

# The Decade of Roma Inclusion

NON- ROMA GROUPS  
Focus Groups Discussion

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**SERBIA**

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For  
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## **SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

### **1. Situation in the country**

General dissatisfaction and pessimism concerning the situation in the country is noticeable. The absence of threats and dangers that existed during the Milosevic's regime is seen as the only positive aspect of the present situation. The main reason for the improvement of the situation is considered the shift of regime – the takeover of democratic authorities and improved international relations.

Negative aspects of the situation seem to be more evident and tangible: living standard is low, life is more difficult, there is uncertainty about getting a job, the majority of citizens are faced with existential problems. The main problem of the citizens of Serbia is unemployment, coupled with fear of losing a job, social insecurity. The main cause of unemployment is considered the bad state of the economy – there are no investments in the economy, it is stagnant, there are no plans for the rehabilitation and launch of production.

A positive attitude towards the EU accession is dominant. However, usually only benefits from European integrations are perceived, while the main conditions and tasks that Serbia has to fulfill (e.g. the extradition of war criminals to the Hague Tribunal) are perceived as imposed from abroad and unnecessary.

### **2. Government, policies and the country's resources**

As for the budget of Serbia, the situation is perceived as very bad in all aspects. The general attitude is that investments from the budget into all segments of the society should be higher. The priority areas, however, are considered the health system, education, economic growth, lower unemployment rate, and the rehabilitation of agriculture.

One half of the respondents think that there is need for more investments in Assistance for minority groups, other half have opinion that in this area additional investments are not necessary or even counterproductive.

### **3. National Identity and Attitudes towards Differences**

All respondents have positive perceptions of their own nation, which is typical for any self-perception. The Serbs are most often described as friendly, hospitable, relaxed, lively, sincere, honest, ready to forgive, fond of going out and having fun, with a rich history, proud.

However, when it comes to the issue of tolerance among the Serbs, Serbian respondents express different opinions: on the one hand, the Serbs are considered tolerant, open to everybody. On the other hand, especially young respondents say there is intolerance in Serbia, even discrimination against certain groups.

Regarding attitudes towards minorities, these attitudes vary from thoroughly understandable and supportiative to extremely racist.

### **4. Attitude towards the Roma**

The greatest problems of the Roma are considered the following ones:

- **Poverty**
- **Unemployment**
- **Lack of education**
- **Hygiene, dirtiness, illnesses**
- **Housing issues**
- **Discrimination, rejection from the society**

However, the Roma are perceived as most responsible for the majority of these problems – because of the way of life they have chosen, they are doomed to live in poverty. A different attitude prevails only in the younger educated group from Belgrade. They believe the poverty of the Roma is a vicious circle from which is difficult to get out as long as their level of education and low employment rate are not improved.

A few participants in the groups express terrifying intolerance towards the Roma, which is not caused by differences in the manner of living, educational level or interests, but pure racial differences (e.g. the color of the skin). The greater number of respondents, however, does not support such a racist attitude, but they often state they feel repulsion towards the Roma because of their manner of living: begging, bad hygiene, no manners and general lack of education.

The perception of the characteristics of the Roma community is often not the same as the perceptions of personal experience with the Roma. Personal experience can be either positive or negative, but the Roma community is generally seen to have very negative characteristics – the Roma are perceived as uneducated, lazy, dirty, poor, mischievous and as thieves. Of somewhat positive characteristics their unity and lively character are seen.

When analyzing the social distance towards the Roma (immagination of different type of contact with typical Roma person), it is seen that even in a superficial contact – encounter in the street or a shop, a smaller number of respondents show unease, fear and even hostility. A negative attitude towards working with the Roma is frequent.

On the other hand, answering on the question if there is discrimination against the Roma in Serbia, respondents most often express the opinion that there is no discrimination; only a small number of respondents think different.

## 5. The Government and the Roma

Answering the question whether the Roma need more help, the majority of respondents give negative answers. The most frequently stated answers are the following: *they already receive enough help, they have more money than us, there are no effects, they themselves are to blame for their poverty, they can become a threat to us if granted more rights...*

However the majority of respondents agree that that it would be best if the Roma were integrated into the community. Different attitudes are rooted in such an opinion: some respondents think that no one should live in such bad conditions as the Roma, while others believe that if the Roma lived separately, they could become a threat to Serbia one day.

The general attitude is that if the Roma integrated into the society (this refers to regular education, better personal hygiene and the culture of housing), both sides would benefit. The change in mentality and the system of life values of Roma population is considered a priority for successful integration of the Roma into the society. But some participants thought that the attitudes of Non Roma population need to be changed also.

The highest instances of government are considered responsible and authorized for launching initiatives for Roma integration. The local authorities are perceived as dependent on the republic authorities, so participants do not expect much from them. Only a smaller number of respondents say that citizens themselves could help the Roma a lot by preventing discrimination.

However, the majority of respondents say that the Roma themselves show no interest in

**being integrated, while the reasons for the lack of motivation are found in their inactivity and adaptability to “living in a ghetto”.**

## **6. The Decade of the Roma**

Citizens are not familiar with help offered to the Roma so far. According to them, the main actions that should be undertaken concerning help to the Roma community are in the field of education, solution of housing issues and improvement of hygiene.

No respondent is familiar with the action of the Decade of the Roma. The first reactions to the information about the Decade are different. There are three main attitudes:

- 1. Complete support to such activities**
- 2. Lack of interest for similar activities (If there was a referendum and they had to vote yes or no to this effort, they would not vote at all)**
- 3. Opposition to such an idea – this attitude was the least dominant**

Different causes of the lack of interest (attitude no.2) have been perceived:

- *It is first important to help the majority – the Serbs, and then to solve the issues concerning the minorities;*
- *No investments can bring about the change of living manner of the Roma, because they are used to living in such a way and, even more, they want to live like that;*
- *Not all Roma are poor, and help should not be distributed on the national grounds;*
- *In general terms, the Roma are not poor, they just spend the money from begging and other activities in a different way;*
- *The Decade will not bring about the improvement in the life of the Roma, because corruption is high, both in the structures of the power and Roma organizations.*

Respondents who support the Decade of the Roma, consider it as the best way to solve the problem of the poorest segment of our society.

Respondents who are against the Decade of the Roma, consider it bad for Serbia because it create danger from extreme strengthening of minority groups and fuelling their separatist tendencies.

EUR 1-2 million a year worth investments within the Decade are perceived as a small sum of money, while EUR 10-20 million a year worth investments seem to be huge.

Only the younger educated group from Belgrade is aware of the participation of ordinary citizens in help to the Roma. Respondents from other groups do not mention any role of citizens in this process or they often state humanitarian aid (*Nis, younger: "What can citizens do? If an activity is carried out, we ourselves should see how much we can offer, in the sense of a humanitarian activity; Belgrade, younger: "We ourselves should think of what to do and how to do it. We should support them so that they succeed in that."*).

However, almost all respondents think that investments within the Decade of the Roma cannot do harm to our country. The underlying argument is that every capital that comes in the country is welcome. Only the younger group from Belgrade states reasons why the Decade would be beneficial for our country: the eradication of prejudices, improvement of the living standard, higher level of culture.

## **7. Ambassadors of Change: Voices to Trust**

The majority of respondents are not familiar with any eminent Roma leader or Roma organization.

The most often mentioned persons who can be reliable and convincing proponents of the

**Roma cause within the Decade of the Roma are the following: Rasim Ljajic (Minister for ethnic minority rights), famous sportsmen such as Vlade Divac, popular persons of the Roma nationality such as Dzej (singer), as well as public persons who have dealt with the Roma, such as Emir Kusturica (movie director).**

## **8. Message Concepts**

**The most favorably assessed statements are those concerning the equality of all people – the statements which emphasize that all people should have equal chances to live better and take effort from prosperity in Serbia (statements 4, 5 and 8).**

**The least favorable assessed statements are 3 and 6: the statement concerning the pure economic benefit from solving the Roma problem, as well as the explicit statement about the fact that shameful discrimination exists in Serbia.**

**The participants generally had objections that all the statements were formulated in such way that they include discrimination against the Roma in Serbia, therefore, as pointed out before, most of the participants do not approve of them.**

## **9. Conclusion**

**The attitude towards the Roma is full of inconsistencies and contradictions – e.g. on the one hand, it is believed that the Roma shouldn't be helped, and on the other, the Roma should be helped to integrate in a better way, because both sides will benefit from that. At the same time, discriminatory tendencies have been noticed, even racist statements, while on the other hand, the problem of discrimination is not even recognized, and the Roma are considered the only ones responsible for their position. All this speaks in favor of the fact that awareness of the Roma issue is at a very low level in Serbia.**

**Attitude towards the Decade of the Roma vary from positive to negative. The negative attitude towards investments into the Roma stems mostly from the perception of personal poverty and misery, but also from the negative attitude towards the Roma. The opinion of the majority of respondents is that if everyone in the country lives badly, investments should be distributed either on an equal basis or first to the Serbs who are the majority nation, and then to other national minorities.**

**The only group that differs in opinions is the younger educated group from Belgrade. This group shows considerably better understanding of the Roma situation, being able to perceive the problems from a wider perspective.**

## Methodology

### TYPE OF RESEARCH

Qualitative research, focus group discussion.

### PROCEDURE - TECHNIQUE

Discussion in focus groups (one of the methods of qualitative research) last approximately from 90 to 120 minutes, they are facilitated by trained moderator (psychologist), and they include from 6 to 10 participants. This techniques makes possible deeper understanding of behavior, attitudes, motives, etc, as well as the collection of a big number of information in a relatively short period of time.

*Results of discussions in focus groups can not be generalized to population, because the sample is too small.*

Taking into consideration that the participants are selected according to previously chosen criteria, opinions expressed in the focus groups should be considered typical for that segment of population only.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- ✓ To ascertain the attitudes of the citizens towards the Roma national minority and the action "The Decade of Roma Inclusion"

### Specification of objectives:

1. Perception of the direction in which the country is heading today: defining the main problems and positive trends;
2. Attitudes towards alignment with the European Union;
3. Perception of own national identity;
4. Perception of identity of the Roma national minority: characteristics, attitude of the majority population towards the Roma;
5. Attitude towards integration of Roma into society;
6. Attitude towards the action "The Decade of Roma Inclusion"
7. Testing of messages for promotion of "The Decade of Roma Inclusion"

### PARTICIPANTS

A total of 16 respondents participated in focus group discussions. They were divided into 2 groups, and structure of the groups according to age, education, income and place of residence is presented below:

	Age range	Sex	Education level	Income	City
<b>FGD1</b>	18 - 30	Mixed sex	Secondary school	Average	Novi Sad
<b>FGD2</b>	18 - 30	Mixed sex	Secondary school	Average	Niš
<b>FGD3</b>	31 - 60	Mixed sex	Secondary/lower	Average/low	Niš
<b>FGD4</b>	31 - 60	Mixed sex	Secondary school	Average	Belgrade
<b>FGD5</b>	18 - 30	Mixed sex	College/ University	Higher	Belgrade

## **Screening requirements**

Participants in focus group discussions were recruited by quasi random method – the interviewers find the respondents according to screening questionnaire, but the sample can not be considered as representative for population

- Neither participants, nor their close relatives and friends are employed in the following areas: advertising, market research, marketing, journalism, psychology
- Participants have not lately (during the past 12 months) participated in any discussion group, interview, or any other form of market research;
- Participants do not know each other;
- Participants are aged from 18 to 30 that is, from 31 to 60 years
- Participants have college/university education (higher income) or secondary education (average income)
- Participants are the residents of urban territory of Novi Sad, Belgrade and Niš

## SURVEY RESULTS

### 1. Situation in the country

- « **Serbia is moving backwards** »

One can notice **general disappointment and pessimism concerning the situation in the country**. Majority of the participants, average citizens of Serbia, had high hopes that democratic changes in the country in 2000 will also bring sudden sharp prosperity and the improvement of life in the country. When it did not take place, **new authorities, following the Slobodan Milosevic's regime are viewed in the same way, maybe even worse**, because they are being accused of being corrupted, of making false promises, lack of interests for the problems of citizens...Asked „Where Serbia is heading?“, the most frequent replay was „Backwards, or standing still“.

*Niš, older: »I am very disappointed. When the regime was ousted in 2000, I hoped that everything will be better, however I am getting the impression now that everything just came back as it was before, authorities and corruption. Only the names are changed.«*

*Niš, younger: » We are standing still. Nothing functions. The economy is standing still. They make false promises.«*

*Novi Sad, younger: »We are going backwards.«*

Only, in the group of **younger more educated people from Belgrade a somewhat more positive attitude is being noticed** and better understanding of current problems in the country. **General country's direction is being viewed as transitional direction for the better**, although the process is very slow and hardly visible.

*Belgrade, older: » I think we live worse than we lived, but each transition is difficult. The fact that we live worse is unavoidable.«*

*Belgrade, younger: » Slow, but certain, going forward.«*

#### Good aspects

- **Perceived as positive aspects of current situation are only the absence of threats and dangers which existed during Milosevic's regime. Positive aspects of the situation without comparing it to the 90s - there are almost none.**

Only when participants were asked to point out positive elements of current situation, they underlined various aspects of higher safety concerning citizens: *no war, no inflation, no mobilization, no sanctions, no threats, no bombing, no shortages, no queues.*

*Belgrade, older: » The good thing is there are far more goods on the market than it used to be. No shortages.«*

*Niš, younger: » No inflation. We finished wars. No more air raids.«*

*Niš, older: »There are less threats, and international acknowledgment. Attitude of the world towards us has changed.«*

As major **reason for the improvement of the situation** respondents see the shift of regime – **the takeover of democratic authorities and better relations with the world**. Citizens observe that



they also played important role in those changes – democratic government seized the power in the elections by the will of citizens.

*Belgrade, older: » Some order is beginning to get hold of in the country. We the citizens deserve credits for that. We voted for it.»*

Again it is easy to observe the difference between **younger more educated group in Belgrade** and all the other groups: in this group situation is viewed from a wider perspective, **they also notice positive developments in interior politics and Serbia's commitment to the world. One of the opinions in the group is that living standard has been raised a bit**, while other groups held completely opposite views on the issue.

*Belgrade, younger: » Less corruption in the government – We are committed to the world mostly in the sense of passing systematic and structural laws, but we still do not see the effects of those, but they are surely a basis for our institutions to open.»*

*Belgrade, younger: » Standard has been raised a bit – I think that in general people live a little bit better, strictly in the sense of purchasing power, traveling. Political changes following the year of are the reason for that.»*

Also, in other cities (Nis and Novi Sad) **younger groups have showed more willingness than the older ones to talk of positive aspects of current situation.**

*Novi Sad, younger: »I was born in a small town, in the country that has been neglected earlier, but now the situation has moved forward. I think politics itself influences the whole thing.»*

*Novi Sad, younger: »There are positive movements in the town, new buildings. So, there is money for building construction and progress. The country has mended its contacts with Europe.»*

### **Bad aspects**

- **Bad sides of current situation are much closer and much more tangible – low standard of living life is more difficult, higher insecurity concerning jobs and most of the citizens face serious existential problems.**

*Niš, older : »I think I live much harder now, you can feel it, no matter that the Dinar stands still, purchase power has been reduced. There is nothing that we can earn, gain nor save.»*

- **Number 1 problem in the country is unemployment**

**The major problem of the citizens in Serbia**, both personal, and the perceived problems of the whole country, **is unemployment, fear of losing a job, social insecurity.** Dismissals are more frequent every day, social programs for endangered families almost do not exist. Also, there is no hope that the situation will improve in the future, because one cannot see positive developments in the area of economy and opening of new jobs plan.

*Niš, younger: » Employment rate is really high, because the country has less and less money. Everything stopped, economy, trade, no import. Many people lose their jobs.»*

*Niš, older: »The worst thing is the fear of losing job. You constantly hear that this or that firm went bankruptcy and we still do not have social policy.»*

**Difficult economic situation – not enough investments in economy, the economy standing still, no plans for reconstruction and launching production** is perceived as the major reason for unemployment.

*Niš, older : »Unemployment (its cause:) Because many firms were closed down. The companies have been closed down because of illegal labor in order to be sold later on for nothing.. They are being sold to some directors.»*

Major causes for such a difficult situation in economy:

- Long-standing lack of investments in economy
- corruption
- privatization
- disrespect of laws by those who are responsible for privatization
- politicians are led only by their personal interests and motives to stay in power

#### **Attitudes toward privatisation as one of the main aspects of our transitional period**

Different attitudes have been noticed concerning **privatization**. On one side, **there is a positive orientation towards the process itself** (it is a necessity) , **but on the point of view that privatization in Serbia has not been enforced properly** (corruption, factories are being sold at below cost...)

On the other hand, a frequent attitude, especially among older participants from Nis and Novi Sad, was that privatization is not necessary, that state-owned firms may be renovated and work in the interest of all citizens. Private business is being connected with exploiting relation towards workers, with dismissals from work and poverty. Also, there is fear of losing one's identity and the state's sovereignty.

Also, they are of the opinion that, **because unsuccessful way of running the privatization process, profitable factories have been put up for sale**, although they could make profit even without the change of the owners, **while the companies which are on the verge of existence (bankruptcy), with whole cities depending on them such as („Zastava“ in Kragujevac, Bor Copper Mine, Electronic Industry Nis, Krusik in Krusevac...)** **are not even mentioned in the plans for privatization.**

*Belgrade, younger: » All foreign investments will get there where there is a good factory, and the cities like Bor will 'fade away' because there are no factories.»*

*Niš, younger : » Privatization – Those who buy a factory just want cheap labor force, no investments in the prosperity of the state.»*

**Among other problems,** there are the following:

- **Problems in health care system**
- **The country (villages) neglected**
- **Centralized authority** – all financial assets pouring down to Belgrade,
- **Bad judiciary**
- **Corruption**

*Novi Sad, younger: »Health care system is the biggest problem in my opinion. One must pay a lot of money just to be seen by a doctor. Doctors are being poorly paid and they know that they can take because everybody needs a doctor.»*

*Belgrade, older: » I would not agree that standard has been raised, maybe in Belgrade, because everything comes down to Belgrade.»*

*Belgrade, older: » The negligence of villages. Our general policy is responsible, from Broz onward.»*

*Belgrade, older: » Corruption everywhere, starting from butchers to medical doctors. Authorities are responsible for this as well. Nobody complies with the law.»*

#### **Attitudes toward joining the EU**

- **Positive attitude towards EU association is dominant**

The attitude towards joining the European Union is still mildly positive. However, **Mainly advantages from European integrations are being perceived and disadvantages are not so often mentioned.** Conditions and tasks that Serbia on that road has to tackle (for example, the extradition of war criminals to The Hague Tribunal) are being viewed as imposed from outside and unnecessary (more observable in older groups). Older participants, also, show a higher level of fear and concern in relation to EU integrations.

### Positive and negative sides of the EU association



#### Positive side:

- ✓ **The possibility to travel** (*getting visas, better communication with the surrounding countries*)
- ✓ **Improvement of standard** (*influx of foreign capital, credits, loans, launching of production*)
- ✓ **Sorting things out in the country** (*the passing and complying with the laws, setting up of certain standards*)

#### Negative sides

- ✓ **The loss of national identity**
- ✓ **We will become cheap labor force**
- ✓ **Selling out of the country as a whole** (*colonial position where all firms will be sold out*)
- ✓ **The prices will go high** (*adjustment with the EU prices*)
- ✓ **Open market** (*only the strongest remain*).

## 2. Government, policies and the country's resources

What happens to Serbia's budget money is a puzzle to the most of the participants, typical Serbian citizens. In that sense, it is no wonder that citizens **do not see enough benefits for themselves in investing in the budget of Serbia.**

The only known funds coming from the Budget are health department, education and pension funds. Having in mind that, according to the view of participants, the situation in these areas is disastrous, general attitude is that **budget investments should be higher in general, by all items**, e.g. the problem is not in bad distribution of Budget resources, but in lack of money in the Budget. Also, the overall opinion is that there is high level of corruption.

*Belgrade, younger: » Even if we want we cannot spend money on what we want, because the Budget is pretty restrictive, economic appropriations have been reduced, we are in debts, our country simply has no money.»*

*Novi Sad, younger: »I think only those in power has something out of it the way money has been distributed, because they have deep pockets. You can distribute that money any way you like, some will steal it anyhow.»*

- **Serbia's Budget – priority areas are health care system, agriculture, unemployment**

Although general attitude is that in all areas situation is rather difficult, **participants singled out as priority areas the health care system, education, economic growth and stamping out of unemployment and revival of agriculture.»**

*Niš, younger : » More money to be invested in health care system, agriculture.» Wherever you go in Nis you cannot find medicines, and that is why new private pharmacies are being opened where we must pay more.»*

*Niš, younger : » I think education needs help the most. A poll showed that judging by the level of knowledge we are second from the last. Definitively, professors and teachers are not interested in working with students. Money should be invested in the right way, schools to modernize, to buy computers.»*

- **The need for lower investments** has been mentioned in only several areas:
    1. To attract foreign capital (*mentioned as the reasons: the lost of national identity, cheap labor force...*)
    2. Fight against corruption in the authorities (*corruption is so wide phenomenon at all levels so the money for its stamping out would end up in wrong places*)
    3. Environment
    4. The help to minorities such as the Roma
- } The area of activity of more developed countries where there are no existential problems. Not the areas of life value.

*Niš, older : »For the Roma and environment less money to be assigned for. The Roma learn at mother's knee bad way of life, they collect card boxes and make some money with it. They got used to it. It is too much to put aside that money for the Roma.»*

*Belgrade, younger: » Helping minority groups – I think enough investments go there. I do not see the reason why to invest more, not to say that we have other problems.»*

As you can see from the table below, **one half of the respondents think that there is need for more investments in Help to minority groups, other half have opinion that in this area additional**

**investments are not necessary or even counterproductive.** "Help to minority groups – I think the existing investments are sufficient. I see no reason for additional investments, we have another problems as well."

Table 1. Government spending (no. of answers)

	More Resources	Fewer Resources	About the amount
1. Agriculture and rural development			
2. Health			
3. Infrastructure (roads, transport, bridges)			
4. Attracting foreign investment to our country			
5. Services for the poor			
6. Environmental protection			
<b>7. Assistance for minority groups (as the Roma)</b>			
8. Education			
9. Governance (corruption)			
10. Economic growth			
11. Employment (particularly for our youth)			

### 3. National Identity and attitudes toward differences

- **Serbs – self-perception : hospitable, heartfelt and relaxed**

Typical for perception of one's own nation, with all participants, **prevail positive features. Serbs are most often described as: companionable, hospitable, relaxed, cheerful, honest, sincere, inclined to forgive, to have good time to enjoy, with very rich history, proud.** In that sense, spending inclinations is perceived as a positive feature, the opposite to be stingy (and not as prodigality).

Some negative features, **like laziness** are also mentioned, **but they have been attributed to outer factors – communist regime and centuries under occupation of Ottoman Empire.**

*Belgrade, younger: » We can enjoy life, everybody envy us being more relaxed than others.» "We are joyful aside all problems.»*

*Belgrade, older: » We forget some things in no time and forgive in no time. We do not remember those who wronged us, we accept everybody wholeheartedly.»*

*Belgrade, younger: » We have the most interesting history, only a majority of people here is not aware of it.»*

*Novi Sad, younger: » We have the word obstinacy in our vocabulary. We like to be spiteful, to destroy ourselves to keep our reputation.»*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Frenchmen and Englishmen they put aside a lot. As for us as long as we have enough to spend we spend and when do not have we do not have..» Serbs as nation are not lazy. The regime has always taught us 'learn in order not to work, not the other way around'.»*

- **Are the Serbs a tolerant nation? – self-perception: different views**

Concerning tolerance and Serbs, opposite views have been pointed out, a more or less equally represented among participants.

**1. On one side, Serbs are being perceived as tolerant, opened to all, "even too much opened".** Within this point of view there were opinions that, **even in the case there is intolerance, it has been provoked by historical injustices** in the region.

*Niš, older : »We are very tolerant, nation as nation has nothing against anyone who lives here.»*

*Belgrade, older: » I think that we just talk we are not tolerant but in fact we are. There is no place like Belgrade anywhere in the world, it accepted everybody, never rejected a soul.»*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Other nations, Moslems, Croats, are Serbs converted to Catholics. We have nothing against an Englishman, but we have something against Croat because of Jasenovac and Velika Gradiska and ethnic Albanian because he burned down our churches. We are not in general intolerant, we just have our reasons.»*

**2. On the other hand, especially among younger respondents, there is an opinion that significant intolerance takes place in Serbia, even discrimination.** High level of awareness of this social problem was the most characteristic for younger educated group from Belgrade. **Causes of intolerance** in Serbia have been seen **in poor living conditions of citizens,** where everybody is mainly focused on his/her personal problems, **but also in upbringing, where children from early age are being taught to be distrustful to other nations,** and in general to differences.

*Niš, younger : » I think we are not tolerant. It is not general, but there are individuals who are racists. They do not like other nations. For example, attitude towards the Roma, in any situations,*

*in some institutions where asking for help. That is probably because of the times we are living in, we are all more or less nervous. No one wants to help..»*

*Niš, younger : » There is that hatred because since early childhood we are aware of that division - we are of Orthodox faith, they are Catholics, we are Serbs - they are Moslems. So, ever since from early childhood we have been holding that grunge against differences.»*

*Belgrade, younger: » We are not tolerant at all. People of different faith make us crazy, also people of different sexual orientation. It is normal thing for Roma to be segregated in schools and all that comes from a family. We always attach something negative with some nation.»*

- **Relation towards minorities**

Serbia is perceived as **multinational country**. Participants of the focus groups express the opinion that a diversity of nationalities and minorities lives in Serbia. What has also been perceived is **fear from other nationality groups** – they are being viewed as well organized, united, enjoying wide variety of rights in relation to the country's majority people. This fear was most obvious in groups from Novi Sad (Novi Sad is the city in Vojvodina region which is the most multiethnic part of Serbia).

*Novi Sad, younger: »We are multinational country. There are at least 40 percent of minorities. We do not make any differences. Minorities here have everything, including schools. IN Hungary they do not want to talk to us although they know Serbian. We treat Croats much better than they treat us. Minorities have enjoyed much more rights than Serbs over there.»*

*Belgrade, older: » I think they have been holding extremely well, in the sense they have their holidays to mark, they gather for certain occasions. Only Guca is something purely Serbian thing, something ours. I am really of Serbian blood and think that those national minorities have been really well connected with the country of their origins. They sometimes enjoy far more rights that we do. They have their own television, radio stations, language, culture.»*

However, again **more observable among younger participants**, different opinions appeared, including **criticism of Serbia's intolerance** – some said they did not have negative attitude towards other nations, but they were aware that those attitudes and opinions prevail.

*Novi Sad, younger: » I do not mind a thing, I have a lot of friends and Rumanians, even Roma people in my village down there. I often have arguments with my friends who do not like Croats, I do not see it that way, all people are the same to me.»*

Unfortunately, **real extreme, entirely racist attitudes**, have been heard as well (but just from a few participants).

*Novi Sad, younger: »I have nothing against refugees, because a refugee he is a Serb and I would like there are even more of them here. For some minorities I would like not to exist at all, like Moslems, they stink, they have like cube-like heads. You can tell ethnic Albanian the moment you see him. I was traveling on a Novi Panzer bus once and the guy who came asking me to show him ticket he was stinking badly of lamb-meat.»*



## 4. Attitude toward the Roma

- **The following problems were singled out as the major problems that Roma people are faced with:**
  - **Poverty**
  - **Unemployment**
  - **Lack of education**
  - **Hygiene, dirtiness, diseases**
  - **Housing problem**
  - **Discrimination, rejection by the society**

For majority of these problems **the Roma themselves are perceived as the most responsible** – by the way of the life they lead they are condemned to live in misery.

Even when it comes to discrimination, especially emphasized among young groups, the responsibility lies with the Roma themselves – bz the opinion of participant, Roma people do not want to integrate themselves, leading the life they used to, which separates them from other peoples, alienating others against them.

### **Majority of participants believe that the Roma are only to blame for being poor**

The Roma national features have been emphasized as the most common cause of their poverty, according to participants : **lazy, not used to work, live from one day to the next.**

*Belgrade, older: » They are healthy, sane and don't want to work, they are used to be joyous and cheerful. What is more important to them is to live today, not thinking of what tomorrow brings.»*

Some participants in each group, but more in younger educated group in Belgrade, had different attitude – **the poverty of the Roma is a vicious circle you cannot break out of it as long as there is a low level of education and employment among Roma population.**

*Belgrade, older: » Their features are lack of education and begging. And they think differently until somebody hit them on the head.»*

- **The issue of discrimination – most frequently there is an antagonism toward the Roma because of the way of life they lead**

**A Few respondents mentioned horrifying examples of hostility towards the Roma**, not caused by differences in the way of life, education or interests, but simply by the existing differences (for example – the skin color).

*Novi Sad, younger: »My sister she knew a couple – she was a Gypsy, he was a Serb. Everybody treated her differently. They think right away that she is dirty, but she was an OK woman. He was disowned by his family because he married a Gypsy woman. He does not talk any more with his parents. She is really normal and dressed up, she finished high school and she works, only you can tell she is a Gypsy by her skin color. You can immediately tell she is a Gypsy. That woman has really beautiful children, but as growing older her complexion becomes darker. » (Another respondent) »I would also disown him. I would go crazy to hear that my daughter is dating a Gypsy.»*



*Novi Sad, younger: »I do not know if I would dare to forbid my daughter to date a Gypsy, but it would be stupid to raise a grandchild that looks alike that grandfather who begs on the street.«*

*Niš, older : »There is that smell, kiss a Roma man and you yourself will feel it.«*

**A greater number of respondents do not support these racist attitudes, but they often state they feel repulsion towards the Roma because of their way of living: begging, no hygiene, no manners and lack of education.** The manner of living of the majority of the Roma, and not their inborn characteristics is stated as the main reason for not establishing contact with the representatives of this group. The majority of these respondents also mention their positive experience with certain Romani persons at work, in school, the place of residence... emphasizing that the majority of the Roma live in an unacceptable manner which instills repulsion.

*Nis, older: "They have nothing which might draw me into socializing with them, they lack hygiene, education, manners. If I want to be liked by someone and to be someone's friend, I will change my behavior in order to attract that person. They have to put effort and change."*

- **General view of the Roma vs. Personal experience with the Roma**

**General perception of the Roma as a community often does not coincide with the perception as a result of personal experience with the Roma.** Personal experience is far more often a positive one. Some participants who expressed rather negative attitudes toward the Roma in general (linking the description of the Roma community to the Roma living in Roma settlements), they said that **the Roma they knew cannot be described in those terms** (they live mostly in houses or buildings, go to school, work, have lesser number of children, have certain hygienic standards etc.)

Table2. Most frequent features of the Roma communities and the Roma they had personal experience with

The most frequent features of the Roma communities	No. of answers	The most frequent features of the Roma they had personal experience with	No. of answers
No houses	2	A thief	3
Easy-going people, marry, optimistic	7	Junkie	2
Very capable	2	Homeless	1
Uneducated	15	OK, normal	3
Lazy, inclined not to work	12	Hard working	7
Disorganized	3	Different	1
Pick-pocketers, thieves, swindlers	9	Friendly	7
Indolent	3	Student, intelligent, educated	7
"Probably there are some of them who are good"	1	Lazy	4
Aggressive, violent, pestering	4	Dirty, sloppy, no hygiene	6
Dirty, no hygiene, sloppy	14	Marry, funny	10
United	6	We do not know any	2
Unemployed	2	Uneducated	4
Uncultured, insolent	6	Rude	1
Poor	14	Cultural	1
		Clean	2
		Stubborn	2

		Does not take care of the children, family disputes, alcoholics	3
		Good parent, good friend	4
		Honest	4
		Liar	1
		Courageous, proud	2
		Rich	1
		Inventive	4
		Have many children	1
		Modest	1
		Poor	2

Looking at the table, the first thing to notice are the strikingly different features which appear in description of the Roma with whom there was personal interaction - here we have different both positive and negative features. Also, some respondents said that they had not had any close contact with the Roma, did not know closely any Roma, so they cannot write down their features (although the features of the Roma community were clearly listed).

- **There are clear anti-Roma prejudices**

However, when describing the Roma communities there were, as a rule, three or four features that we can pretty easily call stereotypes about the Roma community. **The Roma people are being generally appraised as uneducated, lazy, dirty, poor, swindlers and thieves.** Among some more positive features, the following have been underlined - **unity and their cheerful character.** However, the unity as a feature appears both in positive and negative context – it is being perceived as a menace as well (“they are very united, have respect for their language, do not want to talk in Serbian only in Gypsy language”), but as a positive feature as well („they help each other a lot”).

Bellow we have listed some typical statements of the respondents in order to grasp more clearly the attitudes towards the Roma:

**Typical statements on Roma community:**

*Niš, older :* »Movies telling story about Gypsies who won Oscar award. They are described in those movies as they really are – rude, uncultured, like to fight, like drinking.»

*Niš, older :* »There are Roma in my neighborhood. I think they are really lazy, like to be marry, to drink and then arguments break out. They don't take care of their children at all, send them to beg on the streets just that they can have to drink.»

*Novi Sad, younger:* »They are incredibly lazy, just wait for something to fall from the sky. We will work hardly and they wait to get something from us just because the way they look. They are really dirty. And they are incredible swindlers..»

*Novi Sad, younger:* »Chocolate, easy-going people and inventive. Not greedy, live from one day to the next. They want to earn money in the most simplest way possible.»

**Typical statements about the Roma they know personally:**

*Niš, older :* »There is a Roma family in my building, I am really astonished – clean, cultural, civilized.

*Sometimes when pass me on the street as we are the Gypsies not them..»*

*Niš, younger : » I know one who graduated School of Medicine with 9.3 average grade, he married my friend's sister, I never watched at him as a Roma man. The impression is more strong after I see a Roma on the street, this one is a rare example..»*

*Niš, older : »They steal, I have personal experience, they stole a wallet from me on the open market. I believe there are good Roma people, but maybe in my opinion 10 or 20 percent and but far higher percent only makes problems.»*

*Niš, older : »The Roma people are very good friends. It is just a prejudice that they are dirty. A woman washed a coffee cup five time sin order for me to see it is being well washed. I had neighbors, when you go to see them they always open a new bottle of juice, to show to you it is not dirty. Who ever Gypsy's house I came there were extremely nice.»*

- **Contacts with the Roma**

When we asked respondents to tell us their interactions with the Roma, there were all kinds of interactions – from utterly negative to utmost positive. Nevertheless, based on what some respondents said, we can draw a conclusion ( as we supposed it would be) that individual contacts were not the only determinative to the attitude about the group – meaning, not even extremely bad experiences could led to the change to the attitudes about the Roma, but also extremely good ones. All this speaks in favor of the fact that **the attitude towards the Roma is much deeper and depends on upbringing and the general system of values that exists in the society.**

**Bad example experience: Assault on daughter** - *Belgrade, older: » My little daughter when coming back from school some Gypsy kids gathered and wanted to touch her, she came back in tears. I was really angry, I reacted angrily, I found those Gypsies. It has not changed my attitude towards the Gypsies, those are just individual excesses and children of that age.*

**The example of good experience: Nice neighbors** - *Niš, older : »I have neither better nor worse opinion of the Roma after my neighbors. They are very clean but I avoid talking to them. It is somehow an awful thing to do. They stink, have a kind of a smell.*

- **Social distance**

Further on, we wanted to **see which associations are connected to imaginations of interaction situations with the Roma.** For that purpose we used gradual **method, known as social distance measuring** : first we asked participants to try to imagine shallow interactions with Roma with no deep personal involvement, and gradually we rais the level of closeness.

### **In the street, in a store**

In most shallow superficial contact, in the street, in a store, **majority of participants show indifference towards the Roma.**

Nevertheless, some participants show **fear** even at this lowest level, **being uncomfortable, even hostile.**

*Belgrade, younger: » It gets on my nerves when they bang on my window car to give them some money. They are boring when you do not give them. Or when they enter a tram with accordion.»*

*Niš, older : »I have nothing against that they live here if they will not touch me.».*

*Niš, younger : » When I see him that ugly, looking horribly dirty, I am sick that minute. You enter a store and he stinks right in front of you.»*

## **In the building, neighborhood**

One gets the impression **that perception of generally low hygienic conditions is one of the factors determining the attitudes towards the Roma as neighbors.** If the Roma were of higher income it is expected that they would have better housing conditions, above all on the issue of hygiene, and, in that case social distance would be lower.

*Belgrade, younger: » There is difference whether they are the poorest Roma or not. These richer have jobs. Here in Zemun they reacted so angrily because they were the poorest there.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »I would not like it very much. I just do not like when they come to me. It bothers me first that they stink.*

*Belgrade, older: » I was at my friend Roma's house, the house is strikingly clean, to put a finger you will not find any dust but when they go out it is completely different story. I cannot say I am either for nor against they live in my neighborhood because of that. There are sorts of them.*

## **At school, at work**

Many respondents attend the schools together with Roma children. Most often, there were one or two Roma children in class. From respondents' answers we can conclude that **social distance toward Roma depend of the perception of life style of that Roma person:** respondents remember that if the Roma child lived in conditions similar to respondents' (live in house, have educated parents...) then they would not have any problems to make closer contact with him or her, but if Roma child was from low educated families, if his or her hygienic was below standards and if he or she was bad in school then respondents often rejected this kid.

One part of the parents were against their children being in the same kindergartens with Roma children, believing that they can have a bad impact concerning the upbringing. The other portion of respondents say they would let their children go to kindergartens with Roma children, but they also show a certain level of **mistrust** (they would ask for some kind of control). Only the younger educated group from Belgrade is to a great degree open to such an idea.

*Belgrade, younger: » I suppose parents have a founded fear because children at the age start to form some habit and maybe Roma children will be a negative example, make them to steal and so on. Probably that's a founded fear.*

**The negative attitude towards the work with the Roma is frequent.** Although some respondents have good experience with the Roma people who already work with them, respondents usually express the opinion that Roma people aren't educated and skilled enough to work with them. The respondents also think that, the unemployment rate in Serbia is very high, so the Serbian should have the priority in getting the job.

*Novi Sad, younger: » I would not feel good. But they wouldn't be employed for sure, because they can't employee even us."*

- **Similarities between Serbs and the Roma**

**General conclusion of the respondents is that here are no similarities between the Serbs and the Roma.** The Serbs have positive features (*planning on long-term, more responsible, more educated, moral, have jobs, hygienic habits...*). On the contrary, the Roma have all the opposite features from the above mentioned.

*Belgrade, older: » I think we are totally different in everything, starting the way we are thinking. We think how to survive, to work, to plan. And they live from one day to the next. We do not dare to have*

*second or third child; We the Serbs when earn some extra money we immediately invest into house, car...the future.*

- **Observing discrimination – «Do we, our society, treat the Roma fairly?»**

**Respondents most often express the attitude that there is no discrimination against the Roma, while only a small number of respondents think differently.**

Very often there was that opposite question, concerning the **relation towards Serbs** (which is perceived as negative), what tells also about dominant focusing of the participants to themselves and in much lesser degree to other nations.

Once more some participants stress that **the Roma “alone are guilty” for not having equal treatment in a society** as a whole, and a community itself “gives them chances”.

**The observed discrimination towards the Roma concerns most often the issue of employment**, and even if the Roma find a job (which happens rarely), they do not have equal position and working conditions.

Younger participants from Belgrade are more realistic in grasping the problem, have more information and willingness to find out more about the position of the Roma in the community.

*Niš, older : »The society treats most unfairly Serbs in Serbia, a Serbs from Croatia comes and he ahs everything, a displaced person from Kosovo comes and has everything. Or the Government allocates funds for their houses and a person from Serbia loses his job.*

*Niš, older : »Our society treats Roma fairly, they do not pay for their books in school, nor have any duties. Who wants it wants it, who does not want to collect card-boxes, sell him a Dinar per kilo. He begs for you to give him some money and so on.*

*Niš, older : »There is discrimination, but it is not easy to solve. I have seen many times they were hiring people because they had to and then giving them low salary people were forced to leave; In a butcher-shop they are more likely to hire Serbs because of hygiene and the looks of him/her. If you see he is a Gypsy, it is not important whether he is clean or dirty, he looks dirty.*

*Belgrade, younger: » We see them as lower race. A few years ago our Faculty organized action for someone to give lessons in a Roma settlement and nobody wanted. In general, either we tell jokes of them or we do not like them.*

*Belgrade, younger: » The Roma who bring their children to doctors, the doctors are always on a first-name basis, and always injections are prescribed to them, because they do not believe they will give them tablets every eight hours. It is a little bit strange relation towards the Roma.*

## **5. The Government and the Roma**

- **Do you think we should help the Roma more?**

**Answering the question whether the Roma need more help**, most of the participants gave negative answers. The most frequently stated answers are the following:

**No – we help them enough already** (*for example, they get free school kit and textbooks, the whole settlements are being built for them...*).

**No – they have much more money that we do** (*“run half of the market and the way they live and their living conditions – this is something they decide on ”*).

**No – there's no effect** (*"they are used to live as they do and that's it". „they do not want to suffer, have hard times, and when you offer them job, they refuse it, that's the way they are being up brought"*)

**No – there are much more important problems** (*"why to deal with Gypsies in a situation like this"? "We also lose our job daily"*)

**No – it is their own fault, serves them right** (*"they do not like to work and when you offer them a job, they refuse it, they are brought up that way"*)

**No – they can endanger us if they get more rights, because they are the population with excessive natural increase** (*"each has even five children, they have started to make their own national anthem, time will come when they would want their own territory"*)

**Yes – but only to those who are really social cases** (*"they try to manage in all sorts of ways to get everything for free, they beg instead of work..."*)

Minority of respondents believe the Roma people need more help, limiting it to those segments they believe are essential to them:

**Yes – only when it comes to education**

**Yes – to stimulate them to start their own business**

- **Helping the Roma and the situation in the country**

**However the majority of respondents agree that that it would be best if the Roma were integrated into the community. If Roma integrated into society** (above all they had in mind education, to acquire personal hygienic habits and housing culture) **the well-being would be mutual.**

*Niš, younger : » We would also feel better if they would be educated, culture of behavior one learns in school, they would learn everything we do. It would be a kind of obligation to them through learning. The city would be more clean. In that sense education would help.*

*Niš, younger : » In 15 years time there will be more non-hygienic environment, more stealing. If nothing changes in the life of the Roma, it will not be a good environment for my child*

*Belgrade, older: » It should, because everything would be changed for the better as a whole, starting from the lowest. If we mend their living standards automatically we will be better off.*

- **Who should help the Roma?**

**The highest authorities** ( *The Government, Republic authority and the Ministry of Minority and Religious Rights*) are, above all, in charge of helping the Roma, because they see them **as responsible and authorized for launching initiatives.**

**Local authorities are being perceived as dependent on republic,** and that is why expectations are directed towards republic authorities.

Younger Nis group suggested that the Roma **Diaspora** would be more efficient in helping the Roma.

Lesser number of participants say **that citizens themselves** might help the Roma in stopping discrimination against them.

- **Unemployed Roma people**

**All respondents agree in one thing – the Roma are unemployed people.** The respondents did not show any surprise when they heard that unemployment rate of Roma people in Serbia is more then 90%. The participants give the following motives of their unemployment:



- **formal unemployment as a greed** („The Roma who are only registered in the Employment Bureau to get help and on the other side they earn well illegally, and they do not pay taxes ”.)

- **they do not want to work** („Everybody who wants to work finds a job eventually and earn more money that we do”)

## Issue of integration

- **Integration or separation**

**Majority of participants agree that it would be best for the Roma to integrate into community.**

Although, spontaneously they mention all the obstacles expected on the road to integration:

- A lot of time and mutual trust are needed
- If the Roma do not educate themselves, or do not achieve higher living standard they cannot integrate
- They should assimilate
- The change of conscience, awareness and the system of values is a very complex task

As reasons why integration is good people often give answers as: ***that is normal, now they live in miserable conditions, we need to stimulate them to live better, they should have opportunity to make progress in life like everybody else...***

The participants also mentioned some **examples of successful Roma integration** into society and in general the strife and the importance of the problem.

*Niš, younger : » I know that elementary school „Radoje Domanović“ has mixed classes. So that’s possible. Frankly, I have no such prejudices, I was in a mixed class so I would enroll my child with the Roma.”*

*Belgrade, older: » Integration is much better, to integrate and live together as normal people would do.”*

*Belgrade, younger: » Should be integrate, not separated. We do not have these problems as France has with Moslems. Serbs in general do not have negative attitude, they lived together, they do not have so much cultural differences. They should be given the same conditions for education, employment making progress in life.*

Important are the examples pointing to **„false morality”, giving socially – desirable answers** to the subject of integration, where in reality they have much more negative attitude.

*Novi Sad, younger: »I think they are dirty, they have the right to live equally as we all. I would go to school with them, sit with them on a distance and everything is fine.”*

*Novi Sad, younger: »It will be better to disperse a bit, not to be in a ghetto”*

The statement about greater integration of the Roma is concerned sometimes with the **fear of a too strong influence of one separated minority group.**

*Nis, older: "You know they have 3, 4, 5 children. There will be more Romani people if we don’t integrate them, we made a mistake with the Kosovo Albanians, we’ll wage war against them. They’ll devastate us, just like the Albanians. The Serbs believe they’ll react in such a way. Therefore, we cannot afford to talk that is better without them."*

- **Initiative should work both ways**

**The change in mentality and the system of life values of Roma population is considered a priority for successful integration of the Roma into the society. But participants thought that the attitudes of Non Roma population need to be changed also.**

*Belgrade, younger: » The most important thing is to educate those people to understand how important is education system. They are being kept prisoners in that low social position. I suppose that they think, OK I mean what can I do, finish school one day and who will hire me being a Roma. We should remove barriers in the society, but they also must make steps.*

- **Do the Roma people want to integrate?**

Asked by moderator : « **Whether Roma would like to be integrated more into society?»**, the most common answer was negative, and causes of insufficient motivation were in their lack of activities, lack of willingness and adjustment to «live in ghetto ».

It has been emphasized that the Roma do not wish to integrate themselves and that it is disputable whether they will accept help at all, because they might be satisfied with the life they are leading.

*Novi Sad, younger: "Let them help themselves, they should put some effort and create their own organizations. They don't want to work, that's the problem. If my parents didn't work and didn't try a lot, I'd be dirty as well. They leave this kind of impression."*

It has to be pointed out that frequent opinion was that **the Roma were given a chance to integrate into society, but they rejected it on their free will.** In order for the Roma to integrate into community they live in, it is expected that the initiative come from Roma themselves and that they adjust themselves, but on the other hand, there were opinions that local community also must open itself more towards the Roma in order to give them a chance to integrate.

*Niš, older : »They live in a ghetto. It is their feature, they are used to live that way. They had options, chances; They did not integrate because they did not want to.. I know Roma people who rejected their property in order to receive social welfare.*

*Belgrade, younger: » On the Internet you can see a picture – a tin house, with air conditioner. When my friend was building a house, there was a Gypsy settlement there, they offered them apartment, but they did not want, they said they did not want to climb the stairs to the seventh floor?!*

*Niš, older : »All those stories about them made that they retreat. If you live in the building where nobody wants to have a coffee with you, of course they will go where they can find more their Gypsies.*

*Belgrade, older: » I think that we need to study deep into their mental framework and take interest in that minority a bit. They live short but marry. They do not want to educate, they do not want to be a part of society. We must attract them because they are part of us, they live with us. IN my opinion, there should be a law against begging and at least 80 percent of the Roma do that. If there was a law against it I think they would get used to that. You must compel them to bath, wash live and work normally as we do.*



## 6. The Decade of the Roma

**The citizens have not heard of previous activities for helping the Roma population.** The participants recalled that the Roma in some districts had been given apartments, but it has is not [perceived as a wider activity. Also in Nis and Novi Sad there are Roma TV and Radio stations. They mentioned some specific activities in Belgrade, like Roma kindergarten and making basket for playgrounds

**The participants express the opinion that major activities which need to be taken to help the Roma community are:**

- **education**, *Belgrade, older: » Everything starts from education, that's the most important. If they would have grandfather who graduated from College they would not work what they do now. Having higher education they would not collect card boxes.*
- **Solution to housing problems,**
- **The improvement of hygienic conditions.**

Among specific activities which need to be implemented, only younger educated people from Belgrade made constructive offers.

Their suggestions are the following:

- Systematic medical checkups in the Roma settlements,
- Compulsory elementary education,
- Voluntary work of citizens with the Roma children,
- Organizing of Roma cultural events for non-Roma population,
- Organizing sport activities (for example, Roma soccer club)

- **The Decade of the Roma – First impressions : different in different groups**

The participants reacted differently to the idea of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. There were three forms of reactions (positive and indifferent attitude are the most frequent, while negative attitude were rare):

**1. Complete support to the activities**

**2. Disinterest in activities as such**

**3. Opposing the idea**

1. The participants who **supported the idea** believe this action is needed, that the Roma as community live very badly and it is generally good to invest in anything in the country

2. **Those not-interested** had more negative than positive attitude toward the idea. Asked how they would vote on a possible Decade referendum their reply most often was that they would not vote because they are not interested in the Roma issue at all. They cited different reasons for such attitude:

a. First thing is to **help majority people, the Serbs, and afterwards to solve the problems of minorities.** *Niš, younger : » I would not vote – I do not have a high opinion of the Roma, I do not think of them at all. First, we should help Serbs and afterwards them. I think there are a lot of Serbs who need help as well.*

b. These issues are senseless, nonsense: no investments will bring changes to the life of the Roma because **they used to live in that way and the bottom line is that they want to live like that.** *Niš, younger : » I would not vote, I am not interested in that subject. They should be invested but nothing will come out of it. I think they would not accept that help, they are used to that kind of life*

- c. **Not all Roma are poor** and the help should not be given according to nationality but for all poor people equally. Also, there was an opinion that **the Roma in general are not poor**, they just spend differently the money from begging and other occupations. *Belgrade, older: » I think we have a distorted picture for that matter. They have approximately the same incomes as we have. I was buying something to eat once and I saw a Gypsy woman begging and asking for paper bill in exchange for her coins about four or five Dinars, I could never earn that money. I saw them buying Banja Luka kebab, I have never bought Banja Luka kebab and I have worked for so many years there*
- d. This Decade would not bring improvement to life of the Roma because **corruption is widespread both in all authority structures and in Roma organizations**, so probably money intended for the Decade will end up in the hands of some functionaries. *Novi Sad, younger: »The money will be taken by someone else. Some half-illiterate functionary”*
3. The participants **opposing the idea** showed **fear of other minorities** – as arguments they cited that such activities are bad for Serbia because they **pose danger from the increased strengthening of minority groups and separatist aspirations**.
- Niš, older : »It is very bad for us, like a Decade exclusively for Albanians.*
- **Between one and two million euros annual investments seems to be a small sum, while 10 to 20 million annually appear as big investments**

The participants assert that, if the Decade of the Roma Inclusion is applied, it **must be follow some plan, with systematic investing** in solving their problems and not in the form of relief.

*Niš, older : »I would give my support. However, I would not support the relief action, but strictly some specific purpose activity”*

Also, there was a **suspicion that any kind of action would really change the life of the Roma**, because, as it has been pointed out many times until now, according to participants, **they live in the way they want and the way they used to**, so any help would be a nonsense. All groups illustrated this point of view the examples when apartments were given to the Roma, and they sold them afterwards and returned to their settlements.

*Belgrade, older: » It should be controlled, if he sells the apartment and goes back to live as he lived before then they should stop giving them apartments*

**A sum of between one to two million euros annually does not appear as a big sum.** The majority of participants believe that these resources were not enough to do something important with it.

*Belgrade, older: » We do not have a clue how much is needed. But the question is what kind of money would cover it, because they are really at low level of education and conscience.*

*Belgrade, younger: » It is nothing, what one can do with that kind of money. And do not forget to split in two because there will be frauds for sure.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »No big money is that, they cannot even feed themselves with that. They can only build two buildings downtown and that’s it.*

**The sum of between 10 and 20 million annually, on the other side provokes opposite reactions.** It is perceived as a big sum of money, and in some groups (especially older groups in Nis and Belgrade, and younger in Novi Sad) provokes negative reactions for such investment in the Roma people.

*Belgrade, older: » For sure Serbs would feel neglected. We are also lead a difficult life*

- **The role of the citizens in the Decade of the Roma Inclusion**

Only the participants in the younger educated group from Belgrade showed awareness about the role of ordinary citizens in helping the Roma. Participants from other groups either did not mention any role of the citizens or cited clearly **humanitarian forms of help** (giving away old things, money..). Participants of a younger educated group from Belgrade pointed out to the fact of **public support, and the fight with discriminatory aspirations**.

*Niš, younger :* » *What can citizens do? And if some action takes place, we should see what we can do and to what extent in the sense of a humanitarian action*

*Belgrade, older:* » *We alone would think about what to do about it. We should support and see that they achieve, make that successful.*

- **Do you think this action can harm or be useful to our country**

Almost all of the participants believe that **the investment during the Decade of the Roma cannot harm our country**. However, **only younger educated group from Belgrade cited concrete reasons why this Decade would be good for our country: elimination of prejudices, improvement of the living standard, raising cultural awareness**. Participants in other groups cited as argument that **every capital which arrives in our country is welcome**.

*Belgrade, younger:* » *I do not see how that can be bad or wrong. Maybe the good thing would be to remove some prejudices our people have and also prejudices the Roma have.*

*Belgrade, younger:* » *The improvement of their life, destroying of stereotypes and culture awareness raising in the country*

- **Specific Decade goals**

The major conclusion after talks on specific goals of the Decade was that **one, not small part of citizens, have negative attitude toward the Decade which must not be neglected. Negative attitude toward investments in the Roma stems mostly from the perception of personal poverty and misery, but also from negative attitude towards the Roma themselves**. Another thing is very important to understand why there is not-acceptance of such activity: Majority of participants believe that, **if all people in the country live badly, investments should go or to all equally much, or to Serbs first, since they are majority people, and then to the national minorities**.

Regarding the education issue all respondents agree: these activities are mostly accepted, except for introducing the elements of Roma culture into school curricula, which was rejected in all groups except in the group of younger educated participants from Belgrade.

### Education

- **Reduced price for preschool programs/books/transport/school lunch for poor Roma children**

**The reaction to this offer is positive, but it spontaneously raises the issue of its efficiency** („*they do not want to learn and it's as simple as that*").

Some participants believe that the Roma **already enjoy benefits concerning education** (free books, free lunch and snacks...).

Also, there was a question why Serbs as well, especially poor Serb children have no the same benefits.

*Belgrade, older: » He just does not want to learn. There were Roma children in my elementary school, they did not even want to learn to read and write, and of course there have been transferred to special classes. They had that opportunity as well.*

*Belgrade, older: » I think it is not right because we have a lot poor white children Why then the Roma would get something more in relation to the white colored children.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Some Gypsies see school only on a postcard. Each parent should go to prison.*

- **Incorporation of elements of Roma culture into curricula for children**

**Generally opposing the idea.** They believe there is no such a thing as Roma culture, or they have not heard of Roma culture.

Only some younger participants had slightly more positive attitude toward the idea („I would learn Roma songs but only if I choose to do that")

*Niš, older : »Stupid things, tell me an example of Roma culture, tell me a Roma writer?!*

*Belgrade, older: »They have radio for promoting their culture”.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Well, what to learn, when a Gypsy came from Rumania.*

- **Eliminating the separate schools and classes for Romani children and bringing Romani children together with non-Romani children at school**

The citizens shared the opinion over this issue: **There aren't special schools for Roma, and Roma children attend the same lectures in mixed classes together with the Serbian. The respondents accepted the fact like normal, adding that a lot of them even had the studied in such classes.**

- **Loan and scholarship programs to make possible for Roma youth to attend University**

**The same conditions for all** – according to the most of the participants.

Only some younger participants from Belgrade approved this kind of helping the Roma.

*Belgrade, younger: » That is something normal throughout the world. In America even Negroes have scholarships*

*Novi Sad, younger: »But, what if my child wants to study as well. He is a Gypsy and gets everything for free, just have to lay down. You make a lazy people out of them. What did they do to deserve that?! You have many people who do not have money and they are not Gypsies and who will give them money for the College. All should have the same conditions.*

## **Employment**

- **Micro-loans for Roma to start businesses**

Concerning these propositions one can observe **insufficient emphatic relation of the participants and their focusing on personal problems** (*unemployment is one of the key problems in Serbia today*)

Also, **there is a question of misuse of the activity like this one** because of prejudice that the Roma are lazy and that there is a possibility of mishandling the issue.

Only few participants agreed with this goal, again mostly in young group from Belgrade.

*Belgrade, older: » It is not integration it is segregation, I mean not the same conditions for all. OK, let us make a list of poor Serbs*

*Belgrade, younger: » It is all right, but first you must teach them to have obligations in life. First, they*

- **Enacting very strict anti-discrimination laws which would penalize the employers for hiring and promotion of discrimination practices**

The most common reactions of the participants to such a proposition was – **impossibility to realize it in practice and insufficient motivation of the citizens for this action, and the reasons are the following:**

- **Discrimination cannot be easily established** (*„Employer will not say I am not going to hire you because you are a Roma“*).
- **It will not be correct to the employers** (*„If someone hires a Roma person in a butcher’s shop, only the shop manager can be financially damaged, because most of the people would not buy at his store“*)
- **Human relations in companies will deteriorate** (*„One cannot hire a Roma to do something, maybe other people in the firm do not stand the Roma“*)
- **More strict laws are needed to cover relations between employers and employees in general** (*»When we start to penalize, maybe something will change. Our people who work for private employers also have no one to turn to, to complain“*).

Some participants cited the opposite examples of discrimination against Serbs by the Roma:

*Belgrade, older: » I heard there are different cases. One man said he would be a garbage collector and the other said what do you mean to work there when there is a lobby there, if you are not a Gypsy and have not 500 euros, you cannot work there. The Employment Bureau thing is just a formality. Or to hire through a Roma, I mean to get references from him.*

## **Health**

- **Free vaccines for Roma children**

**Some participants agree with this activity, but it also provokes negative attitude of the others:**

- There is such activity already (*„ There is even a campaign for a team to come Roma settlement to give vaccines for the children“*)
- Roma children should not be set aside as special
- It is appropriate to vaccinate only poor Roma children.

## 7. Ambassadors of Change: Voices to Trust

- **Most of the participants have not heard of any prominent Roma leader or organization.**

Only in **Belgrade** they mentioned organization **Roma Heart (Romsko srce)** and Roma leader **Ackovic**, but the opinion of him is not too high– **he is being perceived more like a figure than a real fighter for the rights of the Roma.**

Among the activities of the “Roma Heart” **the only one they have heard of was organizing of kindergartens for Roma children**, but such activities are **perceived rather suspiciously.**

*Belgrade, older: » Ackovic is I suppose president of Roma association. It is more a function I mean just for showing. It works in the interest of the Roma but nothing special. If he was more serious he would have his Roma people begging everywhere.*

*Belgrade, older: » Roma Heart organizes kindergarten for Roma children. The question is whether there is a control there, someone to supervise what is being done in the kindergarten, our control, I mean what they teach those children. Who knows what can come to their minds being so illiterate. It looks like a separation to me. It is a noted part of a society after all.*

In Nis they knew two Roma leaders: Rasim Kurdi and Bajević. Impressions about him are mildly positive.

- **Among the people who, according to participants, could be reliable and persuasive speakers on the subjects connected to the Decade of the Roma Inclusion, the most frequently mentioned ones were Rasim Ljajic, then famous sportsmen like Divac, prominent Roma people like Dzej, and public persons who were dealing with the Roma problems, like Kusturica.**

The participants cited the following names as possible promoters of the Decade of the Roma Inclusion:

- Public persons who were dealing with the Roma people : Emir Kusturica (movie director), Nele Karajlić (pop singer)
- Sportsmen, loved by everybody, already active in humanitarian activities: Dejan Bodiroga (basketball player), Vlade Divac (basketball player)
- *Famous persons of Roma nationality: Džej (singer), Batić (a politician who, according to some respondent's, declared himself as being a Roma), Šaban Šaulić (singer), a Roma who will open Exit, and known from the Internet who answers the question about what is hygiene.*
- Famous public persons, human rights activists: Natasa Kandic (work in Fund for Humanitarian right), Rasim Ljajić (Minister for ethnic minority rights)

*Niš, younger : » Nobody comes to my mind, but I think that maybe sportsmen might do something. They are the closest to Roma and our nation. The Roma people like sport as well. I think Divac would be physically the most acceptable..*

*Belgrade, younger: » Someone about whom general consensus may be reached, with no doubts whether someone likes him or not. A sportsman like Divac, Bodiroga, Piksi*

*Belgrade, younger: » A Roma from the Internet (Hygiene – those are beautiful women ...). He has already become celebrated, everybody knows about him and he will open EXIT.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Nataša Kandić. She could do something about it. She constantly wants to be everywhere.*

*Novi Sad, younger: »Rasim Ljajić. I think positively about him, he deals with minorities issues. The man does his job properly. Who will do it if not him.*



## 8. Message concepts

- **The best appraised are the statements suggesting that all man should be equal – to have equal chances of living better and share prosperity in Serbia.**

		Assessments												Average
		1	2	3	4	5	Sum(1-5)	Sum(6-10)	6	7	8	9	10	
1. It is a true sign of a modern country.	%	21	8	3		8	39	61	5	5	16	11	24	6.1
2. Helping the Roma advance and integrate is, quite simply, the right thing to do.	%	27	8	5		5	46	54	3	5	14	5	27	5.7
3. Helping the Roma is a matter of simple economics.	%	18	3	11	5	21	58	42	3	21	3	5	11	5.2
4. If there is one thing we must do, it is to help the Roma children so that they will have the opportunities to prosper in a way that our own children have.	%	16			3	13	32	68			18	16	34	7.2
5. Helping the Roma is really about giving every person in our country the opportunity to achieve his/her potential.	%	8	3	8		11	29	71		8	13	16	34	7.3
6. The way the Roma have been treated in this country is simply wrong. It makes me ashamed and I want it to change.	%	45	5	8	3	5	66	34	11	8	3	5	8	3.8
7. Having a large minority population like the Roma living in such abject poverty and experiencing constant discrimination reflects badly on our country.	%	21	11	3	5	8	47	53	11	16	11	3	13	5.2
8. Our country is on the road to prosperity, We must make sure that this prosperity is shared by all.	%	8	3			8	19	81	5	11	19	8	38	7.6

**The statement number eight 8 is the highest graded statement.** The only objection refers to the fact that, according to majority of participants, Serbia is not on the road to prosperity.

The lowest grades (the highest percentage of grades between one and five, 1 to 5) were given to statements number 3 and 6 : the statement suggesting simply economical benefit of solving Roma issue and the statement that most explicitly says that there is discrimination of Serbia to be ashamed of.

*Belgrade, older: » (Statement number 3) I do not think it will cost either more or less. It seems somehow too far away, there are more important reasons than this one*

*Niš, younger : » I am not ashamed of anything. We treated them as they deserve, I would treat the same way a Serb.*

The participants generally had objections that **all the statements were formulated in such way that they include discrimination against the Roma in Serbia**, therefore, as pointed out before, most of the participants do not approve of them.

*Belgrade, older: » (Statement 2) Human rights are equal for all, the statement itself includes that we*

*behave unfairly. Every statement is such, as if we are terrorists, they impose answer on us*

*Belgrade, older: » We disagree, I think there is no discrimination against the Roma, they enjoy the same rights*