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struggling with starvation on a regular basis, when child mortality among the Roma was three to four times higher than the general population, reaching a staggering 80 percent in Romania, and when only one in a hundred Roma children had access to higher education, was a distant memory by now. In reality, it scarcely improved.

While half of Roma children start kindergarten, and nine out of ten are in school between the ages of 7 and 15, only 15% complete a secondary education. One third between the ages of 35 and 54 report health problems that interfere with their daily lives, while 45 percent live in households that lack an indoor toilet, indoor kitchen, bath/shower facilities or electricity. (In Romania, approximately 85 percent lack at least one of the above amenities, versus 55% percent of the nearby non-Roma population, while in Bulgaria this figure is 75 percent versus 30 percent). Some 90 percent live in households with an equalised income below the national poverty level, and are unable to afford meat, fish or a protein, utility bills and rent, heating, a TV, a telephone or a washing machine; 40 percent live in households where someone has to go to bed hungry at least once a month. While child labor is virtually inexistent for non-Roma, more than one in ten children work on the farms, street vending, or running errands. Life expectancy is ten years less than the European norm, one in three consider themselves unemployed, and half have experienced discrimination in the past year.

In some European countries, especially in Slovakia, thousands of Roma children are placed in special schools and classes designed for pupils with "mild mental disabilities" or in ethnically segregated mainstream schools and classes that provide a substandard education. In Hungary, in the last few years there has been a disturbing trend in vigilante-style attacks on Roma communities, following widespread discrimination of Roma in the media and segregation in Hungarian society. Violence against Roma communities is also endemic in Italy. In December 2011, a settlement in Turin was set on fire in a racist attack.

G.B.: In Serbia...

N.K.: Striving to become a member of the EU, Serbia has adopted numerous laws and strategic documents to align with the EU acquits. With regard to promotion, implementation and protection of human rights, protection of minorities, and prevention of discrimination, legislative framework is mainly in place and Serbia has also signed all significant international human rights instruments, as stated in the 2011 Analytical Report on Serbia of the European Commission.

Serbia has also introduced various independent bodies for supervising protection of human rights, such as the Ombudsperson, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, etc. However, some laws and strategic documents still need to be brought further in line with EU standards or adopted. Implementation of the legislation and policies need to be strengthened so that results can be felt on the ground. Concerning the most marginalized and socially excluded population in Serbia, some progress has been made, especially in the field of education and health. However, the Roma are still the most discriminated population group. Their employment rate is still very low, just like the level of education. A large number of Roma live in informal settlements under deplorable conditions, while relocation of settlements is often conducted contrary to international standards and resulting in serious violations of basic human rights. Further efforts are required to improve their status and socio-economic conditions.

Between 2009 and 2012, the number of forced evictions of Roma from informal settlements increased. Precisely, there were 18 large-scale evictions affecting over 2,800 Roma and in only two years at least 1,000 individual eviction cases. During evictions, alternative accommodation is not always



Above, below: Roma street newspaper vendors in Belgrade, Serbia.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LICEULICE

provided and even when provided it is inadequate. Roma are resettled to segregated container settlements inhabited only by Roma, with no or limited access to basic rights (the right to water, right to employment opportunities, right to education, right to social welfare and right to health care). Contracts on the use of mobile housing units are discriminatory for stipulating the right of the Belgrade City authorities to breach them unilaterally if the residents are not "behaving politely towards representatives of City of Belgrade" or "if they do not show active approach towards activities of City Administration aiming to socialize individuals and their families". Recent experience demonstrates that well-established organizations have initiated changes in the field of housing but in order to systemically address the problems, it is highly needed to involve Roma activists and enhance their capacities.

Also, resettled Roma are continuously facing public condemnation by the citizens living in the neighborhood, which shows public intolerance towards Roma in Serbia and general lack of understanding for the right to adequate housing, one of basic human rights.

G.B.: How can the situation in Europe be improved?

N.K.: The continuing situation of many Roma to date, places them in a very schizophrenic legal field. Are they a marginalized group, economic migrants, war refugees, asylum seekers that survived ethnic violence and discrimination, an ethnic or a national minority?

So far, there have been many indications of strong commitment and formal recognition of the severity of the situation and the expectation that this will translate into policy on a local level, yet the authorities repeatedly fail to implement changes.

In the past, the EU has repeatedly stressed the need for better integration of Roma by initiating great number of projects/actions, investments into social politics of all EU and non-EU countries. Despite this, strong and proportionate measures are still not in place to tackle the deep-rooted problems facing a large proportion of the EU's Roma population.

What I think is needed is a change at the local level, beginning with the general population. We have to put pressure on governments around Europe to change their policies and give the Roma people the human rights they deserve.



About Liceulice and vendors

Vendors at Liceulice, a street newspaper in Belgrade, Serbia are young people (16-25) that work and live on the streets, mostly Roma boys and girls. For the first time in their lives, many of these youth have a chance to have responsible and paid job.

Unofficial statistics state that there are more than 1,000 young people living and working in the streets (most of them are Roma), just in Belgrade. These young people have little control over their lives and available resources, and are highly dependent on others (e.g. social institutions or other people), which only contributes to their deepening isolation.

The youth vendors are an "invisible social category," without possibility of entering into the system and realizing basic rights. Most of them attend evening schools or don't go to school; they spend great part of the day in the streets, somehow trying to earn money for living. They don't live in a safe and protected surrounding. In addition to this instability, they are marginalized on various other grounds (race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, social status, etc). Although, they are aware of the situation and want to change it, they don't know how or are scared to do it alone. All of this contributes to the young people having low self-esteem and distrust of society.

After some time, Liceulice has widened their target group beyond young people and work with other marginalized groups – persons with disabilities, single mothers, and homeless who are not just Roma, but they are a big part of our distributive network.

Besides work in the magazine distribution, vendors have been attending different inclusive workshops – financial literacy, communications, promotion, computers, etc. One group of Roma teenage vendors even created a hip-hop band "Street face," and they wrote lyrics about their work in Liceulice.

Street Roots and Liceulice are members of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP). Founded in 1994, the International Network of Street Papers supports and develops more than 120 street paper projects.

Street Roots, along with its sister papers around the globe, join members from 40 countries in 24 languages.

Street papers are independent newspapers and magazines that operate on a social enterprise and self-help model to provide an innovative solution to urban homelessness and unemployment. In addition to employment, many INSP street papers offer their vendors ongoing social support and training opportunities.