

Romania

Systematic Country Diagnostic

BACKGROUND NOTE

Roma Inclusion

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Acknowledgments

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Context

1. **The Roma¹ population is Romania's second largest ethnic minority.**² According to estimates by the Council of Europe the Roma make up 6 to 12 percent of the total population.³ Given the lack of ethnically disaggregated data and common reluctance among Roma families to reveal their ethnic identity to officials, it remains difficult to precisely assess the size of the Roma population.
2. **Romania's Roma are among the most vulnerable population groups with key indicators of well-being lagging substantially behind the general population.** The tremendous progress over the past two decades in raising incomes and converging with EU peers has not benefited all citizens equally. The latest data from the 2016 Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II)⁴ confirms that the Roma continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, material deprivation, and lack of access to basic services. As is the case for most Central and Eastern European countries, the vast majority of Roma in Romania continues to live in poverty, and is substantially over-represented among the poor.
3. **Current demographic trends underline the urgency of improving economic opportunities for disadvantaged Roma.** In the context of a fast-ageing Romanian society, Roma are expected to make up an increasing share of the overall working-age population. With approximately 40 percent youth and children (aged 0–14 years) the Roma population is significantly younger than the overall population where the same age cohort accounts for only 15 percent.⁵ Thus, improving labor market opportunities among young Roma would not only have a direct positive impact on the living conditions of vulnerable Roma communities, but would also contribute to the country's economic development more broadly (i.e. faster productivity growth and fiscal benefits through increased revenue from taxes and lower social assistance spending).
4. **There is a relatively strong political commitment in Romania to improve Roma's social inclusion as enshrined in national and EU policy frameworks.** In Romania, the Roma are an officially recognized

¹ In line with the Council of Europe (2012), here "Roma" is used as an umbrella term to refer to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travelers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. However, Definitions underlying the presented evidence on Roma may differ to some extent. For the purpose of the EU-MIDIS II survey, "Roma" refers to autochthonous "Roma" and does not focus on "Roma" who have moved from one EU Member State to another. Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016b.

² The Hungarian form Romania's largest ethnic minority, according to Census data from 2011

³ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma> This estimate is considerably higher than the numbers reported in the 2011 Census, according to which Roma make up 3.3 percent of the Romanian population. However, there are concerns suggesting significant underreporting. Also see: World Bank 2014.

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA); for the following refer to:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-results-2011-roma-survey?mdq1=theme&mdq2=3508> and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016a.

⁵ Romania will experience a substantial increase in the proportion of elderly people and a sharp decline of the overall size of the working-age population (expected to fall by 30 percent by 2050). See: World Bank 2014.

ethnic minority represented in the parliament. Under the European Roma Integration Framework, Romania has prepared its National Roma Integration Strategy 2015-2020 (NRIS) that aims to gradually eliminate poverty and social exclusion of Roma by stepping up its programs and policies in the areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing.⁶ The NRIS can be considered an important step towards achieving the national targets assumed under the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, ultimately its contribution to the agenda needs to be assessed against concrete actions and sustained commitment.

5. **The Government of Romania has assured a sufficient allocation of resources to implement the NRIS by using funds from the state budget, from local budgets, EU financial instruments, as well as other financing sources.** The NRIS stipulates a short-term Action Plan that indicates a total funding of 98 million EUR for 2015-16.⁷ Additionally, Romania will be allocated approximately 16 billion Euro from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the 2014-2020 period.⁸ Around €5 billion (of which €4.3 billion from the EU budget) will be invested under the ESF to improve social services and labor market institutions, promote education and skills, and reduce poverty and social exclusion. The Operational Programme for Human Capital (POCU) for the implementation of the ESF, which outlines the priorities and objectives, gives specific attention to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and disadvantaged communities, including Roma. More than 1.1 billion will be allocated to the corresponding priority axes 4 and 5.⁹

6. **Helping Romania make progress with the Roma agenda lies at the core of the WBG's mission to end poverty and increase shared prosperity.** Given the reality of social fragmentation in Romania, tackling the challenges faced by vulnerable Roma communities is key to reaching the poorest and most vulnerable pockets of the population. Moreover, continued progress in Roma's social inclusion bears enormous economic potential. It will be key to making sure that Romania's growth is both inclusive and sustainable, and, consequently, will be a critical aspect in the process of developing the new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) and Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD).

7. **This note complements the upcoming SCD and aims to inform World Bank Staff and a broader set of Romanian stakeholders about the relevance and status quo of the Roma agenda in Romania.** It draws attention to some key lessons from past engagement in order to advance the discussions among donors, government, and civil society. While a continued emphasis on improving diagnostics and national-level strategies and policies will be important, this note also asks whether new approaches and engagement formats are required to bring about change and give fresh impetus to the agenda.

⁶ See: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_romania_strategy2_en.pdf

⁷ 430,502,000 RON; Government of Romania 2014: 44.

⁸ See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-romania_en

⁹ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=8569>

Where are we today?

8. **Recent data suggest that some progress has been made towards the social and economic inclusion of Roma but still must go a long way in meeting national and international targets.** Despite commitments of the Romanian government and decade-long efforts by the EU and international donors, the disparities in living conditions, health, education, and employment between Roma and non-Roma remain staggering. These inequalities are deep-rooted, mutually reinforcing, and perpetuated across generations. For instance, poor health and inadequate education hamper one's access to earning opportunities and translate into a lack of opportunities later in life. At the same time, the lack of earning opportunities poses limitations to support children's continued education and to maintain living conditions conducive to good health. The data seem to confirm that there are hard-to-reach pockets of vulnerable Roma that have not seen significant improvements in their living conditions.

9. **Poverty and material deprivation among Roma have declined but remain high, particularly in spatially segregated Roma neighborhoods.** According to EU-MIDIS II, the share of Roma at risk of poverty¹⁰ was 70 percent in 2016 (FRA, EU MIDIS II¹¹), declining from 84 percent in 2011 (UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey¹²). However, the gap to the national average of 25 percent remains substantial. Income poverty among Roma strongly correlates with residential concentration, i.e. poverty levels are more pronounced in neighborhoods where all or most residents are Roma. Strikingly, 68 percent of Roma indicate living in such segregated neighborhoods. Severe material deprivation is still widespread, and 62 percent of surveyed Roma households find it difficult to make ends meet. About a third of Roma live in households that experience hunger, i.e. in which at least one person went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month. This share declined from 63 percent in 2011.

10. **Inequalities between Roma and non-Roma start early on in the lifecycle, as is illustrated by the low participation of Roma children in early childhood education.** The EU's strategic framework for cooperation in education and training – Education and Training 2020 – has set a benchmark to ensure that at least 95 percent of children aged between four and the starting age of compulsory primary education (between six and seven) participate in early childhood education. While the general population is on a good path to achieve the EU target (with a share of 86 percent in 2014), Roma lag far behind: only 38

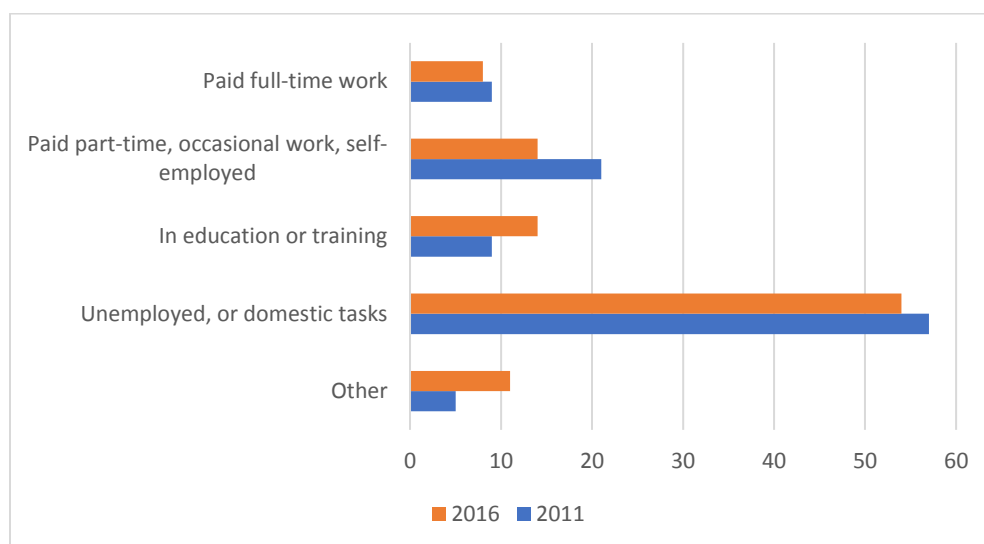
¹⁰ I.e. have a disposable income below 60% of the national equalized median income

¹¹ If not indicated otherwise data presented in this section comes from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016 EU-MIDIS II survey, which collected information from over 25,500 respondents from different ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds in all 28 EU Member States. The data are representative for Roma living in nine EU Member States in geographic or administrative units with density of Roma population higher than 10 %, who self-identify as "Roma" or as members of one of the other groups covered by this umbrella term. In Romania, interviews were conducted in 1,408 Roma households covering 5,764 individuals.

¹² All numbers for 2011 are based on data from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011 and or the and FRA Pilot survey 2011; see: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-results-2011-roma-survey>

percent of children of this age cohort attend some form of early childhood education (EU MIDIS II, 2016).¹³ No significant improvements have been made in this regard since 2011 (37 percent).¹⁴

Figure 1. Occupation Status, Roma aged 16-24 years, percent



Sources: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011; FRA, EU MIDIS II 2016

11. **While there has been a steady progress in educational attainment among Roma, available data suggest that the most vulnerable Roma have not benefited from this development.** The younger generations are gradually achieving higher levels of education (see [Figure 2](#)). However, no improvements have been made with regards to participation levels in compulsory education comparing 2011 and 2016 data. Only 77 percent of Roma children who should be in primary or secondary education attended school in 2016.¹⁵ 77 percent of Roma aged 18-24 years have left school early¹⁶, and 15 percent of 7-14 year old Roma are not attending any educational level.¹⁷ These numbers seem to suggest a non-negligible number of hard-to-reach Roma that fall through the cracks of the Romanian education system without significant progress. Young Roma women are particularly disadvantaged, as is reflected in higher drop-out rates and lower educational attainment.

¹³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016a.

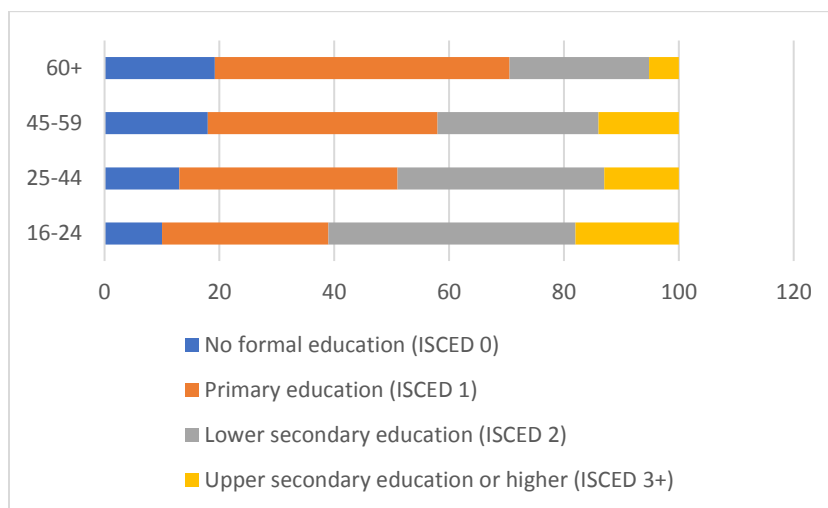
¹⁴ UNDP/WB/EC Regional survey 2011 and FRA Pilot survey 2011

¹⁵ compulsory-school-age children (6-16) participating in education

¹⁶ Early leavers from education and training denotes the percentage of the population aged 18-24 years having attained at most lower secondary education (ISCED 2011 levels 0, 1 or 2) and not being involved in further education or training. There are some deviations from the Eurostat definition.

¹⁷ See: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016a.

Figure 2. Highest completed education level, Roma by age cohort, percent



Source: FRA, EU MIDIS II 2016

12. Moreover, young Roma seem to struggle with the transition from education to employment.

Despite achieving higher education levels than previous generations (see **Figure 2**), a staggering 63 percent of Roma in the 16-24 years age cohort are ‘neither in employment, nor in education or training’ (NEET), and mainly report unemployment or domestic responsibilities as their occupation status (see Error! Reference source not found.). The NEET rate remains almost unchanged since 2011 (62 percent)¹⁸ and the gap to the national average of 18 percent is drastic (Eurostat, 2015).¹⁹ It is particularly young Roma women who find themselves outside the labor market and education system: the NEET rate of Roma women is 77 percent compared with 52 percent of their male counterparts.

13. Employment rates and average earnings among Roma are far below those of the general population, or even non-Roma neighbors.

46 percent of the Roma indicated being in paid work in 2016²⁰ (EU MIDIS II), compared to a national employment rate of 66 percent²¹. The employment status differs substantially between men and women, and between younger and older generations. For instance, the

¹⁸ Based on the household questionnaire and respondent questionnaire on self-declared current main activity, excluding those who did any work in the previous four weeks to earn some money. The survey questions from 2011 and 2016 differ slightly.

¹⁹ Restricted comparability with the Eurostat NEET rate. Percentage of the population 15-24 years that is not employed and not involved in further education or training, based on the ILO concept. See: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016a.

²⁰ For Roma aged 20-64 years; paid work rate is calculated based on the self-declared current main activity. Persons who provide unpaid help in family businesses were excluded. This is a rough approximation of the employment rate definition used by Eurostat to measure Europe 2020 targets. In Romania, particularly low shares of self-declared unemployment, at 5 %, are observed (compared with an average 34% across the 9 countries included in the survey report). This seems to be related to the share of persons engaging in domestic work, particularly of women. (See: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016a.)

²¹ Europe 2020 employment rate 2015: This is calculated by dividing the number of persons aged 20 to 64 in employment by the total population of the same age group. Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016a.

paid work rate for Roma women is only 27 percent as opposed to 64 percent of Roma men. Roma women tend to be primarily responsible for domestic tasks and care responsibilities: while 56 percent of females indicate this being their primary activity, for only 22 percent for males this is the case.

14. **Contrary to common stereotypes, survey evidence shows that Roma aspirations for employment and education are similar to those of non-Roma.** In spite of existing inequalities of opportunity Roma parents still want to see their children achieve higher levels of education. About 73 percent of Roma parents want their children to complete at least secondary education, compared to 92% of non-Roma parents living nearby (World Bank, 2014:11). Similarly, there is a clear preference for secure and regular employment: 74 percent of Roma men and 76 percent of women report preferring “secure employment but low paid” over “having a higher income but insecure and irregular”, compared to 82 and 83 percent for male and female non-Roma neighbors (World Bank, 2014:11).

15. **Poor housing quality and inadequate access to basic health, water, and sanitation services remain a major burden for many Roma communities.** In 2016, 68 percent of Roma reported living in households without tap water inside the dwelling, and 80 percent reported not having a shower or bathroom inside. These numbers reveal a sizable gap to the general population with respective shares of 38 percent and 31 percent (Eurostat, EU-SILC 2016), although 2011 data indicate some improvements (up from 78 percent and 85 percent respectively). Moreover, only half of all Roma aged 16+ years indicate that they are covered by basic health insurance.²² Among the nine EU Member States included in the survey, only Bulgarian Roma have a lower rate of insurance coverage.

16. **Lack of formal property rights contributes to marginalization of Roma, as it denies access to infrastructure, social services, and credits, and restrains economic opportunities.** Research carried out by the World Bank in 2015 in six UATs²³ in two counties in Romania, found that out of 480 households (including 360 Roma households), almost 50% were not aware of procedures to register land. In areas within these four counties where systematic registration was implemented 27% did not have any property documentation, which was mainly related to the lack of identification documents and involved costs. There are many Roma households who do not have formal legal rights to their land and buildings, even when they have been living on the land for years, decades or centuries. The identification of Roma as owners is complicated due to the lack of inheritance papers and the existence of unauthenticated hand written sale contracts. Informality creates difficulties for accessing social protection benefits, as these are accessed by place of legal residency.

17. **Negative stereotypes and mistrust further reinforce Roma’s exclusion in multiple social and economic domains.** Survey data from 2016 indicates that a third of Roma report having experienced harassment²⁴ due to their ethnicity.²⁵ The share of Roma reporting they experienced discrimination due

²² I.e. national basic health insurance and/or additional insurance

²³ Administrative territorial unit, such as a city or commune

²⁴ Including five acts of harassment: offensive or threatening comments, being threatened with violence, offensive gestures or inappropriate staring, receiving offensive emails or text messages, and finding offensive, personal comments on the internet.

²⁵ Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016; see: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-second-eu-minorities-discrimination-survey?mdq1=theme&mdq2=3508>

to their ethnicity (in the past 12 months) was 29 percent in 2011 and 21 percent in 2016. On the other hand, trust in public institutions among Roma is relatively low: 54 percent indicate not trusting the country's parliament and 48 percent have no trust in the legal system (EU-MIDIS II 2016). This fact points to a deep mistrust between the two population groups.

Lessons from the World Bank's Roma engagement

18. **Roma inclusion has been a central element of the World Bank's engagement in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans for over a decade.** During the early stages of this engagement a focus was on generating data to better understand Roma poverty and exclusion. While evidence generation continues to be an important part of the Bank's value proposition for Roma inclusion in ECA, there is also increasing recognition that the Bank needs to better operationalize the Roma inclusion agenda throughout the portfolio.

19. **The World Bank Romania country office began its systematic focus on the inclusion of the Roma minority with its 2014–2017 Country Partnership Strategy (CPS).** The CPS recognizes the importance of Roma inclusion for reducing poverty and fostering sustainable income growth for the bottom 40 percent of the population. One of its three pillars explicitly focuses on social inclusion through (i) inclusive services for marginalized communities, and (ii) improving the social protection system. The CPS addresses social inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged people, including Roma, in line with the EU's principle of explicit, but non-exclusive targeting of Roma.

20. **The World Bank's engagement on Roma inclusion provides some valuable lessons on the practical challenges and opportunities to advance the agenda, both inside an institution like the World Bank as well as in the engagement with external stakeholders.** The World Bank team in Romania developed a new *Roma Filter* for mainstreaming Roma-sensitivity across the Bank's Romania portfolio. Between FY15 and FY17, the Roma Filter has been systematically applied to the Romania country portfolio, with focus in the third year on targeted support to two new projects identified to be high impact for increased attention to the Roma agenda, including additional financing for the Integrated Nutrient Pollution Control Project (INPCP) and the Justice Services Improvement Project. The Roma Filter confirmed the high relevance of Roma issues to the Bank's portfolio in Romania. By systematically screening the portfolio at concept note stage for entry points on the Roma agenda - beyond the reflexive focus on education and social protection – allowed Bank teams to integrate a strategic Roma lens in operations focus on rural infrastructure upgrading or justice system modernization, which have been found to be areas with the opportunity to create a high impact for Roma communities.²⁶ The screening has proven to be most effective if it takes place at the earliest stages of project preparation in an iterative and highly participatory process with task teams and management.

21. **Developing practical ways in which the World Bank can support capacity building for non-governmental pro-Roma civil society organizations has proven to be successful.** An example is the technical assistance provided under a reimbursable advisory services (RAS) agreement with the Norway Grants to increase the capacity of the Roma Education Fund (REF) Romania to implement the ECD Project "Ready Set Go" (also funded from the Norway Grants). The support was aimed at enhancing the capacity of the REF Romania in project management, monitoring and evaluation, as well as fiduciary

²⁶ As confirmed by a systematic portfolio screening over three fiscal years (FY15-FY17) conducted by the ECA Social Development team. A majority of World Bank lending and non-lending activities was found to be relevant for Roma inclusion. See: World Bank, 2017a.

responsibilities. The impact of this RAS is evidenced not only by the successful implementation of the “Ready Set Go” project, but also by several new projects that were prepared by REF Romania and approved under the new Operational Programme for Human Capital (POCU).

22. **Moreover, the Bank’s experiences with the agenda reveal a need to further strengthen government institutions and stakeholder collaboration.** Improving the knowledge and evidence base is only one side of the equation. A recurring theme in the Bank’s engagement has been the lack of Roma voice in policy processes. In practice it has been extremely challenging to engage Roma communities, local and national stakeholders in a meaningful policy dialogue. Task teams have identified a lack of stakeholder capacity, clear mandates, and accountability mechanisms as bottlenecks for policy effectiveness and community engagement. Moreover, the declared Government commitment to the agenda has not always been reflected in the allocated public funding.²⁷ In response to this, the Bank formed in 2017 the Roma Sounding Board (RSB) to serve as a platform for more effective communication and engagement between civil society organizations working on the Roma agenda in Romania, the World Bank, and other external stakeholders. The RSB consists of eight civil society organizations active at the national level and eight Roma-organizations active at the local or regional level, with one NGO representing each region of Romania.

23. **One of the most commonly cited obstacles for Roma-sensitive and Roma-targeted policies, programs and projects - both inside and outside the World Bank - has been the dearth of disaggregated data and robust analysis.** There is a general lack of reliable ethnically disaggregated data in Romania, which in turn is a constraint for Roma-relevant diagnostics that inform policy development. Similarly, it has proven to be hard to measure policy effectiveness given the lack of results indicators that adequately capture the progress of Roma’s inclusion. All of this is however necessary to improve targeting of both the Bank’s assistance and of relevant Government policies (World Bank, 2017a).

²⁷ See: World Bank, 2014:25; World Bank, 2017a; World Bank, 2017b.

The way forward

24. **Over the years the World Bank has developed very concrete policy advice on making progress on the Roma agenda in Romania covering a broad range of sectors and policy areas.** In 2014 the World Bank conducted a comprehensive study that takes a broad look at Roma's socioeconomic achievement gaps in the country (World Bank, 2014). The report offers recommendations in five key "intervention areas": (a) early childhood development; (b) skills and employability; (c) location-specific living conditions; (d) addressing discrimination; and (e) capacity of public service providers. Many of the recommendations have been taken on board by the Romanian Government and its development partners and are reflected in current strategies and programming. For example, specific measures have been implemented to close the early childhood education gap, build public sector capacity, or target disadvantaged communities with critical infrastructure investments. However, other areas have not seen the same degree of attention. For example, more work needs to be done to improve employability of Roma youth helping them transition from education into the labor market.

25. **While improving the diagnostics of Roma deprivation is important, a focus on traditional expert advice appears to be insufficient to make progress on Roma inclusion.** The Roma agenda has been dominated by traditional policy advice of international donors based on the creation of evidence and knowledge-sharing. The underlying assumption was that this approach would lead counterparts to make evidence-based choices for policy development. Instead, the conversations with counterparts have often failed to gain traction with the Roma agenda, given practical barriers, political economy issues, and prevailing anti-Roma attitudes.

26. **Moving forward, any dialogue and engagement needs to start from the understanding that Roma inclusion will not succeed through a top-down approach alone.** Devising solutions for the complex problems Roma communities face requires collaboration between a range of local and national stakeholders to share knowledge and ensure smooth implementation. Despite formal commitments among counterparts it has been difficult to translate these into concerted efforts among various government and non-government stakeholders. Some stakeholders are reluctant to advance the agenda due to ethnic stigma and stereotypes. Hence, given an overall negative atmosphere surrounding the Roma agenda, a focus on ensuring counterpart buy-in is insufficient. Instead, there is a need to garner widespread support on the ground recognizing the importance of trust between Roma and non-Roma communities.

27. **One key insight from successful interventions is that it is paramount that marginalized communities are actively engaged in processes of social inclusion.** The only way to have a sustainable impact on the lives of marginalized communities is to work *with* them and not just *for* them. However, marginalized communities are often spatially and socially isolated, hence their mobilization requires not only actions within the community, but also a change in the way the other local stakeholders see those communities. This includes the mayor's office, school teachers, civil society, employers, etc. and requires continued efforts that go beyond ad-hoc initiatives. CSOs that have already built trust and long-standing relationships within the local community will be critical partners in this regard.

28. **Hence, future engagements will need to place renewed emphasis on bottom-up initiatives that bring together key stakeholders at the local level.** Such an approach will help to address the disconnection between Roma needs and public services by both improving the understanding of Roma's needs and challenges and by building widespread support for the agenda. Community engagement will be a precondition for trust-building activities that overcome frictions between Roma and non-Roma and foster mutual understanding. Existing frameworks, such as community driven development (CDD) or community-led local development (CLLD) can be useful approaches to start a new conversation around Roma inclusion in Romania (World Bank, 2013).

29. **That said, successful program and policy development continues to rely on the generation sound evidence which should remain a key pillar of the Roma agenda.** Maintaining the focus on concrete results in Roma's social inclusion will require improved data availability for impact assessments, monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, more exploratory work needs to be done to identify good practices at the local level and effective ways to improve inter-ethnic relationships as well as between service providers and Roma communities. For instance, while it is often suggested that mediators are an effective means to address discrimination at the service delivery level, there is little evidence proving the impact of this approach. Ultimately, sustained progress in social inclusion will require changes in public opinion and social norms – and an environment that encourages these changes.

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