

Roma people, IDPs, settled in Collective Centre “Old Airport”

Of 19,860 internally displaced persons from Kosovo, in Kraljevo municipality, registered by UNHCR, 19,000 are accommodated privately (in rented apartments, with relatives, etc.). About 460 people (150 children) are settled in 10 collective centers situated in Kraljevo suburbs and surrounding villages. Living conditions in the collective centers are extremely hard due to lack of toilettes, running and potable water, and any kind of heating, beds, mattresses, blankets, winter clothing, personal hygiene items, medicines and food. However, the number of applications for this kind of accommodation has been increasing, indicating the exhaustion of private savings for renting accommodation.

For twelve years, in the worst situation are 184 Roma people, accommodated in collective centre "Old Airport". When they arrived from Kosovo, in June 1999, they found "shelter" in a public toilet at the railway station. After that, one month they spent in the railway station park. On September 1999, as nobody of the officials reacted, they themselves moved to the atomic shelter by the Memorial Park. Living conditions at this shelter were startling. They had no day light at all, aerating did not function, and the air was humid and polluted as the consequence of squalid sewage. They had stayed there until April 2000 and then moved to the UNHCR camp called “Old Airport”, in 17 desert tents.

In January 2001, MSF (French humanitarian organization “Doctors without Borders”) provided them with 19 metal containers (instead of tents) of 18m² each. In each of these containers there are from 8 to 16 people, therefore containers are overcrowded. All families, men and women, the old and the children spend their time in the containers where they eat, sleep and keep their small possessions which they had managed to bring with themselves. They spend days sitting on their mattresses (there are no beds), aware of the fact that they have no chance to go back to their homes, that their children are traumatized for the life and they themselves (the adults) treated from local population and the republic and municipal authorities as creatures with no human dignity.

Of 184 people settled in this collective centre, 91 are children under 15. There are 12 babies from one month to one years of age in this "centre". In the collective centre “Old Airport” live about 30 persons suffering from asthma, angina pectoris, diabetes...

Up to few years ago, in spite of awful conditions they live in, these people did not show signs of depression and took realistically the situation they had found themselves in. However, during the last few years, the situation has been changing. It is evident that with each new day hopelessness and despair they sink deeper and deeper and there are neither signs for hope, nor encouragement.

On Saturday, March 13th, hygiene packages were distributed to residents of the Roma collective center "Old Airport", by activists and volunteers of LINGVA NGO, which they carried out voluntarily. All 184 residents of the Center received hygienic items provided by Group 484 – Belgrade.