

Progress report on the 'Gazela' slum resettlement project



CEE Bankwatch Network's Mission is to prevent environmentally and socially harmful impacts of international development finance, and to promote alternative solutions and public participation.

EBRD AGM Issue Paper, Kiev, May 2008

Summary

Gazela Bridge over Sava River in Belgrade, Serbia, is more than thirty years old. The bridge was projected for 30000 v/day, currently is servicing more than 150000 v/day. The bridge has never been repaired and urgently needs reparation. EBRD approved Euro 25 million loan for the reconstruction of approaching roads to Gazela Bridge to the Public Enterprise Serbian Roads. Three hundred families of predominantly Roma, and a smaller number of non-Roma refugees, live under the bridge on both sides. City of Belgrade in cooperation with EBRD and the European Agency for Reconstruction are working in cooperation on the re-location of the slum settlement inhabitants, as the City of Belgrade will provide Euro 7.5 million and EAR has granted Euro 2 million.

The Gazela bridge is a bottleneck of the Pan European corridor X, and most critical part of the transport system of the Serbian capital, Belgrade. The implementation of the project should become a model and should set the standards for future projects dealing with:

- social and economic care for refugees and minorities with clear poverty reduction objectives and inclusion of the poorest groups of people in Serbia,
- reconstruction and improvement of the most important transport infrastructure in Belgrade and Serbia,
- improvement of the business and corporate standards in the road building sector.

Focus of this issue paper will be on the resettlement issues. From its very beginning the resettlement process was suffering from the controversial way of planning and communication to the directly and indirectly affected population. Both EBRD and the City of Belgrade haven't disclosed any report on the progress with the project and plans for the "Gazela" resettlement. Furthermore, wider national and political Roma organisations were not included in the process, thus preventing their active participation in setting the standards for dealing with Roma housing and inclusion in the future.

This is especially important, as the process of readmission to Serbia of approximately 300.000 Serbian war refugees and illegal emigrants (mostly Roma) has just started. Currently in Serbia there are more than 800.000 Roma living without identification documents and/or address registration, and large number of them live in gethoses, e.g. in about 2000 slum settlements. Therefore, it is important to effectively and immediately involve Roma National Council, Roma political parties, and other civil and expert Roma institution and NGOs in this resettlement process of Gazela bridge project in order to ensure transparency, consensus, sustainability, viability and transfer of good practices.

Findings

The development of a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), a precondition for the EBRD financing of the reconstruction of the Gazela Bridge, is not yet finalised. The process of RAP preparation, responsibility of the City of Belgrade and EBRD, was kept secret from the beginning. As a justification for the confidentiality EBRD noted the past failed attempts for resettlement due to protests of host communities. As a result the RAP is overshadowed by suspicions for misuse of means for the development of the community, conflict of interest of the developers of the scenarios and supervising institutions (experts working in both sides of the process), non systematic approach to problem solving, eg. for inclusion of Roma children in the schooling system.

As prime issues within the RAP formulation process we see:

1. Lack of the open public consultation of the resettled and the host communities, as communication and negotiations are done with selected representatives of the Roma community. Considering that the issues at stake are housing, schooling of children and economic provision for the households, it is striking that the process lacks gender balance, as there are no women representatives involved in the preparation of the RAP.
2. Lack of sustainable economic solution for employment of Roma people: The establishment of the “EcoPlan” company for waste collection is not seen as a realistic solution due to great distance between the proposed resettlement site(s) and the sources of collected recyclables in the city center. Furthermore, the Roma NGO “Humanost” received 50.000 EUR for the establishment of the company and has engaged (not employed) 200 mostly Roma people, which is only a small fraction of the “Gazela” community. This is not a suitable solution for the whole “Gazela” population. There is a City of Belgrade’s plan to employ at least one person from each of another 100 Roma familie in the Public Utility Companies, but this is still not happening.
3. Different scenarios haven’t being assessed in depth in consultation with Roma and host communities as EBRD’s policy on resettlement prescribes.: The only scenario given is Ovca suburban settlement, which is supposed to host the “Gazela” community and a limited number of socially vulnerable inhabitants and their families from different parts of Belgrade. This type of solution will unavoidably lead to gethoisation, as some of the representatives of responsible ministry for social affairs and political representatives of Roma community have recognized.
4. The proposed sites for the construction of new settlements seem to have no valid land use licences. This situation may lead to the legal status problems of the settlement and people living there in the future, making them more vulnerable without any tenancy rights.
5. Lack of systematic solution for the inclusion of the Roma children in the schooling system: the RAP proposed the involvement of NGOs for a year of preparatory work with the children from the Gazela community, and the creation of social clubs in the host communities. This inadequate approach to the problem demonstrates that the failure to involve more competent parties, such as the National Education Council, results in partial and short-term solution. For example, there are various practices already used, eg. in Voivodina Roma kids have class assistants, yet such practices were not given the due consideration.
6. Lack of personal identification documents of Roma: There are only few inhabitants who have the documents necessary for medical care, schooling of children, official employment etc. There

was a census conducted with the Gazela community, yet so far very few people have their ID problem solved.

Conclusions and recommendations to the EBRD

1. Transparent and consultative process should be ensured. Progress reports and Evaluation documents should be provided/ disclosed.
2. All important Roma national institutions should be involved through an effective and active participation, in order to ensure the future use of the project as a model.
3. Transfer of best practices for the inclusion of Roma children in schools should be ensured from municipalities where assistants already existing to less developed municipalities (in this respect).
4. The Gender Balance should be ensured for planning and implementation of the process (including equal employment opportunities).
5. A program of issueing IDs and registering of all Roma in Serbia is crucially important for any progress in the process of Roma inclusion.

For more information

Kalmar K.J.Zvezdan

Serbian National Coordinator

CEE Bankwatch Network

tel:+381 64 28 71 246, +381 65 5523 191

fax: +381 24 523 191

www.cekor.org