

# Report Croatia

## Decade of the Roma - Roma Groups

Prepared for: SMMRI

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary of Key Findings</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Results and Discussion</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1. Situation in Croatia.....	7
2. Identity as a Roma.....	10
3. Greater Integration in the Community at Large.....	20
4. The Government and the Roma.....	24
5. The Decade of Roma Inclusion.....	28
6. Helping your Community .....	31
7. Ambassadors of Change: Voices to Trust.....	32
8. Message Concepts .....	34
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>37</b>
Transcript from focus group .....	37

## Introduction

In February 2005, eight central European countries, including Croatia, and a number of international institutions such as the World Bank and The Open Society Institute launched a “Decade of Roma Inclusion”. The effort is meant to improve the lives of Roma through better employment opportunities, access to education, health, housing, and to advance the overall living standards of Roma.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the Roma population in Croatia, PULS conducted a qualitative research with Roma population using focus group method. The main aim of this research is to find out the attitudes and perceptions of Roma themselves so that efforts of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” could be appropriately designed and targeted.

### Research goals:

The main goals of this research were:

- To determine perception of Roma toward the situation in Croatia today
- To determine attitudes of Roma toward Croatian Government and what it could do to help Roma population in Croatia
- To explore identity of Roma and how Roma view themselves, their problems and needs
- To determine attitudes of Roma toward greater integration in Croatian society
- To determine awareness of Roma about the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” and attitudes toward it.

In order to accomplish these goals, a special focus group guide was designed by the Client based on which discussions were carried out. The research plan encompassed three focus groups with Roma population in Croatia.

## Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative methodology: by method of focus groups.

The focus group method is a qualitative form of research that includes group discussion on a given topic. The basic goal of focus group is to encourage in-depth discussion in order to study values and opinions of the respondents concerning the problem or the topic of the research.

The focus group method facilitates the analysts, advisors, researchers and other to gain a better insight and to understand the way of thinking of certain groups of people. In other words, when using the classic method of polling a large number of people, we receive an answer as to what people think about a particular question, i.e. which option of answering is selected, in the case of the focus group, along with this basic information we try to uncover the reason(s) why people have a positive or negative opinion on a certain topic.

In this way the focus group enables us to see the motivational and other factors behind particular opinions, i.e. (indirectly) by which messages and activities it is possible to hold a positive relationship to public opinion and organize one's own activities according to the needs that individual groups inside the population feel to be the most important.

### Structure of the groups:

Altogether, three focus groups with Roma population were conducted. Groups were homogenous by gender and age of participants. Groups were held in Zagreb, Beli manastir (in Osijek-Baranja County) and Čakovec (in Međimurje County). The city of Zagreb, Osijek-Baranja County and Međimurje County are areas with the highest number of declared Roma in Croatia, according to census from 2001. The structure of the groups can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. The structure of Roma groups**

	ZAGREB	BELI MANASTIR	ČAKOVEC
Gender	Male	Male	Female
Age	18-31	31-60	31-60
Date	June 6, 2005	May 31, 2005	June 1, 2005

Roma moderator, who was especially trained for this and was supervised during focus groups, moderated groups with Roma population. The goals of the research were explained to him, as well as focus group method and moderation.

## Summary of Key Findings

Respondents are quite pessimistic about the current situation in Croatia. The main problem that Croatia faces today is unemployment. In addition to unemployment, Roma refer to other problems in Croatia in the field of agriculture, social welfare and health care system. The state and Croatian Government are often blamed for the direction of the country. Although the general perception of the country is negative, some Roma acknowledge certain positive steps in Croatia today that are mostly seen on individual level. The overall situation in Croatia is perceived through respondents' personal hardships and deprivation.

Roma form their identity through interactions and social experiences in their environment. Their identity is linked to concrete problems that they face. Their feelings of identity are mingled with opportunities they have (or do not have) as Roma, and various forms of discriminatory behavior make them feel Roma.

Respondents have experienced both positive and negative attitudes of non-Roma toward them. But regardless of their personal experiences, most Roma consider their social environment to have negative perception of them. Social discrimination of Roma is a part of their daily life, and their testimonies indicate that a certain form of antagonism toward Roma exists in Croatia.

The greatest problem that Roma themselves face is unemployment. Apart from unemployment, Roma also face difficulties in health care system, housing situation, financial status and family issues. Although respondents do not explicitly mention education as a problem, it becomes evident from their testimonies that many Roma have no or low education. Low education causes unemployment; unemployment causes poverty and other problems that push Roma population toward marginality and social exclusion.

Roma would like to increase contacts with non-Roma in Croatia. Increased interactions could reduce prejudice and discriminatory behavior toward them. Interactions would also facilitate socialization process, resolve problems of Roma population (like education and employment) and make Roma become an integral part of Croatian society.

**Many Roma believe that Croatian Government should play a pivotal role in ensuring Roma population adequate living conditions, provide them help and support, and facilitate employment opportunities. Local Government can also play an important role in reducing problems of Roma population in Croatia.**

**Most of Roma have not heard for the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” but all welcome the initiative and effort to improve Roma lives. Although the idea behind the Decade is perceived as positive by all respondents, some show a certain degree of skepticism toward the extent to which these efforts will be implemented. Roma express importance of transparency when it comes to distribution of financial means.**

**Respondents believe that they themselves can be active in improving lives of Roma in Croatia. They also emphasize the role of Roma leaders in helping Roma community. When talking about their leaders, some Roma show a dose of fear and reluctance. There are some leaders who are perceived as not being active enough when it comes to improvement in Roma lives.**

## Results and Discussion

Individual topics of special interest were studied by using the guide for group discussions. The discussions started with “warm-up” topics that included an analysis of respondents' opinions and feelings about the current situation in Croatia. All this, in addition to getting valuable information, had the purpose of gaining respondents' confidence and helping them to relax and to get to know others in the group.

What followed after this “warm-up” were respondents' perceptions of themselves as Roma, perceptions of their problems and needs. The next topic of discussion included attitudes of Roma toward greater integration into Croatian society, as well as ways in which Roma life in Croatia could be improved. Toward the end of the discussions, respondents spoke about their awareness and knowledge about the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” and their attitudes toward it, Roma leaders in their communities, and attitudes toward the message concepts related with the Decade.

The structure of this paper also follows this outline. Important conclusions are shown in **bold type**, and are often additionally explained by respondents' verbatim statements shown in *Italics*.

### 1. Situation in Croatia

#### Problems in Croatia today

**Overall, focus groups discussions show that respondents are quite pessimistic about the current situation in Croatia. In their descriptions about the situation in Croatia today, many Roma emphasize unemployment and low living standards as main characteristics of life in Croatia in general, and not just for Roma population. As a matter of fact, in all Roma groups it could be heard that unemployment is the biggest problem that Croatia faces today.**

Respondents are aware of **high unemployment figures** in Croatia, and this is often repeated during the groups. Unemployment is largely perceived as a factor that affects a direction in which the country goes.

- *We see that the unemployment is high. You can see it in media and everywhere.*
- *It's bad. No job. Nobody works. Unemployment.*
- *It seems that the things are not going in a particularly good direction, because it's hard and there are many unemployed and it is hard to find a job.*

In addition to unemployment, some respondents also point out problems in **agriculture, social welfare and health care system. Problems in health care system are more**

**emphasized by Roma women than men, while agriculture and social welfare system is mentioned by Roma men living in rural area.**

- *I don't watch much TV, seldom, but I've heard about some disease and that some died at age of 16. And some newly born children in hospital. That is problematic.*
- *The agriculture is rather bad. On top of many unemployed, the social welfare is huge which is very damaging both for the state and for all of us.*

Although unemployment as the biggest problem is mentioned in all groups, young Roma men are slightly more irritated and resentful toward this problem than respondents from other groups. Such findings imply that these young individuals are disappointed in the direction that Croatia takes. From what they say and from the way in which they express themselves, it also seems that these young people feel helpless about the situation in the country.

- *That's sad. To have a man who has no single day of social benefits. They attend the Employment Institute each second or third day. You get your number, have your time with the official and nothing. I think that all is bad, bad.*

**When talking about the overall situation in the country, respondents' personal hardships and problems arise. Most Roma, when talking about the current situation in Croatia, mention problems that they personally have. This implies that Roma comprehend the overall situation in the country through their own prism. It is as if they cannot look at the whole perspective without considering their status in the country and their hardships.**

Right at the beginning of group discussions, when asked about the direction in which the country goes or about their perception of problems in Croatia, respondents instantly start discussing their own problems. For example, their description of problems in Croatia, like the young man cited above, reflects their own problems that they face with regard to unemployment. Women particularly perceive things in Croatia through their own situation at home, and mention their husbands' unemployment and their low standards of living. Their perception of the situation in Croatia is very negative.

- *The situation is hard. Financially – we live very hard, my husband has no job.....*

Roma from war-torn areas (Beli manastir is in the eastern part of Croatia was directly affected by war) mention that war caused high unemployment and increased a number of social welfare users/beneficiaries. These are perceived as large problems for Croatia in general and also for themselves in particular.

- *There are many people who, when the war began, had 15-20 years of work behind them. When the war broke out, they lost their jobs. Many people became social welfare cases. I am among them.*



### Responsibility for problems in Croatia

**When it comes to identifying who or what is responsible for such a situation in Croatia, respondents often say that the State is to blame.**

The State, Croatian Government, and most political figures are the ones who are the most responsible for the direction of the country. Some respondents tend to believe that it is not the politics directly to blame but instead economic situation that is affected by privatization process in which many people lost their jobs. As already emphasized, war is also viewed as a cause for unemployment and overall negative situation of this country.

- *I'd say it is about privatization. I wouldn't say that the politics ruined Belje (a large and strong company that was privatized) and (the region of) Baranja.*

### Positive steps which Croatia takes

**Although mostly pessimistic in their descriptions about the state of the country, some Roma admit that there are certain positive aspects about the current situation in Croatia.**

Even though they are not specific and concrete in stating what is good, most of Roma say that there are positive steps visible in last years, especially when taken into consideration the fact that there was a war until relatively recently. This is particularly emphasized by Roma from Beli manastir. For other Roma, positive steps are seen on individual level and not in large-scale movements. In other words, individuals try to improve the situation and actively work on changing the global picture in Croatia.

- *I think that something positive is happening, too. As bad as it is, some individuals do bother – both in terms of employment, additional training. It is individuals who make an effort.*

Certain positive aspects of life in Croatia are again, like the negative ones, seen through respondents' own situation. To the question "What is positive in Croatia today?" some respondents, especially women, say that it is positive is that they have roof over their head. So, again, the overall perception of the country is recognized through respondents' own life situations.

## 2. Identity as a Roma

### Being Roma in Croatia

**When it comes to identity of Roma in Croatia, i.e. how Roma view themselves, discussions from focus groups show that there are certain differences among groups in their self-perceptions. These differences are based on the regions where focus groups took place as well as on demographic characteristics of respondents in the groups (gender, age). However, it can be seen in all groups that self-identity of Roma and their perception of who they are can be understood through interactions that Roma have in their immediate social environment. It was demonstrated in groups that their identity emerges from social contacts and social experiences that they have not only with Roma but, even more so, with the majority nation.**

When they describe feelings of identity, Roma take attitudes of others toward themselves. This implies that others in their social environment actually identify who they are. What make Roma feel like Roma are others who do not recognize them as equal citizens of this country. Groups with men show that they relate their identity with concrete problems that they face. For them, the largest problem, or at least the one most often mentioned during the groups, is unemployment. Feelings of belonging and identity are interwoven with employment opportunities that they have (or, better to say, that they do not have). It can be said that they perceive themselves through the eyes of others and through the way in which society treats them. From young men's description of how they feel about their identity, it can be said that for them *to be Roma basically means to be unemployed*.

- *Wherever you appear, and say that you are Roma, you will not get a job. If you are looking for anything, you will get it much harder than other communities and people in Croatia.*

Women are more emotional in their descriptions of self-identity. They are the ones who mention feelings of attachment to their nation. They also emphasize that they are proud of who they are, proud of their origin and way of life. But they also emphasize relations of others towards them when describing their identity. Women mention that they feel uncomfortable and embarrassed when being called "Roma" by others. They also say that they feel humiliated and disgraced when being called "Gypsy" by non-Roma.

- *It is a bit embarrassing when others call you a Roma.*
- *It's good when they call you Roma, but in the streets it became 'Cigan' (or Gypsies). That is humiliating.*
- *A Roma girl is a Roma girl.*
- *You must not be ashamed of yourself. We are proud about who and what we are.*

### Perception of Roma by non-Roma

**In their descriptions of identity, Roma often mention the way in which they are perceived by non-Roma in their environment. From their testimonies, it can be said that Roma have had both positive and negative experiences with non-Roma. Their perception of how they are viewed by non-Roma depends on situations and circumstances. There are no rules. Both positive and negative attitudes and experiences are mentioned in all groups.**

Positive experiences with non-Roma are often described on individual level. In other words, *it depends upon individuals* how they are going to perceive Roma, and as such are not generalized. Also, two-way relationship is said to play a role in how non-Roma perceive them. It seems that the notion of “you’re treated as others treat you” can be applied to some examples of experiences when it comes to how others regard Roma.

- *It all depends on the person. If the person is good, nobody will take him as black. Because how you treat others, the others will treat you. In my case, all are as good to me as good I am to them.*
- *Some appreciate us, and see no differences.*

**When describing negative attitudes of non-Roma toward them, respondents often mention forms of stereotypical attitudes and behaviors that non-Roma expose toward them.** One of such stereotypes is that Roma are perceived as a nation that does not like to work. Roma believe that such a prejudice is one of obstacles when they try to find a job. They believe that non-Roma do not want to employ them because they will quit working after a while or will suddenly not come to work. Roma also emphasize that they are often perceived as a nation that steals and lies, and for that reason they are unreliable in work situations.

- *People have a bad opinion about us, since we are Roma, and they say that we don't like to work. That is not true, the majority of Roma in Baranja like to work and we want to work.*
- *For example, when you are looking for a job, some people accept you, some don't. It bothers some people. Because we are Roma. And some other people don't bother. Because individual people always say that we steal, lie, that we are dirty and that kind of things.*
- *I do the job I do, I sell calendars. Some people buy them, some say "go away you 'Cigan' (or Gypsy)". I go away and that's it.*

During the discussions, respondents mention that non-Roma are afraid of Roma because of the belief that Roma steal and are not honest. Roma say they are also perceived as “dirty” and that non-Roma do not want to be near them.

- *When you say 'Roma', then other nationals fear from their stealing. There are many Roma who are just, especially here in Baranja. We are not such people, we are honest people. Others only call us a bad people.*
- *There are such attitudes, that we are dirty, that we steal, that we lie, and so on.*

In some groups, respondents presented and described uneasy situations in which non-Roma mistreated them. These descriptions often include **verbal abuse and insults**, calling them “Gypsies”. Roma are also mistreated in situations when they need help, as is seen from the example below. Although offended, Roma speak of these experiences as if they were “normal”; it is as if they are used on such a form of behavior from non-Roma. **This implies that social discrimination toward Roma is a part of their daily life.**

- *If, by chance, I am walking in a village or a city, and I am thirsty, my flat is tired. I am looking for a tire pump, and they wouldn't give it to me. I see that they have it but they wouldn't let me use it.*
- *They wouldn't give you water?*
- *I make them sick, they say, they wouldn't give me water.*
- *The other day I was in a shop and heard a man saying that Gypsies stink. And I was there in the shop.*
- *Couldn't you tell him to watch his mouth?*
- *I was just looking at him.*

Roma are reluctant to speak out about negative experience with non-Roma and it seems that they are ashamed of how the environment treats them. They are made to be Roma and to feel like Roma by others who exercise anti-Roma behaviors. Regardless of their personal experiences (which include also some positive examples), Roma largely consider their environment to have negative attitudes toward them. **Because Roma describe some positive behavior and attitudes that non-Roma expose toward them, one cannot talk of complete social discrimination towards Roma in Croatia. But, negative experiences which Roma describe suggest that there is a certain degree of social labeling present in this country, and that a certain form of antagonism exists toward Roma.**

According to Roma, the reasons for negative perceptions by non-Roma toward them can be traced to upbringing within non-Roma families. From this it can be said that, according to Roma respondents, non-Roma upbringing and education within non-Roma families serve as a base for development of prejudice toward Roma. This further brings to the point that, according to Roma, prejudice toward them is formed within non-Roma families and are transferred through generations.

- *The problem are old mothers of those children, parents who should tell their children not to talk like that when they are outside. In my opinion, they should be advised not to talk so. Our children do not call people 'rednecks'. I never heard that.*
- *It depends on parents, how parents raised them.*
- *The attitude 'move away you Gypsy' is no attitude. If I don't want to buy something, I won't buy it, and that's it, and I wouldn't insult. That are bad manners.*

Perception of changes in attitudes of non-Roma in recent years

**Respondents are divided in their opinion as to whether attitudes and perceptions of non-Roma toward them have changed in recent years. Some believe that attitudes do not change and they are constant throughout the years. These respondents have usually had positive experiences with non-Roma. Others believe that perceptions of non-Roma have positively changed, while others perceive negative change in attitudes of non-Roma toward them.**

When they talk about positive changes, Roma emphasize greater communication and contact with non-Roma through which attitudes of non-Roma have changed in positive ways. They also believe that non-Roma have started to acknowledge them as workers, as people who are trying and are willing to find a job (even though they still believe that non-Roma largely consider them to be a nation that doesn't like to work).

- *Many things change. People are behaving normally, in our village at least, towards us and our kids.*
- *But some things changed too. And there is communication, cooperation ...*
- *Some things change, they are treating us differently, we are being respected for collecting iron, aluminum, copper, they look at us as workers, the Roma work though.*

Among other improvements, respondents emphasized the existence of Roma Unions that play a considerable role in forming new and more positive perception toward Roma. According to respondents' views, these Unions' role is important in shaping attitudes toward Roma since their function is to inform about Roma, Roma community and their ways of life. **It is believed that through a better understanding of Roma community, prejudices can be reduced.**

- *Today the unions are present in the public. They show the life of Roma, openly, which means they are not hiding. People are getting to know the entire community and see that it's different from what they imagined.*
- *I don't think that they change... I am 40 and not really an old man, but I remember that when I was 17, 18, that Croats always treated us Roma good, at least here... In Baranja, they were always good to Roma.*

Negative changes with regard to how Roma are perceived by non-Roma are mainly related with difficulties in finding jobs. This issue is repeated throughout the discussions and mainly refers to the fact that it becomes more and more difficult for Roma to find work. Roma believe that non-Roma employers have prejudice toward them and won't provide them with a working position.

- *They deteriorated. Let's say two years ago there was enough work for Roma, there were always some jobs. Now in the past two years it's been getting worse. There is no job, no work. Actually there are jobs but they wouldn't accept us as they do others.*

Problems experienced by Roma

**Problems of Roma population have been mentioned in all groups and throughout all discussions. Even during discussion of other issues or topics, Roma respondents returned to the problems that they face and spoke about their hardships. As mentioned above, when discussing problems that Croatia faces, for instance, respondents spoke about their problems. Similarly, when talking about other issues, Roma emphasized problems of their community. The greatest problem that was most often stated is unemployment. In addition to unemployment and difficulty (or impossibility) of Roma to find a job, Roma also mention the following problems: health care system, housing, financial difficulties and family issues.**

The greatest problem that Roma most often mention is **unemployment**. Unemployment, as portrayed above, is a serious issue in Croatia in general. Almost all categories of population face difficulties in finding a job. For Roma, then, it is especially difficult because they are faced with additional factors related to their ethnic background. It was stated over and over how difficult it is for Roma to find a job, and to be able to earn the living. According to their opinion, Roma won't be employed because non-Roma employers do not respect them, believe that they do not work and that they are not responsible. It was also mentioned above that non-Roma perceive Roma as people who do not like to work, and this is also perceived as one possible reason for Roma unemployment. During the discussions, many descriptions of situations in which Roma were refused and were not given a position were presented. Some instances were also mentioned in which Roma used to be employed, but today they cannot find a full-time job no longer. Unemployment is also perceived by respondents as the main cause of poverty. Because they don't have a job, they cannot earn a living and their standard of living is low.

- *They wouldn't employ me for sure, they would take someone else, although I worked in Beli manastir and Darda for nearly 15 years; but now I'm unemployed.*
- *It is only that I have no job. We have nowhere to move from to do something, to achieve something. We have no job and nobody gives us anything. That's it. Who can, they work and make money, only a few, and who cannot, they live of social welfare...*
- *Here, they called me once to Pušćine for a job interview. I went there, they put all into schedule. And they asked me about the bookstore's name. And that's how they tricked me. While I thought I got accepted. And they asked me about my name. I gave them my name, a Roma name. And they said they would call my home phone, if we are accepted. I immediately knew that they would never take me after hearing my Roma name.*
- *They wouldn't give us jobs, which is why we are poor.*

From these testimonies describe Romas' disappointment about such situation. In addition, they also show a lack of confidence. Roma *a priori* think that **regardless of how hard they try, they will not be given a job; regardless of what they do, they will never find a job.**

Unemployment as a problem was mentioned in all groups, but it is slightly more emphasized by Roma men. When women speak about unemployment, they mostly relate it to their husbands' inability (or impossibility) to find a job and somewhat less about themselves as unemployed Roma women (although this is also mentioned but to a lesser extent). This probably stems from traditional way of life and traditional division of the roles in Roma family. This brings to the point that Roma women perceive themselves and are perceived as housewives.

In addition and related to the unemployment, Roma also face **financial problems**. They explain that they have no income, and their financial difficulties cause poverty and famine. Roma mention that they receive social welfare, but this welfare does not bring them enough resources to feed the whole family. From this social welfare, they cannot afford other necessities for themselves and their children (such as clothes, shoes, school supplies), especially when families are large.

- *The money we get is nothing, we are starving. And that is a problem. Our kids go to school, we have no money to buy their pencils, shoes. For 2 thousand Kuna we buy some clothes and shoes for ourselves. And try to imagine seven kids. In addition there is food, which means that actually I have to pay, I am not getting anything.*
- *The problem is of financial nature, nothing else.*

**Housing** as a problem is also raised during the discussions. It was heard in the groups that Roma live in very poor conditions. Their standard of living is extremely low. Their housing conditions are inadequate, concerning the (usually quite high) number of family members. Roma often express a desire have a decent living place, to have a house for their family to live adequately. Most Roma are deprived of basic infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity and other fundamental housing conditions.

- *I would only build a house, at least two rooms. Financially.*
- *Roma don't live well. Some live in misery... Some have houses, I don't. I have only one room and six family members sleep in there together.*
- *I'm ok, I have a life. But it is bad because I cannot build myself a house to have while I am still alive, and to have nice apartment ... this is the only thing important for me, to have a house. My husband works but his salary is low and we have money just to cover bills, and we cannot build a house. This is my difficult life.*



Another problem related to housing came up during the discussion with older men in Beli manastir. This problem is related with devastation and nationalization of houses during the war. **Because they have not regulated their legal status in Croatia, some experience problem with property.**

- *There is a problem in Drava area, they erased property of one family. Our people are, so to speak, careless, they buy the land and nobody built house. And now the court needs to be included, but it would take years, that would be very bad for those people. It would be better if they could get those houses differently.*

Women, more than men, emphasize **health care system and health insurance** as problems faced by Roma (just like they mentioned health as an overall problem that Croatia faces). From what it was heard in the groups, Roma are not treated equally as other non-Roma when it comes health problems and visiting doctors. Roma explain that, when they go to the doctor, they are often *the last ones in the row*, no matter what is the reason for visiting the doctor. They also have to pay extra because **they do not have regulated health insurances**. The only instances when they are treated by doctors are when they are pregnant, and such a situation deeply bothers them. Health insurance as a problem is also mentioned in groups with men, but not to such a degree as in the group with women.

- *When we are seeing a doctor, Roma always come last in turn.*
- *Health insurance.... if I visit a doctor by accident with no health insurance, I am rejected. Which means that I could die without them helping me. And they would help only if you're pregnant.*
- *We go to emergency, if it's Sunday, and we pay for it.*
- *If we talk about health – this morning a man from the village stopped by, asked for help. For two-three days he had sour throat, nobody would check him, wouldn't give him medicine, he has no money to pay. That man used to be employed, he worked for Unikom in Osijek, and now he has no health insurance, he lost his job, has a sour throat, can't go to a doctor, has no money to pay for medicine. I would give him my health insurance card, but the doctor would see that it's not his.*

When further speaking about problems that they face, women also mention **family issues**. These issues are not problems that come from “outside” but rather from inside their community and rest upon their traditional way of life. The issue of **early marriages** was brought up in the discussion. Women believe that early marriages are problematic for young Roma and express a necessity for this to be changed in Roma way of living. From this it can be said that women wish to discontinue the traditional way of living when it comes to entering early marriages. This issue did not come up during groups with men.

Apart from early marriages, some women also mention problems within their own family, namely problems that their husbands have with **alcohol abuse**. It could be heard that



husbands of some respondents have had a history of alcohol abuse, which brought a lot of problems to women and their families.

- *That should be solved so that they wouldn't get married so young and then get pregnant... That is not good. He is still a child. He still has no brains to get married at the age of 14.*
- *My husband quit drinking some 7 months ago. While he drank, we had a catastrophe at home. Fights, quarrels, we couldn't even eat. He quit, he got cured. He tried to drink twice. Now things will get better, I guess.*

Even though **education** was not straightforwardly mentioned as problem that Roma face (when asked directly what are the problems that Roma population faces in Croatia today), it becomes clear from focus groups that inadequate educational system does not exist for Roma. **Although they do not explicitly mention education as a problem, they indeed perceive education as one of the biggest problems of Roma population, as it was heard during different phases of group discussions.** Also, Roma link and relate education to employment. According to what Roma say throughout the discussions, it can be understood that for them unemployment is a result of (no)-education. In other words, low or no education causes unemployment. Had they had (better or any kind of) education, it would have been easier (or possible) for them to find jobs. Had they had jobs, it would have been easier (or possible) for them to resolve housing, financial and other problems that they face in order to improve their living standards.

Other minorities in Croatia, as seen by Roma, do not experience such difficulties in employment because they have formal education and have completed schools or universities. For this reason, it is easier for them to find a job, which makes their standard of living better than living standard of Roma. Problems of education and employment are exclusively experienced by Roma.

- *They don't have problems like we do. Because they have more education than Roma. They will be accepted sooner than we.*
- *The school needs to be enrolled right from the beginning, some vocational school finished, then university. So that we become normal educated people. Afterwards to get a job and live a normal life. In my opinion. All should live like that.*

#### Perception of changes in problems in recent years

Some Roma perceive there have been changes in problems that they face in recent years, in both directions. Positive change, as emphasized by Roma from war-torn area (Beli manastir) is seen from the perspective of the war. Houses were destroyed, and the area was devastated during the war. But, the war is over now and, when comparing to how it was during the war, today things are advancing, moving in a positive direction. When it concretely

comes to Roma and (positive) changes in their way of living, it was emphasized that Roma live better today since they don't have horses anymore but instead drive trucks.

- *There are some changes... We must understand that there was a war here, that there was destruction, consequences of the war are immense, you can still feel the war, lest the politics.*
- *Our Roma in Baranja, some have made a move, they got better. Before, Roma didn't have trucks, they had horses. Now they replaced horses with trucks*

Negative change that is perceived by Roma is, again, linked to unemployment. Roma mention that they used to be employed (in the years before the war) but that today they can no longer find a job. The change is perceived in a sense that Roma used to work before, and today, instead of working, they are even more dependent on social welfare and care by society.

- *Now we live with social welfare, and before we worked for 15 years. I have my working years, but we cannot get pension or aid.*

### The Future of Roma

**Roma are divided in their opinion about the future of Roma in Croatia and about perspective of next generations of Roma in this country. Some respondents, mostly younger generation of Roma men are optimistic about the future. The others believe that the future of next generations of Roma in Croatia is not very bright.**

Younger Roma are more optimistic about their future and the future of next generations. They believe that Roma will complete formal education in the future that will give them an opportunity (and possibility) to be employed. As explained above, employment will, in turn, provide next generations of Roma with better living standards and the future situation is perceived as brighter than today.

- *I think it will get better. Younger generation will attend school. Finish school, enroll university. Sooner or later they will have their job.*
- *It will get better. Because now Croatia lets Roma to send their kids to school. It simply gives them the same rights as to all others. I guess people have realized that there is no job without school. Simply because of better life.*

Other Roma, mostly older men, believe that the future of Roma is the same as future of Croatia in general. There is no difference between what will happen to Roma and what will happen to non-Roma in Croatia. This implies that Roma consider country's changes (whether positive or negative) affect Roma population as well. The future of Roma is influenced by the overall political and societal changes in the country.

The individuals who think so are not very optimistic about the future of Roma here. They are aware about the current situation of Croatia and perceive that the unemployment is high for

everyone in this country. They fear that this situation will not change soon and that such a situation is the future of Roma, too.

- *Their further plans are about a strong future. If the future were good, okay, but now we wonder how to live in Croatia, how to survive in a job. It's very hard. The kid is now at the Employment Institute, there is no work. My wife and I contact them regularly.*
- *We have that example of workers from Sljeme on TV (Sljeme is a Croatian company currently at strike). Workers work and don't get paid for three months. The future of my child is the same. Perhaps the future will be better. We are hopeful. I believe it will get better. Those workers there have been on strike for a year and a half... it's very hard for people with 4, 3 or 2 decades of working experience, lest the children in the employment institute.*

### 3. Greater Integration in the Community at Large

This section explores views of Roma toward tolerance and openness of Croatian nation toward minorities and people who are “different”. It also explores Roma attitudes toward greater contact with the majority nation and about integration into Croatian society. The last part of the section investigates possible obstacles to Roma integration in the community at large.

#### Tolerance of Croatian nation

**It was already heard that Roma participating in these focus groups have had both positive and negative experiences with non-Roma, especially with the majority nation, Croats. When speaking about the tolerance of Croatian nation, both opinions are mentioned. Croatian nation is perceived by some as tolerant and by others as intolerant toward minorities and toward people who are different.**

When talking about how accepted minorities and “others” in Croatia are, Roma draw upon their own experiences that they have had with Croats. The ones who have had more positive than negative experiences believe that Croats are generally quite tolerant and open toward “others”. However, it needs to be noted that this view is not generalized to all Croats. It *depends upon individuals*. Some Croats are, while others are not, is the opinion that some Roma present.

- *I think they do respect. At least the majority. I think they are rather tolerant.*

Some Roma are skeptic toward Croats’ openness to others. They believe that Croats like to think (and say) that they are tolerant, but their behavior and attitudes sometimes show otherwise. The real “test” of tolerance is allowing one’s child to inter-marry, and some Roma wonder whether all Croats would pass this “test”.

- *It would be interesting to hear what they'd say when asked if they would let their kids marry for another nationality. That, essentially, is a real kind of tolerance. All say they are tolerant, and they actually are and are not tolerant.*

Intolerance of Croatian nation is perceived through discriminatory behavior when it comes to employing Roma. Difficulty in finding a job, because one is Roma, is an example of intolerance of Croatian nation toward “others”, as explained by Roma in these focus groups. Some Roma believe that Croats are intolerant toward other minorities as well, like Hungarians, for example.

- *Briefly, in Croatia and globally we have always been a national minority. We have not been respected always. I would refer to what this gentleman said about children's education. My sister's son finished trade school. Nobody would employ him because he is a Roma or because he is something, it doesn't matter.*
- *Both Roma and Hungarians and all in a way... there is no tolerance towards them.*

### Contact with non-Roma

**When asked about contacts with non-Roma, respondents participating in these groups say that they already have contacts with non-Roma and most of these contacts are frequent, almost on a daily level. Roma express a desire for more frequent contacts with non-Roma, and according to their views, both sides would benefit from these interactions.**

Roma from Beli manastir describe that they have always lived in a “mixed” community with other nationalities, such as Croats, Serbs, Hungarians and others, and positively describe this co-habitation. Women say that they have non-Roma friends, and invite their non-Roma friends to celebrate certain occasions/holidays with them. These descriptions are also portrayed in a positive light. A young man from Zagreb, who attends high school, positively talks about his daily contacts with non-Roma teachers and classmates. Although they “joke” and call each other “names”, he has had no problems based on national level, so he says.

- *We have always lived mixed.*
- *We invite friends who like to come and they come. They come to see, while we celebrate. They want to hear the music and see our celebrations.*
- *I go to school, I have teachers... I've never had problems. Sometimes some jokes with friends, I tell him something, he tells me, we kick each other, but it has nothing to do with the national.*

Respondents from all focus groups said that they want to increase the frequency of contacts with non-Roma in general, and also with majority nation, Croats. Frequency of contacts would bring, according to the majority of Roma participants, a higher quality of life, a respect from non-Roma and friendships. Roma children would also benefit from more frequent contacts with non-Roma in terms that they would gain friendships and learn Croatian language.

- *It were better if we hung out with them than to be remote.*
- *It's better that they hang out together. They would have a better life. Respect. And friendship.*
- *We must also get to know other people.*
- *We should hang out more often.*
- *I'd like to have more contacts, friends. I would visit them, they would visit me. We would talk about work, school.*
- *Communication, friendship, and so... It is good to make contacts.*
- *Children need it. To speak Croatian.*

Roma could benefit from non-Roma, as one young man put, by spending time together and by learning manners and behavior from educated non-Roma. From this it can be said that having contacts with non-Roma would have positive influences on Roma.

- *What could I learn from non-Roma? Nothing bad. I don't know how to explain. If we hang out with Roma in that society, we will always learn something bad. From those who drop from school, have no culture, no manners. If we hang out with an educated nation, then there is nothing bad to learn from them.*

But, contacts between Roma and non-Roma develop in both directions; these are two-way interactions. This means that non-Roma would also benefit from increased and more frequent contact with Roma. According to respondents, negative perceptions that non-Roma have toward Roma could be decreased or completely eliminated through these two-way interactions. Non-Roma could learn about Roma and their ways of living and through these relations prejudice could be diminished.

Non-Roma could likewise gain friendships with Roma. In addition to that, Roma could teach them some practical skills, such as selling or *finding their way around*.

- *They get to know us, to see that we are not who they think we are.*
- *They can learn from me that not all Roma are the same.*
- *They would get friendship.*
- *If we become friends, then they could learn something they don't know. That is, e.g., how to sell or something similar. Roma are otherwise famous as rather capable people and where you leave them, they will find their way. We could teach them how to find their way in some situations.*

#### Integration into the community

**Respondents participating in these focus groups express a desire to be more integrated in the community and society at large. They believe that integration could help them in a process of socialization, and that integration would decrease or eliminate prejudices that non-Roma have toward them.**

A part of focus group guide included discussion about attitudes of Roma toward greater integration in the community. Just at the start of this part of discussion, it could be heard from respondents that there exist Roma schools and pre-school which some Roma children attend. Also, it could be heard that special classes for Roma children exist in certain parts of Croatia. Roma from these groups believe that this is not good. They believe that it is better to have mixed schools and mixed classes because in that way children could learn one from another about each other (similarly to what was mentioned above in contacts with non-Roma) and in that way Roma children would not be isolated. Roma insist on including their children in

classes with other. Mixed classes would help Roma children to integrate from early age in the society. It is the opinion of majority of respondents in these groups that children will be isolated if they do not attend mixed classes.

- *It's better to have them mixed.*
- *Mixed ones are the best for kids. When they're alone, it's only Roma children, which is not good. So they are not isolated.*
- *They should go to kindergarten and pre-school to learn Croatian. As we have here in Čakovec. All need that.*
- *Mixed classrooms are better.*

Integration in the community would not only be good for children but also for adult Roma. They express a wish to be included in the society at large, and be an integral part of it. If they were included in the society, they could contribute in terms of: becoming employed, earning money, learning Croatian language, completing formal education, and being included in health care system. In addition to this, Roma believe that, by living together with majority nation and other minorities, fears and doubts about “others” become lesser in degree. They consider that integration would decrease prejudice and discriminatory behavior and attitudes that non-Roma have toward them.

- *The language and this... getting socialized.*
- *It were better for the language and communications if we hung out with Croats, make friends.*
- *You could open up towards the majority because you could learn a lot from other people. If they hang out only where Roma are, they will only like their own. But they will always like their own. If you hang out with other kids, you will learn Croatian, behavior, discipline. If you stay within your own circles... you slow down socialization.*

#### Obstacles to integration of Roma into Croatian society

**It can be learned from focus groups that certain basic obstacles to integration of Roma in Croatian society and community exist. Perhaps the main obstacle refers to low educational level of Roma as a consequence of inadequate schooling system for Roma pupils and students and as a consequence of lack of knowledge of Croatian language. Low or no education causes unemployment. Roma experience a high rate of unemployment not only because they don't possess necessary qualifications (education, experience) but also because of prejudice and discrimination of non-Roma employers (a belief that Roma steal, that they cannot be trusted, that they quit working after a short while, etc.). Unemployment, in turn, causes poverty, inadequate housing and low living standards. All this pushes Roma population in Croatia toward marginality and social exclusion.**

#### 4. The Government and the Roma

**When the question was asked as to who or what could help Roma so that their living standards would be improved, the answer in all groups was that it should be the state and the Government.**

It is the opinion of almost all Roma in the groups that Croatian Government should help Roma in solving problems that Roma have. Roma show a sense of belonging to Croatia. For this reason, the state should also provide them help and care in return.

- *The state should help, you live here, you should work in it, you invest in it, and the state should, if possible, participate in that.*

##### How could Croatian Government help the Roma?

**When asked how precisely could Croatian Government help the Roma, many Roma said that the Government should help them solve previously mentioned problems.**

Some said that the Government should provide Roma with basic infrastructure of which they are deprived, such as water supply, electricity, roads, and other basic housing conditions (such as bed- or bathroom, as stated below). According to some, the degree and the amount of aid should depend on how many families need help. Those who are more needy should receive more help. The participants did not specify how this could be decided.

- *It's about people who have no house, no water, no electricity, no bathroom... It all depends on how many families there are.*
- *If I'm building a house, they could help. It would help if I have no electricity, water, sewage, and so. I have nowhere to take bath, and they should help me.*
- *We need them a lot. I have two rooms in the house, we have no good beds, we have no water.*

Apart from basic infrastructure, Croatian Government could also secure employment for the Roma.

- *Jobs and so...*
- *To help Roma in getting a job... as the gentleman said, to help kids who finished school in their profession... because they invested in that kid, the kid has a better future, better life,... if they worked all their lives physical works and collected old iron and sold it... then they should get this kid a job.*

A young man, when asked how the Government should help, mentioned sports. He finds sports to be very important. However, he could not think of any Roma who would be successful in sports and believes that this is an area that could add to socialization and help greater integration of Roma in the society.



- *I'd ask them to help more about the education, sports education. I have never seen a successful Roma sportsman. They all have good wishes, but as soon as they hear he's a Roma, his future in the sports is gone. I would firstly ask for sports.*

Even though not directly mentioned when Roma cited problems they face, the formal and compulsory full-time education was mentioned as the primary area in which the Government should help Roma.

- *In a sense that it gives compulsory education.*

#### How could local authorities help Roma?

**Participants seemed not to make any difference between the State and the local authorities when it comes to helping and supporting Roma in Croatia. Like central Government, local authorities should provide help with the infrastructure and the employment opportunities.**

- *They should help build some infrastructure. Beginning with electricity, water, sewage, and all together.*
- *Local authorities could help us with water.*
- *I would ask for working places. When you have a job, you can live... Well, finished school. Jobs are an issue for Roma. That's what I would ask for.*
- *They should give us electricity, aid, or employ us... so that I work anything.*

However, participants also mentioned the local community could organize and finance cultural manifestations of Roma culture. Thus, non-Roma could learn about the Roma community, their traditions and the way of living.

- *Financing some entertainment programs to propagate our culture so that the community can become acquainted with our life style.*

### The help received from the Government and local authorities

#### **Roma are divided as to how much the Government has helped Roma so far.**

There are some who emphasize that the Government helped Roma in one Zagreb district by installing water supply and organizing garbage collection. Such activities are welcomed by participant Roma.

- *I'm up here, they were very much helped, I think there had been lots of garbage. They organized it and I think they helped a lot, it's good to remove the garbage, to prevent diseases. In another case, they are being provided with a tank of potable water each week, others got a children's playground. They promised to help in other ways too.*

However, such examples are rare. Instead, Roma show disappointment in Croatian Government more often saying that it has not really helped Roma with their needs. The disappointment is directed both towards the State and the local authorities. Perhaps due to this, Roma are skeptic toward how much Croatian Government could help Roma. In a way, they don't expect anything from the Government because they doubt that the Government would help them at all.

- *I wouldn't say it helps. It helps neither us nor them....*
- *Local authorities in Baranja treat us Roma very badly. When I need some documents, they send me to our union. The same with job. Croats are not a problem for us Roma in Baranja...*
- *Nothing from the Government, from nobody. I don't get any social welfare. I don't believe in any of that.*

### Helping other minorities in Croatia

#### **When asked how much other minorities should receive from the Government, when compared to Roma themselves, respondents are divided in their opinion.**

Some think that all social groups that face poverty should be **treated equally** if they have equal (or similar) needs. Others believe that Roma need **more help** because other minorities do not face the same problems like Roma. The latter group thinks that the Roma are far behind other minorities (in terms of housing, infrastructure, education, etc.) and for this reason the Government should provide them with more resources and financial aid than other minorities in Croatia.

During this discussion, the issue of mother-country was raised in one group. While other minorities have their mother countries which could give them support (whether financial or of any other kind), Roma do not have. For this reason, other minorities have greater advantage over Roma, and Croatian Government should ensure Roma with additional help. The issue of mother-country was mentioned only in this context, only once and only in one group.

- *They should eradicate poverty wherever it is, regardless of the national, complete eradication of poverty, regardless of religion, all poor people would live better.*
- *I think Roma should be helped more because they have more such problems, the sewage, water, electricity. They have no apartments, they have nowhere to live. Such cases happen more often with Roma. Because I have no living conditions. I have no bathroom in the house, no electricity.*
- *We need more help because we are lagging behind.*
- *Hungarians are more advantageous in getting employed. Because they have their original state (homeland).*

## 5. The Decade of Roma Inclusion

### Awareness of the Decade

**Older Roma men have not heard of any national or international efforts to improve the lives of Roma, at least they did not mention in group discussions any such familiarity. Young men never heard of the Decade of Roma as a project *per se*, but they heard about Croatian Government's special efforts to help Roma (the example presented above, which includes help with water supply and garbage collections).**

**Among female Roma respondents, only some knew about the Decade, and a few spontaneously mentioned a World Bank financed project that is directed at helping Roma to improve the quality of life. They are aware that this project is oriented toward helping Roma through financial means and education.**

- *I've heard that the World Bank will help Roma.*
- *They should help us more, give us more money.*
- *It seems that they will help with school, they mentioned something about kids ...*

Roma who have not heard about the Decade show both surprise and disappointment that they are uninformed about such an important initiative. They express an importance of greater publicity that would raise public awareness of the Decade.

### Attitudes toward the Decade

**After the background on the Decade of Roma Inclusion was read to respondents, it was clear that Roma react to this project very positively. All respondents in all groups perceive the Decade as something very positive. However, some Roma show a certain degree of skepticism as to which extent the project will be implemented. Some Roma also wonder if this project will really meet their needs.**

The initial reaction of Roma toward the Decade was very positive. Roma perceive the Decade in a very positive light and the initiative to help them (and other Roma in Croatia) to improve their quality of life is welcomed by respondents in all focus groups. Roma consider that the initiative is very needed among Roma in Croatia and believe that this effort is necessary to a great extent. Most of Roma emphasize that financial support, education and health system should be main aims and priorities of this project.

- *That's very good for Roma, because not many gave anything for Roma before, or signed petitions. Now it's very good that the Prime Minister Sanader did it.*
- *We need that, it would be good both for us and the future of our kids. All is welcome, the health system and education both for us and our kids.*

- *Yes, definitely, especially schools. Kids should have that compulsory education, an institution to control that instead of having sanctions. And it's good that each country has a plan of its own, which is assumingly different, so they could share experiences.*

There are some Roma who are optimistic toward the Decade of Roma. These respondents believe that something positive will come out of this project and that improvements in areas of education, health system and employment will be achieved. They reveal hope that this project will be implemented successfully. Some Roma express confidence in success of this project because Croatian politicians are involved and signed the project (like Prime Minister Sanader) Also, the World Bank finances the project and they *wouldn't just talk about it.*

- *I believe there's something in it. I believe, maybe there will be some improvements.*
- *Even the World Bank and the EU stand behind, that's why I think it will.*
- *We hope it will be better, we hope so.*

Some Roma, on the other hand, are skeptic toward this project, and they are skeptic for several reasons. First of all, they haven't received any support so far and their experience has taught them not to expect anything, *those are just promises.* Secondly, some Roma believe that it solely depends on Roma how their lives will be, and not on outside support. If they work, their living conditions will be adequate, if they don't work, their living conditions won't be adequate, no matter what efforts are made from international Institutions. Finally, some Roma express a degree of mistrust toward the involved Institutions, Croatian Government included. The question was raised as to where the money from this project would really be spent. The issue of transparency was also raised and Roma express importance of transparency about distribution of financial means.

- *I don't get anything now, and that's why I think I won't benefit from it.*
- *If I'd say now that I'm looking for work, nobody would employ me. If I went to get some health security, nobody would give it to me either...*
- *If my husband would work, then I'll have, if he won't, then there will be nothing. Regardless of their efforts ...*
- *The financing should be more transparent.*

Roma are convinced that reactions from non-Roma toward the Decade will not be too positive. According to what they say, non-Roma will be jealous of the fact that Roma receive extra support and additional attention. The focus will be on Roma, and non-Roma will be envious. Roma also think that the widely accepted view of non-Roma in Croatia is that Roma receive supplies and benefits already and the Decade will be perceived as just another of these projects. Non-Roma in Croatia, from what respondents say, believe that Roma do not deserve such a support because they don't work and receive financial resources.

- *Jealous, because they think that Roma get all for free, and we don't work... Not-working ... that is the rumor ... that we are getting it all for free, that we enjoy it .. .They are jealous.*
- *The same as we now react to them, when they drive a Mercedes, BMW, they have a car, and I have a shack. They will react the same, only vice versa.*

#### Special aims of the Decade

A comprehensive discussion about the special aims of the Decade was not achieved in either of the groups. The respondents were not very talkative when it came to special aims and their analysis of aims was very short. Overall, it can be said that all presented aims were perceived as very important to respondents and they continued repeating how these aims are necessary for Roma population.

When it comes to education, Roma emphasized importance of reduced price for school books and other school supplies, as well as for transport and lunch.

When speaking about employment and micro-loans, Roma stressed significance of this aspect as well. Some expressed an opportunity of purchasing a piece of land and buying agricultural machinery if this aim would be achieved. Some Roma also find it crucial to introduce anti-discrimination laws and believe that such an effort would greatly facilitate their employment opportunities.

All respondents perceive health and vaccination for children as essential.

- *To have cheaper the basic things that pupils need for school, like bags, etc. Then feeding the children. And some would need transportation. There are many things to look at, to help kids.*
- *To buy me land so that I could work. Then you can buy machines, you can buy everything.*
- *To open working places for Roma, where nobody looks at race, that is important.*
- *Yes, it only matters that we are healthy.*

## 6. Helping your Community

**During the discussions on how Roma can help their community, it could be heard that Roma themselves play an important role in improving their living standards and quality of life. Roma believe that they could be active participants in the Decade and some express a desire to be included in the project. They also believe that Roma leaders should have a significant role in the Decade.**

When directly asked how they could be included in the Decade, many Roma participating in this research mention that they would visit areas where Roma population in Croatia lives. This would enable them to have an overview of problems faced by Roma. With these problems in mind, Roma would then ask from the Government to provide them with necessary resources and support. When asked what they would concretely ask the Prime Minister or the President, Roma emphasize they would ask for adequate housing and basic housing conditions (water, electricity).

- *First I'd go to all villages to see what they need. I would ask what they need, how they need it. What is their state... I would go to the Government and ask for it.*
- *I'd visit villages. There they have no electricity, no sewage, no asphalt, no nothing. I'd enter houses and ask what they need. Then I'd go to the ministry and ask if they could provide it. If not, then Roma would get together and make e.g. asphalt or water.*
- *I'd ask for all. Electricity, water, to get property of some lots to put together a house.*

The role of Roma leaders in helping Roma community is immense, as perceived by respondents. Their role is recognized not only as representatives of Roma community that represent them and speak out their needs but also as regulators. In fact, some Roma express suspicion as to how the money from the Decade would be distributed, and Roma leaders could have a task of some kind of “watchdog”.

- *They must have some role, so that a Roma receives the money for Roma and then to help all, not to put the money in the pocket and run away.*

## 7. Ambassadors of Change: Voices to Trust

**During the discussion about trust toward Roma leaders in their community, it was noticeable that some Roma were reserved and kept back. A possible reason for this might be a certain dose of fear and insecurity when talking about their leaders. A general view is that there are both positive and negative leaders in Roma community. No concrete names were revealed, especially when respondents spoke about their leaders in a negative context. Roma from Beli manastir have positive experience with their leaders and this was emphasized in the group.**

Roma are divided in their views as to how much Roma leaders actually help their community. There are some Roma who believe their leaders are active, that they genuinely initiate and organize activities, and correctly represent Roma population. Others believe that Roma leaders are not genuine in their intentions. These individuals believe their leaders only pretend to want to help Roma, but that in reality they do not show compassion and desire to provide Roma with any support.

In addition to this, it was heard that there are some leaders who only help their “fellow-men”. What these individuals imply is that leaders tend to show empathy and support only to “their own”, meaning their closer (and wider) family members, friends and members of their community. These leaders are not open toward “other” Roma who are deprived, but only toward the ones that they know. Such a view was mostly heard from the group in Zagreb.

A general view is that there are some leaders who help and others who do not help Roma in their hardships.

- *There are good ones and bad ones.*
- *It depends on person. If we are good with those people... sometimes you help the one you one before you help the one you don't know. In my opinion, we should help all who need help.*
- *They give more and help more to acquaintances, than to people they don't know. Especially if they are related.*
- *Some among Roma presidents only want the Government to see how they help their Roma. The majority really does not help to the needy. They find some people in the street and film them so they can show that they are helping Roma.*

**It was also heard in the groups that some leaders are inactive in their communities. For example, some Roma women pointed out that they do not even know who the president of the community is, who other leaders of the community are or what they do. These testimonies show that there is a necessity for Roma to be informed about activities in their community, and that their leaders need to take a more active approach. Roma show a desire to be informed about what happens in their community.**



- *Whatever is being done, solved, we know nothing about. Only the invitees know. And they refuse to come to our home and explain, to talk at length. That is the problem in our community, they attend meetings and say nothing to us. I don't even know who is the president of our community.*

Roma from Beli manastir speak positively about their leaders in Darda and Beli manastir. They mention Branko Petrović and Branko Đurđević as leaders who are very active and concerned for Roma. Roma speak highly of these leaders and about their Union that was established couple of years ago. From what Roma in Beli manastir say, their leaders are included in protecting Roma rights and actively help Roma from this area.

- *Mister Branko from Darda, he also represents Darda and Beli manastir. Before the union, you couldn't knock on the door, you were sooner outside than inside, "come in two days", they said. Today, the union has been there for 4,5 years, we are very glad to have someone to talk to, which is the union's president. When you contact them, they check out what is going on, several time with President Branko, representatives who represent us, you get in, no problem ... the union helps a lot, we have opened the doors, the doors are always open, eyes open, and we are very glad. If we have not created the bylaws, if we haven't made the union, our eyes would still be shut.*

## 8. Message Concepts

The final part of the focus group guide included three message concepts that were read to respondents. Respondents then had to rate these statements on a scale from 1-10, where 1 meant that the statement is not at all persuasive and meaningful, and 10 meant that it the statement is extremely persuasive and meaningful.

**All three message concepts that were rated have been raised and discussed during the groups prior to the final part of the discussions. Overall, it can be said that the group with young Roma men in Zagreb show a degree of doubt toward the statements and do not consider the messages completely convincing. The other two groups, with older men and older women, rated all three statements with a grade 9 and over (after the average grade was calculated).**

1) I believe the Decade of Roma effort will have a positive impact on the lives of Roma here in Croatia because governments have committed real resources. It's not just 'talk.'

Such an attitude was heard during the groups, and examples were given above as to how much respondents consider the Decade to have positive influences on lives of Roma in Croatia. But, discussions also revealed that some respondents do not believe that the Decade will positively affect Roma. The negative attitude was not taken into account when grading the statements in groups with older Roma men and Roma women: the average grade in both groups was 9,7. Young Roma men show lower degree of confidence in this statement, as it could have been heard in the group. Their average grade is, although lower than the grade in other two groups – 6,6 – still rather high.

2) I believe the Decade of Roma effort will have a positive impact on the lives of Roma here in Croatia because of the involvement of organizations like the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.

A part of the focus groups involved a discussion on this topic as well. Both "sides" were heard in the discussions. This statement, again, was graded with 9,7 in groups with older men and women. Younger men show disbelief and consider this statement to be far less persuasive, with average grade 5,3.

3) If the Decade of Roma effort is to have a positive impact on the lives of Roma here in Croatia, we Roma will have to play a prominent role in ensuring that the goals are achieved.

The last statement was meaningful for all three groups. Women (average 10) and older men (average 9,4) completely believe that the statement is convincing and that Roma need to be active as well in order to help themselves. Young men also agree (average 8,3) that it is important for Roma to be actively involved in the Decade.

- *Roma must be active in order to achieve the goals of the action.*
- *If Roma put more effort, it would be even better. Then they would do something.*

## Conclusions

This research provides a wealth of information about the life of Roma Croatia. It gives insight into problems of the Roma population, their attitude towards integration in Croatian society and their perception of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion”.

The living conditions of members of Roma community in Croatia are very difficult. They face a reduced access to health care, have low (or no) education, very poor housing conditions and high unemployment rates. They are also subjected to social discrimination in various forms. Apart from verbal abuse, Roma experience discrimination in health care system, employment and other every day situations.

A large problem and a source of insecurity for Roma is employment. Reasons for high unemployment rates are manifold: low education, feelings that they will not be employed no matter what they do, and non-Roma prejudices toward them. Unemployment, in turn, causes poverty, and poverty causes other hardships Roma have which push them to the margins of Croatian society. Roma do show a desire for increased contacts and interactions with non-Roma. These interactions could facilitate process of socialization and could reduce discriminatory behavior exercised over Roma population. Roma also show a desire for greater employment opportunities and access to education.

Roma welcome the efforts behind the “Decade of Roma Inclusion”. They also see themselves as active participants in the Decade. They also show a desire to fight for their rights, for solving their problems and for improving their lives.

## Appendix

### Transcript from focus group

Focus group held in Beli Manastir with older Roma men on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

## Focus Group Guide

Research topic: Position of the Roma in Croatia  
Version: The Roma group

### INTRODUCTION

#### ROMA

BELI MANASTIR, May 31, 2005. 14:00

- Bogoljub,
- Pedrag
- Nikola
- Dragoljub
- Stevan
- Radivoje
- Sava
- Dušan

*Today we will talk about the life of the Roma in Croatia as it is now and as you would like it to be.*

### Introduction: How are things going?

- **Moderator: To start with, I would like you to describe the direction of Croatia today (in general)?**
- We can see that there's high unemployment. That can be seen in the media and everywhere. The situation in agriculture is pretty bad. High unemployment means a lot of social welfare and that is very negative for the country and for us people. There are a lot of people who had, before the war, spent 15, 20 years working, some even longer. When the war broke out, people lost their jobs. Many people live on the welfare. I am one of them.
- This gentleman has said it all.
- **Moderator: Would others like to add anything to this?**
- There's nothing to add. The main thing about us is that we want to work, the majority of us wants. There is a bad opinion about us since we are Roma; they say we don't like to work. That is not true; most of us Roma people here in Baranja, like the gentleman said used to have jobs and want to work.
- **Moderator: In your opinion, what would be the main cause of unemployment? Who is responsible for that?**
- I would say that basically it's because of the privatization process. It's more because of the privatization; I wouldn't say it was politics which ruined Belje (an agribusiness corporation) and Baranja. They will give job to the person they want to employ. They will certainly not employ me but someone else, although I used to have a job on the territory of Beli Manastir and Darda municipality for almost 15 years, but now I am unemployed.
- Yes.
- **Moderator: What do you think, are there any positive moves in Croatia, that is, what do you now see as being positive in Croatia?**
- I can't say anything against, because it really isn't all so terrible. Only this unemployment. We have no starting point for creating something in life, for achieving something. We don't have jobs and nobody is offering one to us. That's all, those who can work and earn money, only few of us, whereas others live on welfare. Only that...
- I have five grandchildren. I have three children, all married. From two daughters I have five grandchildren. I am a musician and I used to live off music. I no longer work as a musician. I work with iron, collect scrap iron. Here in Baranja I don't have anyone to work with. I feel backward here. It's been 10, 15 years since I have not lived off music and we are no longer familiar with trends in music. I was forced to accept my current job in order to survive.
- Yes. That is a gloomy picture of the life of the poor in Croatia in general, and we Roma people belong to that category.

- **Moderator: Stevan, in your opinion are there currently any positive moves in Croatia in general, any positive moves in the life of little man? Can one live in Croatia?**
- One must live. Whether there are any moves... yes. We must understand that we had a war here, a lot was destroyed, consequences are enormous, war can still be felt, to say only that much without going into politics. Regarding us Roma people, in my opinion, and I believe other Roma share it, we can boast of being to a certain extent accepted here in Croatia. May Lord let it get only better.

#### Your identity as a Roma

- **Moderator: You have just started another topic of interest. What interests me now is what it means to be a Rom here in Croatia, for you personally?**
- Before the war, a Rom was something... when someone said Rom, we say Rom, and before they called us *Cigani* (*Gypsies*). When they called us *Cigani*, it implied that we engage in stealing, trafficking children and alike. Whereas now, at least that's how I see it, when people say Rom it has a different connotation. It no longer implies that a Rom steals or whatever. They have a better attitude toward that Rom. Some of our Roma here in Baranja made some progress, have a better life. Before, no Rom had a truck. They had horses. Now they've replaced horses with trucks.
- We Roma have children... but we have no jobs.
- Something has changed, and we look at the world around us differently...
- **Moderator: Fine. Sava, tell me, how do you see these changes in the non-Roma toward us?**
- We live now on welfare, whereas before we had jobs for 15 years. I have a record of employment, but we cannot get pensions or aid. I gave my horse carriage for welfare. My wife and I, and we also have a son. He has liver disease, I have lungs disease. What has changed is that before we used to work and earn money, now we neither work nor earn, but live on welfare.
- **Moderator: Dušan, tell me, what is the attitude of other people from our community toward us?**
- Regarding the Roma, it is quite bad. When you say a Rom, other ethnic groups are afraid, afraid that we steal and who knows what else. There are many honest Roma people, particularly here in Baranja. We are not people like that, we are honest people. But an opinion has been formed that we are bad people.
- Some consider us to be dirty, people who steal, tell lies and alike.
- On the other hand, some things have changed. There is communication, cooperation...
- **Moderator: So, there are positive moves?**
- There are...
- Some things have changed, we are being regarded in a different light, we get respect for collecting scrap iron, aluminum, copper, for taking it to the buying station, selling it, and so now we are regarded as people who work; Roma people do work.
- **Moderator: In your opinion, should government allocate resources exclusively to help the Roma?**
- Help should be given to anyone in need of it. To all the poor.
- Whoever needs help, should receive it, it's only natural. People in need of help should get help if possible; we should support such a person at least a bit. I see it now in my case. We are making a bit of progress... our situation is improving... as a result of these vehicles that we now have, that we drive. Before we used horses, now we drive trucks. As for the way we manage, we manage somehow... we manage to get money to buy things.
- What do you mean by that?
- We have one vehicle and God forbid...
- **Moderator: What opportunities exist for Roma youth? Dragoljub, you said your son was a high school graduate, what are his plans for the future?**
- His plans are to have a strong future. To have a good future, but at this time and age one asks oneself how to survive in Croatia, how to survive in business. It is very difficult. The kid is now registered with the Employment Bureau; he does not have a job. My wife and I are also regular at the Bureau. I am one of those people who used to have a job. I am 42 and it's very hard to find a job. I am 42 and, thank God, can work another 10 years. Three children, two of them

minors who still go to school, so it is very difficult. I don't know how, where to turn for help... I have no idea.

- **Moderator: What do others think, what future prospects Roma youth from this area have?**
- Why, we have the example of Sljeme workers which was on television. People go to work but did not get paid for three months. My child's future is the same. It is my opinion that his future will be the same, but it does not have to be, it does not mean it will be. Perhaps the future brings better times. We live in hope. I believe it will get better. But when something is happening there, when we watch it, those workers who were on strike for a year and a half, then it is very difficult for people with 40 or 20, 30 years of work experience, let alone for children registered with the Employment Bureau.
- The situation, in general, is very difficult, and for the Roma it is even more so.

#### Greater Integration in the community

- **Moderator: Do you think that Croats, that is, Croatia as a nation, appreciate Roma community in the whole of Croatia and if so, how much? I am not looking for numbers; rather tell me in your own words how tolerant Croats are.**
- In short, here in Croatia, as well as everywhere else in the world we have always been a national minority and we still are. We have not always been appreciated. I would like to add to what the gentleman before me said about the education of children. My nephew graduated from high school where he was trained as a salesperson. Nobody would employ him because he is a Rom or something, it doesn't matter what. We all invest the welfare we receive in our children so that they have clothes, shoes, books, that they have things like other children. When they finish school, there are no jobs. I am not saying there are no jobs only for the Roma, there are no jobs for other people as well. In general there are no jobs. If we look at Croatia, there are Hungarians, Serbs, as well as Croats who are perhaps without a job, not just us Roma.
- True.
- So, there are many of us, also other ethnic groups which are likewise belittled/undervalued, in other words, which have no access to jobs or to other...
- **Moderator: In your opinion, therefore, tolerance and appreciation...**
- Are still not satisfactory. They are not.
- **Moderator: ...generally toward people who do not come from the majority ethnic group...**
- Exactly.
- Roma and Hungarians and all others in some way... there is no tolerance toward them.
- **Moderator: Are there any changes in that segment, do you think Croats are changing some of their opinions about the Roma?**
- Well, I don't think they are changing them... I am 40 years old, therefore not an old man, but I remember when I was a young man of 17, 18, that Croats were always good to the Roma, at least here, I can't tell for other places, but here in Baranja... they have always been good to the Roma.
- I think it is even better today, but true, it always depends on the person, what kind of person you are, there are all kinds of people, at least that's how I see it.
- **Moderator: So, in your opinion, it is good?**
- Yes.
- **Moderator: Sava, I would like to hear what you think, whether you would rather live separately, if you had a chance to have a house outside a Croatian town or village, or whether you would rather have a Croat for a neighbor?**
- We already have our own house... I have my house, I would not...
- **Moderator: I am saying this hypothetically, what would you rather?**
- Well, I don't know...
- Would you rather live down there in some Roma settlement or would you rather...?
- Well, I don't know...
- We have all always lived in mixed communities.
- **Moderator: That is what I am interested in, what does a person gain by living in a mixed community, what do we who live together with the non-Roma gain?**
- Communication, friendship, and such...
- We get some different contacts in this way.



- This is how people live in Baranja. Roma live in towns and villages, the neighbor is a Croat, and I am a Rom.
- That's it, yes.
- Well, we have always lived, at least here in Slavonia, in mixed communities.
- There were Croats and Serbs...
- We have always been good to each others, raised our children together, children attended the same school.
- Well, ok, there is also a Roma settlement here, I mean a place where only Roma people live, there is one in Darda, there are wretched huts, also by the cemetery where they live mixed.
- There are mixed ones everywhere, there is a Roma settlement in Darda, but a mixed one and they live there. .
- And that is good.
- It is good like that... when I had a job, children went to school, they went and returned together, when possible they played together...
- There is a purely Roma settlement... In Varaždin, there in the surrounding area... In Međimurje.
- **Moderator: And so, what do you think about contacts with other ethnic groups?**
- That's desirable.
- **Moderator: You speak Romany here; did you learn any other languages besides Romany?**
- In Baranja we mostly speak Romany, but we learn also foreign languages...
- Everybody learns...
- ...mostly, they learn 3, 4 languages. They learn Serbo-Croatian.
- **Moderator: All right; but if you live near Hungarians, wouldn't you pick up anything from their language?**
- That happens as well.
- In places where Hungarian is taught from first till fourth grade, they spoke Hungarian, they can speak it.
- Personally, I know some Hungarian, I understand...
- **Moderator: Tell me about handicrafts, Sava said he was into basket-making which many consider a handicraft that has died-out... Is there anyone else here who knows one of old handicrafts from this region?**
- Yes, there still exist some of these handicrafts.
- **Moderator: What else was here besides basket-making?**
- Cutting brushwood.
- I don't remember that one, but there was work for wages.
- Yes, work for wages.
- My father who is an older man remembers "Roma Brushwood Association" in 1998-99 with Roma people, there was a tradition, they collected and cut brushwood in the forest and then sold it at an outdoor market.
- **Moderator: Tell me, do some of these old tools still exist, do any of you have them?**
- They exist. (x2)

#### Helping your community

- **Moderator: Since we have big problems, unemployment is a problem, who in your opinion should be responsible for helping the Roma community?**
- The government should help, in the country in which you live and in which you work, in that country you invest and that country, if possible, should take part in it, in securing jobs and in enabling the Roma... like the gentleman said, a child who completed some education, such child should find a job, work... because they invested in that child, so that the child would have a better life in the future, if he is a manual worker all his life and collects scrap iron and sells it, then it would be only fair that his child gets a job.

- I always say that if he completed some education, then he should work in his profession.
- Well, also the municipality; (local) municipality should help because municipality operates via the state.
- **Moderator: How should either local authorities or the national government help the Roma?**
- Well, I don't know that, perhaps communication, they should with us, I don't know...
- **Moderator: How could the local community, for instance the municipality, help you now?**
- That's what I wanted to say, they could give us electricity, or give us a one-time financial assistance or jobs perhaps... so I can work, doesn't matter where and what.
- And not only receive welfare, but try to work while we still can.
- **Moderator: Tell me, how big should that help be in your opinion, how much should the Government or the local community help you?**
- I can tell you this, financial assistance is a very small assistance, you get it only once, 500 Kuna from the municipal government, that is very little, I would rather that they give me a job, to work, I would be happier, more satisfied, if I had a permanent job. So that I can earn money, have a small pension later in life, and have something at the old age, so give me work and not a one-time financial assistance, if I get it every 2-3 months it will not be of much help, but a permanent job would be a much bigger help, permanent employment.
- **Moderator: You said that there were other poor communities here, someone mentioned how unfair it would be if the Roma would get more help than others...**
- It all depends on us, depends on the state, whether the Croatian or Roma, who is in those power... who communicates.
- **Moderator: We are talking about the Roma and other poor groups, is it all right if the Roma get more help than others?**
- I would not say that anyone is being helped. Neither side is being helped... their life is worth as much as mine, because they are also in need just like the rest of us.
- Action should be taken, poverty should be completely eliminated no matter where it is, regardless of one's ethnic belonging, people should be helped regardless of their religion or ethnicity, and all poor people would live better.
- My God.
- Also these young people.
- **Moderator: What are your expectations from the Government regarding the improvement of the life of Roma people?**
- Well, I have something to add here, I was at a meeting recently and I asked a question, "Are there any differences between finances", in other words whether there was a difference between ethnic groups in Croatia when it comes to finances. She replied that there was... actually, I asked whether all people had the same rights. There was a minister there, I guess, I cannot remember her name; she said we did not have the same rights as others...
- What do you mean we don't have the same rights?
- We don't. I did not understand it so I asked her to clarify it to me, to tell me in more details why not, "Well, you Roma set up your own association, it is up to you to fight for it," that's what she said. That's why in Slavonia and Baranja we don't get free electricity, free water supply, as far as social problems are concerned Slavonia remains... in Zagreb they have everything, their electricity and water bills are paid for them...
- ...they even get aid... and then she said "You have to fight for it, send requests, send to Zagreb, etc." I don't think it's because of the birth-rate, we have the same rights although we were isolated from Croatia. If we look back in time, back to Hitler, we were at the bottom of the social scale. It is like that now. I always said "in communist times we had no influence, we could not fight for something, since we have this right now, for the first time we have our association, and we will fight if possible..."
- **Moderator: I don't understand how anyone could say that we don't have the same rights as others since the Constitution guarantees the same rights to all citizens of the Republic of Croatia.**
- Not that we don't have rights, we have rights, everyone in Croatia acknowledges us, Croats and all others, we Roma among ourselves, what troubles us is that we don't have jobs...
- There is no health care for us.
- I need 70 Euros per day to support my family, which amounts to I don't know how much per month, I don't have money for utility bills, neither for water nor electricity bills.

- Life is something else, but now that you've mentioned it, since we were talking about health care, this morning a man from the village came to me and asked me for help. He has had a soar throat for 2-3 days, but the doctor would not see him, would not give him any medication, and he does not have money to pay. That same man once had a job, he worked in Unikom in Osijek, now he does not have health insurance, he lost his job, has a sore throat but cannot go to the doctor because he doesn't have money for the medicine. I was thinking of giving him my health insurance card, but the doctor will notice it's not his card.
- **Moderator: Would you like to increase contacts with the non-Roma, would you as a Rom like that?**
- Yes, we would, why not?
- Do you mean the accession to Europe ...
- **Moderator: No, I mean contacts with non-Roma people here in Croatia.**
- Oh my God, yes, it would be good for employment as well, to get jobs.
- Positive, no doubt that we should increase contact with them.
- We have to communicate with them; we don't have our own school, a Roma school which children could go to.
- We should neither have it, nor do we want a Roma school.
- As it was before, so it should be now.
- My grand grandfather, I have no idea when he was born, he used to say that Croatia was his homeland, we don't want to isolate ourselves from Croats.
- **Moderator: So, you don't want to be isolated?**
- We don't want to isolate ourselves from Croats, to have no contacts with them. We don't want that.
- Not from Croats, not from any other ethnic group.
- We can cooperate with them, just like with others...
- That's right.
- ... as we have until now.
- And we want to have contacts and work with Croats and all other non-Roma people.
- **Moderator: And what is their attitude toward this, do they want us?**
- We don't have anyone among us to confirm this, to say "We want to be with the Roma"...
- **Moderator: But you know, you have neighbors, how are they treating you?**
- There are some who accepted us.
- Well, here in Baranja, it was a bit awkward during the war to have contacts with Croats, because we stayed here but some had left and then returned...
- ...That unfortunate war brought all kinds of things, however I wanted my kid, since I used to play football in Šparta for many years, I was on the Šparta team, it was a second division team, and so I wanted my kid to follow my footsteps and play for Šparta, and now there was nobody I could... because there are no Serbs in Šparta anymore, you understand, they all left, there are no former friends of mine there who could help him into the team, and so what to do?, I went to a neighbor to ask him since he is the coach, a returnee, he returned to Šparta, and I asked him and he said "Pele, don't hesitate to ask, let bygones be bygones, your child will play football in my team, I will love your child the same as I loved you, there's no reason to judge him by whether he stayed here or not, whether he is Ciganin (Gypsy) or"...therefore, there is contact. There are also good contacts.
- Yes.
- **Moderator: So, there are good vibrations on both sides.**
- ...there are people... generally speaking, Croatian people are good people, but it could be of their interests that we stayed here, there was this war, and they want to join the European Union...
- Eh, that will not happen soon, that accession.
- ....some other government, some other countries, perhaps it would be different for us, I don't know what it looks like.
- **Moderator: Ok, this accession to the EU, do you feel that now they treat the Roma differently?**
- My opinion is that they don't.
- **Moderator: All right, everybody has his own opinion. Tell me about local authorities, what are their reactions to some of your requests, needs, wants?**
- Pretty good.

- As for local authorities, when it comes to Baranja, they have been treating us Roma people very badly. I will give you a specific example, when I need to obtain a document, any document, regardless from which office, they simply turn me down and say “You have your association, contact them,” and that’s how it is with local authorities in Baranja. Also regarding employment, when a Rom is looking for a job, when it is a Croat, a Hungarian, a Rom, local authorities should see, we have agriculture they say, but that agriculture is stagnating, it could be stagnating for another year, 5, 10 or 100 years, and economy, if some businessman would take over a firm, some rich man or tycoon would buy it, if he would employ us, we would work, and as for Croats that is not a problem for us Roma in Baranja...
- ...if it is like that, if Croats treat the Roma like we do here. The situation here was critical for us, particularly because the majority of us are Orthodox, as you can see from our names and surnames, and when they came with us, it’s not everywhere, not for everyone, but when you look at it globally, we can live. I would be happy if a Croat... Croats are... some of their people have less than we do, and they weep and cry, we saw it on television, and we saw it in public, people setting themselves on fire because they were poor, while we Roma are managing somehow, perhaps because we are used to it, used to survive, happy nobody is bothering us, happy we are left alone...
- **Moderator: How strong is the Roma community here; is the Roma community capable of helping itself?**
- This Roma association has done some things, it helped people quite a lot, it helped these returnees who returned from Serbia, it helps, but ok it cannot help everybody, but it did help some people and it really is intervening on our behalf.
- If we need some documents, this or that, they do it.
- They have opened our eyes.
- **Moderator: Who would like to tell me what schooling, education in this area is like?**
- Super.
- **Moderator: Are there any college graduates?**
- There are no college graduates. We have an elementary school, a high school. An elementary school in Darda, a high school in Beli Manastir. Our children who wish to go to high school have to enroll in Beli Manastir or Osijek, it depends. If you wanted to hear about donations for schooling Roma children. Every school-going Roma child proves it with a document if he/she continues education at a high school level. They give us children’s allowance and some money for books. But half is acknowledged, parents pay half of it, half money is reimbursed. Some people get full reimbursement, it depends. That’s how it is here in Darda, and I believe the same goes for Beli Manastir. That’s it regarding donations. As for books, there are donations from other countries, donations by Croatia, from the national budget, that’s it.
- I would like to add something regarding the communication between children, there are no problems. No incidents.

#### Decade of the Roma

- **Moderator: Have you heard of any special government efforts to help the Roma? What kind of projects are they?**
- We’ve heard. Newspapers wrote about old houses unsuitable for living, damaged to a high degree, without a boiler-room, electricity, water. When will they repair that, whether in one, five or ten years or in one month, but they made a register of houses and as far as we know, there will be a revision. That’s what we’ve heard, that there should be some revision and then everybody reported the condition of his house. I believe that the Ministry for Urbanism should come and scan the situation. To see whether houses should be torn down or if there would be a partial reconstruction and renovation.
- **Moderator: Do you know of any projects, of something concrete that is done for the Roma in the European Union? Have you heard of any such projects?**
- I heard something a few days ago. I was in Hungary. The Roma from Hungary, I have relatives there, they are in the EU. They built the substructure of the house and they have three children. The state, the European state, will build the whole house for them. They were here and saw how we live and said “it will be long before you join Europe, this way you cannot go to Europe”. We went to Hungary, their houses are being built, and they only need to build the substructure. That’s what that cousin of mine told us.

- **Moderator: Together with some European countries, Croatia has launched a big project. Does anyone here know what that project for helping the Roma is about?**
- I'm not familiar with it.
- **Moderator: Have you heard of the Decade of the Roma? What is Decade of the Roma? Have you heard of it? It was in the newspapers. What's it about?**
- That's a project which will run from 2005 till 2015. The decade which is devoted to helping the Roma. Is it strictly for the Roma or for everyone in general?
- **Moderator: It is for the Roma. It includes eight European countries; Prime Minister Sanader put his signature on it as well. Do you know anything about it, what areas it covers?**
- Baranja, Virovitica.
- **Moderator: All right, these regions. What I had in mind was the areas of interest regarding the Roma population. Such as education which you've already mentioned, then...**
- Health care, education.
- And social welfare.
- **Moderator: I will give you now a little background on the Decade of Roma Inclusion: In February, 2005 eight central European countries and a number of international institutions such as the Open Society Institute and the World Bank launched a "Decade of Roma inclusion." These activities are intended to improve the lives of Roma through better employment opportunities, access to education, health and housing. This effort is meant to stimulate activities in countries like ours that will advance the living standards of the Roma and ensure greater integration into our society. Each of the eight countries has a different action plan that identifies clear goals (e.g. improve education) and specific goals such as "All Roma boys and girls complete compulsory education." Moderator: These are only concrete goals suggested for one segment.**
- **Moderator: What is your reaction to that plan?**
- I think something will come out of it. Because the European Union is behind it, all these countries are, so that the Roma are included into the EU population. Today we have only one bathroom here, it is unbelievable that something like this still exists.
- **Moderator: To what degree do you believe these activities to be necessary?**
- That's exactly what's necessary, it is not superfluous, we need that.
- **Moderator: In your opinion... this project will draw a lot of attention, a lot of media attention. What do you think will be the reaction of others? We've mentioned other poor groups. How will they react? Dušan?**
- We are hoping it would be better. That's what we are hoping for.
- **Moderator: How will your Croatian neighbor react? All of a sudden, he sees that someone is building a house for you. What will his reaction be?**
- The same way as people react to them now, when they drive a Mercedes, a BMW, he has a car, I have a wretched hut. He will react the same way, only in opposite direction. Opposite.
- **Moderator: What do you think of the future of the youth, in light of what we've talked about? Are there any prospects for them?**
- There's progress, there's future.
- Because this program is going to run for 10 years.
- **Moderator: Do you believe there is a way in which you and your community could do something within such a program? Moderator: For example, Sava could answer this question. Sava, how would you participate in the Decade of the Roma? You, for instance, make your baskets, isn't that good?**
- Yes, I used to carry them on my back. We were very poor then, but nevertheless we lived well and managed somehow. When there was work, I worked.
- **Moderator: These baskets of yours could become a tourist offer.**
- That's right. But we don't have brushwood anymore.
- **Moderator: We'll find it, Sava.**
- We'll plant brushwood.
- We'll have a work drive.
- **Moderator: How could the Decade of the Roma be of help to you now? Specifically this year and the next one. Predrag?**

- This is what I think - this gentleman here could do more regarding these baskets, to promote them on the market. As for us, let's say my mother or his grandmother could bake *pogača* (round unleavened flat cake) and then sell it to tourists. We could open a boutique, let's say for baking things and alike. We could do it in such a way that these older men can use their skills.
- In this particular case, a basket-making business should be started, he is not the only one, there are other men.
- If there would be a possibility, why wouldn't he start a business?!
- Musicians.
- The point is, a man who wants to make baskets, let him make baskets. So that these young people who go to café bars, that they would consume less drugs, and that the gentleman can gather these young people around him and show them how to make baskets. He would sit young people around him and show them, this is how you do it, this way, and that they are willing to do it. But these children don't need promises; they need rewards for what they do, so that they would have some benefits. A day in which everyone would buy 20 baskets, baskets are needed in fall for picking corn. So you can go to Zagreb or to the coast or along the highway, you've seen that people sell all kinds of things. Why not sell baskets?!
- **Moderator: What would you ask from the Decade here, you concretely? What would you ask if you had an opportunity to come to Mr. Soros who financed it from the World Bank or to Prime Minister Sanader or to someone from your local authorities? What would you suggest to them?**
  - I would suggest employment, that I get a job and insurance, life insurance.
  - In previous times, all welfare beneficiaries, and that's how it was before the war, were entitled to free health care. Every year, before or after the New Year, they were under obligation to register with the Employment Bureau and then go to the Social Welfare Center to get a stamp which was valid for a year.
  - Sadly, that has been changed.
  - What do you do with a man who found some work through private channels, who helped collecting hay and fell from a wagon and broke an arm? He needs to see a doctor because the pain is too much to take. Of course, the doctor will see him, he must see him. But afterwards they send you a bill of 500-600 Kuna. That should be changed. I, for example, would say that if I had an opportunity, I would say that such things ought to be changed at least for people like this man, if his condition is critical and he needs to see a doctor, he should be exempted from paying for doctor's services.
- **Moderator: All right, what else can you expect from the Decade?**
  - Well, we have vans, small trucks; we collect scrap aluminum, copper, perhaps that something be opened...
  - That reconstruction begins, that something is opened.
- **Moderator: What would you open, if you had secondary raw material? What could you open?**
  - I could open a reconstruction.
- **Moderator: You mean collecting scrap material?**
  - Scrap material.
  - Through an association, and that association would employ us, we Roma would work there.
- **Moderator: I think your ideas are very good, and this Decade is something inexhaustible, it has been defined through 4 segments, but it is always possible to amend certain segments with people's needs. So, during the Decade there will emerge some different needs in this region. What would you change in the education of your children? What do you consider good, and what would you change?**
  - Only jobs, that I have a job.
- **Moderator: Regarding the education of children, schools?**
  - That these children don't work, don't collect scrap iron and such things, instead that they participate as much as possible in school activities, meaning that they become more educated. To spend more time at school so that they have a vocation and don't work with scrap iron or make baskets.
- **Moderator: You would like to improve the quality of education through the Decade program?**
  - That's right.

- **Moderator: What is the situation like with small children who don't go to school, with preschool children? Have you got an access to kindergartens?**
- We do. (x2)
- **Moderator: So, you would not change that, that's good. For children who complete elementary and high school, what needs to be done?**
- To pursue further education, all depending on possibilities. All depends only on financial resources.
- If they complete high school, then they can go and work.
- It depends on wishes, for e.g. whether the child wants to go to college or not.
- **Moderator: We have already mentioned employment opportunities when we discussed employment. The Decade proposes, I will read to you now some of the specific goals.**
  
- **Education**
  
- **Reduced price for preschool programs/books/transport/school lunch for poor Roma children**
- **Abolishment of separate schools and classrooms for Roma children and incorporation of Roma children into regular non-Roma classrooms**
- **Loans and scholarship programs so Roma youth can attend universities**
- That's needed. To reduce prices for basic school accessories such as pencil-boxes, school bags and other things that children need at school.
- And food. So they can eat there.
- There are many things to be looked into and to help the children and not only the children, but for education.
- There are also people who have all this and still ask for things, they are... ungrateful.
  
- **Employment**
  
- **Micro-loans for Roma to start businesses**
- **Moderator: Do you know what that means?**
- To buy land to work on it.
- You have money to buy farm machines, you have money to buy everything.
- **Moderator: The Decade proposes many of these positive, good things. Somebody here mentioned health care, saying how terrible health insurance was.**
- Neither I nor my children can get health insurance, nobody.
- **Moderator: So you would ask for a change in the legislation regarding health insurance for the Roma?**
- That's right.
- **Moderator: Actually, you advocate that for all needy groups.**
- For all.
  
- **Health**
- **Free vaccines for Roma children**
- That's what we need. Health insurance for the children and for us.
  
- **Moderator: Living here is very specific; do you have any suggestions and problems which you would attempt at solving through the Decade? Because, after all, you live in a war-torn region, your ethnic belonging. Are there currently any hot issues which you are keeping to yourself, in yourself, and which it might be possible to solve through the Decade?**
- I used to own a house, but the ownership of the land was not transferred to my name in communist times. I lived in that house with my wife and children for nearly 30 years. Now I have problems with obtaining the residence permit, I cannot get the residence permit for Beli Manastir since I don't have a house, but I have all the documents and yet the County of Osijek denied my application. Because I asked them to build my house, they destroyed that land, all of that, but they say that I hold no right to it.
- **Moderator: So, the restitution of property to the Roma was not properly solved here?**



- That's right.
- I've got all the documents.
- **Moderator: Are there more of such cases? These are sporadic, individual cases? Are there more cases?**
- There is a settlement down there in Bilje. It's a settlement, a small one, only ten houses, it was destroyed in war. Serbian army destroyed it. These people got by somehow. This gentleman here, he is now a subtenant, lives in a rented apartment, you are now renting an apartment. Some people bought another house; some left the country and went abroad, managed somehow.
- **Moderator: What is your return here like? Is the return good or are people still returning? Has the return been completed or is it still underway?**
- We were asked to return to our houses and so people are returning, but how good it is we don't know.
- For us from Bilje it is very bad and the return is difficult.
- A short while ago he mentioned he had a house, a plot of land, which is a state land. Now, the question is whether they allow you to return to that plot and build houses. Perhaps there are already houses there and you no longer have access there.
- **Moderator: Houses have been built there?**
- New houses have already been built there.
- Nothing has been built there.
- Not on the plot you lived at.
- **Moderator: Is it a building land or a plough field, what kind of land is it?**
- A plough-field.
- **Moderator: Look, this goes through the housing project. Legalization of land belongs to the issue of housing. In Međimurje, this problem was solved by the government; government could also solve it here, or town authorities. This in fact should be solved on the local level. If local authorities cannot solve it, then ministry takes over.**
- For example, this gentleman has lived on that plot for 20 years, it used to be a municipal land. He had a house and lived in it, so it means that he would automatically lose all rights if he lived there, he had a little house on that land. Bilje municipality should give him something.
- **Moderator: Your suggestion for this Decade, particularly for the first two years, is to tackle the issue of property restitution to those Roma people who were displaced and refugees. Are there any other suggestions from this area?**
- We have a problem down there in Drava, there is a settlement there which was erased from the ownership. Our people are, so to say, negligent, those who bought property there, and nobody built a house. And what's happening now is that these people cannot enter it into books, the procedure would take time and money which would be very bad for these people. So if they could get back these houses in some way.
- **Moderator: We will propose that, as I said at the beginning, all this is being recorded and whatever is said here will be taken into consideration. I believe Dušan has not yet said anything about this topic, does he have a suggestion? How was the issue of the disabled Roma solved?**
- Very badly, my wife and I are both disabled people. We live off 880 Kuna. I have been disabled since early childhood, my wife also. I asked for welfare, but I cannot get it.
- When you pay electricity and water bills. (x2)
- I've got a telephone.
- He lives off 400 Kuna.
- **Moderator: Tell me about one more issue, the care of elderly and disabled people of Roma ethnicity. How was that issue dealt with here?**
- It was dealt with, to a certain extent.
- They receive welfare, but his house was taken away from him.
- Whoever owns an immovable property, a house, and is registered as an owner in the Land Registry, they all had to mortgage their houses, for as long as they receive welfare. If an owner would like to sell his property in the future, he would have to register it to the buyer's name. In order to sell, he must present a registered land certificate. Therefore, as soon as he obtains it, that same moment... the Welfare Center, the same Center for Welfare...
- The balance is paid. The amount of welfare received must be paid back. He cannot sell the house.



- I am opposed to that. There's a settlement across the railroad tracks, people are not owners of these apartments, they were built after 1965 after the flood. These welfare beneficiaries did not have to mortgage anything, they cannot give any mortgage, they are owners of that. They receive bigger welfare than I or you or some other people. These people are not bound by any law.

#### Ambassadors of change

- **Moderator: Let's now talk about some of the Roma leaders, here.**
- I am very glad that the gentleman president of our association, I am very glad that he helps us when we need help.
- And Mr. Branko from Darda, he also represents Darda, Beli Manastir, Mr. Petrović Branko from Darda. Before, when we did not have an association, you could not even knock on someone's door, you were out of the room even before you knocked on the door, come tomorrow, come the day after tomorrow. Today, when we have an association for 4,5 years, we are very glad that we have someone to turn to, and that is the president of the association, and when you turn to the association, then they go, a couple of times with the president Branko, representatives who represent us, you go inside, no problem, they greet each other, and I have to stand by the door and wait, and then everybody goes in before their turn, and it's never my turn, so this association means a lot, it helps a lot, and I am very glad about it as a person, because we opened doors, doors are now open to us everywhere, and our eyes are open, and we are very glad. If we had not brought that statute and if we had not founded an association, our eyes would still be closed.
- **Moderator: In your opinion, how much can the president of an association or the president of a council contribute to improving the relations in a Roma community? How satisfied are you with your representatives and is there anything else they could do?**
- In my case, the actions he took were in good direction, he helped me get a stove. He helps me as much as he can, when I need something, I pay him a visit.
- **Moderator: Predrag? In your opinion do Roma leaders, representatives of Roma settlements, representatives of national councils do their job well?**
- I am member of a council and I know many things, without our president it would probably be even more difficult. He solves a lot of problems, starting with promises and further on. I don't know how much is enough, our people are never satisfied with some things, but he is helping them. Perhaps it is not enough to them, perhaps they don't communicate a lot, but I tell you he has done a lot by now. Perhaps he could do more.
- People usually say that association representatives "grab" only for themselves, but it's not like that.
- **Moderator: All right, we have to be open and talk.**
- There are some benefits, so they say.
- **Moderator: We have to be open with each other. So, you are satisfied with their work so far. There's one thing that interests me, we've been talking all this time without mentioning women, how they are organized? Has anyone organized women in order to improve their emancipation?**
- No emancipation. My wife is in Jovica's association. She is in their committee, some women are not especially organized, some have children and are housewives.
- **Moderator: Do you think it should be done?**
- Perhaps it should. People regard everything from the financial point of view. My wife is at home, she has a little child. She has obligations, has to spend more then to go as a volunteer as you said, although she has nothing. I am on the council and have nothing, although I work a lot. Sometimes I don't feel bad because we work for the people, I have no financial benefits, I have nothing.
- **Moderator: What about Dušan, that information is very important to me. Very little has been done here for the disabled, because the welfare for him and for someone else, although in the same amount of 800 Kuna, is not worth the same. He has special needs.**
- It is not the Roma association that has withheld his dues, as an association of Roma people it ought to help him. Croatia has withheld his dues, the welfare system has. He was not given a wheelchair, he bought them. He cannot even get the wheelchair, even though he cannot walk on his own.

- I would like to say that here in Baranja in general we have a lot of good people, young people, there are no sports activities here, we play tournaments between our 6 villages, settlements in Baranja. We communicate, we don't have financial resources. Not long ago, they hosted us really well in a nearby village, we played with four-five teams. We socialize also privately, in this war we communicated. As a junior, I was a professional football player in Osijek, there I played also against Zvijezda, I love that sport, but we don't have that sport. We hang around together, but we have such slim opportunities for that. If there would be something so we could organize ourselves a bit stronger.

#### Messages

- **I'd like to read to you some statements that reflect on why the Decade of the Roma may be good for the Roma community. I'd like to know what you think of each statement.**
  - 1. I believe that the Decade of the Roma will have positive impact on the life of the Roma here in Croatia because governments invested real resources. This is not just a lot of talk.**
    - I believe something will come out of that, since they...
    - I also believe so, because these are foreign organizations and societies, also the European Union...
    - **Moderator: Why do you believe so?**
    - Well, since they've started it, and since they are conducting these analyses... then something will come out of that.
  - 2. I believe that the Decade of the Roma will have positive impact on the life of the Roma here in Croatia because of the involvement of such organizations as are the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.**
    - Yes, that's it.
  - 3. In order for the Decade of the Roma to have positive impact on the life of the Roma here in Croatia, we the Roma will have to assume a prominent role in ensuring the accomplishment of the goals.**
    - The Roma also ought to think and act.
    - I would like to commend this third statement, I like it a lot and Roma people should also "make a move"
    - If the Roma would try, they would accomplish something.

#### The End

- **Moderator: Is there anything else you would like to add to this discussion?**
- This was very good. We are very glad to have talked about this. Perhaps someone feels better now that he has said what he wanted to say.
- **Moderator: Dušan, what do you say?**
- Very good.
- We all said what we wanted to say and what our opinion was and we learnt a lot from each other.
- **Moderator: I am glad to have met you.**
- May we see each other again, may you come again and help us.
- **Moderator: We could arrange another meeting, I would love that. Thank you for your cooperation, you were very constructive indeed.**