



*Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the OSCE and other International Organizations in Vienna*

**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Serbia**  
Working session 9: Humanitarian issues and other commitments  
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Mister Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Belgium on behalf of the EU and the recommendations made in it. In addition, I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

The topic of internally displaced persons is significant, complex, extensive, and nonetheless global. Therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to introduce you to the **Proposal for Resolving Housing Issues of Displaced Persons from Kosovo and Metochia through a Regional Approach.**

Displacement, as a result of the conflict in the Western Balkans during the 90s, has been a subject of a series of regional and international efforts to resolve this problem. None, however, have so far focused on displaced persons from Kosovo and Metochia. Allow me to inform you that there currently 200,000 IDPs from Kosovo and Metochia in Serbia. Out of that number, 68,514 IDPs, that is 16,644 families, are in need. This is the latest data from a joint survey of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia and UNHCR, conducted in 2018.

After 20 years of displacement, the rate of sustainable return compared to the total number of IDPs in Serbia is only 1.9%. Unfortunately, internally displaced persons are still hostages to numerous unresolved issues. They have neither been granted sustainable return to the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metochia, nor the access to their basic human rights and livelihood needs. Restitution of rights does not exist in Kosovo and Metochia because it is not secured by those who have committed to do so and by those whose mandate it is to establish the restitution of rights.

Let me share briefly the basics of the Proposal.

Due to the extensive experience gained through the implementation of programs financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, the donor and the EU pre-accession funds, as well as through the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme (RHP) since 2013, Serbia developed specific methodological tools that are unique in the world to address the housing needs of refugees and displaced persons. The Regional Housing Programme is a joint initiative by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia aiming to provide durable housing solutions to vulnerable refugees following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia. It is mostly financed by the international donor community where the main donor is the European Union. RHP has four basic types of assistance in delivering permanent housing solutions: apartments for lease or purchase, packages of building material for renovation or adaptation of households, purchase of village houses and prefabricated houses.

By implementing RHP for refugees, the Republic of Serbia has gained valuable experience, which could ensure effective implementation of a similar housing program intended for displaced persons from Kosovo and Metochia. Bearing in mind that the RHP is implemented in the above mentioned four countries, it is evident that future projects intended for displaced persons from Kosovo and Metochia would be based both on the effectively established mechanisms and lessons learned in terms of an even more efficient implementation and regional cooperation. Moreover, legislative and strategic frameworks have been set up, with structures and competent institutions for the implementation of programs designed to provide support to this part of vulnerable population.

We would like to emphasize that the issues pertaining to the needs of internally displaced persons should certainly be addressed regionally. We must also not forget the IDPs outside of Serbia. Therefore, we see this type of program as a viable solution for current issues as well as for the prevention of second and third generation of IDPs.

We believe that a regional approach is also necessary not only in terms of providing financial support from international donors, but also for the actual implementation of the program for the return and integration of displaced persons, under the auspices of the international community, the OSCE and UNHCR in particular. A regional initiative called the Skopje Process has already been launched and it can provide a solid basis for further development of regional cooperation.

We would also like to highlight that resolving housing issues and improving living conditions of IDPs do not open the question regarding the status of Kosovo and have no political implications. This is rather intended to go in line with the respect of the basic human rights of IDPs in accordance with their decision, based on the comprehensive information on the opportunities available, to exercise their personal rights, first and foremost the right to freedom of movement, and access to permanent housing solutions.

However, if we do not take further the initiative to obtain donor funds for providing housing solutions to IDPs in due time, this vulnerable population will soon become an enormous burden to the state, and lean on the state alone, both in terms of social benefits and housing problems, due to the fact that they cannot and should not resolve these troubles alone.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me one final remark:

Every year the Republic of Serbia provides about 500 housing solutions for IDPs out of its budget. At that pace, it would take us about 33 years to deal with the most vulnerable part of our population! Are we going to wait for more than three decades to address this significant issue?

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to share Serbia's view on this important question.