

What life looks like in informal collective centres in Serbia

The research on the situation in informal collective centres conducted by A 11 - Initiative for Economic and Social Rights was conducted in October and November 2019 and included seven municipalities¹ with ten informal collective centres (one third of which are informal Roma settlements)² and sample of 95 households with a total of 395 members. The units of the research was a household, and a convenient quota sample was used, with at least one third of the estimated number of households from each informal collective centre.

The research was conducted to meet the preparation of the new National Strategy for Resolving the Problems of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. In addition, the research sought to advance the existing knowledge of the needs of one of the most vulnerable categories within the displaced population - internally displaced persons living in informal collective cen-

tres. Specific objective 3. 6. of the National Strategy for Resolving the Problems of Refugees and Displaced Persons states, as one measure, that it is necessary “to create conditions for the closure of informal collective centres and unhygienic settlements by meeting the housing needs of internally displaced persons accommodated therein.” Therefore, with this research A 11 Initiative tended through an analysis of the situation of displaced persons living in these centres, and particularly their position regarding the exercise of the rights to housing, education, health care, social protection and work and employment, to point at their marginalization and need to prioritize the problems they face.

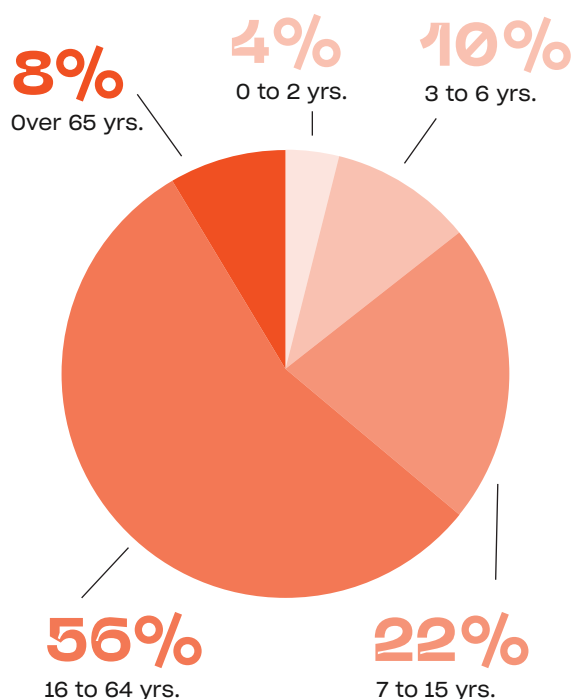
General data and possession of documents

An average household living in an informal collective centre consists of four members. Of the total number of household members,

¹ City Municipalities: Čukarica, Rakovica, Voždovac, Grocka, Zvezdara, Palilula, and Sjenica.

² Informal collective centres: OMV pumpa, Kamp Palilula, Bivši Lahor, Čukarička šuma, Stara škola, Kamp Grocka, Kamp Čukarica, Mirijevo, Kamp Rakovica, Fekovića brdo.

Age structure of the households members



children under 15 make up 36%. The fact that residents of informal collective centres have a problem to register their permanent residence is evidenced by the fact that 85% of the respondents do not have permanent or temporary residence registered at the real address of their residence, and one quarter of them have their permanent residence registered at the address of the social welfare centre, which enables them to exercise the majority of economic and social rights in the places where they live. Registration of permanent residence at the address of a social welfare centre is reserved for residents of informal Roma settlements. There are no respondents with permanent residence registered at the address of a social welfare centre among those living in the informal collective centres covered by the research.

While internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in informal collective centres possess an IDP identity card, in 40% of households in informal Roma settlements, at least one household member does not have an IDP identity card. Possession of this document is important both for easier access to health care in the place of temporary residence and for simplified procedure for changing or registering a place of permanent residence.³

Housing

The fact that the residents of informal collective centres are in a state of long-term unmet housing need is evidenced by the fact that respondents live in informal collective centres on average 18 years, and that half of the housing units is not built of solid materials. At the same time, no household in informal Roma settlements has a facility built of solid materials. Residents of the settlements “Čukarička šuma”, “Fekovića brdo” and “OMV pumpa” live in facilities made of materials such as wood, sheet metal, nylon, carpets, cardboard, boards. In addition, 78% of internally displaced households living in informal collective centres reside in housing units of up to two rooms, with an average of four household members each. In the general population, 16% of households live in the housing unit



³ Internally displaced persons who have an IDP identity card and registered temporary residence are exempted from the implementation of the Decree on the procedure for determining the fulfilment of the prescribed conditions for issuing passports for persons from the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. This by-law is also applied to permanent residence registration procedures and makes it difficult to change the permanent residence of persons from Kosovo (those who have their permanent residence registered in Kosovo or are registered in the citizens registries in Kosovo), so possession of IDP identity card is very important for those persons from Kosovo who are trying to register their permanent residence in the place where they live.

consisting of up to two rooms.⁴ Housing deprivation is also evidenced by the data that as many as two-thirds of internally displaced households living in informal collective centres live in residential space no larger than 30 square meters. In the general population, seven percent of households live in residential space of up to 30 square meters.⁵

In informal collective centres, 47% of households do not have access to electricity (vs. 0.1% of households in the general population)⁶, 39% of internally displaced persons in informal collective centres do not have access to drinking water (while 4.8% in the general population do not have installations for running water)⁷, 40% do not have a toilet and a bathroom, 39% do not have sewage, while 37% do not have access to any of the above stated. No household from informal Roma settlements have access to electricity and running water, sewage, toilet and bathroom at the same time. In the settlements “Čukarička šuma” and “OMV pumpa”, households do not have access to any of the above stated, while all households in informal collective centres have an access to at least one of the above stated. However, an image of the plight of internally displaced persons in the informal Roma settlements and informal collective centres covered by the research becomes clearer if the data are compared with the data on living conditions in the general population, where less than one percent of the dwellings have no access to either to water or electricity, heating or sewage, or sewer.⁸

The fact that they live in constant fear of forced evictions from informal collective centres is evidenced by the data that 80% of respondents living in informal collective centres claim that there have been announcements of their resettlement so far, and the vast majority of them were offered to be found a rural household as an alternative accommodation.

In two thirds of informal collective centres, residents live in improvised space not intended for living and half of them live in worker's barracks.

Social protection

The poverty in which residents of informal collective centres live is evidenced by the fact that 36% of households from informal collective centres use the right to financial social assistance, while in the general population less than 4% of the total population exercise the right to financial social assistance.⁹ The research also showed that 27% of households from informal collective centres exercise the right to child allowance. Every fifth household is fed in soup kitchens, with the use of soup kitchens being five times more frequent among internally displaced Roma.

Given the numerous legal and administrative obstacles faced by applicants for social welfare benefits in Serbia, it is reasonable to assume that the number of those living in poverty is significantly higher.

⁴ Calculation of the author on the basis of the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia on dwellings for permanent habitation by number of rooms, available at: https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/3102030201?language=Code=sr-Latn&fbclid=IwAR0-DppJff_i6M2JWS3w9zHpqLnqR5SmjvV4Rk_G9hz1Kb-l6XgVZ6laliQ

⁵ Calculation of the author on the basis of the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia on dwellings for permanent habitation by floor space, available at: https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/3102030202?languageCode=sr-Latn&fbclid=IwAR1NjZTFJOtNW6zMAjHr5GuWqEkks_Uu4L4WPtwXboW7yEyiW1oROSsg3w

⁶ The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period 2016–2025, p. 36.

⁷ Survey of the Living Standard, p. 61.

⁸ Calculation of the author on the basis of the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia on installations and auxiliary premises in dwellings, available at: <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/31020303?languageCode=sr-Latn>

⁹ For instance, in 2016 a total of 3.7% of the total number of residents exercised the right to financial social assistance. See Draft Social Welfare Strategy 2019–2025, available at: <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1820/nacrt-strategije-socijalne-zastite-2019-2025-27032019.docx>

On the other hand, the needs of residents of informal settlements are great and the interest of the competent local authorities is insufficient, which is confirmed by the fact that 54% of the respondents stated that the employees of a social welfare centre never visit an informal collective centre. On the other hand, 51% claim that neither the local commissioner for refugees and displaced persons ever does it either.

The fact that Roma are significantly more vulnerable than the most vulnerable displaced persons in informal collective centres is evidenced by the data that 77% of households in informal Roma settlements receive social welfare assistance, while in other informal collective centres only 12% of households receive social welfare assistance. It should also be kept in mind that, despite poverty, some internally displaced Roma do not exercise any of the social protection rights due to obstacles related to registration of permanent residence, lack of identity card or other documents¹⁰, and the number of socially disadvantaged households among internally displaced Roma is greater than the number of households whose members exercise the right to financial social assistance, one-off financial assistance or child allowance. Unlike internally displaced Roma from informal settlements, other internally displaced persons from informal collective centres who are not beneficiaries of the right to financial social assistance, one-off financial assistance or child allowance do not exercise these rights because they are employed or receive a pension.



Health care

Health condition of the residents of informal collective centres is at an unenviable level, and research has shown that in 49% of households there is at least one member who has a serious or chronic illness or disability. Diabetes (33%) and asthma (20%) are stated as the most common diseases. It is of particular concern that as many as 13% of those with severe or chronic illness have some type of cancer. An additional difficulty in exercising the right to health and health care is the fact that as many as 13.6% of households of internally displaced persons in informal collective centres have at least one member who does not possess a health booklet. All available data show that health insurance coverage is lower for the Roma compared to the general population¹¹, and the research confirms that this gap is even larger for internally displaced persons, especially internally displaced Roma. Among the households covered by this research whose members are without health booklets, 69% are internally displaced Roma. The key reason for not possessing a health booklet is the difficulty with registering a permanent residence or with obtaining other documents. All respondents who answered the question about the reasons for not possessing a health booklet, both from infor-

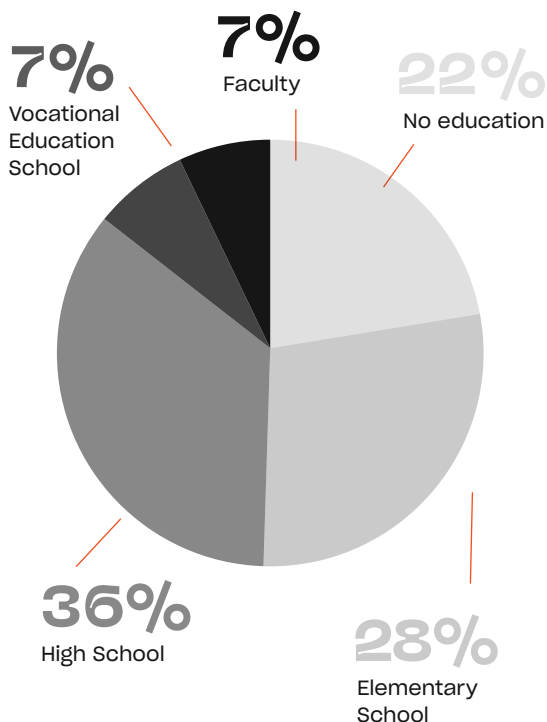
¹⁰ This is illustrated by an example of informal Roma settlement “Čukarička šuma”, where 30.7% of households covered by the research do not receive financial social assistance; 71.4% of those who answered why they did not exercise the right to financial social assistance, stated the lack of documents, an ID card or registration of permanent residence as the reasons, and 28.5% stated that they did not exercise that right because they were employed.

¹¹ See, for instance, UNDP, Roma at a Glance - Serbia, April 2018, available at:

https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Factsheet_SERBIA_Roma.pdf. According to that research, the health insurance coverage among Roma is 93% and 97% in the general population.

mal Roma settlements and informal collective centres, stated precisely the problems related to registration of permanent or temporary residence, or lack of documents or an ID card. Households with members without health booklets are the most present in the informal Roma settlement “Fekovića brdo” in Sjenica, where 25% of the households covered by the research have at least one member without a health booklet, as well as in the informal Roma settlement “Čukarička šuma” in Belgrade: 20% of households in that settlement have at least one member without a health booklet, and some of them have six or even eight members without a health booklet.

The highest level of education in a household



Education

Data on education also show a lower coverage of children with compulsory primary education. Thus, the research has shown that out of the total number of households with school-age children, in 13% at least one child does not attend compulsory primary education. At the same time, this percentage is significantly higher for Roma children and amounts even to 21%. In more than half of the total number of households with kindergarten and pre-school children, no child attends kindergarten, that is the preparatory pre-school program. As a reminder, in the general population, 98% of preschool children attend or have attended a pre-school preparatory program in a timely manner¹², and 95% of non-Roma girls and 97% of non-Roma boys have completed primary education¹³.

A total of 40% of the respondents cited poverty as the reason for not attending school. Other reasons included lack of documents and disability of a child, and 20% of respondents did not answer the question about the reasons why children do not attend primary education. When it comes to the reasons for not attending the pre-school preparatory program, 75% of respondents who answered this question cited poverty as a reason.

Employment

The data that in 22% of households at least one member is unemployed and does not work, while in 42% of households there are members who are registered with the National Employment Service and who have never been offered a job, indicates that it is necessary to improve the access to employment and jobs for residents of informal collective centres.

¹² Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014, The 2014 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and The 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Roma Settlements in Serbia, Final report, Belgrade, Serbia: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, p. 173.

¹³ UNDP, Roma at a Glance, op. cit.

The data that in 90% of households from informal Roma settlements the unemployed people working in the black market collect secondary raw materials¹⁴, while in other informal collective centres in 27% of households the unemployed members are engaged in collecting secondary raw material confirms that the work of collecting secondary raw materials is predominantly reserved for the Roma.

As a rule, residents of informal collective centres do not exercise the right to self-employment subsidies. There is no household in which any of the members was a beneficiary of those subsidies.

Every tenth household still has members who are beneficiaries of compensations for people from Kosovo, and the extremely low income per household member is testified by the fact that half of the households covered by the research disposes of up to 8,000 dinars per household member on a monthly basis, with an average income of about 5,000 dinars per member in Roma households, while other displaced persons have about 13,000 dinars. In the general population, the average income per household member is just under 24,000 dinars.¹⁵

¹⁴ In the settlement "Čukarička šuma", for instance, in only 11.5% of households there was an employed member. In 92.3% of households, the unemployed, able to work, members are engaged in the collection of secondary raw materials, and 8.3% of them, in addition to collecting secondary raw materials, are engaged in other jobs in the informal economy.

¹⁵ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Household Budget Survey, 2018, newsletter, Belgrade, 2019, available at: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G20195652.pdf>



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