

REGIONAL CONFERENCE: “HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HOUSING FOR ROMA IN THE ENLARGEMENT REGION”

31 May-01 June 2018, Hotel “Princess”, Bar, Montenegro

:: CONCEPT NOTE ::

RATIONALE

The Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 project, funded by the European Union and the Open Society Foundations, works with the economies of the Western Balkans and Turkey to improve their performance in formulating, implementing, budgeting and monitoring their Roma integration policies within the EU integration process. Significant focus of the project is placed on the thematic areas of education, employment, health, housing and civil registration. Notwithstanding the importance of all of these priorities, practice has shown that housing remains the most challenging issue in the Roma integration process. Sustainable and decent housing is the *sine qua non* for achievements in the other priority areas, and requires the most substantial financial resources.

Hitherto, numerous housing initiatives relevant for Roma were implemented in the enlargement region, with different levels of success. In its work so far, and in contacts with public officials, civil society, international and other relevant stakeholders, the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team became aware of the magnitude of remaining work to be done, and the need for a holistic approach both during planning and implementation of housing measures. Experience and testimonies reveal the pressing need to take into account the whole ‘reality’ of Roma families and individuals benefiting from housing measures and design measures which can achieve sustainable living communities.

Such a holistic approach needs to be aligned with the [European Social Charter](#) (art. 30 and 31), should closely follow the commitments under the [Vienna Declaration](#), and consider the conclusions and recommendations from the OSCE documents [Roma Housing Settlements in South-Eastern Europe: Summary and Recommendations](#) and [Best Practices for Roma Integration](#). The holistic approach should be:

- **integral:** combine activities in area of housing with activities in other areas such as employment, education etc., ensuring sustainability and decency of living;
- **participative:** including Roma into the whole process - from planning to implementation;
- **individually tailored:** taking into account the specific situation of each family.

The holistic approach should be efficient in addressing some of the common challenges in the enlargement region which remain to be tackled with additional vigour such as:

- * increased homelessness and insecurity of tenure;
- * legalization issues;
- * poverty affecting sustainability of housing units;
- * lack of accompanying infrastructure;
- * housing measures perpetuating exclusion and ghettoization;
- * cooperation of local and other levels of authority;
- * horizontal cross-institutional cooperation;
- * prejudices of the wider society;
- * necessity for Roma to adjust certain aspects of life to new forms of housing.



When it comes to specific solutions, the experience reveals that the *legalization and reconstruction of settlements and individual housing units* should be pursued before other solutions whenever possible. The legalization does not require resettlement which is commonly sensitive and difficult process to implement. The legalization also needs to include participatory reconfiguration of settlements when needed for infrastructural and other reasons. The second solution should be *social housing*. When it comes to the social housing, the concept needs more precision and a clear regulatory framework at the national level. The framework should include clear division of responsibilities among different government levels, sources and obligations in terms of allocating funding and other resources, and defined beneficiaries and contents of the package of social housing.

Having this in mind, the Roma Integration 2020 Action Team is organizing a regional housing conference with the main objective to gather relevant public officials from the enlargement region and point out common challenges, strengths and deficiencies of previous housing initiatives. This should be a starting point for conceiving future and improved housing initiatives.

The specific objectives of the conference are several:

- ✓ To increase knowledge of public officials about the advantages of holistic approach and create a platform for participating economies to discuss ways of applying a holistic approach when implementing future housing initiatives;
- ✓ To increase the knowledge of public officials about the advantages of simplified legalization and reconstruction compared to other solutions, and to advocate for simplification and facilitation of legalization procedures.
- ✓ To encourage the participating economies to comprehensively regulate the field of social housing and allocate sufficient resources for its successful implementation.
- ✓ To encourage participating economies to integrate a holistic housing approach and proposed solutions into the upcoming cycles of public budgeting and IPA programming.

METHODOLOGY

The first objective of the conference is to increase knowledge of public officials about the advantages of holistic approach and create a platform for participating economies to discuss ways of applying a holistic approach when implementing future housing initiatives. Holistic approach aiming to design tailor-made housing measures will require collection of comprehensive data about housing, health, social, economic, civil, and family situation of potential beneficiaries. The discussion will focus on possibilities to collect needed data, upgrade integral initiatives to become holistic, and adopt holistic approach in the enlargement region (with adaptations in the participating economies if needed). Since the holistic approach should be integral, ways to increase inter-institutional cooperation and coordination (horizontal and vertical) should be discussed. Furthermore, possibilities for including Roma into needs assessment, designing initiatives and measures, and implementation need to be considered. Individuals with previous experience in implementing integral and/or holistic approach initiatives will present their experiences and advantages of such an approach.

The second objective relates to promoting facilitated legalization and reconstruction as a first solution to housing for Roma. The Roma Integration 2020 Action Team will commission research which will identify possibilities for facilitated legalization in the enlargement region and the holistic approach to it, which will be presented in the conference.





The third objective relates to comprehensively regulating the field of social housing. The Roma Integration 2020 Action Team will commission research which will identify possibilities for comprehensively regulating the field of social housing and improving the institutional and national performance. Practitioners in this field will also present their experiences.

In light of the fact that housing initiatives require major financial resources, out of which a large portion comes from the EU, the enlargement region is encouraged to discuss inclusion of a holistic approach in the programming cycle of IPA, in addition to programming of the public budget. Hence, the fourth objective of the conference is to create a platform for participating economies to discuss these issues. The discussion should pay attention to necessary pre-conditions for including holistic approach into the future IPA and budget cycles, such as: comprehensive needs assessment of Roma, mapping of Roma settlements and assessing possibilities for legalization, mapping of municipalities' assets, well-substantiated assessment of financial requirements, addressing the under-absorption of IPA funds, capacity building of public officials, etc.

PARTICIPANTS

- National Roma Contact Points (7 expected)
- Responsible officials relevant for the area of housing – dealing with construction, infrastructure, spatial planning, or similar topics (up to 2 per economy, total 14 expected)
- Responsible officials in charge of local level governance (7 expected)
- Responsible officials in charge of employment (7 expected).
- Responsible officials in charge of social care programming (7 expected)
- Roma civil society representatives (7 expected)
- Representatives of the relevant international organizations: ASB, BMZ, Caritas, COE, EU/EC, Habitat for Humanity, HELP, Hilfswerk, Norad, OSCE/ODIHR, OSF, RHP, SDC, Sida, UNDP, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, WB

Potential panellists will include the expert presenting the commissioned research, together with relevant persons presenting advantages of integral housing approach and possibilities for its adoption and implementation. Individuals having experience with integral housing approach will present real-life examples.

The location of the conference is set for Hotel "Princess" in Bar, Montenegro.

DRAFT AGENDA

Day 1

Opening Session

Session I: UNDP Regional Roma Survey – Results

Session II: Housing Legalization - Pressing issues and Ways Forward

Session III: Social Housing - Pressing Issues and Ways Forward

Day 2

Session IV: Towards Holistic Approach – Practical Examples of Integral Housing Initiatives and Ways Forward





* Followed by participant discussion on possibilities to apply holistic approach methodology

Session V: Including Holistic Approach in IPA and budget programming (pre-conditions, strategy, steps)

* Followed by participant discussion on possibilities to include holistic approach in IPA and budget programming

NB. The option to include a photo exhibition presenting the housing situation and living conditions of Roma in the region will be considered in cooperation with Roma CSOs.

