

Göttingen, 22. February 2013

Update

The current situation of displaced persons (DPs) and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Montenegro

The Roma in Montenegro

According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, there is a total number of 11,000 displaced persons (DPs) and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the countries of former Yugoslavia living in Montenegro.¹ The Bureau for the Care of Refugees (Zavod za zbrinjavanje izbjeglica) registered 8,443 people from the Kosovo living as IDPs in Montenegro. 2,689 people from Former Yugoslav republics have the status of displaced persons. There are also many more people from Former Yugoslavia living in Montenegro, whose residence status is not yet clarified.

Due to a change of law in 2009, all displaced persons (IDPs and DPs) were called upon to register or to submit an application for a temporary or permanent residence in Montenegro. 5,639 of about 9,500 people who had applied for right of residence were granted the status of “foreigners with permanent residence permit” before the end of 2012. The application deadline was extended to the end of 2013.²

There were only a few Roma people among the applicants, as they lack the necessary identity papers from their home countries to be able to apply for a residence permit.

The situation of the Roma

About 3,000 Roma who fled from the Kosovo in 1999 are living in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. The displaced Kosovan Roma form the most marginalized population group in Montenegro. About 1,500 Roma people are

accommodated in the refugee camps Konik I and II. With 226 families and about 1,220 people, Konik I is the largest refugee camp. Roma people are hardly represented in the institutions of the country and only a few of them take part in social life. Thus, only two

¹ <http://www.minradiss.gov.me/vijesti/119243/Ministar-Boskovic-susreo-se-sa-novoimenovanom-predstavnicom-UNHCR-a-u-Crnoj-Gori-Indumathi-Mohandas.html>

² <http://www.mmp.gov.me/vijesti/119110/U-zenevi-prestavljen-Izvjestaj-o-stanju-ljudskih-prava-u-Crnoj-Gori.html>

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members of the Roma minority are employed in state institutions: One Roma at the Ministry for Minorities and a Roma woman in the Government's Office for Civil Affairs. There are no Roma employees on the regional levels of government, although – according to Article 79, paragraph 9 and 10 of the Constitution of Montenegro – a proportional representation of the minority groups is obligatory in national and regional institutions. Unfortunately, this is only on paper. It is particularly striking that there are no members of the minority group represented at the local radio and television stations, although there are some well-educated Roma journalists in the country by now. There aren't even any Roma people working for the urban waste companies at the moment – although these firms had employed Roma people before. Especially in the smaller communities of Montenegro there are no Roma among the employees.

Officially, the unemployment rate in Montenegro ranges at about 14%. Unofficially, it is still much higher. The unemployment rate for Roma is about 50%.

The status of the Roma refugees who are accommodated in the camps Konik I and Konik II has not been clarified yet. A major fire destroyed some of the houses of refugee camp Konik I in July 2012³ – and 157 families (with about 800 members) lost their homes. Because the fire spread very fast, they weren't able to save their documents or any other possessions. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

The people have been living in containers ever since. They lost everything and had to start again from scratch, not for the first time. They were offered to be granted a legal status as foreigners, but many of them have no official documents because of their escape – so they can neither obtain a regular residence status nor take up a job work. The victims would have to travel to their home countries to obtain the needed documents, but most Roma people don't have enough money to pay for the trip to have the documents issued. So far, only a few Roma or “Egyptians” were able to settle their status as foreigners.

Education

Although some progress was made regarding the field of education (there is compulsory schooling), there are still Roma who are not integrated in the regular school system. Roma children take part in lessons together with other children, but the school authorities remain idle when Roma children leave school prematurely – in the seventh or eighth grade, for example. The government does not check on the compliance with compulsory school attendance regularly. As a consequence, the dropout rate among Roma pupils is still high and nobody cares if Roma children leave school without a degree.

Not even the parents of school dropouts must fear to be penalized, because their social and economic situation is so difficult. Poverty and adverse housing conditions are still the major problems regarding school attendance. There is also a lack of school supplies and transportation facilities.

Housing situation

The government plays down the problematic situation of the Roma by emphasizing the generally difficult social and economic situation of the majority of the population and other

³ <http://www.help-ev.de/laender/montenegro/fotos-fluechtlinge-montenegro/fotostrecke-brand-in-konik/>

minorities.⁴ The main problems of the displaced and internally displaced persons are still to be seen in their access to the labor and housing markets. Some of the refugees and internally displaced people were able to solve the accommodation problem by building a house by means of their own resources, with the help of relatives, friends or with support from international relief agencies – but around 5,000 displaced or internally displaced persons are still living in dwellings that were either built especially for them (about 1,300 people / 350 families) or in residential properties that were converted for them.

Around 3,700 people (about 800 families) live in lodgings that do not meet any housing standards. However, this is still the less expensive alternative, compared to renting out these apartments on the normal housing market.

Decade of Roma Inclusion – little progress

Montenegro has adopted a number of strategies to improve the situation of the Roma and has also signed a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements during the last few years: As a signatory of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015), Montenegro adopted a national strategy in 2007, to improve the situation of the Roma and the Egyptians in the period of 2008-2012. A few months ago, the Government of Montenegro also adopted a new strategy for the period of 2012-2016. Nevertheless – according to the Vice-Chairman of the National Council of Roma and Egyptians in Podgorica – there is still a large discrepancy between the desired and the actual living conditions for the Roma of Montenegro.

Roma NGOs criticize the Roma-strategy, because it was supposed to be implemented or coordinated by the ministries – without the Roma organizations being involved. Also, the proposed projects and their implementation procedures are not transparent enough, because the projects were not publicly announced.

The European Commission sees a priority in Montenegro's strategy to improve the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and “Egyptian” peoples, but the local authorities are reluctant to make use of the funds that were provided for accommodation programs for the Roma.⁵ The “Regional Housing Program” – which is a part of the so-called “Sarajevo Process on Refugees and Displaced Persons” (supported by the international community, the EU, the UNHCR, the OSCE and the CEB) – provides for housing units for 6,063 people (1,177 households), 60 assembly houses and 90 residential units for the elderly. Refugee camp Konik is supposed to be resolved by 2016.

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⁴ Source: An email from Željko Šofranac, Director of the Government Bureau for the Care of Refugees, Podgorica, to the Society for Threatened Peoples: zzzi@t-com.me, (February 13, 2013)

⁵ <http://www.coebank.org/Contenu.asp?arbo=164&theme=2&ChangeLangue=EN>

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