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## **Talking Points – Which Future for the Roma in South-East Europe?**

### **1. Looking back: Experience with Roma inclusion so far**

- ***We have come a long way in terms of getting the Roma exclusion issue onto the political agenda*** – 2003 Budapest high-level conference; 2005 launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and subsequent joining of additional countries – partnership of new, old and future EU Member States; 2008 EU Roma Summit.
- ***Roma are contributing as equal partners.*** The key principle of the Decade is Roma participation and we are seeing results. DecadeWatch recognized as Roma monitoring voice. Roma experts are increasingly driving the policy debate at national and European levels.
- ***We know a lot about the nature and depth of Roma exclusion but we cannot track policy impact over time:*** Analytical work across many countries has mapped out the challenge. Roma poverty rates are a multiple of national poverty rates, social exclusion is multi-dimensional and is transmitted from one generation to the next. But data limitations remain a big challenge and prevent good evidence-based policymaking

- *We have benefited from building a critical mass of knowledge and experience of what works* to promote equal opportunities for Roma in education, health, employment and housing. The *Roma Education Fund* has assumed a key role in building knowledge of what works in Roma education. We also have access to social inclusion policy interventions from around the world which we can apply for Roma inclusion.
- *But so far Roma integration measures have been largely sporadic, and pilot projects without being scaled up can only be effective at the margin.* Real change for Roma will only materialize once the issue of exclusion moves from the margins to the center of policy-making and the experiences from successful pilot projects are scaled up.

## **2. Looking ahead: A greater focus on systemic policy solutions and an EU mechanism to support good policy-making, with participation of Western Balkans**

- *The exclusion of Roma is a key economic challenge which requires a systematic policy response.* Exclusion carries substantial costs in terms of direct fiscal costs (e.g. foregone tax revenues, social welfare benefits) and economic costs (productive contribution of many Roma to the economy is lost for countries that need high rates of economic growth to converge with the leading economies in Europe and who are facing a demographic decline). It is time to highlight the economic benefits of inclusion policies.
- *Further progress on Roma inclusion needs a shift in focus from scattered projects to systematic policies.* Roma inclusion needs to be viewed in the context of overall education, health and employment policies. Use EU funding for strategic policy innovation, not for uncoordinated projects.
- *Maximize efforts to break the intergenerational transmission of exclusion.* Focus on early childhood education and early intervention services to tackle disadvantage from the start.
- *Good policy-making at national level requires exchange of international good practice, peer review and monitoring. This is where the European Union can help through an EU policy on Roma that provides a policy coordination forum* to support and spur policy action at national levels. This is why the World Bank supports calls

from several Member States, the European Parliament and civil society for an EU Roma policy, while recognizing that actual policy formulation is primary responsibility of national governments. Opportunity to leverage the REF as a testing and advisory tool, including on programming of EU structural and pre-accession funds for education.

- ***Non-EU Member States in the Western Balkans need to be involved in an EU process on Roma inclusion.*** There is a danger that they will not benefit from the EU instruments on Roma. The Decade of Roma inclusion can play a bridging role and should be a core element of an EU process.

### **3. The World Bank's contribution**

- ***World Bank will continue to support the Roma inclusion agenda*** by partnering with interested governments and the European Commission in
  - *bringing to the table international best practice* experience on social inclusion policies, e.g. employment activation, early childhood development, conditional cash transfers;
  - *conducting analytical work* and providing policy advice, e.g. Czech Roma employment report;
  - *providing financial support*, e.g. Roma Education Fund; Bulgaria and Romania Social Inclusion Project.