

Report from visit to new Roma settlements in Belgrade, 11.02.2010

We visited 3 settlements:

1. Makis in Cukarica municipality
2. Kijevo in Rakovica municipality
3. Varos in Mladenovac municipality

1. Leaking of containers - We found leaking in Makis and Rakovica but almost none in Mladenovac. In Makis, we witnessed seven containers that are leaking. This leakage appeared during the snowy period when snow may have pressured container roofs. The problem with leaking was reported to City authorities before our visit, and at the time of writing (19 February) still needs addressed. Other issues with the containers - such as electricity problems or problems with water - have mostly been resolved in a timely manner by the City.

The problem with leaking water may endanger the electrical trip switch panel in some containers. In one container in Rakovica this installation had burned, so the user went to another container and connected a power supply from there. There is a general practice among the settlers to place towels to collect leaking or condensed water above the panel for prevention, but this had not been applied in this case.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to ensure long-term solutions to prevent leakage of containers in future cases of heavy rain or snow.

2. Electricity

In Barajevo a weak electricity supply is causing long black outs, and because of this it is impossible to turn on more than one appliance per container at a time. The City authorities know of this problem, as it is relevant for all families in Barajevo. As heating also runs on electricity, the sporadic availability of electricity for only a few hours daily is a serious limitation, especially during the winter months.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to improve the electricity supply for settlers in Barajevo so as to avoid long black outs, especially during winter months.

3. Sinking of containers in Mladenovac

The containers are placed on concrete bases and also have their own foundations. Some of these have sunk into the ground by at least 15-20 cm. The containers are still above ground level but some are distorted.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to repair the foundations of the containers that are sinking in Mladenovac, so as to make them stable.

4. Health care and ID documents

A significant number of settlers (especially IDPs) still have not been able to solve problems related to their legal status and personal documents, resulting in a lack of health care documents. The authorities know about this problem, and the City finally issued on

15 February final versions of contracts for using the containers, including full addresses of the locations and other necessary elements. Previously settlers had only preliminary versions of the agreements.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to identify people without identification documents and assist them to obtain documents through a fast-track procedure.

5. Employment

For some adults in the settlements, work has been offered in City communal public enterprises, such as *Gradska čistoća* (waste), *Zelenilo Beograd* (gardening services) and *Pogrebne usluge* (cemetery maintenance). A number of settlers are working informally especially in Rakovica and Makis, and we estimate those employed at about 30 people of the 114 families.

However the situation in this regard is complicated, as those who have all the necessary preconditions for employment do not want to accept official employment, but rather remain informally employed and receive social assistance in order to preserve the status of *socially vulnerable*, which will bring more points in the forthcoming allocation of social flats. This demonstrates that long-term housing is a crucial concern for the settlers.

In addition to the fact that the expected number of apartments in the forthcoming allocation of social housing is nowhere near the number of families from the Gazela settlement that seek long-term accommodation and that there is no guarantee about how many flats will be allocated to former Gazela residents, the application process for the flats themselves is extremely expensive. The lack of an integrated administrative system in Serbia means that many have to travel to their places of birth, obtain documents and pay various fees, sometimes with costs totaling between 120 - 150 euros.

Recommendation: Employment is one of the most important components of the RAP, and the RAP's sustainability depends on it. Before the physical resettlement, employment was promised to one person per family. The City of Belgrade needs to make a clear, time-bound and budgeted plan for employment and ensure the employment of Roma resettlers in public enterprises and other areas.

This process should not interfere with the process of allocating social flats. The resettled people need to know what they can expect in the future after the five-year contracts for the container's use expires. They need guarantees of a long-term housing solution. We believe that with such information, acceptance of employment would be much higher

6. Other issues

Traveling with public transport is still a problem for the settlements further from Belgrade such as Barajevo and Mladenovac. People contend that they cannot afford to pay for local travel. The closest shop to the Barajevo settlement is seven kilometers away,

and public transport there is regional so it is impossible to avoid paying (which is a frequent practice with local buses in Belgrade).

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to identify school children who are still without public transport documents and unemployed people in all locations and assist them in obtaining documents for subsidized local travel.

At least eight to ten entitled families still have not received double containers, including the family of Mehfireta Memišević from Rakovica in which 13 inhabitants share a single container. There are eleven children, three of whom are ill and one who is severely disabled.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to fully implement the standards prescribed in the RAP regarding this point and provide double containers as soon as possible to applicable families.

Some settlers are still afraid to express their opinions in all settlements. With the exception of Mladenovac, the work of the representatives is perceived by many of the affected residents as not representing the interests of the inhabitants. Many interviewees expressed fear of being expelled if they express any dissatisfaction with the City of Belgrade.

Settlers in all the settlements visited were stunned when we produced a letter from Secretary for Social Affairs Mr Vladan Djukic stating that all of them have every right to speak freely about their concerns. As reported on previous occasions some city employees have directly attempted to prevent people from speaking to visiting NGOs and even told settlers that visitors needed permission.

Recommendation: The City of Belgrade needs to:

- ensure that all of its employees are briefed on the need for and benefits of freedom of expression of the settlers.*
- conduct an information campaign within the settlements about freedom of expression and the function of the representatives, to show the settlers that they have the right to speak about their concerns with whomever they choose, including NGOs, journalists and so on.*