

## **LEGACY, LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES AND WHAT TO DO NEXT?**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The regional conference “DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION: LEGACY, LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES AND WHAT TO DO NEXT?” was organized in Belgrade on 20. - 21. 06. 2019 by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade in mandate of the OSCE Presidency as main partners, joined by a wide range of representatives from the civil society and regional structures, actively assisting with the conference program and/or as donators.

Within five conference panels inclusion problems of the whole Roma population’s life cycle were identified and best practices and solutions shared. Decade of Roma inclusion created a very helpful network of assistants and donors in favor of this community but also responsibilities and obligations of state and local administrations over its destiny, acceptance and style of life and finally gave Romanies ownership on selection of their future. However, the Decade just started the way of doing, learning and sharing the best measures, projects and stories to fully-fledged inclusion of Romanies. In this regard regional meetings and discussions on best measures taken in this process – like the abovementioned conference, could be very helpful. And so we share conclusions and recommendations from the Belgrade conference as a possible basic document for further strategies and action plans or simple plans to be worked out by all players of the Roma inclusion process.

#### **I. Panel**

#### **Non-discrimination, Legal Assistance and Social Inclusion of Roma**

##### **Panelists:**

**Ms. Stana Božović**, State Secretary, Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Republic of Serbia

**Mr. Dan Pavel Doghi**, Chief of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

**Mr. Ábel Ravasz**, Commissioner for Roma Communities, Government of the Slovak Republic

**Ms. Suzana Paunović**, Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, Republic of Serbia

**Mr. Stavros George Stavrou**, Senior Social Development Specialist of the World Bank

**Mr. Dejan Vljaković**, Secretary General, Roma National Minority Council in Serbia

**Moderator:** Mr. Milan Antonijević, Open Society Foundation

**Rapporteur:** Ms. Slavica Denić, SIPRU Team

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

- There is a legal/strategic framework in Serbia for the social inclusion of Roma men and women. Namely, this process is recognized as one of the priorities of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the key strategic documents in the process of European integration, primarily in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. In addition, every two years, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Government of the Republic of Serbia organizes a workshop on social inclusion of Roma men and women in order to monitor the improvement of the position of this national minority and to define priorities for the forthcoming period in the form of operational conclusions that are binding for the relevant institutions. It is recommended to improve the coordination of all stakeholders in the process of inclusion of Roma men and women in order to gain a complete insight into the implementation of measures and to monitor the progress.
- The strategic documents to be adopted must be in line with the needs of Roma men and women. It is recommended to establish cooperation between institutions at all levels and the Roma community but also take into account the timely delivery of these documents.
- The financial resources required for the implementation of measures and activities must be defined in a well-planned manner and in accordance with the needs of the Roma community, both at the national and the local self-government level. In addition, it is recommended to improve the capacities of relevant institutions for the absorption of international/donor funds.
- Measures for social inclusion of Roma men and women should be implemented at the level of local self-government. In this regard, the recommendation is to support the existing human resources at the local level (pedagogical assistants, Roma coordinators, health mediators) and to increase their number.
- The recommendation is to treat and monitor the problem of discrimination and anti-Gypsism not only from the perspective of human rights, but also from the security perspective.
- The percentage of Roma children attending pre-school institutions aged 3-5.5 years, as well as children who complete the preparatory preschool program, is extremely low. It is recommended to create measures to increase the inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education.
- The recommendation is to abolish a 1% quota for enrollment of Roma students to faculties and colleges in the Republic of Serbia.
- The recommendation is to use to a greater extent the opportunities given by measures of active employment policy but also to adjust these measures to the needs of the Roma community.

- The forthcoming census should provide us with more accurate data on the number of Roma men and women living in Serbia. It is important to keep the number of members of the Roma community in mind so that the strategic documents that are being adopted, as well as the measures and activities being implemented, are in line with the needs of Roma men and women. It is recommended to organize promotional campaigns that would point out the importance of listing and declaring all members of the Roma community.

### **Recommendations concerning the readmission process**

- Keep in mind that this is a highly vulnerable population.
- When they leave the country of origin, they come out of the social protection system, and it is necessary to simplify and facilitate their return and support social inclusion again.
- Pay attention to the mental health of children returned under the Readmission Agreement because the process of returning to the country of origin itself is very stressful.
- Children who have been educated in Western European countries are often returning to the lower grades when they return to Serbia because they face the problem of diploma nostrification, due to the lack of necessary financial resources. The recommendation is to provide legal, advisory and financial assistance when attaining diplomas.
- Being in Western European countries, people have acquired some knowledge and skills, and it is recommended to view them as a human resource that can contribute to the economies of the country from which they originate.

## **II.A Panel**

### **Status of Roma Women in Society and Community (results and challenges)**

#### **Panelists:**

**Ms. Tatjana Prijić**, Office of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Government of the Republic of Serbia

**Ms. Ana Šaćipović**, Director of the Association of Roma Women Osvit, Niš, Republic of Serbia

**Ms. Danica Jovanović**, Manager of the Roma Association Novi Bečej, Republic of Serbia

**Ms. Slavica Vasić**, Co-founder of Bibija, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

**Ms. Indira Bajramović**, President of CSO “Bolja Budućnost”, Bosnia and Hercegovina

**Moderator: Ms. Milana Rikanović**, UN Women

**Rapporteur: Ms. Vera Kurtić**, CoE Mission to Serbia – ROMACTED

#### **Conclusions**

Representatives of Roma women's organizations, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and

Herzegovina, as well as representatives of international organizations, attended the Panel dedicated to the position of women, teenage girls, and young girls from the Roma community. It is important to note that among panelists, there were representatives of Roma women's NGOs and women who received the European Commission's Roma Heroin Award for the contribution to the process of inclusion of Roma men and women.

The position of Roma women in the region continues to be characterized by multiple, cross-referenced and repeated discrimination, in all spheres of life. The average life expectancy of Roma women is below 50 years of age, and they still have a high number of pregnancies. Reports from international organizations show that a total of 9% of Roma women are employed, many girls prematurely leave school. Roma women still face traditional roles and social patterns, they have a low level of education, and restricted access to health and social protection.

Representative of the office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Tatjana Prijić, informed the Panel that, from year to year, the civil society is increasingly using the possibility of reporting discrimination, but she noted that there has also been a growing number of applications by the citizens themselves. The data of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality show that based on specific cases and the analysis of the situation on an annual basis, as well as on reports by domestic and international bodies, discrimination based on ethnicity was the 6<sup>th</sup> most frequent type of discrimination in the past year. Half of these cases relate to discrimination against Roma, mostly in the field of education. It is important to note that the submission of complaints to independent bodies is not a measure of the level of discrimination in a society, but is only an indicator of awareness-raising on discrimination and mechanisms to combat discrimination. It is also pointed out that there are positive changes observed on the basis of the performed situational testing.

As it was noted in the first Panel, Serbia is committed to reporting on its obligations to international documents. To this end, relevant international bodies issued a set of recommendations to the Republic of Serbia in February this year, including the recommendations for improving the position of Roma women.

Within the shadow reports, there were also reports under the CEDAW document sent to the UN CEDAW Committee, as well as the GREVIO expert group overseeing the monitoring of the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe. They all noted that it is necessary to eliminate the causes that lead to the current state and discrimination that Roma women face.

### **Violence against Roma Women**

The problem of violence against Roma women is regarded as a global problem concerning the entire society. However, Roma women are in the position of multiple discrimination facing both violence in their own community/family and the wider community. The panelists concluded that narrowly profiled measures limited in certain areas only cannot address the situation adequately. It is necessary to work together through the system, from the local to the national level, with the active participation of the civil society.

Ana Šaćipović, representative of the Association of Roma Women Osvit, presented data on the work of SOS telephone support lines in the Romany language that exist in Niš, Novi Bečej and Belgrade. It was concluded that in the past there had been SOS telephone support lines that Roma women had never resorted to for assistance and support. However, they are now more encouraged to report violence if they have been informed that they will be able to talk to Roma women working for this service. In addition to providing services on the SOS phone, these organizations work on educating representatives of the police, prosecutors' offices and

centers for social work, dealing with their own prejudices and stereotypes, and also monitoring the business relations between these institutions after training.

The SOS telephone service is licensed under the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence. The Roma Women Network, a group of women's organizations that provide women's support services consists of 27 specialized women's organizations with many years of experience, trusted by users and operating with licenses issued by the state. By 2018, there were 8 organizations from the Network providing the SOS telephone service, of which 3 were in Romani language.

The work of specialized women's organizations depends entirely on international donors. Women's specialized organizations are not supported by the Republic of Serbia. Last year, a National SOS telephone line was formed contrary to the standards set by the Istanbul Convention, since telephone interviews with people reporting violence are recorded, and those who provide services do not have the necessary competence and experience to provide such a service. The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence envisages measures for the protection of the victim by restricting access to the victim by the perpetrator, but the application of these measures is different for Roma women and other women living in wider family communities. By reporting and removing violators, Roma women experience additional violence from other family members, and the most appropriate measure is to place victims in safe women's houses. However, social welfare centers do not check whether the capacity of a safe house is filled before reporting violence. In such cases, mediation of organizations working in the field is necessary. In most cases, Roma women return to the perpetrators even after the stay at a safe house, due to the large number of children, poverty, as well as the non-competitiveness on the labour market and the lack of provision of accommodation by the state in some of the further support programs.

### **Recommendations**

- The Panel's recommendation on the topic of violence against Roma women is that - in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence - the state should support the work of specialized organizations working with victims of violence.
- It is necessary to provide continuous monitoring of cross-sector measures, in order to protect victims of violence more effectively.
- It is important to ensure continuous work and increase the capacities of safe houses for the reception of women who have experienced domestic violence, especially Roma women who have pressed criminal charges against domestic violence perpetrators and received protection measures, in order to increase the safety of women and protect them from additional victimization by an extended family.
- It is necessary to provide continuous support programs so that the users of safe houses become independent, financially and psychologically, so that they are not forced to return to the domestic violence perpetrators.
- It is important to ensure the continuous operation of SOS telephone services run by specialized women's organizations.

### **Early Marriages Problem in the Roma Community**

The Panel raised the issue of the terminology used to define the problem of early marriages, and the need for standardization to include under this term not only children marriages, but also forced and contractual marriages. One of the possible solutions is the use of the terminology "children marriages" that would generate other factors, based on the fact that entering into a marriage violates children's rights.

It is estimated that the main problem is that institutions still fail to sanction these practices that violate the legislative framework in all countries in the region, which provides that it is forbidden to establish a marriage before the age of 18 (with the possibility of an age limit of 16 with the consent of the parents).

A significant part of the recommendations of the UN CEDAW Committee is administratively related to the problem of child marriages in the Roma population. Danica Jovanović, representative of the Roma Association Novi Bečej, presented the data from field research in Novi Bečej, where more than 50% of Roma women have experience in a child marriage. 99% of girls experience sexual violence on the first wedding night, which continues throughout the marriage. This violent practice, which is gender-based, results in the impeded exercise of all other rights of Roma women, teenage girls and small girls.

The problem of children's marriages leads to the situation that the victim remains exposed to domestic violence due to economic dependence, lack of job, and lack of support in the safe house accommodation for women and children victims of violence.

The experience of Roma women's organizations shows that a continuous and comprehensive psychological support must be provided. The Coalition for the Prevention of Early Marriages, which was initiated by UNICEF, as well as the Roma Inclusion Office of the Government of AP Vojvodina, which signed the Declaration on the Prevention of Early Marriages, which is now an official document of the Office, have been mentioned as examples of a good practice in dealing with this problem.

### **Recommendations**

- It is recommended to ensure continuous action by state bodies, local institutions and civil society in order to prevent child marriages.
- It is necessary to deepen the early warning system for institutions and citizens if a child marriage is suspected.
- It is necessary to establish cooperation and open communication with specific Roma women's organizations in order to combat child marriages jointly.
- It is important to support Roma women's organizations financially and in other ways in activities aimed at educating employees in local and national institutions. Local Roma coordinators, pedagogical assistants, health mediators, as well as contact persons from local and national institutions should be involved in the fight against child marriages.
- In the fight against child marriages, it is necessary to include men from the Roma community, both activists and non-activists.
- It is necessary to introduce affirmative measures in employment for victims of child marriages in order to gain economic independence.

### **Economic Empowerment of Roma Women**

During the conference, there was a strong reaction of activists from Roma women's organizations, who did not agree that the Republic of Serbia is helping Roma women victims of violence to gain economic independence, noting that the aid of 240,000 RSD is insufficient for a Roma woman, living in poor economic conditions with low level of education and experiencing domestic violence, to start her own business.

There is not enough data on the area of economic empowerment of Roma women, and the collected data have been collected partially without a clearly structured methodology, which would contribute to data completion and thus enable their systematization.

Slavica Vasić from the Roma Women's Center Bibija presented data from the shadow report of the CEDAW document, prepared by the Roma Women Network, which relate to the economic position of Roma women.

There are clear differences between the economic activity of Roma, especially Roma women, and the majority population. The data show that for about every 100 gainfully employed citizens from the majority population, there are about 114 who do not work, whereas in the Roma community, for every 100 employed, there are 257 unemployed, dependent people. The disconcerting fact is that the gainfully employed Roma rate fell by 5.95% over the past year.

However, there is a high level of gender differentiation among Roma men and women who are gainfully employed. Men make up 77.5% and women 22%, which represents a significant difference from the general national level.

The unfavorable economic situation is also affected by all the aforementioned factors: early marriages, birth and maternal status, low level of education, discrimination, etc. The Roma community continues to make a great deal of its income through social assistance that is not sufficient for survival.

Much of the work of Roma men and women continues to be done in the gray economy, which is one of the main survival strategies. Larger existing NES programs require professional competences and skills. Even when the NES provides some benefits to socially vulnerable groups, Roma women still do not meet all the necessary requirements.

Roma women's organizations support women and girls at the project level. The number of beneficiaries is up to 200, and, although it is noticeable that this is a small number for the overall Roma population, it is still a great success for a non-governmental organization or network. It should be noted that this is very important to the users themselves, both because of the eco-consciousness of independence, and because of the better position in the community. However, such projects are not sustainable due to a short time for their implementation and a large number of problems that cannot be solved during the project.

The recommendations presented on the Panel refer to the existing envisaged measures for economic empowerment, which have not achieved the expected results yet due to many factors, including the non-implementation of measures.

### **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to introduce the practice of analyzing the long-term effects of the programs targeted at Roma men and women, as well as programs aimed at launching small businesses.
- It is necessary to build mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating their long-term effects.
- It is necessary to create a special program for the economic empowerment of the existing as well as the potential Roma women entrepreneurs.
- It is necessary to stimulate the creation of local business centers that provide non-financial services, such as dedicated training for successful livelihoods, mentoring

support for business, flat and bookkeeping support, assistance in fundraising and donations, marketing assistance, participation in fairs, etc.

- It is necessary to improve the programs of re-training/additional training for Roma women and girls.
- It is necessary to implement the affirmative action of employment of Roma men and women in institutions, especially in the area where they are assisting the Roma population. Although there have been projects envisaging engagement of Roma men and women, it is necessary for them to establish a working relationship and make their employment not of a project character only.
- It is necessary to support the establishment of women's cooperatives in which Roma women will be able to start a business for which they receive education within various projects.
- After starting a business by vulnerable groups, it is necessary to provide a grace period for charging taxes and other charges, as this is a factor of the abandonment and deterioration of private business initiatives.

### **Political Participation of Roma Women**

Indira Bajramović, representative of the organization Bolja budućnost, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, presented examples of good practice in the area of economic empowerment and employment. She noted that the situation of Roma men and women is better than before the declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, especially in terms of building partnerships between institutions and Roma civil society.

The concept of Roma women in Bosnia is not used in official documents for inclusion, which makes a difference with the existing strategic documents in Serbia, but it is estimated that it is more important that the envisaged measures apply to Roma women, although this, too, has been insufficient. It is particularly important to allocate budget funds for the implementation of these measures.

An example of good practice from Bosnia and Herzegovina is a program for projects to support the political participation of Roma women, which has resulted in the election and appointment of Roma women in the local communities' councils.

An important issue on the subject of political participation is the existence of quotas that have not been used as envisaged to ensure that the positions guaranteed for a less represented sex are filled by politically active women. Instead, these are set by men only to comply formally with legal provisions. Panelists also noted lack of activities to support elected and appointed women, as well as to support women's interests by women.

### **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to ensure the existence of electoral quotas where there are none, and prevent their abuse where they already exist;
- It is necessary to organize additional sustained mechanisms for supporting Roma women in decision-making positions;
- It is necessary to ensure the sustained work of Roma women's organizations that monitor the implementation of adopted public policy measures, especially in the sphere of Roma men and women inclusion, as well as the advancement of women's position at the local and national level.

## **Problems Faced by Single Mothers**

The audience asked an important question about the situation of single mothers in the Roma community. This category is one of the most vulnerable within the Roma community, often confronted with poverty, additional violence if they left and pressed charges against the perpetrators of home violence, the inability to work, etc. Due to poverty, their children are taken away from them and given to foster families, who are paid financial compensation for the care of children, making it an absurd situation for children to be separated from their mother/family and assigned to foreigners for money.

## **Recommendations**

- It is recommended to provide financial assistance to single mothers and poor families, in order to preserve custody over their children.
- It is necessary to provide support in the form of education and employment for single mothers and poor families with children.

## **II.B Panel**

### **Education and Employment as Prevention Tools to Avoid Marginalization of Roma**

#### **Panelists:**

**Ms. Azra Junuzović**, Deputy Director, Roma Education Fund, Hungary

**Ms. Arabela Iljaz**, Project Coordinator and IPA Proposals Evaluation Committee Member, Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of North Macedonia

**Ms. Danijela Stojanović**, Advisor, Sector for Labour and Employment, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Republic of Serbia

**Mr. Srdžan Amet**, Economic Development Head, Municipality Suto Orizari, Republic of North Macedonia

**Mr. Božidar Nikolić**, President, Romanipen – access to education

**Ms. Jelena Tadžić**, Team Leader for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, United Nations Development Programme

**Moderator: Ms. Marija Mitrović**, GIZ Youth Employment Promotion

**Rapporteur: Mr. Petar Antić**, GIZ Inclusion of Roma and Other Marginalized Groups

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

- Approach to active inclusion should focus on three distinct levels for social groups facing compound challenges:
  - ❖ The policy or macro level: Systemic links between active labour market policy and social assistance (social policy) are scrutinized from the legal, institutional and policy perspective;
  - ❖ The organisational or meso level: Adopting optimal institutional model for collaborative work (from loose networking to partnership and one-stop shops) and for co-generating solutions that meet multiple income and support needs of Roma;
  - ❖ The beneficiary or micro level: Clients of the institutions (users) receive support via tailor-made employment and social services and measures.

- Roma involvement, together with systematic support through mentoring, tutoring to build resilience among students and strong Roma identity is a key towards prevention of marginalization of Roma. This has to be accompanied with continuous measures to combat systematic racism and funding to facilitate employment. In that regard, building liaison between potential employers and Roma individuals and strengthening Roma start-ups and business is another essential element in preventing marginalization of Roma.
- It is recommended that the synchronized activities of all actors in the labour market intensify in the coming period, which will encourage greater inclusion of Roma in Active Policy of Employment measures, especially in additional education and training measures, in order to strengthen the competences of the unemployed Roma and increase their employability.
- It is necessary to provide anti-segregation measures including measures to increase the inclusion of children of Roma nationality into educational system (example: Assistants in education).
- It is necessary to create educational measures that would increase participation of children of Roma nationality of age from 3 to 5 years in pre-school institutions, especially in the day stay.
- Anti-discrimination measures should be part of active measures of employment.
- Involvement of Roma associations, NGO's, local leaders as local partners in the direct implementation of project activities results with better response of Roma community.

### **III.A Panel**

#### **Housing as Important Part of Roma Social Inclusion**

##### **Panelists:**

**Mr. Ivan Milivojević**, Deputy Secretary General, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Republic of Serbia

**Mr. Želimir Lalić**, Deputy National Roma Contact Point, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Mr. Erol Ademov**, Senior Officer for Communities Relations, Municipality of Stip, Republic of North Macedonia

**Ms. Boriانا Hasanllari**, Expert, Housing Directorate, General Budget Directorate, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Republic of Albania

**Mr. Danilo Smolović**, Policy Expert, Regional Cooperation Council, Roma Integration

**Moderator: Ms. Mirjana Maksimović**, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia

**Rapporteur: Ms. Aleksandra Bojadjieva**, Policy Expert, Regional Cooperation Council, Roma Integration

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

##### **Legalization of objects where Roma live**

The first topic discussed at the panel was the legalization of objects where Roma live. This is identified as the least expensive solution to the challenge of Roma housing in order to provide

for security of tenure for Roma. It is recommended to make efforts to legalize Roma houses wherever and whenever possible, although it is evident that legalization is challenging.

Mr. Milivojević outlined the process of legalization in Serbia that can be summarized in the three following steps:

1. consultations with the Roma community;
2. urban planning with a due regard to desegregation;
3. actual legalization, including legal, technical and financial support to Roma for making them able to apply and legalize, as well as building capacities to the involved institutions.

During the discussion, a representative from the Croatian government stated that majority of the houses of Roma in Croatia have been legalized through the efforts of the government and that the government of Croatia was ready to share its experience with the governments from the region.

Mr. Ademov, speaking from the viewpoint of the local community, identified a number of challenges regarding housing, including:

- Need for identification of the illegal objects, and, in more general terms, proper data collection in housing;
- Obstacles hidden in the laws, such as tight deadlines for application;
- The load of documentation required for application, including expensive documentation such as geodetic report;
- Need for legal support and possibility to appeal a decision;
- Need to involve Roma in the decision making (including the committees deciding on the applications at local level);
- The need for the object to adhere to building standards as a requirement for legalization, and at the same time impossibility to intervene to improve the standards;
- Land ownership, as the key challenge for the legalization of the houses of Roma;
- Penalization of housing if deemed illegal after the procedure (the case in Montenegro, as reviled by a civil society participants from Montenegro).

### **Parallel Processes to the Legalization Process**

- In parallel to the legalization process, efforts should be made to:
  - ❖ **upgrade the housing standards of the individual housing units** of Roma;
  - ❖ **upgrade the communal infrastructure**, including by developing urban plans, funding and implementing communal infrastructure construction projects, ensuring individual connections to communal infrastructure, as well as building social infrastructure. Building social infrastructure is particularly important in the efforts to transform the Roma settlements from ghettos into developed urban areas and to advance the socio-economic integration of Roma in general.
- There are cases when legalization is absolutely impossible, such as when an object is built on a land prone to natural disasters, when a group of built objects is built in a way to not allow for space for communal infrastructure, etc. In such cases, **evictions** are inevitable. Mr. Smolović listed the key recommendations in order to properly implement evictions:
- Any eviction must be properly **justified** after all the options are exhausted, and it should be done in consultation with the immediately affected persons;
- Proper **legal and procedure guidelines**, following the human rights standards, should be developed and implemented by the responsible institutions;

- The legislation dealing with evictions must provide for **triggering the social legislation** in cases when people from vulnerable groups are evicted, particularly in cases when evictions is from the only object that the persons have, and the object is for primary housing;
- The concept of “**public interest**” in the context of evictions must be properly elaborated, since the housing of Roma is also a public interest. “Public interest” must not be broadly and arbitrarily invoked as a pretext for evictions of Roma.
- It is recommended that any legislation regulating evictions should call for, besides justification, short and long term impact assessment from the potential eviction for the affected persons, as well as for the municipality.
- Proper data collection on evictions is needed throughout the region.

## **Social Housing and Holistic Approach to Housing**

Homeless persons, including those rendered homeless due to negative legalization decision, must be provided **social housing**. The whole region is struggling with social housing, as the available social housing stock is far from the demand. Mr. Lalić presented the unique program of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the region, whereby state budget funds are allocated each year since 2009 in order to build new or renew existing houses of Roma in order to provide them with proper housing. Some 1.000 housing units have been built or rebuilt through this program, which is significant success. The program is characterized with the allocation of the funding by the Council of Ministers to the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, which distributes the funding in a form of grants to the local communities. The local communities are therefore closely engaged and contribute, most often with in-kind contribution of building land, and there is a requirement for participation of Roma in the process. The new owners of the houses are trained in using and maintaining the house. The challenges are in building infrastructure of the settlements, legalization of existing houses, cases of selling houses, as well as the holistic approach.

The **holistic approach to housing** was mentioned by a number of speakers during the panel, and was defined by Mr. Smolović as an approach by which housing measures are planned and delivered taking into consideration the full socio-economic situation of the beneficiaries and deliberately providing a comprehensive package of public services and measures in housing, employment, education, health, non-discrimination, equal access to services, etc. aimed at ensuring full and sustainable integration. The holistic approach is also participatory and individually tailored.

Another example regarding social housing presented during the panel was the Law on Social Housing (22/2018) in Albania. The law regulates a range of social housing programs implemented by the government, and specific provisions to ensure Roma benefit from the law. One of the programs is the social housing for rent with lower price than the market prices, whereby quarter of the beneficiaries is Roma. Roma are also prioritized as beneficiaries by law, including the requirement to have at least 5% of the beneficiaries of the programs to be Roma. The participation of Roma in the programs in the reality is much higher, according to the data. The law includes programs such as social housing rental, rebuilding or building housing units, low cost housing program, urban planning for housing program, temporary and specialized housing programs. The financial instruments of the law include housing allowance, subsidies (up to 100%) for the market cost of housing, subsidy for the interest rate for housing loans, lump-sum subsidy for low cost housing, competitive granting of housing projects, usufruct (right to use housing for life), obligation of new buildings of 2.000 m<sup>2</sup> and above to allocate 3% of the building for social housing.

During the discussion of the participants, two good practices by non-governmental organisations were presented, including:

- EHO: providing building materials in phases and engaging the beneficiaries;
- HELP: long planning phase including other social aspects besides housing, such as employment, neighbourly relations, etc.

The participants highlighted the importance of decent housing for socialisation and integration, the challenging process of gaining building permits, the complex process of legalization, not affordable communal connections, hesitation of the central and local governments to give the land to Roma, housing as the most expensive priority area. All the issues touched upon during the panel need further elaboration and detailed discussion.

### **Housing Segregation**

At the end of the panel, a note on the **housing segregation** was given, as the issue of housing segregation was mentioned several times. Housing or spatial segregation is when a group of people lives in a certain geographic area whereby the inhabitants are predominantly persons belonging to that group, or persons belonging to other groups, but in similarly vulnerable position, and whereby the social, economic, cultural, political, civil and other relations with the rest of the society are from difficult to non-existing. Therefore, housing disaggregation does not necessarily mean deconcentrating people, because minority groups tend to live in proximity to one another in order to maintain their language, culture and other identity aspects, but it must include developing the location up to the level of the rest of the society and building the social, economic and other relations with the rest of the society.

## **III.B Panel**

### **Health and Healthy Family Environment**

#### **Panelists:**

**Ms. Marcela Adamová**, Manager, Roma Health Mediators Hospital Program “Healthy Regions”, Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic

**Ms. Nesime Selioska**, President, Roma S.O.S., Republic of North Macedonia

**Ms. Svetlana Ilić**, Association of Health Mediators, Republic of Serbia

**Moderator: Ms. Ina Kokhedima**, Expert, General Directorate of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Republic of Albania

**Rapporteur: Prof. Dr. Snežana Simić**, Medical Faculty, Social Medicine Institute, Belgrade

### **Conclusions**

Existing data on the health status of Roma men and women point to their endangered health because of multiple risk factors related to risk behavior, the disproportionate environment in which they live and their unfavorable socioeconomic position that leads to poverty, social exclusion and deprivation. According to the available data, their health status is lagging behind the health of the overall population in almost all countries in the region. In the case of Serbia, the existing data on their state of health are obsolete, therefore a research on their state of health is necessary. UNICEF, in its MIKS report, provides specific data on health, growth and development of children up to five years of age and their mothers, especially in Roma non-standard settlements. With the new MIKS research being carried out now, it would be good to provide specific data on Roma population in non-standard settlements, so that a

comparison can be made with the health status of other population in the upcoming general research on the health of the population of Serbia.

During the debate and the interventions at the Conference, the participants emphasized the multiple vulnerability of the Roma population, especially children, women in reproductive age, disabled people and the elderly. While there are good and effective programs for women (mothers) and children, the elderly and the disabled are completely marginalized and their needs are unrecognizable. Particular attention should be paid to working-age men because of the health risks of smoking and alcohol.

The database for monitoring the social inclusion of Roma, maintained by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, is not regularly filled and data is obsolete and insufficient. A method should be devised to provide valid indicators for monitoring the health and healthy environment of Roma men and women, as well as other indicators on Roma inclusion, in accordance with European requirements that are necessary for monitoring the objectives of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women, as well as measures and activities of the Action Plan.

An example of good practice from Slovakia on health mediators in hospitals in obstetrics and pediatric departments is remarkable and probably unique in Europe. So far, health mediators for Roma men and women in the region have been primarily engaged in the primary health care level. Even though it is still a pilot project, it has shown good results, so we should consider the possibility to apply for European funds in order to implement a similar project in our country, bearing in mind that staying at the hospital for young Roma women and young children is very stressful and that every support and help is welcome.

An example of good practice from Northern Macedonia is valuable when it comes to educating and supporting the Roma population on the right to health and healthcare, especially when it comes to patients' rights. Examples of positive court practice have been presented, as a precedent for Macedonia and its Roma population, as they have empowered them and restored their faith in the judiciary and respect of their rights.

## **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to provide mechanisms for assessment and evaluation of health (and other) policies targeting Roma men and women (as pointed out in the opening statements). This primarily refers to impact analysis or some of the evaluation methods - the effects and results of such policies, i.e. cost analysis (cost-benefit ratio) that are significant for justifying funds invested in national, regional or local programs and projects, and the possibility of obtaining new ones (analyzing the needs for new projects and programs).
- It is necessary to resolve the status of health mediators in Serbia, whose position is still unsatisfactory given that it is project-financed and the health mediators are insufficiently paid, and inadequately equipped and educated. They have been engaged for more than ten years as assistance and support to the Roma population in exercising the right to health care, as well as their other rights, and their work has shown good results. The panelists recommended that some of the issues tackled during the debate, as well as measures in the Action Plan for Monitoring the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women be resolved, as follows:
  - ❖ Selection of the model of the institutionalization of health mediators and systemic solution for their status;
  - ❖ Increase in their number so that all municipalities in Serbia with Roma non-standard settlements have health mediators in a mobile team at the local level;
  - ❖ Provision of detailed description of tasks and responsibilities as well as provision of adequate equipment for their work and payment of travel expenses;

- ❖ Definition of an optimum education model so that they are fit to respond to the field work challenges – to help mothers and their children and adults in exercising their rights to health care, obtaining personal documents (in particular exercising the right to health insurance), and other rights for all Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia.

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Although the Decade for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women has been brought to closure, there are still many activities that can reduce or eliminate marginalization and ensure respect of their fundamental rights. A National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women, together with the Action Plan, represents a good basis for the continuation of the old programs, and the formulation of new programs that would improve the situation of Roma men and women in the society.