

## MICS4 Fieldwork in Serbia



MICS team in the capital of Belgrade, Serbia

Serbia's capital Belgrade is defined in MICS as one of the three regions that cover the whole country. Three MICS teams, one of which works almost exclusively with the Roma population, were selected to interview all households in Belgrade. Recent political developments, heading the country towards market-oriented economy alongside with the adoption of EU standards and practices, influenced various socio-economic changes that reflect in the everyday lives of the citizens of Belgrade. Faster, more dynamic, more stressed-out lifestyle is emerging. After long working hours, people need to make their way through notoriously overcrowded Belgrade traffic in order to spend the remaining part of the day with their families. Not rarely, faced with the environment of progressively more expensive goods and services in the face of the global economic crisis, many will hurry to commit their time to part-time jobs in order to make sure the house budget does not collapse in the middle of the month. And since most of the members of our MICS teams in Belgrade say that they usually cannot find people at their homes before 17:00 hrs, the moment of getting

to your home in Belgrade is probably the very same moment you will encounter the members of our teams committed to interview the members of your household!

Refusals to take part in MICS are very frustrating for our interviewers. The day before writing this report I spent hours in traffic jams just to reach one enumeration circle in the elite district of Senjak. I have visited ten households with one team and did not get the opportunity to see an interview – namely, not a single member from any of the listed households was at home at the time of our visit. For the members of the Belgrade 1 team, the most frequently encountered problems in the fieldwork are related to citizens' mistrust towards interviewing. „Communication is usually not a problem when people readily open their door for us“, they say - but it is certainly not always the case that the door are readily opened.

Our MICS interviewers are well prepared to cope with such and similar situations. After a ten day training that took place in October on Divčibare, Serbia, they are accustomed not only with the details of questionnaires, interviewing and measurement procedures, but completely aware of the more common fieldwork related problems. The last two days of the training were dedicated to the complete simulation of urban and rural fieldwork. Immediately after in-class theoretical and practice work, our interviewers spent these last two days of training interviewing people from Mionica and the surrounding rural areas. The real fieldwork in Serbia started only a few days after the training, on November 1st, 2010. Belgrade is more difficult: the city is known for a notoriously low response rate in all survey studies, and the

MICS management team working at the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia were aware that additional steps are needed in order to assure that MICS 4 in Serbia meets the high standards of quality defined by UNICEF.

The communication campaign before the beginning of the fieldwork has certainly facilitated



**Photo:** MICS 4 poster in Roma settlement, Zrenjanin, Vojvodina, northern Serbia. The posters were printed in both Serbian and Roma languages for dissemination in Roma settlements across the Republic of Serbia.

access to households. The MICS management team and UNICEF prepared 8,600 letters that were sent out to all households selected for the current round of MICS in Serbia. This is the fourth MICS that takes part in the this country. Mr. Dragan Vukmirovic, the Director of the SORS, spoke about the importance of MICS on TV in the very beginning of the fieldwork, while many team supervisors, employees of the SORS, informed local media about MICS. Interviewers say that the media campaign was effective: wherever people remembered reading the letter, or hearing about MICS in other ways, the teams were accepted more readily and the cooperation was good.

Beyond immediate fieldwork experiences, members of our teams say that MICS has a special meaning for them. Two young members of Team 1 are both students of demography who believe they are gaining significant professional experience during this fieldwork. The team editor working with them says she is proud to take part in MICS. She also believes taking part in MICS to be a significant professional contribution to her career.

In more distant parts of Belgrade, MICS Team 16 faces quite different problems than their colleagues doing the urban fieldwork. They work almost exclusively with Roma population. Roma households encompass around 21% of the total MICS 4 sample in Serbia (1,800 Roma households out of the total of 8,600). Some Roma settlements in the region of Belgrade are situated in more or less urban areas, while others, like Mali Leskovac lack advanced sanitation, regular roads or electricity in spite of the fact that they are not situated far away from common areas of Belgrade like Karaburma.

The measurer and driver of Team 16 will remember this fieldwork as a valuable experience. He believes he learned a lot about Roma and that the immediate contact with them helped him to overcome some stereotypes he might have had about them and their culture. He remembers a visit to an Albanian-Roma household in Mali Leskovac who migrated there after the war in Kosovo in 1999. He was fascinated to find out a Muslim household with totally different traditions and understanding of the importance of social hierarchy than his own living nearby the urban area of the capital city of his country. His teammate, a young sociologist, notes how difficult it must be to be a Roma, faced with many stereotypes and prejudices on the behalf of people who surrounds you.



Roma girl in Mali Leskovac, Belgrade.

The editor working with the members of Team 16 sees her involvement in MICS 4 as valuable from another viewpoint. It took time for her to help the four people who never met each other before their training to start functioning as a real team, but at the end, she says it was a great personal experience. A young anthropologist working as an interviewer in this team, believes she learned a lot during the fieldwork with Roma. Roma people sometimes hesitate even to enter the communication with the team members, she recalls, but once the barrier falls, they are very open and ready to help.



Roma woman and her two children live in the household in Mali Leskovac, Belgrade, selected for MIC4.



Roma children leading the MICS 4 team to their household in Mali Leskovac, Belgrade.



Dragan Krstic, the MICS team supervisor and an experienced professional working with the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia for more than thirty years, helps to clarify the age of household members in a Roma settlement in Leskovac, southern Serbia.

Dragan Krstic, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia employee who supervises the fieldwork in the area of Leskovac, is often faced with aftereffects of the economic crisis during the MICS fieldwork. In the year marked by prominent effects of the economic crisis, members of many Roma households in the area migrated to the north of the country to work. Some members of Roma households cannot readily provide even some of the basic information needed for MICS, and Dragan often needs to put his decades of professional experience to help the interviewers and the editor in the field. He is very satisfied with the work of his team and proudly describes how they manage to resolve the problems they encounter.



MICS interview with a young woman in Kraljevo, southern Serbia.

The MICS team in Kraljevo, working under supervision of Jasmina Savic, faces many problems caused by the consequences of the recent earthquake. Kraljevo was struck by an earthquake of the magnitude of 5.3 degrees on 3rd November this year. The earthquake was felt across the country, even in the capital city of Belgrade, 175 km to the north. Only two people lost their lives in the earthquake, but the material damage in the city and the surrounding area is huge. In the time of our visit, the state of emergency is still formally declared, and help from all different parts of Serbia is still reaching Kraljevo.

"The MICS team worked under difficult conditions since the earthquake, causing severe material damage to many households, stroke only two days after the beginning of the fieldwork. Many families moved to safer locations due to the consequences of the earthquake. There were 500 small strokes after the earthquake of 3rd November. Some time ago, earth from a hill nearby slid to the main road during the teams' stay in the area and postponed their return to Kraljevo for hours", Jasmina explains.

Zvezdana Dimitrijevic-Jenovai, the supervisor of the MICS team from Novi Sad who cover the Roma settlements in the scope of MICS in the northern part of Serbia, describes her experience of taking part in MICS: "This was a unique experience for me because this was the first time I have entered Roma households and realized their living conditions. After this survey I have developed an even stronger belief that many families need help and education in order to be properly included in the society."

"The worst experience during the fieldwork for me was interviewing a Roma family who have a little girl who has been bitten to an ear by a rat, living in a place where people do not fade lights in the evening in the fear of rodents!", Zvezdana recalls. Usually, experiences with Roma children are beautiful: they are very curious and happy to meet people visiting their families, readily and friendly asking more questions that you would be able to answer, she adds.



Roma girl asleep. She lives in poor conditions in the Roma settlement in Zrenjanin, Vojvodina, northern Serbia; her parents reported her being bitten by a rat two weeks before our visit.

An impression of the entire MICS fieldwork teams is that people in rural areas are more responsive than those who live in the cities. Our interviewers have frequently reported on warm welcome in the Serbian villages. Members of teams working in Belgrade were also recalling beautiful experiences and working in nice atmosphere, but in the rural areas, where everything goes slower compared to the accelerated tempo of city life, people seem to be more curious, more open, and ready to share their time with our interviewers.

Finding young men (the population targeted by the Men of Age 15-29 Questionnaire) proved to be difficult. Interviewers had to visit many homes over and over again in order to meet men who spent most of their days working, sometimes far away from their homes, and mostly tired once they are finished with the daily routine.

In spite of many – mostly expected, predicted and discussed - fieldwork related problems, a bit of luck on the side of our teams came from the unexpectedly good weather conditions for the late autumn in Serbia. Due to this occasion, many teams rushed to complete the more remote and somewhat difficult to access enumeration circles in rural areas.

Currently, the Republic of Serbia has a level of understanding of the situation of children and women that relies mostly on the results obtained from the latest, third round of MICS, conducted in 2005, and published in 2007. In 2011, we will have the results of MICS 4, which now encompasses an additional questionnaire for young men. The efforts put in the quite complex MICS 4 fieldwork present an essential link in the chain of planning, preparations, actions and analyses that will enable us to develop a comprehensive picture of the development and needs of the youngest citizens of our country. We are thankful to our

MICS 4 fieldwork teams not only because of their professional and skilled approach to their job, but for their understanding of the essential importance of the contribution they are giving. And it seems that the awareness of that importance helped them overcome the difficulties and obstacles they were facing in the previous two months of fieldwork.



Water source in Roma settlement, Zrenjanin, Vojvodina, northern Serbia.

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