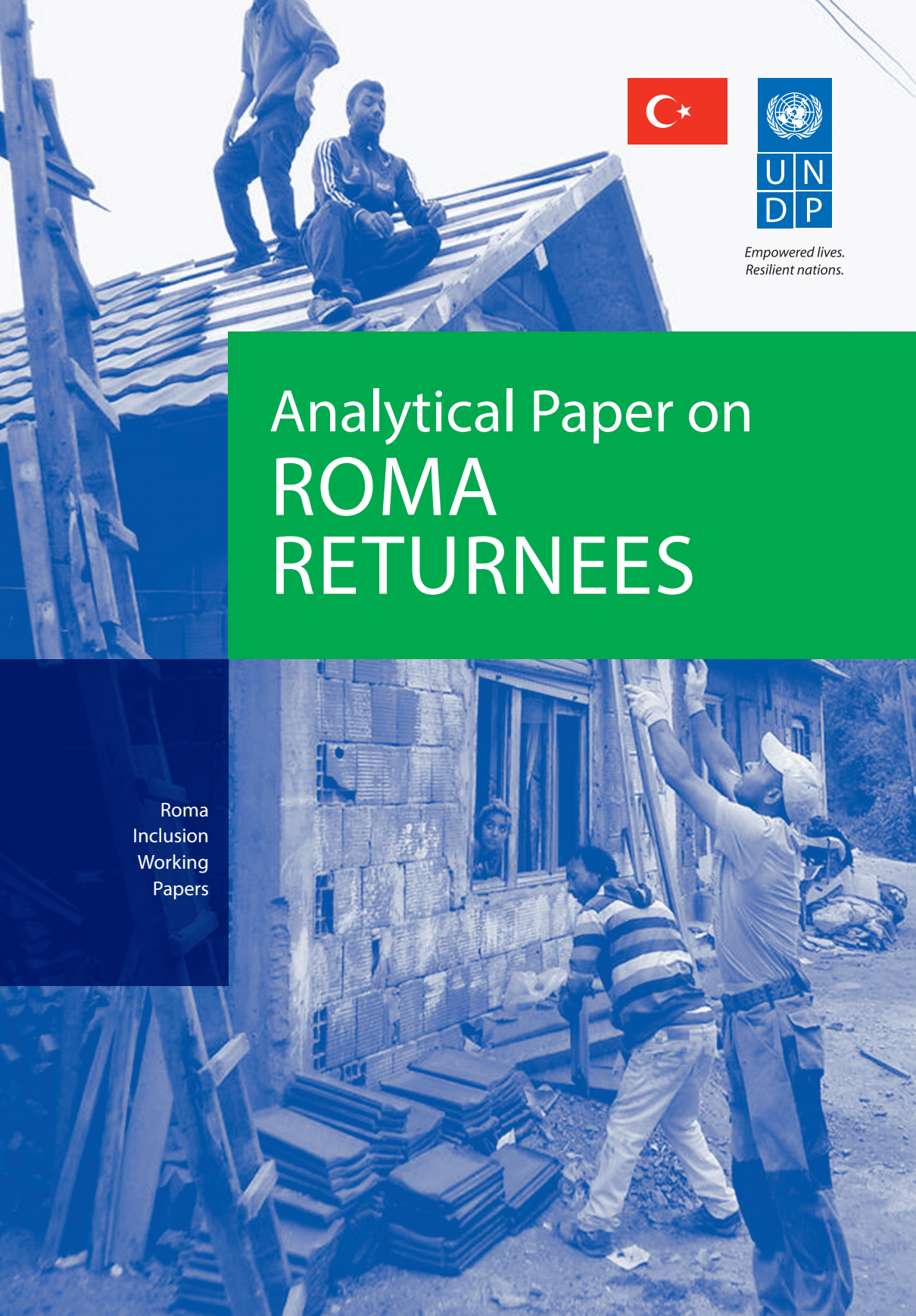




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Analytical Paper on ROMA RETURNEES

Roma
Inclusion
Working
Papers



The project “Support the Reintegration of Roma Returnees” is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the financial support of the Government of Turkey.

Analytical Paper on ROMA RETURNEES

September 2017



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Introduction

The recent migration crisis has posed severe challenges for Europe, having an enormous impact on all asylum seekers and related policies. Although only one percent of requests submitted so far in the EU countries have been considered admissible, citizens of the Republic of Serbia continue to apply for asylum in big numbers¹. What is more, many of the asylum applications are unfounded and their increase threatens to jeopardize the EU visa-free regime for Serbian citizens, which was granted to Serbia in 2009.

The other side of the same coin is the expected rise in a number of returnees. According to estimates of the German government, **up to 200,000 Serbian citizens are expected to be returned from the EU in the near future. Most of them are Roma**². This is recognized by the Strategy for Reintegration of Returnees, which singles out Roma as a group at particular risk in the return process that should receive special attention.

The main purpose of this assignment is thus to conduct analysis and prepare a report about the current situation of Roma returnees under the readmission agreement in Serbia. In particular, **this paper is an attempt to reveal impact of the inclusive Roma housing, employment and education interventions under the UNDP project 'Reintegration of Roma Returnees in Serbia'** and make assessment on strengths and weaknesses of the applied 'cooperation model'. The final objective is to support economic empowerment and social inclusion of Roma returnees in Serbia.

Having in mind the specific tasks of this assignment, the work was carried out through desk research and review of the most relevant national documents, as well as through the field interviews with Roma returnees in order to observe the chang-

1/ Serbian nationals are in the 7th place of the total number of applications received in the 2nd quarter of 2016, with 6,920 asylum applications registered in Germany and other EU countries.

2/ According to the **Commissariat for Refugees and Migration**, 81.6% of 2,866 registered returnees in 2015 under readmission agreement were Roma. In 2016 and the first half of 2017, they constituted 73.7% and 76% respectively.

es at the sites where the intervention is taking place (cities of Niš, Subotica and Vranje). The observations and feedback from the UNDP project beneficiaries, as well as from a number of other Roma returnees that have not been included in the project, was collected with the help of Roma coordinators. For these purposes, detailed questionnaire has been developed. The analysis focused on inclusive housing, employment and education outcomes.

This report sets out structure with five chapters. Following the introduction, chapter 2 gives overview of the current situation regarding Roma returnees. Chapter 3 provides beneficiary analysis in the cities where the intervention is taking place, describing their satisfaction, attitudes and benefits based on the field interviews, while chapter 4 portrays ingredients of the successful 'cooperation model' for the inclusion of Roma returnees. Finally, chapter 5 discusses main challenges and provides recommendations on how to proceed forward.

2

Overview of the current situation

It remains questionable if the migration crisis has raised interest of policy makers and donors for Roma returnees in Serbia or the agenda has been somewhat sidelined. In any case, the issue of Roma returnees cannot be solved separately from the challenges faced by the returnees in general and Roma people in the process of their socio-economic inclusion in Serbia.

There are a lot of things, which are still unknown regarding returnees. For instance, none of the state institutions are collecting data about their knowledge of Serbian and foreign languages and at what level is their knowledge. There is no systematized information about the schools in which their children went abroad. The same applies to the National Employment Service register about the knowledge and skills of the returnees. It is not surprising then that only 89 people have been registered as returnees in 2015 in their database. For 58, out of that number, individual employment plans have been developed, while 16 persons have taken part in the active labour market measures.

The position of Roma at the labour market, for the sake of illustration, is also far cry from satisfactory, as seen in the Box 1 below.

Box 1: Position of Roma minority at the labour market³

- Unemployment rate of 59.1% compared to 17.9% in the general population
- Higher long-term unemployment
- One-third of unemployed between the age of 15 and 30
- Informal employment of 70%, compared to 27% for non Roma population
- Employment rate of 26% (Roma women 13%)
- Longer waiting time for employment
- Large number of inactive young people (81%), especially Roma girls

^{3/} Source: Roma inclusion index, 2015 and UNDP, WB and EC, Data on vulnerability of Roma, 2011.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015), as well as the Strategy for Improvement of the Position of Roma from 2009⁴ identified education, housing, health and employment as crucial areas for poverty reduction among the Roma population. The subsequent, newly adopted **Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (2016-2025)** also covers those priority areas, aiming at their social inclusion and combating Roma discrimination, as well as creating conditions for their full access to human rights. The Strategy does not mention returnees as a separate group, but it points out several important issues for returnees such as improvement of procedures for obtaining relevant documents, establishment of position of local Roma coordinators, health mediators and teaching assistants.

As already above-mentioned, the **Strategy of Reintegration of the Returnees⁵** - which gives strategic framework for national and local institutions in dealing with socio-economic integration of returnees – emphasizes Roma as a particularly vulnerable group and maps key challenges in the process of their successful social inclusion. It underlines low availability of data regarding returnees, as well as their incomparability, which undermines adequate understanding of their needs. It also notes particular problems, for example of children, which do not speak Serbian language and thus have problems in taking part in the school classes.

The National Employment Strategy for the period 2011-2020 recognizes returnees and Roma as vulnerable groups that have problems in labour market inclusion, but only mentions self-employment through social entrepreneurship as a measure for their economic empowerment.

Although existing national strategies set up relevant framework for dealing with Roma returnees, they do not offer practical solutions, often leaving returnees without proper assistance for reintegration in the society. On the other hand, **local self-governments have limited capacities to deal with their inclusion.**

The existence of local action plans (LAPs) in the area of social inclusion of Roma and the budget for their implementation proves to be a prerequisite for solving the problems of Roma in their communities, including returnees. The LAPs for migration and returnees – irrespective of the quality of documents and if they are copy-pasted instead of based on proper needs assessments – have a cohesive function and become a reference framework for the programmes and activities fo-

4/ The Strategy was in force until 2015.

5/ It is based on the Agreement on readmission of persons residing without authorization between Republic of Serbia and the European Union, which entered into force on the 1st of January 2008.

cused on social inclusion of Roma⁶. They include housing solutions as well income generating activities and facilitation of access to different services.

The situation at the local level is not only determined by the capacities of local self-governments, but also other actors, especially civil society organizations dealing with Roma issues and various projects of international development agencies. For instance, **the inclusive UNDP project 'Reintegration of Roma Returnees in Serbia', implemented in cooperation with Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and Standing Conference of Roma Associations of Citizens – League of Roma**, entails partnerships between government, local authorities, communities, private sector, civil society and International organizations.

The implementation of activities runs in three pilot cities (Niš, Subotica and Vranje) with a higher number of registered returnees, and includes:

- a) Economic empowerment in Niš** - addressing the challenges of unemployment and lack of income. UNDP and its partners (City of Niš, Clean Earth Capital, Centre YUROM and Help) established the operational Incubator Center. All the partners have significant role: the City of Niš, as the local self-government, has provided 20% of funds for the implementation of activities, helping with equipment and licenses; Clean Earth, as an American construction socially responsible company, has provided a building lot; Centre YUROM, as a local Roma NGO (member of Standing Conference of Roma Associations of Citizens – League of Roma Network), has been in direct contact with returnees and managed the work of Incubator centre; Help, as an international NGO, has provided the training equipment; while UNDP has facilitated partnerships and controlled implementation. Roma returnees were employed by the Roma cooperative Mahala 1 as construction workers, engaged on building of their own houses. Apart from providing them with employment, the intervention enabled Roma returnees with market-oriented construction skills through training as well as necessary legal advice.
- b) Housing solutions in Nis and Vranje** – providing resolution to housing problems as one of the basic conditions for successful re-integration of returnees. Under this component, returnee construction workers have been engaged in reconstruction of houses, ten returnee houses have been refurbished in Nis and ten in Vranje, and additional community construction projects (roads, etc.) have been implemented and materials for two additional homes have

6/ According to the Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Serbia, 126 municipalities have adopted their LAPs so far, including the allocation of specific municipal budget lines for the implementation of the plans.

been secured through rational and engaged work of construction workers from the Incubator Centre.

- c) **Education of returnees in Subotica** – supporting returnees to obtain documents required for the enrolment of children into the education system (personal documentation, health records, etc). The City of Subotica and the Roma Education Centre have provided help to more than 50 pupils through ‘support packages’ including Serbian language classes, mentoring, tutorials, after-school activities, and materials linked to specific grades and needs. The support package has been designed to fit specific needs of each pupil. Furthermore, a comprehensive database of returned persons and their families has been created including their social cards and reports of received assistance. The Roma Education Centre has also trained professionals to provide mentoring support to Roma children in overcoming language barriers.

Beneficiary analysis

Main findings from the field survey, i.e. 47 interviews with Roma returnees in three cities (13 in Niš, 18 in Subotica and 16 in Vranje) are examined in this chapter. The analysis is based on detailed questionnaire (enclosed as the Annex 1 of this report), developed for the purposes of this task.

Table 1: Number of interviewed Roma returnees

	Project participants	Non-participants	TOTAL
Niš	11	2	13
Subotica	18	0	18
Vranje	12	4	16
TOTAL	41	6	47

Having in mind rather small sample of this survey – in general and especially in the three specific cities individually – as well as the minor number of interviewed non-participants of the UNDP project⁷, as seen from the table 1 above, **it is very hard to give statistically viable and quantitatively significant conclusions.**

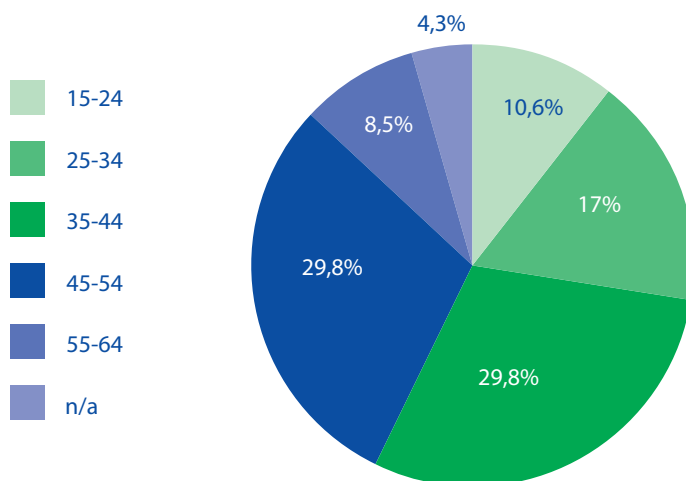
However, in some cases, as you will see below, the spread between the answers is wide enough to allow for comparison between the cities, providing statistically significant assumptions. In any case, **the sample is sufficient to grasp the level of satisfaction, needs and attitudes of the respondents, and to get significant insight into impact and benefits of the project for the Roma returnees.**

Profile of surveyed returnees is as follows: 2/3 men and 1/3 women, with one case when the interviewee did not want to respond to this question. All are working age

^{7/} This was especially the case in Subotica, where Roma domicile population, that did not participate in the project, was very closed and revolted because the project was dedicated only to Roma returnees, so they were no willing to take part in the survey and provide any answers.

population, aged 15 to 64. More detailed age structure of the respondents can be seen in the graph 1 below.

Graph 1: Age structure of the interviewees



All the interviewees have citizenship of the Republic of Serbia. Consequently, all who responded to the question said they have been signed in the register of births or that they have birth certificate.

When asked to name one good thing that happened to them in the previous six months, there were no difference between the interviewees in Niš, Subotica and Vranje. The good things are **mostly related to the important family issues (weddings, births, health, etc) and housing.**

*"Our middle son got married, the elder had another child, the family is slowly growing."
(respondent in Niš)*

*"Several good things happened. My wife had a successful operation, now we are having our roof mended, the children are good, I can't complain."
(respondent in Vranje)*

Rarely, positive things include jobs and possibility to work, children's success in school, or 'small' every-day matters such as winning on football bets or getting a watermelon at the market for free.

*"I found work through our Roma cooperative, it's not permanent, but it's not bad either."
(respondent in Niš)*

"We started working at the green market selling the things our son is sending us from Germany."

(respondent in Subotica)

"I won a bit of money betting on sports."

(respondent in Vranje)

"Yesterday I went to my friend's place to play and I got half a watermelon from a woman selling it in the street. I was very happy while I was eating the watermelon."

(respondent in Subotica)

On the other hand, when asked to explain how they are living upon return, huge majority gives negative examples regarding hard life in Serbia.

"It's not like in Germany, there we had proper living conditions. Here it's nothing but trouble. You have to pay the bills, and where does the money come from. No one asks you that."

(respondent in Vranje)

"My life is nothing here. No job, discrimination. They are threatening to take away my social assistance because I went for asylum."

(respondent in Niš)

"I went abroad with my family in 1991. We were forced to return to Kosovo 6 months ago. From there, I came to Subotica, to my wife's family. Seven children, born abroad, none of them speak Serbian. We speak Romani and German. My children saw fire in the stove for the first time in their lives! The first few months I lived in uncertainty and fear. My family connected me with Steva, I told him everything. He suggested to find a way for the children to start school, to get personal documents in order. Language classes were provided for the children. He helped me register residence for me and the children."

(respondent in Subotica)

Some of them, of course, have positive angle on looking at things.

"After returning from abroad, I heard of a cooperative looking for construction workers. As that's what I did in Germany, I applied and got the job. It's not like in Germany, but still I'm able to work and earn money."

(respondent in Niš)

"Well, I came back and started trading. I'm selling second-hand merchandise at the green market. I can't complain, it's not bad. My children are going to school, they've fit in."

(respondent in Vranje)

"Well, at first it was hard, until we got used to this life in Serbia. For long years we lived in Germany, we went when the children were little. Trouble's what made us come back, we lived a fine life there. Alright, now we're doing better than when we just arrived."

(respondent in Subotica)

On average, respondents spent more than three and a half years abroad (44.3 months), with considerable difference between the ones in Niš and Vranje (between year and a half and two years) and Subotica (almost seven years), as seen in the table 2 below. This means that they had more time to adapt abroad, which poses more difficult task in their inclusion when they are back to Serbia again.

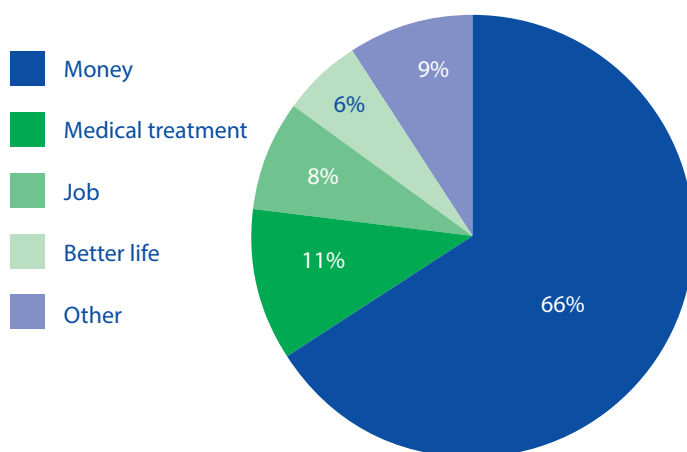
Table 2: Average time that Roma returnees spent abroad

	No. of months
Niš	19.6
Subotica	82.6
Vranje	21.3
TOTAL	44.3

For most of them (3/4 of interviewees), it was the only time they went abroad. The others went three times on average.

The reason for going abroad left no dilemma, as 2/3 of respondents (with no major difference based on the place of current residence) said it was for the purpose of money. Medical treatment, job and better life followed the suit, with 10.6%, 8.5% and 6.4% respectively, as seen in the graph 2 below.

Graph 2: Main reason for going abroad



Huge majority (85%) returned to the place where they had been living before.

It is interesting to note that **nobody contacted local self-government upon return to Serbia. Family and friends have still been the most important first safety net** with slightly above 51% of the respondents, as seen in the table 3.

Centres for Social Work were the first address upon return for 1/4 of the total number of interviewees. The numbers are particularly high for Niš (46%, marked in dark blue). There is a statistically significant difference compared to Subotica and Vranje, which might suggest that **the Centre for Social Work in Niš did especially good job for Roma returnees.**

Table 3: Whom Roma returnees contacted first upon their return to Serbia

	Niš	Subotica	Vranje	TOTAL
Local self-government	0	0	0	0
Family	2	7	6	15
Friends	1	2	6	9
NGO	2	6	0	8
Centre for Social Work	6	3	3	12
Nobody	2	0	1	3
TOTAL	13	18	16	47

The table 3 also shows that **NGO in Subotica was particularly active** (33%, marked in green) compared to the NGOs in rest of the cities (15% in Nis and 0% in Vranje) and total (17%). The difference here is also statistically significant, despite the small sample, showing important work that NGO Roma Education Centre in Subotica is doing for Roma returnees.

This is confirmed when asked about who helped them most, as respondents in Subotica clearly indicated that it was first and foremost Subotica NGO Roma Education Centre.

Apart from family and friends, which helped the most in all places, returnees often mention Roma coordinator or representative in the municipality by

name. For example, it is usually **'our Ferhat'** in Niš, or **'Steva the coordinator'** from the Roma Education Centre in Subotica.

Former neighbours welcomed returnees in a 'good' manner, with only couple of statistically insignificant 'bad' exceptions. Fortunately, according to the respondents, 'ugly' welcome was never a case.

There was no difference with the new neighbours in a situation when they did not return to the same place where they had been living before. **The situation was pretty much the same regarding their community, with however slightly 'colder' welcome.**

Very important conclusion is that there are rare cases when returnees want to stay in Serbia, i.e. not willing or planning to go abroad again. That wish was expressed by only 10% of the respondents, while **90% wish to go abroad as soon as there is an opportunity to do so.**

When asked about the necessary things they need to prevent them from going abroad, there are no differences between the cities. **In all three places, money / income was mentioned far more times than all other necessities (46 out of 47 times in total, or in 98% of responses), followed by roof cover (36 times, or 77%), and social protection (19 times, or 40%).** These are the only three needs mentioned more than 10 times in absolute terms by the respondents.

When asked to rank their answers, not surprisingly money / income was put on the first place as the most important condition to be met in order not to leave the country again (33 times, or in 70% of responses). This was the most important factor in all three cities (Niš, Subotica and Vranje). It was followed by roof cover (singled out as the most important factor 8 times, or 17%), and permanent job and health protection (both of them mentioned 3 times, or 6% each).

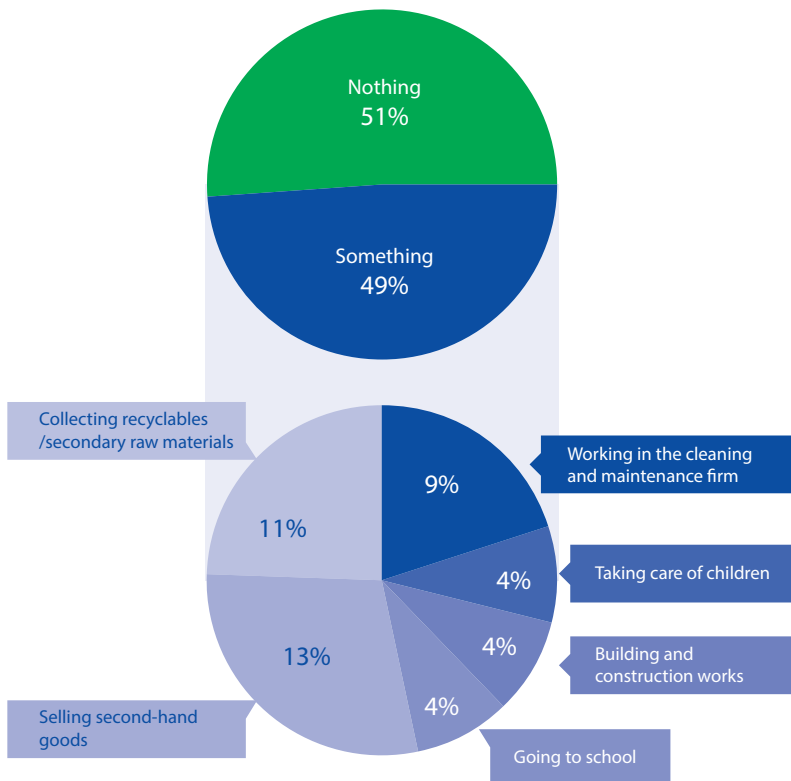
Approximately 62% of interviewees are using financial social assistance upon return. This number is lower in comparison to the period when they had been abroad, as **89% said it used financial social assistance during their stay in a foreign country.**

With one exception, all the interviewees, who are not using social assistance in Serbia now, heard about that possibility. The ones, who are currently using it, are mostly familiar with the procedure as they were using social assistance before they left or they were helped by family and friends in obtaining all the necessary documents. In the case of Subotica, Roma coordinator from the Roma Education Centre provided help as well.

Majority of respondents (51%) did nothing when they were abroad. This is in line with the above-mentioned fact that most of them were using financial social assistance during that period.

Approximately 2/3 of the ones that did something (or 33% of the total number of respondents), as seen in the graph 3 below, dealt with selling second-hand goods (13%), collecting secondary raw materials (11%) or cleaning and maintenance (9%). The rest of them took care of children, did some work informally or went to school (4% each).

Graph 3: Type of work that Roma returnees did when they were abroad



Similar situation, if not even worse, is shown regarding skills that they eventually developed or improved during their stay abroad. **Approximately 79% responded negatively stating that they learned nothing.** The majority of the remaining respondent, which gained some skills, only learned German language.

According to their answers, **72% of the interviewees in all three cities are currently unemployed.** However, this figure should not be taken for granted and needs more detailed explanation.

In a number of cases, even though they say that they are unemployed, they are either doing some part-time seasonal works in the field, selling staff at the green or flea market, or taking care of children. The other side of the coin is that **among those who say that they are employed (28% of respondents), there are also those who are working the same above-mentioned jobs informally in a grey zone.** They just simply see their labour market status differently, i.e. some considering that they are unemployed and some that they are in fact employed for the same jobs.

If we look through zoom lenses, **the situation is quite different across the board.** In **Niš**, there is a clear-cut case, as all employed are working for the cooperative as a part of the Incubator Centre, established with the support of UNDP project. In **Vranje**, those who say that they are employed are actually in a grey zone and officially unemployed. In **Subotica**, one half of the employed are in also in a grey zone and officially unemployed, while the other half is having 'proper' permanent jobs either in a private sector or in a public enterprise.

This is to some extent confirmed by the fact that **80% of respondents are registered at the National Employment Service as unemployed**, which is eight percentage points more than the number of unemployed (when asked whether they are working somewhere or not, as it was just explained above).

More importantly, **it is crucial to mention long-term nature of their unemployment** in order to fully understand difficulties of socio-economic inclusion of Roma returnees. The fact is that they are **registered at the National Employment Service for more than 13 years on average.** This not only prevents them to obtain new skills and become more competitive at the labour market, but also largely diminishes their motivation to actively search for job. In that sense, it is not different from the rest of the population; as a general rule – the more people are excluded from the labour market, the harder it is to get them back.

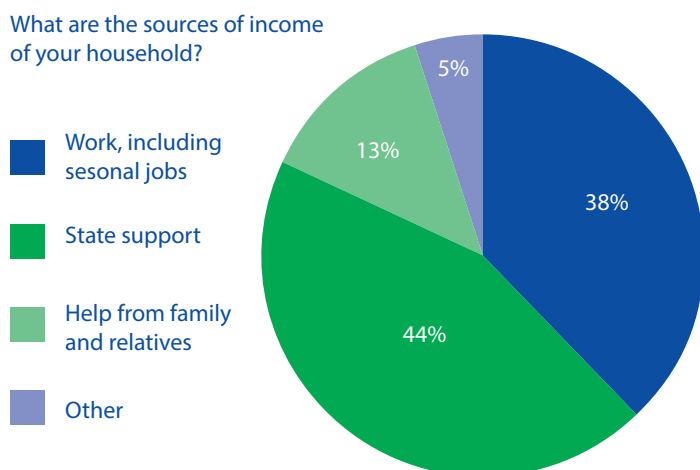
When asked what they would like to do, apart from a few disbelievers regarding chances to find a job or unmotivated to work, almost all would like to work in one way or another. **Majority would not choose and would accept any kind of work.**

Here it is essential to emphasise the **specific situation for women, which are expressing their willingness to work, but in some flexible forms of employment and working hours, as they need time to take care of the children and household in general.**

Also, **the ones that did some work abroad are more specific in their answers and would usually like to pursue what they already did**, for example in the construction sector. **The same applies to the ones who are currently working**, such is the case in Niš with returnees engaged in cooperative constructing (their) houses. They show high(er) motivation to work and would like to be engaged in the same type of jobs in the future.

Having in mind all the above, it is not surprising that labour is not the major source of income for households of Roma returnees, as it can be seen in the graph 4 below.

Graph 4: Sources of household income for Roma returnees



Income of their households is coming mostly from the state support (44%). It is followed by income from labour (38%), both permanent and seasonal jobs, which usually include harvesting, field work in the agriculture or selling goods at the market, and help from friends and families from Serbia and abroad (13%). Finally, other sources of income (5%) are coming from their neighbours, NGOs or personal savings.

When it comes to education, 11% of the interviewees never went to school. The common reasons for that were poverty and the lack of school materials, shoes or clothes, as well as discrimination of female children as they were not supposed to go to school but to stay at home, according to their parents.

From 89% of the interviewees that went to school, most of them (53%) finished primary school. Approximately 1/4 have not completed primary school, while 11% finished secondary school.

Their major concerns in life are presented below in the table 4, which lists those issues from the most to the least worrying for them. It can be noticed that the most pressing issues on average **are lack of job / income and hunger**, which were scored above 3.

The least worrying is no access to education and fire, which scored below 2 on average. All the other issues were between 2 and 3 on average, namely from the most important to the last, according to the score: discrimination, loss or damage of roof cover, no access to health services, street violence and criminal and spread of diseases due to bad hygiene.

Table 4: Major concerns for Roma returnees (How much they are worried; 1 being least and 4 being most)

	Niš	Subotica	Vranje	Weighted average per category	Unweighted average per category
Lack of job / income	2.69	3.61	4.00	3.49	3.43
Hunger	2.23	3.56	3.37	3.13	3.05
Discrimination	2.38	2.83	3.37	2.89	2.86
Loss or damage of roof cover	1.69	2.94	3.31	2.72	2.65
No access to health services	1.92	2.61	2.69	2.45	2.41
Street violence and criminal	1.77	1.72	2.81	2.10	2.10
Spread of diseases due to bad hygiene	1.23	2.56	2.25	2.09	2.01
No access to education	1.92	2.06	1.81	1.94	1.93
Fire	1.31	1.83	2.31	1.85	1.82
AVERAGE PER CITY	1.90	2.64	2.88		

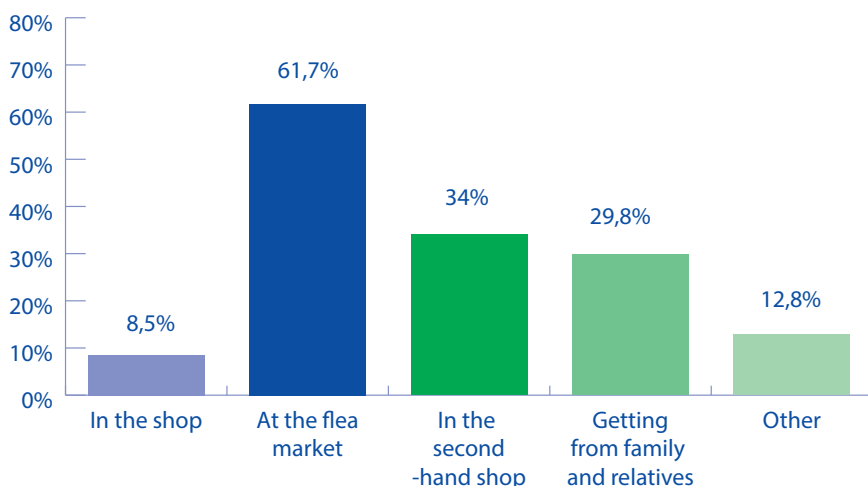
Lack of job / income is in all cities major reason to worry. The least important for respondents is disease in Niš, street criminal and violence in Subotica and access to education in Vranje.

On average, **Roma returnees are least worried in Niš, and most in Vranje.** Consequently, when comparing cities according to the issues, respondents from Vranje are most worried in 6 out of 9 categories (marked in green in the table), while Subotica is leading the board in 3. On the other hand, Niš is least concerned in 7 out of 9 categories (marked in dark blue). Those in between are marked in orange.

It is interesting to note that **returnees in Subotica – compared to the other cities – are mostly concerned for hunger, spread of diseases and access to education.** On the other hand, **returnees in Vranje are least concerned out of three cities for education.** These are potential outliers, for which further data mining with larger sample might be relevant.

Also, **loss or damage of roof cover**, as a category, might need more detailed examination. Most probably, it **would have scored above 3, but Niš lowered that significantly**, compared to Subotica and Vranje. It is hard to say if it has something to do with the fact that the project helped Roma returnees in Niš to take part in the (re)construction of their houses, or not; but it is worth to be further analysed.⁸

Graph 5: Places where Roma returnees obtain their clothing (multiple answers)



8/ In the additional mini survey that was conducted by UNDP upon the finalization of this research study in Subotica, Valjevo and Vranje on the sample of 12 respondents, it was shown that all of them have problems with roof cover and are concerned about that.

The respondents are mostly buying their clothes at the flea market and in the second-hand shops; in 61.7% and 34% of cases respectively, as seen in the graph 5 above. Family and relatives, mostly from abroad, are sending clothes to the 29.8% of returnees, while only 8.5% buy their clothing in regular shops as well. Finally, 12.8% find other ways, either getting the clothes from neighbours, NGOs or Red Cross. Some of them are also collecting left-overs from the garbage containers, or on a totally different end they are wearing clothes which they brought from abroad.

All of that is in line with the above-mentioned fact that a number of returnees is working in a grey zone selling staff at the market. In other words, it is worth guessing that when there is a demand, there is also a supply, assuming that a certain number of returnees are working at the market selling staff which they brought with themselves or received from relatives from abroad. How significant is that number and what is the impact on Roma returnees however needs further research.

Regarding nourishment (also given a possibility for multiple answers), none of the respondents is eating at a restaurant. The **vast majority of them are eating at home (91%)**. This is sometimes combined with other sources of alimentation. In 21% of cases, they are taking daily meals at the 'soup kitchen' (*narodna kuhinja*), while 5% of returnees are getting provisions from the humanitarian organization Bank of Food.

Huge majority of returnees have mobile phone (83%). The ones who do not have it are either women or elderly (above 55 years old).

When asked for what they are using mobile phones (possibility for multiple answers), it became clear that the **main purpose of mobile phones is to stay in touch with friends and relatives**. They are often used for talking to friends and relatives (79%) and sending messages to them (49%). Also, mobile phones are used for 'surfing the net' (38%), meaning that these are phones of newer generations (android phones or similar). **In only a small number of cases (9%), they are used for searching for a job.**

Table 5: Four areas regarding socio-economic inclusion of Roma returnees (1 being most and 4 being least important)

	Niš	Subotica	Vranje
Personal documents	IV - 3.54	III - 2.72	III - 3.21
Roof cover / housing	II - 2.54	I - 1.66	II - 2.07
Job / employment	I - 1.15	II - 2.28	I - 1.21
Education	III - 2.92	IV - 3.33	IV - 3.5

When ranking four most important issues regarding status and socio-economic situation of Roma returnees (personal documents, roof cover / housing, job / employment and education), that were tackled during the project, it is mostly confirmed what was mentioned above on how much they are worried concerning certain issues (please consult table 4).

Without going into deeper analysis due to the small sample, there is no doubt that **job and roof cover are valued more than personal documents and education**, as seen in the table 5. This is the situation in all three cities where survey was done.

Job is the most important for returnees in Niš and Vranje, and roof cover for the ones in Subotica. Again, it is hard to say if this is only due to the fact that the houses were constructed and repaired thanks to the project support in Niš and Vranje, and not in Subotica. So, it is not incorrect, but it is a proximate cause.

It is very interesting to analyse what was the most important issue for the ones who have participated in the project activities in each of the cities.

In Niš, the fact that Roma returnees participated in the construction of their own houses (55%) and that they gained new skills and knowledge (45%) were crucial. Two things are also worth examining. First, **nobody mentioned money**, although it was one of the possible multiple-choice answers. Second, **all returnees that are currently employed in the cooperative said that gaining new skills and knowledge was the most important thing to them.**

What is more, they also expressed more positive expectations about the future.

*"Things changed for the better with the project. I went through the training and now I have official vocation, I'm also working through the cooperative."
(respondent in Niš)*

Based on that, it is safe to say that satisfaction and attitudes are interlinked in this case. The ones who got job, even temporarily, and got engaged through the project in the construction works of their houses, showed more motivation and optimism about their future. **Job is mentioned often in their answers as a prerequisite for the future.**

*"I'd like the work to develop in the cooperative, and there to be more work."
(respondent in Niš)*

On the other hand, **others who are currently unemployed were less positive, focusing more on their children and/or on going abroad again.** Some also completely lost motivation and are not expecting much from the future.

*"Well, I expect these children to finish school and get jobs."
(respondent in Niš)*

*"I'm expecting nothing really from the future."
(respondent in Niš)*

For all returnees that participated in the project in Vranje, and were willing to answer, **the fact that they got their houses repaired was the most important issue** regarding the project. **This is also reflected in their future expectations.**

*"Well, it's changed, the house is nicer, now the new roof and new ceiling."
(respondent in Vranje)*

*"Well, some houses were adapted. They're saying there will be more starting next year."
(respondent in Vranje)*

*"I'm expecting their assistance, I've heard that another project will start next year."
(respondent in Vranje)*

On the other hand, **in Subotica** where project support was focused on obtaining documents for the returnees and their children, especially regarding their enrolment in educational system, people appreciated different matters.

Three things were equally appreciated (28% each) as the most important benefit: (a) obtaining documents, (b) Serbian language lessons, and (c) mentoring support to Roma children regarding school activities and provision of all necessary school textbooks and supplies.

"We got school supplies and assistance with children. They're learning Serbian and mathematics."

(respondent in Subotica)

"Well, my son got all the documents, he's going to school regularly, we are to get health cards too, Steva is helping us with that."

(respondent in Subotica)

Getting documents was the most important benefit, in particular for the children that were born in different countries, but the overarching, integrated support in terms of mentoring, school supplies and language lessons was crucial for their inclusion into the education system in Serbia. **This enhanced their motivation to continue with school**, since without it, children usually very soon lose motivation and the final result is high school dropout.

Roma returnees that received such support for their families in Subotica consider education as important factor for the improvement of their economic situation in the future and express that attitude in a number of cases when asked about the future expectations.

"I'd like my son to finish high school and be his own man, to get along well together at home."

(respondent in Subotica)

Last but not least, **continuous support from Roma coordinator (and Roma NGO) was also mentioned in answers as crucial for solving their current status as well as for their future.**

"Steva helped us get this old house and we got all the papers for us and for the children and we applied for social assistance, they told us we would get it in two months. We'll also get health cards. Steva helped us fill out all these papers and take them. I can't write, but my husband can."

(respondent in Subotica)

"We feel we're not alone. We can turn to people who will understand us."

(respondent in Subotica)

4

Ingredients of the successful 'cooperation model'

All returnees – voluntary or under the readmission agreement, being Roma or not – are faced with a set of challenges upon their return:

- **lack of personal documents,**
- **inadequate housing,**
- **incompatible education,**
- **lack of employment.**

Unfortunately, those challenges are usually tackled individually, focusing only on the most burning issue, while in a way neglecting the others, especially in the short run.

Roma returnees are the most vulnerable of all, discriminated on several grounds, and for their successful re-integration there is no universal model or prescribed recipe. However, there are certain ingredients, which proved to be necessary in supporting their long term socio-economic inclusion.

It is needless to say that **all areas are interrelated and cannot be addressed separately.** For instance, the level of education and professional training influence the possibilities of employment and, in turn, employment allows for improvements in living standards, including changes in housing conditions, access to education and healthcare. Therefore, **inter-linkages between each area need to be taken into account as a part of integrated approach to the inclusion of Roma.**

The examples from Niš, Subotica and Vranje, three pilot cities where inclusive UNDP project 'Reintegration of Roma Returnees in Serbia' is implemented, can be instrumental in this regard. UNDP works there on ensuring that Roma returnees have better access to personal documents, education, employment and housing, giving priority to all that at the same time, and not to one particular issue, in order to grasp the 'big picture'.

Local cooperation model in Niš and Vranje show how linking employment and housing can yield excellent results. Roma returnees are engaged through socially responsible cooperative in refurbishing and construction works of their houses,

which not only gives them formal job, but also ensure their motivation and affordable and quality housing solutions. It also became evident in the additional mini survey conducted after this research in Subotica, Valjevo and Vranje that Roma are interested to work in construction, if given the opportunity to do so.

It has been evident for some time that the problems concerned with the effective labour market integration of Roma are multi-dimensional and action is needed on several fronts. **The problem is not just high unemployment rate among Roma, there is also the issue of the quality of employment.** Roma Inclusion Working Papers (UNDP, 2012a) identified Roma labour market marginalization and concentration in informal employment as a key element in determining gaps in wages, which cannot be sufficiently explained by differences in school quality.

The established Incubator Centre in Niš not only gives Roma returnees employment, but enables them with market-oriented construction skills through training as well⁹, leading to their employability and creation of sustainable supply of skilled labour. It also provides them with necessary legal advice, particularly in the area of obtaining necessary documentation and legal assistance. However, the Incubator Centre is still not functional as it was planned, and it needs additional support to become fully sustainable.

And if there is one more **crucial ingredient of success** that needs to be underlined based on the analysis of that example, it is **partnership at all levels and between various stakeholders**. The only way that reintegration can be supported, leading to greater durability and sustainability, is through partnership: partnership between different levels of government, government and civil society, international organizations and government, government and private sector, etc. **For example, several partners took part in establishment and operationalisation of the Incubator Centre: city of Niš, Clean Earth Capital socially responsible company, international NGO Help, local Roma Centre YUROM (member of League of Roma Network) and UNDP.**

Subotica leaned on education, but it is another good practice example of intersectoral cooperation model for the integration of Roma returnees. City of Subotica and the NGO Roma Education Centre from Subotica have established a system of support and legal aid for returnees to provide necessary documents for the enrolment of children into the education system. Roma Education Centre has trained professionals to provide mentoring support to Roma chil-

9/ The prospect of training is important for all. If they would have possibility to be trained for the roof cover construction worker, all respondents in the mini survey conducted in Subotica, Valjevo and Vranje would undoubtedly accept it.

dren in overcoming language barriers, including also eventual psychological and pedagogical support. Free textbooks and supplies for school children are provided as well in cooperation with the Provincial Secretariat for Education. **However, the local self-government is still cooperating with the Roma Education Centre on ad-hoc, limited project-related basis and the lack of systematic integrated approach prevents the cooperation to unleash its full potential.**

A sustainable cooperation model for the inclusion of Roma returnees would need to include strong local presence as a must. In this case, **it was done through the role of Roma coordinators.** They contributed to the visibility of Roma problems in a local community and showed that sensitization for work with Roma returnees is crucial for a successful implementation of envisaged support. However, Roma coordinators are still largely un-institutionalized and success still depends on their individual efforts and involvement, such as the case with 'our Steva' in Subotica who is also part of the NGO Education Centre.

Roma coordinators helped in the outreach and real impact of the intervention. **Without them, it would be hard to get to the Roma returnees and to motivate them to fully participate in the activities, which is a key to success.** Roma returnees brought new dynamics to the local communities – some with professional skills obtained abroad, some with adopted social norms from abroad – and it is sometimes even harder to motivate them upon return. When approached in the right way and with adequate support through the cooperation model, they are motivated for the present and positive about the future.

It is also worth mentioning that the **inclusion of Roma returnees calls for integrated interventions over longer period of time.** This is a process in which short term approach is likely to be unsustainable. **UNDP knowledge and experience in dealing with Roma issues over the years was crucial in this regard.** It helped in mobilizing human, environmental and socio-economic resources of local communities, bringing various stakeholders together to apply integrated and flexible approaches. What is more, it emphasized the involvement of beneficiaries, in this case Roma returnees in the implementation of the intervention, such was the case with their engagement in constructing their own houses.

All in all, this is a useful platform for addressing multiple concerns of Roma returnees that are all related and mutually supporting. **UNDP can tap close connections between economic (employment), social (access to services), political (discrimination) and institutional (provision of services) spheres that are hindering their full inclusion.** Through such a cooperation model, Roma returnees, especially women and young girls, can benefit from economic empowerment, housing and education.

The cooperation model, with all its above-mentioned ingredients, is suitable for replication. The given examples of three pilot municipalities represent only the ones with higher number of registered returnees, but this does not mean that the problem is not present elsewhere.

Recommendations

Looking at the current situation of Roma returnees in Serbia, there is no doubt that their position has been very difficult. Many barriers for their better social and economic inclusion are present, such as lack of access to jobs and services, lack of adequate skills and competences due to the long-term unemployment, high dependency on social assistance, etc. let alone their unregulated status due to the lack of personal documents, inadequate housing conditions or overwhelmingly present discrimination on many grounds (Roma, returnees, women, etc) both vis-à-vis other (majority) communities and within the Roma community itself.

Lack of tailor made interventions is preventing the real impact. It is clear from before that neither one-dimensional approaches, nor short-term projects yield results. The UNDP intervention shows that focus must be on all pressing issues for the inclusion of Roma returnees in Serbia and all areas important for them at the same time. **The examples of links between housing and employment or personal documents and education – as examined in Niš, Vranje and Subotica – can be beneficial in that regard.**

The same relates to the **participation of beneficiaries in the project, which is vital for both design and implementation of the activities.** Roma returnees, who took part in a construction works of their own houses, were crucial for the successful realization of the UNDP intervention and its sustainability. Their motivation was raised not only in regard to the implementation of the envisaged activities, but also towards their future life expectations.

Cooperation at all levels is still a sporadic phenomenon, based on individual efforts. The reason for this lies in systemic solutions, as each of the existing mechanisms for inclusion of various vulnerable groups was established on the basis of independent, if not to say separate actions. However, the analysed UNDP intervention has been based on recognition of complexity of matter regarding Roma inclusion and necessity to ensure interplay of different actors and factors to achieve desired impact. This kind of **multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnership is ever more needed for Roma returnees now.**

The analysis shows that sensitization for work with Roma returnees is sine-qua-non of success. However, this is hard to achieve and takes considerable time and local presence. UNDP experience in working with and in Roma communities, such as the case in Niš, Vranje and Subotica, demonstrates the **importance of the role of mediator and facilitator that supports and understands local communities**, and the other way around.

Personal involvement especially matters. In this regard, the existence and involvement of Roma coordinators cannot be appreciated enough. Although their role is not fully institutionalised and still depends on individual efforts, their work is highly relevant for the visibility of Roma problems (returnees included) and in getting access to the community itself. Therefore, **position of Roma coordinators needs to be regulated in with clear set of objectives and individual duties**, in order to avoid the situation in which they are stuck between assistance providers, intermediaries with the government bodies and protectors of Roma community interests through participation in designing public policies.

None of the identified factors per se can be recognized as a guarantor of success, though they might be assumed to be preconditions for the successful implementation of various interventions targeting Roma returnees.

Any future ‘cooperation model’ for the socio-economic inclusion of Roma returnees needs to incorporate combination of necessary measures, dealing with lack of personal documents, inadequate housing, incompatible education and lack of employment at the same time. Only combination of measures gives tangible and sustainable results and only then inclusive outcomes might be achieved.

Integrated approach, adequate coordination and synergies between different working areas and actors have been so far more the exception than the rule in various implemented interventions, but they stand at the core of the ‘cooperation model’.

So far, UNDP programme has been based on understanding and responding to complexity of challenges for Roma social inclusion.

This model needs to continue in the future, and it should include:

- **Collection of relevant data**, as there is clear and present low availability of data regarding returnees, as well as their incomparability, which undermines adequate understanding of their needs;

- **Micro-macro linkages** important for development of institutional mechanisms for social inclusion, area-based development and strengthening of pro-Roma civil society;
- **Partnerships with private, public and civil society sector at national and especially local level** related to the work on reintegration of Roma returnees, with a clear and focused state backup;
- **Support to returnees**, through the cooperatives and incubator centers, refurbishment of houses or access to education by providing necessary documentation as well as facilitation of enrollment of Roma children in schools ;
- **Development of Roma construction skills**, through practice and cooperation with private sector, **and investment in their vocational trainings** (roof cover repair works could be potential entry point for testing) for market driven employment and starting up jobs in demand.

In order for the reintegration of Roma returnees and the cooperation model to be successful, assistance must be based on their real needs, not predetermined but fine-tuned locally, and above all comprehensive.

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