



This project is funded by the European Union

# GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATION OF INFORMAL WASTE COLLECTORS



Регионален  
Бизнис  
Центар  
Скопје



## **Guidelines for integration of informal waste collectors**

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of MDC-Ti.Net and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

**I. Guidelines for Integration of Informal waste collectors**

1. Reflections on the literature review of Political and Social Situation of Roma in the country
2. Beneficiaries and parties involved/ definition of IWC's
3. Principles of work with the IWC's
4. Factors influencing the integration of informal waste collectors
5. PPP and the Directive on Packaging and packaging waste
6. Mitigating the occupational health hazards

## I. Guidelines for Integration of Informal waste collectors

### 1. Reflections on the literature review of Political and Social Situation of Roma in the country

Understanding how Roma people, or related groupings called “Egyptians”, function is an essential part of understanding Informal waste picking. Most waste pickers in the Balkans are from this background, and live in segregated settlements, slums, “nomad camps” or other special communities. Sometimes this appears to be by choice to live together, at other times it is due to prejudice and a social conspiracy to keep Roma – and especially waste pickers – “away” from living areas of non-Roma.

Starting in January, Anne Scheinberg member of the consultant team has been working on a literature review of the situation of Roma Informal waste collectors in the country.

The orientation also included meetings with two scholars of Roma politics and society, generally called “Ciganologists,” working on Roma in the European Union: Professor Peter Vermeersch of the Catholic University Leuven, and Professor Huub van Baar of the University of Amsterdam. From this preliminary review, it seems possible to summarize the following aspects of Roma life which are highly relevant to waste picking activities. This represents a very preliminary analysis, which requires triangulation and validation by groups of Roma themselves. The original list of 13 points was submitted to the two scholars, and this revised list incorporates most of their critiques of it.

1. Many Roma have lived sedentarily since the major Ottoman settlement policies of the 16th and 17th century, so they have an experience of “centuries of sedentary existence” in the country, in spite of the image of Roma as “travelers.” Modern-day Roma are not inclined to travel and live a ‘nomadic’ life, although movement may still be important to them for a number of other purposes, such as trading. Roma (like those throughout other former Yugoslav republics) are settled, or would like to have a legal place to settle. When they are in informal settlements, they would like them to be legalized so they are not continuously evicted.
2. According to some scholars, and in contrast to the above, Roma retain some form of “mobility consciousness,” meaning that to avoid conflicts, they may choose move away – to a different area for picking, to join a different settlement, to move to a different city.
3. In an earlier study we found that Roma have difficulty in making horizontal linkages, or joining together in businesses. Anyone in a community who seems to be in a position to achieve something for the benefit of the group can and does present him or herself as a leader to the outside world. That is, there is unlikely to be the type of leadership among waste pickers in the country as there is in Latin America, where there is a strong tradition of labor or community leaders.
4. There are indications that Roma communities tend to be egalitarian and horizontal social groupings, with few or no internal divisions or structure. It is likely that even individual earnings are pooled and shared between group members, or in any case, there is not a one on one relationship between who does the picking and who gets the benefits.
5. The relationship of IWC’s to waste picking is similar to that of hunter-gatherer peoples to hunting and gathering. They pick when they need money or items, and don’t pick when they have other work or enough money and things to eat.
6. In the country, both men and women pick waste, and there is little distinction in materials by sex of the collector. Both men and women also use carts, generally hand carts, but sometimes bicycle carts or motorcycles with trailers
7. It appears likely that only some groups of Roma pick all waste, if they are not from the “tribes” that have other occupations. Plastic is picked by men and women, metal and paper mostly by men.
8. There are also many part-time waste pickers who pick waste when they cannot find agricultural labor, or play music, or do other seasonal or situational work to earn income.
9. In the country, families pick waste together on the landfill.
10. It is likely that men do more of the selling and negotiating with buyers, and women do more processing and sorting.
11. Many sources say that Roma have a wide variety of modes of interaction, which they use quite deliberately to confuse the rest or get an advantage. This was clear in some of the visits to the Mahala, where someone appeared and started yelling loudly about the misery in which they live. This was in contrast to the waste pickers participating in the working groups, who were serious, engaged, and generally avoiding presenting a “script” designed for outsiders.
12. Contrary to many stereotypes, the scholars report that questions to Roma informal recyclers

about waste picking or other activities are answered honestly, and that a lot of time is wasted trying to figure out a deep hidden meaning of an answer which is actually clear, accurate, and straightforward – only the asker or field worker doesn't understand enough to see that.

13. Although many Roma have gone to school and now can read, the degree of literacy varies widely, and much information is transmitted and held orally by individuals and groups. However among waste pickers, it appears that both men and women are much more highly numerate than literate. Women appear to be the repository of information about the community, the family, and the relationships.

Ongoing reforms have demonstrated limited effects on the marginalized groups. The country still faces the consequences of severe economic crisis and political instability from the 90's. The unemployment rate for Roma in the country is approximately 70%.

Previous studies suggested that the position of individual waste collectors in the raw material market chain should depend on the care and stimulation measures of the government subsidies on employment and local government assistance. There are several government strategies that address this issue: poverty reduction strategy [2], national action plan for employment [3], sustainable development strategy [4] and strategy for Roma and their integration [5]. Consultant is of opinion that more substantial impacts to well being of informal waste collectors may be within their own reach and from their own ability to adopt more effective business models, based on best management and operational practice in entrepreneurship and waste management in general, that is currently beyond their immediate reach. When performing the interviews with selected IWC in Pod Kale area, consultant was not able to identify visible impacts of existing governmental/sector policies to improvement of living/work conditions of the vulnerable group of poorest informal waste collectors in all area visited. Whilst understanding the strategic importance of such policies for the well being of target community, the consultant is inclined to put the immediate priority to the practical aspects of life/work of IWCs, through series of incremental, small improvements in the way of performing their waste collection activities, to be based on observing the daily operations and living routine of IWCs, once organized through initial stage of cooperative or a social enterprise.

While fully understanding the need and importance of development/enforcement of relevant policies and legal framework for the long term well-being of target communities, consultant is of opinion that performing the robust, simple action of establishing and running the small, growth-oriented organization – social enterprise would generate swiftly the visible effects to the target community and generate valuable information for streamlining the future operations/development strategy. Positive perception by IWCs of incremental steps made is considered as key to their mobilization and future commitment to a small business operations and objectives. This does not necessarily require a strong focus to policy/institutional issues during the early stages of social enterprise operations, simply given the fact that the entire almost all IWC community apart from the 19 already formalized, is currently performing the waste management activities completely outside the existing legal framework. This also applies, in substantial extent, also to other waste operators doing their business in the market, whereas even the well established waste management operators may have questionable legal compliance status.

## **2. Beneficiaries and parties involved/ definition of IWC's**

Individual interviews with IWC's and their families based in the area known as Pod Kale and in 12 other locations in Skopje were held in the houses where interviewees live. The interviews were performed in the houses of interviewees, following the invitation of community members, in response to brief information provided by the consultant on the project purpose.

Since our project is about engaging waste pickers and informal recyclers, we begin with them, their knowledge, experience, evaluations, opinions, their wishes, their perception of risks and advantages in making change. This adds an element and a focus to the specific engagements with cities, towns, organizations, and individuals that we may already know in our work, or those we meet through the snowball research. In a project like this, therefore, it is important to be transparent with everyone about what we are doing, and what we want to accomplish. We have a clear agenda for supporting informal recyclers to organize and professionalize their recycling activities, but the specifics have to be based on what they want and how they themselves see the situation and want to change it. We have an equally urgent and clear commitment to supporting all stakeholders in improved co-operation, which leads to improved approaches in sustainable waste management and high-performance recycling. The things we are doing, consulting, mobilizing, engaging waste pickers and introducing them to techniques for enumerating their communities and quantifying people, tones, and benefits, are designed to improve and stabilize the relationships between waste pickers and the solid waste systems in which they operate, so that both are better off. As a result of initial mapping of target community, the following provisional segmentation of target community involved in waste management has been identified at local level:

**Poorest IWCs** -This group could be further divided into two subgroups:

Residents of Pod Kale, often living for years at the same location. This group, together with New Residents along the Vardar river are belonging to PIWC group. Their living and work conditions require immediate action and urgent improvement. Collection of waste is mainly performed by head of family, but having also the other family members active, including women and children. They operate small carriages (some of them modified baby trolleys) or horse carriages, impacting their ability to collect material from

wider surroundings of the city. While operating mainly in the area of centre of the city, they are still able to reach as far as Karposh and Gjorce all on foot or tricycles, where possible. Waste types collected include dominantly paper and Plastic. Most of them are involved in waste collection from their childhood. Families are working as atomized, self-dependant collectors, selling the collected waste to Local or External Middle Men. The area they are able to cover in terms of waste collection is limited by the transportation means they use. The territory they cover is not divided among waste collectors – they are free to circulate the town, and they do so and do not get in conflict with other similar IWCs from the same or other settlements – they consider each other as being in the same, poor position, struggling for earning the minimum for living. All the interviewed representatives of families in this group expressed their full interest to become a part of organization/cooperative, hoping to improve their work and living conditions. They mainly collect recyclables directly from the containers owned by Public Utility Company City Sanitation and/or by offering waste collection/cleaning services to individual households (i.e. cleaning of basements). The amount of collected waste within this group varies between 1 and 1.5 Jumbo bags per person per day. Total monthly incomes within this group were reported at 8000 to 10.000 MKD per person, as resulting from waste collection.

New residents of Sapunara arrived to the settlement from other municipalities. New residents are living in the old factory with no utilities, their number provided by the project staff is approximately 200, and are reportedly currently being involved in waste collection, however this group having minimal preconditions for performing this activity: no transportation means and not having the space for disposing the collected material.

### **Established IWC's**

Living and work conditions of this group are considerably better compared to Poorest IWC group: they live in well build houses, with running water and electricity in the municipality of Shuto Orizari, Gjorce and Chair. In the collection of waste they use motorized equipment - some of them being in possession of trucks. Their key competitive advantage compared to Poorest IWC group is their mobility and ability to cover larger area, by having better transportation means, allowing them to collect larger waste quantities. Some of Established IWCs employ informally workers to help them with collection, and see themselves as capable of organizing a larger group of IWCs from the same settlement in a bigger, structured organization. Established IWCs are selling their waste to External middle men with whom they have been successfully cooperating for years. Some Established IWCs are specialized in collection of specific waste streams (Plastics, metal and paper). Some of the EIWCS had demonstrated ability to enter into informal arrangements with larger waste generators (like Supermarkets, through entering into deals with Supermarket directors/foreman, reportedly offering in return only site surrounding cleaning services)

### **Local Middle Men (LMM)**

Operate mainly in Metal waste collection. LMM Posses motorized transportation means (trucks) allowing them to collect/buy waste from PIWCs and, sometimes, from other settlements – mainly the ones where they have relatives.

Stakeholders within this group have been directly consulted during the course of the assignment.

### **Roma NGOs**

Roma NGOs have not been previously involved in incentives targeting the improvement of living and work conditions of Roma population in Skopje, and have played important role in that process. However, given the specification and proposed approach of the project, Consultant does not see an immediate need for extensive involvement of the Roma NGOs during the initial phase of the project. As the project concept develops/evolves, opportunities for cooperation with the project should be explored. Main objectives of these NGOs are to plead for the emancipation and improve the living standard of Roma; education of women and children, distribution of humanitarian aid. The latest activities of these organizations was related to legalization of 'wild' Roma settlements; infrastructure; self-organization of the Roma group for necessary activities; renovation of social facilities, distribution of humanitarian aid; survey and registration of displaced Roma from Kosovo; education of women and children.

Stakeholders within this group have not been directly consulted during the course of the assignment.

### **External Middle Men (EMM)**

Presented both by well established private companies, or un-registered individuals/informal groups of individuals operating in the recyclable waste management market in the country. Currently, their collection mechanisms are to a substantial extent dependant on buying the waste collected by IWCs. Any changes in this, which may impact commercial interests of EMM may be considered as a

hostile/competitive act that could result in tensions between IWCs (that previously were a part of EMM supply chain) and EMMs. However a re-design or complete change of current relationships between IWCs and EMM is required in order to facilitate the re-distribution of value added/harvested within the supply chain. It may be worthwhile considering the ways for reducing of dependence of IWCs upon EMM in favor of LMMs, anticipating that LMMs may thereby become involved in the process of local value generation and that may be ready to work together with PIWCs and EIWCs at local level on improving the living conditions, together with their neighbors and relatives. EMM are considered to become competitors of the social enterprise in foreseeable future. Some of External middle men are actually well established legal entities in recyclables market with which both Poor IWCs and Established IWCs run informal business relationships in the gray economy zone. During the course of this assignment, consultant did not have direct contacts with EMMs.

### **Small Traders**

Small traders, without a place of business, but with a truck or other motorized vehicle. They buy paper, plastic or metals from pickers, either loose or in bags or boxes. They earn money by knowing which materials are more valuable, removing non-recyclable parts, and selling them to a “scrap yard” that is one step higher in the chain, They add value by cleaning and separating materials, which they do at the entrance to the dump or landfill, in unused land, or elsewhere. Their vehicles are used to pick up materials from generators, and to transport materials in quantity to a junk shop for sale.

### **Small Junk Shops**

Small junk shops. These are micro-enterprises, often run by families. Usually junk shops have a fixed place of business but often no working permission. They usually specialize in one type of materials, which they buy from pickers and sell up the recycling chain, that is, into the formal commodities marketplace. Small junk shops are often located at or on the road to the landfill, or in the vicinity of the residential area. The most interesting thing about small junk shops is their extremely high need for working capital. This is because they have to pay cash to the pickers, who otherwise will not sell to them. But they are selling materials to larger industries which only pay net 30, 60, or in some cases net 90 days.

### **Medium and large junk shops**

Medium and large junk shops. These are larger, usually registered businesses that would be classified as those which belong to the formal commercial sector. They have some equipment, which is at least a platform scale and one piece of processing equipment: a low-cost baling machine for paper, chipping or flaking mill for plastics and a small crusher. for glass., The smaller ones have one owner-operator and the larger ones are industrial operations, processing tens and in some cases hundreds of tons per month.

## **3. Principles of work with the IWC's**

In the country the partnership with the informal waste collectors have been established around the following goals and principles:

- Improve working conditions, health and safety provisions, recognition for informal recyclers, and stabilize their livelihoods as recycling entrepreneurs
- Preserve or strengthen the positive impacts of informal recycling for host cities
- Improve resource efficiency and streamline marketing of secondary resources

**Recognition:** Accept the presence of the informal recycling sector (IWS), and recognize their role as the base of the recycling value chain. Informal recyclers are responsible for most of the materials that are captured, processed, and sold into the recycling value chain, and recognizing them is essential.

**Competence:** The IWS has the practical experience and knowledge to maximize recycling under local (market) conditions, and adapt quickly to new value chains and market opportunities. Cities that understand this will continue to benefit from informal activity.

**Participation:** Treat informal sector recyclers as subjects, not objects, of interventions. They have opinions, expertise, and experience. Acknowledge them as key stakeholders in the design, monitoring



and evaluation of recycling and valorization systems, and the definition of quality standards. Remember 'nothing about us without us'.

**Source separation:** Assume source separation is feasible, if well designed. Work with city authorities and informal recyclers to build on, or introduce, upstream separation of recyclables, organics, and residuals at the level of households or businesses.

**Find what is working:** Look for, analyze, and build on existing capture, processing, and marketing activities, rather than a) assuming that everything has to be built from scratch, or b) replacing existing informal systems with parallel formal ones. Work with the informal recyclers to collect data on both waste generation and recycling rates.

**Safe and dignified working conditions:** Bring insights and ambitions of informal recyclers together with global ideas of sound practice, to achieve practical, feasible, and context-sensitive improvements in environmental, health and safety working conditions of informal recyclers. Promote dignified working conditions along with improvements in productivity & earnings.

**Eliminating child labor:** Work with informal recyclers who are parents, and with their children, to ensure that children go to school, and that recycling activities by children under the legal age of adulthood in the country are constrained, supervised, reduced or eliminated.

**If it's working, don't fix it.** Give priority and intervene to improve marketability of difficult materials; to strengthen local markets; and where existing recycling processes are dangerous, polluting, or illegal.

**Maintain inclusivity in relation to all stakeholders:** Engage with local authorities, municipal associations, national governments, regional economic communities, and bilateral and multilateral global institutions, to evaluate, disseminate, and transfer sound practices of partnership with informal recyclers into public policy and legislation, and promote global recognition of the informal recycling sector.

#### 4. Factors influencing the integration of informal waste collectors

When considering the success factors for informal sector integration in solid waste management systems, it is important to distinguish between internal factors enabling informal workers to be active in solid waste management over a long period and factors that further the sustainable integration of the informal sector in official solid waste management systems. The primary characteristics of the informal sector is that even in the context unfavorable to their activity, informal waste collectors and recyclers remain active in waste management as long as they earn an income from it, no matter how small it is. But in a Development approach that attempts to strengthen informal sector integration in solid waste management, the objectives being pursued are a) to improve the working and income conditions of informal sector actors b) to give them the longest-term perspective possible as waste management actors. This requires minimum of official recognition and organization of waste collectors.

Integrating the informal waste sector depends on many factors. The four major enabling conditions relevant for promoting the integration process are: Integrating the informal waste sector depends on many factors. 1) Voice- The organization of informal waste collectors into membership- based bodies accountable to their members and the representation of these organizations in relevant policy making institutions. **Organization is precondition to integration** 2) Visibility- Official recognition of the economic contribution of informal sector workers, resulting from improved labor force and other economic statistics and from policy research. **The demand for integration has to be substantiated.** 3) Validity- Legal identity and formal recognition of informal sector workers and their membership-based organizations. **Integration has to be backed by political power.** 4) Viability- Integration has to be backed by political power. **Economic autonomy supports Integration.**

## 5. PPP and the Directive on Packaging and packaging waste

The main opportunities and economic niches for the informal waste collectors and their organizing are from the modernization of waste management through the implementation of the directive on packaging and packaging waste (The enabling environment), which enables additional funds for recycling purposes merely distributed through legal waste management channels. No informal collector will be able to use funds if they continue to function like they do now, they will still be the most important part of the recycling but still get the least from it. **The ministry of Environment should enforce full implementation the directive on packaging and managing packaging waste as a precondition in establishing an enabling environment for the Public Private partnership between the compliance schemes, the municipalities and the IWC's.**

In order to establish successful implementation of the model of collection and recycling, the Municipalities under cooperative effort between the Roma informal waste collectors, Municipalities, Public utility companies and compliance schemes will address the sustainability of the collection and recycling through inclusion of the informal sector into the formal solid waste management through inclusion of their IWC's social enterprise as a partner.

## 6. Mitigating the occupational health hazards

The work with IWC's should specifically support Roma informal waste collectors in their professional identities with different modes and types of training, capacity building, coaching, technical support, access to financing instruments, as well as facilitating changes in the enabling environment, including municipal policy making and public utility company practice, while at the same time working hard on the full implementation of the law on packaging and managing packaging waste.

Based on the extensive knowledge gained in the past three years through implementation of the Plastic Recycling Project and the implementation of the EIDHR project, and the situation of the informal waste collectors in the country we have come to a conclusion that integrating the informal collectors in the formal waste management system remains the need for capacity building and training in **general business practices for informal collectors**. Specific examples include basic financial and cost analysis, information as to registration and legal status, Access to finance, access to active labor measures, information about where a business can be located, environmental licenses and registration with ministry of environment, transport rules about vehicle conditions, axel weights and load coverage requirements, and the like.

This group of people are confronted with extremely hazardous working and living conditions. They generally lack sanitary services, health care and social benefits. Child labour is very frequent and life expectancy is very low. However besides the aim to improve social inclusion and protection there are environmental and economic arguments to integrate their work within the formal waste management system.

There is also a very great need for training in the **areas of social, institutional, and organizational knowledge**. Examples include practical knowledge, such as, **occupational health and safety**, vaccination, lobbying, use health institutions and use of the courts. Specific skills should also be subject of training such as conflict resolution, negotiation, innovation, documenting abuses, making complaints in relation to harassment.

Finally, there is a need for training in relation to skills related to **information and knowledge** in particular: what it is, where to get it, what use can be made of the library, municipal departments, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, publications, and the like.

The role of the Association of Informal waste collectors and MDC TI Net.is to develop the partnership and establish the cooperation under Public Private Partnership background among stakeholders.

The principles of work in this project should contribute to promoting the non-discrimination by addressing the root of the problem – inclusion of the informal waste collectors in the formal waste management scheme. Including the informal waste collectors into the formal waste management scheme will contribute towards their social inclusion, and as legally employed, will enable them with social rights. Nowadays, being outside the formal system, they are not registered and therefore not part of the social system. Many times children of the informal collectors instead of attending school are working together with their parents.

The EIDHR Project “Inclusion of informal waste collectors into the formal waste schemes in the country” is implemented by MDC-TI.Net.

Contacts:

MDC-Ti.Net

Address: Leninova 11, 1000 Skopje

T/F: +389 2 3246-794; 3246- 796

e-mail: [office@mdctinet.org.mk](mailto:office@mdctinet.org.mk)

[www.mdctinet.org.mk](http://www.mdctinet.org.mk)