

# Roma Housing in Belgrade – Recent Approaches, Challenges, and Key Actors' Perspectives

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# General social context (institutional, political, economic, cultural, action)

- weak state and undeveloped civil society (atomization not individualisation / lacking voice strategies)
- ideology of populism (positive laws)
- high unemployment (20%) and widespread poverty (10% under poverty line)
- housing shortage – particularly qualitative
- strategy of poverty reduction, no national housing strategy – anachronistic or poorly coordinated laws...

# Roma population characteristics

- Multidimensional deprivation and significant social exclusion
- Low economic and human capital
  - unemployment rate around 50%
  - More than 50% under the poverty line
  - life expectancy under 60 – poor health conditions
  - 65% without any education (23% elementary school, 11% secondary, less than 1% university) – conservative attitudes, particularly low individualization
  - lacking identity documents
  - almost 70% of Roma live grouped in “Roma” settlements – completely 34,6% or partly illegal 35,5%, slums or not hygienic 43,5%, etc. (Belgrade: up to 150 settlements, rather small - 19% in central, 59% in second zone)

## ■ Vicious circle of poverty

- *Lacking identity papers* - unable to find formal work or enroll their children in the education system that will train them for more promising employment opportunities; therefore subsisting on the work they can find recycling scrap material, they must live in illegal, unsanitary housing conditions; living in unregistered housing, it is difficult to obtain identity documents

- Low social capital (bonding not bridging or linking)
  - Spatially dispersed, culturally diversified identities – lacking common interests
  - Flourishing NGO sector – more than 1000 (settlement based) – rare mutual cooperation, small effect on empowering Roma communities
  - Way of life influenced by culture of poverty – negative image – stereotypes – stigma – huge social distance of others and towards the others

- Low political capital
  - Political *habitus* – anomic, considerable political desorganization
  - Latent political structure – manipulation with ethnic voices
  - Lack of motivation – to negotiate, to participate
  - Respect for authoritarian power
  
- According to three most important stratification dimensions (available capitals, power, respect) – ethno/underclass

# Roma Decade – Approaches and Challenges

- AP for housing
  - Legalization – developing of adequate planning documents and regulation of property issues for 240 Roma settlements up to 2015
  - Resolving the urgent situation and/ or resettling slums – 30 settlements up to 2015
  - Sustainable rehabilitation and improvements of 120 settlements (infrastructure building, housing upgrading and inclusion into local social infrastructure)
  - Relying on municipal social housing programs for those poor Roma families not included in the settlements

- No integrative and strategic approach in political arena, although some institutions are formed (Republican Council for national minorities, Office for Roma Decade implementation ....)
- International standards accepted due to accession process to EU – no political determination and realistic (stable and sustainable) budget resources (estimated annual resources for complex action of solving Roma settlement problems are 22,4 million Euros)



- A number of pilot programs initiated, dominantly supported by foreign money – focused at improving consequences not removing causes (small sustainability) - the scale of such efforts has been relatively small
- Implementation of resettlement programs thwarted by widespread prejudice against Roma
- Roma themselves have low trust in Decade, NGO leaders more sell the problem of Roma than solve them

- Existing laws - opportunities and obstacles
  - Law on protecting rights of national minorities (2000) – primarily cultural autonomy – spatial concentration (15% in municipality)
  - Law on Social Housing (2009) – without enough attention for the most disadvantaged, particularly to Roma in unhygienic settlements, need to introduce new alternative models to collective housing – to balance economic and housing solutions
  - Law on planning (2003, 2009) – missing interactive approach, extensive documentation and high costs, institutional discrimination exists on all levels - tolerated illegal settlements but reluctance to pass the municipal property to Roma communities
  - Draft Law on Legal Subjectivity – supported by Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, obstructed by Ministry of Local Self-governance

# Belgrade social housing policy and Roma question

- Primacy of entrepreneurial strategic approach to city development (no local housing strategy)
  1. to prepare the valuable locations for capital investments (new social housing programs for relocating the poor)
  2. to legitimize the dominant strategy with marginalized social housing programs (*ad hoc* political decisions, not comprehensively developed).

# Belgrade Master Plan

- Two models – to avoid segregation
  1. 5 - 8% of social housing in any construction over 250 units.
  2. construction sites for predominantly social housing:
    - must be within the residential tissue, or directly neighboring it as its extension
    - should be on low-cost land owned by the city, close to schools, medical services and public transport, on safe terrain, and the infrastructure outfitting should be cheap

The Master Plan provides for 67 such sites for about 7,000 units, and further 25 sites for about 2,500 units were also examined.

# Social housing program

- Marginalised part of affordable non profit housing (1100 annually – 15% social rental)

## Standards

- 36-50m<sup>2</sup>,
- 5 years contracts
- equipped with basic furniture, completely equipped with infrastructure,
- subsidized rents and utility costs (for 50m<sup>2</sup> – 15 euro)
- evictions presumed for arrears longer than 1 year
- target group – the most deprived, households on social help – less than 80% of the average income.

## Roma inclusion – rare

- Registration
- Education and employment status favor over social deprivation

# Planned program for Roma resettling

- In 2003 – program of constructing 5000 units for resettling slums/illegal settlements mostly populated by Roma – no implementation

# Experience with Roma resettling Gazela case

- Connected with major infrastructure projects, financed by EIB, EBRD, DFID – precondition: satisfactory resettlement of the Roma
  - consultations about the available options, provided legal support to families
  - alternative options adequate and sustainable, metal containers not sustainable option and permanent, necessary to have defined duration
  - short term solution must provide adequate sanitary conditions as well as access to schools, health and social care
  - employment opportunities should be integral part of the resettlement process

- First attempt in 2005, to resettle in container as temporary accommodation (city of Esen and Caritas) in surrounding blocks – location planned for social housing to be built afterwards - huge protests
- Coordination Center for Roma Integration: to help *assimilation* and socialization of Roma in Belgrade



- By fall 2008, in collaboration with Roma Heart (NGO involved) local authorities planned to build a new permanent settlement of about 400 small houses - to include a community center, broad range of city-run social services, including health services, a kindergarten and job training services, a permanent recycling center employing about 250 workers.... The plan was abandoned in early 2009 after failing to find an acceptable site for the new settlement - in each of four proposed neighborhoods there were strong resistance – ghettoization arguments – specific subculture

- In February 2009, new “action plan” to place Roma families registered in Belgrade (60% of those living in the settlement) in existing social housing flats scattered throughout the city – argument - in line with “European” models that attempt to integrate social housing more directly into the urban fabric rather than creating an isolated ghetto.

Roma advocates - model is not right for families currently living in the Gazela encampment - tight-knit community, the ability of residents to continue collecting and recycling scrap material will be limited, difficulties in implementing programs of job training and other social services.... Fear that after the city's rent support ends after the first five years of the program, families will be forced to relocate to illegal settlements again.....

- In August 2009 – non standard provisional Resettlement Action Plan employed - short term container housing option
  - According to the plan the resettlement should have been on 13 locations in all Belgrade municipalities except the very city center but in the end the Roma were resettled only to the peripheral 5 locations
    - lower social strata neighbourhood
    - separated from the neighbourhoods in vicinity
    - kept in secret as much as possible
  - One container for 5 persons, 16 m<sup>2</sup>, all will have electricity and water, sanitary containers connected with sewage..... for every 10 families... The price of one moveable container with furniture is around 6.000 euros. The children will get free textbooks and will be transferred to schools everyday.

■ *EHDR and EIB evaluation: between principles and interests*

- A lack of open public consultation with the resettled and the host communities.
- A lack of sustainable economic solutions for the employment of Roma people
- Alternative scenarios have not been assessed in any depth in consultation with the Roma
- A lack of systematic solutions for the inclusion of Roma children in the school system
  
- considerable improvement compared with the squatter shelters under the bridge but does not represent a long term sustainable solution
- Serbian authorities are finding difficult to justify the treatment of Roma more favorably than other vulnerable groups

- *Republican-local authorities perception: authoritarian and stigmatizing*

Concepts of resettling according the experience of Vienna and Berlin (and in accordance with EAR and EBDR principles), which prevent concentration of poor people and ghetto formation

### Mayor of Belgrade

stated that no one who stands in the way of Belgrade's development will be tolerated .... he would have been against any loan that was conditional regarding the provision of social housing for the Roma, "It's [the loans] not a donation, but ... a loan, and if these are the conditions, we will not take it,"

- Minister of Work and Social Affairs –  
if the city is to realize the demands of EIB  
the message would be that everyone  
who illegally occupy the land can get the  
flat, it would cause the anger of others  
without solved housing problems,  
containers are suitable solution for the  
moment, with intention to search for  
more permanent solutions of  
integration, the building of new flats  
would mean that 1 mil euroes spent for  
containers were spent for nothing.....

## ■ Ministry of Finance

- – EBDR and EIR contract without saying that Roma should be provided with social housing, just that they should be provided with assistance to apply for it
- malicious act regarding the people without the residence in Belgrade (transferred to the place of origin or left without solution)  
- the problem that lasts for years and government has done nothing to solve it

Conditions of resettled Roma are good and much better than they had before (they got place to live, dry and clean, furniture, with sewage, adequate personal hygiene, electricity and heating, all that paid from the budget, the enrollment in school is now better, 60% in comparison to 20% before.....)



## Resettled Roma will

1. have the right to social assistance only if they send children to school
2. use the containers as long as they are in socially deprived category, if they make social improvement they must leave and the units will be given to those in social need
3. be included in broader social program - get health documentation and registered for employment (each week they will be informed about available options) aim – to employ at least one family member
4. have representatives for steady contacts with city authorities and social centers
5. be monitored by policy to prevent possible hostility towards Roma
6. be monitored regarding energy, water consumption – for which they never paid the bills

## ■ *NGO perspective: critical but passive*

The containers failed to meet international standards for adequate housing and are often overcrowded, cold and damp

Veil of secrecy – no information about the exact contracts' conditions

City of Belgrade doesn't understand the term 'consultation'. Consultations aren't the same as presentations..... 'consultations' are actually a form of negotiation"

Regarding the applying for social housing - the revised process is likely to offer little hope to the Roma as many of their applications were rejected because they had not had Belgrade residency for two years

There is no legal act that would obliged those without legal documents to leave the place in which they have no registered residence

Reimbursement issue - EU Court admitted de facto property over illegally built objects (if tolerated by state) - not legally regulated in Serbia

Relying on positive law of Belgrade authority is not crucial if they lack responsibilities towards human rights or are in conflict with higher legal acts (Constitution, international standards that Serbia ratified)

- *Roma perspective: marginalized – blaming the victims; coping strategies – low capitals fuel functional substitutions*

"The authorities act as if it is our fault that we live in the settlements, as if it is our choice. What other choice have we got?"

Someone are content after resettling but others complain that new location is far from the center and not good for their collecting work, or that "They put 40 containers one next to the other, and it's worse than it was before... It's even smaller than it was at Gazela," .... "We want the roof, even temporary option is acceptable but we are blackmailed by «leaders» of the community who decide instead of us."

Fear that dump recycling will be institutionalized within Public Communal Enterprises, which will take advantage of this economic activity (after regulation and getting EU funds), Roma will be left out (as they are already manipulated)

Strategy of grouping on sites planned for resettling: "before it was only five houses now it is 200, some of those who would like to get the flat already have house, on daily basis the settlement is growing for 10 new members, ready to black mail the state "

Negative experience with Roma in social housing - in Obrenovac as the program was not an integrative one in a broader sense, Roma stole everything they could from the apartments, ruined them and left.

Roma to be resettle do not have unique opinion about preferable options – however, majority would opt for social mixing (social housing), the minority for removing of the whole settlement

- *Local population protest: low trust in authorities; redistribution issues in poor society – abuse social policy system, undeserving poor; social distance to Roma – stigmatizing*

“Why should they have any priority over the other poor people without housing who live much longer in Belgrade

I have no chance as a citizen of Serbia without flat, employed and with no criminal record to get a bank loan with income I earn, at the same time I read every day about new comers in Belgrade that will get containers with guarantees to receive housing for free. I even do not have right to compete with them for these flats. To which NGO should I address..

Great message to us without housing, let us sacrifice a bit and live a few years in shanty town and the Mayor will build us a flat ....”

“Of course they are people as we are, there is no genetic difference, but education and culture made them as they are, therefore, those who opt for collective resettling should think would that be a new ghetto. They should be approached as ordinary people and housed all over the city..... and than strictly control their habits, help them to *assimilate* in the best way, to begin to live as ordinary people “

“They should not be given flats, which they will sell and go back to their huts, but vouchers to buy flats they like, with professional support ... “

“ Neither city authority has serious attempt to solve their problem (just want to move them from valuable location) nor Roma can integrate if they continue to live in ghetto, they will just be removed without any real improvements in housing or employment, if they really want to help they should firstly develop employment strategies to pull them from their way of life, simple removing will not solve anything”

# In conclusion

- Segregated (recognized rights) vs. integrative multiculturalism (the values of minorities in interaction with mainstream society)
- Civic or ethnic citizenship (equal treatment or positive discrimination – possible synergy?)
- Economy of ethnic enclave – importance of socialization process
- Legislative and institutional framework - voice vs. exit strategies
- Slums of despair vs. slums of hope