
DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005-2015



A LOST DECADE ?



REFLECTIONS ON ROMA INCLUSION 2005-2015

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Written by: Bernard Rorke, Margareta Matache, Eben Friedman

Edited by: Bernard Rorke, Orhan Usein

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The photos used in this publication depict parts of life of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians living in Konik Camp, on the outskirts of Podgorica, Montenegro.

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INTRODUCTION

Bernard Rorke

The launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005 raised hopes, promised much, and disillusioned many. It raised hopes, for it was unprecedented that so many governments, in the presence of international organizations and civil society groups, would publicly pledge “to work toward eliminating discrimination and closing the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society;” and promised much in committing “to support the full participation and involvement of national Roma communities,” to demonstrate progress, and measure outcomes in the implementation of Decade Action Plans. Having raised so much hope at the outset, little wonder that today, so many feel so disillusioned.

As one Roma activist put it: *“At the beginning of the Decade there was so much effort that it felt as if a flame was burning. Unfortunately as each year passed by the flame grew dimmer, went down, and down. By the end of the Decade, there’s no flame, the flame went out!”*¹

So was it a lost decade? Ten years on, this publication aims to take stock and reflect on the vicissitudes of Roma inclusion since 2005. Three chapters by three different

authors, combined with dozens of interviews with activists, officials and representatives all connected to the Decade, yield a wide and varied plurality of perspectives. Yet some common themes emerge to suggest that despite the lack of progress on the ground, all was definitely *not* lost in the Decade that was.

There is much concurrence around the verdict of George Soros in the opening interview, that steps were taken by governments during the course of the Decade, but they were far from sufficient to have any substantial impact; that the Decade gave Roma a seat at the table in negotiations, but that Roma are still “woefully underrepresented” in international organizations, national governments, and municipal authorities; that the Decade raised awareness about the plight of Roma communities but did not lift visible numbers of Roma out of poverty.

¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, April 2015.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

Assessment of progress and achievements was rendered difficult by the failure of governments to deliver on the commitment to review progress in a “transparent and quantifiable way.” Nonetheless Eben Friedman, drawing from a range of available monitoring reports, provides a “rough sketch” of how participating governments actually delivered on closing the unacceptable gaps in education, employment, health and housing since 2005. Decade Watch reporting on the first two years stated in 2007 that “systematic outcome monitoring, in particular comparable across countries, is currently impossible because of significant data gaps.” At the end of the Decade this still remains the case.

However, all the available information suggests that education is the priority area in which the most progress has been made. Despite a slow start in designing health-related policies, available data suggests there was more progress (albeit slow and uneven progress) made in health than employment or housing. Friedman reports that the crosscutting issues were largely neglected throughout the Decade. Any modest advances made in combating discrimination in the first half of the Decade were rolled back in the second half with evidence of *growing* discrimination in some EU countries with anti-Roma sentiment manifested increasingly in the form of marches, rallies and violent attacks, spreading in many cases to localities without a history of interethnic tensions, and sometimes involving persons not previously associated with the extreme right. Of the other crosscutting themes, gender equity received scant attention, and poverty reduction was “for the most part left alone.” The verdict of the first Decade Watch report in 2007 was that “Despite some progress, the Decade has not reached the critical point that would guarantee success.” This verdict holds just as true in 2015.

ROMA PARTICIPATION

The importance accorded to the notion of Roma participation was reflected in the terms of reference of the Decade, where repeated reference was made to the need to “involve Roma meaningfully in all policy making on matters concerning them.” Participating governments committed to strengthen the capacity of Roma organizations to ensure their effective participation in the entire Decade process including the National Working Groups.

For their part, Roma civil society activists were expected to initiate dialogue between local authorities and local communities; communicate the Decade goals and objectives to the Roma populations, actively participate in implementation and monitoring of National Decade Action Plans, and ensure national level Roma participation “to the broadest possible extent.”² By any standards this was a tall order, but as Margareta Matache notes in her examination of how Roma actually did participate, the Decade was greeted with broad optimism by many Roma who found that for the first time doors were open for regular consultation. In some countries Roma advocates began to meet with state representatives, ministry officials and to communicate with local authorities.

Disillusion set in quickly after the first flush of enthusiasm as many Roma activists found that governments ignored them, did not take their contributions seriously, and in many cases officials chose instead to work with more compliant Roma organizations. Many of the young Roma leaders quickly gained a better understanding of politics and policy-making, but as some reflected in recent interviews, the burden of responsibility was overwhelming for those with little or no experience in complex negotiations: *“Everything was on the shoulders of civil society and there was not time to restructure, to acquire the knowledge and skills for policy dialogue.”*³

The deliberate tactic of the Decade founders to select groups of young, “fresh” and well-educated Roma and to put some distance between the Decade and the more established figures within the Roma movement was a misstep.

² International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), p. 6, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.

³ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadir Redjepi, April 2015.

As Matache notes, while the intensive focus on young leaders strengthened youth capacity, voice and visibility in the movement, it also led to some backlash in Roma civil society, which had an adverse impact on their advocacy outcomes. It is clear that including more senior Roma advocates would have made for a better balance, and maybe even better results.

So in terms of the slogan “Nothing about us without us”, what became of Roma participation in the course of the Decade? Matache concludes that as far as Roma elites were concerned, the Decade succeeded to involve Roma leaders in formal dialogue and negotiations with state institutions in all stages of the Decade. In the course of the Decade many organizations strengthened their capacities, and through their efforts in practically implementing many Decade projects, raised their international profiles and won wider recognition for their achievements. But overall, Roma participation was judged to be more form than substance in terms of outcome and impact. Almost three quarters of experts interviewed in the 2009 Decade Survey concluded that consultations with Roma organizations were ineffective. One interview with a Roma public figure, appointed to work on the Decade within the government, perfectly encapsulated the dilemmas, difficulties and deficits: *“My hopes were very high, but unfortunately politicians are the same everywhere. Big promises, great words but after that when it comes to action, and actually delivering, we get very little, in fact often there is simply no action... I started to have internal battles with the deputy ministers, the political cabinets, with the other ministries, and for one year and a half, I was just fighting with this guy, and that guy, with this politician, with this administration, trying to negotiate, to communicate, to collaborate... finally they committed 20,000 – this amount for a national Action Plan policy is just ridiculous, and I was not prepared to take this burden of responsibility on my shoulders, because you could not show any results with this amount of money. In the end I just said NO.”*

But Matache highlights one important feature in that the Decade provides a model of a participatory approach to devising inclusion policy frameworks and holding governments publicly accountable – with as much to be learned from its failures as its successes.

One lesson to be learned is that sidelining gender equity comes at a high cost. The die was cast right from the start in the Terms of Reference, which merely stated that governments “shall in addition take into account” gender mainstreaming. Matache explores the debates throughout the Decade about how best to address the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women and girls, but as far as action is concerned she concludes “governments and civil society often misunderstood or simply neglected gender equality in drafting and implementing the National Action Plans,” and the declared commitment to strengthen the capacity of the Roma women organizations went unfulfilled.

Beyond the Roma elites, the ambition to involve Roma communities actively in the Decade went unrealized, and the reports from all participating countries indicated low levels of awareness and only sporadic community participation. In terms of raising broad awareness of the very existence of the Decade, the republics of the former Yugoslavia did remarkably better with 42% of the population registering some level of Decade recognition, compared with 5% in Romania. While many projects implemented under the aegis of the Decade did have some impact on local communities, there was nothing on the scale needed to bring about systemic and sustainable change. And it would be hard to dispute the verdict of one Roma activist when he said, *“If you speak to normal everyday people at the local level, many have no idea what the Decade was about – at the end of the Decade many people don’t know that there was a Decade.”*⁴

⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, April 2015.

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If the Decade is to be judged on its own terms – i.e. its pledge “to close the gap” between Roma and non-Roma within ten years – then clearly it has not been a success. But, as I state in my concluding chapter, only the most naïve could have expected such a social transformation to be launched, packaged and completed within a decade. It was abundantly clear from the outset that the enormity and complexity of political reform and policy implementation required to undo centuries of racism and exclusion would take far more than ten years.

But the Decade set a very necessary, audacious and public agenda for Roma inclusion: identifying key inclusion policy priorities, insisting on the need to set clear targets with earmarked resources within fixed time limits; tracking progress with regular and robust monitoring mechanisms and calling for structured Roma participation.

This actually existing and imperfect Decade template for social inclusion marked a departure in that it raised the stakes in advocacy terms: calling for comprehensive inclusion policies in place of ad-hoc project-based interventions; it extracted commitments (albeit soft ones) from governments, for which they could be held publicly to account; and it shone a harsh light like never before on what had long been Europe’s hidden and neglectful shame.

As to change for the better, there is wide agreement that it is in the sphere of education that most progress is visible after ten years. Yet despite this, some Decade countries still remain wedded to systems and habits that perpetuate inequality and segregation. The difference at the end of the Decade is that segregation of Roma pupils no longer goes unquestioned, unchallenged and accepted as routine. There is now a broad and basic understanding in the wider society that segregation of Roma pupils is a pernicious practice. At the end of the Decade, even the segregators know that what they do is fundamentally wrong and runs contrary to any shared notion of “European values.”

One durable legacy of the Decade is the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. George Soros describes the Framework as “a copy of the Decade and an expansion of it to all EU Member States.” The European Commission acknowledged the Decade as being “a strong inspiration” for the Framework. Back in 2005, one ambition

of the Decade was to invite more governments to join up. The original eight were joined by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain. So it was beyond all expectations that by 2013, all 28 EU Member States would have submitted National Roma Integration Strategies under the remit of an EU Framework; that the Commission would link Roma integration to its wider Europe 2020 strategy for growth; that the European Council would issue country-specific recommendations on Roma integration to Member States; and that the first ever legal instrument on Roma, a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States, would be adopted.

An important Decade lesson learned was that an emphasis on development, partnerships, social inclusion and societal cohesion cannot paper over the cracks when it comes to racism and discrimination. Just as combating discrimination was relegated to a “cross-cutting theme” in the Decade, the EU Framework strategies faced criticism from civil society, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe for failing to make a clear and unambiguous link between tackling racism and promoting social inclusion. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated more than a decade ago, “development opportunities are inexorably linked to human rights.”

But there are signs that the European Commission and the European Parliament are finally coming to absorb this one key lesson from the Decade – that there can be no progress on Roma inclusion unless direct and indirect forms of discrimination are tackled head on, unless the institutional racism that Roma face every day is fully exposed and effectively dealt with. The latest Commission Communication on the EU Roma Framework issued in June 2015 is very forthright in delineating the failures of Member States to confront one of Europe’s oldest hatreds; the failures to ensure equal access to quality education for Roma children and persistence of segregation in schooling and housing; and the failures to properly transpose and enforce EU anti-discrimination law at regional and local level to protect the rights and dignity of Roma all over Europe.

Beyond its commitment as Guardian of the Treaties to ensure that EU anti-discrimination legislation is properly transposed and enforced, as “the necessary starting point in the fight against discrimination,” the Commission declared that it intends to use all means within its

competence to fight against anti-Roma discrimination, including infringement proceedings. In addition to legal tools, the communication states that fighting prejudice, discrimination, hate speech and hate crime needs political will and determined targeted action; that funding must be ensured to fight discrimination and segregation; and that in order to combat structural discrimination, mainstream public policies in education, employment, healthcare and housing are in urgent need of thoroughgoing inclusive reform.⁵

The European Commission, in this communication has taken on many of the demands, entreaties and recommendations of nearly ten years of civil society advocacy related to Roma inclusion. And one could argue that the Decade and the multifarious activities directly related to it, opened up much space for civil society to make these demands; provided the impetus to produce the data, reports and recommendations; and provided participatory platforms to ensure an international audience was listening. If the European Commission lives up to its declared intent to use all means necessary within its competence to fight discrimination, and to do so at a moment when racism and xenophobia have become so much more of a mainstream political disposition in many countries, we may look forward to actually moving forward in our search for justice and equality. If the Framework starts to deliver something by way of tangible progress on the ground, and begins to turn the tide on prejudice and discrimination, then perhaps in time critics may come to look back less disparagingly on the Decade.

By the end of the Decade, there is at least wide recognition that Roma exclusion is one of Europe's biggest democratic deficits; that anti-Gypsyism is ethically repugnant and economically unsustainable. There are no illusions of the enormity of the task that lies ahead, and no assumptions that progress will go unchallenged by dark political forces, but there is now a far deeper understanding of what is at stake, and what it will take to undo the damage done in order to fulfill the promises of democracy for all of Europe's Roma citizens.

⁵ European Commission, *Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies COM(2015) 299*, (Brussels: European Commission, 2015), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_communication2015_en.pdf.



GEORGE SOROS LOOKS BACK ON THE DECADE

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Margareta Matache

Margareta Matache (MM): *Could you tell me what first prompted you to get involved in Roma issues?*

George Soros (GS): I have been engaged with Roma issues since the beginnings of my philanthropy. The foundation I established in Hungary in 1984 drew my attention to Roma through its work to preserve and give prominence to Roma culture. After the collapse of Communism and the lack of a socio-economic safety net in many countries, it was clear that marginalized groups were losing out. No one was more marginalized than the Roma. Unfortunately, the expansion of the EU did little to improve matters for Roma; their living conditions have actually deteriorated since many of them became EU citizens. At the same time, the majority population's attitude toward Roma has become more hostile almost everywhere in Europe. All across Europe, the Roma face tremendous racism and discrimination. This is truly shocking.

MM: *What determined you to shift from a project-based approach focusing on Roma human capital and civil society development to seeking to influence governmental policies?*

GS: My foundations are pursuing multiple strategies toward the same end. We continue to support the development of Roma civil society, the creation of a Roma educated elite, and inclusive education for all Roma children. But these things cannot happen without changes in government policies. Because governments are not always enthusiastic about changing their policies or bearing the political cost of inclusion, it was key that we promote a pan-European effort and encouraged European institutions to do their part. This is a problem that required and still requires a European solution. Hence my support for the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

MM: *As you stated in an earlier interview, the living conditions of Roma people across the region deteriorated after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Realistically, what did you hope and anticipate to achieve in a ten-year time frame with the Decade of Roma Inclusion?*

GS: I did not expect to reverse the impact of hundreds of years of structural poverty and discrimination in a single decade, but I was hoping that participating governments would see it in their collective interest to address these problems. While governments did take some steps during

the course of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, they are far from sufficient enough to have an impact.

MM: *What do you think are the main gains of the Decade? What about its weaknesses?*

GS: The Decade succeeded in raising the political profile of Roma exclusion throughout Europe and the world; there is much greater awareness today than there was ten years ago that the situation of Roma is untenable. The Decade also helped give Roma a seat at the table to talk to their governments about how to address the problems facing Roma communities. What the Decade did not do was to lift visible numbers of Roma out of poverty.

The one area where we can see the most progress for Roma in the past ten years is in the field of education. Decade governments are making some progress here, with the help of the Roma Education Fund, an important Decade initiative that my foundations network created and continues to support. Today there are more Roma children in preschool, more completing compulsory education, and more going on to university than there were ten years ago. The numbers are still inadequate but the trend is encouraging.

MM: *You promoted Roma young leaders through the Decade. What do you consider they have achieved now, at the end, as compared to what you were hoping they would?*

GS: I believe that the biggest impact we can have is through the education of Roma young people to become the next generation of leaders. Educated Roma should have pride in their Roma identity and act as role models for other Roma. Otherwise, educated Roma could blend into the majority population because they do not fit the negative stereotype, but the stereotype would remain. Instead, Roma can help break the stereotypes that block their acceptance by the majority population.

Through the Roma Education Fund and other means, a small but growing cohort of Roma has received a quality education while retaining their Roma identity. Some of these people have become civil society activists; others have become business people, lawyers, and doctors. Regardless of their profession, if they are taking pride in their Roma heritage, they are contributing to inclusion.

MM: *The Decade motto was “nothing for Roma without Roma”. Did this happen?*

GS: The Decade has done more than any other intergovernmental process to make sure that Roma civil society has a seat at the table. But there needs to be much more engagement of Roma in all stages of inclusion: from policy and program development to implementation. Unfortunately, Roma are still woefully underrepresented in international organizations, national governments, and municipalities. This must change in order for that motto to have real meaning.

MM: *How much importance do you believe was placed on community empowerment and strengthening during the Decade?*

GS: One of the challenges of the Decade as an international forum is that its actors have been mostly representatives from national governments, not from municipalities and not from Roma communities. More attention to community engagement is important. One of the things we noticed is that when a government held the Decade presidency, it frequently impelled national governments into a deeper dialogue with municipalities and Roma communities about priorities and programs.

MM: *Looking back, knowing what you know now, what would you change if you had to inspire a similar process once again?*

GS: It would have been better to have the European Union strongly behind the Decade from the outset. We tried but failed to make that happen.

MM: *In 2012, EU Member States have committed to participate in the EU Roma Framework process. In so many ways, this is a legacy of the Decade. What future do you see with the EU taking the lead?*

GS: I am happy to see the advent of the EU Framework, which is, in many respects, a copy of the Decade and an expansion of it to all EU member states. I am also pleased to see that, in partnership with my foundation network, the EU is providing support and leadership to a new initiative called Roma Integration 2020, which will focus on enlargement countries.

EU engagement is critical for several reasons: first, the prospect of EU membership remains a strong incentive for enlargement countries to address Roma exclusion. The more the EU can reinforce the necessity of taking concrete steps to bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma as the price of admission, the better the chance of meaningful change. Second, the EU has vast resources that it can make available to promote inclusion, through structural funds for member states and pre-accession assistance to the enlargement countries. But governments have to take up the challenge to use those funds effectively for Roma inclusion. For the most part, they have not done so yet.

The Decade piloted a number of initiatives to make governments accountable for their commitments, through reporting, civil society monitoring, and the creation of inclusion indicators. The EU needs to build on this beginning and ensure accountability; otherwise, the Framework will be meaningless. This means that governments must regularly collect and disseminate data on Roma inclusion and exclusion in the key sectors. Independent monitoring by watchdog organizations is also important and should be supported with EU funding.

MM: *Finally, what needs to be reformed to achieve Roma rights and Roma empowerment?*

GS: Achieving real inclusion, including rights protection and empowerment, is a complex task. Education by itself is not enough. Housing won't help if Roma lack the means to pay for it. A lasting solution requires Europe to build a Roma working class with meaningful employment opportunities. All of these things require the strong political will of governments, engagement of Roma communities, the support of the majority population, funding and technical expertise from the EU and others, and engagement by the private sector.



ASSESSING PROGRESS UNDER THE DECADE

Eben Friedman

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the achievements of the Decade in relation to the four priority areas and three cross-cutting issues.⁶ For each theme, an attempt is made to identify trends in the first and second halves of the Decade, as well as over the course of the Decade as a whole. Where available evidence allows, the assessment attends not only to changes in the situation of Roma over time, but also to how the situation of non-Roma changed over the same period. In this way, the chapter offers a rough sketch of the extent to which participating governments have delivered on their commitment to “closing the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society” over the course of the Decade.⁷

As will become clear in the thematic sections below, the assessment of achievements is held back by the failure of participating governments to deliver on another commitment made at the launch of the Decade: “to review [...] progress in a transparent and quantifiable way.”⁸ Although the regularity of government reporting increased over the course of the Decade, in most countries the Decade did not increase the volume of available official data on the situation of Roma or on gaps between Roma and general populations.⁹ Thus, as noted in the initial Decade Watch report on the progress of the Decade in its first two years, it remains the case at the end of the Decade that “[s]ystematic outcome monitoring, in particular comparable across countries, is currently impossible because

of significant data gaps.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, the incomplete information available is sufficient to ground some broad conclusions about achievements in the course of the Decade, summarized in the chapter’s final section.

EDUCATION

From the first years of the Decade, education has stood out as the priority area in which the greatest achievements have been made. By the time the first Decade Watch report was published in 2007, many countries already had coherent and sustained programs and policies rather than sporadic measures and pilot projects.¹¹ The survey of experts conducted as part of Decade Watch two years later suggested that the Decade had made an impact on early childhood and preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary education across the Decade countries.¹² Sub-areas of education in which expert assessments of the Decade’s impact were less positive included adult education, desegregation, employment of Roma in the education sector, and inclusion of Roma language, culture, history, and identity. At the level of the participating countries, the overall assessment of the Decade’s impact on education was positive in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia, neutral in Macedonia, and negative in Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, Slovakia, and Spain.

⁶ This chapter draws heavily on the overview of progress under the Decade through 2013 provided in Eben Friedman, *Decade of Roma Inclusion Progress Report* (Istanbul: United Nations Development Programme, 2015). The author wishes to thank UNDP for permission to make extensive use of material from that publication.

⁷ International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference* (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), p. 2, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹ Following up on a proposal endorsed at the twentieth meeting of the International Steering Committee in Prague, participating governments have generally submitted Decade Progress Reports to the International Steering Committee through the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation (hereinafter “Decade Secretariat”) on an annual basis since 2010. Because these Progress Reports contain little in the way of hard or comparable data, however, the analysis in this chapter relies on the following main sources of information: the three regional reports produced in the first half of the Decade by coalitions of actors in civil society with support from the Open Society Institute and the World Bank under the Decade Watch initiative; the regional surveys commissioned by UNDP in 2004 and by UNDP, the World Bank, and the European Commission in 2011; the annual progress reports of the European Commission on accession countries; and the civil society monitoring reports produced in 2012–2014 under the coordination of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation in cooperation with the “Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma” program and the Roma Initiatives Office of the Open Society Foundations.

¹⁰ For details please see the *Decade Watch Reports*, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/egy-cikk.php?hir_id=9316; the *Civil Society Monitoring Reports on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/civilsocietymonitoring>; Christina McDonald and Katy Negrin, *No Data – No Progress: Data Collection in Countries Participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* (New York: Open Society Institute, 2010); Jakob Hurrel et al., *Uncertain Impact: Have the Roma in Slovakia Benefitted from the European Social Fund?* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme), p. 90; Andrey Ivanov, *Making Inclusion Truly Inclusive, Development and Transition* (2012), no. 19: 3–6, p. 4.

¹¹ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006* (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007), p. 25.

¹² Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), pp. 53–54.

Comparing data from regional surveys commissioned by UNDP in 2004 and by UNDP, the World Bank, and the European Commission in 2011 confirms the general impression offered by Decade Watch, suggesting that the situation of Roma in the priority area of education improved in the first half of the Decade.¹³ Among the most significant changes are the following:

- The share of Roma aged 15–24 who consider themselves able to read and write increased in all countries except Macedonia and Serbia;
- The share of Roma aged 14–20 who have completed at least primary education increased in all countries;
- Rates of completion of at least lower secondary education among Roma aged 17–23 increased in most countries (but not in Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, or Serbia); and
- The share of Roma aged 20–26 who have completed at least upper secondary education increased in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Macedonia.¹⁴

Beyond getting better in its own right, Roma's education situation also improved relative to non-Roma over the first half of the Decade. In primary education, the gap between Roma and non-Roma decreased in all Decade countries except Macedonia. Gaps in completion of upper secondary education decreased in all countries except Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. On the other hand, gaps of more than 25 percentage points in completion of primary education remained in Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, with the gap in completion of secondary education 40 percentage points or more in all Decade countries.

Throughout the Decade, the European Commission's progress reports on the participating countries of the Western Balkans noted progress in the educational situation of Roma more frequently than progress in the other priority areas. Despite the improvement, however, the European Commission and actors in civil society have documented persistent problems in this area. Arguably the most pressing of these is school segregation, including the overrepresentation of non-disabled Roma children in special primary schools and classes intended for children with mental disability.¹⁵ In Croatia, the situation has actually worsened since the midpoint of the Decade, when the European Court of Human Rights issued its decision in the case of *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia*.¹⁶ Implementation of the Court's decision in the case of *D.H. and Others v. The Czech Republic* has also progressed little since the decision was issued in 2007, with the Czech School Inspectorate finding that in 2013 Roma still accounted for over a quarter (28.2 percent) of all children in primary education with a curriculum for light mental disability.¹⁷

Another persistent problem is segregation in standard education. Despite the fact that the schools and classes attended predominantly by Roma are supposedly equal in quality to those attended by their non-Roma peers, this form of segregation often results in Roma receiving education of inferior quality as a result of a combination of poor infrastructure and fewer resources.¹⁸ The second half of the Decade has seen progress in Montenegro toward dismantling this form of segregation by stopping enrolment in the country's *de facto* segregated primary school and providing transport as well as assistance in enrolling in other schools from the 2013–2014 school year.¹⁹

¹³ See Andrey Ivanov et al., *At Risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe*, (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2006); United Nations Development Programme, *Roma Data*, available at <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/sustainable-development/development-planning-and-inclusive-sustainable-growth/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data.html>

¹⁴ Christian Brüggemann, *Roma Education in Comparative Perspective: Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011*, (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), pp. 20–23.

¹⁵ For details please see for example *Civil Society Monitoring Reports on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/civilsocietymonitoring>; *Progress reports of the Decade countries on the implementation of the Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/decade-documents-decade-progress-reports>; *European Commission Progress Reports on the Western Balkans countries*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm.

¹⁶ Ljubomir Mikić and Milena Babić, *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in Croatia in 2012 and 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), pp. 47–48; see also European Court of Human Rights, *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2010).

¹⁷ Government of the Czech Republic, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Progress Report 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014); see also European Court of Human Rights, *D.H. and Others v. The Czech Republic* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007).

¹⁸ For details please see *Civil Society Monitoring Reports* and the *European Commission Progress reports* as cited above.

¹⁹ Ajša Hadžibegović et al., *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in Montenegro in 2012 and 2013*, (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), p. 55.

EMPLOYMENT

The first Decade Watch report notes wide variations from one country to the next in the area of employment.²⁰ The findings of the Decade Watch survey of experts conducted in 2009 point to only modest impact of the Decade over its first five years in this area, with training and retraining assessed more positively than equal treatment, job placement, or self-employment.²¹ At the level of the individual participating countries, developments in this area were assessed as neutral or positive in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia, whereas overall assessments in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, and Slovakia were negative.

The two regional surveys suggest that progress in closing gaps between Roma and non-Roma in the priority area of employment was mixed in the first half of the Decade. On the positive side, the wage gap decreased in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Romania.²² Also decreasing between the two surveys in all countries except Romania was the gap in joblessness between Roma and non-Roma.²³ The reduction in Roma's joblessness rates which explains this change, however, seems to have more to do with higher rates of participation in education than with improved employment prospects.²⁴ In fact, employment rates generally dropped among both Roma and non-Roma in the Decade countries between 2004 and 2011. Further, the gap in employment rates between Roma and non-Roma widened except in Albania, Bulgaria, and, for women only, Serbia.²⁵

Findings of the regional survey conducted in 2011 also provide a rough picture of discrimination on the labor market and its consequences. Although the survey did not focus directly on discrimination in employment, the fact that “differences in educational level – and other individual

characteristics – are not on the whole sufficient to explain the gap in employment opportunities and wages between Roma and non-Roma” suggests that discrimination is at least an important part of the explanation.²⁶ Another finding from the survey is that poor employment prospects are a key factor in both Roma's and non-Roma's decisions to move to another country.²⁷ This is particularly important for making sense of how often Roma express an intention to leave their current country of residence. Thus, at the midpoint of the Decade, there was still much to be done to equalize Roma's employment opportunities with those of non-Roma.

Data provided by participating countries around the middle of the Decade suggested that targeted programs for Roma administered by national employment agencies had done little to improve Roma's employment situation. The most successful program for which participating countries provided data to the Decade Secretariat is Hungary's “Roma Employment Organizing Activity,” which according to the government has helped nearly two-fifths of its beneficiaries to find a job.²⁸ As shown in the table below, programs in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia were less than half as successful.

EU-funded programs for stimulating employment among Roma have been criticized for emphasizing awareness raising and training over more concrete measures to support entrepreneurship.²⁹ At the same time, even if the programs shown in the table and others like them had been much more successful in improving participants' employment prospects, in most countries their effect on the employment situation of the Roma population as a whole would be limited by their small scale.³⁰ Finally, experience from the first half of the Decade pointed to the potential for public employment programs targeting Roma to reinforce social barriers between Roma and

²⁰ Open Society Institute and the World Bank *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006*, (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007), p. 25.

²¹ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey*, (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), p. 56.

²² Niall O'Higgins, *Roma and Non-Roma in the Labour Market in Central and South Eastern Europe*, (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), pp. 32, 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁷ Stoyanka Cherkezova and Ilona Tomova, *An Option of Last Resort? Migration of Roma and Non-Roma from CEE Countries* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), pp. 35–36.

²⁸ Government of Hungary, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Progress Report 2011* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2012), p. 21.

²⁹ Jakob Hurre et al., *Uncertain Impact: Have the Roma in Slovakia Benefitted from the European Social Fund?* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme), p. 75; Iulian Stoian, David Mark, and Marius Wamsiedel, *Decade Watch Romania Report: Mid-Term Evaluation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion* (Bucharest: Roma Civic Alliance of Romania, 2010), p. 25.

³⁰ Niall O'Higgins, *Roma and Non-Roma in the Labour Market in Central and South Eastern Europe*. (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), p. 36.

non-Roma without bringing lasting improvement in Roma's employment situation.³¹

In the second half of the Decade as in the five years before, the European Commission singled out employment in its Progress Reports on the participating countries of the Western Balkans as an area in which there has been a lack of progress in relation to the situation of Roma. The austerity measures (including but not limited to hiring

freezes) adopted in response to the global economic downturn appear to have negatively affected implementation of Decade countries' NAPs in the area of employment in the second half of the Decade.³² As stated by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its Decade Progress Report for 2013, "Given the political and economic complexity and the current conditions of the market economy no significant increase in Roma employment is expected in the future."³³

Table 1. EMPLOYMENT RESULTING FROM TARGETED PROGRAMS FOR ROMA

Country	Year	Roma participating	Roma employed	Employment Success rate (%)
Hungary	2009–2011	4 723	1 824	38.6
Czech Republic	2011	No data	No data	17.0
Bulgaria	2011	8 248	1 384	16.8
Bulgaria	2012	21 663	3 375	15.6
Czech Republic	2012	No data	No data	11.4
Romania	2011	50 149	5 492	11.0
Serbia	2012	839	79	9.4

Source: Decade Progress Reports

HEALTH

When the first Decade Watch report was compiled, most participating countries had not yet adopted statewide initiatives targeting Roma in the priority area of health.³⁴ The Decade Watch survey of 2009 documented neutral to positive developments in many countries of the region in the first half of the Decade in relation to access to health insurance and primary health care, as well as in relation to children's and women's health.³⁵ By way of contrast, the impact of the Decade on access to medicine and to specialized treatment, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and the employment of Roma in the health sector were assessed negatively to neutrally. At the level of the individual

participating countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Spain received overall assessments between neutral and positive, while assessments of the impact of the Decade on Roma's health in Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, and Slovakia were on the negative side of neutral.

The findings of the regional surveys conducted in 2004 and 2011 suggest modest progress during the first half of the Decade in the area of health. On the one hand, the financial affordability of medicines for Roma increased between 2004 and 2011 in all countries covered by the regional surveys except in Albania and the Czech Republic. On the other hand, although the gap between Roma and

³¹ See, for example, Erzsébet Bogdán, Gábor Héra, and Zoltán Mészáros, *Monitoring Research Concerning the Implementation Process of the Objectives Indicated by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Program in Hungary in the Period of 2005–2009* (Budapest: Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2010), p. 26.

³² See, for example, Tihomir Knežiček et al., *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012 and 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), p. 57.

³³ Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Progress Report 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), p. 7.

³⁴ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006* (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007), p. 27.

³⁵ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), p. 58.

non-Roma in access to medicines decreased between the two surveys in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, changes were relatively small (less than ten percentage points) except in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Romania, the gap between Roma and non-Roma in access to medicines grew in the first half of the Decade. As of 2011, the remaining gaps between Roma and non-Roma in access to medicines were more than twenty percentage points in all countries except Montenegro, which successfully reduced this gap from 55 percentage points in 2004 to nine in 2011.

Montenegro stands out also for progress in the first half of the Decade in relation to spatial proximity to healthcare. Between 2004 and 2011, the share of Roma households living within three kilometers of a general practitioner increased from 27 to 78 percent.³⁶ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, and Serbia, on the other hand, Roma's spatial proximity to healthcare increased over the same period. Not surprising given the size of the increase in spatial proximity to healthcare in Montenegro in the first half of the Decade is that the gap between Roma and non-Roma in relation to such proximity decreased most there as well. In Croatia and Serbia, relatively small gaps between Roma and non-Roma in spatial proximity to healthcare were nearly eliminated, while small gaps in favor of Roma were reversed in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Macedonia. Finally, Roma's and non-Roma's respective perceptions of their own health status appear to have become more similar in the first half of the Decade in all countries except Croatia and Hungary.³⁷

Qualitative assessments conducted in the second half of the Decade paint a picture of uneven progress in the area of health broadly similar to the one described above in

relation to the first half of the Decade.³⁸ Anecdotal evidence from several Decade countries further suggests that health mediation programs in local Roma communities – often implemented primarily by Roma women – have exerted a positive effect on Roma's access to health services by facilitating communication between Roma and (non-Roma) healthcare workers, providing health education, and undertaking social work in the community.³⁹ Further, replication of this general model appears to owe much to the Decade as a forum for cross-country exchange of experience. However, mediation programs are not enough to ensure access to care, with the European Commission calling on the governments of Bulgaria and Romania in 2014 – the two countries with the longest experience with Roma health mediators – to improve health insurance coverage among Roma.⁴⁰

HOUSING

Whereas the first Decade Watch report makes note of wide variations from one country to the next in the priority area of housing,⁴¹ the 2009 Decade Watch survey yielded neutral to negative overall assessments of all sub-fields of housing policy.⁴² The only country with an average assessment falling between neutral and positive in the 2009 survey was Bosnia and Herzegovina. The countries where developments in the area of housing were assessed most negatively were Bulgaria and Slovakia.

The regional surveys conducted in 2004 and 2011 provide a larger body of evidence in support of the same general conclusion: Progress in housing in the first half of the Decade was unimpressive. To summarize the developments in Roma's situation over the period between the surveys:

³⁶ Data from the 2004 survey provided by UNDP; cf. Dotcho Mihailov, *The Health Situation of Roma Communities: Analysis of the Data from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), p. 55.

³⁷ Whereas the question on the 2004 survey referred to "chronic illnesses", the question on the 2011 survey asked about "any long-standing illness or health problem." See also Dotcho Mihailov as cited above, p.34; Data from the 2004 survey provided by UNDP.

³⁸ For details please see *Civil Society Monitoring Reports on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/civilsocietymonitoring>; Irena Martinović Klarić, Lana Peternel, and Branko Ančić, *Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Other National Commitments in the Field of Health: Croatia* (Brussels: International Organization for Migration, 2015).

³⁹ For details please see *Civil Society Monitoring Reports on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/civilsocietymonitoring>.

⁴⁰ European Commission, *Report on the Implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. COM (2014) 209 final* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2014).

⁴¹ Open Society Institute and the World Bank *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006* (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007), p. 28.

⁴² Open Society Institute and the World Bank *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), p. 55.

- Roma’s access to improved water sources increased only in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Montenegro, while access to improved sanitation improved in all countries except the Czech Republic.⁴³
- The proportion of Roma households in insecure housing decreased in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia, but increased in Albania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Montenegro.⁴⁴
- Average space per household member increased among Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Macedonia, and Montenegro, with the average number of rooms per household member increasing among Roma in Albania, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

Developments in Roma’s housing situation relative to that of non-Roma in the first half of the Decade are more complex due to changes in the situation of non-Roma. Countries in which the gap in access to improved water sources decreased include not only the three in which Roma’s access increased (i.e., Bulgaria, Hungary, and Montenegro), but also four countries in which non-Roma’s access stagnated or deteriorated (i.e., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, and Romania). By way of contrast, the gap between Roma and non-Roma in relation to access to improved sanitation worsened only in the Czech Republic, where Roma’s access deteriorated over time. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, the gap was reduced by over 40 percentage points in the first half of the Decade.

Where insecure housing is concerned, gaps between Roma and non-Roma increased not only in the four countries where the situation of Roma deteriorated in its own right between 2004 and 2011 (i.e., Albania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Montenegro), but also in Hungary. The gap in average space per household member, on the other hand, grew in a majority of countries, (Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia) while decreasing in Albania as a result of larger drops in average space per household member among non-Roma than among Roma. In similar fashion, a (slight) drop in the average number of rooms per household member among non-Roma in Macedonia made for a reduction in the gap between Roma and non-Roma despite the lack of change in the situation of Roma in the first half of the Decade. Gaps between Roma and non-Roma also decreased in Albania and Bulgaria.

Since joining the Decade in 2009, Bosnia and Herzegovina has stood out among the countries of the Western Balkans for the consistent progress made in addressing the housing situation of Roma.⁴⁵ In the middle of the Decade, Croatia also received praise from the European Commission for improvements in Roma’s living conditions, but the Commission’s 2014 *Report on the Implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* makes note of residential segregation in Croatia as a problem.⁴⁶ The same report observes residential segregation in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, warning the Czech Republic in particular against using EU funding for substandard housing targeting Roma.

Before the European Commission turned its attention to residential segregation as a problem, this form of discrimination was recorded in 2013 and 2014 by civil society actors in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, and Slovakia.⁴⁷ The frequency of forced evictions of Roma also appears to have increased in the second half of the Decade in Albania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Slovakia.⁴⁸

⁴³ Access to an improved water source means having piped, potable water inside the dwelling or in the yard outside the dwelling. The term “improved sanitation” refers to the presence of a toilet or bathroom inside the dwelling.

⁴⁴ The term “insecure housing” refers to houses in a poor state of repair and/or slums.

⁴⁵ See European Commission Progress reports on *Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2010 and 2014*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm

⁴⁶ See European Commission Progress reports on *Croatia between 2008 and 2011*, available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm; *Report on the Implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. COM (2014) 209 final* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2014).

⁴⁷ For details please see *Civil Society Monitoring Reports*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/civilsocietymonitoring>;

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Seven regional surveys conducted between 2006 and 2012 provide information on developments related to the cross-cutting issue of anti-discrimination in selected Decade countries. The first comprehensive regional study on discrimination against Roma in the Decade countries was the Decade Watch survey of 2009. This survey probed experts' assessments of changes in discrimination over the previous five years not only in general, but also in each of the four priority areas. In Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, overall assessments pointed to stagnation or deterioration in the situation, while in all other Decade countries the situation was assessed as having remained stable or improved.⁴⁹

In this survey of experts, positive assessments of the change in discrimination in the first half of the Decade exceeded negative. Of the four priority areas, changes in the situation with regard to discrimination in education were assessed positively by the largest share (approximately 45 percent) of interviewed experts.⁵⁰ The smallest share of experts (around 30 percent) gave a positive assessment of changes in relation to discrimination in housing. Finally, while overall assessments of the change in discrimination were more positive than negative, the share of respondents providing a negative assessment of the (then-) current situation in relation to discrimination was approximately three times larger than the share of respondents offering a positive assessment (i.e. 46 versus 15 percent).

Regional surveys commissioned by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2008 and by FRA and UNDP in 2011 document trends in several types of discrimination against Roma in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (among other EU countries) around the midpoint of the Decade:⁵¹

- In all five countries, the proportion of Roma who had experienced discrimination over the previous twelve months when looking for work decreased, with the greatest improvement registered in Hungary.
- The percentage of Roma who had experienced discrimination in the workplace over the last twelve months decreased in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania, while increasing slightly in Slovakia.
- Modest improvements were registered in all five countries with regard to Roma's experiences over the past twelve months with discrimination by healthcare personnel.
- The frequency of Roma's experiences over the previous twelve months with discrimination by housing providers and school personnel increased between the two surveys in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Slovakia while dropping in Hungary.

While various surveys conducted over the course of the Decade point to persistent (and in some cases increasingly) negative views of Roma on the part of non-Roma in the Decade countries,⁵² in one area Eurobarometer surveys conducted in 2006, 2009, and 2012, reported an increase in the number of respondents claiming to have a Roma acquaintance: from 12 percentage points in 2006 to 18 percentage points in 2012.⁵³ The notable exception is the Czech Republic, where the percentage of respondents with Roma friends or acquaintances was more than 20 percentage points lower than in any of the other Decade country in 2012. The results of the UNDP/WB/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011 suggest that any reported increase in the frequency of friendships between Roma and non-Roma has not yet led to widespread acceptance of mixed marriages among the members of either group: Only in Croatia did majorities of both Roma and non-Roma respondents indicate that such marriages might be acceptable.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), p. 52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵¹ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *EU-MIDIS: European Union Minority and Discrimination Survey. Main Results Report* (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009), pp. 162–163; Data from the 2011 survey provided by UNDP.

⁵² See, for example, Anikó Bernát et al., *The Roots of Radicalism and Anti-Roma Attitudes on the Far Right* (Budapest: TÁRKI, 2013), p. 2; Melanie H. Ram, Europeanized Hypocrisy: Roma Inclusion and Exclusion in Central and Eastern Europe, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 13, no. 4: 15–44, at 32–33.

⁵³ Eurobarometer, *Discrimination in the European Union* (Brussels: European Commission, 2007); *Discrimination in the EU in 2009* (Brussels: European Commission, 2009); *Discrimination in the EU in 2012* (Brussels: European Commission, 2012).

⁵⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Roma Data*, available at: <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/sustainable-development/development-planning-and-inclusive-sustainable-growth/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data.html>.

Table 2. ROMA RESPONDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Context of discrimination	Roma respondents' experiences of discrimination (%)									
	Bulgaria		Czech Republic		Hungary		Romania		Slovakia	
	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011
When looking for work	29	19	45	37	47	25	19	15	38	28
At work	7	6	27	11	25	6	12	5	4	9
By housing agency/landlord	0	3	13	26	16	11	3	13	10	23
By healthcare personnel	11	9	18	13	18	6	11	9	17	11
By school personnel	2	4	11	17	17	9	4	7	6	10

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009, 2011)

In the course of the Decade, the European Commission has made note of widespread and continuing discrimination against Roma in all participating countries of the Western Balkans at least once. Apparent in the second half of the Decade, is *growing* discrimination against Roma in some EU countries participating in the Decade.⁵⁵ With anti-Roma sentiment manifested increasingly in the form of organized events and violent attacks, spreading in many cases to localities without a history of interethnic tensions, and sometimes involving persons not previously associated with the extreme right, the counterintelligence service of the Czech Republic has characterized this development as potentially more dangerous “than the activity of more radical, yet better monitored extremist groups.”⁵⁶ For its part, the European Commission has pointed to the need for increased attention to anti-Roma hate speech in particular and for enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation in general in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.⁵⁷ Finally, the stakeholders interviewed for this publication who mentioned developments in relation to (anti-) discrimination generally took the view that the situation is worse at the end of the Decade than it was at the beginning.

GENDER EQUALITY

Responses to the 2009 Decade Watch survey suggest that attention to issues of gender in the first half of the Decade was greatest in the area of health and least in the area of housing.⁵⁸ The impact of the first five years of the Decade on women's health was assessed at neutral to positive overall, with Macedonia and Romania were assessed most positively and the Czech and Slovak Republics most negatively.⁵⁹ At the same time, more than half of respondents indicated on average that relevant programs in the four priority areas do not address gender issues at all, or expressed a lack of knowledge about the extent to which these programs address such issues.⁶⁰

The findings of the regional surveys conducted in 2004 and 2011 suggest some progress in reducing gender gaps in the priority areas of education and health while pointing to deterioration in the area of employment.⁶¹ In education, gaps between Roma women and Roma men in relation to dropout rates and educational attainment decreased, yet there was little change in the gender gap in relation to literacy rates. In the area of health, a tendency toward

⁵⁵ See Erzsébet Bogdán, Gábor Héra, and Zoltán Mészáros, *Monitoring Research Concerning the Implementation Process of the Objectives Indicated by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Program in Hungary in the Period of 2005–2009* (Budapest: Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2010); Lídia Balogh et al., *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Hungary* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013); European Roma Rights Centre, *Czech Republic: Country Profile 2011–2012* (Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre, 2013).

⁵⁶ Government of the Czech Republic, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Progress Report 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), p. 21.

⁵⁷ European Commission, *Report on the Implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies COM (2014) 209 final* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2014).

⁵⁸ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), p. 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶¹ Ewa Cukrowska and Angela Kóczé, *Interplay between Gender and Ethnicity: Exposing Structural Disparities of Romani Women* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

convergence between Roma men and Roma women was evident in the period between the two surveys in the frequency of (self-reported) chronic illness. By way of contrast, the gender gap in employment increased more among Roma than among non-Roma in the period between the two surveys.

With the partial exception of Spain,⁶² a lack of sustained attention to issues of gender is evident throughout the Decade. Although mention of Roma women in strategic and policy documents adopted in the framework of the Decade is common (often in terms of multiple discrimination), gender equality is frequently neglected as a cross-cutting issue, such that consideration of women as a distinct target group tends to be missing in the design of measures aimed at Roma even where Roma women are particularly affected by certain problems.⁶³ Moreover, consideration of Roma women in broader strategic documents on gender equality is inconsistent.⁶⁴

Of the countries participating in the Decade, two have at one time or another adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) for Roma women: Macedonia and Serbia. Despite the potential for a separate NAP devoted to Roma women to promote the integration of issues of gender in the design, implementation, and assessment of initiatives in the four priority areas as well as in relation to anti-discrimination and poverty reduction, treatment of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in both countries has at the very least not been helped by the lack of a clear fit between the NAPs for Roma women on the one hand and the NAPs for education, employment, health, and housing on the other.⁶⁵ Further, in a rare example of direct criticism with regard to the handling of the situation of Roma women, the European Commission's 2012 Progress Report

for Macedonia contains the observation that “[i]nsufficient support to the National Action Plan for Roma Women renders its implementation almost impossible.”⁶⁶ In the last years of the Decade, the Macedonian government has declared a change in approach to the situation of Roma women, mainstreaming issues of gender in its new strategy for Roma and attending to Roma women in the implementation of mainstream strategies for gender equality and non-discrimination.⁶⁷

The stakeholders interviewed for this publication were divided on the appropriateness of treating gender equality as a cross-cutting issue rather than making it a priority area. Additionally, two of the interviewed stakeholders – both Roma women – questioned the appropriateness of addressing gender equality in the framework of the Decade at all. Despite these differences, the most common view expressed by interviewed stakeholders in relation to gender equality was that the Decade has brought little progress.

POVERTY REDUCTION

A central conclusion of the focus groups conducted in late 2012 and early 2013 with Decade stakeholders was that “[i]n design and practice, the focus [of the Decade] has been on the poverty dimension.”⁶⁸ Still, there are relatively few data available on the extent to which poverty among Roma has been reduced in the course of the Decade. Coverage of poverty in the Decade Watch reports is limited to an observation in the 2007 report about the lack of relevant data.⁶⁹ The European Commission's progress reports on the Decade countries of the Western

⁶² See Miguel Laparra et al., *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Spain* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013), p. 56.

⁶³ Stephan Müller, *National Policies towards Romani Women in the Western Balkans* (Sarajevo: CARE International Northwest Balkans, 2011).

⁶⁴ Eben Friedman, *Regional Report on Anti-discrimination and Participation of Roma in Local Decision-Making* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2013).

⁶⁵ Eben Friedman et al., *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Macedonia* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013); Tatjana Perić, *Achieving Human Rights of Roma Women in Serbia: An Analysis of the Implementation of Existing Institutional Measures* (Niš: Women's Space, 2012).

⁶⁶ European Commission, *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2012 Progress Report* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2012), p. 54; cf. Roma Center Skopje, *Submission to CEDAW: Commentary on the Realization of the Romani Women Rights with Focus on the 2006 CEDAW Committee Recommendation No. 28* (Skopje: Roma Center Skopje, 2013).

⁶⁷ Government of Macedonia, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Progress Report 2013* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), p. 14.

⁶⁸ Working Group on the Decade Future, *To Be or Not To Be...Roma Decade After 2015?* (Zagreb: Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012), p. 2. Stakeholders participating in the focus groups included representatives of government and civil society in all Decade countries except Bulgaria and Slovakia, as well as international partners.

⁶⁹ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2007 Update* (Budapest: Createch Ltd., 2008), p. 17.

Balkans also pay little attention to poverty as such. Even the stakeholders interviewed for this publication rarely expressed views about the Decade's effects on poverty among Roma.

Apparently the only body of data allowing an assessment of poverty reduction during the Decade in more than a single country comes from the regional surveys of 2004 and 2011.⁷⁰ The findings of these surveys suggest that both monetary poverty among Roma and the gap between Roma and non-Roma in absolute poverty rates decreased in the first half of the Decade. The only data on poverty reduction among Roma in the second half of the Decade come from a survey conducted on a representative sample of Roma in Macedonia in 2012, with a majority of respondents perceiving a lack of progress in this regard.

SUMMING UP

Available information suggests that education is the priority area in which the most progress has been made in improving the situation of Roma relative both to what it was at the beginning of the Decade and to the situation of non-Roma. Assessing the other priority areas in terms of achievements in the course of the Decade is made more difficult by the smaller bodies of available data, but it appears that achievements in the area of health have been greater than in employment or housing; despite a slow start in designing and implementing health-related policies targeting Roma, there is evidence suggesting both gradual acceleration and uneven progress. Assessing employment and housing is more difficult still due to incomplete information. Nonetheless, the second half of the Decade seems to confirm the observation made around the Decade's midpoint that a "lack of coherent policies regarding housing and employment affects negatively the efficiency of programs in the fields of education and health."⁷¹

The cross-cutting issues have been largely neglected throughout the Decade. Issues of discrimination have received attention from governments as well as in external assessments, but modest advances made in the first half of the Decade were rolled back in some participating countries in the second half of the Decade as relations between Roma and non-Roma deteriorated. A lack of sustained attention to issues of gender was recorded in both halves of the Decade. Finally, poverty reduction has for the most part been left alone not only by government policies, but also by external assessments.

Overall, at the end of the Decade, the general conclusion of the first Decade Watch report still rings true: "[D]espite some progress, the Decade has not reached the critical point that would guarantee success."⁷²

⁷⁰ See Andrey Ivanov and Justin Kagin, *Roma Poverty from a Human Development Perspective* (Istanbul: United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

⁷¹ Iulian Stoian, David Mark, and Marius Wamsiedel, *Decade Watch Romania Report: Mid-Term Evaluation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion* (Bucharest: Roma Civic Alliance of Romania, 2010), p. 53.

⁷² Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006* (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007), p. 18; cf. Angéla Kóczé, *Civil Society, Civil Involvement and Social Inclusion of the Roma* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), p. 45; Working Group on the Decade Future, *To Be or Not To Be...Roma Decade After 2015?* (Zagreb: Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012), p. 2.



NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: ROMA PARTICIPATION, GENDER EQUITY AND THE DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION

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Margareta Matache

PART 1: NOTHING ABOUT US...? ROMA PARTICIPATION AND THE DECADE

The success of the 21st Century European Roma movement in staking the claim “Nothing about us without us” ensured that the principle of Roma participation in policy-making became a staple of the official rhetoric of governing institutions over 15 years of discourse on Roma inclusion. In 2003 the phrase long associated with Nicolae Gheorghe, “for Roma, with Roma” was enshrined in the 2003 OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti, with the imperative to maximize Roma ownership of the policies that affect them.⁷³ In 2005 the participatory principle “nothing about us, without us” was a defining feature first of the Decade, and then later in 2011 of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Yet it remains clear that much still remains to be done in practice to make this principle a reality.

The Decade Terms of Reference stated that the program’s success required “the close involvement and participation of Roma in the decisions and work of the Decade.”⁷⁴ This chapter explores the levels of Roma participation and the tactics of Roma civil society throughout the Decade at national and regional levels. The term Roma participation includes Roma civil society, Roma governmental officials, and Roma communities. In the course of the Decade, Roma participation was evident in the first two of the three categories.

1. Roma participants in the Decade: Young leaders

Roma leaders and organizations have played various roles in the Decade, ranging from policy formulation to monitoring activities. In the incipient phase, the Decade focus was on young Roma leaders, but later on more Roma organizations and networks became involved, especially in monitoring.

The Decade initiators made a strategic choice to work with a fresh, well-educated group of young Roma, and deliberately distanced themselves from more established and more experienced leaders. The Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the World Bank decided upon criteria⁷⁵ to select ten to 12 young Roma leaders from each country through “local competitive processes” that would “demonstrate an even gender balance.”⁷⁶ The Roma organizations and leaders at national level employed different recruitment strategies. In Romania, for example, a Roma National Working Group, comprising prominent national NGOs, selected seven male and three female activists based on their expertise in the Decade priority areas.⁷⁷ In the Czech Republic, the selection was conducted by the Open Society office in Prague.⁷⁸ Overall, the groups of young leaders selected were not as locally focused, nor as gender balanced as expected – factors which would hinder opportunities for nationwide participation. Nevertheless, the World Bank and OSF sought to ensure the participation of a diverse group of young Roma leaders at the 2003 conference organized in Budapest, as well as post-conference, in the Decade processes, and the leaders committed to bring their unpaid contribution to the Decade.⁷⁹

⁷³ OSCE/ODIHR, *Action plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area*, (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2003), available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/20666?download=true>.

⁷⁴ International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.

⁷⁵ Five criteria were proposed: 1) experience working on one of the four priority areas of the Decade; 2) commitment to soliciting and representing a broad range of perspectives; 3) language capacity; 4) leadership capabilities; 5) affiliation with an organization or network. For more information see International Steering Committee, *First Meeting of the Roma Decade Steering Committee: Minutes and Summary*, (Budapest: International Steering Committee, 2003), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9331_file1_decade-sc-i-december-11-12-2003.pdf.

⁷⁶ World Bank, Briefing Note, *Conference Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future*, 2003, available at: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/07/24/000012009_20030724095242/Rendered/INDEX/26415.txt.

⁷⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Gelu Duminica, March, 2015.

⁷⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Gabriela Hrabanova, April 2015.

⁷⁹ International Steering Committee, *First Meeting of the Roma Decade Steering Committee: Minutes and Summary*, (Budapest: International Steering Committee, 2003), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9331_file1_decade-sc-i-december-11-12-2003.pdf.

The young Roma leaders made valuable contributions in developing the Decade documents and the national action plans.⁸⁰ Both the OSF and the World Bank worked with the young leaders, through meetings and videoconferences, to establish priorities and strategies. Some young leaders argued that these consultations shaped the Decade priorities,⁸¹ an opinion that was shared by George Soros: “the Decade represents a comprehensive approach to address the issues that Roma leaders have identified: education, employment, housing, and discrimination.”⁸²

The Decade’s ToR stipulated a distinct role for Roma civil society in the implementation and the monitoring of the National Action Plans,⁸³ but the policy formulation processes were shaped according to the countries’ needs: “[t]he delegations are informed and ready to help catalyze the preparations for the Decade that will be needed in each country.”⁸⁴ Thus, the involvement of Roma leaders in the formulation of the National Action Plans differed from country to country. In Macedonia, the view that the process was more open and democratic than other countries⁸⁵ was disputed by some activists who maintained that only a few Roma were involved in formulating the Macedonian strategy.⁸⁶

The Decade opened the door for regular collaboration and exchanges with state officials in some countries. In Macedonia, Roma advocates started to meet more frequently with state representatives, ministry officials, and more importantly, began to communicate with local authorities. *“There had been no opportunity for that, but thanks to the Decade, we started to become more regular partners with institutions.”*⁸⁷

One of the Decade’s greatest contributions was to empower many young Roma leaders through study visits, trainings and practice. As one said: *“My experience and involvement in the Decade was a great learning experience. First of all I was quite young, and my capacity building took the form of learning by doing, attending and participating in many meetings, working on policy strategies, on recommendations, and meeting high-level authorities on the national and international levels.”*⁸⁸

Many of the young leaders of 2005 have become strong advocates, politicians, and state officials. Their prominent profile in the Decade and the experience they gained in working with state and intergovernmental officials may well have contributed to that progress. To mention just a few, Gabriela Hrabanova was nominated the director of the Roma Unit in the Czech government, Gruia Bumbu became the president of the Romanian government’s National Agency for Roma, and Agnes Osztolykan was elected a member of the Hungarian Parliament.

However, the competition amongst the young leaders was not always healthy and productive. According to one interviewee the underdeveloped Roma civil sector and institutions, and different interests and disagreements amongst Roma representatives stymied improvements in Roma participation.⁸⁹ Some young leaders recall that

⁸⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Veselj Beganaj, March 2015.

⁸¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Gruia Bumbu, April 2015.

⁸² Open Society Foundations, Press release *Prime Ministers Endorse “Decade of Roma Inclusion,” Called by George Soros*, July 1, 2003, available at: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/prime-ministers-endorse-decade-roma-inclusion-called-george-soros>.

⁸³ International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.

⁸⁴ International Steering Committee, *First Meeting of the Roma Decade Steering Committee: Minutes and Summary*, (Budapest: International Steering Committee, 2003), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9331_file1_decade-sc-i-december-11-12-2003.pdf.

⁸⁵ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadir Redjepi, April 2015.

⁸⁶ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

⁸⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadir Redjepi, April 2015.

⁸⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Gabriela Hrabanova, April, 2015.

cooperation was slowed by competition, careerism and opportunism: *“The competition between the young Roma leaders themselves led to fragmentation into small groups, and we fell apart. We couldn’t have proper discussions with one another; it was all about talking to the white people but not talking to one another, not caring about the real deal, forgetting about the mission.”*⁸⁹

The young leaders may have gained a better understanding of political and policy processes, but the weight of responsibility was overwhelming for those with less experience in complex negotiations: *“Everything was on the shoulders of civil society and there wasn’t time to restructure, to acquire the knowledge and skills for policy dialogue. We didn’t have Roma politicians at the international level to lead discussions, and at the local and national level we had one or two MPs in each country, but their capacity and skills were not compatible with the demands of such a complex process.”*⁹¹

Some of the young leaders selected chose to distance themselves from the Decade for various reasons and at different stages of the process. Some left in the very beginning, disappointed that gender was not a priority area, and that it lacked consistent policies: *“Everything is a project, project, project.”*⁹² Others invested serious effort in the first phase of policy formulation, but left when they saw the governments were not serious: *“I was involved in the Decade until 2006... When I saw that the Government had no interest in approving the Action Plan, I removed myself from the entire process, and I refused to be involved in the Decade. I saw no reason to participate.”*⁹³

Looking back, some of the young leaders argued that OSF and the WB reduced their support for the young leaders because of their limited capacity to organize themselves and their relative inexperience. As Vamosi notes, *“[i]n the end there was no support for the young Roma leaders because they were not good enough to organize themselves. I remember OSF and the WB getting us together several times, paying for everything and we didn’t do anything. If I had the experience then that I have now, had we been more mature leaders, we probably could have made more use of this opportunity.”*⁹⁴

More senior Roma leaders played a marginal role in the Decade. At the 2003 conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe,” which heralded the Decade, most of the 125 Roma present were young Roma leaders. During the event the WB president acknowledged this limitation and promised to increase the participation of the senior Roma leaders and other Roma representatives: “I am well aware that some who have not spoken today, but to whom references have been made, such as Nicolae Gheorghe who has made his own huge contribution, should be recognized and included in what will be an inherently open process.”⁹⁵ However, both as a consequence of the Decade’s emphasis on the young and also because senior leaders did not make strong demands to take part, this limitation remained a feature of the Decade. Many of the senior leaders had other platforms such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) set up in 2004, and some undoubtedly perceived the Decade as competition.⁹⁶

Support for Roma participation at Decade ISC meetings came mostly from OSF. Many saw this as indicative of the governments’ lack of commitment. As one former leader remarked, *“nothing for the Roma without the Roma only held if a third party (OSF) paid the bill.”*⁹⁷ Beyond this, many Roma felt that the authorities and other institutions did not recognize or value their contributions:

⁸⁹ Interview conducted by the authors with Veselj Beganaj, March 2015.

⁹⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Gyula Vamosi, April, 2015.

⁹¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadir Redjepi, April 2015.

⁹² Interview conducted by the authors with Azbija Memedova, April 2015.

⁹³ Interview conducted by the authors with Gelu Duminica, March 2015.

⁹⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Gyula Vamosi, April 2015.

⁹⁵ World Bank, Briefing Note, *Conference Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future*, 2003, available at: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/07/24/000012009_20030724095242/Rendered/INDEX/26415.txt.

⁹⁶ Valeriu Nicolae, *The Decade of Roma Inclusion: Between hopes, glitches and failure*, 2005, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9696_file1_between-hopes-glitches-and-failures.pdf.

⁹⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Gelu Duminica, March 2015.

“Government activities to include the Roma voice at some level happened but it only stayed at the surface level of representation, and not in a way that it could be a source feeding the government with ideas for policy change, that could lead to more consolidated activities.”⁹⁸

That attitude also emerged in the language of official reports. For instance, at the 7th ISC meeting, the report listed the “important guests” who spoke in the opening session – none of them members of Roma civil society.⁹⁹

Partnership with governments was often deemed unfair and many felt that governments simply chose the Roma NGOs and leaders they wanted to work with, set the rules and set the agenda and some advocates were simply excluded: *“Our organization was excluded from the process; they stopped informing or consulting us, and we ceased to be a partner of the government in implementing the Decade.”¹⁰⁰* In other countries, the cooperation between Roma leaders and government offices has been perceived as positive. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dervo Sejdić mentioned constructive cooperation with the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees.¹⁰¹

As a tactic, the intensive focus of the Decade on young leaders created milestones in strengthening youth capacity and voice in the movement, but it also led to some backlash in relation to their advocacy outcomes. The inclusion of more senior Roma advocates from the very beginning and throughout the Decade would have contributed to a better balance of expertise and ultimately to better negotiations and results.

2. Roma participants in the Decade: Non-governmental organizations

The Roma civil society has received significant gains during the Decade. First, the program has contributed to strengthening the capacity of some Roma organizations, raising their international profile and bringing wider recognition of their efforts and achievements. Roma organizations have also given back to the process, not least by practically implementing many Decade projects.

Almost three quarters (67.95 percent) of the experts from all Decade countries interviewed in a 2009 Decade Survey concluded that government consultations with Roma organization were ineffective; and 11.33 percent added that there were no consultations at all.¹⁰² The criticism was also confirmed by Roma leaders: *“Keeping in mind that only a few people were involved in creating the strategy, that it was a closed process, not involving people in the communities, my expectations were not high...In the field, people were never asked what they really need. There was a big gap between the governments and the Roma.”¹⁰³*

Roma participation was assessed positively in Spain, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and rather negatively in Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic.¹⁰⁴

Roma NGOs have extensively participated in Decade monitoring. In 2006, OSF and the WB initiated and financially supported Decade Watch to monitor implementation of the Decade national action plans. The research teams consisted of representatives of Roma organizations, alliances, and networks active in the Decade countries, and they benefited from WB and OSF trainings and mentoring covering methodological issues, editorial and production aspects.¹⁰⁵

Several cycles of Decade Watch reporting were conducted between 2007 and 2009. Whereas the reports published

⁹⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Beata Olahova, April 2015.

⁹⁹ The Government of Romania, *Report of the 7th International Steering Committee meeting*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9464_file1_7thiscmeeting.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Delia Grigore, April 2015.

¹⁰¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Dervo Sejdić, March 2015.

¹⁰² Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch, Results of the 2009 Survey*, (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9317_file1_decade-watch--results-of-the-2009-survey--revised.pdf.

¹⁰³ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch, Results of the 2009 Survey*, (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9317_file1_decade-watch--results-of-the-2009-survey--revised.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on the Decade Watch please visit: http://www.romadecade.org/egy-cikk.php?hir_id=9316.

in 2007 and 2008 focused on governments' progress and good practices in social inclusion during the Decade, the 2009 evaluation was a sociological survey analyzing the "independent opinions" of 300 people, Roma and non-Roma experts and decision makers, representatives of local and central institutions, civil society, scholars, and politicians.

The NGOs' opinions about the usefulness of the Decade Watch differ. One Roma government representative argued that the Decade Watch created competition and confusion among participating countries over what could have been counted as progress.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, others believe that later on in the process, the International Steering Committee meetings turned to "only shaming and blaming."¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, one of the milestones of this monitoring process was its participatory approach, which still remains underutilized across the region.

The Decade Secretariat published two Civil Society Monitoring Reports in 2012 and 2014 produced by nationwide coalitions of organizations, selected through open calls.¹⁰⁸ Some of the NGOs involved in the reporting conducted an analysis of the Decade impact at the local level. In Bulgaria, Integro interviewed municipalities and Roma activists at the grassroots level and enabled them to report on their insights about the Decade.¹⁰⁹ This is indicative of a wider trend to shift policy debates on implementation more towards local communities.

Thus, civil society participation in the Decade comprised both weaknesses and strengths. There are differing opinions about the quality, the roles and legitimacy of those participating. Decade Intelligence assessed it as one of the milestones of the program, concluding that "the principle of 'nothing for the Roma without the Roma' has been the value of the Decade that was most successfully promoted."¹¹⁰ Some of the young leaders are more critical: *"In many meetings, the Roma did not even have the chance to address the plenary. But as always, you can*

*find Roma activists to accept and validate processes and working methods."*¹¹¹ The participatory approach taken in the monitoring processes could serve as a model for future policy monitoring, evaluation and research that targets Roma communities.

3. Roma participants in the Decade: Roma officials in governments

Between 2005 and 2015, Roma representatives, some nominated earlier, and others designated for the purpose of the Decade, joined governments to implement not only the Decade but also other policies targeting Roma.

In some countries, Roma officials led the Decade processes. In Romania, M. Ionescu, the President of the National Agency for the Roma, played a prominent role in the 2005–2006 Romanian Presidency of the Decade. However, even though the National Agency for Roma was the governmental agency in charge of the Decade, and it was a Roma-led agency, the Romanian government never approved the Decade Action Plan during the entire program period. There was a pre-existing 2001 strategy for the improvement of Roma situation, which was updated in 2005, with not dissimilar priorities and involving many Roma experts and organizations. This led to confusion and to the lack of formal institutional commitment.

Other government bodies that had responsibilities for implementation perceived the Roma-led units and agencies as the full and only implementers of the Decade plans. In Macedonia, a unit was formed in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy responsible for day-to-day coordination of Decade activities in the initial years of Decade; the staff consisted of university-educated Roma.

In other countries, young Roma leaders were involved in the formulation and implementation processes led by non-Roma. In Hungary, the Decade was made part of the Roma integration department. In 2003, the socialist

¹⁰⁶ Interview conducted by the authors, March 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Adriatik Hasantari, April 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, *Civil Society Monitoring Reports*, (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013, 2014), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file26_civil-society-monitoring-summary-report.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ Interview conducted by the authors with Lilia Makaveeva, March 2015.

¹¹⁰ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, *Decade Intelligence Report*, (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9765_file1_decade-intelligence-report.pdf.

¹¹¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Gelu Duminica, March 2015.

government in place gathered a group of educated Roma, including Ágnes Osztolykan, to work on the Roma integration and the Decade. They drafted the Decade Action Plan in Hungary and succeeded in having it passed through a parliamentary decision. But the Roma advocates often found themselves powerless and voiceless inside the government structures. *“If you are a civil servant or a NGO person you cannot really push the government to do something.”*¹¹²

Moreover, the increased presence of the Roma in public institutions did not necessarily mean progress in Roma communities.¹¹³ Although Roma representatives participated in government processes, they did not have enough political power and influence over the governments to bring change. *“In many of the countries, the Roma representatives of the governments were not ready to fight for the budget or for updates in the strategy when something was wrong.”*¹¹⁴

In other situations, Roma representation in governmental positions declined by the end of the Decade. For example, in Bulgaria, Tano Bechev concluded that *“we lost many positions at the national and local level and today no one wants to hear about the Roma.”*¹¹⁵ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sanela Bešić said that institutions reached the point where no Roma professionals are employed in any central institutions.¹¹⁶

Roma civil servants working at the grassroots level have also encountered obstacles. In Macedonia, one interviewee reported that Roma health mediators were not well accepted in relevant institutions, which viewed them as competition.¹¹⁷ In Romania, the most celebrated Roma health mediators program suffered modifications adopted in 2008 by the Government. Based on the decentralization-focused amendments, the local municipalities have become the health mediators' employers. Some municipalities have

refused to sign the contracts with the mediators, required mediators to accomplish tasks that were not part of their job description, and also implemented salary cuts.¹¹⁸

Overall, Roma participation in the official institutions was judged to be more form than substance in terms of outcomes and impact. At national level the majority of Roma stakeholders were judged not to have contributed as much as they could have, and at local level, Roma expertise was only used sporadically to address the needs of communities.

4. Roma participants in the Decade: Roma communities

Despite the ambition of the Decade to involve Roma communities in the implementation of the program's goals and objectives, people in all the Decade countries reported modest levels of awareness and only sporadic Roma community participation.

The countries of former Yugoslavia succeeded in reaching out to the Roma communities more than the other countries. The level of awareness about the existence of the Decade was as high as 42 percent in Macedonia and 27 percent in Croatia. In contrast, in countries such as Romania or Albania, the Roma were generally unaware of this program, with only 7 percent of Roma in Albania and 5 percent in Romania stating that they had ever heard of it.¹¹⁹ A national survey in Romania revealed an even lower level of awareness about the Decade amongst the Romanian Roma: only 2 percent of the Roma had heard about the program and 44 percent of that small number heard about it on TV.¹²⁰

¹¹² Interview conducted by the authors with Agnes Osztolykan, March 2015.

¹¹³ Interview conducted by the authors with Azbija Memedova, March 2015.

¹¹⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

¹¹⁵ Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, April 2015.

¹¹⁶ Interview conducted by the authors with Sanela Bešić, April 2015.

¹¹⁷ Interview conducted by the authors, March 2015.

¹¹⁸ Romani CRISS, *Roma health. The perspective of the stakeholders involved in the health system: physicians, health mediators, patients*, (Bucharest: Romani CRISS, 2011), available at: http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/publicatie%20criss%20sanatate%20osi_22_02.pdf.

¹¹⁹ Tatjana Peric, *The housing situation of the Roma communities: Regional Roma Survey*, (Bratislava: UNDP, 2011), available at: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/misc/The%20housing%20situation%20of%20Roma%20communities>.

¹²⁰ Romani CRISS, *Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination: The Roma perspective*, (Bucharest, Romani CRISS, 2011), available at: <http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/Stereotipuri,%20prejudicati%20-%20perspectiva%20romilor%20cercetare%202011.pdf>.

This data is confirmed by young Roma leaders working at the grassroots level: *“If you speak to normal everyday people at the local level, many have no idea what the Decade was about – at the end of the Decade many people don’t know that there was a Decade.”*¹²¹ Nevertheless, the lack of awareness about the Decade does not necessarily indicate that the program had no impact in Roma communities.

Some Roma organizations did focus on raising awareness about the Decade at the community level. In Serbia, the League of Roma worked to ensure information and exchanges from the higher to the lower, grassroots levels.¹²² But some stakeholders interviewed for this publication emphasized that there was limited awareness about the Decade amongst the grassroots organizations as well.¹²³

While the governments made little effort to work with and inform Roma communities about the Decade, the distance between Roma leaders involved in the Decade and the communities also contributed to the lacunae in awareness. Moreover, though the Roma leaders from all over the region were smart, creative and skilled, they did not work much with the Roma people in the community and have them “behind them”.¹²⁴ In areas where young Roma leaders were also involved in community work, the awareness level amongst the people was higher. For instance, in Pecs, where Gyula Vamosi worked, the Roma were better informed about the Decade than were the Roma living in Roma neighborhoods in Budapest.¹²⁵

To diminish the awareness gap, but also to contribute to the implementation of the Decade’s goals, in 2012, the Decade Secretariat selected and provided financial support to Roma Civil Society Focal Points in all Decade countries. An important task of the Focal Points was to disseminate information about the Decade to the Roma communities and the Roma civil society.¹²⁶

The Focal Points reached regional and local authorities as well as civil society and have made a positive impact in communities through awareness raising activities. According to Fabian Sanchez, representative of the Focal Point organization in Spain, the Decade Focal Points cooperated and coordinated their activities, locally with at least 15 other Roma organizations.¹²⁷ Other Roma leaders agreed that the establishment of the Focal Points was a very positive initiative, but they argued that it was introduced too late in the process to produce significant results.¹²⁸

The participation of Roma communities in the Decade has been infrequent and often nonexistent, and several leaders said that Roma participation never materialized into community participation. Almost half the experts from all Decade countries interviewed in a 2009 Decade Survey concluded that the Roma did not have *any say* in creating policies. The lack of participation of grassroots Roma communities is not peculiar to the Decade, but rather a common feature of all “top-down” policy processes addressing Roma. When consultation with the communities did occur, as in Macedonia, community members were *“shocked to be consulted about their needs and about the solutions they had for inclusion.”*¹²⁹ And some Roma leaders we interviewed agreed that problems should have been tackled in a more integrated and participatory way, and local Roma communities should have been consulted so that projects might reflect their actual rather than their presumed needs. The perception is that the Decade did not reach down to local communities and that *“the Decade focused too much on various meetings and events, and much less on continuous work and changes in the field.”*¹³⁰

¹²¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, April 2015.

¹²² Interview conducted by the authors with Osman Balić, April 2015.

¹²³ Interview conducted by the authors with Isidro Rodriguez, March 2015.

¹²⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Agnes Oszolykan, March 2015.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ For more detailed information on the Roma Civil Society Decade Focal Points please visit: <http://www.romadecade.org/decade-participants-civil-society>.

¹²⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Fabian Sanchez, March 2015.

¹²⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Veselj Beganaj, March 2015.

¹²⁹ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

¹³⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadica Balog, April 2015.

5. Conclusions

The motto “Nothing for the Roma without the Roma” has been understood and applied in different ways by stakeholders participating in the Decade at the national and regional levels.

Overall, the Decade succeeded to involve Roma in formal dialogue and negotiations with state institutions in all stages of the Decade. Roma state representatives, experts, researchers, and civil society leaders managed to raise awareness within governmental structures about the need and the means for Roma inclusion.

As a political process that involved Roma civil society in different developmental levels, the Decade provides a model of a participatory approach in how to devise policy documents and inclusion priorities; and how to hold governments publicly accountable through regular public consultations. However, there remains a need to develop more innovative and effective tools for consultation that actively engage local communities and grassroots leaders. From one side Roma leaders and organizations at the center could have filled this gap through more direct work with communities and local NGOs. As Ágnes Osztolykan concluded, *“we have to organize ourselves, as Roma, and we have to build real connections with the Roma communities in the field.”*¹³¹ The Decade failed to actively engage enough grassroots organizations, not only to ensure empowerment and participation, but also to make use of the experience and direct knowledge about their own communities.

One of the Decade’s milestones was the use of participatory tools in policy monitoring. While the OSF worked primarily with Roma NGOs, networks and scholars, one clear lesson remains and that is the need to ensure effective involvement of more Roma grassroots organizations and community members in monitoring activities.

The Decade engaged the passions and commitment of many and secured a declaratory commitment from participating governments to promote equality and inclusion, but in

practice it did not produce the substantive changes needed to end the exclusion of Roma communities. Civil society representatives we interviewed highlighted the need for a more integrated, cross-sectorial approach in designing and implementing Roma policies, and many insisted that economic empowerment needs to feature as a key priority in any “integrated model.”

PART 2: ...WITHOUT US? GENDER EQUALITY AND THE DECADE

The terms of reference of the Decade stated in 2005 that in addition to focusing on the priority areas of employment, education, health, and housing, “each participating Government shall in addition take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming.”¹³²

In most Decade countries, throughout the program implementation, civil society and institutions implemented various projects aiming to contribute to gender equality. While some of these projects proved efficient, there was no Decade-wide, systematic investment in equality measures for Roma women and girls.

Roma feminists highlighted the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women and girls, and the inequities in education, employment and health between Roma women and girls and their non-Roma counterparts, as well as the disparities between Roma men and women. The core argument was that the particular challenges faced by Roma women required that special attention be paid to gender equity in formulating policies to promote Roma inclusion. In tandem with the debates on whether Roma inclusion policies should focus more on mainstreaming or

¹³¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Ágnes Osztolykan, March 2015.

¹³² International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.



targeted action in the Decade, there was much discussion on whether gender equity should be defined as a cross-cutting theme or feature as a distinct priority for targeted action. By the launch of the Decade it was decided that governments should take “gender mainstreaming into account” in each of the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing.

This section analyzes the discourse around gender equity, the effectiveness of the cross-cutting approach and the impact of measures adopted and actions implemented within the remit of the Decade to promote equality and provide support for Roma women and girls.

1. Cross-cutting and targeting approaches

The distinctive history of injustice against Roma women and girls – including forced sterilization, and the lived experience of very blunt and often violent discrimination – in European countries has pushed contemporary Roma females into specific types of social and economic disadvantage. Just to take one example, in 2006, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 48.59 percent of Roma women had either incomplete or no elementary education, compared to only 5.87 percent of non-Roma women; 31.08 percent of Roma men; and 1.64 percent of non-Roma men. Enrolment rates for Roma females in secondary education were 22 percent as opposed to 18 percent of the Roma man. The participation to tertiary education of both Roma females and males was 1 percent. By contrast 73 percent of non-Roma females and 79 percent of non-Roma males were enrolled in secondary education and 12 percent of non-Roma females and 10 percent of non-Roma males in tertiary.¹³³ Across other Decade countries such as Serbia or Montenegro,¹³⁴ surveys showed similar disparities in education especially between Roma and non-Roma females. Despite such stark inequalities, a common lacuna in policy development across the region was the lack of targeted measures to address disadvantages specifically affecting Roma women and girls.

At the Roma Women’s Forum in 2003, as well as in other Decade consultations, advocates considered two directions to tackle gender equality: 1) treat gender equality as a distinct priority area, and 2) treat gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in all the Decade priorities, an approach extensively utilized by other minority groups and intergovernmental entities.

Some Roma women activists were more in favor of the cross-cutting approach, arguing that the principle of gender equality should apply everywhere and that gender mainstreaming should feature in all policy measures and activities to promote Roma inclusion.

Others were more in favor of targeted gender measures, arguing that a cross-cutting approach leads to a limited focus and an inevitable sidelining of women’s agendas. Roma women stressed the need for targeted measures for Roma communities to provide redress for their historic and current social and economic disadvantages. They also insisted that additional targeted measures be developed within the context of Roma inclusion policies for Roma women and girls, to take account of the multiple forms of discrimination they face in all sectors.

Beyond the either/or dichotomy some Roma women activists proposed combining both approaches. The Roma Women’s Agenda (the document agreed at the Roma Women’s Forum to be considered by the Decade Action Plans) recommended developing national action plans for Roma “that explicitly include recommendations for improving the lives of Roma women.” The agenda also called for national programs that “provide employment opportunities for particularly vulnerable Roma women’s groups, such as single mothers, mothers with husbands in prison, and victims of domestic violence.”¹³⁵ In the end the Decade opted for a cross-cutting approach to address gender inequalities, to the disappointment of some Roma women activists, such as Azbija Memedova, who subsequently distanced themselves from the Decade.¹³⁶

¹³³ Stephan Muller, *National policies towards Romani women in the Western Balkans, Country paper on Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2011, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9376_file2_country-paper-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-national-policies-towards-romani-women-in-the-western-balkans.pdf.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Open Society Institute Network Women’s Program, *A place at the policy table: Report on the Roma Women’s Network*, 2003, available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/roma_womens_finalreport.pdf.

¹³⁶ Interview conducted by the authors with Azbija Memedova, March 2015.

In the larger global context, cross-cutting has been widely applied in intergovernmental and governmental work on gender equality, human rights and poverty reduction. The UN set an example in this sense, as “all UN entities are responsible for integrating gender equality in their activities.”¹³⁷ Similarly, in choosing this approach, the initiators of the Decade responded to the fundamental need for cross-sectorial actions to address the inequalities facing women and girls.

However, the UN has complemented the cross-cutting approach with targeted conventions, institutions and programs focusing exclusively on women’s empowerment and equality. In contrast, the Decade stakeholders did not take similar further steps to establish specific agencies, measures and programs for Roma women and girls, either in Roma-only or mainstream processes.

In planning the Decade, the targeting and cross-cutting approaches should not have been considered to be mutually exclusive. As suggested by the Roma Women’s Agenda, while it was a notable decision to include gender equality measures across all priority areas, the governments should have included additional measures and institutions specifically targeting Roma women and girls to boost women’s empowerment and compensate for past disadvantages.

2. Gender discourse in the Decade

The Open Society Institute’s Network Women’s Program (NWP) was one of the most valuable advocates for gender measures in the Decade. However, when the program grew smaller, it seems that the focus on Roma women in the Decade diminished as well.¹³⁸

In 2003, the NWP organized the *Roma Women’s Forum* in preparation for the *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future* conference hosted by the OSI and the World Bank. The Forum and some of the most

established Roma feminists set up a few milestone directions on gender: 1) include Roma women’s issues in mainstream women’s groups and structures (Azbija Memedova); 2) address the specific needs of Roma women within the broader Roma discourse (Nicoleta Bitu); and 3) partner with Roma men and other allies to tackle specific Roma women’s issues (Enisa Eminova). Presenting the conclusions of the Forum at the Roma in Expanding Europe conference, Bitu concluded that: “Roma women ... seek to mainstream Roma women’s issues into all levels and structures for both women and Roma.” The Roma Women’s Agenda also included general principles and targeted recommendations for different stakeholders and it suggested four priority areas: education; economic empowerment; health and sexuality; and grassroots leadership and political participation. Activists had expectations that the governments would consider the Agenda in developing the Decade Action Plans, and that the principles and recommendations adopted would be incorporated into all working plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion.”¹³⁹

However, the women’s message was diluted from the moment the Decade ToR was drafted. First, the ToR neither made any reference nor build on the Roma Women’s Forum and the Roma Women’s Agenda. Second, it only asked governments to “take into account” or “bear in mind” gender mainstreaming with regards to the priority areas.¹⁴⁰

Some countries placed a priority on gender equality. Measures aiming to support Roma women and girls were included in the Decade National Actions Plan in Spain.¹⁴¹ Yet, overall, the national Decade Action Plans used timid language in drafting measures for Roma women and girls. For instance, the Decade Plan in Serbia only incorporated gender measures briefly and in very general terms. The plan aimed to support Roma girls to go to school, or to help make Roma women become more employable, along with unemployed Roma, Roma with disabilities, and Roma youth.¹⁴² In contrast, the mainstream National

¹³⁷ Savitri Goonesekere, *A Rights Based Approach to Realizing Gender Equality*, available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/savitri.htm>.

¹³⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Azbija Memedova, March 2015.

¹³⁹ Open Society Institute Network Women’s Program, *A Place at the Policy Table: Report on the Roma Women’s Forum*, 2003, available at: http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/roma_womens_finalreport.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ International Steering Committee, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015: Terms of Reference*, (Bucharest: International Steering Committee, 2005), p. 6, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9292_file1_terms-of-reference.pdf.

¹⁴¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Fabian Sanchez, March 2015.

¹⁴² *Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/article/decade-action-plans/9296>.

Action Plan on the Specific Position of Women in Serbia placed the issues of Roma women at the core of the action proposed, and it also specified the right of a Roma women's organization to monitor and implement activities.¹⁴³ The Slovak National Action Plan had even more limited gender measures. It only referred specifically to women and girls in the education section, where it stated that "all Roma boys and girls" should be involved in educational processes.¹⁴⁴ It did set objectives related generally to Roma enrolment to a certain level of education, but it made no mention of specific measures for girls, or of specific measures addressing gender inequality. The Decade Action plan in the Czech Republic did not include any gender related measures.¹⁴⁵

Nor did civil society monitoring processes place a priority on analyzing gender-related activities. Although the specific country reports of the 2005–2006 Decade Watch summarized the gender measures proposed by governments within the Decade Action Plans, the Decade Watch did not touch upon the measures that governments implemented to address gender issues: "For reasons of scope, this first volume of Decade Watch did not assess government activities on gender, as well as specific government activities on poverty reduction and the other cross-cutting agendas under the Decade, but there are plans to do so in the next round."¹⁴⁶ The next round of reporting, the 2007 Update, tackled gender aspects even more poorly. The 2012–2013 Civil Society Monitoring Reports did not include specific sections on progress on gender issues in Decade Action Plans, but it sporadically and briefly referred to it in other sections.¹⁴⁷ In 2014, the Decade Intelligence Report followed the same pattern.¹⁴⁸

There are some positive examples of women's participation. In Spain, the State Council of Roma People, a consultative body set up by the Spanish government (20 national and regional NGOs and 20 representatives of the ministries) stipulated in its rules of procedure that Roma Women's NGOs must be members of the Council.¹⁴⁹

There was an expectation that Roma women activists would be at the forefront of promoting gender discourse. Nevertheless, some of the young Roma leaders considered the participation of Roma women in the Decade as "accidental",¹⁵⁰ not adequate,¹⁵¹ or poor and underrepresented.¹⁵² For example, in Croatia, only two Roma women were involved in the National Roma Program Monitoring Commission.¹⁵³ In addition, the number of Roma women involved in the Decade processes should not necessarily lead people to conclude that the Decade was responsive to gender issues, as not all women had a feminist or gender-sensitive agenda.

Ágnes Oszolykan argued that gender equality was an important issue for OSI, UNDP and the World Bank, but less for governments and Roma organizations involved. Gender equality was perceived as a top-down proposal towards post-communist governments that have not been ready to take this issue on board seriously: "*Gender was important for non-Roma people from higher institutions. Gender was one of the last concerns of the Decade.*"¹⁵⁴ Some Roma activists feared that a dedicated gender discourse would be perceived as a competitor topic for Roma rights at best, and as a marginal topic at worst: "*Gender equality in 2005 was not on the public agenda. At that point in time some leaders would have said we have more important issues. Those were the times back then.*"

¹⁴³ Tatjana Peric, *Addressing Gender Inequality in the Decade of Roma Inclusion: the case of Serbia*, 2005, available at: http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/peric_2005_0.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ *Decade Action Plans*, available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/article/decade-action-plans/9296>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch: Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2006* (Budapest: Createch Ltd, 2007) http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9319_file11_decadewatch-complete-english.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, *Civil Society Monitoring Reports* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation 2013–2014), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9772_file1_civil-society-monitoring-summary-report-1.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, *Decade Intelligence Report* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2014), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9765_file1_decade-intelligence-report.pdf.

¹⁴⁹ Interview conducted by the authors with Fabian Sanchez, March 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Delia Grigore, March 2015.

¹⁵¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Sanela Bešić, April 2015.

¹⁵² Interviews conducted by the authors with Adriatik Hasantari, Nadica Balog, April 2015.

¹⁵³ Interview conducted by the authors with Nadica Balog, April 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Ágnes Oszolykan, March 2015.

*Now, gender equality needs to be enforced.*¹⁵⁵ Some advocates argued that general Roma policies had to be prioritized: “We need first to address the issues of the communities and then to focus on such aspects. Going into the Roma community and trying to change the patriarchal relationships needs to be addressed after other problems are solved.”¹⁵⁶ Sanela Bešić noted that: “We talk about Roma in general, we have so many problems, and gender is not a priority for many. We need equality with non-Roma, and then with us.”¹⁵⁷

Nonetheless, the specific inclusion of Roma women’s issues in the OSCE Action Plan in 2003, followed in 2005 by their inclusion in the Decade of Roma Inclusion regional framework and some of the governments’ National Action Plans was a double first.

3. Implementation of gender equality measures

Both state institutions and NGOs piloted some gender-focused projects in the Decade countries. Some of the initiatives exclusively targeted Roma women and girls, and others explicitly addressed the issues of women and girls within larger inclusion projects. For example, a project implemented by the Office for Roma inclusion of the Vojvodina in Serbia, offered employment to Roma women from Vojvodina. The project to improve the employment of Roma women in five municipalities in Vojvodina aimed to create new job opportunities for Roma women through mentorship and technical assistance. The project encouraged women from rural areas and from Roma settlements to participate. As a result, 50 Roma women successfully completed training in business and 10 new companies were founded by Roma women and supported (through mentoring, technical services and grants) through subsidies for self-employment.¹⁵⁸

In some countries, Roma women created National Roma Women Focal Points, which enable them to coordinate and promote gender issues. The *Manushe* group from the Czech Republic established a model in the Decade for ways to implement Roma women’s participation and empowerment. Women benefited from capacity strengthening activities, including ICT computer training. They also organized gender equality campaigns involving both men and women to draw attention to gender issues even in small cities. In this way the issue became a priority raised by activists at the government level. During the Decade, some Roma women succeeded in enrolling in university, others managed to join political parties, and still others became powerful negotiators in relations with municipality representatives.¹⁵⁹

Regional and national events aiming for Roma women empowerment were organized. In October 2015, a thematic workshop on Roma Women Health and Security was held in Sarajevo. In the workshop, participants from the Decade countries aimed to ensure that the Decade National Action Plans had adequate policies and training programs for Roma women and that they addressed concerns related to reproductive health and gender-based violence.¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, only a limited number of Roma women and Roma women’s organizations were empowered during the Decade. Bešić argues that a limited number of women were invested with strength and capacity.¹⁶¹ Memedova underlines that in Macedonia by the end of the Decade, not a single Roma women’s NGO remained active.¹⁶²

The 2009 Decade Survey found that gender equality measures were widely and clearly neglected across the Decade countries and across its initiatives¹⁶³. The participants at the 2010 regional conference held in Serbia to assess women’s participation in the Decade similarly concluded that an insignificant number of Roma women

¹⁵⁵ Interview conducted by the authors with Gelu Duminica, March 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Interview conducted by the authors with Lilia Makaveeva, March 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Interview conducted by the authors with Sanela Bešić, April 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Interview conducted by the authors with Gabriela Hrabanova, April 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Fabian Sanchez, March 2015.

¹⁶¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Sanela Bešić, April 2015.

¹⁶² Interview conducted by the authors with Azbija Memedova, March 2015.

¹⁶³ Open Society Institute and the World Bank, *Decade Watch, Results of the 2009 Survey*, (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9317_file1_decade-watch—results-of-the-2009-survey—revised.pdf.

were involved in the development and implementation of the Decade, and that Roma women experts were not fairly included in the gender equality mechanisms. Broadly “cross-cutters” were neglected during the Decade. As one interviewee stated: *“We did not do anything with all the cross-cutting issues. The cross-cutting issues were not important in the Decade”*¹⁶⁴ – and gender was no exception.

4. Conclusions

The Decade recognized the underprivileged situation of Roma women and girls in accessing public goods and their fundamental rights. This recognition provided an opportunity to advance the gender agenda, but still much needs to be done to complement the legal equality frameworks in place with positive measures to compensate for past and current disadvantages of Roma women and girls.

Governments and civil society often misunderstood or simply neglected gender equality in drafting and implementing the National Action Plans. Some leaders argue that defining gender as a crosscutting theme instead of a priority area suggested to all that it was less relevant than the four main priorities. Further, gender equality was proposed as a priority by international organizations to governments and civil society at a time when the Roma women’s movement was in its incipient phases; and many Roma women did not feel powerful enough to prevail against governments and male Roma leaders. As a consequence, gender equality received scant consideration: *“Gender was the last, last issue in the decade.”*¹⁶⁵

Overall, gender equality was the weakest point or the greatest failure in the Decade, in terms of ambitions, dialogue, and results. *“This area was simply not in focus, was rarely discussed, and on the few occasions that it came up, not very professionally. It was a lost opportunity.”*¹⁶⁶ Some of the Roma leaders we interviewed argued that to achieve better outcomes, a dedicated, targeted approach is also needed to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the Roma women and girls.

There were major gaps in benchmarks and monitoring gender equality in the Decade; also missing concrete targets, clearly defined actions, indicators, and allocated budgets to address gendered disadvantage and discrimination.

Although the Decade made a strong and visible contribution to putting gender equality on the Roma inclusion policy agenda, the declared commitment to strengthen the capacity of the Roma women’s organizations went unfulfilled. And although an increasing number of Roma women participated in policy work and in civil society work, some were not involved in promoting gender equality, while others lacked capacity and resources. Greater involvement and participation would have required financial resources to provide additional gender equality trainings and empowerment programs, and more effort to mainstream the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women and girls.

¹⁶⁴ Interview conducted by the authors with Shejla Fidani, April 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Interview conducted by the authors with Agnes Osztołykan, March 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Interview conducted by the authors with Tunde Buzetzy, March 2015.



SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HOPE AND DESPAIR: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ROMA INCLUSION BETWEEN 2005 AND 2015?

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Bernard Rorke

INTRODUCTION

Back in 2005, the World Bank President, James D. Wolfensohn, and George Soros, Chairman of the Open Society Institute, between them effectively launched the Decade of Roma Inclusion. They managed to corral Prime Ministers from eight central and eastern European countries in Sofia to sign up to a very public pledge to “*declare the years 2005–2015 to be the Decade of Roma Inclusion and commit to support the full participation and involvement of national Roma communities,*” and to work toward “*eliminating discrimination and closing the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society.*”

James Wolfensohn described the plight of the Roma as “one of the great moral issues facing Europe”, and warned that doing nothing will only bring more disaffection and suffering, but “*if we succeed, the Decade offers an opportunity to turn the tide of history and harness the political will to include the Roma as full citizens in European societies.*”

For George Soros, the Decade signaled “a sea change” in Roma policy, but was just a beginning and he warned “*we must be prepared to fight social exclusion and discrimination over the course of the Decade.*”¹⁶⁷

As the Decade draws to a close, it’s an obvious and opportune moment to reflect on what happened to all those hopes and the hyperbole, to take stock of the state of Roma inclusion in 2015, and reflect on what came of the opportunity presented by the Decade “to turn the tide of history.”

DECADE LESSONS AND LEGACIES

If the Decade is to be judged on its own terms – i.e. its pledge “to close the gap” between Roma and non-Roma within ten years – then clearly it has not been a success. But only the most naïve could have expected such a social transformation to be launched, packaged and completed within a decade. It was abundantly clear from the outset that undoing centuries of racism and exclusion would take far more than ten years. And there were no illusions concerning the practical challenge to sustain the political will needed to implement substantive social inclusion policies across such a motley crew of barely consolidated democracies.

At the best of times it is virtually impossible to sustain any kind of international political momentum over a protracted period, never mind such a loose, non-binding pledge by political leaders of parties whose track record and commitment to Roma inclusion was at best tepid, ambivalent and ambiguous, and at worst wholly insincere. Indeed, as one observer noted, the momentum had already stalled between the 2003 Budapest conference announcing the Decade¹⁶⁸ and the actual launch in Sofia in 2005.

In the intervening 18 months, elections in Croatia, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Romania meant that important politicians who had attended the Budapest conference were voted out of office. The prospect of imminent EU membership no doubt acted as an incentive for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to take part in the 2003 conference; by 2004 the three countries joined the EU and already interest had begun to wane.¹⁶⁹ The European Commission also changed in 2004, and the Decade lost its strongest supporter in Brussels when Anna Diamantopoulou left her post as European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs. By 2005 the European Commission had become a more diffident partner in the process, and this would hinder the impact of the Decade for some years.

¹⁶⁷ The World Bank, News & Broadcasts, *European Leaders in Unprecedented Initiative to Fight Discrimination against Roma*, 31 January 2005, available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20333779~menuPK:34463~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Open Society Foundations, Press release, *Roma in an expanding Europe: Challenges for the future*, 8 July 2003, available at: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/governments-endorse-decade-roma-inclusion>.

¹⁶⁹ Valeriu Nicolae, *The Decade of Roma Inclusion: Between hopes, glitches and failure*, 2005, available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9696_file1_between-hopes-glitches-and-failures.pdf.

Notwithstanding all these hiccups, shifts and changes, by the time the Decade was launched in 2005, there was still a widely shared optimism that the Decade would make a difference. The significance of the event is clear from the recollections of many of those present on the day. From Bulgaria, one of the young Roma activists interviewed described his high hopes and ambitions for change:

*“We thought that we as Roma were beginning to matter to other people ... that we were part of something that would ensure our political participation...”*¹⁷⁰

Another activist from the Czech Republic described how she hoped that the Decade would make a difference to Roma-related policies so that, by the end of the Decade, she would see *“Roma as a natural integral everyday part of the society, visible as bus drivers, shopkeepers, visible in public institutions, that it would become unremarkable that Roma will be visible in ordinary aspects of daily life. I was quite optimistic and hoped for a bright future where our voices would be heard.”*¹⁷¹

The disenchantment and disappointment factor was built in to the DNA of the Decade, for intergovernmental and international processes are at the best of times cumbersome and unwieldy. As the number of meetings and conferences soared, activists working in situations of acute deprivation soon became vexed with the “blah blah” and balderdash they had to sit through; and even more vexed at the lack of tangible outcomes or even coherent conclusions at the end of what many declaimed as yet “another talkfest.” The entirely reasonable activist mindset is that talking is fine as long as it is a prelude to action, and not a cover for inaction. The problem is that these international processes seem to operate at a sluggish pace completely at odds with the urgency and gravity of the situation. This too became the fate of the Decade, despite all the efforts from civil society, the Decade Secretariat, and many partner organizations to inject a sense of urgency and quicken the pace of governmental action in a desire to see some tangible change “on the ground.” However I would argue that when it comes to Roma inclusion, the Decade with all its deficits and by virtue of its successes and failures alike, has left some indelible

marks and legacies on policy processes in Europe that will remain worthy of recognition.

Legacy 1: The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020

It is reasonable to suggest that one profound and durable legacy of the Decade is the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. The European Commission is quite forthright in acknowledging its debt to the Decade, and describes it as being “a strong inspiration” for the EU Framework:

*“... playing a very positive role in mobilizing civil society and ensuring the smooth transition of enlargement countries into the EU Framework. The work of civil coalitions coordinated and supported by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat has also showed a strong added value.”*¹⁷²

Indeed the EU Framework is so closely modeled on the Decade that it effectively rendered the Decade redundant. EU Member States’ interest radically waned as the Framework eclipsed the Decade: they found it hard to see what added value remained, and soon came to resent the burden of double reporting (and the two consequent rounds of criticism for their lack of progress on implementation, vague national strategies, and weak monitoring).

The similarities between the Framework and the Decade are so striking as to be worthy of mention: the Commission requested in its communication that member states deliver national Roma integration strategies focusing on four key areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing. Priorities identified in the subsequent EBSCO Council Conclusions included the urgent need to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion; and a reminder to member states to pay special attention in their strategies “to the interests and difficulties of Roma women and girls, who face the risk of multiple discrimination.”¹⁷³

States were requested to “put in place a robust monitoring mechanism with clear benchmarks which will ensure

¹⁷⁰ Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, March 2015.

¹⁷¹ Interview conducted by the authors with Gabriela Hrabanova, April 2015.

¹⁷² European Commission DG Justice, *EU and Roma, 2014 report*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm

that tangible results are measured, that money directed to Roma integration has reached its final beneficiaries, that there is progress towards the achievement of the EU Roma integration goals and that national Roma integration strategies have been implemented.”¹⁷⁴ So all the key components of the Decade, conceived between 2003 and 2005, were repackaged in the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.

The EU was a reluctant Decade partner back in 2005. But by 2007, two waves of EU enlargement meant that approximately 4.5 million more Roma became EU citizens. Greater freedom of movement soon meant that the so-called “Roma issue” could no longer be confined to the post-communist polities of Central and Eastern Europe. The Commission soon began to slowly shift from a hands-off “color-blind” approach to social inclusion, towards an unprecedented commitment to a comprehensive and coordinated Europe-wide framework for Roma integration.

It is clear that some key lessons of the Decade were not lost on the Commission:

- The fact that 12 governments were willing to sign a pledge to close the gap between Roma and the rest of their citizenry, effectively affirming the primacy of their national responsibilities in a pan-European endeavor sent a clear signal that forging political consensus for an EU-wide framework was not beyond the bounds of possibility.
- The fact that National Action Plans were so central to the Decade also provided a working template of how to surmount the “Europeanization” pitfall – how the European Commission could avoid a “symbolic transfer of responsibilities” by Member States to European institutions on Roma integration.
- The shortcomings of the Decade also proved to be instructive. Critics pointed to the lack of tangible progress since 2005, in that living conditions were actually worsening for marginalized Roma communities and that this was coupled with a rise in anti-Gypsyism;
- The failure by governments to set quantifiable targets, and the lack of disaggregated data against which to

measure progress made for weak reporting and monitoring; and the absence of coordination across line ministries and regional and local authorities;

- The failure to make smart use of EU funding instruments for Roma inclusion; and the missing ingredient of substantive and structured Roma participation.

One lesson for the Commission was that something more binding than an expression of intent was needed from Member States; that it would no longer suffice for the Commission to pose as an “honest broker” between states if any progress on Roma inclusion was to be made on the ground. The Framework called for “robust monitoring mechanisms”; smart use of EU funds for inclusion; Roma participation; effective measures to combat discrimination; coordination with line ministries and local authorities. All well and good, but from the evidence of the Decade, it was clear that left to their own democratic devices, many Member States would simply lapse back into their old illiberal habits when it came to Roma inclusion.

In terms of what could define success, and what would be needed to move beyond the realm of aspirations, the lessons of the Decade provided a sobering and salutary litany of “pitfalls to be avoided” by the European Commission. One thing became abundantly clear: the Commission would have to become far more interventionist to keep this Framework on track. The weak strategies submitted by governments, the huge data gaps, and lack of progress in the first couple of years, held forth the prospect that the Framework might go the way of the Decade, or worse. A clear lesson from the Decade was that enforcement mechanisms and clear structures were needed to sustain the momentum and bind the states as tightly as possible to this Framework.

One ambition of the Decade was to invite more governments to join up. The original eight were joined by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain. So it was beyond all expectations that by 2013, all 28 EU Member States¹⁷⁵ would have submitted National Roma Integration

¹⁷³ Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, *Council Conclusions on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2011), available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122100.pdf.

¹⁷⁴ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* Brussels COM(2011) 173 Final, (Brussels: European Commission, 2011), available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173&from=en>

¹⁷⁵ Malta did not adopt a National Roma Integration Strategy as it declared there is no significant Roma population on its territory, though will address Roma integration should this case arise.

Strategies under the remit of an EU Framework and appointed National Roma Contact Points; that the

Commission would link Roma integration to its wider Europe 2020 strategy for growth; that the European Council would issue country-specific recommendations on Roma integration to member states; and that the first ever legal instrument on Roma, a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States would be adopted. Neither could many have foreseen back in 2005, that an EU Roma Task Force would oversee the use of EU Funds to promote Roma inclusion, and that a minimum 23.1% of the Cohesion policy budget would be earmarked for investment in people – through the European Social Fund, allocating at least 20% of this amount in each Member State to combat poverty and social exclusion with an “explicit but not exclusive” focus on Roma communities.

Legacy 2: Inclusive education

As to change for the better, it is in the sphere of education that some progress is visible after ten years. As Friedman says, Decade Watch reports and UNDP surveys suggest that things did improve in early childhood and preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary education across participating countries. Throughout the Decade, the European Commission’s Progress Reports on countries in the Western Balkans noted progress in education more frequently than in other policy areas. The Commission’s recent assessment on progress with the EU Framework revealed that Member States have taken a series of specific measures on inclusive education which delivered results on the ground. For instance, the reports reveal a clear positive general trend with regard to access to early childhood education and care. Two-year obligatory pre-school has been introduced in Bulgaria; obligatory pre-school from the age of three was introduced in Hungary from the 2014–2015 school year. Such mainstream measures are promising as regards education of Roma children for primary education, but as the Commission notes, sufficient capacities and quality staff are crucial for long-term results. Overall, while there are some positive

signs, the Commission is clear that “much more needs to be done to bring about change on a larger scale.”¹⁷⁶

It is safe to say that while some governments deserve praise for their efforts, much of the progress on inclusive education is attributable to the work of the Roma Education Fund (REF), which was founded at the launch of the Decade in 2005. For ten years, REF has provided support to thousands of children and young people in education from pre-school to post-graduate studies; built sustainable partnerships with school authorities, civil society, and parents; and produced a significant volume of evidence-based policy research about what it takes to do the right thing. For ten years REF has remained steadfastly committed to desegregation and ensuring that Roma children have equal access to quality, integrated education. The 2014 REF annual report provides a clear idea of the scale of the organization’s activities:

- REF grants supported a grand total of **95,000** direct beneficiaries across 13 countries in 2014.
- From that total, 8,093 beneficiaries attended **early childhood development (ECD)** projects.
- The **primary education** projects primarily targeted those children at most risk of early leaving and supported 19,001 pupils.
- A total of 5,432 **secondary school** students from eight countries received scholarships and school-based mentoring in 2014.
- In **tertiary education**, REF provided scholarships for 1,441 students in 2014.

In the course of the decade REF has shown that school desegregation is possible, feasible and better for all; that substantive Roma participation is crucial for success; and that effective cooperation on the ground delivers the kind of change that can transform the lives of tens of thousands of Roma pupils.

The cumulative effect of years of work by REF and its partners has resulted in ever larger cohorts of Roma children enrolling in pre-school, and students successfully graduating from secondary and tertiary education. But the challenges remain formidable, as the REF Director noted in her introduction to the annual report:

¹⁷⁶ European Commission, *Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* (Brussels: European Commission, 2014), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_implementation_strategies2014_en.pdf.

*“Access to quality education transforms lives, and REF made that a reality for tens of thousands of Roma families in 2014. But beyond the scope of REF projects, the painful reality is that too many families remain trapped in poverty compounded by discrimination.”*¹⁷⁷

REF’s mission to promote equity, improve quality, broaden access and increase completion rates throughout the entire education cycle, with carefully targeted and closely monitored interventions, provides a proven template for what needs to be done across Europe. The evidence from ever-increasing number of high quality projects across 15 countries shows that it is possible to narrow the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma.

These targeted interventions show that partnerships for equity bring benefits to the entire society. Yet despite all this, some Decade countries remain wedded to systems and habits that perpetuate inequality and segregation. And the news on **29 April 2015**, that the European Commission would launch infringement proceedings against Slovakia served as a reminder that ten years after Slovakia signed up to the Decade, systemic segregation of Roma children in education remains stubbornly pervasive.

The Commission initiated similar proceedings against the Czech Republic in September 2014 over its failure to end school segregation. The decision came six years after the judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*. In November 2014, the Czech Government rejected the Commission’s charges out of hand and objected to its interference, stating that education does not fall within the European Union’s purview.¹⁷⁸ The tenor of recent prejudicial remarks in **May 2015**, made on Czech Television by the Education Minister Marceel Chládek in response to a critical report by Amnesty International gives little cause for optimism: *“We are doing our best today just to get children from excluded localities into the schools. Many representatives of the schools go to their*

*homes to drag them out of bed. They are doing their best to teach them the basics of hygiene, to speak Czech correctly and also to teach them that it’s just not normal for someone to stay in bed until noon and then smoke a pack of cigarettes – in other words, that people also go to work.”*¹⁷⁹

Although the steps taken by the Commission were widely welcomed by human rights groups, far from being a cause for celebration the initiation of infringement proceedings is a sign of failure. At the end of the Decade, the necessity to resort to such action is testament to successive governments’ brazen recalcitrance in the face of international legal judgments, and complete indifference to EU “urgings”, recommendations and conclusions. It stands as a damning indictment of both democracies for the failure to tackle segregation and promote inclusion of their Roma fellow-citizens. The Czech Republic and Slovakia stand accused of deliberately and systematically ruining the life chances of thousands of Roma children and young people by depriving them of the right to a decent education.

In 2001, the Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov fully endorsed “the idea of desegregation of Roma schools in Bulgaria” and described Vidin as a first step “in a process to which the Bulgarian government is committed.” The president’s wish that the example of Vidin would become the norm all over Bulgaria seems even more remote a possibility today. For instead, at the end of the Decade, the Vidin authorities have used public money to build a wall to turn a Roma neighborhood into a ghetto. And the situation across Bulgaria in 2015, according to the Roma Education Fund country assessment published on **6 May 2015** is one where *“unchallenged ethnic segregation of Roma in the education system is exacerbated by an increasingly socially stratified education system that confines students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds to lower quality education compared to peers from better-off families.”*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Roma Education Fund, *Annual Report 2014* (Budapest: Roma Education Fund, 2014), available at:

http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/ref_annual_2014_web_singlepages-mod.pdf.

¹⁷⁸ Romea.cz, *Czech Govt approves response to Brussels denying Roma discrimination in schools*, 24 November 2014, available at:

<http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-govt-approves-response-to-brussels-denying-roma-discrimination-in-schools>.

¹⁷⁹ Romea.cz, *Roma demand apology from Czech Education Minister on Facebook for his insulting remarks on television*, 7 May 2015, available at:

<http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/roma-demand-apology-from-czech-education-minister-on-facebook-for-his-insulting-remarks-on-television>.

In Budapest, on **24 April 2015**, the Hungarian Supreme Court (Kúria) gave its blessing for school segregation and effectively exempted religious-run schools from anti-discrimination provisions in the law.

The Kúria dismissed claims made by the Chance for Children Foundation and overruled two previous court decisions that ruled that a school in Nyíregyháza was unlawfully segregating Roma children. The school, which had been closed down in 2007 following court action, was reopened as a church school by the Greek Catholic Church, and can now lawfully operate as a segregated Roma-only school.¹⁸¹

These recent developments are a cause for real concern and stand as a corrective to any overly optimistic prescriptions. However, the difference at the end of the Decade is that segregation of Roma pupils no longer goes unquestioned, unchallenged and accepted as routine. Relentless campaigning by civil society organizations, years of strategic litigation, international court judgments, EU resolutions and communications condemning such practices as illegal, have led to a broad and basic understanding in the wider society that segregation of Roma pupils is a pernicious practice. At the end of the Decade, even the segregators know that what they do is fundamentally wrong and runs contrary to any shared notion of “European values.”

There is a widening consensus and commitment across Europe to try to close the gap in opportunities and outcomes between Roma and non-Roma pupils. Undeniably much progress has been made in education since 2005 but it's clear that much more needs to be done for this commitment to translate into effective implementation on the ground on the scale needed to deliver equity in education to millions of Europe's youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

Legacy 3: Housing

Despite the fact that international instruments have long established the right to adequate housing, and the growing recognition of the need for action to improve housing conditions for Roma, there has been no discernible progress in this area in the course of the Decade. On the contrary, the last ten years has yielded a litany of forced evictions, demolitions and increased tension.

In Bulgaria on **21 July 2015** the BBC reported that nationalist parties were calling for the demolition of two Roma settlements to continue in defiance of an interim ruling by the European Court of Human Rights halting the planned demolition.¹⁸² The two Roma neighborhoods, one in the town of Garmen and another in the Orlandovei suburb of Sofia, were targeted for leveling following three nights of orchestrated violent disturbances in June, where attempts by far-right mobs to storm the Roma neighborhoods and attack residents led to injuries and arrests. Human rights groups accused the government of backing down to pressure from nationalist parties in the run-up to local elections.

Exactly one year earlier, on the **21 July 2014**, clashes broke out between police officers and Roma people who formed human chains to try to prevent authorities from demolishing their homes in the Bulgarian town of Stara Zagora. The demolition of a total of 55 illegally built homes in the Lozenec quarter began on 7:30 AM that Monday morning. The Helsinki Committee condemned the action taken by the town hall and accused the Bulgarian state of “practicing institutional racist violence.”¹⁸³

On **1 July 2015**, on a visit to Budapest, Michael Georg Link, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), expressed his concern that “discriminatory measures being introduced by local

¹⁸⁰ Roma Education Fund, *Advancing the Education of Roma in Bulgaria REF Country Assessment – 2015* (Budapest: Roma Education Fund, 2015), available at: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/bg_country_assessment_2015_web.pdf.

¹⁸¹ Politics.hu, *Nyíregyháza school did not segregate according to supreme court*, 23 April 2015, available at: <http://www.politics.hu/20150423/nyiregyhaza-school-did-not-segregate-according-to-supreme-court/>

¹⁸² Nick Thorpe, *Bulgaria tensions lead to Roma home demolitions*, BBC News Europe, 21 July 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33597660>

¹⁸³ Romea.cz, *Bulgaria: Roma blockade demolition of their homes, riot police intervene Stara Zagora*, 22 July 2014, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/bulgaria-roma-blockade-demolition-of-their-homes-riot-police-intervene>,

authorities in some parts of the country could set a dangerous precedent and provide a negative example for others.”¹⁸⁴

Link was referring to Miskolc. The fate of those living in the ghetto on the edge of the town is emblematic of how Roma are faring in Hungary at the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. This is the setting for a Fidesz plan to ethnically cleanse the city, to dismantle the ghettos and slums to make way for a parking lot for a soccer stadium. Tenants were offered up to 2 million forints (EUR 6,500) to buy homes *outside the city limits*. Both Fidesz and the neo-Nazi Jobbik party launched signature drives and claimed that several thousand locals support the plan.

Where exactly the Roma displaced from Miskolc were supposed to move was unclear. Several nearby villages declared they have no money to provide work or benefits to any newcomers, and signed petitions saying that there will be no welcome for Miskolc’s impoverished Roma.¹⁸⁵ The attempt to banish those compensated beyond the city limits was subsequently struck down by the Supreme Court. However based on the track record of the local authorities to date, and the responses of the ruling party to international criticism, there is little cause for optimism that authorities will heed the ODIHR Director’s call to “adhere to OSCE commitments prohibiting discrimination, and to international human rights standards on the right to adequate housing,” in working towards a just solution in cooperation with civil society.

From Serbia, Amnesty International reported on International Roma Day, **8 April 2015**, that three years after the forced eviction of more than one hundred Roma families from the Belvil settlement in Belgrade, “a toxic combination of bureaucratic incompetence, inertia and discrimination has resulted in the failure of a multi-million euro European Commission funded project to resettle them.” Amnesty reported that the

majority of these families are still living in squalid racially segregated metal containers.¹⁸⁶

One might reasonably wonder whether or not these few recent news items are indicative of how housing has fared as a Decade priority since 2005. UNDP finds it difficult in general to draw anything like definitive conclusions on Roma inclusion from the available data. But housing is the one Decade priority area for which the largest body of comparable data from the 2004 UNDP Vulnerable Groups Survey and the 2011 Regional Roma Survey is available: “Overall, these data suggest that progress in housing under the Decade has been unimpressive.” In light of “the deepening of housing gaps between Roma and non-Roma in some Decade countries,” the latest UNDP report on the Decade has called for a complete rethink by local and central authorities that pays attention to forced evictions and residential segregation as forms of discrimination.¹⁸⁷

The civil society monitoring reports provide a more vivid picture of what that means on the ground in settlements, improvised dwellings, hostels and containers for thousands of Roma, especially Roma children across Europe today.¹⁸⁸ And the fate of Roma children should be a priority for these states, for all the Decade countries have ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which proclaims “the child shall enjoy special protection ... to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.”

The Bulgarian report provided a vivid description of the environment for thousands of children in segregated Roma neighborhoods, which lack basic infrastructure and services, schools and kindergartens, playgrounds and recreation areas, and access to public transport. In the largest and poorest Roma *mahala* in the western Bulgarian town of Dupnitsa, around 90 percent of the dwellings

¹⁸⁴ OSCE Newsroom, *Authorities need to promote sustainable, non-discriminatory housing solutions for Roma*, ODIHR Director Link says during visit to Hungary, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/167966>.

¹⁸⁵ Bernard Rorke, *Anti-Gypsyism 25 years on: Europe fails Havel’s litmus test*, Open Democracy, 16 January 2015, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/bernard-rorke/antigypsyism-25-years-on-europe-fails-havel%E2%80%99s-litmus-test>.

¹⁸⁶ Amnesty International, *Serbia: Forcibly evicted Roma still awaiting resettlement despite EU millions*, 8 April 2015, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/serbia-forcibly-evicted-roma-still-awaiting-resettlement-despite-eu-millions/>

¹⁸⁷ Eben Friedman, *Decade of Roma Inclusion progress report* (Istanbul: United Nations Development Programme, 2015), p.9.

¹⁸⁸ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, *Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and Decade Action Plans in 2012, Summary Report* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file26_civil-society-monitoring_summary-report.pdf

have neither a bath nor an inside toilet. Around 40 percent of the people do not have their own bed, households are crowded, and a fifth of dwellings do not have legal access to water and electricity. Across Bulgaria, in terms of extending basic services to Roma neighborhoods progress was described by survey respondents as “negligible.”

In the Czech Republic a combination of massive sell-offs of municipal housing stock, rent deregulation, and rising indebtedness has forced many families from regular housing into hostel-type accommodation. This has become a lucrative business, sustained by the payment of housing subsidies.

The report stated that, “overcrowded and neglected, with shared sanitary facilities, hostels are thoroughly unsuitable as a way of providing stable homes for families with children.” While some municipalities try to assist emergency cases, others have openly declared their intention to “export their local integration problem to other municipalities,” and block any development that might benefit local Roma.

The written comments submitted by the ERRRC and others to the UN on **22 July 2015** concerning the Czech Republic confirm only that things have worsened since the Decade Monitoring Reports were published.¹⁸⁹ Some key points were:

1. Research commissioned by the government revealed that the number of socially excluded areas doubled to 600 since 2005.
2. Among the hidden homeless (those not showing up in official figures), there is an increasing number of young people, the most vulnerable being those leaving institutional care, and a disproportionate number of these young people are of Roma origin.
3. New owners of private property have evicted Roma from city centers to peripheries, from developed areas to structurally disadvantaged regions and socially excluded localities.
4. According to the Regional Roma Housing survey, almost half of Roma in the Czech Republic feel under the threat of being evicted. The Czech Republic has the largest share of Roma that perceive themselves as threatened by evictions.

5. Roma with disabilities who live in socially excluded areas face multiple disadvantages as they are also deprived of the support they need, of reasonable accommodation, accessible transport, and access to medical, psychological, vocational or educational services.
6. The housing situation was further worsened by the introduction of a new Civil Code which came into force on 1 January 2014, limiting the rights of tenants. With this new authority, some municipalities have refused to approve housing subsidies collectively to all inhabitants of residential hostels, the majority of which are Roma. Consequently, as the media reported, 17,000 to 25,000 people, including families with children, are at an imminent risk of homelessness. In May 2015, an amendment to the Act on Material Needs made the conditions for paying subsidies stricter and subject to approval by the municipality under whose territory a residential hostel belongs.

In neighboring Slovakia, a number of municipalities classified settlements as waste dumps and carried out forced evictions and demolitions on “environmental grounds”, often without providing alternative accommodation to families with small children. Over the last 10 years there is a clear trend of Roma “migrating” from integrated urban residential areas to segregated urban ghettos and rural settlements. UNDP surveys in 2005 and 2010 confirm a deepening of spatial segregation and a deterioration of living conditions among Roma. Up to 54.3% of the Roma respondents who had moved to a segregated area reported their previous residence to be within town or village boundaries.

The Civil Society Monitoring Report notes “illegally built, poor Roma settlements are increasingly becoming sites of political contest. Without providing any alternative housing opportunities, municipalities have been shamelessly demolishing these areas pushing Roma families even further to the margins. In the period from August 2011 to February 2013 alone, we recorded 21 cases of forced evictions or settlement liquidation. In some cases, the municipality failed to provide alternative housing even to families with small children.”¹⁹⁰ Amnesty International reported that on the 21 October 2013, the inhabitants

¹⁸⁹ European Roma Rights Center et al., *Written comments of the European Roma Rights Centre, Mental Disability Advocacy Center and Platform for Social Housing, concerning the Czech Republic. For consideration by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, at its 87th session (3-28 August 2015)*, available at: <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/un%20cerd%20czech%20rep%20written%20comments%20errc,%20mdac,%20pfsh.pdf>.

of an informal settlement near Prešov were forcibly evicted and made to demolish their own homes: “Beforehand, the mayor had announced the eviction on his Facebook page, and left a message for the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, asking him to look after ‘his flock’.”¹⁹¹

The Romanian authorities stand accused of “the deliberate expulsion from the society of vulnerable people who live below or on the poverty line and suffer from inadequate housing conditions.” According to Amnesty, “legislative flaws allow local authorities to sweep away long-established Roma communities entirely and – when not rendering people homeless – relocating them to inadequate housing, out of sight of the rest of the population, under the pretext of ‘inner-city regeneration’ and ‘development’.”¹⁹²

At the end of the Decade, there is precious little by way of a legacy when it comes to housing. Any innovative approaches and patches of progress over the last ten years have been eclipsed by the actions of local authorities in most of the Decade countries busily and shamelessly building up walls around settlements, or in other cases simply tearing them down; relocating those that have been forcibly evicted on unsuitable and sometimes toxic sites devoid of basic amenities. Routine institutional discrimination by housing authorities goes largely unchallenged, segregation continues to grow, and the gap between Roma and non-Roma in terms of housing and living conditions is actually widening. One of the most worrying signs at the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion is that forced evictions and relocation – effectively banishing Roma communities out of sight and beyond the city limits – has become an increasingly popular policy option, and a sure way for populist mayors and politicians to strengthen their standing in their local constituencies.

Legacy 4: Health

When it comes to health it seems there’s been little progress in closing the gap between Roma and non-Roma in the ways we live and die and the quality of our lives in between. Ten years on there remain persistent and profound gaps in data, information and knowledge needed to remedy this state of affairs. At the end of the Decade, according to the most recent EU report on the health status of Roma, “there is still a lack of understanding as to the specific causes of health gaps between Roma and non-Roma.”¹⁹³

The report bemoans the lack of ethnically disaggregated data and the fact that the heterogeneity of the Roma populations within and between countries makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions from small sample surveys. Ten years on, it seems that we still don’t have the kind of information that would allow for “robust evaluation” of the impact of existing policies. The report is critical of existing research, which too often “relies on old data, proxy indicators (if more relevant ones are unavailable), anecdotal evidence and small-scale studies which cannot be extrapolated to larger populations.”¹⁹⁴

On the key indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy international studies confirm previous assessments that infant mortality rates are higher among Roma populations, and that Roma die earlier than non-Roma. But beyond this data, information on mortality remains disjointed and ad-hoc. Data does exist in several countries on infant mortality but these rates are often not comparable over time or with other data, as they tend to come from smaller-scale studies.

Where data is available there is sufficient evidence that the barriers to health care in the majority of countries are linked to social exclusion factors and include the following:

¹⁹⁰ Roma Institute, n.o. et al. *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Slovakia* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file14_sk_civil-society-monitoring-report_en.pdf.

¹⁹¹ Amnesty International, *Annual Report: Slovakia 2013*, available at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/annual-report-slovakia-2013>.

¹⁹² Amnesty International, *Statement for Working Session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination II*, Human Dimension Implementation Meeting OSCE/ODIHR, 2013, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/106724?download=true>.

¹⁹³ European Commission/ Matrix Knowledge, *Roma Health Report: Health status of the Roma population* (Brussels: European Union, 2014), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/docs/2014_roma_health_report_es_en.pdf.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.20.

- language and literacy barriers;
- a lack of knowledge of available health care systems;
- discrimination by health care professionals;
- a lack of trust in health professionals;
- physical barriers – mobility and distance;
- a lack of identification and/or insurance.¹⁹⁵

The European Commission in its 2014 report on the implementation of the EU Framework echoed these findings, noted that few Member States provided information that would allow for comparison of the health of Roma with the general population; and that ensuring basic health coverage still remains a challenge, particularly in Bulgaria and Romania. The rise of unemployment in these countries, has led to an increased number of families lacking health coverage. The impact of budgetary cuts, restructuring or cancellation of services in general health policies in some Member States had further deleterious consequences on vulnerable groups, and there is evidence that economic crisis is disproportionately impacting Roma populations' access to health care.¹⁹⁶ Even in Spain, where the health status of the Roma community greatly improved over decades largely due to universal health care coverage, there are deep concerns about the impact of the 2009 crisis and subsequent austerity cutbacks. The Decade civil society monitoring report warned that “there is an acute risk that progress made to date will unravel as a consequence of recent socio-economic and policy developments.”¹⁹⁷

Problems were highlighted with regard to certain reductions in health spending, increasing bureaucracy in accessing health cards and pharmaceutical co-payment. Of greatest concern are the reported direct effects on health within the most vulnerable families, especially for children's diet and chronic disease monitoring and management within elderly disabled groups. Stakeholders also reported cases of worsening mental health of Roma, especially women with depression and rising levels of anxiety.

On the positive side, the Roma health report does note that over the last decade, the health needs of the Roma population has increasingly become a priority for a range of European and international institutions, both as a consequence of targeted Roma inclusion measures and mainstream health development strategies; and that there is “increasing evidence of partnerships” on the issue of health data.

Undoubtedly this has led to some positive interventions, the most-mentioned being mediator programs. Actually, the Health Mediator Program long preceded the Decade; it was piloted in Romania by Romani CRISS in the 1990s and adopted by the Romanian Ministry of Health in 2002 as an official policy. However it can be said that the Decade allowed for peer learning, exchanges of good practice, and the kind of publicity that stoked a much wider interest in health mediators and mediation programs in general.

Designed to facilitate access to health care in many countries, health mediator programs have been credited with increasing vaccination rates, supporting Roma to obtain identification and insurance documents to gain access to health care, raising health awareness and promoting preventative health care.

A 2013 World Health Organization study report highlighted these successes and also the challenges encountered over 10 years of health mediation in Romania. These have included insufficient initial training, modest remuneration

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁹⁶ European Commission, *Report on the implementation of the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* (Brussels: European Commission, 2014), p.6, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_implementation_strategies2014_en.pdf.

¹⁹⁷ Miguel Laparra et al., *Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Spain* (Budapest: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2013), available at: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file16_sp_civil-society-monitoring-report_en.pdf.

of mediators, difficult working conditions, inadequate supervision, limited opportunities for professional development, and changes brought about by the decentralization of health care. In addition to low wages and difficult conditions, the study found that following decentralization over 70% of mediators' contract status had been changed from undetermined to determined period; many faced discrimination in their new workplaces and some local authorities simply refused to hire mediators.

The mediator programs have been widely praised for reaching a high number of beneficiaries, focusing on preventative health care, and assisting some of the most vulnerable populations. In addition, WHO noted some "unintended consequences" that can also be considered program successes: "challenging patriarchal ideologies of gender power relationships; providing employment and opportunities for personal and professional development to Roma women; and addressing issues that are not related to the responsibilities of health mediators, such as school mediation and lobbying for the improvement of living conditions in the Roma communities."¹⁹⁸

This is all very good but clearly not good enough, as mediation needs to be seen as a partial and temporary fix. The role of mediators is to "act as liaisons between doctors and Roma patients, trying to reach common ground for the effective delivery of health care." With the best will in the world, poorly paid, insecure, low status mediators cannot liaise on an equal footing with medical professionals. In this subordinate role they are ill equipped to challenge institutional discrimination head-on. Mediation programs are mere sticking plasters; repairing the damage done by deep discrimination needs something more by way of sutures and stitches. Training more and more people to mediate should not distract attention from the primary objective that governments and health care professionals fulfill their respective obligations to provide unhindered, non-discriminatory access to quality health care for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity.

If at the end of the Decade there is still "a lack of understanding" about what causes the health gaps between Roma and non-Roma, it's hard to make a convincing case for any health legacy worth talking about. Even in the best-case scenario of Spain, the Decade monitoring report warned that "despite the advances achieved by national and regional health programs involving the development of comparative surveys, targeted awareness-raising campaigns for the promotion of preventive healthcare among Roma and inter-cultural training sessions and materials for health professionals, there is an acute risk that progress made to date will unravel as a consequence of recent socio-economic and policy developments."

Across the rest of the Decade countries, the available evidence demonstrates that Roma populations in general suffer greater exposure to wider determinants of ill health; live less healthy lifestyles; have poorer access to and lower uptake of primary care and preventive health services; suffer poorer health outcomes, in terms of morbidity from both infectious and chronic diseases, and shorter life expectancy. Furthermore as a result of the economic crisis and subsequent recessions, Roma health status and health access is deteriorating further in a number of places as a result of cutbacks.¹⁹⁹ And when it comes down to everyday experience, all too often interactions between Roma and health professionals remain unpleasant. The complaints of Roma patients in Romania about their treatment resonate across the continent when they describe doctors' lack of interest, reflected in "avoidance of physical contact, lack of involvement of patients in the selection of the treatment, inadequate informing of the patient with respect to side-effects and risks of the treatment and the use of aggressive procedures."²⁰⁰

Ten years on, in the absence of any substantive progress, or coordinated, comprehensive government-led drives to eliminate the barriers in access to health care, the most that can be said at the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion is that while health data remains inadequate,

¹⁹⁸ World Health Organization, *Roma health mediation in Romania: case study* (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, Roma Health Case Study Series, No. 1, 2013), pp 15–17, available at: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/235141/e96931.pdf.

¹⁹⁹ European Commission/ Matrix Knowledge, *Roma Health Report: Health status of the Roma population* (Brussels: European Union, 2014), p.17.

²⁰⁰ World Health Organization, *Roma health mediation in Romania: case study* (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, Roma Health Case Study Series, No. 1, 2013), p.14.

more and better data is now being gathered under the aegis of the EU Framework; a smattering of good practice is emerging; and meeting the health needs of the Roma has “become a priority for international institutions.”

Legacy 5:

On development and discrimination

On 28 April 2015 came the frankly baffling news that Slovak police officers are training their Czech colleagues to work in Roma communities. It was baffling in light of the kind of massed and violent raids on Roma settlements favored by Slovak police – the latest, code-named “100” took place on 2 April 2015 in the municipality of Vrbnica and left 19 Roma people injured. The ERRC has documented at least five such police raids in Eastern Slovakia. They all shared the same pattern – raids on settlements authorized on vague pretexts, the deployment of extensive and excessive force followed by ineffective and cursory investigations.²⁰¹

That Slovak law enforcement officers seem to operate in a climate of impunity, was rendered clear by the recent decision on 28 February 2015 by the Košice District Court to acquit 10 current and former police officers who faced prosecution for abusing Roma children at a police station in 2009.²⁰²

The police filmed their humiliation and torture of the children using their mobile phones and shared the footage. The Slovak Spectator deemed the footage, which subsequently went viral on social networks, to be reminiscent of mistreatment at Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib jail.²⁰³

The court, however, refused to allow the recordings to be submitted, saying the footage had been illegally obtained. The presiding judge stated: “*The evidence is not sufficient to find the defendants guilty, nor to express a conclusion beyond the shadow of a doubt that the crime took place as the prosecutor alleges.*”²⁰⁴

It’s fairly clear that in Slovakia and many other participating countries, the Decade certainly didn’t deliver justice and scarcely made a dent in discrimination. As one interviewee put it: “*I really doubt that the Decade helped to bring more justice to Roma, and certainly not to the Roma in isolated communities. With or without the Decade or the EU Roma Framework, access to justice should be a priority, a fundamental right in every democratic society. Having access to justice within an acceptably prompt and timely framework where the victims can feel that something happened to remedy what is wrong and unjust, to make it right – this is the justice we need – but it’s the justice we don’t have.*”²⁰⁵

The pledge back in 2005 that governments will work toward eliminating discrimination rings rather hollow in 2015. Friedman reports a slight diminution in discrimination against Roma around the mid-point of the Decade. Regional FRA and UNDP surveys recorded drops in hiring and workplace discrimination Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, and “modest improvement” in discrimination by healthcare personnel.²⁰⁶

While bearing in mind that these purported “modest improvements” come from a truly dire starting point,²⁰⁷ they must nonetheless have come as a surprise to Roma in Baia Mare in Romania where in 2011, the mayor ordered

²⁰¹ Zdeněk Ryšavý, *Slovakia: 300 Roma protest police intervention in Vrbnica*, Romea.cz, 11 April 2015, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/slovakia-300-roma-protest-police-intervention-in-vrbnica>.

²⁰² As reported in the Slovak Spectator, according to the indictment, the police allegedly attempted to intimidate the boys – who could not be prosecuted due to their young age – with a police dog, which bit three of them. Subsequently, the minors were forced to slap and then kiss each other. The mistreatment continued in the building’s basement, where the suspects were ordered to strip naked within ten seconds, while police officers recorded a video. One of the boys was allegedly suspended over a handrail, beaten and forced to say the name of his mother. A police officer was accused of putting a pistol to the head of another boy and asking him whether he wanted to be shot. The same defendant was supposed to have ordered the Roma boy to lick his boots and hit another boy with a shovel.

Please see: <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20056357/ex-officers-suspected-of-bullying-roma-minors-acquitted-by-court.html>

²⁰³ Slovak Spectator, *Police filmed abusing Roma children*, 13 April 2009, available at: <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20032625/police-filmed-abusing-roma-children.html>.

²⁰⁴ Slovak Spectator, *Ex-officers suspected of bullying Roma minors acquitted by court*, 2 March 2015, available at: <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20056357/ex-officers-suspected-of-bullying-roma-minors-acquitted-by-court.html>.

²⁰⁵ Interview conducted by the authors with Beata Olahova, March 2015.

²⁰⁶ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *EU-MIDIS: European Union Minority and Discrimination Survey. Main Results Report* (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009); Data from the 2011 survey provided by UNDP.

²⁰⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *EU-MIDIS Data in Focus Report 1 – the Roma*, (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009), available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2009/eu-midis-data-focus-report-1-roma>.

the erection of a concrete wall around the Roma neighborhood,²⁰⁸ or indeed those Slovak Roma living on the wrong side of some 14 concrete walls built around the country since 2008 to segregate poorer Roma communities from their “white” neighbors. The building of a wall to separate a densely populated Roma housing complex from a nearby estate in Košice, Slovakia’s second largest city and a European Capital of Culture for 2013, attracted international media attention and EU condemnation.²⁰⁹ Such attention seems to have little effect, and many local authorities across the region continue to either opt for mass forced evictions of Roma families, or walling off entire communities to put a seal on segregation.

On **7 April 2015**, *Deutsche Welle* reported from Vidin in northwestern Bulgaria where the authorities have built a wall that separates the Nov Pat Roma settlement from the rest of the city.²¹⁰ This is especially disheartening, for back in 2000 it was in Vidin that NGO *Drom* launched the pilot school desegregation program that would become so internationally renowned.

Walls apart, this apparent diminution in anti-Roma discrimination proved to be a temporary blip rather than a trend, and in the second part of the Decade, Friedman reports *growing* discrimination in some EU Decade countries. Neither is anti-Roma prejudice confined to Central and Eastern Europe, recent YouGov research across seven northern European countries finds extremely “high levels of negativity” against Roma.²¹¹

While tackling discrimination was prominent in the Decade pledge, it was relegated to second fiddle as the “human development paradigm” took pride of place in the nascent decade program. The United Nations Development Program’s 2003 report *Avoiding the Dependency Trap* had a profound influence on the very framing of the Decade, and the key theme of the report was that “*providing Roma with opportunities to develop their talents and make free choices of their own should be at the core of Roma integration.*”²¹²

The point was that legal frameworks for rights protection are a necessary but insufficient precondition for sustainable integration, and UNDP insisted that there must be complementarity with an approach that focuses more broadly on development opportunities for Roma. This was a valuable contribution to perspectives on Roma inclusion. But the complementarity got lost somewhere along the way, as issues of racism and discrimination became somewhat smothered by a softer EU emphasis on social inclusion and cohesion, as the Commission moved forward with its own Roma framework.

For all the talk of human development, there has not been much progress when it came to delivering jobs; and in many countries unemployment rates rose amongst Roma since 2005. The FRA report from 2011 found that unemployment rates for Roma stood three times higher than for non-Roma; that the most disadvantaged Roma were those aged 16–24, 58% of whom were not in employment or in education or training, compared to 18% of non-Roma. Although Roma in this age group had improved their educational attainment significantly, this was not reflected in enhanced employment prospects. The report suggests that structural barriers, such as segregation, racism and discrimination may be reinforcing these disadvantages. The survey found that between 38% and 75% of Roma experienced discrimination when looking for a job. The situation is worst in the Czech Republic where three out of four Roma looking for work in the last five years reported experiencing discrimination.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Reuters, *Romanian town erects wall by Roma neighborhood*, 1 July 2011, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/01/us-romania-ghetto-idUSTRE76028D20110701>.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Tatiana Vaksberg, *Bulgarian Roma: Life behind the wall*, Deutsche Welle, 2015, available at: <http://www.dw.de/bulgarian-roma-life-behind-the-wall/a-18365997>.

²¹¹ Will Dahlgreen, *Roma people and Muslims are the least tolerated minorities in Europe*, 5 June 2015, available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/06/05/european-attitudes-minorities/>

²¹² United Nations Development Programme, *Avoiding the Dependency Trap: The Roma Human Development Report* (Bratislava: UNDP, 2003), available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/avoiding-dependency-trap>.

²¹³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States* (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014), available at: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-roma-survey-employment_en.pdf.

The 2014 report on the implementation of the Framework strategies reported further deterioration in the employment situation of Roma, with chances further limited by direct and indirect discrimination and concluded, that “despite the success of some measures, no tangible widespread impact has yet been achieved on the ground.”²¹⁴

It seemed to many that with the emphasis on development and opportunity (notwithstanding the evident lack of opportunities), and partnership with governments, there was less talk of rights and rights abuses; less talk about how to combat anti-Gypsyism; less talk about how best NGOs could watchdog local and national authorities to combat the combination of prejudice and corruption that renders progress on Roma inclusion well-nigh impossible.

Slightly more jaundiced observers feared processes whereby states would make inefficient use of EU funds to contract out the provision of vital public services to competing NGOs, and divest themselves of direct democratic responsibilities to excluded communities under cover of expanding choice. At the same time, the resource-starved NGOs would mutate into dependent clients, and to paraphrase one astute observer, “watch dogs would be turned into lap dogs.”

The “new realists” held forth the notion that if you present politicians with evidence-based arguments extolling the economic benefits of inclusion for the entire society; if you provide the evidence that investment in Roma inclusion today will bring financial benefits (perhaps not tomorrow, but maybe five or ten years hence), those that hold power will accede to the incontrovertible logic of the economic case for Roma inclusion, and act on this to produce policies that are wise, judicious and will be implemented successfully and smoothly.

Unsurprisingly the European Commission bought into this way of thinking, and regularly extolled the “important economic and financial consequences of Roma integration,” which the Commission claimed would in turn “foster

a climate of greater openness to the Roma people with the general public and thereby contribute to their smooth integration.” This faith in the forces of the market went further: in its communication the Commission suggested that economic integration of Roma would contribute to social cohesion, improve respect for fundamental rights and help eliminate *all* “discrimination based on someone’s race, color, ethnic, social origin or membership of a minority.”²¹⁵

Well, some cautioned way back in 2005 that as far as this particular economic fallacy is concerned “it ain’t necessarily so;” and that such thinking was rooted, and remains rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of any concept of the political. One lesson over the last decade has been that antagonisms cannot simply be wished away, and prejudice does not evaporate in the face of compelling economic data. For politics remains as stubbornly combative and conflictual as ever, and will never be reduced to “the mere administration of things.”

This is not to diminish the importance of evidence-based argumentation on the functionality and utility of social inclusion, but merely to suggest that beyond the bubbles of experts, bureaucrats and functionaries, there is only so far you can run with this line of persuasion against weak political will to address fundamental prejudice in society.

Just as combating discrimination was relegated to a “cross-cutting theme” in the Decade, the EU Framework strategies faced criticism from civil society, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe for failing to make a clear and unambiguous link between tackling racism and promoting social inclusion.

The message from civil society was clear: left unchecked and unchallenged, anti-Roma prejudice threatens to derail progress; the rise of anti-Gypsyism presents a fundamental threat to all coordinated efforts to promote Roma inclusion. As UNDP stated more than a decade ago, “development opportunities are inexorably linked to human

²¹⁴ European Commission, *Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* (Brussels: European Union, 2014), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_implementation_strategies2014_en.pdf.

²¹⁵ The Commission’s faith in the healing powers of economic opportunities in a free market was especially touching in the midst of the greatest post-war recession that has deepened the divide between Euro-winner debtor countries and the Euro-losers on Europe’s periphery, and plunged these indebted countries into deep political crisis with unprecedented levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty; and where the “winner countries” have witnessed the rise of right wing populism and with it a bitter politics of fear and loathing hardly conducive to social inclusion of visible minorities.

rights.” The Decade National Action Plans from 2005 failed to make this link, and as if nothing was learned in the interim by those elected to govern, the “inexorable linkage” gained little ground in the national Roma integration strategies submitted to the Commission in 2011. But there are signs that the European Commission and the European Parliament are finally coming to absorb this one key lesson from the Decade – that there can be no progress on Roma inclusion unless direct and indirect forms of discrimination are tackled head on, unless the institutional racism that Roma face every day is fully exposed and effectively dealt with. The initiation of infringement proceedings against the Czech Republic and Slovakia are clear signs that the new European Commission is muscling up in defense of fundamental human rights. More recent developments have also been encouraging.

The EU Roma Platform on **16–17 March 2015** prioritized fighting anti-Gypsyism and fully recognized that racism and discrimination remain major obstacles to Roma inclusion.²¹⁶

On **15 April 2015**, the European Parliament called for more efforts to end discrimination, hate crime and hate speech against Roma people and for 2 August to be recognized as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. In the resolution MEPs expressed their “deep concern at the rise of anti-Gypsyism, as manifested inter alia through anti-Roma rhetoric and violent attacks against Roma in Europe.” Anti-Gypsyism was described as “incompatible with the norms and values of the European Union” and “constitutes a major obstacle to the successful social integration of Roma.”²¹⁷

On **18 May 2015**, the European Ombudsman, Emily O’Reilly issued a decision which called on the European Commission to do more to ensure that the 350 billion euro 2014–2020 “European Structural and Investment Funds” do not support cohesion projects that breach fundamental rights. She stated that the Commission cannot abdicate its human rights obligations just because it does not directly

manage the funds, and recommended that the Commission strictly apply sanctions when Member States fail to fulfill their obligations or violate the EU Charter.²¹⁸

Not long after, on **17 June 2015**, the European Commission signaled its impatience with the failures of Member States to eliminate segregation in its latest communication on 17 June 2015, and warned that it intends to use all means within its competence to fight against discrimination, including infringement proceedings, and announced that a number of investigations on discrimination against Roma concerning access to education or housing are underway.²¹⁹

Conclusion: A lost decade?

A quick scan of Roma-related news items across Decade countries over four months up to July 2015 yields a dispiriting catalogue: reports of police violence and justice denied; violent attacks on Roma neighborhoods; accounts of forced evictions and the toll they take on young and old; and yet still more evidence that racial segregation in several European democracies is a habit that too many white people just can’t kick.

At first glance, all this might seem to suggest that as far as Roma inclusion is concerned it’s been a lost decade. One could object that “cherry-picking” the best of bad news stories over a few months proves nothing. So, to get a sense of what the Decade achieved it has been necessary to look wider, dig deeper and examine a range of publications including the civil society monitoring reports; World Bank, UNDP and FRA surveys and researches to see if they offer any succor for those who would like to be counted among the “glass half-full” variety of observers, who would assert that all was not lost, and that gains were indeed made in Roma inclusion over the course of the decade that was.

²¹⁶ European Commission, Directorate General for Justice, *European platform for Roma inclusion – Summary and conclusions*, 2015, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/roma-platform-2015/platformconclusions_en.htm.

²¹⁷ European Parliament News, *MEPs urge end to Roma discrimination and recognition of Roma Genocide Day*, 15 April 2015, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150414IPR41851/html/MEPs-urge-end-to-Roma-discrimination-and-recognition-of-Roma-Genocide-Day>.

²¹⁸ European Ombudsman, *Ombudsman makes eight proposals to Commission to avoid fundamental rights violations in multi-billion euro “cohesion” policy*, 18 May 2015, available at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release/faces/en/59897/html.bookmark>.

²¹⁹ Bernard Rorke, *Zero tolerance: New EU Communication talks tough on anti-Gypsyism*, ERRC blog, 23 June 2015, available at: <http://www.errc.org/blog/zero-tolerance-new-eu-communication-talks-tough-on-anti-gypsyism/65>.

As the Decade was by definition a forward-looking endeavor, it is worth pondering what it might have meant for Roma children and young people. A look at the findings on health, housing, employment and education would suggest that for young Roma, the Decade, along with the EU Framework for Roma Integration, and the EU 2020 Agenda for inclusive growth must seem like a joke in the worst possible taste. National governments, who have ratified the legally binding Convention on the Rights of the Child, stand accused of failing, and on the evidence contained in the Decade monitoring reports, continue to fail in their obligations toward millions of Roma children right across Europe.

When it comes to the rights and wellbeing of Roma children, the stark gap between rhetoric and realization is an affront that should (but does not) inspire outrage and indignation among all right-minded citizens. As UNICEF put it, Roma children in all countries across Europe remain at risk of systematic violation of their rights, reflected in severe poverty, social marginalization, discrimination, and the denial of equal access to services and of equal opportunities in society.²²⁰ As it was at the beginning in 2005, sadly so it seems to be at the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

So a convincing case could be made for the Decade amounting to nowt. The “tide of history” didn’t turn; Roma inclusion was not buoyed up by a “sea change” in policymaking; the Decade failed to harness the political will to include the Roma as full citizens in European societies.

In fact, critics might say things worsened for Roma over these 10 years, with the rise of far-right movements with explicit anti-Roma agendas, and a hardening of the kind of political rhetoric that scapegoats the Roma for society’s ills, rhetoric that too often constituted incitement to racial hatred. As economic austerity continues to bite, the continent has witnessed a widening of the gap between rich and poor, a narrowing of life opportunities for masses of unemployed and excluded sections of the population, with Roma communities disproportionately represented among those categorized as “multiply disadvantaged.” In many of Europe’s worse-off regions, whole communities are barely subsisting, living

from hand to mouth, and just as excluded now as they ever were.

So, was it a lost decade? It came in with something of a bang, and critics might suggest that it will go out with a whimper in 2015, leaving scarcely a ripple on the public consciousness, with the vast bulk of Roma communities across the 12 participating countries completely unaware that there ever was a Decade.

There is nonetheless a case to be made that suggests it would be cavalier to dismiss the entire enterprise as a lost cause. However rhetorically gratifying it might be to write off the Decade and damn it as a failure, a more circumspect assessment would suggest (as Zhou Enlai never said of the French Revolution) that it is “too early to say”.

As discussed earlier there are clear signs that the EU is taking anti-Gypsyism seriously and is prepared to take concrete steps against racism and discrimination. These first steps have been a long time coming. At the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Europe is moving towards official recognition of anti-Gypsyism as a long-standing and deeply rooted form of European prejudice; there is full acknowledgment of the need to combat institutional racism when it comes to the misuse of EU funds; and a clear decision from the European Ombudsman that the EU cannot abdicate its human rights obligations.

The lived reality in villages, towns and cities where Roma face intimidation and other forms of very direct and indirect discrimination every day, may seem a universe away from resolutions passed in Brussels and Strasbourg. But these moves must be just the first steps, for when it comes to combating the words, deeds and institutional practices that denigrate and dehumanize our Roma fellow citizens, it is the practical impact that will count. For, at the end of the Decade many segregated Roma communities in urban slums and rural wastes are even more isolated, more excluded, and feel less secure and safe than before.

The Decade by virtue of its shortcomings, has highlighted the need for a coordinated and public Europe-wide “reckoning with history” to shed light and spread

²²⁰ UNICEF, *Roma children: The Roma in East and Central Europe*, available at: http://www.romachildren.com/?page_id=665

knowledge about the Roma. As Thomas Hammarberg put it, what we witness today is “*a continuation of a brutal and largely unknown history of repression of Roma, going back several hundred years. The methods of repression have varied over time and have included enslavement, enforced assimilation, expulsion, internment and mass killings... A full account and recognition of the crimes committed against the Roma might go some way to restoring the trust of Roma communities in society.*”²²¹

For if we are to displace the politics of hate with a politics of hope, solidarity and mutual respect, then we need trust. The Decade did not deliver trust, neither did it dispel anti-Roma hostility and prejudice. Indeed in some countries we witnessed shocking regressions and surges in anti-Gypsyism. Talking to one of those young Roma leaders who was so optimistic at the launch of the Decade, the bitter sense of disappointment and disenchantment came across: *We were very optimistic back then. But now, it's a disaster, a full disaster. Things became hopeless in Bulgaria, I had no more energy to struggle for things that nobody was interested in. Then I left for Germany and started over... Germany is a much more tolerant place we live among many minorities. All Roma want is the opportunity to work and live normally... Sad to say the only way to live a normal way of life is to leave Bulgaria.*²²²

Another of the young, highly committed and active Roma leaders from 2005 told me about what drove him to leave Hungary: *“I asked myself do I have to fight this prejudice every day? I didn't have the energy. I did not see much of a future in a country that has no respect for what I am, where what I represent is being trod on – so I asked myself what am I doing here? So we left Hungary for England and we love it, and my kids love it. They love the UK – the first reason is the lack of this deep anti-Gypsyism that you get with almost every interaction with outsiders in post-communist Europe. Here we can almost forget about it. We know that there is some anti-Gypsy feeling, but nothing like as deep as in post-communist Europe. My kids are very happy and doing well in school.”*²²³

Tens of thousands of Roma from Romania, Bulgaria and increasingly Hungary, see no future for themselves or their children at home. Emigration is perhaps the most poignant testimony to the failure of the Decade to at least deliver hope for a better future.

Clearly the Decade did not (indeed it could not) deliver the kind of social transformations required to lift millions out of poverty, undo centuries of exclusion, and eliminate popular prejudice and structural discrimination. But it did set a very necessary, audacious and public agenda: identifying key inclusion policy priorities, insisting on the need to set clear targets with earmarked resources within fixed time limits; tracking progress with regular and robust monitoring mechanisms and calling for structured Roma participation.

This actually existing and imperfect Decade template for social inclusion marked a departure in that it raised the stakes in advocacy terms: calling for comprehensive inclusion policies in place of ad-hoc project-based interventions; the Decade put Roma participation at the heart of the entire endeavor and attempted to give some structure and substance to the idea; it extracted commitments (albeit soft ones) from governments, for which they could be held publicly to account; and it shone a harsh light like never before on what had long been Europe's hidden and neglectful shame.

Hitherto, anti-Gypsyism had been routinely accepted as a banal fact of life, racial segregation deemed as natural as winter following autumn, and acute poverty understood as a “cultural predisposition.” By the Decade end, there is at least wide recognition that Roma exclusion is one of Europe's biggest democratic deficits, ethically repugnant and economically unsustainable; a recognition that has translated into the EU Framework, with no illusions of the enormity of the task that lies ahead, but a far deeper understanding of what is at stake and what it will take to undo the damage done in order to fulfill the promises of democracy for all of Europe's Roma citizens.

²²¹ Thomas Hammarberg, *Human rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publications, 2012), available at: https://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/source/prems/prems79611_GBR_CouvHumanRightsOfRoma_WEB.pdf.

²²² Interview conducted by the authors with Tano Bechev, April 2015.

²²³ Interview conducted by the authors with Gyula Vamosi, April 2015.

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