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Faces and causes of Roma marginalization: Experiences from Serbia

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FACES AND CAUSES OF ROMA MARGINALIZATION

Experiences from Serbia

Slobodan Cvejić

The “**Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Communities**” inquiry explored the economic, political, demographic, and social forces at municipal and community level which shape practices and consequences of social exclusion and potential pathways to inclusion. **Phase 2** of this research focused on a representative sample of municipalities (20–30 per country) in Hungary, Romania, and Serbia to explore basic local social services and infrastructure provisions, conditions of political participation of the Roma, and local interventions targeting Roma inclusion. This research phase relied on structured field research collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. This short country report is based on the **Final Country Report on the Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Serbia**, edited in June 2013 by Slobodan Cvejić, with contributions from Irena Petrović, Dunja Poleti, Marjan Muratović and Nenad Vladislavljev who assisted in data collection and processing. The following individuals conducted field research: Dejan Živković, Dejan Raimović, Goran Jumerović, Goran Lakatuš and Milica Pavel, under the leadership of Marjan Muratović and Nenad Vladislavljev.

For the full volume resulting from this research please see Szalai, Júlia and Violetta Zentai, eds. (2014) *Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Contexts*. Budapest: Center for Policy Studies, Central European University.

ABBREVIATIONS

DILS	Delivery of Improved Public Services
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LAP	Local Action Plan
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NAP	National Action Plan
NES	National Employment Service
SEN	Special Education Needs
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that Roma are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable ethnic group in Serbia (Cvejić, Babović, and Pudar 2011), the Western Balkans (OSCE 2013; FRA and UNDP 2012) and throughout Europe (Müller and Jovanović 2010).

On the other hand, some comparative studies have also shown that there has been some improvement made in the decrease of Roma poverty and the increase of wellbeing (UNICEF 2010), which points to the fact that it is possible to influence and ameliorate some of the causes of Roma exclusion. This also means that there is variation among Roma in the level of social inclusion and economic wellbeing.

In this report we review and analyze different appearances and causes of Roma marginalization in Serbia. We are interested in explaining how and why Roma experience social exclusion and why this tends to be related to their spatial segregation. We pay particular attention to collective forms of marginalization and to processes that put whole communities on the margins of social life. Also, the collective aspects and conditions influence to a large extent the potentials and limitations of what individual members of the community may or may not do to help improve their own situation.

We assume that Roma marginalization is the product of complex and gradual processes of deprivation affecting different aspects of social life, starting from early childhood. As such, we aim to identify where these deprivations intersect in physical and social space and how they often take the form of a cultural model and thus become reproduced inter-generationally and labeled pejoratively by the majority population—in settlements that have a high concentration of Roma. We analyze four areas important for Roma inclusion: education, employment, political and cultural participation/representation and involvement in local development planning and activities.

For the above purpose we have conducted our research in four clusters of settlements that have a high share of Roma population. Clusters are formed of four settlements each, two urban and two rural.

2. Research design: sample, methodology and research team

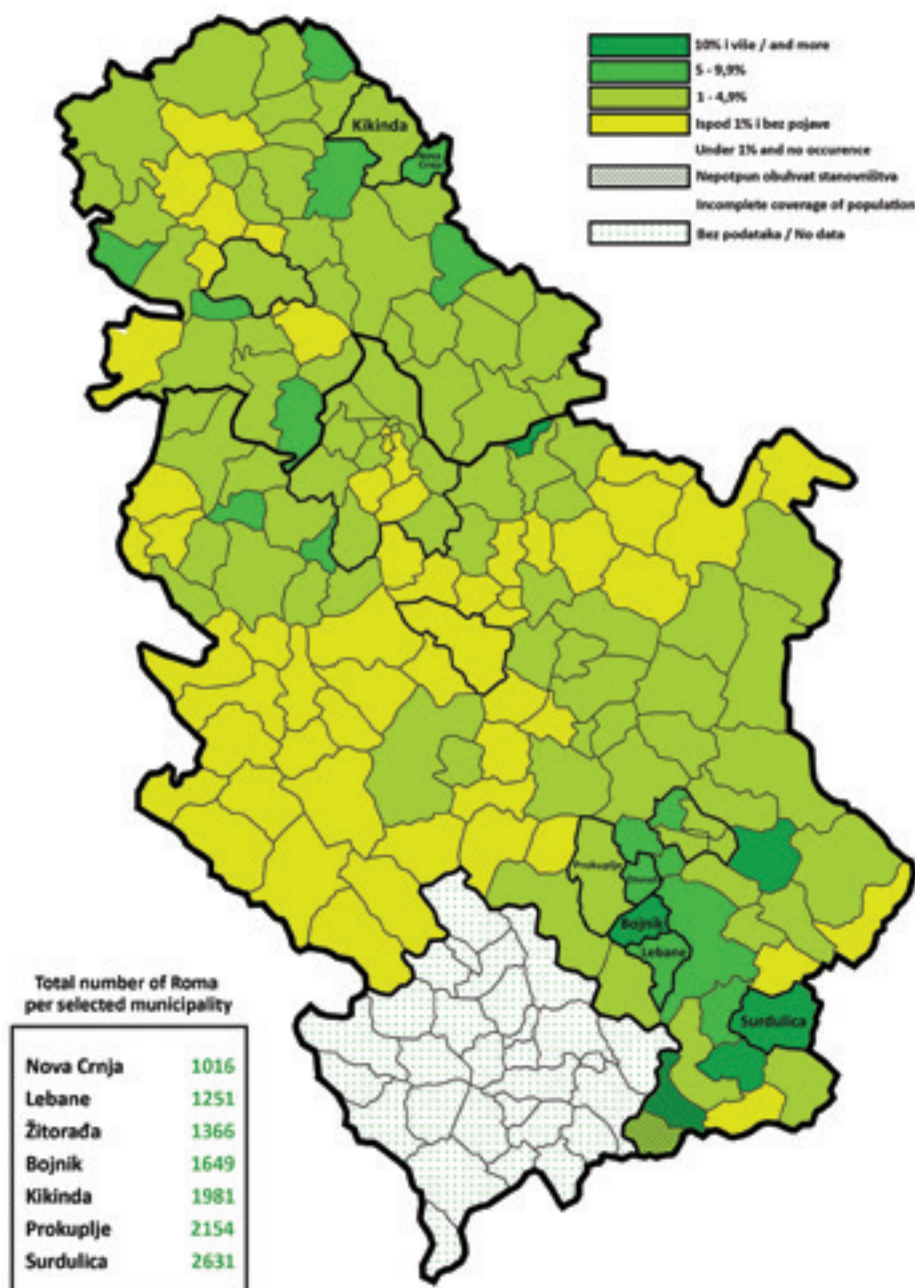
2.1 The sample

In Serbia, unlike in Romania and Hungary, the number of local administrations is small (150 municipalities, 23 cities and Belgrade: 174 in total). Conversely, the variation in population sizes of municipalities is large: from 11,000 to over 220,000 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2012). As such, we limited our geographic selection to four clusters that formed more or less organic units. All four clusters cover territories where Roma population density is moderate to high (5%–15% of the total population, according to official statistics). Three of the clusters are positioned in the least developed and poorest southern region of Serbia; two of them neighbor each other territorially. One cluster is located in Vojvodina, the northern region of the country. Although Vojvodina is a relatively richer part of Serbia, its eastern region of Banat is almost as

poor as the South. Nevertheless, our sample structure ensured variation in several important aspects, such as:

- Roma (sub)cultures,
- traditions and practices of inter-ethnic relations,
- institutional settings, and,
- levels of economic development.

Map 1. Roma population density in Serbia, 2011 census data



Map by Jelena Ilić.

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2012). *Ethnicity. Data by Municipalities and Cities.*

The final sample structure was as follows:

CLUSTER 1

Prokuplje is composed of a mid-size city of Prokuplje (27,333 inhabitants) as a center, a smaller, neighboring rural municipality Žitoradja (around 3,000) and the villages of Žitni Potok and Rečica (around 500–600 each). This cluster has moderate density of Roma population. In this cluster we identified seven Roma segments with approximately 900 Roma families, almost entirely settled at the borders of settlements. The exception was Čerkez Mahala which is closer to the center of Prokuplje.

CLUSTER 2

Lebane is composed of the small municipality of Lebane (9,272 inhabitants), the even smaller rural municipality of Bojnik (around 3,000), and the villages of Pertate (around 1,500) and Stubla (around 1,000). This cluster has the highest density of Roma population in Serbia (over 15% by official statistics). Here we identified 13 Roma segments with approximately 450 families, again settled at the borders of settlements, with exception of the villages of Pertate and Stubla where Roma segments are in the middle of the settlement.

CLUSTER 3

Surdulica is composed of the small municipality of Surdulica (11,400 inhabitants) and three villages, Jelašnica (around 1,000), Binovce (around 500) and Prekodolce (around 1,500) (the later belonging administratively to the neighboring municipality of Vladičin Han). Binovce is the only settlement in the sample that was not included in the UNDP survey (2011). This cluster also has a high density of Roma. Here we identified six Roma segments with approximately 920 Roma families, settled at the borders of settlements, with the exception of Prekodolce where Roma comprise 90% of the population.

CLUSTER 4

Kikinda is composed of the mid-size municipality of Kikinda (37,700 inhabitants), the small rural municipality Nova Crnja (around 2,000) and the villages of Bašaid (around 3,500) and Aleksandrovo (around 2,500). This cluster has a moderate population density of Roma. We identified seven Roma segments with approximately 270 Roma families. Segments in Kikinda and Bašaid are positioned at the borders of settlements, but in Nova Crnja and Aleksandrovo a small number of Roma families (25 and 20, respectively) live mixed with the majority population (Serbs and Hungarians in Nova Crnja and Serbs in Aleksandrovo).

Table 1. Ethnic composition of Roma/poor segments per settlement

Settlement Title	Roma/Poor Segment Title	Total Families	Roma Families
CLUSTER 1			
Prokuplje	Carina	452	276
	Džungla	43	43
	Čerkez Mahala	576	358
Žitni Potok	Rid	115	115
Žitorađa	Gornja Mahala	110	40
	Donja Mahala	87	35
Rečica	Rečica	160	30
CLUSTER 2			
Lebane	Kod Groblja	20	20
	Jablanička i Solidarnost	100	100
	Šarce	150	40
	Šilovačko	16	16
Pertate	Novo Naselje	16	16
	Stara Mahala	15	15
Bojnik	Crkvički Put	150	50
	Oransko	60	60
	Konjovački Put	30	30
	Pustorečka	40	40
	Kod Mosta	20	20
Stubla	Nova Stubla	12	12
	Stubla	30	30
CLUSTER 3			
Surdulica	Novo Naselje	130	130
	Gornja i Donja Mahala	285	285
	Piskavica	55	40
Jelašnica	Jelašnica	120	80
Binovce	Binovce	60	50
Prekodolce	Prekodolce	300	270
CLUSTER 4			
Kikinda	Mali Bedem	70	70
	Veliki Bedem	200	15
	Stara Klanica	19	19
	Strelišće	120	20
Bašaid	Zlatna Greda	170	100
	Picoder		
Nova Crnja	Nova Crnja	600	20
Aleksandrovo	Aleksandrovo	800	25

Source: Assessment of local Roma collaborators.

2.2 Methodology

Data collection in Serbia started with ‘socio-tours’ to the selected settlements. Before the field work, we organized a training session in Belgrade, where the whole team met and discussed the proposed methodology and tasks. We also undertook desk and geographical research, reviewed available census data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the target municipalities (ethnic composition, age, GDP, social transfers, educational institutions, number of pupils, etc.) and other relevant data (statistics on employers, unemployment rates, health care institutions, the political composition of local assemblies, etc.), provided in Annex 1 to this document. Our team leaders also connected with Roma informants (NGO activists, educational assistants, local Roma coordinators or simply respected members of the local community) who we would collaborate with throughout the project in the various localities.

The first round of visits to Roma settlements was intended to establish deeper contact with Roma informants, undertake a visual assessment of infrastructure and housing conditions, and collect basic information for socio-mapping. This round of visits was also considered an extended form of training and team building since the whole team was participating in data collection (national team leader, cluster team leader, desk researcher and field researcher). In subsequent rounds of visits more detailed data was collected on Roma-poor segments as well as on local Roma participation, schools and employers.

Generally, the whole process of data collection went well. However, there were a few minor problems related to the methodology:

1. *Official statistics.* Statistical data from the 2011 census are available only to the level of cities and municipalities, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, urbanity or some other characteristic. For the purpose of our sample composition we occasionally had to rely on estimates based on the 2002 census, when data was presented down to the level of settlements. Also, it should be stressed that while ethnic data is presented as “official” in Serbia, when undertaking a census citizens do not have to claim their ethnicity. Roma, in fact, tend to avoid declaring their ethnicity, sometimes even opting to declare themselves as ethnic Serbian or some other ethnicity. As such, official statistics more than likely underestimate the Roma population by 2–3 times.¹ The 2002 census suggested that the official number of Roma in Serbia was around 108,000; in 2011 it was around 147,000.

1 Ethnic data are being collected in Serbia for different purposes: the census, the unemployment registry at the National Employment Service (NES), the application for measures of support in secondary and tertiary education, etc. However, these data are based on self-declaration and many Roma tend not to declare their ethnic origin or they declare Serbian ethnic origin. In addition, little ‘ethnic’ data has been published so the information usually stays within the respective institutions. For example, NES holds separate data on ethnicity and prioritizes Roma in active measures of employment, but there is no regular public reporting on Roma participation in these measures. Also, if a student claims the right to affirmative action in university enrollment, he/she needs official confirmation by the Roma National Council, but there is no accurate data on the total number of Roma students. On the other hand, over the last few decades there has been a lot of research on Roma conducted in Serbia, covering different aspects of their living: health, housing, education, employment and welfare. This body of research ranges from particularized ethnographic studies to large scale surveys (e.g. MICS). Therefore, most of the generalizations about the Roma population in Serbia are based on incomplete official statistics or research with limited representativeness (due to the reluctance of Roma to self-declare their ethnicity and due to frequent migration). Although the outreach and accuracy of data about Roma in Serbia has increased and presents a much better evidence base for policy making today than ten or more years ago, there is still a lot of space for subjective interpretations which affects strategies and measures of Roma inclusion and jeopardizes the basic human rights of the most poor and excluded Roma (e.g. those who live in informal urban settlements).

2. *Reliability of information provided by local informants.* Both field researchers and local Roma informants had problems calculating rates of unemployment, financial assistance beneficiaries, school attendees, and other critical indicators in the absence of accurate data lists. It was easier for them to give descriptive assessments like “a lot”, “a little” and similar.

2.3 Roma participation in the research

The added value of the methodology was the establishment of a Roma research team in which researchers and especially team leaders were not merely collecting data, but also building their own and their community’s capacity to assess problems of Roma inclusion in an informed and knowledgeable way. Cooperation between team members was strong in all organizational aspects. Some degree of mistrust was noticed only at the level of local administration when accepting a Roma researcher, and this was only in the Kikinda cluster where Roma are generally least included in the local community and least accepted by the local administration. On the other hand, non-Roma researchers were warmly accepted in Roma communities and by Roma informants, which was made easier by Roma researchers being part of the team and ‘holding the door open’. Common training sessions showed that Roma from Vojvodina and Roma from Southern Serbia easily cooperated and exchanged experiences, which was again made easier by the two team leaders having known each other for years. But even without that, our researchers knew about each other’s traditions and local community challenges, which showed that Roma in Serbia can build a single ethnic community.

The fact that our team leaders and field researchers were Roma ensured a good response from our Roma informants and the local Roma community. On several occasions information was cross-checked with local people who assembled for this purpose, often in open spaces, Roma associations’ facilities or in private houses.

3. Roma segregation: space and community

3.1 Roma settlements in Serbia—major trends

Data on the time of the establishment of Roma settlements in Serbia lead to the conclusion that Roma in Serbia abandoned a nomadic way of life early in their history (Jakšić and Bašić 2005). At least 47% of major Roma settlements in Serbia were constructed by the beginning of the twentieth century. Out of the total of 593 Roma settlements in Serbia in 2005, 11% were constructed between 1901 and 1945. By 1972 another 22% were built, and another 14% of settlements were built between then and 1991. Finally, in the period 1991-2000 the remaining 5% of Roma settlements were built.

There are 593 Roma settlements in Serbia. Of these, 314, have less than 200 Roma inhabitants. There are 179 settlements with between 200 and 500 Roma, and 62 settlements with between 500 and 999 Roma. There are 22 larger Roma settlements with up to 2,000 inhabitants, and 13 settlements have up to 5,000 Roma. Only four settlements in Serbia have more than 5,000 Roma inhabitants. Some 70% of the total Roma population in Serbia lives in these settlements.

Out of 593 Roma settlements, 285 are in cities, and the others are suburban or rural. Roma settlements are evenly dispersed in rural and urban environments, but the settlements in urban environments are more densely populated and the population is more numerous.

Twenty-eight percent of Roma settlements in Serbia were built according to a formal plan.² Thirty-five percent were built illegally, and 35% spread illegally from an originally planned core settlement. Living in a *mahala*³, be it rural, urban, or suburban, is the traditional Roma way of living—in Serbia and elsewhere. The *mahala* is often interpreted as the symbol of Roma spatial segregation. According to Jakšić and Bašić (2005), although a majority of the interviewed Roma families already live in urban, suburban or rural *mahalas*, the *mahala* can hardly be called their preferred option in terms of residence. The results of this study show that the attachment of Roma families to the *mahala* has weakened as almost half of Roma families living in *mahalas* would now gladly move to a mixed community. An advantage of living in a *mahala* is the feeling of safety and solidarity, and the integration of the family in the local community. The main shortcomings are isolation, deprivation, and various forms of exclusion.

Based on the data presented above one can conclude that over time Roma have settled in small communities on the borders of (usually larger) settlements. Most of these Roma segments are small in their number of inhabitants and distinct from the majority of the local community in spatial, infrastructural, social and economic terms. The fact that those Roma segments in larger urban surroundings that were previously located at the outskirts of the city but have since become absorbed into the current urban tissue remain impoverished and deprived of quality infrastructure confirms that neglect of Roma residential segments and Roma communities living there has been a habit that characterized all political options and local development modalities to date. This spatial segregation makes the marginalization of Roma visual and exacerbates all other types of exclusion. It is not surprising, therefore, that so many Roma who acquire resources (human, social, economic) sufficient for independent living tend to move to those parts of the settlement where the majority population lives.

3.2 Roma segments in the settlements included in our research

The concentration of Roma is moderate in Žitoradja and Prokuplje. In Žitoradja it is 8.3%, in Prokuplje municipality it is 4.8%–5.6% in the city and 3.6% in rural areas.

This cluster is unique in that it hosts the only settlement of internally displaced Roma from Kosovo in our sample (the border with Kosovo is just 50 km away). These IDPs ended up in a slum behind an old Roma settlement in Prokuplje (Džungla/Jungle, neighboring Carina), but also squatted in many empty houses in other Roma segments of the city. This is important because Roma IDPs in Serbia are considered the most disadvantaged group, suffering from extreme poverty and deep exclusion. They speak Albanian, not Serbian, and even their Roma dialect is not readily understandable to some Roma in Serbia. However, the Roma neighborhoods offer them some

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- 2 Urban planning in Serbia is regulated by national laws, but implemented by local administrations and based on a local General Urban Plan. Local urban regulation is financed mainly from local budgets with occasional supplements from national programs and special-purpose budgets. As a consequence, the regulation of Roma settlements is usually last on the list of priorities and often depends on programs of international organizations or special national programs (e.g. social housing).
 - 3 Mahala is a concept transferred from the period of Ottoman administration. It denominates a local neighborhood (a block) usually dominated by a single ethnic group. Today in Serbia it is almost exclusively used for Roma segments of settlements.

familiarity and safety. On the other hand, the fact that the local administration in Prokuplje, in a time of severe economic crisis, plans to invest in basic urbanization and regulation of the Jungle settlement suggests that the problem of Roma segregation is at least becoming more visible, which might also result in better inclusion in the future.

The settlements in this cluster orbit Prokuplje which is the main administrative and economic center. There is a strong and visible difference in the quality of life between the urban and rural settlements. Nevertheless, it is always the Roma segments in the settlements that are the poorest. The difference between Roma and non-Roma segments is less visible in rural areas where the degree of poverty is much higher and afflicts a large number of households. It is more visible in Prokuplje, where two segments, Džungla and Mala Guba have inferior housing and living conditions compared to Čerkez Mahala and Carina. Generally speaking, the inhabitants of all the Roma segments in this cluster live in small, individual houses of poor quality with basic infrastructure and relatively easy access to transport, groceries and social services. However, some Roma are more deprived and at risk of exclusion than others. Villages always suffer more: in Žitni Potok only 10% of houses have piped water and others use a single pipe in the street. It is distinct for being the only Roma segment in the sample where Roma feel insecure about their housing. Almost all Roma houses are built illegally on their own land (in villages) or on community land (in cities) and are under the process of legalization. In Žitni Potok there is a threat that the Public Enterprise Srbijašume (Woods of Serbia), which is in charge of the public land where the village is built, will clear away Roma houses in order to build an economic facility. The village also suffers from electricity shortages. Marginalization of Roma is based on a complex cycle of poverty and deprivation, and segregation is visible.

Bojnik, in the Lebane Cluster, has the highest concentration of Roma in Serbia, 14.9%. In Lebane it is 5.7%, with a high disparity between rural and urban settlements (3.7% and 8.4%, respectively). In Lebane and generally in Bojnik, Roma communities live in segregated areas, neighboring with local communities. In Pertate they live mixed with majority population, in Stubla one settlement is in the center of the village. In Lebane a new segment (Grobljansko) was financed by public investments after a flood wiped out homes in the early 1980s and it merged with an already-existing segment of poor non-Roma. However, it was built on the edge of the city and is as unsuited for habitation as are the others. Although territorially segregated, Roma seem to be more accepted by the local majority community than, for example, in Kikinda. However, even here Roma are the poorest part of community. Lebane was the only city in the Serbian sample in which a poor, non-Roma neighborhood was marked as segregated and living next to Roma (next to Grobljansko, mentioned above). In broad terms, the Lebane Cluster is organic in administrative, social and economic terms, but community ties are weak and social relations particularized. The same vicious circle of unemployment, low education and poverty keeps Roma at the margins of the local community, but stereotypes are not as strong as in the bigger cities.

In the Surdulica cluster the concentration of Roma is high; there are 2,631 Roma registered in the Municipality of Surdulica according to the latest census (2011), totaling 13% of the population—far higher than the national average (2%). Together with municipalities of Bojnik (included in our research), Bela Palanka and Vranjska Banja it has the highest concentration of Roma in Serbia. The share of Roma in the urban settlement of Surdulica is 11%, and in rural settlements 15% on average. Roma settlements are exclusively residential zones, with almost no economic activity. Often there is not even a grocery store, so inhabitants have to travel to the city to meet their basic needs. This is easier for Roma from Surdulica than for those from villages, especially Binovce

and Jelašnica which are respectively 7 and 13 km away from Surdulica and have no public transport connections. By contrast, the Roma from Surdulica can walk the 2-3 km distance into town to access services and jobs. Prekodolce Roma have better infrastructure in the village and good public transport, which makes Vladičin Han easily accessible. However, Roma from the other two villages have difficulties accessing all social services other than pre-school and primary school education which is obligatory. The degree of poverty in the villages of Jelašnica and Binovce is striking, both among the Roma and non-Roma populations. Both villages are being depopulated and the non-Roma population is old and dwindling. This cluster is organic in the sense of its absolute central position in the city of Surdulica and the ways in which other settlements depend upon it. However, employment and social activity is limited, and the peripheral position of villages is deteriorating the living standards of all citizens, especially Roma.

In the Kikinda cluster the concentration of Roma is moderate, but much higher in Nova Crnja/Aleksandrovo (10%) than in Kikinda/Bašaid (3%). There were 1,981 Roma registered in the Municipality of Kikinda in the last census (2011), with a low disparity between rural and urban settlements. In Kikinda and Bašaid, Roma communities live in segregated areas, neighboring with the local community. In Nova Crnja and Aleksandrovo they are less numerous and live mixed with the majority population. In both locations Roma form the poorest part of community. In the city of Kikinda they can benefit from more opportunities for occasional informal work (e.g. waste collection and petty trade) and close proximity to social services. In rural areas they do not own land or engage in farming; rather, they tend to commute to the city to search for sources of income. Interestingly, Roma in the Kikinda cluster rarely engage in agriculture whereas Roma from the southern clusters tend to migrate to Banat (Kikinda is the largest city in North Banat) specifically for seasonal field work. Since this migration was not noticed by our local Roma informants in the Kikinda cluster, it is likely that Roma from southern clusters stay at large farms somewhat distant from the villages. The villages in Banat are generally poor, but in Bašaid the state of Roma housing and infrastructure spoke of the extreme poverty suffered in this region. In general, we can say that this cluster is not organic in administrative or economic terms. The marginalization of Roma is consistent throughout the settlements in the cluster, but is more obvious in Kikinda and Bašaid due to their territorial segregation. The housing and infrastructure conditions in the Mali Bedem and Klanica settlements are worse than other Roma settlements in Kikinda. Such segregation provokes certain levels of tension between Roma from this particular settlement and outsiders, whether Roma or not. There were a few instances of verbal conflicts with representatives of the local administration and researchers who visited the settlement, as well as with local Roma coordinator.

The quality of one's residence, and the ability to be mobile in a neighborhood, district or region is vital for the social mobility and social inclusion of Roma. Generally speaking, Roma segments in our sample are symbols of poverty and deprivation and we could not identify more than two among the 33 Roma segments that provided solid infrastructure, quality housing and reasonable standards of living, this way meeting the standards of the majority population. The remainder of Roma citizens are enclosed in the circle of their immediate neighbors and meet wider community almost exclusively through social service providers (education, health, social care, employment service, etc.). In these institutions, with the exception of schools, they often face treatment that is usually not expressed as open discrimination, but that undoubtedly replicates their marginalized status. The school is a weak bond because once they finish primary school most of them leave education and return to this semi-permissive model of inclusion. Even when departing the segments Roma usually do not end up in an inclusive environment. Trying to escape social isolation

and generate some income, Roma usually migrate to economically more vital regions in Serbia where they spend several months doing underpaid seasonal works, in often humiliating living conditions and having no social coverage and health insurance.

Roma residential segments are themselves obstacles to Roma social mobility and living in them perpetuates collective marginalization. On the other hand, there is intense pressure on Roma individuals or small groups who are deprived of all major resources and who try to live alone in majority communities. As such, Roma segments at least present some safety net for them in terms of identity support, income generation opportunities and basic personal safety (e.g. Jungle fusing with Carina in Prokuplje). Trans-generationally, Roma residential segments might take incremental steps to foster Roma mobility. However, even if this assumption is true, the process would be painfully slow and of limited scope, since the segregation and exclusion of Roma from these segments remains exceedingly high.

Nevertheless, Roma segments across the Serbian sample are not completely uniform. First, we should distinguish between urban and rural segments. Since the proximity of social institutions and the informal labor market are so important for the everyday survival of Roma families, those living in cities tend to fare better. It is not the size of the settlement that matters, but the social safety net and income opportunities it offers. To be sure, it is not the mere presence of such institutions that help sustain Roma families, but their accessibility. This is why even in such a small sample the cities vary in their degree of (un)favorability for inclusion. Prokuplje is bigger than Surdulica, Lebane and Bojnik, but so is Kikinda, yet the level of Roma inclusion is far better in Prokuplje than in Kikinda where the same institutional network seems less accessible to Roma. In this comparison the share of Roma matters (their percentage of the population is twice as large in the Prokuplje cluster than in the Kikinda cluster). This share is twice as high in Bojnik than in Prokuplje, but there poverty is so high, and institutional, economic, human and other resources so low, that opportunities rarely appear.

In truth, it is the combination of institutional development, resource availability and Roma civic and political activity that makes institutions more accessible and local communities more inclusive for Roma. Differences exist between rural Roma segments, too. Some of them, like Prekodolce in the Surdulica cluster, sometimes fare better than certain urban segments, such as Grobljansko in Lebane, or Mali Bedem in Kikinda. This is due to several particularities of Prekodolce, e.g. its proximity to two smaller cities that offer some possibilities for (largely informal) work and a long history of cohabitation with Roma, a significant inflow of remittances, and an active local NGO. On the other hand, the village of Binovce is not only quite distant from the nearest city (7 km), but is almost completely cut off from it due to a lack of public transportation. The result has been the village's relegation to a ghetto. Here distance is not only physical: there are other small and distant villages with ageing populations in Surdulica county, but such a degree of isolation is rare. In Binovce, working as an educational assistant or health coordinator are the ultimate opportunities for the Roma community, but these scarce institutional offerings should be supported by more civic and/or political engagement in order to increase the visibility of the Binovce Roma and direct some public funds towards the development of the village.

4. Gears of poverty: education and (un)employment

4.1 Roma education in Serbia—major trends

Roma in Serbia face many administrative barriers to education related to school enrollment, segregation and school performance. Some outstanding problems with regards to primary and secondary education include:

- **Limited effectiveness of legislative measures.** In 2003, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the National Council of the Roma National Minority, enacted affirmative action measures to ensure the secondary and tertiary enrollment of Roma students applying to the National Council. The legal basis for affirmative action is included in the *Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (Art. 4)* and in the *Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities (Art. 4)*. The new education policies are intended to adjust Serbian legislation in order to prevent the perpetual unwarranted categorization of Roma children and to start an effective re-categorization of those students who are currently misplaced in special education programs. Inclusive education projects are a priority. These changes resulted in a reduced number of children in special schools and in the downsizing of the special school network that disproportionately affects Roma students (OSCE 2013). However, thus far such legislation has had only a modest effect on practice. Because school governance is centralized, local administrations find little incentive to implement them sufficiently to help Roma.
- **Barriers to enrollment in the compulsory Preparatory Preschool Program and Primary School Education.** To date, enrollment in preparatory preschool education has been contingent on producing a residence permit that shows which neighborhood school is appropriate for any given child. For Roma, many of their settlements are not officially registered and, therefore, Roma children cannot obtain the requisite residence permits. Consequently, neighborhood schools (or any other schools) have not been obliged to enroll Roma students if they do not have proof of a residence permit, undercutting the prospects for Roma enrollment. As for primary school enrollment, the above mentioned possibility to enroll a child in a school “out of area” still divides schools between “elite” and “for poor”, leaving Roma segregated in low-quality schools.
- **Age restrictions on primary education enrollment.** Based on the new *Law on foundations of the education system and upbringing*, all children between six-and-a-half and seven-and-a-half years of age, before the beginning of the school year, are to be enrolled in the first grade of primary school. Children older than seven-and-a-half are eligible for late enrollment and may be admitted to the corresponding grade on the basis of a knowledge test organized by an ad-hoc committee set up by the school. These committees are responsible for determining the appropriate grade placement for any incoming child. Only individuals aged 16 and older are eligible for enrollment in adult education programs. Unfortunately, many Roma children who are out of school fall in the age gap between seven-and-a-half and 16 years. Because the ad-hoc committees are neither functional nor interested in enrolling extra students who may deplete resources without generating revenue, many of these children are completely excluded.

- **Primary education enrollment is also conditional upon passing a medical examination.** Because Roma are often unemployed and unregistered, they face tremendous difficulties accessing health care. Therefore, the compulsory medical examination creates yet another administrative barrier to education. In the last few years these exams have been organized during the obligatory pre-school year which has simplified the process for Roma families.
- **Extremely high dropout rates in primary education and barriers to re-entering the mainstream education system.** While the enrollment rates among Roma children for the first grade is between 82% and 90%, some 50% of Roma students drop out of school by the end of fourth grade. Thus, the proportion of Roma students who do not complete primary education is estimated at 65% (UNICEF 2010). Furthermore, without a legal means for dropout students to re-enter the education system, most students who leave school never return. Depending on the level of education completed prior to dropping out, some students will have the chance to finish primary education through an adult education program or obtain vocational training from the National Employment Services Program. At the moment neither option provides students with any meaningful education certificate.
- **Discrimination and lack of human rights for Roma education.** From the perspective of Roma children, school management and staff (including teachers) rarely exhibit welcoming attitudes towards them. Roma parents are often excluded from school board involvement. Serbian teachers seldom succeed in motivating Roma children in the school environment. Such attitudes contribute to the poor performance of Roma children, especially regarding examinations. However, this is yet another field in which substantial progress has been made by introducing Teaching Assistants to the classroom. Now there is an opportunity to better support Roma and other children who experience learning difficulties through individualized learning programs.

In sum, Roma in Serbia face a long set of education barriers, from enrollment issues to access to quality education. Consequently, their participation in education is one of the lowest in South Eastern Europe. Even though the low participation of Roma children in education is the primary problem, for those who are enrolled, segregation is a growing concern, especially within primary schools. Segregation has been reduced through the downsizing of special schools, but is still prevalent in schools for adult education since they serve mainly Roma. In order to prevent further segregation this issue should be addressed from the time that students enter the education system.

4.2 Roma and education—Serbian sample

This section summarizes our findings related to Roma exclusion in the education sphere, where we were able to identify certain trends as well as cluster specificities. First, we identified high enrollment rates of Roma children for obligatory education. The reported primary education dropout rate was less than suggested by the most recent research (e.g. MICS4) and segregation was not visible. Transfers to secondary education are a significant problem. The distance to schools and the costs related to secondary education are only part of the explanation, especially for poor rural families. The Delivery of Improved Local Services project (DILS) measures, which were later institutionalized through the provision of Roma education assistants, as well as a wide

awareness-raising campaign, contributed to producing these improvements in Roma participation in primary education. At secondary level there have been no such tools or advancements. Attempts at introducing a more robust affirmative action plan have been tried but few Roma families are aware of this, and even those that are find the application process difficult to complete. Roma children are almost completely absent from high schools.⁴ In sum, Roma exclusion from education happens gradually, with very few students ever reaching or completing high school, not to mention university.

The share of Roma is unequal in elementary schools in the Prokuplje cluster, regardless the schools' quality in teaching or equipment, as assessed by the school staff. The same is true for secondary schools in the Prokuplje cluster. In contradiction to official statistics on Serbian Roma in general, Roma in Prokuplje tend to continue on to secondary education at fairly high rates. In general high school they comprise less than 1%, and in medical vocational school they make up over 25%. Roma inclusion policies in Serbia pay special attention to increasing the number of Roma among teachers and medical doctors. Much promotion of these professions has been made among young Roma in order to streamline access to education and health services and thus improve two important pillars of human development at the same time.

In the Lebane cluster, the fact that the Roma population is much younger than the Serbian one does not translate into a larger percentage of Roma pupils in the local classrooms. Roma comprise 15% of the population and this corresponds to the share of Roma pupils in the schools. This share is unequal in elementary schools, regardless of their quality in teaching or equipment, but the variation is lower than in the Prokuplje cluster. Lebane too sees a higher percentage of Roma pupils continue on to secondary education compared to the Serbian average. Nine to ten percent of Roma here attend one of the two technical schools. None attend general secondary education.

In the case of the Surdulica cluster, the fact that the Roma population is much younger than the Serbian population makes the share of Roma students much higher than the general population. Roma are unequally distributed in elementary schools, but here this partly corresponds to the quality of the schools. Namely, the concentration of Roma is much higher in two distant rural schools. On the other hand, Roma are least concentrated in one of the only two schools that scored 'among the good ones' in student performance and 'good' on the physical condition of the school in our research (the others are mediocre for both indicators). Fewer Roma in this cluster attend secondary schools (e.g. 4%) as compared to the Prokuplje and Lebane clusters. None attend general secondary school, 10 attend a technical school and 29 go to agricultural school. It is probable, though, that some Roma children go to other cities for secondary education (e.g. Vranje and Niš).

In the Kikinda cluster, Roma are unequally distributed in elementary schools, regardless of the schools' quality in teaching or equipment. There is a school in the center of Kikinda that enrolls 30% of its pupils from outside its catchment area. The school's performance is outstanding, its infrastructure is good and it is well equipped with supplies, but this is not the school with the lowest share of Roma (here they make 7%). However, almost half of the Roma attending this school do so under the Special Education Needs (SEN) program. In accordance with official

4 There is no official statistical data on the proportion of Roma students in secondary schools. The estimates presented here are based on school administration reports and assessments by the Roma National Council.

statistics on Serbian Roma in general, in Kikinda Roma pupils rarely continue on to secondary education. Of the 2,375 pupils in Kikinda only 11 are Roma, and none of them attend general high school.

The practice of putting Roma children in special schools and classes is fading out. The dropout rate was lower than expected in comparison to official statistics. Often dropouts are caused by the migration of Roma families to EU countries, or to other regions of Serbia for seasonal work. There is a stark difference between urban and rural schools. Rural schools are more often of lower quality, although they usually provide a better pupil/teacher ratio.

Looking at infrastructure quality and student performance in the Prokuplje cluster schools, we do not find segregation of Roma other than general (non-ethnic) disparities between urban and rural schools. There are no “special” classes in the schools; children with SEN are dispersed throughout regular classes and are supported through individualized learning programs. There is, however, a separate special school with 34 children, all of them Roma. Children with SEN are unevenly distributed across the schools; however, there is no rule, either in dispersion of children with SEN, or in dispersion of Roma among them. Such decisions are made depending on the assessment of teaching assistants and their personalized approach to individual teaching programs. Roma are more concentrated in schools with favorable pupil/teacher ratios, but this indicator could be misleading. While in rural schools there are 3–5 pupils per teacher, in Prokuplje there is one school with 9 pupils per teacher and 3 schools with 10–15 pupils per teacher (the same is true with the music school). In the “special school” 8 teachers serve 36 Roma pupils. In other words, the favorable pupil/teacher ratio is being achieved through higher Roma attendance of lower quality rural schools and the special school. If this advantage is not used for teachers paying more attention to Roma children who lag behind, then it turns out to be a disadvantage of segregation along ethnic lines.

Grade repetition is not frequent among pupils in Serbian elementary schools. However, when it happens it is almost exclusively Roma who end up repeating grades. Schools of all sizes suffer dropouts. But Roma comprise between 80% and 100% of the dropouts across all schools. Generally, Roma children drop out of school more frequently in instances where their concentration is lower and where the pupil/teacher ratio is less favorable. This is another indication that Roma pupils are not being properly included in urban schools dominated by non-Roma students.

The Lebane cluster’s two village schools are mediocre, while the other 3 are among the better ones. The physical condition of the schools is again worse in the villages. The few children with SEN are evenly distributed across the schools. In total there are 10 children with SEN (in Stubla there are none), and only one of them is Roma. Roma attend all schools, with a more or less even concentration, and there are more Roma teachers in this cluster with a higher concentration of Roma than in the Prokuplje cluster. Grade repetition is not frequent among elementary school pupils. There are no over aged pupils or students learning at home. There are no dropouts from the rural schools (the one in Stubla only has 4 grades) and in others it is around 1%. Thirty to eighty percent of all dropouts are Roma.

There are no “special” classes in the schools in the Surdulica cluster; children with special educational needs are dispersed throughout regular classes and supported through individualized learning programs. Children with SEN are unevenly distributed across the schools. However, only 5 of these 30 children are not Roma, and in the city of Surdulica only one of three children with SEN is Roma, which is comparatively low in the clusters we have observed. It is hard to establish

an explanation for this, except for the fact that there is one urban school in which there is better performance, less Roma and less children with SEN. Here we arrive at a paradox: it is this school that has the largest number of Roma teachers (4), while in the two rural schools where there are high concentrations of Roma and no children with SEN, there is no Roma teacher. There are more peculiarities with regards to education in this cluster in comparison to the former two clusters. First, the grade repetition rate is higher, and, as usual, Roma make up between 70% and 100% of those repeating grades. Second, there are more over-aged pupils, two-thirds of them being Roma. Finally, dropouts exist in all of the schools and vary in size. What does not vary is the share of Roma dropouts—it is between 80% and 100% across all schools.

Concerning the quality of the primary schools in the Kikinda cluster, it is hard to establish a hierarchy. Moreover, Roma attend schools that perform better overall and others that perform worse. Some of these schools are in better physical condition and are well equipped and others fare worse in these respects. In addition to the existence of a “special school”, there are also two small special classes in two rural primary schools. However, there is no rule, either in distribution of children with SEN, or the dispersion of Roma among them. Such determinations depend on the assessment of teaching assistants and their approach to individual teaching programs. Grade repetition is not frequent among pupils in elementary schools, but is somewhat higher than in the other three clusters. Interestingly, grade repeats in this cluster tend to be of majority population pupils, not Roma. The dropout rate is low in this cluster and not all of these cases are Roma. The major problems begin to occur during the transition to secondary education. A large number of Roma do not continue education, and of those that do, some drop out.

We did not encounter evidence of racism or open discrimination of Roma in the schools. Nevertheless, two noteworthy matters attracted our attention. One was an ‘elite’ elementary school in Surdulica which is high performing and well equipped but less accessible to Roma children than other schools. The other case is the school in village of Bašaid (Kikinda municipality) that performs worse than other schools, has a high concentration of Roma, a special class dominated by Roma children and occasional cases of verbal ethnic conflicts.

To conclude, if the Roma segments are spread around settlements, Roma children are spread around to several elementary schools. This means that segregation is not very strong and especially not visible, with the exception of the special school in Prokuplje, which can be seen as a leftover from the previous educational system. However, there is always a lower incidence of Roma enrolling in the more ‘prestigious’ schools in the bigger cities. Also, the pupil/teacher ratio is not a determinant per se with regards to achieving better outcomes in education; more important is the individualized approach being offered to Roma pupils. Better scoring schools with a small share of Roma are inclusive for them if there are more Roma teachers. Rural schools with high a percentage of Roma might achieve good results if teaching assistants are active. This suggests that Roma children in general very much need effective support to stay afloat in the mainstream education system. So far this support is limited and with a short life span, since many Roma children leave school after the 4th grade. Thus we can conclude that education segregation becomes increasingly intensified after the middle of elementary school, resulting in extremely low participation in university education. This process particularly affects the poorer and rural Roma families. The situation in this regard is similar to that of spatial segregation: in Prokuplje, where the gears of Roma inclusion merge in more productive ways, the educational achievements of Roma are more pronounced; in Kikinda where the negative labeling of Roma by the majority community is the highest and institutional support more discriminative, Roma education also suffers.

4.3 Roma employment in Serbia—major trends

Together with education, employment is the most frequently mentioned source of Roma social exclusion. The major problems are inactivity and unemployment. These problems affect Roma women far more than men. The National Strategy for Improvement of the Position of Roma states that the low rate of economic activity affecting the majority of Roma is a consequence of economic culture, socioeconomic underdevelopment, marked political barriers in employment and a specific set of demographic factors. The Roma population is markedly young, with an above-average share of people below the age of 15. The share of those over 15 in the total Roma population is 58.3%. Low economic activity, a young age structure, and a large share of the population reliant on government support are the key contributing factors sustaining and deepening the divide between Roma and the majority population (e.g. 60% of Roma receive government support compared to 37% of the majority population).

The majority of Roma are outside the employment system, they are not (legally) economically active and they are often registered as unemployed. When they are employed, they tend to perform the most difficult and dangerous jobs at the lowest wages, normally informally. For instance, one of the most exploited groups of workers are the collectors of recyclable waste. Recently there have been efforts to recognize and formalize this form of economic activity.

The majority of Roma households have limited sources of income, such as seasonal agriculture and construction, grey sector activities, collection of recyclables, remittances from abroad and social benefits from the government. Two basic factors contributing to the unfavorable position of Roma in the labor market and confining the majority of Roma to low-paid and temporary occupations are: 1) low levels of education and vocational training, and 2) discrimination by potential employers. The result is that Roma are generally oriented towards affirmative action employment offerings from the National Employment Service. However, due to the global economic crisis and austerity measures, the share of the national budget for employment measures was reduced from 0.3% in 2011 to 0.15% in 2012. Second, many Roma are not familiar with the procedures for applying for employment support. On the other hand, there are cases of non-Roma declaring Roma ethnicity in order to gain such support (self-declaration is a standard part of the procedure at NES). Third, Roma rarely compete for 'first job' or 'self-employment' support. Most of them take part in public works. A feasibility study showed that this was the least efficient of all active employment measures since less than 5% of people engaged this way ended up with a permanent job (Arandarenko and Krstić, 2008). Roma work for a few months (6 at most) and then go on unemployment support again. This is related to the fourth problem: when starting on a public works project, or other formal jobs, the unemployed lose their right to financial welfare assistance. It takes a month or more after that to regain those unemployment benefits, which makes Roma reluctant to accept this form of employment.

4.4 Employment of Roma in the Serbian sample

Our research was only able to cover a sample size of Roma, employers and businesses in the segments we studied, but our findings have been so consistently unfavorable that no sample extension would change our basic conclusion. Our findings were also consistent with other research inquiries on this issue. In short, the share of formally employed Roma in Serbia is extremely low. Even when they are employed, it is usually confined to informal, short-term, unskilled, and physi-

cally grueling labor, often accompanied by health risks. Roma women fare even worse than men; besides employment they tend to be responsible for most of the house work.

There were no racist incidents reported in the Serbian sample. However, if one scratches the surface it is easy to find the tell-tale signs of discrimination. Once Roma enter a firm, it is likely they will be treated as any other employee, cooperate and socialize with other employees, join the trade union, and enjoy full labor rights. Most discrimination happens during the application process, which is usually 'justified' behind the argument that Roma do not have the requisite qualifications. An explanation from a German employer countervails this: *"The qualification is not that important. If they are diligent and have work discipline, they will learn these basic operations."* There are even signs that some employers are willing to hire Roma employees, but the Roma themselves do not show enough interest. If true, this points to a form of self-discrimination. They assume the widespread stereotypes of Roma as not being educated, skilled or diligent enough to get or keep a job. If there is no initiative from the National Employment Service or the public to announce vacancies, Roma do not find ways to ascertain decent employment. Often Roma visit the Center for Social Work to learn about public works opportunities, but even then many decide not to give up financial welfare assistance for a limited number of salary payments that are not considerably higher, in any case, than welfare assistance. This is especially so given that it is highly unlikely they will be able to keep the job for very long. Private employers recruit employees through their networks and via recommendations. As such, those Roma not living in segregated segments tend to be better networked, closer to employment-related information, and get more jobs.

With such a low incidence of employment, any particular concentration brings visible variation to the phenomenon. A single firm that employs a larger number of Roma paints the picture of Roma employment in that cluster. The Surdulica cluster offers a picture of Roma employment that is in accordance with the dominant stereotypes. Here there is a public utility company that employs 29 Roma men from the city in unskilled positions. Rural Roma, Roma women, and Roma from the poorest segments of the settlement are disadvantaged in this regard. In other cities the role of a public utility company alters the picture for Roma employment. In the poorest segment, Bojnik, there are no Roma among 24 persons employed in the public utility company and in neighboring Lebane there are only three. Under pressure of high unemployment non-Roma are pushing out Roma even from the least qualified, hardest and dirtiest jobs. In Prokuplje and Kikinda, the privatization of the public utility sector has brought about changes to Roma employment. In Kikinda a private waste collection company attracted more Roma (10) than a public utility company (3), although both employ slightly more than 100 people, while in Prokuplje there are only five Roma with full time jobs among the 67 employees at a recently privatized utility company. A single large firm in Prokuplje has significantly impacted Roma employment. In Prokuplje most Roma now work in manufacturing; they are mostly women who undertake unskilled labor. Ninety percent of them come from the Roma segments of the Prokuplje urban area.

There is no sign that Roma employment will improve much from the picture presented above. Local development plans and employment strategies foresee the further privatization of the public utility sector in other cities, too. This leaves Roma issues to the National Employment Service's active measures of employment which are too demanding for most Roma in administrative and educational terms and usually turn into public works which fail to provide formal full-time employment. Exceptionally striking are the complaints from our local Roma informants that even getting selected for two months of low paid public works is sometimes based on the

political affiliation of the applicant, not to mention appointments in public administration and public enterprises. For this reason, instances where foreign companies employ Roma, especially women, under regular employment conditions, present a sound employment model for Roma households as well as a cultural model that could set a new trend in Roma employment. Foreign companies tend to protect the values of equality, social responsibility and human development. Much more attention and support should be paid to Roma self-employment, especially in waste collection. Existing measures of support to self-employment are insufficient and often fail to offer real options for micro-financing. The initiatives in the field of social entrepreneurship and the Waste Collectors Trade Union should be extended greater financial, educational and management support in order to achieve sustainability and spread these experiences wider.

Absence from the labor market is one element in a downward spiral of Roma exclusion. A lack of basic education is just one of the factors contributing to Roma exclusion. Some of the employers in our sample noted they do not require formal education for many positions, just skills and diligence. But young Roma who grow up in ethnically segregated parts of settlements see people around them who combine informal work and social transfers as a survival strategy and learn that model of behavior and adopt values that are not favorable for entering the formal labor market. Finally, even if they do not want to accept such a model of economic behavior, which is a growing trend with increases in education attainment for new generations, they have to face progressive laws not being implemented thoroughly, informal networks being a primary channel of employment, public works being politically manipulated, and active labor market measures being poorly financed. A single firm in our sample offers proof that different practices are possible and that Roma could very well enter the workforce through normal channels and sustain such jobs over time.⁵ The readiness of many small employers in ethnically mixed communities points to another field where measures of support could be directed.

5. Participation and activism: Roma in the social, economic and political life of the local community

5.1 Political and civic activity and participation of Roma in Serbia

Serbia took a major step toward increasing the visibility of the Roma issue, advancing Roma political and social rights, and promoting the quality of living for Roma by adopting the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* (the Decade). In 2005, as a part of this process, the Government adopted National Action Plans (NAP) to improve the position of Roma in the fields of education, employment, housing, and health care, with a special focus on anti-discrimination, gender equality and poverty reduction. In 2010, a National Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Roma was adopted. The basic principle of the Decade is to include representatives of the Roma community in the planning and realization of all proposed measures. Serbia's NAP helped to spur 35 municipal action plans, including 42 small-scale projects in 31 municipalities targeting

5 The German company 'Leoni', in Prokuplje, produces cables for the automobile industry. Under the policy of corporate social responsibility they employed a high share of Roma workers, especially women. Currently, 'Leoni' employs 437 men and 1,513 women, among them 34 Roma men and 161 Roma women (the share of Roma in Prokuplje is slightly less than 5%). In the year preceding our research 'Leoni' had to fire 32 workers, only 4 of whom were Roma.

some 25,900 Roma in 129 communities. Infrastructure and reconstruction projects expanded water and sewage systems, and built or repaired houses, community centers and children's playgrounds. Employment projects provided vocational or self-employment courses, and education projects focused on preschool and primary school, and 100 Roma students were included in the school system. Although several projects and programs have been realized since the adoption of NAP and the National Strategy, the major problem remains that there is no permanent budget to finance the NAPs or the Local Action Plans (LAP).

Meanwhile, the Government of Serbia has established or has supported the establishment of several offices at national level to advance Roma inclusion and harmonize its efforts with international human rights protection standards. These are: the National Council for Ethnic Minorities, the Office for Human and Minority Rights, and the Permanent Secretariat for National Strategy. Working groups in the ministries in charge of implementing the Decade Action Plans and the Roma Strategy were also established. The working groups are in charge of proposing yearly priorities and mechanisms for allocating financial resources. After the National Council of Roma was established, Municipal Councils for inter-ethnic relations were set up in many municipalities with a significant share of Roma minority. In Vojvodina, the Provincial Council for the Integration of Roma and the Office for Roma Inclusion were established.

Concerning civil society representation in the political participation of Roma, the number of Roma NGOs increased significantly over the last 10 years. As a consequence of initiatives coming both from the 'top' and from the 'bottom', representatives of the League for the Decade, a network of Roma-led and pro-Roma NGOs, have been involved in governmental bodies addressing Roma issues. The Coordinator of the League identified these mechanisms as the most efficient models found in Serbia for regular dialogue between Roma civil society and the government. He pointed out that civil society's role in the council and working groups has gone beyond the boundaries of consultation to "active cooperation on implementation at the local level".

Apart from the above-mentioned formalization of political and cultural presentation and participation, most of the achievements in the Decade framework were made through project financing from the EU, UNICEF, the Fund for an Open Society and other donors. They have advanced the institutionalization of support mechanisms that target direct poverty alleviation. Notable examples include the establishment of the Network of Roma Health Coordinators and the service of educational assistants.

5.2 Roma voices in the Serbian sample

In the Prokuplje cluster, there is one local Member of Parliament (MP) of Roma ethnicity and a Roma Office comprised of 4 coordinators from the municipality of Prokuplje. Most importantly, the President of the National Council for Roma is from Prokuplje and the Western Serbia Regional Center of the National Council for Roma has been seated in Prokuplje. There are several Roma NGOs there, one of which is very active. There is no local Roma media, and no specialized Roma show or column. There is a folk dance group organized by an NGO and Roma organize a few public celebrations during the year. In Žitoradja municipality no Roma are represented in local government, and there is one Roma coordinator and two Roma NGOs, although they are not particularly active. Roma are not presented in the media and have only one organized public event per year. Roma living in the two villages in the cluster do not participate in the political,

social or cultural life of their settlements. They are completely oriented towards Prokuplje in all of these aspects. The exception is one school board member in elementary school in Žitni Potok.

In the Lebane cluster no Roma take part in local government. There are two NGOs in Lebane and none in the Bojnik segment. Lebane's NGOs are only indirectly involved in decision making, through communication with a Roma coordinator. Roma participate in school boards and trade union councils. There is no local Roma media in the cluster, and no specialized Roma show or column. The same 2–3 public celebrations of Roma cultural heritage, as in the other two southern clusters, are organized in the municipalities of Lebane and Bojnik (the International Day of the Roma on April 8, Saint Vasillia [Vasilica] on January 14, and Saint George [Đurđevdan] on May 6). Roma living in the two villages from this cluster tend not to participate in the political, social or cultural life of their settlements, except for being occasionally visited by the Roma coordinator.

In the Surdulica cluster there are two Roma members of the local parliament and one member of the municipal council (local government). There are a few NGOs in Surdulica, one of which is actively involved in consultations with local government and with the Roma coordinator. There is one more Roma NGO in Prekodolce. There is no local Roma media, and no specialized Roma show or column, but for some time the daily news in Romani language was broadcasted on a local radio station once a day. The same 2–3 public celebrations of Roma cultural heritage, as in the other two southern clusters, are organized in the municipality of Surdulica.

In the Kikinda cluster there is one local Roma MP and at the same time he is the Roma coordinator and a member of local government. There are Roma NGOs in Kikinda, one of them being active, but controlled by a political party and playing only a symbolic role in decision making. In Nova Crnja there are no Roma in local government (the only municipality in the sample without an appointed coordinator) and there is one active Roma NGO. There is no local Roma media, and no specialized Roma show or column. In Kikinda there is a Roma dance group and a jazz band. The celebration of Roma Day was funded by the local budget.

In sum, the typical structure of Roma representation and participation is as follows: there is no Roma representation at regional or sub-regional level; there might be 1–2 Roma members of local government, although they do not necessarily represent Roma political parties (they often represent the most influential parties, usually from the left side of the political spectrum); there is an appointed Roma coordinator with a consultative role, also influenced by the dominant political party; there are a few Roma NGOs which play a consultative role and advocate for Roma interests; there is no Roma self-government; there is no local Roma media; Roma cultural life is based on private practices with occasional public events, as well as a few religious celebrations and the Day of Roma.

However, large differences are obvious among settlements in which Roma live with respect to Roma representation and participation. Again, as with education, employment and housing infrastructure, it is rural Roma who are the most disadvantaged. The larger the settlement, the better represented Roma interests are. But there are differences between the clusters, too. Prokuplje seems to be far ahead of the other clusters, followed by Surdulica, Kikinda and Lebane at the end. Roma representation in Prokuplje seems to be close to what the design of Roma institutional support should provide. However, it is the presence of the President and one member of the National Council of Roma and their devoted activism that linked all the institutional components and organizational resources into a recognizable structure of action. Ties with national level institutions and cooperation with political parties in the localities are important for the

promotion of the Roma agenda at local level and improved inclusion. In Surdulica, not all institutional components mentioned above are present, but much is compensated by the highest civic engagement of Roma in the Serbian sample. Although here the influence of strong political parties on Roma representation is visible due to the activity of local NGOs, Roma participation seems to be the most authentic of all the clusters. In Kikinda major progress has been made thanks to the concentration of roles, positions and power in one person, but this also presents a major risk for sustainable inclusion of Roma in the local community. The Lebane cluster, and especially the municipality of Bojnik, has the highest concentration of extreme poverty and the weakest structure of Roma representation. These seem to be interrelated.

Roma participation in the planning of local development is weak, formal and restricted to 'Roma issues'. This situation is not brought about solely by the reluctance of local authorities to include Roma representatives in local planning, but also by weak Roma capacities to effectively engage in planning project activities. Budget shares devoted to Roma inclusion are symbolic. EU project funds represent important potential resources for advancing Roma inclusion, not only for their size, but also for the goals and clear targeting involved in the projects they could fund. The Delivery of Improved Public Services project, as mentioned earlier, is an example of good practice.

The above conclusion about Roma representation and participation is reflected in local planning and budgeting. The Prokuplje and Surdulica administrations are paying more attention to Roma inclusion and investing substantially more in this direction. This is especially so in Prokuplje which has a much larger local budget and is also influential enough politically to attract more resources from the central budget and more EU projects. This is the only municipality in the Serbian sample where there are significant investments in housing and infrastructure in Roma settlements.

6. Conclusion: where and how to proceed with the research

Roma marginalization is the result of a complex intersection of institutional development challenges, limited resources and opportunities, and suboptimal civic and political activism/representation. All of these factors are exacerbated by spatial segregation. Serbia's transition period has been defined by a heritage of weak national institutions and political clientelism on the one hand and the pressures from globalization and the neo-liberal atomization of society on the other. Against this context, Roma have had little opportunity to be successfully included in society. The individual resources of most Roma are too scarce for sustainable positioning in the labor market, and collective voice and action are too weak to accumulate enough political and economic strength to repulse the drivers of segregation and marginalization. Knowing that structures have been established to build capacities at all points of the Roma inclusion matrix (laws, strategies, political bodies, institutional measures, cultural identity, civic activism, etc.), two questions arise: why have Roma inclusion improvements been so slow and limited, and why does Roma inclusion fare better in some local communities than others, even if they seem similar in many aspects?

The general view of our sample shows that Roma who live concentrated in certain segments of settlements live in extreme poverty and segregation. They have small and poorly-constructed

houses built illegally in rural settlements. Infrastructure in the settlements usually means nothing more than a road and water supply. They have access to basic social services, although they face difficulties accessing them because of a lack of information and social and administrative skills. Roma people from our sample live from financial welfare assistance and occasional (seasonal) informal work. They rarely have secondary education or hold a permanent formal job. They have been poorly represented in local power structures and have minor influence on the planning and development of their communities. Some general measures have been established at the beginning of 2000s to alter these structural drivers of Roma exclusion. These measures have been widened and better tailored with Serbia's entry into the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005.

However, segregation is not a homogeneous phenomenon. It is worth observing the differences between the settlements and Roma segments in our cluster in order to detect the specific drivers of exclusion and segregation at the local level. First of all, there is notable evidence of differences in economic wellbeing and social inclusion between Roma living in more developed municipalities and those living in less developed municipalities. In this regard, the general disparity between Vojvodina in the north and the southern municipalities was expressed more in institutional practices than in economic support.

More important is the difference between Prokuplje and Kikinda as large municipalities on the one hand, and all of the smaller municipalities (including Nova Crnja in Vojvodina) on the other. Cities offered more opportunities for both formal and informal work and better access to social services and non-institutionalized support (NGOs). Cities also meant bigger local budgets, stronger communication links between local and central level institutions, a higher concentration of human resources and institutional capacities, and more space to solve Roma issues. Nevertheless, even these are of limited scope and very much dependent on project funds. Moreover, when scarce resources are invested in urban Roma segments this leads rural Roma to suffer more extreme deprivation. There are only a few exceptions here: Nova Crnja and Aleksandrovo are more urbanized and Roma there live dispersed throughout the settlement. In Prekodolce, Roma comprise the majority of the population in the village which is practically a suburb of Vladičin Han and well positioned on the road to Surdulica (but also has a strong Roma NGO in the settlement).

Second, there is small but important difference in the coping strategies of the households between the Kikinda cluster in the North and the other clusters. Roma households in the South receive very little help from the local administration. They reduce their expenditures by using electricity illegally and this is tolerated. On the other hand, in the Kikinda cluster, if a Roma household is not capable of paying for electricity it simply must make do without it. It can, however, access firewood for heating in the winter as well as free meals for children attending the school. It is difficult to say which of these examples is more inclusive. The system with more informality or the one with more formality? It is hard to measure because in both cases Roma live in poverty. It is probably more about less developed southern municipalities spilling over a part of their economic problem to the national budget through the (public) National Electric Distribution Company. Third, there are different approaches the local administration takes towards financial welfare assistance for Roma households. It could be said that it is more generous (more in scope than in size) in the Vojvodina cluster where local budgets can also count on financial resources from the provincial budget. In the South there is the case of Surdulica municipality where local Roma have regularly complained about the conservative approach taken by the local Center for Social Work. It is not only the structural determinants that place southern Serbia in a worse-off economic position or put Roma at the bottom of the social ladder but also the way in which local

administration interprets the process of redistribution. Finally, the importance of international projects in our municipalities is very high, not only because of the funds they bring, but also because they advance human rights and social inclusion standards and changes the values and normative framework at the local level.

Standards and goals set by international institutions and organizations through global policies of Roma inclusion provided a new institutional and political framework for improving the position of Roma in Serbia. Several basic structural gears of exclusion and deprivation have been addressed over the last several years: Roma ethnicity has been officially recognized as a constituency in Serbia, health care for the Roma population has improved markedly, basic education has become more widespread and inclusive and a set of institutional positions and mechanism has been enacted to serve as the backbone of sustainable Roma inclusion in Serbia. Still, moving out from extreme poverty is proceeding too slowly. Our research pointed to several interlinked causes for this which result in the marginalization of Roma from early childhood all the way through to old age. First, there is a vicious cycle of low education, unemployment, and poverty which often results in low education levels/attainment for the next generation. Recognizing that low education levels influence employment prospects and poverty, a set of measures was designed, introduced and preserved for several years to increase Roma enrollment in obligatory education and decrease the dropout rate. These measures were intended to become self-sustainable: schools played their role by providing enrollment opportunities for Roma children, Roma teaching assistants contributed by providing individualized educational support to children lagging behind, Roma NGOs promoted the value of education, and Roma health mediators maintained frequent contact with families, explaining the importance of education for childhood development. Enrollment has increased, undoubtedly, but the dropout rate remains stubbornly high. And, ultimately, it is the economic well-being of the parents that often plays the most significant role in a child's propensity to drop out of school. This can be due to a lack of income needed to pay for basic education costs or due to the need to migrate with the family in search of income elsewhere.

The pivotal role that poverty plays brings employment back to center stage. And this is where the system of support to Roma in Serbia is weakest. The carefully established institutional structure explained in the previous chapter might fail or be too slow to produce effective outcomes simply because the support to Roma employment is too limited. Public works have proven over and over to be ineffective in this regard. The NES measure called 'the first employment' usually requires at least secondary education, which is still rare among Roma. Measures for self-employment are insufficient both in financial and educational terms. In our sample it was the private sector that proved that things could be different. And examples of good practice are of exceptional importance. Support to Roma education was wide and deep; so too should be the support systems for employment. Some ideas are already being implemented in this regard (social enterprises, a trade union of waste collectors), but accessing sufficient resources in a time of economic crisis where the general unemployment rate is over 25% is particularly vexing. Some forms of employment support might be useful for the whole micro-community and not solely for the employed person and his/her family.

Recognizing the above, and having institutional mechanisms and legal provisions in place, the question is: why has there been so little improvement regarding Roma employment? Most concrete action to improve Roma employment will take place at local level and with local funds. This is where the capacity of institutional support to Roma is challenged most. We saw from the Prokuplje example that this is feasible, although the Nova Crnja or Lebane/Bojnik examples make

it seem almost impossible. The additional components needed are: better political organization and representation of Roma, increased political will (and less manipulation) from major political parties, more unity among Roma both at local and national level, and stronger advocacy and lobbying from the civic sector. Wherever we found at least two of these components to be strong, Roma marginalization was less severe.

* * *

From our research we learned how Roma marginalization is shaped by certain institutional development challenges, limited resources and opportunities, and suboptimal civic and political activism/representation. Still to be learned is how the combination of these factors should be approached and how policy makers and Roma activists should manage and combine their scarce resources to strengthen the Roma community and achieve better Roma inclusion results. In the next stage of the research we intend to investigate the dynamics and modes of intersection of these factors of inclusion in the empirical context of everyday Roma family life. For this reason we need to select different settlements to compare different levels of factors of inclusion/exclusion and their modes of intersection. We will investigate rural and urban settlements, various levels of economic development, and communities showcasing different degrees of inclusion.

Such research will help us better grasp the different structural factors that intermingle to produce marginalization. Yet, it is the everyday practices of certain ways of life by Roma families that perpetuate those sources of exclusion. Their social actions, individual and collective, can contribute to a decrease in marginalization. As such, we must investigate several family histories and accompanying contextual features (educational and employment opportunities, social services, etc.) to establish how individual resources and coping strategies result in similar patterns of exclusion or, conversely, platforms for a better life.

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Annex

Selected indicators of development, living standards and education

Table A1. Selected indicators of development, 2011, municipal level

Indicator	Serbia	CLUSTER 1		CLUSTER 2		CLUST. 3	CLUSTER 4		
		Prokuplje	Žitoradja	Lebane	Bojnik	Surdulica	Kikinda	N.Crnja	
Employed per 1,000 inhabitants	241	184	73	102	94	164	252	110	
Unemployed per 1,000 inhabitants ⁶	102	174	167	237	222	158	104	152	
Major industries of employ., in %	Public	28	45	53	51	62	51	23	42
	Manufac.	22	29	23	16	8	17	40	27
	Trade	14	5	3	8	6	5	9	9
Share of agricultural land in total land, in%	66	58	84	63	67	54	90	90	
Share of individual farmers in cultivated land, in %	83	87	88	87	92	54	67	84	
Employed in small businesses per 1,000 inhabitants	56	37	22	40	33	48	40	16	
Investments (Euro/head)	690	618	11	11	18	501	347	70	
Share of investments in new capacities, in %	58	82	0	0	77	18	29	44	

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

Table A2. Selected indicators of the living standards, 2011, municipal level

Indicator		Serbia	CLUSTER 1		CLUSTER 2		CLUST. 3	CLUSTER 4	
			Prokuplje	Žitoradja	Lebane	Bojnik	Surdulica	Kikinda	N.Crnja
Average wage, in Euro		380	270	280	270	280	340	320	300
Newly built apartments per 1,000 inhabitants		2.5	0.6	0.1	0.6	0	0.8	1	0.1
Roads, km per 100 km ²		48.7	47.7	44.9	59	65.9	32.9	22.8	28.2
Share of modern roads, in %		63	65	89	41	68	72	100	90
Persons per medical doctor		345	255	863	572	603	236	421	788
Share of health and social protection in budgetary expenses, in %		18	38	34	35	33	47	33	38
Share of education in budgetary expenses, in %		12	22	35	42	40	36	29	39
Educational institutions	Preschool	2,427	18	6	15	10	8	18	6
	Elementary	3,469	37	20	25	18	17	15	6
	Secondary	497	4	1	2	1	3	4	1
	Tertiary	189	1	0	0	0	0	2	0

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

Table A3. Selected indicators of education/literacy, 2011, municipal level

Indicator		Serbia	CLUSTER 1		CLUSTER 2		CLUST. 3	CLUSTER 4	
			Prokuplje	Žitoradja	Lebane	Bojnik	Surdulica	Kikinda	N.Crnja
Tertiary education, % of 15+	Total	16.2	13.3	4.9	7.9	4.7	11.1	12.1	7.6
	Urban	23.2	18.6	—	13.2	—	15.6	15.6	—
	Rural	6.1	5.0	4.9	4.1	4.7	5.3	5.9	7.6
Without primary education, % of 15+	Total	13.7	16.3	28.0	26.0	34.0	20.8	14.7	23.2
	Urban	7.0	7.6	—	14.7	—	14.2	11.7	—
	Rural	23.4	29.8	28.0	34.0	34.0	29.2	21.0	23.2
Illiterate, % of 10+	Total	1.96	3.4	6.2	5.9	9.1	5.0	1.9	3.8
	Urban	1.0	1.8	—	3.23	—	3.3	1.5	—
	Rural	3.3	5.9	6.2	7.8	9.1	7.2	2.6	3.8

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

