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## Third Roma Inclusion Seminar



### Report

**SDC - Western Balkans Division**

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## 1. Introduction

A first Roma inclusion Seminar was organized in Belgrade in late 2013, for program officers involved or interested in development programs working with Roma populations, to share their experiences and get to know each other. At this seminar, people get to know each other and to present each other program. One finding of the seminar was that “discrimination” is a central issue to all the thematic work done on Roma inclusion. One year later, themes for the next seminar were selected through consultation with participants. Institutionalization and policy dialogue were selected as priority topics for the second Roma inclusion seminar in Bucharest in April 2015. Participants discussed perspectives and experiences of institutionalizing progress in Roma inclusion. The situations and challenges differed from country to country, but a common picture emerged of very poor living conditions of Roma communities; low access to services and poor quality of these services (if available); low capacity of service providers and limited political will. For the third seminar, it was decided to focus on effectiveness, sustainability and transformation. The challenge is to find a balance and manage the trade-offs between:

- 1) Working with existing institutions – if necessary supporting reforms – in order to ensure sustainable improvements in the lives of people. *But this will require a long time and considerable effort to see general improvements of the situation, and unless discrimination against Roma people is addressed within institutions*

- as well as more widely, they are less likely to benefit or will be the ones who will see positive change the latest;*
- 2) Enhancing access and promoting the use and quality of services for Roma communities for this generation, and in particular for children (education). *This might have a higher cost for Roma people as opposed to other constituencies, as Roma are harder to reach. Setting political will aside, it also requires more human and financial resources which are scarce.*
  - 3) Improving the terms for Roma people to participate in society - changing the relationships between Roma (and other poor and marginalized people) on one hand and more affluent people, government officials etc. on the other. *Transforming relationships requires paying attention to both discriminated people and those who have power and perpetuate discrimination, avoiding segregation and promoting mixed situations: this is likely to be a long term perspective requiring consistent efforts.*

The third Roma inclusion seminar took place in Tirana in May 2016. It gathered 30 participants from SDC offices in 10 countries in southeast Europe and the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia) and ambassadors (Albania, Macedonia, Romania). A senior sector officer on Roma inclusion for the Norway Grants based in Brussels, and the responsible of RomAct from the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, also based in Brussels, joined the seminar. Roma special guests were invited to participate as critical friends and to give feedback and participate in discussions throughout the workshop. Seven Roma guests participated from Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia and Hungary.

The objectives of the third learning workshop were:

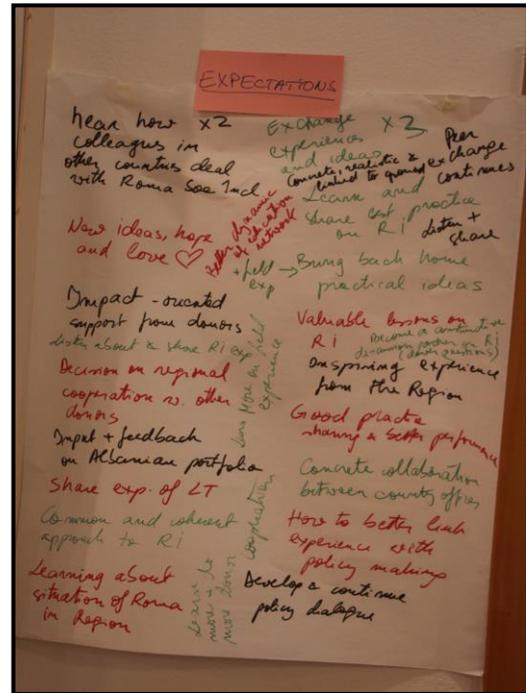
- To deepen reflection on how SDC strategies and programmes contribute to effective, sustainable and transformative change in the lives of Roma people, and the trade offs and challenges involved in working with this multiply marginalized group.
- To reflect on how some SDC country offices are promoting social inclusion through their strategy and programming (with a special focus on CAPEX in Albania, our host country for this seminar).
- To reflect on and build further on the Learning Trajectories, and to make a plan to further promote reflective practice, peer learning and collaboration through 2016/17

Section 2 introduces and defines the Seminar themes. Section 3 summarises the case studies presented and discussions that took place around the themes of effectiveness, sustainability and transformation, and draws out implications for the strategic orientation of Swiss programs. Section 4 summarises the learning trajectory process and outputs, ideas on collaboration between SDC offices, and agreements on next steps. Section 5 summarises the case studies and discussions around social inclusion programming and implications for future strategic planning. Section 6 presents the evaluation of the workshop and recommendations for the way forward.

## 2. Introduction to the themes

The first session of the 2016 Seminar introduced the program and set the context for the 4 days. Participants highlighted the renewed importance of social inclusion in the development agenda (SDGs, leave no one behind, SDG 1, + inequalities) and in the Swiss bill to the parliament. Expectations of participants included:

- Learning together, sharing practical ideas and learning from the recent learning trajectories;
- Identifying new ways to collaborate and link practice and evidence to policy, to improve cooperation across the region.



### Introducing the theme of the Seminar

Making the link with the last seminar (Institutionalisation & Policy Dialogue) the facilitators clarified how this Seminar would be about deepening the previous conversation, and thinking about how we can achieve **Effectiveness, Sustainability and Transformation**. Methodology would include presentation of case studies and reflections to locate these concepts in different contexts that each member of SDC staff is working in.

Laurent Ruedin gave a [presentation](#) of these 3 key concepts in relation to Roma Inclusion, explaining why these themes are relevant now for SDC, and what we mean by them. Laurent concluded that transformation requires:

- Addressing intersecting inequalities
- Provision of quality education for all
- Promoting social diversity and mixing
- Supporting processes by which individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty (empowering processes)

The discussion that followed raised some useful observations about how we can distinguish between these concepts in practice. Different views were expressed, and some understanding emerged in the group that *effectiveness* is about changes as a result of our contribution; these changes are *sustainable* when they become part of everyday life; while *transformation* is our final goal and it is linked with a change in mindsets. In the case of Roma inclusion, it requires working with the majority population as well as with Roma people. The point was also raised that transformation may not be for the better – the rise of populist, nationalist movements and xenophobia in Europe make the need to be careful and promote active citizenship and empowerment even more crucial.

This was followed by a participatory exercise to explore these terms in groups. Ideas around each concept were collected on three flipcharts: [effectiveness](#), [sustainability](#) and [transformation](#).

Finally, Valérie Liechti presented the [summary of findings of the external evaluation on Education](#) (Roma Inclusion aspect). Valerie noted the comparative advantage of SDC in basic education: bilingual education, community development, education for Sustainable Development. Positive aspects of the SDC approach to education in Roma inclusion include: multi-sectoral approach, grassroots support with alignment with national and EU strategies, and the integration within public schools. The main critique was the low collaboration of these projects with the regional programme. The report recommended an increase in regional coordination, and to develop a Swiss vision on Roma inclusion drawing out the many commonalities among Swiss supported initiatives throughout Western Balkans and New member states. Roma inclusion should be considered a transversal theme in the region, and a TOC should be developed to move from outcomes to *systemic* change.

### **3. Deepening our understanding of Effectiveness, Sustainability and Transformation**

Reflections from Roma guests and an SCO programme officer highlighted the mutual benefits of bringing Roma colleagues into the discussion, and the participatory nature of the Seminar. Data discussed during the seminar could be corroborated with the experience of the Roma guests, and suggestions were made about future collaboration and the role that SDC could play in promoting Roma participation. This opened up the debate on transformative change, and the role of donor organisations.

#### **3.1 Effectiveness, sustainability and transformation: experiences**

Dominique Bé presented some [experiences of RomAct](#). The way that RomAct approaches targeting is to begin with geographical marginalization. The aim is to reduce the gap (inequalities) in several areas: education, employment, health,

housing by working on the ‘missing link’ – the relationship of Roma communities with local authorities, with the ultimate goal of improving public services at municipality level (entry point access to services) so that there can be a better use of EU funds. Romact is mainly a capacity development program of local authorities to better serve their citizens including Roma; and to improve the capacity of Roma to be active citizens. They also work on raising awareness among the majority population on the need to include Roma in the job market.

Dominique framed the key concepts of Effectiveness, Sustainability and Transformation:

**Effectiveness means:**

- Working with vulnerable people – many of whom are Roma, not as ‘ethnic targets’ but recognizing the heterogeneity of their situations
- Working with large municipalities which lack mainly political will (note: small municipalities lack everything, including resources)

**Sustainability is threatened by:**

- Short term political changes so that efforts in building capacities of elected persons are lost
- Lack of strategic vision of municipalities which run after the money
- Donor priorities that don’t always match community needs, competition rather than coordination and municipalities that ‘shop around’ to find the cheapest deal

**Transformation requires:**

- A shift from social welfare to social / active inclusion
- Changing the culture of public services in this part of Europe, so that “service” means serving the population
- Improving the capacity of Roma to be active citizens themselves

In the plenary discussion, the positive contribution of the Roma mediator role was highlighted, in terms of economic and political empowerment. A caveat was raised that, in funding Roma mediators, donors can create an extra layer which takes away responsibility from the municipalities, and can undermine efforts to promote more active citizenship amongst Roma people themselves. Roma mediators work most effectively when they engage with both municipalities and citizens and enable dialogue.

**3.2 Presentation of experiences and case studies:**

Selected case studies highlighting the linkages between effectiveness, sustainability and transformation were presented from [Romania](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Serbia](#) and [Albania](#). In the case of Romania and Bulgaria, it was clarified that Roma inclusion was negotiated as part of the Swiss contribution (about 10% of the budget). In the case of Romania, the government did not choose to implement the Roma inclusion projects, and SDC delegated the implementation to 3 Swiss NGOs. The Bulgarian government accepted

and SDC works in Bulgaria through state institutions. Comparison between Romania and Bulgaria highlights the trade-off between effectiveness and sustainability: in Romania, implementation is more rapid and results are achieved, but institutionalization is a challenge, whereas in Bulgaria it took a long time to get the municipalities on board, the quality of implementation is more uncertain, but the sustainability is ensured.

**Romania:** Cerasela Bănică presented on ‘Social inclusion and improvement of living conditions for Roma and other vulnerable groups’, which is implemented in Mureş, Cluj and Bihor by a Swiss-Romanian consortium led by HEKS Foundation. A key challenge for transformation has been the pressure from the majority population not to invest on Roma issues. Learning on sustainability suggests the need for a community development approach to Roma inclusion which works with Roma people as active agents of change – this can address the issue that projects may in the short term be effective, but often the situation longer term does not improve, and there is increased poverty.

**Bulgaria:** SDC’s approach in Bulgaria is to work in the municipalities where the biggest Roma ghettos are (up to 70’000 hab), and to work with the municipalities (who are the main executing agencies, and select NGO partners. This assures sustainability, since services will be sustained by delegated Municipal budgets. There are trade-offs, since building relationships for longer term results and length takes *time*. In terms of transformation, it is hoped that through taking ownership of these projects, the municipalities will change their behavior towards Roma people. However, there is a trade-off because giving control to the municipalities means that they chose their own NGO partners and may exclude bottom-up approaches.

**Serbia:** Lidia Vujicic presented on the pilot “Joint programme for Roma and other marginalized groups”, with a focus on “drop-out intervention model” early warning and prevention system. They are working with 10 secondary schools, using the existing resource and capacities of the school. Key to sustainability is the direct support to legislation and up-scaling; key to transformation is the focus not on one group (Roma) but on a change of mindset in the school promoting solidarity and people helping each other, not only those at risk of drop out but *everybody*, including teachers and other students.

**Albania:** Silvana Mjeda presented the CEFA model, implemented by the local organization NPF (Ndihme per Femijet). It is one of the very first initiatives in Albania to support Roma inclusion through education and family/community development. It initially focused (1998) on Roma children education, in catch up classes, exclusively created for mainly street Roma and Egyptian children, trafficked and/or exploited children and was backed by a strong humanitarian approach on food provision in exchange for children and families’ participation into the program. Over time, the approach evolved with the communities it served, and to address issues of sustainability/institutionalization (e.g. the catch up classes created only with Roma students might lead to segregation). In 2009 the Ministry of Education took over the salaries for 8 teachers working with catch-up classes and in 2013 all children were part of mainstream classes. The food basket was reduced and replaced with an approach aimed at empowering families through income generation activities and

vocational training for (self) employment. By 2012 the food basket was dropped and the new approach was fully functional. In parallel, from 1998 – 2013 SDC supported the creation and gradual development of the social services and since 2013 has capitalized the experience and is transferring the knowledge, practices and know-how to the local social services and school staff in the four cities.

Some of the positive effects of this model at the system level have been to put education of Roma/Egyptian children high on the agenda of the Ministry of Education, and that the ministry had to create legal dispositions and venues to accept Roma children more easily into the public system, i.e. the order that every child should be in school with or without a birth certificate, a zero-drop out strategy, collection and analysis of school statistics segregated by ethnicity which served to provide new instructions and orders of the regional education directorates to the schools on the issue of hidden drop outs, and creation of a school friendly environment for Roma and Egyptian children. The model was institutionalized, in that CEFA classes became part of the education system; however, the Roma children were not accepted easily into the school. The training of teachers and the constant work of social workers to build bridges between the CEFA and other mainstream classes overcame finally the barriers of communication and integration in the schools. A second mainstream pre-school class was opened in the project school in Tirana which helped to increase the number of Roma children going into pre-school education, as well underlined the importance of the application of the early child development principles.

This presentation provided background information for the field visits to Elbasan and Tirana.

### 3.3 Plenary: Key points

- Transformation is linked with long-term involvement, and a gradual evolution of the project. In the case of CEFA in Albania, it was *adaptive*, through detailed work like embroidery!
- How a project is funded, and by whom, makes a difference. In Romania, it was felt that the government is delegating responsibilities to NGOs (national and international) for Roma inclusion. In other contexts, Roma mediators may be integrated as school staff, or paid by project funds, which makes a difference for sustainability.
- To achieve transformation / systemic change, the link between national and local level is crucial but may also be the main weakness. When a municipality is not keen to promote the involvement of Roma people, the model of working through municipalities is problematic as they may block projects that promote Roma participation and empowerment.
- Given the variation between municipalities in the situation of the Roma communities and political will, the approach needs to fit the context.
- Across the case studies there is a common challenge of how to link advocacy at community level with national level, and how to make room for programs to adapt and evolve.

- We need to understand better the perspectives of the Roma communities, and the changes they want to see, before we reflect more around the definition of sustainability, effectiveness and transformation.

### 3.4 Input from Agota Kovacs

Norway together with Iceland and Lichtenstein have invested in a detailed demographic survey of Roma in Romania, for baseline purpose and from a policy making perspective, as there are no reliable data on most important aspects related with Roma. The output is not yet a public document, but it will be shared as soon as it becomes one. It is an outsider's [non- Roma] identification of where the Roma are, and who they are. These are not only maps but a database that brings together data on: needs, stigmatization, devaluation, exposure to environmental risk, at risk of eviction and other aspects that are not considered in poverty assessments such as functional analphabetism. Almost all the country was covered (3042 over 3181 territorial units).

### 3.5 Roma guests feedback of the morning



**Roma inclusion ... inclusion of whom?** We need to think about individuals, families, communities, neighborhoods, gender.

**Effectiveness:** for an integrated approach, the role of institutions is crucial. We shouldn't try to "fix Roma" but rather to "fix the institutions"! It needs funding, and public service motivation (e.g. of teachers).

**Sustainability:** means working with institutions on their strategic vision, capacity, moral duty, scaling up, and moving from competition to coordination

**Transformation:** requires legal provision to ensure the legal basis of Roma inclusion;

inclusive social welfare; involve Roma in programs; work with Roma as active citizens; reform education policies.

The plenary discussion highlighted the need for 'Roma inclusion' approaches to take into account the realities of Roma lives, and the different and sometimes conflicting pressures on Roma families (and especially women) living at the intersection of economic marginalization and patriarchal social norms. For example, early marriage is an issue that can be addressed through enforcing child protection laws. However, there is also a need to work with Roma women, who have some power and voice in

the community, but they haven't been empowered enough to fight against early marriages. There are also competing concerns and risks for Roma families, who may see early marriage as a way to keep their child safe from drugs and gangs. Change is happening but it is a slow process, and is also linked with the perception of non-Roma communities. Currently early marriage is very much the kind of impossible choices that people feel trapped in. Empowerment happens in each country context differently.

## 4. Learning and collaboration

### 4.1 Learning Trajectories

Lili Gouneva and Daniela Dimitrova gave presentations to feed back on the process, content and learning of their Roma Inclusion learning trajectories (LTs) (Discrimination; Women's Empowerment). The summaries of the LTs and the power point presentations can be found [here](#).

#### **Lessons:**

- Discrimination is a historical process, it has built up over time, and we often can't see it because it has become 'normal'. To fight against discrimination and be committed to change there is a need first to be aware: Liberatory consciousness (Barbara Love, 1997). Reflecting on our projects: we don't really have transforming discrimination in our focus!
- The discussion raised that there is a general need to improve the quality of education and health services (in Bulgaria and Romania), not only for Roma, and targeting is not always useful. For example, in the context of overall low quality of education, Roma children will be similarly disadvantaged as non-Roma children, but also be doubly disadvantaged by being Roma. On the other hand, efforts to promote higher standards of education of all children, for example for child-centered education, better wages for teachers or more teaching assistants in schools, then these can build alliances with parents in general and it will avoid being seen as divisive, especially in small communities where 'Roma-only' programs are suspicious to mainstream parents or can even lead to more segregation in schools.
- There is a huge racism in Bulgaria and Romania: the newspapers never provide positive examples of Roma people, and sharing good examples could be a strategy.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Fighting discrimination needs to be present and monitored in our programs
- Staff to go on more field visits, and use participatory methods to engage more with Roma people
- Organize seminars for SDC staff and partners on discrimination and women's empowerment.

Three Learning Trajectories are proposed for 2016/17:

**1) Women's Empowerment (continuation)**

Lili, Jo, Murisa, Cerasela, Laurent

**2) Discrimination (continuation)**

Daniela, Violeta, Murisa, Albert, Dalma, Szilvia

**3) Community Development & Mobilisation (new group)**

Laurent, Cerasela, Albert, Jo, Lajos

**4) Active Citizenship [to merge with 3]**

Szilvia, Jo, Violeta

There were also suggestions of working on Donor Coordination, and Data collection (Irina, Anca). These ideas will be followed up by RNL.

#### 4.2 Good practice exchange

Exchanging good practice on Roma inclusion between SDC staff in the region is important for building the capacity and expertise of SDC staff and sharing learning between countries. To this end, a good practice learning group was established to discuss and propose *methods* for exchanging knowledge, and some preliminary examples. Irina Faion introduced the work of this group, and further ideas about [collaboration and peer learning were shared by Dominique Be](#). Four quick examples of good practice were shared, from Kosovo, Serbia, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Building on these examples and the simple template developed by the group, it was suggested to gather more examples to create a simple database. This will be a resource in which SDC staff can search for the relevant expertise when they are beginning a new initiative or looking for support. As a first step towards understanding where the expertise lies, and to match it with demand for particular knowledge, an exercise took place to generate a list of expertise / good practice by country group, and an indication of demand for each of these areas of knowledge. This 'supply and demand' approach was compiled into a [collaboration matrix](#).

Areas of interest for peer exchange included: Professionalization of Social Work; Combining top-down (policy) & bottom-up experiences, After-school provision; Institutionalization through policy dialogue; Working between policy partners and community-based service providers; learning from 'Voice from Roma Community'; the Roma inclusion ambassador group; cooperation between local institutions and NGOs; Integrated approach to Roma inclusion (pre-school education, housing, microcredit, health, employment); Data collection at system level (central stats office); Development of active citizenship; and the involvement of municipalities on Roma Integration.

### 4.3 Final reflections on learning and collaboration

Georgette Bruchez, head of the Western Balkans Division confirmed the need to develop expertise amongst SDC staff on Roma inclusion, and not only use consultants. Collaboration is important for this, and peer review is a good tool for example when developing a new project. However, we should avoid sharing experience for the sake of it, we have to be pragmatic. There is a need to look at social inclusion in the domains of interventions of our strategies. Ideally, programs aiming at systemic change can be designed in such a way as to promote social inclusion. However, this is not always possible and in such cases we have to develop programs for Roma inclusion and social inclusion of other excluded groups as special complementary measures.

Georgette Bruchez noted the progress in collaborative learning comparing the Bucharest Roma inclusion Seminar to Tirana: the discussions are more structured and substantial. She endorsed continuing with purposeful and results oriented exchanges. She also endorsed exchange, inviting colleagues for collaborative work, especially on Roma and social inclusion. The seminars will continue, promoting peer learning, and Laurent Ruedin will take on the role of Social Inclusion thematic adviser.

The next seminar will take place in autumn of 2017.

## 5. Social inclusion

### 5.1 Social inclusion strategies

**Serbia (Lidia Vujicic):** Social inclusion is a priority topic for Serbia's integration into the EU. In Serbia there are huge regional disparities, low social transfers, material deprivation, and increasing in-work poverty. The poverty rate is 9%, with 25.6% at risk of poverty and exclusion. SDC support is largely integrated in country efforts. The Swiss contribution for 2014–2017 has prioritised: decentralisation and SI reform; increased quality of and access to municipal services for citizens/vulnerable groups; and increased youth employability. We find that Swiss cooperation has contributed to the successful fulfilment of EU accession negotiation chapters relating to SI, substantial improvements in evidence-based policy, improvements in coordination on SI policies and delivery at the local level through direct community services to over 15'000 beneficiaries annually in over 85 municipalities (ECD, PPP, primary, secondary, adult education, skills development, institutionalisation of good practices etc).

Looking ahead, we need to learn from existing good practice (e.g. ECD, prevention of high school drop out), and explore new ideas: e.g. inclusive employment, skills/business/dual; access to justice (women/Roma, rural); active inclusion - to facilitate the transition from the social welfare consumption to employment opportunities. We are asking ourselves how to target, and what are the trade-offs.

Where does gender fit, should we target more vulnerable age groups, and how do we fit social inclusion with the logics of the governance and economic domains? To what extent is SI about social protection/benefits, or about active inclusion e.g. to employment? The paradox faced in the SCO Belgrade office is to understand how, despite the good results reported above, evidence that the programme is highly relevant and has contributed strongly to SI, there is still an increase in poverty, decrease in access to social benefits, and an increase in vulnerability (especially of children, elderly, rural, women...). The question to address now is if our analysis is insufficient, and if we should continue with direct involvement in community services or focus on 'brokering' transformations? Or both?

**Kosovo (Laurent Ruedin):** In order to improve the focus on social inclusion in the new Cooperation Strategy, we have asked ourselves who are the people living in poverty. In Kosovo 30% of the population is under the national poverty line. Bad governance (e.g. clientelism, nepotism, corruption) is the most powerful mechanism of exclusion. Therefore, improving governance is an important way of improving the social inclusion of many people. Besides gender, age, generation, ethnicity, disability status are important dimensions of discrimination. The Albanian majority and Serbian minority are de facto geographically segregated and live in a situation of exclusion. However the group which is suffering multiple forms of discrimination, for whom discrimination is inherited (rather than circumstantial) and who are most of the time both poor and discriminated, is Roma Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE). It has therefore been decided that beside gender and the relation with Serbian minority (context sensitivity), special attention should be paid to RAE inclusion throughout Swiss programs. This might be done through complementary measures to the systemic programs. These comprise grassroots projects, working with Roma NGOs but also, importantly policy dialogue at national level.

**Albania:** (Silvana Medja) The core of SDC social inclusion work in Albania is the CEFA model, described in Section 3. CEFA takes a multidimensional and institutionalized approach to the social inclusion of the Roma in four main municipalities of the country. It served as a vehicle to test the ongoing Swiss supported reform actions related to social sector and fed the reform with consolidated practices and experience.

For SDC Albania, social inclusion refers to social protection (social benefits and social care services), but also ECD, inclusive housing, inclusive access to health, education, employment. They partner with the World Bank, UN and UNICEF. Silvana presented the CAPEX in Albania, and their strategic outlook for social inclusion. The key 'ingredients' have been: Professionalization of social work; catch up classes; evidence-based social housing strategy; youth disability forum; technology for people with disabilities; needs assessment and referrals. The strategic outlook identified areas of strength for consideration: combining central-local level interventions; applying multidimensional and systemic approaches; connecting to the national policy framework, and building on existing resources; and raised the question of the target group. Territorial reforms represent an opportunity. Silvana invited feedback from the Seminar participants, around three potential entry points:

- 1) Social inclusion at local level
- 2) Social care services at local level
- 3) Data collection information systems

## 5.2 Reflections on social inclusion strategies

### **Jean-Hubert Lebet, Swiss Ambassador in Romania: input on the Romania experience on Group of ambassadors on Roma issues**

Romania is the country with the largest Roma population. A number of ambassadors in Romania committed to Roma inclusion and from different countries were shocked by the way Roma issues were dealt with. They established a small group of ambassadors who meet every 6 weeks for breakfast, and identify best practices. Their discussions have led to the following findings:

1. Roma issues are a hugely complex problem, and due to high levels of racism in Romania for example, there are disincentives for politicians to support work on Roma (they are not re-elected).
2. We lack understanding about who are the Roma
3. We need to start from an understanding of Roma as citizens with rights, and also duties. The stance of the group of Ambassadors was no tolerance on crime or early marriage.
4. Embassies and NGOs should not replace the government
5. Our approach needs to be empowering and transformative – this means avoiding blaming, or conversely, rewarding people for being Roma
6. The orthodox church is not an ally for tackling Roma inclusion
7. Political representation of Roma is crucial - recent very positive changes in Romania have been seen under the technocratic Ciolos government, with the appointment of important Roma activists such as Ciprian Necula or Valeriu Nicolae to big posts in ministries such as the Ministry for European Integration. These have led to substantial changes in the lives of Roma people, such as access to ID papers.

**Sybille Suter, the Ambassador of Switzerland in Macedonia**, highlighted some challenges for working on social inclusion in Macedonia:

We lack a common understanding on social inclusion, but have to include social inclusion in our strategy and define indicators, without knowing what it is. In Macedonia the UNDP multidimensional social inclusion index is the concept in place. Should the Swiss Cooperation Office refer to the country framework, or use the UNDP definition? Another frequently used and reference concept is the EU concept of “At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion” AROPE, which is essentially statistical, including different indicators. We need greater clarity, but also to understand who are the excluded and *how are people excluded* - the dynamics of exclusion.

Georgette encouraged the country offices to have ambition when they design their strategies to tackle the issue of social exclusion; to look where we can make a difference, it is important to be realistic. We should reflect on when it makes sense to mainstream and when to have special measures.

Mattia Poretti, as Regional Adviser for Roma inclusion speaking also on behalf of the Ambassador of Switzerland to Bulgaria, who could not be present at the meeting, said that SDC had had great success with being part of the Roma Social Inclusion Ambassadors' group. This has allowed SDC more direct access to central government institutions, and more potential advocacy leverage. However, it's important to be selective when suggesting relevant issues that Ambassadors can take up, and also to make sure Ambassadors are thoroughly briefed to represent these. In this way, SDC can create more visibility for work it believes is important and build credibility for its programming. In future, this could lead to meaningful policy dialogue. For example, in Bulgaria SDC has contributed for 5 years and in all this time has coordinated its work with the Roma Education Fund. Now is the time for SDC to bring its work to the level of policy influence, for example through working through SDC Ambassadors who are also members of REF's Board.

He also emphasized that fundamental to social inclusion on the one hand is *identity and belonging*, and *opportunities* on the other hand. All too often, donor agencies define Roma on the basis of their discrimination, but Roma often define themselves on the basis of their identity or belonging. In order to progress, what compromises do people have to make? Do they have to deny their identities in order to gain more opportunities? A solution is to offer *universal, quality education and health services*, which must be responsibilities of the state. Housing and employment are likely to require other actors, such as the private sector, but with state intervention to establish how much social housing, what kind of employment opportunities etc. While it is sometimes useful to offer opportunities to Roma without specifying that it is a Roma project, we need to 'name' Roma inclusion because it is a way of making visible and challenging discrimination.

## 6. Evaluation

The Roma guests shared their feedback on the seminar as a whole. They saw SDC's initiative to promote experience sharing and reflection as very positive, and welcomed further involvement of Roma in SDC teams. They suggested ways in which SDC could increase their capacity for effectiveness, sustainability and transformation. These included strengthening SDC's capacity to facilitate research, data collection and measure impact. The policy dialogue initiated by ambassadors was highly valued, but there is still need for donors to coordinate their efforts more. Effectiveness can be achieved through projects that focus on multiple issues. Working towards transformation needs to include capacity building for Roma NGOs and for Roma

people so that they are better able bring their knowledge into collaborations. Finally, the Roma guests emphasized the importance of addressing discrimination: “Projects should not feed the stereotypes – discrimination is getting stronger. Each project should have a part that tackles discrimination and be careful not to perpetuate stereotypes and not promote discrimination among the majority”. To work effectively, and promote transformation, the Roma guests advised that SDC staff continue to learn about Roma identity, culture and way of living and understand that Roma often have to engage in difficult trade-offs to stay ahead of the oppression they experience. For example, often Roma have to choose between identifying openly as such, or accepting a measure of antigypsyism (such as when seeking employment or housing). Access to citizenship rights for all is key and it will not happen without a struggle. In this respect, SDC’s closer engagement with those who fight for Roma rights is important. SDC cannot do this alone, it must build alliances with Roma and pro-Roma organisations, find new partners and so learn more to make it work more effectively and to enlarge its voice in the public sphere.

The participants evaluated the Seminar positively, with all categories rated in the majority as ‘good’ with a smaller number of ‘ok’, and only one ‘unhappy’ (results of seminar).

Synthesis of the evaluation: overall the seminar was seen as useful and successful. The opportunity for sharing concrete experiences and ideas as well as open and dynamic discussions were highly appreciated. The participation and contribution of the Roma guests were unanimously praised as bringing a strong added value to the seminar. However, a couple of things should be improved: the program was too overloaded. We must keep a reasonable pace, but with breaks to allow for networking and discussion, without rushing or having problems of time keeping.

The efforts to focus on concrete operational aspects were appreciated, but it was felt that the discussions could be brought still closer to real issues that colleagues are facing in their daily work. The enabling, flexible and participatory style of moderation was very much appreciated. On the other hand, the workshop needed a clearer thread and the results of each session / day should be summarized so that participants can feel how they relate – and contribute – to the general objective of the seminar. All these aspects will be given priority in the planning of the 2017 seminar.