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**Report from the Second Self-Governance Working Group Meeting (SGWG)**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28-30 May 2013

**Objective**

The purpose of the Self-Governance Working Group (SGWG) is to promote the exchange of initiatives/practices of Roma inclusion in self-government structures and activities, and to offer possibilities for mutual learning and capacity building. Representatives of municipalities responsible for Roma issues will take part in it upon approval by the Regional Project Co-ordination Committee. In addition, associations of local self-governments (where relevant) and Roma NGOs can also participate in the SGWG.

**Background**

At the first meeting of the SGWG, which was held on 12-13 September 2012 in Zagreb, the participating local self-governments proposed topics for the subsequent meetings. The topic most local self-governments expressed interest in was participation in local decision-making, so this issue became the focus of the second SGWG meeting held on 28-30 May 2013 in Sarajevo.

**Launch of the Regional Report**

BPRI used this opportunity to officially launch the Regional Report on Anti-Discrimination and Participation of Roma in Local Decision-Making, which includes over 30 examples of good practice. The Report also provided the following recommendations:

<i>Combatting discrimination against Roma</i>	<i>Promoting the participation of Roma in local decision-making</i>
1. Derive local policy and practice from central government anti-discrimination policies.	1. Build Roma participation into initiatives that affect Roma directly.
2. Raise awareness about discrimination as a problem and about the means for combating it.	2. Plan policies to address local community needs while taking into account priorities set at higher levels.
3. Prioritize local outreach by centralized anti-discrimination institutions over the establishment of new, local institutions.	3. Secure funding for implementation.
4. Streamline procedures and access to remedies for discrimination so that they take into account the often difficult and complex legal situation of Roma.	4. Promote growth in the pool of capable interlocutors through targeted training programmes and long-term investment in education.
5. Address the multiple types of discrimination faced by Roma women and girls.	5. Ensure the sustained and active presence of Roma women in decision-making.

The Regional Report is available at [www.bpri-odihr.org](http://www.bpri-odihr.org) and <http://www.osce.org/odihr>.

Best Practices for Roma Integration  
Supported by OSCE participating States



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## **Participants**

The second meeting of the SGWG was attended by 31 local self-government units (cities, municipalities, communes), 18 NGOs, 10 National Human Rights Institutions and ministries in charge co-ordination of Roma-related policies from throughout the Western Balkans region (the complete list of participants is available in Annex 1). Among these, BPRI welcomed the participation of 13 Roma employed in the local self-governments and 11 Roma NGOs who play a particularly important role in initiating new projects and ensuring good communication with the Roma communities. Many of the good practices initiated by these stakeholders were featured in the Regional Report and the meeting included a presentation from each jurisdiction.

## **Best practice examples**

### *Participation of Roma in Local Decision-Making*

Zdravko Janjušević from the **Bijelo Polje Democracy Centre** (Montenegro) presented the organization's work on the development and implementation of the Local Action Plan. The Local Action Plan for Roma Integration was adopted by the municipal assembly in December 2012. Implementation is advancing most effectively in the field of education although many challenges still remain. For example, there are still no Roma children in the pre-school education system.

Zoran Pavlović, Co-ordinator for Roma Issues in the **City of Kragujevac** (Serbia) since 2005, spoke about their experience in multi-sectoral co-operation in the field of Roma integration. This was essential for resolving problems in the field of civil registration, access to the healthcare system, tackling child begging, preventing a case of trafficking and other issues.

Husnija Bešković, Deputy Minister at the Kosovo **Ministry for Communities and Return**, pointed out national mechanisms for integration of communities and their participation. Law on Elections foresees "reserved seats" for members of minority communities. The Office of the Prime Minister is also engaged in this field. Special efforts are made in the field of education.

Special attention was given to Roma youth as three BPRI **Young Roma Professionals**, Aldina Fafulović from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Talita Jašarevski from Croatia and Besart Elshani from Kosovo\*, presented their experience in running for local elections and combatting discrimination in their local community. The average age of Roma is almost half of the average age of the general population in the Western Balkans, so it is important to engage them in identifying new solutions for Roma integration.

### *Anti-discrimination*

On behalf of the **Ombudsman's Office in Serbia**, Dragana Vujković described the field research they implemented to follow the impact and awareness about the National Strategy for Upgrading the Position of Roma. The Ombudsman's team also visits Roma settlements and co-operates with Roma Health Mediators, Pedagogical Assistants, Roma Co-ordinators and other mediators. The purpose of these visits is to raise awareness about anti-discrimination mechanisms, register complaints and refer Roma people to relevant services.

Since the problem of legally invisible persons persists, the Ombudsman's Office proposed changes of the Law on Non-contentious Proceedings to enable people to get registered with two witnesses (this was passed in 2012). An MoU between the Ombudsman's Office, Ministry of Interior and UNHCR was signed and a working group formed to monitor the implementation of this process. In addition, the Ombudsman also follows the implementation of the newly amended Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence of Citizens which allows the registration of people without residence at the address of the Centre for Social Work.

The Ombudsman published a report about the eviction of Roma from the Belville settlement in Belgrade. Ten recommendations were provided, but only a small percentage is implemented.

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\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Irma Baraku, **Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination** from Albania, initiated “Open Days” in co-operation with local self-governments in order to raise awareness about anti-discrimination mechanisms among Roma. Special attention was paid to local self-governments with high Roma populations and those in more isolated areas. The Commissioner signed an MoU with these local self-governments and identified a municipal focal point who can refer complaints to the Commissioner. The number of complaints has increased six fold compared to 2012. In the upcoming period, the Commissioner will focus on the access to education for Roma children, especially girls.

Monika avlovi from the **Ombudsman’s Office from Croatia** explained the process of ‘strategic litigation’ which means they can themselves raise complaints of discrimination on behalf of one or even a group of citizens. Five strategic procedures were implemented to date – all dealing with cases of discrimination based on ethnic identity. Specific challenges exist throughout the region in providing evidence of discrimination, recording testimony, identifying witnesses and other issues. This contributes to the low number of discrimination cases reported by Roma. It is also necessary that those who are proven to have discriminated against Roma suffer consequences in accordance with the Law.

Almira Redžepi, **Roma Focal Point at the Anti-Discrimination Commission** in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, worked to help increase the number of cases of discrimination reported by Roma. Anti-Discrimination Law identifies 19 basis of discrimination, including ethnic identity. In 2011, there were 62 complaints, 14% based on ethnic identity (and only a few by Roma). Recently an incident took place in a shopping mall, where the contracted cleaning firm was ordered to remove all Roma employees from the food court. The Anti-Discrimination filed a complaint on behalf of the Roma. There were also two complaints against the Border Services but they were found not to be substantiated. The burden of proof falls with the potential discriminator.

All powerpoint presentations are available under “Documents” at [www.bpri-odih.org](http://www.bpri-odih.org).

### **Field visits**

SGWG participants had an opportunity to visit the municipalities of Jajce (led by Lindita Bezhani, Chief of Cabinet of the Ombudsman of Albania) and Lukavac (led by Osman Bali , President of the League for Roma Decade in Serbia).

- In **Lukavac**, the participants met with Mina Frljanovic, Municipal Roma Referent (municipal Co-ordinator for Roma Issues) recently recruited with BPRI assistance to help improve relations between the local self-government and the Roma community, as well as the Izeta Bajric, Secretary of the Municipal Council. This is a relatively small municipality with approximately 1,400 Roma who have lived in this region for a very long time. Around one third of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina live in Tuzla Canton where Lukavac is located. There are 11 settlements where Roma live, including 7 which have purely Roma population. Out of an estimated number of 600 children in Lukavac, only 72 are attending primary or high-school. World Vision is working to increase this number by organizing workshops for parents and following up on a case-by-case basis. There are no Roma attending university, mainly due to poverty (the closest university is located in Tuzla which would require them to move). In 2006, Lukavac had two Roma in the municipal assembly but not anymore.
- In **Jajce**, participants met with Vernesa Zekic, Roma Social Protection Mediator – a Roma woman recently recruited with BPRI assistance to help improve access to social services for Roma families. They also had an opportunity to discuss the introduction of this position with Enver Sabic, Assistant Mayor, and Indira Mehic-Cejvan, Director of the Centre for Social Welfare. Jajce is home to 56 Roma families, with 123 children. The municipality is reconstructing houses to improve living conditions, as well as working to improve the sewage and water provision systems. Among other things, some 23 Roma houses were refurbished with the facilitation of the municipality, and 3 Roma families were relocated to more appropriate housing units. Currently the Municipality is working with an external donor to install 24 septic tanks for Roma households, as part of a project aimed at improving the water supply in the Roma settlement. Good co-ordination with the central government has been crucial for achieving results in this area. The Roma Social Protection Mediator also provides assistance with civil registration, helps to improve access to services, and organizes training sessions on domestic violence. However, the municipality of Jajce does not employ any Roma in their administration. Participants also learned

that Roma could not run for the Presidency or House of Peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina since they are not among the three constituent peoples.

### **Good Practice Protocol for Local Self-Governments for the Integration of Roma**

Based on the Regional Report, BPRI derived a Good Practice Protocol for Local Self-Governments for the Integration of Roma, which was presented at the SGWG meeting. This Protocol pointed out several key principles that should guide co-operation between local self-governments and Roma communities:

1. *Explicit (but not necessarily exclusive) targeting of Roma* – this principle is based in recognition of the fact that the needs and concerns of Roma as a vulnerable group must be taken into account from the beginning of policy design.
2. *Contribution to integration and mainstreaming* – whereas policies aimed at Roma are necessary, it is at the same time crucial that such policies improve access to services used also by non-Roma rather than creating parallel services.
3. *Attention to issues of gender and participation of Roma women.*
4. *Co-ordination and coherence with other policies* at local and central levels while taking into account local needs.
5. *Addressing multiple aspects of a given issue in a holistic approach* – taking into consideration the complex nature of the marginalization of Roma, it is necessary to consider links across different policy areas.
6. *Producing multiplier effects* – wherever possible activities should be designed in such a way as to bring about improvements beyond the circle of direct beneficiaries or in thematic areas other than those targeted by the activities. For examples, initiatives focused on economic empowerment of adults have potential to contribute to improving children's access to education.
7. *Securing equitable representation* – governments should create conditions for minority communities to participate in public affairs and public administration in reflection of the diversity of the population. To this end, ways should be found to promote the recruitment and retention of persons belonging to minority communities in the public sector.
8. *Promoting growth in the pool of capable interlocutors* – the degree to which the knowledge of members of local Roma communities can be applied in developing and implementing appropriate policy is integrally linked to the capacity of those supplying the knowledge.
9. *Systematic monitoring and evaluation* – the effectiveness of policies aimed at Roma should be measured in terms of appropriate indicators against ethnically and gender-disaggregated baseline data collected, process and maintained in conformity with European standards on personal data protection.

In accordance with these principles, the protocol proposes and elaborates three key steps towards implementing Roma in local planning and decision-making: 1) preparing the ground for Roma civil society and local administration to work together, 2) developing local policies for and with Roma, 3) implementing practical policies.

The Good Practice Protocol is available at [www.bpri-odih.org](http://www.bpri-odih.org).

After some criticism towards the resettlement of the Roma population from illegal settlements in Belgrade, Aleksandra Krstic, Assistant Secretary for Social Protection of the **City of Belgrade**, pointed out that the City has been working for a number of years to improve the position of Roma people, especially those living in unhygienic settlements. She reported that 1,189 people have been rehoused in mobile housing units and electricity and water have been provided. Moreover, 650 social housing units have been constructed and 200 awarded to Roma families. The City also provides support in terms of furniture, clothes and registration for personal documents. The City currently employs 7 Roma in the Secretariat for Social Protection, and a number of Roma also work in the public utility companies. Participants from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia noted that changes such as eviction or relocation of Roma families, due to urban planning restrictions by the city council, must be carried out in close communication and negotiation with Roma families.

Several Roma activists pointed out the importance of '**nothing about us without us**' when policies and projects are being developed. They also encouraged Roma communities to take the lead and become more proactive in advocating for their rights.

### **Upcoming BPRI activities and Next Steps**

BPRI will publish a Regional Report on Upgrading and Legalization of Roma Settlements and Access to Social Housing. This will be presented at the Regional Housing Roundtable in the Fall 2013.

The third SGWG meeting will focus on monitoring of local policy implementation, including policy practice gap studies, social cards and other methodologies.

Participants are welcome to send comments on the Good Practice Protocol in the next two weeks. After this period, it will be considered as adopted by SGWG. One recommendation received at the meeting was that more literature should be developed for local self-government officials interested in Roma integration or management of inter-ethnic relations in general. There is a continuous change of staff at the local level and they need to be informed about methodologies and principles in this sub-field of good governance. Another obvious need that was expressed was to provide training for Roma people working in good governance as Roma co-ordinators or counsellors.

## Annex 1: List of participants

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