

WeBLAN

Western Balkan Legal Aid Network

Presentation on the Network's vision, mission and activities

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Who we are?

- Association Vasa prava BiH, Bosnia and Hercegovina
- Civil Rights Programme, Kosovo
- Legal Centre, Montenegro
- Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, Macedonia
- Information Legal Centre, Croatia
- Praxis, Serbia

Background

Since February 2008, members of the network have implemented two EC and UNHCR funded projects facilitating social inclusion of minorities, mostly RAE, in the Western Balkans:

- *Social Inclusion of and Access to Human Rights for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Western Balkans (CARDS 2008), Feb 2008 – July 2009*
- *Social Inclusion: Regional Support to Marginalized Communities (IPA 2009), Aug 2009 – Oct 2011*

- The regional network was initially formed by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on regional cooperation in 2009, when the Regional Coordination Body was also established.
- The objectives of the RCB were to assist within the region in civil registration procedures and the provision of documentation, collaborate on cross-border related cases, exchange information on legal and administrative frameworks, share best practices and jointly advocate for systemic solutions.

Project related activities and results

- Free legal assistance to the RAE community regarding civil registration procedures, provision of personal documentation, acquisition of citizenship and facilitation of access to basic rights

Regional aspect: over 1,500 individuals in the region received assistance in obtaining cross-border documents and conducting civil registration procedures

- **Raising awareness** of RAE in the civil registration and the naturalization process
- **Increasing capacity** of stakeholders through training, workshops, seminars and roundtables
- **Advocating** for improvements in procedures and services linked to civil registration.

- **Outreach activities** included numerous legal team field visits, face to face interviews and discussions with individuals



Further development of the Network

- Signing a new MoU in Sarajevo in March 2012
- WeBLAN – Western Balkan Legal Aid Network established
- WeBLAN will operate as an independent network of civil society organizations devoted to the protection, promotion and improvement of human rights and combating discrimination and social exclusion.

WeBLAN aims to:

- Contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness in the region of the Western Balkans;
- Reduce the number of persons at risk of statelessness, which particularly affects the RAE population, especially those displaced during the conflicts in the region;
- Contribute to the enhancement of social inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and other marginalized groups and to their full enjoyment of all basic human rights in the region of the Western Balkans;

- Ensure adherence to international human rights standards for legal practitioners who provide legal aid services;
- Contribute to the improvement of access to public services and access to justice;
- Contribute to the prevention and combating of discrimination affecting marginalized groups;
- Strengthen the regional ties and promote cross-border cooperation on issues linked to social inclusion of the marginalized groups in the Western Balkans.

Remaining needs in the region

- There is still a need for assisting RAE throughout the region in conducting civil registration procedures and obtaining personal documents – from the beginning of this year Praxis alone worked on over 120 cross-border cases
- Although some progress has been made in terms of improved legislative structures, implementation of such legislation is often uneven or lacking completely

Envisaged WeBLAN activities

- Continued provision of free legal aid – country based and across borders
- Establishing a network website
- Monitoring implementation of the law in the field of civil registration
- Sharing best practices
- Advocating for systemic solutions and providing the necessary input, analysis and knowledge to the respective authorities in the region