



Social inclusion

Supported by the European Union and UNHCR, the South Eastern Europe regional project entitled "Social inclusion: Regional Support to Marginalized Communities" started in 2007. The Project is funded by the EU under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and is conducted in the region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and Serbia) by UNHCR's representations and their implementing partners in their respective countries. The aim of the 1.25 million EUR programme which will last 18 months is to assist governments to provide and facilitate access to free legal aid to Roma in the region, aiming at regularization of their legal status in respective countries.

In September 2009, UNHCR and the European Commission signed the agreement on the implementation of the IPA supporting this ongoing regional project. The project is implemented in Croatia for the very first time and is directed towards the prevention of statelessness within the Roma population. The issue of statelessness is relatively a newly recognised issue in the Republic of Croatia. Even though the latest national census (2001) reported 9.000 members of the Roma minority in Croatia, estimations have it that in reality 30.000 - 40.000 Roma presently reside in Croatia. UNHCR, after consultations with the civil society and national authorities, estimates that a significant number of this population is stateless.

UNHCR Croatia and the Office of the Ombudsman, as implementing partner, launched the project in October 2009. The project is designed to compliment the Croatian National Programme for Roma (NPR) and the efforts under the Decade for Roma Inclusion Action plan.

The role of UNHCR Croatia and the Office of the Ombudsman within the project include direct provision of legal assistance related to regularization of legal status of Roma in Croatia, assistance in administrative procedures regarding the issuance of documents and organization of public campaigns in order to encourage communities to seek assistance related to status regularization and access to citizenship.