

The Decade of Roma Inclusion

ROMA GROUPS
Focus Groups Discussion

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SERBIA

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. Situation in the country

The representatives of the Roma community mostly see the situation in Serbia as bad. They emphasize two aspects of bad life situation: bad material state (caused by unemployment, introduction of different legal restrictions and the generally low living standard in Serbia) as well as bad relations with the non-Roma. The situation is considered worse, in all its aspects, compared to Slobodan Milosevic's time.

As for positive aspects of the situation in the country, tendencies towards European integrations are seen as positive (which would, according to the majority of the Roma, lead to better living conditions and greater rights for the Roma), as well as more regular payment of social welfare benefit.

2. Identity as a Roma

There are different opinions about the status of the Roma in the country. On the one hand, it is possible to hear that the position of the Roma is good, while on the other hand, there are respondents who believe that the Roma live in a subordinated position. Respondents complain of the existence of extremist groups who attack them because of their ethnicity (like Skinheads) and inadequate answer of the society to such incidents. Also, all groups complain of the deterioration of interpersonal relations with the non-Roma and increased discrimination in the last several years.

The greatest problems the Roma community faces are the following: unemployment, bad financial state, bad housing conditions (insufficient infrastructure in Roma settlements, a great number of residents in every building), lack of education (impossibility of educating children due to financial problems, as well as the impossibility of Roma children to find their place in school because of bad knowledge of Serbian), bad health (inadequate nutrition, inadequate hygiene, illnesses), refusal and discrimination by the non-Roma.

Roma respondents believe that all other minorities live better than the Roma community. Apart from living in better material conditions, they are also better accepted by the non-Roma. Also, our respondents believe that poor Roma live much worse than other poor people. On the one hand, they live in greater misery (they have no houses or goods – cattle, land...), while on the other hand, they feel isolation compared to the general non-Roma population.

Respondents believe that the main reasons why the Roma are poor are unemployment and the way of living of the Roma themselves. It is possible to notice that there is a strong consciousness of their own problems, reasons for the existence of these problems and the role of the Roma themselves in the creation of the problems.

They have an optimistic attitude towards the future of the young Roma because of the EU accession (which would, according to the majority of respondents, provide for a better life for everybody, and for the Roma as well) and because of some already existing improvement in the educational sphere (the possibility to attend evening classes, opening of Roma kindergartens where children can learn Serbian, etc). There are, however, fears that poverty in the country will become deeper, which would mean a tougher life for the Roma as well.

3. Greater Integration in the Community at Large

The majority of respondents believe there are both tolerant and intolerant Serbs and that this characteristic is not typical of the whole nation.

Respondents emphasize that they have positive experiences with the non-Roma in personal contacts, while negative experiences are dominant with short and superficial encounters. In such situations, the non-Roma consider them typical representatives of their nation that they have prejudices about. *"A Gypsy is a Gypsy, always the worst. The Gypsy is believed to be dirty, sullied, stinking, lying, stealing. They say – look at him, get away from him. They think we're liars and thieves."*

All our Roma respondents say more contacts with the non-Roma are necessary. Greater integration is perceived as the only solution to better relations between the Roma and the non-Roma. Respondents think that the negative opinion the non-Roma have of them would improve if they had a chance to spend time with them.

Separation would not give any solutions. Respondents even express fear that people might think they have separatist tendencies, believing (probably justifiably) that this would cause even greater intolerance on the part of the non-Roma.

The only obstacles are the following: unfavorable picture that the non-Roma have of the Roma and the way of living of the Roma, which is at the first place caused by lack of education and bad material situation.

Answering the question how the non-Roma would react to greater integration, our Roma respondents mostly think that there would be no greater problems and that Serbs would accept it.

4. The Government and the Roma / Helping your Community

Roma respondents believe that the government should invest more into the Roma community. They do not expect investments in terms of humanitarian aid, but as a sort of initial capital which would help the Roma start changing their way of living. They also expect that additional investments would not be unconditional and that there would have to be results. Investments should also be systematic and planned on the basis of the insight into the real state of affairs in the Roma settlements.

Respondents' opinions are divided as regards the help to the Roma compared to other poor groups and minorities. A certain number of respondents believe that the Roma deserve the greatest portion of help because they are the most vulnerable group in Serbia. Other respondents believe that everyone should get equal help. The argument behind this is the fear that others might become envious of the help the Roma are receiving.

According to our respondents, the main obstacles to greater investments into the Roma community are the following: envy of other poor and vulnerable groups (but also of all those living in Serbia) , previous experiences with the Roma (the Roma mostly did not know how to use the benefits that they were getting, which resulted in the attitude of the non-Roma that investments are not cost-efficient), lack of education of members of the Roma community, bad experience with organizations for help to the Roma – respondents mention examples of corruption and the lack of interest.

According to Roma respondents, the government is interested to help the Roma, but there are several obstacles: on one hand, the funds are lacking (the state budget is empty), while on the other hand, the Roma believe the state does not invest in them more because it has no confidence that they will use these funds in the right way.

According to our respondents, the Roma community can help themselves to a great degree. It can do this through Roma organizations, with the help of the Roma diaspora or direct self-help – voluntary contributions, e.g. for settlement rebuilding.

5. The Decade of the Roma

Respondents most often say there were national and international activities aimed at helping the Roma, but they most often received no help. Some poor Roma were helped, but most often end-users had to pay to get this help.

According to poor Roma from Roma settlements, the following three kinds of help are the most important: solution to housing issues, offer of material help (help in employment, offering the possibility to earn money or offering social welfare help), and help in educating Roma children. Female respondents most often emphasize the problem of illiteracy of their children, while the male ones focus more on the material status of the family – thinking about the help either through social welfare benefit or employment.

Almost no respondent is familiar with the Decade of the Roma action. The first impressions after reading the short description of the Decade are to a great degree positive. Respondents show faith in the success of such actions, expecting at the first place the improvement in the sphere of their own employment and schooling of their children.

There is fear of the reaction of the non-Roma because it is supposed that the majority of these actions might cause revolt of other people who live badly and do not receive help. Respondents believe that negative reaction can be avoided if the Roma show a particular move forward as regards their behavior, after the commencement of these actions.

6. Ambassadors of Change: Voices to Trust

Respondents point to the importance of the representatives of these organizations going to Roma settlements and concluding what kind of help is needed to their inhabitants. Respondents also believe that the role of Roma organizations is very important, because educated people are in them and they can represent the interests of the Roma. It is also possible to hear the words of praise concerning some activities that are already underway in settlements, although the majority of respondents believe Roma organizations do not help the Roma to a sufficient degree. The activities of Roma organizations were, according to respondents more efficient in the past. Roma organizations and leaders are often accused of corruption and insufficient interest in helping their people.

Besides a greater financial help and other kinds of material help, Roma organizations, according to respondents, should help in the improvement of the picture that the non-Roma have about the Roma.

There are also regional differences – a great number of leaders whom people trust are mentioned in Novi Sad, while there is almost no leader mentioned in Belgrade and Nis.

7. Message concepts

Respondents mostly agree with all statements. The only reasons for giving bad estimates are comments on the difficulties in realizing these goals and doubt that the results will be visible soon.

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

- ✓ Examining of attitude of Roma people towards their own position in the state and towards the action "The decade of Roma inclusion"

Specification of objectives:

1. Perception of direction of our country: defining the main problems and positive trends
2. Perception of their own national identity
3. How accepted Roma people are by non-Roma population
4. Attitude towards integration of Roma into society
5. Attitude towards the action "The decade of Roma inclusion"
6. Testing of messages for promotion of "The decade of Roma inclusion"

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 17 respondents participated in focus group discussions. They were divided into 3 groups, and structure of the groups according to place of residence, age and sex is presented below:

	City	Age range	Sex
FGD1	Novi Sad	31 - 60	Female
FGD2	Belgrade	18 - 30	Male
FGD3	Niš	31 - 60	Male

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

- 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 and 31 to 60
- Participants are the residents of urban territory of Novi Sad, Belgrade, Niš

SURVEY RESULTS

1. Situation in the country

- **Situation in Serbia is deteriorating** (*"It is deteriorating, people find it hard to make ends meet, money comes and goes"*)

The representatives of the Roma population mostly perceive the situation in Serbia as worse. Our respondents are mostly not able to observe the situation from a wider perspective, but only from their personal angle. Observing the situation from their personal perspective, they point to the following two segments:

1. personal economic situation
2. relations among people

1. As far as the **personal material situation** is concerned, it is perceived as much worse than during the previous (Milosevic's) regime. The main reasons for this are the following:

A. **Unemployment** – the Roma are losing their jobs, but the non-Roma as well, so that they take the jobs that the Roma were involved in before, and it is hard to find a new job. The Roma are in an even worse situation than others because they have no goods.

Novi Sad, female: "If we don't work, we can't eat."

Belgrade, male: "We have nothing, I don't work anywhere, the white people have work. They take on workers, only the Roma are left and they are in the worst position."

Belgrade, male: "Our people are in an impasse, other people have their villages, their goods, the Roma don't have all this."

B. **Introduction of new legal prohibitions** – due to numerous taxes and registrations, many Roma people cannot sell their goods on the market, and they also have their illegally obtained goods taken away by inspection workers.

Nis, male: "Since the new government came on power, the Roma are the ones who have suffered most. I don't like the G17 party, they have ruined everything, not only the Roma but everyone else. During Milosevic's time, it was possible to work, to smuggle."

Novi Sad, female: "Inspection workers come to the market now and take away the toilet rolls you're selling. It's better for me to go stealing, rather than selling on the market because they take away my goods. They take away from me the little money I have collected."

C. **Generally low living standard in the country** – all citizens live worse, the purchasing power is lower, while prices are on the increase."

Nis, male: "If they are OK, we are at least a bit OK. If they are in a bad situation, we cannot be better either."

Nis, male: "This government has ruined it all, during Milosevic's time one could build houses and buy

clothes for children in order to send them to school."

Belgrade, male: "10 years ago, 10 German marks was a lot of money, and now 10 euros is nothing."

2. The Roma also complain of the **deterioration of relations with the non-Roma**. The majority of our respondents say they had better relations with Serbs before, but now they are exposed to different kinds of stigmatization. The reason for this is believed to be the general deterioration of living conditions, which makes people more intolerant and nervous.

Novi Sad, female: "I believe we're going into a bad direction, because the world has changed. People are very evil, when I was younger many people were ready to help."

Novi Sad, female: "It was better during President Milosevic, because he was giving us grants, we lived better, there was more work, they weren't taking away your goods on markets, there wasn't such a great difference between nations."

It is however interesting that the life of the Roma (judging by their statements) was better during Slobodan Milosevic who is known to have caused national hostility. This can be partly accounted for by the measures the present government has taken for curbing the grey economy which is the main source of profit for the Roma. However, when it comes to discrimination against other nations (Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks) it is becoming less pronounced, while intolerance to the Roma is on the rise. The only explanation for increased intolerance (if it is really increased) is the reduced level of the speech of hatred in the media directed to other nations (Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks, but not the Roma), and also increased national consciousness of the Roma. In the 90's the Roma started opening greater Roma organizations and fighting discrimination, fighting for their rights and better living conditions. Such an arousal of national identity could have fueled fear from separatist Roma tendencies on the part of the non-Roma, and at the same time, greater intolerance towards them. Another explanation is that intolerance has always existed, but the Roma were not noticing it to such a degree.

- **Positive aspects**

Positive aspects of the present situation are the following:

A. More regular payment of social welfare benefit (the state is considered responsible)

Novi Sad, female: "They struggle, after all, we have children's allowance, social welfare benefit that we receive regularly. They provide us with all this."

B. Positive attitude towards European integrations. Accession to the EU will lead, according to our respondents, to the improvement in living conditions, employment, but also better interpersonal relations, more rights for the Roma.

Novi Sad, female: "If we go into Europe, we might get jobs, at least our children might find work. They might not be separating us so much, if they abide by these world rules. Our children might be able to go to school as well."

"Nis, male: "We want to enter the EC, and we'll all be satisfied."

There is a **positive attitude towards the state, PM Kostunica and President Tadic** because they are perceived as responsible for the policy of European integrations.

C. Better Roma organization and offers of mutual help

Novi Sad, female: "Things are going forward. We have now Roma teachers who come to our homes to teach our children."

D. The possibility to earn more than before

Belgrade, male: "Now I can earn more by playing the violin."

E. Improvement of general living conditions

Nis, male: "Parks and building are being built., Serbia is being built."

2. Identity as a Roma

- **What is it like to be a Roma in Serbia**

According to our respondents, a Roma person is faced with two greatest problems: **bad existential conditions** (mentioned in the previous chapter) and **low status in the society**.

- **Acceptance from the Serbs – different impressions**

There are different opinions about the status of the Roma in Serbia. On one hand, it is possible to hear the opinion that the **position of the Roma is good**, while on the other hand, some respondents believe the Roma live in a subordinated position.

Novi Sad, female: "It depends on the Roma themselves, both the old and young. I'm Roma, but many Serbs and Hungarians respect me as a friend and citizen. I have friends who love me, I cooperate with them very well, and then I don't feel as a Roma. I feel bad because of my children – they go in the street and have to shout: "Old ironware", while others shout back with words: "Fuck you, Gypsies." They swear at me as well when I pass by, all of them - children, women and men.

Nis, male: "They accept us well, we are equal."

Novi Sad, female: "They think we're liars and thieves. There're some well-mannered and educated Roma, but there're also those who still stand in front of the church and beg. But there are also Serbs who rummage rubbish bins and beg. But people do not make a difference. The Serbs are considered good, and we are bad."

Respondents also complain of **extremist groups** (such as Skinheads) who attack them because of their nationality. Although they state these are only individuals, respondents feel that these groups and the incidents they cause are insufficiently recognized and punished by the society.

Belgrade, male: "When we see the Skins, we run away. When I see them with their chains and other horrendous things I get scared. I think they are people who like violence. They offend us, the Gypsies. Someone should take responsibility and punish these groups."

Nis, male: "Not all Serbs are bad, these are individuals, a minority. They beat up a boy who wasn't able to get on his knees afterwards. I was later told they had beaten him up, and an old person had been looking and laughing."

- **Has anything changed compared to previous years?**

All groups complain of **increased discrimination in the last several years**. Respondents complain of worse relations among people, but they also state they have more problems when finding work and getting social welfare benefit.

Nis, male: "The Serbs have started avoiding and insulting us. And you have to withdraw because you have no one by your side. It was not like that before, but now the Serbs have started avoiding us."

Novi Sad, female: "The things have changed, they're worse now. A Gypsy could find work before, whenever he tried he could get a job. If one went to the social welfare service and asked for help, he was asked for an identity card and got the papers."

- **The problems of the Roma, from the Roma viewpoint**

The Roma believe their main problems are the following:

1. **Unemployment** – *Novi Sad, female: "You have to work, if you don't work, you can't get dressed, eat or feed your children."*
2. **Money, financial situation**
3. **Housing** – housing problems are manifold:
 - a. **Insufficient infrastructure in Roma settlements** – *Nis, male: "We live in the settlement of Crvena Zvezda, our roads are not asphalted, we have no sewerage, water or electricity."*
 - b. **Bad housing conditions** – *Novi Sad, female: "My great problem is that eight of us live together. It is very dirty, sullied, you wouldn't send your dog there."*
4. **Education** – *"There is no education for a Gypsy. It has been and it will be like that."*

Roma respondents observe the **education problem as one of the gravest ones for the Roma community** (*"It all depends on school, we can't progress if we don't go to school."* *"He hasn't gone to school and he cannot be equal with the Serbian child."* *"If you have no school, you can't find work.")* However, **the majority of our respondents have not gone to school, neither do their children go to school.** How to account for this? Respondents mention the following barriers to the schooling of their children:

- a. **Impossibility to educate children due to financial problems** *"And how will I work, I get no pension, I receive no social welfare benefit, it means I have to employ my child."*
 - b. **Roma children fail to find their place in school** (above all due to bad knowledge of the language, teasing by other children...) *Nis, male: "Education is the problem. My child is unable to keep up with other white children no matter how bright he is, because he doesn't know the language well, and we all talk in the Gypsy language at home."* *Novi Sad, female: "My child refuses to go to school, because he doesn't feel well there. We have to be strong and send our children to school."*
5. **Inadequate nutrition**
 6. **Hygiene**
 7. **Health, illnesses**
 8. **Refusal and discrimination by the non-Roma** – The Roma notice that the attitude of the non-Roma towards them is very negative, and they recognize many prejudices. *Novi Sad, female: "A Gypsy is a Gypsy, always the worst possible. He's believed to be dirty, sullied, stinking, stealing. They say: 'Look at him, move away from him.' They think we're liars and thieves."*

- **The Roma and others (other minorities and the poor)**

Roma respondents believe all **other minorities live better than the Roma community**. Apart from living in better material conditions, they state they are better accepted by the non-Roma.

Novi Sad, female: "All others live better than us – The Hungarians, Romaans. They are better accepted than us. I know of no Hungarian or Russine who is unemployed."

Our respondents are also of the opinion that **the poor Roma live in much worse conditions than other poor persons**. On the one hand, they live in greater misery (they have no houses, goods – land, cattle...), while on the other hand, they feel they are isolated compared to other nations.

Novi Sad, female: "I think these poor Serbs and Hungarians live better than us. Firstly, it's because

they have their rights, their houses. Some Roma people have their houses, and some don't."

Novi Sad, female: "The Roma are the least respected, when we go to the street or to the cinema, only because we're Roma. Our nation is being discriminated against a lot."

- **Future of the young Roma**

There is an **optimistic** attitude towards the future of the Roma, because of **the EU accession** (which would provide for better life for everyone, and for the Roma as well), and because of some **already existing improvement in the educational sphere** (possibility to attend evening classes, opening of some Roma kindergartens where children can learn Serbian, etc.). There are, however, **fears that poverty in the country will become deeper**, which would lead to a more difficult life of the Roma.

Nis, male: "They have the possibility to obtain education. I can see Roma children attending evening classes."

Belgrade, male: "We don't hope that things will be better. It can be worse. You earn more money now, but you spend them more easily. Before, one could live on 10 German marks for a week, and now it lasts for one day. 10 years ago life was cheaper."

- **Why are the Roma poor?**

The main reason why the Roma are poor is considered **unemployment and the manner of living**. According to respondents' statements, it is possible to notice **extremely developed consciousness of personal problems, reasons for them and the role of the Roma in creating these problems**. They even express self-criticism with regard to the manner of spending the earned money.

Novi Sad, female: "It's because we live on the breadline."

Novi Sad, female: "There's no work for us, that's why we're poor. We find no work because we're uneducated and we lack hygiene. We're not educated in such a way. We get married at the age of 12, 13."

Belgrade, male: "There are poor Roma because they gamble and drink. They either work for one day, and then they don't work 25 days." "I earn 3000 dinars, and I bring home 500 dinars. The rest I spend on drinks."

3. Greater Integration in the Community at Large

- **Are Serbs intolerant?**

The majority of respondents think **there are both tolerant and intolerant Serbs**, and intolerance is not typical of the whole nation. There are also opinions that the situation is worse, but that it has also improved recently.

Novi Sad, female: "I think they accept us, the Roma, but people are not the same. One person has a good soul, another doesn't. The one with a good soul will see I'm poor and he'll help me. The other insensitive one goes around cursing me. "

Nis, male: "I finished eight grades of primary school. I ate and drank with a Serb. There's no chance of that happening now, they look down on us. But let the child go with a Serb to school."

Nis, male: "They're better accepted than ever. Our country is doing better, and we can feel that."

- **Contacts with the non-Roma**

Respondents emphasize that their **experiences with personal contacts with the non-Roma are positive**, while **there are negative impressions about cursory and superficial encounters**.

Close relations are related to personal relations when the non-Roma recognize them at least by name (the same work, going to school with the non-Roma, selling goods on the market, playing instruments in bars visited by the non-Roma, help in the house...).

Novi Sad, female: "I have plenty of contacts every day, and I have good relations with them. I help them and they help me more."

Belgrade, male: "I play with them every night, they accept me."

Belgrade, male: "I work with Serbs, I'm the only one a Roma. They accept me very well."

Belgrade, male: "There are no problems with the ones you know. There is however a difference with those who don't know you. Those who don't know you will say: "Look at this Gypsy. If he knew you, he would have a higher opinion of you."

Superficial encounters, however, are not pleasant. In such situations, the non-Roma consider them typical prejudiced representatives of their nation.

Novi Sad, female: "There're both good and bad ones. It is bad when we sell ironware and he tells us: 'Get away!' It is good when they get us in their homes and give us a treat."

Nis, male: "When they see us, a child gets scared and says: 'Daddy here come the Gypsies'. All this stems from upbringing. It has been and will always be like that."

Nis, male: "I got on the public bus. The man standing next to me moved away a minute later. I have never been stealing in my life, I'm clean."

- **Integration vs. Separation**

All our Roma respondents believe **it is necessary that there are as many contacts with the non-Roma as possible**.

Novi Sad, female: "We should be as good friends with them as possible, they should be our home friends. We should get to know each other, be in contact, help each other. It wouldn't be good to live separately,

we can't do it like that,"

Nis, male: "Why shouldn't I live with the Serbs? Why shouldn't he tell me: 'Good afternoon my neighbor.' I'd be happy if my child was with the Serbs."

Greater integration is perceived as the only solution for better relations between the Roma and the non-Roma. Respondents believe that the non-Roma have a very negative opinion of them, which would be improved if they had a chance to spend more time with the non-Roma.

Belgrade, male: "It would be better, especially for us, the Roma. If our children had more contacts with the Serbs, they wouldn't be harassed in schools. It may be desirable to organize some trips for our and Serbian children together, even for our illiterate children. There would be fewer problems if we cooperated with them more, there wouldn't be so much violence when you go to the city. They think we're violent, intolerant, it would be good if they knew us better."

According to them, **separation would not lead to any improvement.** Respondents even express fear of the possibility to be labeled with separatist tendencies, believing (probably justifiably) that it would spur even greater intolerance on the part of the non-Roma.

Novi Sad, female: "It would be stupid if there weren't more contacts. Some are asking for their hymn and state, and we don't want all this. We were at war when the Americans attacked us, we, the Roma went to fight with the Serbs, we ate and slept together, we still want to live together."

Novi Sad, female: "We don't want to ask for our hymn or flag. We're not like Albanians, we don't want our schools, this is not good."

- **Obstacles to integration**

Obstacles to integration are the following:

1. **unfavorable picture** about the Roma among the non-Roma;
2. **the manner of living of the Roma**, caused by the lack of education at the first place.

It is possible to notice a high level of self-criticism among our respondents. They also mention the possible ways of solving the problem of the unfavorable image of the Roma.

Nis, male: "Others should see us as we are. We have our associations, and an association could be created with the aim of improving the perception of ourselves."

Novi Sad, female: "We'd have more problems because we're uneducated. There's a lot to do about us, a lot of effort has to be put in our improvement."

- **How would the non-Roma perceive greater integration?**

Answering the question of the perception of the non-Roma of a greater integration, our Roma respondents mostly think that **there would be no problems and that the Serbs would accept them.**

4. The Government and the Roma – Helping Your Community

- **The Government should invest more into the Roma community**

Roma respondents are of the opinion that **the government should invest more into the Roma community**, but such statements are not expressed very easily. They do not expect investments in terms of humanitarian aid, but as **a sort of initial capital which would help the Roma start changing their way of living**. They also expect that additional investments would not be unconditional and that **there would have to be results**. Investments should also be systematic and **planned on the basis of the insight into the real state of affairs in the Roma settlements**.

Novi Sad, female: "They should invest in order to help us."

Novi Sad, female: "If they give they also ask for some results. We should be able to use what they give to us. And we should show them what we have done."

Belgrade, male: "We're not asking for having to eat and drink. We know we spend a lot on food and celebrations than other nations. They should come to our settlements and see what should be improved. I think the Roma themselves should stop living like that, in those carton boxes."

- **Do you think the national government should do more for the Roma than it does for other minority groups or poor people?**

Respondents' opinions are divided as regards the help to the Roma compared to other poor groups and minorities.

1. A certain number of respondents believe that **the Roma deserve the greatest portion of help because they are the most vulnerable group in Serbia**. *Belgrade, male: "We should get more help because we have many children in our families. We're the poorest ones."* *Novi Sad, female: "They should help because our group is the most vulnerable one."*
2. Other respondents believe that **everyone should get equal help**. The argument behind this is the **fear that others might become envious of the help the Roma are receiving**. *Nis, male: "Our local community should not be concerned only about the Roma but also of the general interest, everyone should live well. If we're the only ones to get help, this might provoke revolt, as if we were living better and they worse."*

- **Obstacles to greater investments into the Roma community**

According to our respondents, the main obstacles to greater investments into the Roma community are the following:

1. **Envy of other poor and vulnerable groups, but also of all those living in Serbia**. *Novi Sad, female: "Others would be looking upon us in a different way, they would be jealous. But still, they should give us more, just to help our children."*
2. **Previous experiences with the Roma – the Roma mostly did not know how to use the benefits that they were getting, which resulted in the attitude of the non-Roma that investments are not cost-efficient**. Such an attitude of our respondents is indicative of the fact that the Roma are aware of the situation they live in and attitudes towards them (judging by the interviews with the non-Roma, such a perception is dominant in our population.) *Novi Sad, female: "The Roma are to blame for the lack of investments into them. They were offered help but they*

didn't know how to use it. Some non-Roma persons say it is no use to help them, they are layabouts."

3. **Lack of education of members of the Roma community** leads to the difficulties in changing habits, even besides greater financial investments. *Novi Sad, female: "We're not educated enough to open shops, to do anything else besides dealing with cartons, ironware and markets."*
4. **Bad experience with organizations for help to the Roma – respondents mention examples of corruption and the lack of interest** of people who were supposed to help them. *Novi Sad, female: "A man who came to help the Roma stole everything and the government trusts him no longer. We need the right person who could tackle this problem." Belgrade, male: "They're not interested in us, the people who are supposed to help us are not interested."*

- **Do you believe the government wishes to do more for the Roma?**

According to Roma respondents, the government is **interested to help the Roma**, but on one hand, the **funds are lacking** (the state budget is empty), while on the other hand, the Roma believe the state does not invest in them more because it has **no confidence** that they will use these funds in the right way.

Novi Sad, female: "I believe the government is interested in helping us, but we should all be strong and determined. We should show them that we can be like the non-Roma – that I can have electricity, water and better opportunities."

Novi Sad, female: "If the state helped me, if I was given employment, I would find a job, everything would be more different and cleaner. But the state is not investing because we're careless."

Belgrade, male: "I think no one would help us until the state becomes stronger in the financial sense."

- **One thing you would ask from the President?**

"He should come and see how we live, what is going on. He should help us in everything."

Wishes addressed to the President are different, but are concerned with the **solution to the three greatest problems of the Roma communities: employment, housing and education.**

Employment – *"I would ask for employment for my son."*

Possibility to keep doing the same things – *"I want to work and not to be exposed to police molestations when we pass by in our cart."*

Job loans – *"Loans are important for us to start businesses and do things. I want to work on my own and earn."*

Housing loans – *"They should either give us apartments or sell apartments to us so that we pay 50 euros for the next 50 years."*

Housing – *"I would ask for one room."*

Help in education – *"Our children should go to schools, we should raise them properly, they should have the opportunity to get a job and work."*

- **How can the Roma community help itself?**

According to our respondents, **the Roma community can help ourselves to a great degree.** It can do this **through Roma organizations**, at the first place. **The Roma diaspora** is also mentioned as a possible source of help.

Novi Sad, female: "There should be a Roma organization and one president, someone who would speak on behalf of everyone. Someone who is educated. He should ask for money from other presidents, and we should live in a different way, our children should go to school. They should help us so that our children should be clean and they should provide us with necessary things – books, hygiene, clothes, food for children."

Belgrade, male: "The Roma who live in better conditions, those who are richer and those who live abroad could help us."

Belgrade, male: "There should be some association so that a Gypsy would help a Gypsy."

However, since a certain number of respondents express mistrust in Roma organizations, there are also suggestions that **the Roma should help themselves directly, by collecting contributions**. It is noticeable that on the one hand there is a clear critical attitude and perception of the personal responsibility for the present situation, while on the other hand the Roma show **a great degree of naivety when considering how the Roma community can help itself** (collecting contributions for settlement building, opening of factories...).

Belgrade, male: "We can help ourselves, we don't need these Gypsy presidents. If we all gave 100 or 200 dinars, our settlement would be better than New Belgrade. This is individual help, the Jews do this, they help each other. We should help ourselves in a certain way, we should be a team and give voluntary contributions. The whole settlement should give a dinar or two."

Nis, male: "The Roma community can open some factories."

They also mention other forms of self-help, which are not primarily material in nature, but are the expression of the Roma initiative for integration. This refers to the statements of the Roma wishing to solve some of their basic problems themselves (in the field of education, employment, hygiene). *Novi Sad, female: "The Roma can regularly send their children to school." "We could look for jobs ourselves." "We should be more careful of our children's hygiene."*

- **Role of Roma leaders and Roma organizations**

Respondents point to the importance of the representatives of these organizations **going to Roma settlements and concluding what kind of help is needed to their inhabitants**. Respondents also believe that the role **of Roma organizations is very important**, because educated people are in them and they can represent the interests of the Roma.

Novi Sad, female: "They should come and see how we live, they should know how each person is to be helped."

Novi Sad, female: "They teach our children how to read and write. They struggle for our boys to get a driving license for trucks. It should be like that because they are educated and we are not."

It is also possible to hear the words of praise concerning some **activities that are already underway in settlements**, although the majority of respondents believe **Roma organizations do not help the Roma to a sufficient degree**. The activities of Roma organizations were, according to respondents more efficient in the past. Roma organizations and leaders are often accused of **corruption and insufficient interest** in helping their people.

Nis, male: "They should try more and distribute all grants they get to the poor. They are only working to fill their own pockets now – they should be more fair. They should come to our settlements and say what should be rebuilt and improved."

Novi Sad, female: "Our Roma representatives received financial help. They come to our

settlement, give a little and put the rest in their pockets.”

Belgrade, male: "Around 12 years ago our Roma representatives started collecting money, introducing the sewerage system, building playing grounds, asphaltting roads. But nothing has been happening lately.”

Besides a greater financial help and other kinds of material help, Roma organizations, according to respondents, should help in **the improvement of the picture that the non-Roma have about the Roma.**

Nis, male: "Others should see us what we are. We have our associations, and it is possible to create an association which would improve the perception others have of us.”

5. The Decade of the Roma

- **National and international activities aimed at helping the Roma – there is knowledge of such activities, but most often respondents received no help**

Our Roma respondents have **most often heard** of such activities (international activities are most often mentioned – the help of Greece, Switzerland, Austria...), but **they themselves have not benefited from them.**

Some poor Roma were helped, but most often end-users **had to pay to get this help.**

Nis, male: "The EC is not helping only us, but everyone. Switzerland has given humanitarian aid in Belgrade and Nis only for the Roma. But no one knows where this money is today."

Novi Sad, female: "I've heard that Greece is helping us, as well as Austria, they're sending grants for the Roma. They're sending firewood to us. But this is nothing, because we have to pay for the wood we get."

Respondents mention **the state was engaged in such activities before**, but for the last several years no such activities have taken place.

Belgrade, male: "There was something 2-3 years ago. There was a man called Cerovic, he had our roads asphalted, and pipes installed. He arranged Mirijevo, it was like a village before, there were neither roads nor lightening."

- **Goals of the activities – housing, employment and education**

According to poor Roma from Roma quarters, it is most important to give the following three kinds of help:

1. **Solution to housing issues;** *"Housing is the top priority, everything else is easier."* *"They should see what we're lacking. We live in such a misery."*
2. **Offer of material help: help in employment,** offering the possibility to earn money or **offering social welfare help.** *"It is OK if you get a flat, but how to survive?"*
3. **Help in educating Roma children;** *"Education is needed because more than a half of the Roma are illiterate."* *"A lot should be done about education. Our children should get knowledge, which is good in the long run."*

It is noticeable that during the whole conversation, especially when talking about the goals of future activities, **female respondents emphasize the problem of illiteracy of their children, while the male ones focus more on the material status of the family – either through social welfare benefit or employment.**

- **Knowledge about "Decade of Roma Inclusion" and the first impressions**

Almost **no respondent is familiar with the Decade of the Roma action.** Only one respondent says she heard the speech of the Prime Minister about help to the Roma.

Novi Sad, female: "We heard Kostunica say that if we show better results, we'll have more work. These results are related to the schooling of our children."

The first impressions after reading the short description of the Decade are to a great degree **positive.** Respondents believe **such actions are necessary,** and they see their children as primary users, because

of the emphasis on educational goals.

Novi Sad, female: "I think it's very important that they offer education to our children."

Belgrade, male: "Such actions are greatly needed. Our children will benefit from them more than ourselves, because we finished some schools. A child goes to the shop and doesn't know if he got the right change."

Respondents show **faith in the success of such actions**, expecting at the first place the improvement in the sphere of their own **employment and schooling** of their children.

Novi Sad, female: "I think they would offer employment and education to our children."

Respondents also say they would **support the government in such an action**; *Belgrade: "I would be the first to sign something like that."*

- **Reaction of the non-Roma**

Respondents show fear of the possible reaction of the non-Roma, believing that an action aimed only at the Roma **could cause great envy and even greater animosity** of the non-Roma. Some respondents even believe that such actions might cause **open conflicts**.

The Roma show a certain degree of **understanding for such a reaction** of the non-Roma because they believe many people in Serbia live badly and more and more non-Roma people are losing jobs.

There are also opinions that **not all non-Roma will backlash**, that some of them will recognize the general benefit.

Novi Sad, female: "They'll say everything goes to the Gypsies. Just as they used to say in winter when we got firewood and oil."

Novi Sad, female: "If we got the help, there would be a civil war and a lot of jealousy, because there're many educated Serbs who can't find work."

Belgrade, male: "They would mind. I'd like them to find work just like us."

Belgrade, male: "Clever people would not be against it, the stupid ones would. It is also better for them if we have pretty settlements."

Specific goals of the Decade

Judging by the reactions to particular aims of the Decade, it is possible to conclude the following:

1. **Respondents approve of specific goals**, believing that such actions are necessary;
2. There is **fear of the reaction of the non-Roma** because it is supposed that the majority of these actions might cause revolt of other people who live badly and do not receive help;
3. Respondents believe that **negative reaction can be avoided if the Roma show a particular move forward as regards their behavior**, after the commencement of these actions.

Nis, male: "There will be more hatred between us and the Serbs, there might even be conflicts. We want to be in Europe, to be together, and that everyone lives better."

Novi Sad, female: "I believe the non-Roma bear a grudge against the Roma because they're very annoying, even besides the help they get they go around and beg. I was standing at the bus station, children were begging, a woman gave some money only to one of the two boys and they cursed her. If they saw we were putting some effort, if we showed some results they would be reacting in a different way."

Education

- **Lowered prices of pre-school programs/books/transport/lunch at school for poor Roma children**

This is **one of the most widely accepted goals**, especially in the female group. The male groups accept them as well, but one comment of a male respondents should not be disregarded – **parents should be provided for first so that the family would be able to finance children’s education.**

Novi Sad, female: "This is excellent, more than positive."

Nis, male: "Of course we would like this, everyone would like to have his children educated and successful. We'd also like to have policemen, lawyers."

Nis, male: "If I work and have my own salary, I'll pay for the books. It means it is important to provide for parents first. If my daughter asks for 50 dinars for school, I can't give her because I don't have even 5 dinars. They know we have nothing, no land or a cow. They first have to give us a salary or social welfare benefit, and then I'll think of the books. I don't agree with that."

Our respondents **do not expect the non-Roma to backlash**, because their main objection is that the Roma do not send their children to school. In their opinion, the positive answer of the Roma population (e.g. more regular schooling and greater success of Roma children) would be crucial for the positive reaction of the non-Roma population.

Nis, male: "I think they wouldn't be against it because our children would receive education as well."

Novi Sad, female: "When they see our child who goes to school and wants to get knowledge, they might react in a different way."

Belgrade, male: "There is no reason for the non-Roma to react, they know the Roma are impoverished and that we should be educated in order to be able to provide for our children."

- **Abolition of separate classes for Roma children and bringing Roma children together with non-Roma children at school***

*Since there are no separate classes for Roma children who are integrated with non-Roma children, the discussion held is about frequent cases of transferring Roma children into schools for children with special needs due to their falling behind non-Roma children with mastering the curriculum.

Respondents **unanimously agree on this action**. One respondent gives his own example – because of falling behind with studying he was transferred to the school for children with special needs where many Roma children go. He felt isolated from the rest of the population. This respondent also suggests that **pre-school programs should be introduced for the Roma children** (where these children will learn Serbian; since they find it hard to integrate into the schooling system if they do not speak Serbian.) who will be able to follow the curriculum.

Nis, male: "The Roma and Serbs should be together. We want to be with Serbs."

Belgrade, male: "I'd be the first to abolish separate classes. Why should the Roma go to these special schools when we're equally smart.."

Belgrade, male: "It could be good if pre-school programs were introduced, when they start the primary school they'd know Serbia better."

Since common classes already exist, **a greater reaction of the non-Roma population is not expected**. It is expected that if the number of the Roma children suddenly increases in some parts of the city (as they would not go to special schools any longer) the non-Roma population might be

suspicious at the beginning, but the success of integration would depend on the Roma themselves at the first place (this mostly refers to the maintenance of hygiene of Roma children).

Novi Sad, female: "They are bound to comment, but if they saw that our children are clean they would stop."

- **Loans and scholarships, so that the Roma youth can attend the university**

Although such an action is welcomed, the majority of the Roma believe this would not affect the majority of their children because **university education exceeds their aspirations**. However, this would be the only chance for successful Roma children to continue their education (there is the example of one respondent who was an excellent student but had no finances to pursue his education.)

Nis, male: "Why not, our Roma children don't have to finish only 8 grades of primary school,"

Novi Sad, female: "This is also good, but I don't know if our children would do that. I can't force my child if he doesn't want to go to school."

Belgrade, male: "I was a top student in primary school, I could've got a scholarship."

As for the reaction of the non-Roma, the majority of respondents believe such an action could be interpreted as dividing and segregating the Roma and **giving the Roma a more favorable status**.

Novi Sad, female: "It's not pleasant. This is again a division. We say today that that we're being discriminated against, but they might say the same."

Employment

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

Our respondents, especially male ones, show the greatest interest in this type of activity. They perceive it as an action that might **contribute to their welfare and complete change in the style of life** (the beginning of a normal life, no poverty and discrimination)

There is **ambivalence concerning the reaction of the non-Roma**:

1. Some respondents believe there **should be a separate fund for the Roma**, because the unemployment rate is the greatest with the Roma, and also, the Roma do not have material goods that might offer them social security. *Novi Sad, female: "This is great, I suppose they wouldn't mind. I think they have no reason to be against it, this means the Roma want to move forward and work."*
2. Others believe there **should be no separation** and that everybody should be helped because many people are unemployed. *Nis, male: "The government should help the Roma, Serbs and everybody else, everyone should live well. 70% of people are unemployed in Nis; the Roma, Serbs and all other nations are unemployed." "Help all poor people, not only the Roma."*
3. A number of respondents simply **do not deal with the issue of the non-Roma** – they believe this action is very important for the improvement of living conditions and they are indignant that they have to wonder each time what other people's reactions would be. *Belgrade, male: "A non-Roma person who has no job has a flat and his grandfather left him a house. If he has no money, he goes to the market and sells the cow." "It would be good if there was work. As for me, I don't care for the non-Roma, what matters to me is that I have a good life."*

- **Adoption of strict anti-discrimination laws so that employers will have to pay fines for implementing and promoting discrimination**

On the one hand, it is noticed that such laws would be useful because they **would enable the Roma to find work more easily**. However, it is again emphasized that **not only discrimination against the Roma should be punished, but against everybody**, because everybody should have equal rights to find work.

Novi Sad, female: "It would be good if something like that existed. They would be employing whenever we knock on their doors, if there is place.

Nis, male: "This law should not be valid only for us, but for the whole population. We're not being realistic in that case. The person who cheated on me should pay a fine, and if a Serb is cheated on, the fine will not be paid."

The **possible reaction of the non-Roma is seen as very negative**. They would be forced to abide by the law, but animosity towards the Roma will be more intense and they would have to suffer certain sanctions.

Novi Sad, female: "I believe they should respect the law whether by their will or not, but they wouldn't agree with paying the fine."

Belgrade, male: "It might be counterproductive. This man might hate you even more because you were the reason why his business stopped."

Health

- **Free vaccines for Roma children**

Actions aimed at the improvement of health are also **much needed**, especially **because of the bad hygiene of Roma settlements**. Some respondents believe such actions already exist and they should be continued. All respondents agree that **not only Roma children should benefit from these actions**, but all children in Serbia.

Belgrade, male: "Of course this is a good action. We live in such dirty settlements and children should be vaccinated."

Novi Sad, female: "I'd like everything to be free of charge, a child is a child. Equal justice should exist, a child should not suffer."

6. Ambassadors of Change: Voices of Trust

- **Roma leaders and organizations – a great number of leaders whom people trust are mentioned in Novi Sad and almost none in Nis**
- **There is great mistrust in Roma leaders in all towns because they are accused of corruption, theft and lack of interest in Roma problems**

Novi Sad

The following names of great Roma leaders whom people trust are mentioned in **Novi Sad**:

- Trifun Dimic
- Petar Novica Nikolic
- Slavica Brdja « *He fights for schooling Roma children* »
- Stevan Bjeljic « *The man who fights for the health of Roma children.* »
- Marija Aleksandrovic
- Sava Aleksandrovic
- Natasa Jovanovic

The Roma leaders mentioned in the negative context are the following :

- Radojko Nikolic
- Abedin
- Cilika "He's a great liar. He gave us just one kitchen cloth and was stealing from us."

Respondents from Novi Sad mention different examples of corruption and theft of Roma leaders:

Novi Sad, female: "They aren't good, and the little we get they take away from us. We get help, each of us 25 kilos of flour and they charge us 900 dinars."

Novi Sad, female: "They go from house to house and collect help. They didn't want to give the paper – the confirmation to my mother until she gave them 300 dinars."

Nis

The main attitude of respondents from **Nis** is that they **feel cheated and betrayed by their Roma leaders** who were representing them. The only person they would trust is **Rasim Ljajic**, the Republican Minister for Minority Issues.

Nis, male: "We have been cheated a lot, we have lost trust in everybody."

Nis, male: "Rasim Ljajic is the greatest leader, we trust him most."

Roma respondents show **great disappointment in their representative in the local government – Mr Balic**. They believe he is insufficiently engaged in the Roma issue, and are especially indignant because Mr. Balic was thanking for his victory at the local elections, saying that the Roma did not vote for him, but Serbs.

Nis, male: "We were pushing this little Balic to go forward, and now he doesn't even look at us, the Roma. As he says, Serbs helped him, not us."

Belgrade

Similar attitudes towards Roma leaders are noticed in **Belgrade**, but **the least knowledge of Roma leaders** is noticed here as well (several respondents say they do not know of any Roma leader). The Roma most often **accuse their leaders of theft and lack of interest in Roma problems**. Only Ackovic is mentioned as a Roma leader, and some Roma persons talk about him in a positive way and some in a negative way.

Belgrade, male: "I know of no leader."

Belgrade, male: "There are several of them at the dumping place, they are thieves, we don't trust them."

- **Role of Roma leaders and organizations in the Decade of the Roma is important**

Roma leaders and organizations are expected to **visit Roma settlements and articulate Roma problems**, but also to **lobby in state institutions** for their problems to be solved. The main reason why their role is considered important is their level of **education**.

Belgrade, male: "They should come together because they're more educated and they should cooperate with the uneducated ones."

Belgrade, male: "They could participate together with the state, government, President, the non-Roma and talk with them about the realization of these plans."

7. Message concepts

Respondents mostly **agree with all statements**. The only reasons for giving bad estimates are **comments on the difficulties in realizing these goals and doubt that the results will be visible soon**. According to their reactions, it seems that they understand the ideas expressed in statements 1 and 3, while they interpret the meaning of statement 2 in the light of the first one.

Belgrade, male: "This seems improbable, and I don't believe him anything until I see all this by myself."

Nis, male: "I think this is good, but impracticable."

Novi Sad, female: "This might come true, but it is not know when."

Estimates for the given statements have been given for all three groups:

		Assessments												
		1	2	3	4	5	Sum(1-5)	Sum(6-10)	6	7	8	9	10	Average
1. It's not just 'talk.'	%	8				17	23	77		8	4	4	58	8.0
2. World Bank and the Open Society Institute	%	4				42	46	54		4	4	4	42	7.3
3. We Roma will have to play a prominent role in ensuring that the goals are achieved	%					4	4	96		8	8		79	9.4