

Narrative Report form the Round Table *Civil Monitoring of the Regional Housing Program with a Special Emphasis on Care for Roma Population*

Podgorica, 02.06.2014.

On June 2nd 2014 the Igman Initiative organized a round on the topic *Civil Monitoring of the Regional Housing Program with a Special Emphasis on Care for Roma Population* in Podgorica, with support from the Foundation Open Society Institute from Budapest. Introductory speakers at the first panel were: Branko Lukovac, Co-president of Igman Initiative for Montenegro, Željko Sofranac, Director of the Montenegrin Directorate for the Care of Refugees, Aleksandar Cadjenovic, representative of the UNHCR in Montenegro and Radomir Sovljanski, representative of the Open Society Foundations from Budapest.

Branko Lukovac opened the round table saying that this is the first in a series of discussions that will be focused on the civil monitoring related to providing housing for Roma refugees within the framework of the Regional Housing Programme (in further text the RHP). The purpose of the roundtable is to discuss the initial assessment of the activities of the RHP in Montenegro prepared by Milan Radovic, independent expert of the Igman Initiative for Montenegro. Another purpose is to find ways to engage the representatives of Roma population in the process of monitoring the RHP and assess all aspects of resolving this issue.

Željko Šofranac state that Montenegro has included internally displaced persons from Kosovo in the RHP - according to data from 2009 total number of displaced persons in Montenegro is 16 000 people, while over 11 000 of them comes from Kosovo. He provided an overview of the activities undertaken by the Government of Montenegro within the framework of the Sarajevo process with the aim of finding best solutions for the most vulnerable groups such as Roma population.

Within the framework of a project aimed at resolving the issues of vulnerable groups the Government of Montenegro applied for funds in the amount of 27,696,000 € for 1.177 households. As part of the first wave of the RHP the Government of Montenegro submitted the project of constructing 62 housing units in Niksic, amounting to 2 780 000 €. The Council of Europe Development Bank is the main partner in the project, with whom the Grant Agreement was signed, while the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is the main coordinator.

Last year in Paris, the Assembly of Donors of the RHP Fund has approved the project Camp Konik which anticipates the construction of 120 housing units in total value of 7 348 000 €.

Mr. Sofranac reminded that aside from the RHP an IPA project from 2011, within which 60 housing units will be constructed, is still being implemented.

Fatima Naza from the Center for Roma Initiative pointed out the importance of including the representatives of Roma population in to the realization of the RHP. She also expressed concern that through the RHP exclusive Roma communities could be created, which would only enhance segregation.

Aleksandar Cadjenovic from the UNHCR in Montenegro said that the basic role of the UNHCR within the RHP is the monitoring of the selection of project beneficiaries as well as the monitoring of activities that will lead to the successful integration of vulnerable groups. He pointed out that within 3 projects that Montenegro had submitted and that were approved, the majority of prospective beneficiaries are actually Roma and Egyptians. In his opinion, the issue of achieving sustainable relocation of Roma population, which would be in line with their everyday needs, is of very complex and delicate nature.

Radomir Sovlajnski from the Open Society Foundations from Budapest noted that this is also a political issue that will be addressed in the process of accession to the European Union. Within this process an active engagement and sound activities of local governments, as well as their coordination and cooperation with CSOs is paramount.

After these addresses all participants were actively engaged in discussing the topic, expressing a number of comments, opinions, suggestions and initiatives, some of which will become an integral part of the expert report.

At the second panel the speakers were Aleksandar Popov, Co-president of Igman Initiative for Serbia, Tanja Bakalbašić, Project Coordinator for Montenegro and Milan Radović, Igman Initiative expert for Montenegro.

Aleksandar Popov presented in detail the project *Integrating Roma Interest to the Sarajevo Housing Project* which is being implemented by the Igman Initiative. He pointed out that this process tackles not only the question of housing and care for Roma population but also a much wider range of issues. The issues of providing housing from Roma population is significant and complex for the reason that Roma often encounter difficulties when attempting to prove their status of displaced persons as they are more often than not legally invisible persons. They also lack access to all valuable and relevant information, as well as representation in media.

Tanja Bakalbašić invited the participants from Roma CSOs to engage in the discussion and give their opinion about the RHP. She pointed out that this is only the beginning of the monitoring of the RHP, hence all contribution and suggestions are welcome.

Milan Radovic said that his role in project is to the prepare report on the development of the RHP in Montenegro, to evaluate the obstacle and draft recommendations. He pointed out that the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, as well as other institutions engaged in the implementation of the RHP, are very open for cooperation and that all requested data is transparent. He urged Roma CSOs to participate in the process of monitoring and to point out to the government institutions other significant issues that affect Roma community. He also said that the RHP is carried out in terms of vulnerability not in terms of ethnicity; hence first criterion for selection would be vulnerability.

According to the discussion among the participants the following issues have been indicated as conclusions of the round table:

- The issue of the sustainability of the RHP,
- The involvement of the representatives of Roma population and Roma CSOs in monitoring and mediation between Roma community and the Government during the implementation of housing projects,
- The regulation of the legal status in Montenegro and issues that will arise due to the fact that a large number of immigrants have not applied for the status of internally displaced persons hence might become illegal aliens and therefore will not be in the position to apply for housing under the RHP,
- The issues of segregation and ghettoization through already approved projects which will be implemented within the RHP,
- Subsequent integration of Roma in other areas: employment, education, health insurance, etc. Roma experts should be involved in this process,
- The housing units should not be built around landfills. Local CSOs should issue a warning to the local authorities in cases where locations are inadequate or would lead towards segregation,
- The issues of local self-governments standing for the owners of newly constructed housing units as stipulated by the Law on Social Housing,
- Using the examples of good practice local programs of social housing, as well as the initiatives aimed at influencing public policies in the area of Roma integration should be developed
- The EU Delegation to Montenegro should be engaged as it is the major partner in the implementation of the RHP,
- It has been suggested that aside from housing units parcels of lands should be secured and used for auxiliary facilities, for example for stabling as most of Roma use horses and carriages to collect secondary raw materials,
- Members of Roma community should be introduced to their rights and obligations under the contracts on housing,
- Members of Roma community should be informed about their rights according to the Law on Social Housing,
- The expert team should provide recommendations for outlining a guidebook and criteria for the selections of beneficiaries so as to prevent discrimination of Roma within the RHP.