

Report on the Housing session

The chair of the session was: Jaroslav Kling, Project manager, UNDP regional center, Bratislava

Speakers of this session were:

1. Vladimir Macura , expert from Serbia
2. Baresku Cataline , expert from Romania

In this session we had opportunity to hear what is the housing situation of Roma in Serbia and in Romania and which are the measures that these countries have undertake in order to Roma situation in this field.

Both presenters stressed out that that the housing condition of Roma people in these countries is very bad and that most of Roma live in the settlements with no water, electricity and sewage system and that Roma family with 4-5 members live on the house of 30 to 50 square meters. Also they pointed out that there are Roma settlements that are built on the lend that is not their property. In Serbia for example these settlements are usually on the land owned by the state, while in Romania some of these settlements are built on the land that is private ownership.

However they also stressed out that their governments have undertaken certain measures in order to improve the housing condition of Roma in these countries.

In Serbia: Among the measures that the government has undertaken, i.e. the Ministry for Infrastructure is adoption of the guidelines for the improvement and legalization of the informal Roma settlement. The term guidelines means an official Ministry's recommendation to municipalities indicating how process of improvement and legalization should be done and what sort of steps and actions should be undertaken. These guidelines rely on the existing laws. And these guidelines refer to the already existing settlements, not to the future settlements.

These guidelines suggest that legalization of the whole Roma settlement and not house by house. They define the procedure on how the local municipality will improve the settlements. Among the procedures that are listed are: analysis of the Roma settlements and making decision which settlements will be improved, development of the local urban plan, legalization of land and houses, improvement of the whole settlement etc. Improvement and legalization refers to the settlement for which there is a sense to be improved.

It is also stressed out that improving and legalization of the settlement is the cheapest, socially painless and for the citizens the most appropriate procedure, and that therefore the authorities instead of moving Roma from particular Roma settlement they should legalize that settlement.

He alleged that housing is the basic human right and that improvement of housing is the obligation of the municipality and that Roma should be included in the process from the very beginning i.e. solution should not be imposed on them.

Macura also emphasized that the survey on the quality of the Roma and other settlements has shown that Roma settlements are 50-70 % under the average urban settlements.

On the other hand in **Romania** we have different governmental approach in solving the housing issue. The government of this country in order to improve the situation of Roma in this country financed projects for the building low cost housing. One of these kinds of projects was realized in Romanian city Dohai (in the North) in the period of 2004/2005.

Cataline stressed out that in the situation when the project is implemented because of the emergency and not because of the good governmental will, than in that situation those in charge with project implementation think more about the investment and about the involving experts that will be engaged in the project and not about the people. With Dohai was the same case. The site that was planed for moving Roma was former Industrial dump and this was no men and industrial area. Previously these Roma were living in the city, in different abandoned buildings such as former Jewish shops etc.

The construction of the houses in Dohai was no longer that 6 months. It is truth that Roma in this area had better living conditions but they live in the segregated environment outside of the city and maybe in the toxic area. And many of them are not happy with the new situation. What was also the issue is that these houses were built with no urban planning.

He stated that when planning a project many things should be taken in consideration: political context, geographical, socio-demographic context, funding, having national plan, in the process of implementation local authorities should be involved etc.

He stated that everybody is going for a pilot project and as a result instead of massive intervention we have small scale interventions. In Romania, 500 houses were built, which is ridiculous if we compare that number with the number of Roma living in Romania. However, in Catalina's opinion even these small programs (like Dohai) are important because they can attract more and more small programs and thus force the government to deal with this issue.

It is **concluded** that on both countries there is a will for the improving housing conditions of Roma and that the both governments has undertaken certain measures to enable Roma to improve Roma living conditions. However in order to realize this goal the government should, when running the housing project, take in consideration sociological, needs assessment and integration approach.

It is also stressed out that the housing issue should not be looked in isolated way and but in the connection with other areas i.e. education, employment and health care. These four areas should be looked as a complex issue and in this way they should be solved.

