të cilësisë së jetës së minoriteteve Rome dhe Egjiptiane, veçanërisht në lidhje me zhvillimin rural të qëndrueshëm.

Përveç kësaj, falë raportit të studimit dhe rekomandimeve, Amaro-Drom do të ketë njohuritë e duhura për të kuptuar më specifikisht nevojat dhe fushat për ndërhyrje, formulimin e zbatimin e politikës së zhvillimit rural të qëndrueshëm, si dhe do të fitojë kapacitetet për të avokuar për politika të përmirësuara që do të ndikojnë pozitivisht në jetën e këtyre minoriteteve në Shqipëri.

# Introduction

The policy paper "Situation of Roma and Egyptian communities living in rural areas in Albania, Findings and Recommendations", supported by WE-Effect, aims to generate policy recommendations in the field of rural development with the objective at the possible improvement of the formulation and implementation of policies that support Roma and Egyptian farmers living in rural areas in Albania. This policy paper will help the Amaro-Drom organization to advance its advocacy efforts toward improving the quality of life of minorities Roma and Egyptian, especially in relation to sustainable rural development. More specifically, thanks to the study report and recommendations, Amaro-Drom will have the necessary knowledge to understand the formulation and implementation of the sustainable rural development policy, as well as the capacity to advocate for improved policies that will positively impact the lives of Roma and Egyptian minorities.

# Objective of the Policy Paper

In the diverse landscape of Albanian agriculture, Roma and Egyptian farmers often find themselves overlooked despite being in greater need of support for social and economic development. Formal employment of Roma and Egyptian communities in rural areas largely relies on agriculture, characterized by small plots of land, inadequate infrastructure, and high maintenance costs. While agriculture presents a significant income-generating opportunity for Roma and Egyptian communities in rural areas, they frequently encounter challenges such as land ownership issues, limited education and business skills, and constrained access to resources. Social marginalization and restricted political influence further hinder their ability to establish successful agricultural endeavors. Acknowledging these difficulties, Amaro Drom, a dedicated advocate for the rights and well-being of Roma communities, has undertaken the task of preparing this policy paper. The focus is on outlining the challenges faced by Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania, with a specific emphasis on the organization's target groups in Levan, Pluge, Grabian, and Morava. The document also provides recommendations to support the efforts towards enhancing the well-being of Roma and Egyptian communities and promoting sustainable rural development.

Amaro Drom, with over 20 years of experience in Albania, is actively working towards the social and economic integration of Roma and Egyptian communities. The organization's ongoing project, "Increased Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion of Roma Community through Improved Performance of Amaro-Drom," focuses on supporting sustainable rural development, strengthening small-scale farmers to enhance resilience to climate change, and promoting gender equality.

# Methodology

The policy paper, titled "Situation of Roma and Egyptian Farmers Living in Rural Areas in Albania: Findings and Recommendations," was developed in November 2023. This report is a combination of data gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The desk research includes assessments and reports of available policy documents, research papers, reports, and studies from public authorities, international donors, and organizations.

The key reports considered include:

* National Action Plan For Equality, Inclusion And Participation Of Roma And Egyptians In The Republic Of Albania (2021-2025)
* Decision No. 348, Dated 29.4.2020 For Procedures, Criteria And Rules For The Implementation Of incentive Program Through Self Employment
* Policy Analysis That Aims at the Integration of the Roma And Egyptians In Albania. Roma Integration
* Smallholders and Family Farms in Albania - Country Study Report 2019, FAO
* Assessment of Investment Needs in Settlements and Communities Roma and Egyptian in the Municipalities Lushnjë, Divjakë, Fier, Berat, Kucovë, Vlora, Gjirokastër, and Delvina in order to improve their living conditions, March 2017. UNDP
* Roma and Egyptians in Albania: a socio-demographic and economic profile based on the 2011 census

Furthermore, data and information from first-hand sources within the Amaro Drom target groups in the areas of Levan, Grabian, Morava, and Pluge were closely analyzed. In the context of this policy paper preparation, four focus groups discussions, including 58 members from Roma and Egyptian communities living in rural areas were organized. The focus group discussions were conducted using semi-structured questions and the information was collected during the routine activities of Amaro Drom in the field of rural development. The objective was to validate the analysis and establish a common understanding of the conclusions and recommendations. The questions used during the focus group discussions are listed in the table below:

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| No. | Semi-Structured Questions for Focus Groups Discussions |
| 1. | What are some of the primary challenges faced by Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania regarding access to agricultural resources, such as land, water, and inputs? |
| 2. | How would you describe the level of support and assistance available to Roma and Egyptian farmers from governmental and non-governmental organizations in Albania? |
| 3. | Can you identify any cultural or social factors that may influence the participation of Roma and Egyptian communities in agricultural activities in Albania? |
| 4. | What are the main types of crops or livestock typically cultivated or raised by Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania, and what are the associated challenges and opportunities? |
| 5. | How do Roma and Egyptian farmers perceive their access to markets and opportunities for selling their agricultural products? Are there any barriers or limitations they face in this regard? |
| 6. | What are the gender dynamics within Roma and Egyptian farming households in Albania, and how do they impact agricultural decision-making, labor distribution, and access to resources? |
| 7. | Are there any specific policies or programs implemented in Albania aimed at supporting Roma and Egyptian farmers in agriculture? How effective do you perceive these initiatives to be? |
| 8. | Can you describe any discrimination or marginalization experienced by Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania within the agricultural sector or broader society? |
| 9. | How do Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania perceive their relationship with other agricultural stakeholders, such as local communities, agricultural services etc |
| 10. | What are some of the traditional farming practices or knowledge systems utilized by Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania, and how do they complement or differ from modern agricultural methods? |
| 11. | How do Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania perceive the impact of climate change on their agricultural livelihoods, and what adaptation strategies are being employed? |
| 12. | What are the aspirations and future goals of Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania regarding their involvement in agriculture, and what support do they believe is necessary to achieve these objectives? |

# Context of the study

Against the Albania's historical reputation as a country with immense agricultural potential, constituting approximately 24%[[1]](#footnote-1) of its land area, the importance of agriculture in the national economy has diminished over the years. In 2019, agriculture contributed merely 21% to the country's GDP[[2]](#footnote-2), signaling a significant shift from its once-central role. The transformation can be traced back to the land reform of the early 1990s, which distributed state agricultural land equally among the rural population, resulting in small and fragmented farms. This structural change challenged the growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector. In addition, continued emigration of young people from both rural and urban areas led to a significant decline in the population engaged in agriculture.

Regardless of the figures, Albania government is always putting more priority in the field of agriculture and rural development given the great potential of the country to develop sustainable rural development and contribute toward increasing the country economic situation. Albania has a rural population of 38.89% (2019)[[3]](#footnote-3), a number that is rapidly decreasing each year, which makes engaging human capital in rural areas an urgent issue for the country. Albanian government has designed various strategies and policies that focus in rural development including quality of infrastructure and basic services, unstable electricity supply, lack of access to drinking water, reduction of work labor, prices of first hand supplies, etc.

In this context, the percentage of Roma and Egyptian communities living in rural areas is 23.5% according to Census 2011. The predominant formal employment, mainly in agriculture, sustains basic needs for communities residing in rural areas, characterized by small land parcels, inadequate infrastructure, water system deficiencies, and high maintenance costs.

Roma and Egyptian communities in rural areas face continous issues of poverty, low education levels, challenging and unhealthy housing conditions, limited access to rights and social services, and various forms of discrimination. The majority of Roma and Egyptian individuals rely entirely on informal labor, rendering their children particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, including begging and scavenging for recyclables. Despite agriculture being a predominant activity in many municipalities of Albania, Roma and Egyptian families find it challenging to engage in this economic activity, further complicating their integration into the labor market. Economic opportunities in rural areas, both within and outside agriculture, are limited, coupled with inadequate social services, educational opportunities, and social welfare provisions. Consequently, many family members opt for migration, relying on remittances to distance themselves from agriculture.

Compounding these challenges are traditional social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities, restricting the decision-making power of rural women. Practices such as early marriages, limited mobility, and social interaction constraints limit their personal autonomy and empowerment. The underrepresentation of rural women in decision-making processes at local and national levels further marginalizes their voices and perspectives, leading to inadequate consideration in policy development, implementation, and resource allocation processes. The various challenges highlighted underscore the urgency and importance of targeted interventions to address the complex issues faced by Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania.

# Findings of the study

There is still uncertainty regarding the accurate number of Roma and Egyptian communities residing in Albania. According to the 2011 Census, 8,300 Roma and 3,368 Egyptians were recorded in Albania. However, alternative documents suggest a considerably higher population, estimating 120,000 Roma and 200,000 Egyptians in the country. It is crucial to note the significant disparity in these figures. The majority of Roma and Egyptian communities are concentrated in urban areas, accounting for 76.5%[[4]](#footnote-4), while 23.5% reside in rural regions. This distribution varies across different cities in Albania.

Among the rural population, around 52% of Roma families in villages own agricultural land, averaging 1 hectare of land surface. However, a considerable number of families either lack land or have sold it due to financial constraints. Among those who own land, wheat cultivation is prevalent (49.4%), while 19.1% do not engage in agricultural activities, and 20.2% lease agricultural land[[5]](#footnote-5). Despite land ownership, many families struggle to utilize it for income generation, primarily fulfilling basic family needs. To confirm this, respondents from the target groups associated with Amaro Drom organization highlight the difficulties they face, including high costs of materials, lack of water systems, and poor infrastructure. While some have ventured into wheat cultivation, they express skepticism about agriculture as a sustainable source of income for their families.

Another prevalent challenge within these communities is the problematic nature of land registration. Despite owning land, many individuals encounter obstacles in formally registering their property. This issue becomes more pronounced and complex, particularly for women within these communities. Not only do women face challenges in registering land, but they also encounter eligibility issues regarding the legitimacy of their land ownership. Deep-seated mentality issues that further marginalize women, deepening the difficulties they encounter in asserting their rightful claims to land ownership, compound these challenges. The intersection of gender-related challenges and land registration complications points out the need for targeted interventions to address not only the bureaucratic aspects of land registration but also the cultural and societal barriers that disproportionately affect women within these marginalized communities.

Accessibility to financial support is severely limited for Roma and Egyptian farmers due to high bureaucratic procedures and intense competition for available funds and subsidy schemes. The National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025) underscores this challenge, emphasizing that the IPARD II program lacks preferential selection criteria for Roma and Egyptians communities. The funds provided through this program are applicable to all interested applicants, making it more difficult for these communities to access and profit from them. Given their pre-existing complex challenges, such as issues related to education and housing, Roma and Egyptian communities find it especially challenging to secure these funds.

Moreover, the IPARD funds primarily serves the larger farmers, leaving smaller farmers, including Roma and Egyptian communities, with limited opportunities. Although programs like SARED are accessible to small farms, their reach, especially among rural women, remains modest. Additionally, FAO reports reveal a significant disproportion in direct support distribution, with Albanian farmers receiving €3 per hectare from the state, while a substantial €42 goes to institutions and entities monitoring the agricultural sector. This stands in contrast to other countries, where the majority of funds are directed straight to farmers. An analysis by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization further underscores the concerning reality that Albanian farmers receive 18 times less financial support from the state than their counterparts in neighboring countries, raising questions about the equitable distribution of EU funds.

In addition to the issues stated above, there is a huge lack of knowledge and trust among the Roma and Egyptian communities regarding the support and subsidy schemes for farmers. Roma and Egyptian entrepreneurs in the field of agriculture do not possess sufficient information regarding possible grants from government agencies. Target groups of Amaro Drom in Pluge, Morava, Levan and Grabian state that they have little knowledge of these subsidy schemes and most of them (86%)[[6]](#footnote-6) do not believe that they can achieve this subsidy schemes due to high level of bureaucracy and transparency of fund distribution. This has made that Roma and Egyptian entrepreneurs in most cases do not succeed in agriculture ventures. Although the government of Albania has foreseen to tackle this challenge, the reality has not yet changed for these communities. In this regard, In the national plan of Action For Equality, Inclusion And Participation Of Roma And Egyptians In The Republic Of Albania (2021-2025) it is stated that some of the measures included in the plan to achieve this objective are: the reduction of local taxes and fees for businesses established by Roma and Egyptians, prioritization of Roma and Egyptians to be included and benefit from IPARD II program grants for agriculture and rural development etc.,.[[7]](#footnote-7) . Although these objectives look very promising for the Roma and Egyptian entrepreneurs in agriculture, in reality the situation for these communities in rural areas do not appear the same. Also, there are no specific data how the objectives of the Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025) have been progressed so far, although the plan has already been implemented for more than two years.

Another significant challenge of the Roma and Egyptian communities in agriculture activities is that lack the proper knowledge and skills when it comes to creating small businesses to generate sustainable incomes for their families. Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania face significant lack of knowledge and skills necessary for establishing small businesses aimed at generating sustainable incomes for their families. Participants from Roma and Egyptian farmers, beneficiaries of Amaro Drom organization, declare that the absence of guidance in business development makes them hesitant to create income sources beyond traditional agricultural activities. The lack of entrepreneurial expertise not only limits their economic potential but also does not give these communities a hope to consider agriculture a long-term income generation activity for next generations as well. Also, they face challenges in accessing information, technology, and digital platforms due to limited infrastructure, connectivity, and digital literacy. This has limited their access to markets and networking opportunities, which are crucial in creating successful agriculture ventures. Addressing this knowledge gap and providing targeted support in business development could empower Roma and Egyptian farmers to explore alternative forms for income generation, strengthening economic resilience within these communities and contributing to their overall socio-economic well-being.

# Recommendations

1. **Generation of relevant statistics and data for an informed decision-making and policy development.** To enhance the socio-economic prospects of Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania, it is important to prioritize the ongoing development of comprehensive statistics and data. This initiative serves as a fundamental foundation for the formulation of targeted and cohesive policies by both the government and active donors within the agricultural sector. A crucial initial step involves addressing the existing gaps in the availability and utilization of statistical information.

A key recommendation is the establishment of a comprehensive and gender-responsive farm register to capture the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Roma and Egyptian farmers. Additionally, it should serve as a mechanism to systematically collect and analyze specific indicators and statistics pertinent to small farms ran by Roma and Egyptian farmers. Key figures related to income, a critical determinant of their well-being, should be systematically collected and documented. By focusing on the development of targeted statistics, policymakers can have insights that are essential for designing policies that address the unique needs of Roma and Egyptian farmers.

1. **Increase Support for Small-Level Farmers:** To support Roma and Egyptian farmers, a holistic approach is recommended. Financial support should be tailored to their needs, including direct subsidies, low-interest loans, or grants aimed at facilitating access to crucial agricultural inputs such as seeds and equipment. The informal nature of agriculture activities in agriculture sector, particularly among Roma and Egyptian farmers, poses a significant barrier to securing loans. Also, the documentation requirements and standards by programs like IPARD II, makes it very difficult for small farms to participate in grant opportunities. A strategic approach involves supporting farmers with legal requirement and documentation, or directing them towards alternative programs or schemes with more flexible eligibility criteria. This ensures a more inclusive and supportive financial environment for Roma and Egyptian farmers.
2. **Education and Skills Programs for Roma and Egyptian Farmers:** A comprehensive strategy involves designing of education and skills programs specifically for Roma and Egyptian farmers. Beyond traditional agricultural aspects, these programs should integrate modules on fundamental business skills. Workshops focusing on financial management, marketing strategies, and other entrepreneurial skills will empower farmers to run successful and sustainable agricultural businesses. Targeted training programs and extension services are crucial in strengthening their agricultural knowledge and skills, covering topics ranging from modern farming techniques to sustainable practices. It is also important that they expand their expertise beyond agriculture, and include topics such as business management, marketing, food processing, income diversification, tourism, and environmentally and socially sustainable development. State institutions should reinforce quality control measures for inputs, offering training on optimal pesticide usage, and supporting Roma and Egyptian farmers in procuring essential equipment, such as spray pesticides. This comprehensive approach aims to empower Roma and Egyptian farmers in Albania with the knowledge and resources necessary for sustainable and diversified agricultural practices.
3. **Land Registration Support:** To secure the long-term effectiveness of interventions, facilitating the land registration process for Roma and Egyptian farmers is crucial. Providing legal assistance and support throughout this process, including raising awareness about land rights and assisting with paperwork could help them to achieve the land ownership certificates. This effort aims to establish a more equitable and gender-sensitive framework for farm registration, land transactions, and land ownership for Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania.
4. **Improve Market Access and Food Safety Standards:** Improving market access involves establishing linkages between Roma and Egyptian farmers and key players in the agricultural supply chain such as retailers, wholesalers, and cooperatives. At the same time, training programs must address food safety standards and best practices. Educating farmers on compliance with regulatory requirements not only ensures product safety but also expands their market reach. Moreover, improving coordination across the agricultural value chain is an important condition to optimize production, processing, and distribution for increased efficiency and competitiveness,
5. **Support a holistic approach in social and economic development of Roma and Egyptian living in rural areas.** Considering the fact that Roma and Egyptian communities in rural areas face complex challenges of poverty, social exclusion, education, housing etc, it is important to have interventions that ensure their overall wellbeing, including interventions that improve social protection, infrastructure, social welfare, and broader economic development. Targeted initiatives must ensure that Roma and Egyptian farmers that choose to remain in agriculture are equipped with the necessary resources to expand and advance their enterprises. Simultaneously, those opting to transition away from agriculture should be presented with alternative income opportunities within rural areas, contributing to overall rural development.
6. **Bottom-up and participatory advocacy to increase the impact of the Roma community and Egyptian on local government units** and their decision-making bodies in the direction of improving their response to their challenges in agriculture and rural development. There is an obvious need to mobilize families in rural areas, especially those from Roma and Egyptian minorities to ask the respective municipalities to monitor the progress of plans for the social and economic integration of Roma and Egyptians in rural areas. Since the implementation of policies for sustainable rural development belongs to municipalities and decision-making institutions, bottom-up advocacy will increase the responsibility of municipalities for the serious implementation of plans and strategies in this direction.

1. [Country Report – Albania - Agriculture and rural development](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/ext-study-applicant-albania_2006_en_0.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/albania-agricultural-sector-agr [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.monitor.al/popullsia-rurale-bie-me-4-per-4-vite/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Roma and Egyptians in Albania: a socio-demographic and economic profile based on the 2011 census [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dekada e Romeve dhe Situata e Romeve ne Shqiperi, SOROS (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Amaro Drom internal data-Survey with Roma and Egyptian farmers in Pluge, Grabian, Levan and Morava [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Action For Equality, Inclusion And Participation Of Roma And Egyptians In The Republic Of Albania (2021-2025) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)