

## Report from the roundtable for recipients of small grants within the project “Best Practices for Roma Integration”

9-10 December 2013, Podgorica, Montenegro

As a regional project in the Western Balkans, “Best Practices for Roma Integration” (BPRI) aims to contribute to the integration of Roma in the countries of the region, reflecting commitments they have made as OSCE participating States and with a view to possibly joining the EU. This project is funded by the European Union (90 per cent) and OSCE participating States (10 per cent) and also works in Kosovo.

The EU’s Enlargement Directorate General held a number of high level conferences on Roma involving all the governments in the region that have led to a series of conclusions and commitments. If Roma are to truly benefit from these, governments will need to increase their efforts and find innovative solutions. Civil society organizations, and especially Roma NGOs, will need to continue advocating for reforms, proposing more inclusive solutions and raising awareness about the status of the Roma minority.

As one of the mechanisms for this type of co-operation, BPRI provided small grants for 20 local projects in the Western Balkans. On 9-10 December 2013, BPRI hosted a regional roundtable for all recipients of small grant projects, including the local self-governments, NGOs as well as several ministries that participated in the selection of these local projects (from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo\* and Montenegro). The aim of the roundtable was to enable these stakeholders to present their small grant projects, exchange lessons learned and discuss any possibilities to scale up or develop follow up activities. Out of a total of 59 participants, 26 were representatives of municipalities and 21 representatives of NGOs attended the roundtable.

The participants agreed that these local projects enabled them to implement in their local community some of the good practices they found out about through the BPRI project. The projects required the involvement of Roma and non-Roma stakeholders, thus promoting their co-operation and raising awareness about Roma issues. For some municipalities, this was their first time in jointly implementing a project with a Roma NGO. In addition, these projects enabled different departments within the local self-governments to work together and learn first-hand about the problems faced by Roma. Most projects focused on infrastructure but also engaged the departments working on social welfare, healthcare, education and others.

The participants urged national governments to continuously provide funding for projects at the local level, as this will help implement national strategies for Roma integration. It is also important to invest in strengthening the capacities of Roma NGOs so that they could be

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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 Kosovo declaration of independence.

implementing partners even for more complex projects. Cross-border co-operation and other IPA funding should be maximized for Roma inclusion.

The projects started in early 2013 and will be finalized towards the end of the year. The budget was EUR 5,000 per project (for a total of EUR 100,000) in the region. The projects had over 25,000 beneficiaries in 20 localities, approx. 50 per cent of whom were Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

BPRI published a brochure summarizing all 20 local projects: