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***“Integrating” Bulgarian Roma—
Discrepancies between Words and Deeds***

*Experiences of Roma Mothers and Roma Social
Community Workers in the Ghetto of Pazardzjik,
Southwest Bulgaria*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question of why the process of inclusion of the Bulgarian Roma in Bulgaria seems to give no actual results despite all the EU strategic documents and Roma inclusion programmes adopted by the Bulgarian government. What are the reasons for its ineffectiveness and futility, and how does this affect the lives of the individual Roma person? This study explores the views and experiences of Roma mothers and Roma social workers concerning their inclusion into the Bulgarian society.

I have approached my inquiry in a qualitative manner by collecting data using the grounded theory method. The techniques I used to collect the data are one-to-one and focus-group interviewing.

In the first chapter, I clarify who are the Roma people in Bulgaria and their place in the political system in Bulgaria. I also describe characteristic traits of the Bulgarian Roma ghetto.

The theoretical framework of this master's dissertation is based on the interactionist theory. The second chapter sheds lights on the theoretical approach I have used as well as it clarifies the theoretical concepts. These help the reader closely link social integration and well-being. I use the concept of quality of life as an overarching framework for concepts that stress social integration and exclusion issues.

In the methodology section, I describe the choice of the research method and the techniques I have used to collect, present, and analyse the data. I interviewed a focus group of Roma mothers and a focus group of Roma social workers. I also conducted an additional one-to-one interview with the head of a Roma nongovernmental organisation,

the Foundation for Multi-ethnic Cooperation–Napredak, based in Pazardzjik, Bulgaria. The disposition of the two focus-group interviews and the one-to-one interview was semistructured. By using the technique of the semistructured interviewing, I opened for the possibility to be flexible in my attempt to explore a framework of themes that I adjusted to the different interview contexts, and to the interviewees.

Section 4 presents the opinion and experiences of Mr. Plamen Tzankov, head of the Roma NGO Foundation for Multi-ethnic Cooperation–Napredak, working with the isolated Roma community in the city of Pazardzjik, Bulgaria. According to his experiences in the field, the challenges to Roma inclusion in Bulgaria include lack of sufficient education among Roma, long-lasting unemployment and poverty, lack of political will for a dialog with Roma organizations, difficulties in funding Roma inclusion projects, and deeply rooted racism in the Bulgarian society.

In Section 5, I present the results of the first focus-group interview with Roma mothers. I have used three tables to present the encoded data.

In section 6, I discuss the results from the first focus-group interview.

Similarly, in section 7, I present the results from the second focus-group interview with Roma social workers, and in section 8, I discuss the results from the obtained data.

Considering the frustration of my respondents with the government and the political system in Bulgaria, it is apparent that they blame the politicians for creating an apartheid that works against the Roma population. The experiences of my respondents report use of harsh language, reluctance to provide social services, and discrimination by officials from national or local governments.

In the conclusion section, I summarize the findings of my study.

According to the respondents' perceptions and opinions and my interpretations of their experiences, I found discrimination to be one of the most important factors hindering the Roma inclusion.

Other factors such as Roma's long-term unemployment, segregation in education, and

inefficient professional qualification training programmes are drawn as central to Roma exclusion on national level.

Insufficient funding of the Roma NGO Napredak is drawn as the main factor hindering the success of the initiated grassroots inclusion projects in the Roma neighbourhood in the city of Pazardzjik.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

I am Bulgarian, and the first eighteen years of my life, I lived in a small, ethnically mixed community in eastern Bulgaria. The life and culture of a small town influenced my life and taught me to value close relations, interconnectedness, friendship, and differences between people.

During the course of my studies, I developed an interest in ethnic minority groups. Some of my attitudes and preconceptions towards ethnic minorities were challenged, and I became more aware that they face specific problems in everyday life.

Consciously and deliberately, I concentrated on the Roma minority partly because of my multicultural background.

Two years ago, I conducted a small study at the end of my bachelor's degree course. In April 2009, I travelled to Bulgaria to carry out a study in a community of Roma people. I had access to the research field through a friend of mine who used to work as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Roma community 'Iztok' in the city of Pazardzhik, southwest Bulgaria.

My main interest was why some Roma communities look like slums. How do people who live in these communities experience their own lives? Why are they excluded from Bulgarian society? The limitations imposed by the structure and extensiveness of my first study made it necessary to narrow the focus on community social work practices in Iztok, Pazardzhik. I conducted one semi-structured interview with Mr Plamen Tzankov, the coordinator of the non-governmental organisation the Foundation for Multi-ethnic Cooperation—Napredak.

I was essentially interested in what and how the NGO Napredak does for the Roma community Iztok. I focused on social work methods and practices being used by the NGO in their work with the Roma community towards integration. The NGO Napredak

was founded sixteen years ago. It has worked since with this particular Roma community. The long experience and extensive knowledge of Mr Plamen Tzankov helped me to see that integration is possible given the necessary time, goodwill, and communication on all levels, finances, and social work towards empowering the Roma community. I was new to the profession of social work, inspired by different theories and very optimistic and eager to put into practice my knowledge. This positive disposition was transferred to my work as I focused on community social work as a means towards Roma inclusion.

The current study has a rather different angle but it is still related to the same community. In October 2011, I went back to the Roma neighbourhood Iztok, Pazardzjik, to conduct a new research. This time the main focus was to find out why the so called ‘Roma integration’ in Bulgaria seems so ineffective.

I contacted the coordinator of the NGO Napredak and requested his assistance in arranging the interviews I had planned in advance.

1.2 Study focus

In this study, I investigate the experiences and challenges of some Roma mothers living in the segregated Roma community Iztok in Pazardzjik and of Roma community workers involved with the NGO Foundation for Multi-ethnic Cooperation—Napredak. Two of the community workers are also employed at Social Services Agency. Using one-to-one semi structured interview with the coordinator of NGO Napredak and two focus group interviews, I seek to investigate the challenges that both groups face in efforts to integrate their families into mainstream Bulgarian society. I discuss the issue of research methods in a later section.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The intention of this study is to answer the research question of why the process of inclusion of Bulgarian Roma in Bulgaria seems to give no actual results and how does

this marks the lives of the people I interviewed. In this study I explore the views of Roma mothers and Roma Social workers concerning their views and experiences of their inclusion in Bulgarian society. In addition, I also undertook an extensive assessment of many documents and resent research projects accounting for the situation of Roma people in Bulgaria.

The organization of the Master dissertation is built around themes such as discrimination, poverty, marginalization, and unemployment, limited access to public services such as health, education and housing. Through the voices and experiences of the Roma people I interviewed, I want to reach the public and show that ineffective public polices affect the life of the individual person enormously and sometimes beyond repair. The individual becomes a product of its environment and a victim of its time as life chances and opportunities to improve quality of life are minimized.

I open the introduction chapter with information about the Roma people in Bulgaria; their socio-economic situation; and how the political system in Bulgaria affected this ethnic minority. Many Roma in Bulgaria end up in the vicious circle of poor family – bad housing – low education – low-paid job – poor next generation family.

In the theory section I focus on the consequent relation between the concepts of well-being and life quality and that of social integration. I presume that there is a close relationship between the concepts and on this background I prepare the reader for the methodological approach I have used in my research.

In the sequent methodology chapter I present my choice of research method and describe the procedures. To answer to my research questions I have used two interviewing techniques: one-to-one interview and focus group interviewing. The presentations of the results I have done in two ways. To present the results of the one-to-one interview I have incorporated the discussion chapter into the findings chapter followed then of a conclusion chapter.

To report the findings of the two focus group interviews I have simply created tables with categories and sub-categories using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings. Consequently I have linked the results to a separate discussion chapter in which the findings are discussed in relation to existing research (Burnard, 2004).

In the conclusion chapter I summarize the results of my study.

1.4 Who are Roma people?

In this section, I present information about the origins of the Roma people and some information about the assimilation policies towards Roma during the past communist regime in Bulgaria. With this I attempt to show in brief the development of Roma social policies through history.

1.4.1 General information about Roma people

Throughout this dissertation I use the term ‘Roma’ instead of ‘Gypsy’ because the latter is considered offensive and historically misconceived as it suggests etymologically that this ethnic group comes from Egypt (Crowe, 2007).

There are an estimated ten to twelve million Roma people in Europe, living in almost all Council of Europe member states. In Bulgaria, the Roma comprise 10.33 per cent of the population (The Council of Europe, 2011).

The widely accepted theory is that Roma’s origin is northern India (Crowe, 2007; Fraser, 1995; Liégeois, 2008). Researchers of the history of Roma migration (Fraser, 1995; Crowe, 2007) into Europe, and into Bulgaria, in particular (Marushiakova & Popov, 2000), believe that the first big migration wave of the Roma which had started from the Iranian plateau occurred in the eighth century with their entrance into the Asian part of the Byzantine Empire. According to Marushiakova & Popov (2000), the arrival of the Roma in Bulgaria dates back to the fourteenth century.

Around the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of the Roma in Bulgaria still lived in the countryside as nomads with permanent settlements at wintertime. Their settlement started around 1929–1930s, when the first settlements with Roma population started to appear (Chapkanski, 2011, p. 9)

1.4.2 The communist regime in Bulgaria and the Roma people

During the communist period in Bulgaria (1945–1989), the state policy towards the Roma was influenced by the ideology of the proletariat—only the class differences were important in the social differentiation of the society. Ethnic and individual diversity were irrelevant and seen as a barrier for social unity (Deacon, 2000). The state policy aimed at unifying all members of the society by the homogenisation of the labour class (ibid., 2000).

The measures the communist state took towards the integration of the Roma included obligatory employment in the industrial and cooperative sectors, forced resettlement in state-provided housing, obligatory inclusion into the health system, and obligatory education for the Roma children (Chapkanski, 2011; Liégeois, 2008; Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2004). The Roma children were often sent to segregated schools or schools for mentally and physically disabled children (Barany, 2005; Chapkanski, 2011; Fraser, 1995; Ringold et al., 2004).

As a whole, the communist policies did change conditions for the Roma by increasing access to education, employment, and housing. On the other hand, the forceful assimilation created mistrust between the service providers and the Roma (Chapkanski, 2011; Grekova, 2008; Ringold et al., 2004).

1.4.3 The new democracy in Bulgaria and the Roma people

The transition period after 1989 was characterised by sharp changes on governmental level. From a communist state and planned economy, Bulgaria made a move towards democracy and market economy (Ringold et al., 2004; Sotiropoulos, Neamtu, & Stoyanova, 2004). After the initial breakthrough from communism, political participation faded away and the economy worsened (Deacon, 2000). However, the new state inherited the structures of welfare services from the communist regime. These were in general low quality and used to hide many inequalities based on political criteria (Sotiropoulos et al., 2004).

In terms of economic development, under communism, Bulgaria as well as the rest of ex-communist countries in central and east Europe was behind west European countries (Sotiropoulos et al., 2004). After the fall of communism in 1989 (ibid., 2004), in the early 1990s, the Bulgarian economy was characterised by relatively low GDP per capita, low level of industrialisation and low-skilled service industries, relatively large agricultural sector, and weak social and political institutions. These characteristics reflected the overall poverty and unemployment situation. Extended income inequality throughout the 1990s was a main trait of Bulgarian society (ibid., 2004).

This was the time when poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination of the Roma people became visible to international institutions (Ringold et al., 2004). A wide range of European and international institutions, for example, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Union, NATO, and the World Bank, became actively involved in making decisions about state-minority relations (Kymlicka, 2005; Sotiropoulos et al., 2004).

1.4.4 The situation of Bulgarian Roma nowadays

Employment and education

Barany (2005), Liégeois (2008) and Ringold et al. (2004), report that the transition period hit the Roma population very hard. As the Roma generally are less educated and skilled than others, they faced difficulties competing for jobs on the new free labour market. They were the ones who got laid off first from state-owned industrial enterprises and agricultural cooperatives, and as result many became clients of low-funded social services (Ringold et al., 2004). These severe consequences are clearly relevant and visible looking at the lives of the Roma people I interviewed. None of them had a university degree. The members of the focus group of Roma mothers were entirely dependent on Social allowances and had barely worked with a legal labour

contract. Even though the employment situation of the second focus group of four social community workers was different, they still reported difficulties entering the labour market.

Health care

Roma health in general deteriorated greatly after the fall of communism as the health system was re-organized in the new political system. A new health insurance scheme was introduced. Partial privatisation of health care and worsening of the economic conditions in Bulgaria affected a large part of the population (Neesham & Tache, 2011). Health services were divided into private and public (Sotiropoulos et al., 2004). Many people could not afford to pay for private health care services (not only the Roma) so they had to use public which deteriorated greatly (ibid., 2004). The Roma had no means to pay health insurance and thus had very limited access to health care, if any (Ringold et al., 2004; Chapkanski, 2011). The reports given by my respondents match entirely with the picture given above. The results and the analysis of the results of the interviews I have conducted support these statements as well.

To give just an example of the hardship one of the Roma mothers experiences I would tell in brief her story concerning the health care in Bulgaria. The only child she has suffers serious health problems. The child has heart failure and needs constant health care supervision which is not available in the city of Pazardzjik. To provide the help, the mother ought to travel at least once a month to the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia. The financial support from the state is extremely insufficient for the needs of this child, she reports. The medicines, the stay in the hospital, and the travel expences exceed greatly the financial help she recieves from the state. The mother also expresses strong concern about the discriminatory practices in the hospitals.

Roma 'ghettoes' and Roma exclusion

Presently, more than 50 per cent of the Roma in Bulgaria live in so-called 'gypsy ghettoes' (Grekova, 2008). The Roma community of Pazardzjik, which is the concern of

my study, is one that consists of roughly twenty thousand inhabitants of Muslim Roma. The data about the numbers is unofficial and acquired from the leader of the NGO Napredak. The community is situated outside the city of Pazardzjik.

This section explores the issues of absolute poverty and marginalisation (spatial and social) and their implications for the Bulgaria Roma in general. These issues I dare say are applicable to the particular Roma community in Pazardzjik as well, as it is a segregated Roma community not much different from the rest.

According to Ringold, Revenga, & Tracy (2002) *“the highest level of absolute poverty among Roma is found in Bulgaria, followed closely by Romania. Even at the lower US\$2.15 line, 41 per cent of Roma households in Bulgaria and 38 per cent in Romania are found to be poor . . . at the higher line of \$4.30 per capita, 80 per cent of Roma households in Bulgaria and almost 70 per cent of those in Romania are poor”*.

The issue of poverty and social exclusion will be examined more closely in theoretical terms in the theory section (See 2.4.1).

The difficulties Bulgarian Roma in general face reflect large losses of low-skilled jobs in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing that were provided for them during the communist period in Bulgaria and disappeared during the transition process to democracy. The resulting marginalisation manifests itself today in inadequate access to decent education and jobs in the formal sector, substandard housing, poor health, and low life expectancy (Cekota & Trentini, 2011).

On the other hand the spatial isolation of certain Roma communities is of a great concern in regard to the integration and inclusion of members of such ‘ghetto’ communities. Addressing this issue European Commission (2012a, p. 23) reports that the concentration of Roma in isolated neighbourhoods has increased during the last fifteen years. This concentration in separate neighbourhoods usually results in the social isolation of their residents, deterioration of their living conditions, problems with the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure and cleanliness, transport problems, and difficulties in service provision. One of the most serious consequences is the deterioration of the opportunities for the young generations to be prepared for involvement in the formal economy, hence the increasing difficulties they encounter in seeking and finding jobs (European Commission, 2012a).

Ringold et al., 2004 point out that segregated Roma communities score lowest on the scale of factors mentioned above. The common problems for such settlements are the lack of running water, electricity, appalling living conditions, health problems, high rate of childbirth death, and lack of food and proper clothing (ibid., 2004).

The Roma ghettos are overcrowded with the highest concentration of poor people (Chapkanski, 2011; Grekova, 2008; Tomova, 1995; Ringold et al., 2002).

There is little internationally available research on the specificity of the Roma ghetto. Ringold et al. (2002), gives a general picture of the typical traits of segregated Roma communities in Europe. The Roma communities are characterised by diversity, but there are some common patterns in the way they are organised (ibid., 2002).

A typical trait is that Roma ghettos in cities suffer an extensive level of exclusion (Ringold et al., 2002).

I use the concept of exclusion here in a sense of social exclusion. In the following theory section, I explore the concept in-depth. Now, I refer to the term in the sense given by Giddens (2006): “*social exclusion refers to processes by which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society*” (Giddens, 2006, p. 378).

Another issue for the most of the Roma ghettos in Bulgaria is that they do not own the land of their housing, and the actual dwellings are illegally built. Lack of water, toilets and bathrooms, electricity, telephone services, waste collection, and public services are issues which the Roma have to deal with on an everyday basis. Figures show that only 9 per cent of Roma in Bulgaria have access to hot water, bathrooms, and indoor toilets (Chapkanski, 2011; Ringold et al., 2002).

Similar issues were brought up in the course of interviews of my study. Three of the interviewed Roma women were residing in illegally built houses. These three women did not have bathrooms at their houses and sanitary facilities were outside their dwellings.

Chapkanski (2011), points out four characteristics of the Bulgarian Roma ghetto.

The first one describes the ghetto as a self-sufficient micro society but not completely isolated. According to Chapkanski (2011), complete isolation is not possible, because of the need of the inhabitants to leave the ghetto to provide for their families. The Roma

community in Pazardzjik shares this characteristic. It has a market, little grocery shops dispersed around, a school, kindergarten and even a library. Despite the people who work in the service sector in the neighbourhood, there are no other jobs available. To take part in any way in the broader social life, the inhabitants have to leave the neighbourhood.

The second common characteristic for Bulgarian Roma ghettos is the issue of illegal housing. These houses are often made of tin, cardboards, stones, etc. They look more as construction sites rather than houses and are frequently built as extensions of already existing dwellings (ibid., 2011). One can observe this trend in the Roma community of Pazardzjik as well. One of my respondents, a mother of six children, lives in a construction like the mentioned ones above. Comfort is not a word that one can use to describe the living conditions.

A third characteristic, which one can observe across Bulgaria, is the gap between extreme poverty and extreme wealth on the territory of Roma ghettos (Chapkanski, 2011; Grekova, 2008). The contrast between small shacks that are neighbours with a huge four-story palace is unavoidable to see by anyone passing by. In the ghetto of Pazardzjik, I saw two big houses contrasting with the rest. One of them apparently belonged to the local 'pimp' and the other one to his cousin.

The ghetto within the ghetto is a phenomenon first observed by Tomova (1995) and described by Chapkanski (2011). The so-called *ghetto within the ghetto* is situated usually at the end of the Roma neighbourhood made up of inhabitants cast aside by the rest of Roma (Chapkanski, 2011; Tomova, 1998). The existence of a *ghetto within the ghetto* is applicable for the Roma neighbourhood of Pazardzjik as well.

The ghetto within the ghetto is a result of extreme poverty. Loss of jobs and property forces the Roma people to move to the outskirts of the Roma neighbourhood into small handmade constructions. The spatial exclusion is usually followed by social exclusion (Chapkanski, 2011).

The results of the research by Chapkanski (2011) coincide to a large degree with the observations I made in the present study.

Other available research on Roma 'ghetto' communities is presented by PER (2002). It reports that Roma 'ghetto' neighbourhoods have existed throughout central and south-

eastern Europe for centuries despite many attempts to dissolve them (PER, 2002). In recent years the Roma 'ghettoes' have become areas where no municipal workers, much less police, dare to enter (ibid., 2002). One of the Roma community social workers who I interviewed confirmed this as saying as one of his duties at the Social Services Agency is to assist municipal workers in their visits to the neighbourhood.

Roma ghettoes are seen to a large degree as troubled settlements in general but a rather different perspective had been offered by a representative of the Council of Europe based on the overview of the situation (PER, 2002). It is a view which suggests that the Roma 'ghettoes' represent a unique microcosmos and should be considered an important part of the European cultural heritage. Therefore, any attempts to destroy them regardless of the illegal status of the settlement and the dwellings is opposed to the Council of Europe's intentions (ibid., 2002). Roma 'ghettoes' are not exclusively characterised by poverty; while conceding that poverty rates are certainly higher inside the settlements than outside, improvements within such Roma communities can be achieved given better policies (ibid., 2002).

The consequences of social and spatial segregation of Roma in Bulgaria and for the particular Roma ghetto in Pazardzjik are further worsened by another issue regarding the illegal character of the buildings. According to Vasil Kadrinov (Green European Foundation, 2011, p. 30), 25 per cent of Roma housing in Bulgaria is illegal. The legal framework allowing for the legalisation of illegal construction is no longer applicable, and currently there are no opportunities for such legalisation to be carried out. There are some local initiatives formally envisaging the legalisation of illegal construction; however, according to NGOs, there are serious doubts as to whether they will be implemented in practice in view of the restrictive legal framework (ibid., 2011).

1.5 Summary

In the introductory section I presented the focus of my study and described the structure of the Master dissertation. I laid the basis for this study by giving some information about the origins of Roma people. Further I described how the Bulgarian political system affected Roma both during the communist era and the new democracy. In my

opinion Roma ‘ghettoes’ in Bulgaria have become the ultimate manifestation of social and spatial exclusion of some Roma people. The bigger part of the people I interviewed live in such environment and therefore I saw the necessity to initiate an account of a representation of the typical ‘Bulgarian Roma ghetto’.

2. Theoretical chapter

2.1 Theoretical framework

The purpose of this study as mentioned earlier (See 1.2) is to represent the views of some Bulgarian Roma (mothers and social workers) who live in a so called Roma ‘ghetto’ on how do they experience their inclusion in Bulgarian society. I focus on their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences.

The meaning of social inclusion in this Master dissertation is implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings and that no matter what society members have or who they are, they are treated equally and have equal opportunities (Anis, & Haan, 2008). I have conveyed this understanding of the concept to the respondents in my study. I interviewed two focus groups (one consisting of Roma mothers who have their children at school and another consisting of Roma community social workers). I have also interviewed a Roma activist – the head of the NGO Napredak who for more than a decade has worked locally for the Roma inclusion cause.

To satisfy the aims of my study I based the research on the interactionist theory. The perspective I sought is one that enables me to present people’s voices as accountable and trustworthy and, therefore, I based my field research on ethnomethodology.

I believe that people's immediate perceptions, opinions, and experiences are shaped to a certain degree by society structures (Giddens, 2006). Therefore, I present Giddens's structuration theory as a reference point to lighten the issue of integration in a structure-agency perspective.

2.2 The Interactionist theoretical approach

Interactionism is a theoretical approach in sociology which stresses the exchange of symbols between individuals in social interaction. It emphasises that the small-scale interactions of individuals and not the interactions by society as a whole (Giddens, 2006, p. 26). This perspective is normally considered to consist of three possible variations—phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology. In general, the interactionist perspectives tend to focus on relatively small-scale levels of social interaction, and for this reason they are sometimes referred to as a “micro level sociological analysis” (Giddens, 2006). The basic ideas of this theoretical approach, regardless of variations, can be summarised as follows :

- 1) Individuals act (make conscious choices about their behaviour based upon the way they interpret situations) rather than simply react to social stimulations. Social constructivists, for example, adopt an opposite stand whereby people's behaviour is viewed in terms of responses to forces external to the individual
- 2) The way in which social actors interpret the behaviour of others and social situations are significant as a means of understanding the world which is socially constructed (Bilton, Bonnet, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworrth, & Webster, 2002).

This social construction of the world is based upon the meanings people imply in different social situations (Bilton et al., 2002).

The practical application of the theoretical concepts I have presented above brings my study to a point where the meanings, experiences and opinions of the respondents are vital to the understanding of social integration through the perspective of those who it

concerns. To me as a researcher and a social worker it is important to know how the individual perceives the world. Therefore, it is important to listen and make continuous efforts to understand how people reflect on their lives. Their experiences prove to be of extreme value when evaluating different life situations. However, if the social world is a construct of meanings and interpretations, then the concept of social integration must be one that is also socially constructed.

According to Ritzer & Goodman (2003), the self, the identity, and the meaning are socially constructed realms. Action becomes meaningful in the process of interpretation (ibid., 2003). In this sense, the individual's perceptions are also social constructs. The question which I pose to myself in this sense is "if one have lived excluded from society one's whole life, how would one construct his or her identity in relation to social inclusion?"

In the attempt to answer this question I would turn to another issue that interactionists stress on. It is the social context within which people interact (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003). The social context is important for people's interpretations of the behaviour of others and the way they choose to behave in various social settings (ibid., 2003).

According to the ethnomethodology the social world is an arbitrary, conditional, and relative construction. Ethnomethodology is a perspective within sociology which focuses on the way agents understand their everyday world. All it matters is the personal subjective views and all human accounts are of equal validity or invalidity. The content of communication and interpretation during an event is context-bound, and any understanding of it is subject-centred. The ethnomethodology operates on micro level. Everyone has one's own account for a certain event, or in other words, we all experience the world differently (Bilton et al., 2002, p. 505–509).

Hilbert (1990) (*cited in* Ritzer & Goodman, 2003), recognizes some strains in this theoretical approach and he argues that to the ethnomethodologist, there is no distinction to be made between macro and micro structures in society. The micro-macro issue is dealt with in a way that instead of seeing it on two levels it gets dissolved and integrated as one because they are generated simultaneously. (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003, p. 399). However, it is my conviction that forces on macro level exist and it is not always up to the individual to determine one's own future. In accordance with the

theoretical ideas of Marx and Weber in terms of agency and structure I am strongly convinced that economic factors are vital for the future of an individual. Life chances and quality of life are correlated with material wealth (Giddens, 2005, p. 321-322). Inequalities in society reflect also the government's political will to create opportunities for the disadvantaged members of society (ibid., 2005, p. 365) and in this way the individual's life becomes to a large extent contingent on factors related to structural processes.

In the next section, I will review the concept of social integration and its linkage to the concept of well-being. It is important to note that my approach towards understanding my informants' points of view is tightly connected with exploring also their subjective views on their general well-being as an important factor to their social inclusion (United Nations, 2010).

Social inclusion bears a positive connotation and I would like to use the term throughout the study in a sense of togetherness, solidarity, social bond and a feeling of being part of one society. However, social inclusion and social integration is often used interchangeably in many contexts (European Commission, 2010a; European Commission, 2011). The annual Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion 2006 (European Union, 2006) reckons the social inclusion objectives as 1) access for all to rights and resources, 2) active social inclusion and 3) coordination and mobilization of all actors. European Union (2006) also defines social inclusion as '*process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live*'.

With this in mind I will next consider the concept of social integration.

2.3 What is social integration and its connection to well-being?

In this section, I review social integration within two perspectives. One relies on objective determinants and the other one based on individual perceptions.

2.3.1 Social integration

The United Nations Research Institute for Social development (UNRISD) gives a definition for social integration that covers three different aspects (UNRISD, 1994).

The first one sees social integration as an inclusion and implies equal opportunities and rights for all human beings.

Integration means improving the life chances of those in disadvantaged positions. Social integration as an inclusion is a positive objective in itself. Many policies are based on the assumption that there should be a greater justice, equality, material well-being, and democratic freedom. Policymakers believe in the ideal that adequate strategies and plans can be designed to achieve these goals. The opposite of social integration, in this sense, is social exclusion (UNRISD, 1994).

The question which arises here is in what terms inclusion should happen? The excluded can be included in ways which attempt to promote an unacceptable degree of homogeneity; and when it occurs, the search for social integration becomes synonymous with uniformity. However, the issue of how to assure equal rights and opportunities for all, while respecting diversity, must be one of the central policy questions. It is also thought to be the most complex one. This is why social integration can be considered a negative goal by some groups (UNRISD, 1994). In the previous chapter I have briefly gone through similar Roma assimilation policies used during the communist era in Bulgaria (see 1.4.2) and its effects on Roma.

This brings us to the second view on social integration that invokes the image of an unwanted imposition of homogeneity (UNRISD, 1994).

The third view does not imply a positive or a negative state. It is only a way to describe the established patterns of human relations in any given society (UNRISD, 1994).

According to Heggen, Bergem, Høydal, Kvalsund, & Myklebust (2003), in the attempt to assess social integration and social exclusion, the conclusions will depend on the construction of the concepts and the empirical measures we employ. Using empirical and 'objective' indicators of welfare might allow for references that Roma as a group are not socially integrated (Oakley, 2005).

According to The World Bank (2009) and Ringold et al., (2002) welfare among Roma households is significantly lower than that of non-Roma in terms of both material deprivation (consumption and income) and other measures of deprivation including housing status, education level, and employment opportunities.

According to Ringold et al., (2002) a strong negative relation between Roma ethnicity and Roma's welfare was found and appeared to be due to differences in endowments and opportunities. An interesting finding however is that the report states that an important 'structural' component also plays a big role in the exclusion and poverty of Roma. According to the report this component may reflect the influence of the past and present discrimination, exclusion, and cultural factors which may also affect access to public services.

Social integration of Roma in Bulgaria is based on the action plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, which details the measures to implement the National Roma Integration Strategy, links well to key EU strategies such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the European Structural Funds (ESF) policies (Dr Stateva, Stock, Dr Junge, Serrano, 2012). In recent years, Bulgarian government has produced numerous policy documents, strategies and action plans but not much statistical evidence is available to document successes and inconsistencies argue Dr Stateva et al., (2012).

A report concerned with tackling poverty and exclusion in Bulgaria argues that in the period 2003-2007 the share of the Roma among the poor constitute over 40 per cent of the poor population in Bulgaria (Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2009). The report points out some specific traits and causes in regard to Roma poverty and exclusion. Roma are regarded as an ethnic multi-disadvantaged minority who are exposed to several risks. Further the authors of the report argue that the trend of 'children with parents-children' is one which deepens further the risk of poverty and exclusion. Another peculiarity of the Roma poverty is the early school leaving. The early school leaving with the ethnic Bulgarians is observed mainly between the primary and secondary school, while the Roma minorities leave school immediately after the first or second school year. The report mentions also some empirical research which shows that:

- 1) Among children of age 7-15 from Roma households – every fifth child does not go to school, and 8.7 per cent go to school from time to time;
- 2) 1/3 of the 16 years old Roma surveyed have not gone to school;

3) More than 17 per cent of Roma at the age of 17-25 cannot read and write (Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2009).

The statistics are worrying but however, indicators used to measure poverty, social inclusion or exclusion of Roma are in many cases ‘objective’ in the sense that the status of individuals or households can be verified by documentary evidence and is not based on a subjective judgement by the respondent.

The Laeken indicators (Palmer, 2002) are a set of common European statistical indicators which measure social exclusion and poverty based on objective dimensions. These indicators need to be considered as a consistent whole that reflect a balanced representation of EU social concerns rather than as a set of individual indicators (Eurostat European Commission, 2005). These indicators were developed as part of the Lisbon Strategy which aims for the coordination of European social policies at country level based on a set of common goals (Bohnke, 2004).

There is, however, a risk that the sole reliance on objective indicators could be perceived as reducing the legitimacy of the application. Exclusion is a personal experience as well, and the views of those suffering poverty and social exclusion should not be disregarded (Atkinson & Marlier, 2010).

2.3.2 Subjective social integration

To follow a perspective which explores social integration subjectively has its advantages quite simply because needs and circumstances are just as varied among Roma as they are among the rest of population. In this study I am after capturing and understanding the ‘feelings’ of the individuals I interviewed about their own perception and experiences of their social inclusion. I believe that the actors themselves can judge best whether they are excluded or not, poor or not and happy or not.

By gaining access to one’s subjectivity, a researcher recognises that people have different needs. As a researcher I recognise that people reflect their own situation, and they strive to find solutions and adjust to life in various ways (Heggen et al., 2003).

2.4 The concepts of poverty, social exclusion and happiness

2.4.1 Poverty and social exclusion

Focusing on Roma social exclusion means turning attention to the problem that comes with high unemployment rates, increasing inequality, and poverty and that people have fewer opportunities to participate in social life (Bohnke, 2004; Bhalla & Lapayere, 2004).

The term ‘social exclusion’ can be described as comprehensive, multidimensional, and dynamic; it generally refers to limited chances for individual participation, economically, socially, culturally, as well as politically and addresses the issues of reinforcing processes of accumulated disadvantages and the weakening of social rights (Bohnke, 2004).

According to Fløtten (2003), the concepts of poverty and social exclusion are viewed in many ways as the same phenomenon. Some view social exclusion as poverty, others see poverty as one form of social exclusion (economic exclusion). Sometimes social exclusion is considered an inevitable consequence of living in poverty but in general Fløtten (2003) argues that the two concepts should be kept apart.

According to The World Bank (2005c) poverty is distinct deficit in well-being. The conventional view links well-being mainly to control over commodities, so the poor are those who do not have enough income or consumption to put them above some adequate minimum threshold. This view sees poverty essentially in economic terms (ibid., 2005c).

Poverty may also be tied to a specific type of consumption; thus someone might be house poor or food poor or health poor. These dimensions of poverty can often be measured directly, for instance by measuring malnutrition or literacy.

The broadest approach to well-being (and poverty) focuses on the capability of the individual to function in society. The poor lack key capabilities, and may have inadequate income or education, or be in poor health, or feel powerless, or lack political freedoms. In this sense we talk more of social exclusion (The World Bank, 2005c). According to Fløtten (2003), it is exactly the weakened social ties which divides the two concepts. It is therefore possible to be poor without being socially isolated and it is possible to be socially isolated without being poor.

Because marginalisation and exclusion as well as integration and inclusion are also experienced subjectively, for example in terms of feelings of not belonging or respectively belonging to society (Bohnke, 2004), I will next explore the concept of well-being as it takes account of how people feel about their life.

2.5 The well-being of people – indicator for their social integration

As mentioned above one way to think the concept of well-being is to see whether households or individuals have enough resources to meet their needs. Typically poverty is then measured by comparing an individual's income or consumption with some defined threshold below which they are considered to be poor. This is the most conventional view. Poverty is seen largely in monetary terms and is the starting point for most analyses of poverty (The World Bank, 2005c).

Well-being and ill-being are also multidimensional and intertwined concepts.

Experiences of ill-being include material lack and want (of food, housing and shelter, livelihood, assets and money); hunger, pain and discomfort; exhaustion and poverty of time; exclusion, rejection, isolation and loneliness; bad relations with others, including bad relations within the family; insecurity, vulnerability, worry, fear and low self-confidence; and powerlessness, helplessness, frustration and anger.

Well-being and ill-being are states of mind and being. Well-being has a psychological and spiritual dimension as a mental state of harmony, happiness and peace of mind. Ill-being includes mental distress, breakdown, depression and madness, often described by participants to be impacts of poverty (The World Bank, 2005c).

Regarding the notion of well-being of a family, I would not advocate for a confined list of categories of family well-being. However, using the work of Pendergast (1998) as the foundation, I use her categories of physical needs, socio-psychological, stability, interaction, spiritual/moral, cultural, environmental, and economic.

Well-being is also brought up in literature as quality of life. The concept of quality of life refers to ‘*the overall well-being of individuals in a society, defined according to desirable value-based societal goals such as equal distribution of life chances, achieved minimum standard of living for everyone, or access to employment and social protection systems*’ (Bohnke, 2004). There is public consensus in the European Union about the importance of the attainment of social rights, social cohesion, and social integration. This consensus includes an understanding that people should have equal opportunities to participate in employment, social protection systems, and institutions, which promise a generally accepted minimum of basic essentials. Policy thinking, which seeks social integration, access to employment, and reduction of poverty, implies an improvement of quality of life for everyone (Bohnke, 2004).

Thus, the concept of quality of life can serve as an overarching framework for concepts that stress social integration and exclusion issues (Bohnke, 2004).

The concept of quality of life includes a concern on how people feel about themselves and their situation in life. These subjective assessments can be about specific domains in the life of people (Anderson, Mikulić, Vermeulen, Lyly-Yrjanainen, & Zigante, 2009).

In this study, I am concerned with my respondents’ perceptions and experiences on education, employment, family life, and social and health services as these social institutions are the ones which the Roma participants in my study contact on daily basis. I use the accounts of the people who I interviewed as a report on their experiences regarding their social inclusion.

According to Anderson et al. (2009), indicators on subjective well-being are often considered as ‘soft’ ones. They only permit comprehensive and meaningful assessments of an individual’s quality of life. Measures of subjective well-being—especially overall life satisfaction—are the best available indicators of the degree to which the expectations and needs of the population are met (Anderson et al., 2009).

Therefore I find the voices of the interviewed Roma people trustworthy because the overall well-being of people living in a society not only reflects living conditions and their control over resources but also the way people feel about their lives and respectively their inclusion in the wider society (Bohnke, 2004).

In this study, I suggest that a serious gap has developed over the years between the actual and intended integration of Roma in Bulgaria.

More than 80 per cent of Roma in Bulgaria are poor, suffer social exclusion and have little resources to be able to attend to their lives without the help of the state. The Roma Education Fund (2007), describes in details all documents adopted to help implement the EU Framework of national Roma integration strategies. Bulgaria adopted the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities in 1995 and the Framework Program for the Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society in 1999 (Kymlicka, 2005). In addition, as part of its participation in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Bulgaria developed the 'Decade Action Plan 2005–2015 (Roma Education Fund, 2007).

Programs and documents have been adopted and many NGO's are working for the implementation of the recommendations of the National plan for integration of Roma. But instead of observing a progress things seem to be getting worse. Structural conditions that intend Roma integration are created in Bulgaria but why these conditions do not produce the required change? This is a question of a great complexity. The inconsistency between the intended Roma inclusion and the actual results is evident from the field work of my study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research method

The central subject of this study is to learn from the participants (Roma mothers and Roma social community workers) living in the Roma community of the city of Pazardzjik, Bulgaria, how they experience their life in relation to inclusion in mainstream Bulgarian society.

Integration I define throughout the study as social integration with inclusionary objectives securing equal opportunities and rights for all citizens (UNRISD, 1994).

Social integration from the individual's point of view I consider as a form of inclusion of the single individual or her/his family in different areas of social life (Bohnke, 2004). This I have regarded as measurable by subjective indicators based on the personal experiences (ibid., 2004) reported by Roma mothers and Roma community workers. Such subjective indicators are overall satisfaction with life and the individual general sense of well-being (ibid., 2004) related to the feeling of inclusion or exclusion of the Bulgarian mainstream society.

To make it clear for my respondents what I mean by the concepts of overall satisfaction in life and well-being, I have asked the respondents to think about how they experience their life in relation to inclusion (exclusion) in the Bulgarian society. I have considered that the criteria to measure overall satisfaction in life are participation on the labour market, inclusion in the education system, satisfaction with family life, and access to health and social services.

The theoretical hypothesis that I made—namely, that reality is socially constructed and that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experiences—predisposes my role as a researcher. The only way for the researcher to understand the informants' point of view is to become involved in the reality of the participants and to interact with them in meaningful ways (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

When a researcher seeks deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the participants, it is advisable to use a qualitative research method (ibid., 2008). Therefore, I have approached the research questions in a qualitative manner.

If the objective of a given research is concerned with investigating things that one could observe and measure, and if one assumes that such measurements can be made objectively and repeated by other researchers, then there is a need to approach the issue quantitatively (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena (Morgan, 1988). One of the main traditions within qualitative research is grounded theory, which is a leading approach in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the first step is data collection (Flick, 2002). Therefore, my main goal

as a researcher is to understand, discover, and generate a theory or theoretical understanding of a process, action, or interaction grounded on the views of the participants; to integrate categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes (Bloomberg & Volp, 2008).

3.2 Focus-group interviews

To achieve the initial goal of my study—that is, to understand the views of the participants—I defined the method of procedure to collect the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The data I collected directly from the participants using the technique of focus-group interviewing.

Focus-group interview is a type of interviewing technique in which the appropriately selected members of the focus group participate in a conversation. Focus groups are suited to research on topics relating to attitudes and cognitions in an environment of interaction (Morgan, 1988). The main characteristics outlining the interviewing technique are *“a focus on specific issues, with a predetermined group of people, conducting an interactive discussion”* (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

I have inductively developed thematic codes and subcodes from the raw data derived from the focus-group interviews that I have in consequent chapters interpreted (Boyatzis, 1998).

I organized two focus groups as five respondents were invited in the focus group consisting of Roma mothers, and four respondents were invited in the focus group consisting of Roma community social workers. All of the respondents who were invited were present at the focus-group sessions.

3.3 One-to-one semistructured interview

In addition to the focus-group interviews, I conducted an open one-to-one semistructured interview with the coordinator of the nongovernmental organization Napredak, Mr. Plamen Tzankov.

The aim with this interview was to review the progress the NGO Napredak has made with implementing the Roma inclusion projects on a local level. The decision to carry out an additional interview was evoked by the necessity to obtain more relevant information about the overall picture of the current situation in the Roma “ghetto” in Pazardzjik. The interview with Mr. Plamen Tzankov I divided into two main parts. In the first part, I asked general questions about the practical progress the NGO Napredak has made with the inclusion projects after my first visit in 2009. In the second part, I addressed the issues of Roma social integration. Specifically I asked questions connected to how my respondent sees integration of this particular Roma community on the background of the new developments.

This interviewing technique is used usually to accumulate qualitative data by allowing a respondent to talk about their opinions on a particular subject (Wengraf, 2001). The researcher decides the focus of the interview, and the objective is to understand the respondent’s point of view, rather than generalize (Flick, 2002; Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

I used open-ended questions, and the interview was like a conversation.

I believe that using the one-to-one open semistructured interview, in addition to the two focus-group interviews, optimized the strengths of both in a way that it allowed me to perceive the situation in a more comprehensive way.

3.4 Research sample

Focus groups

- One focus group with five Roma mothers living in the Roma community of Pazardzjik, Bulgaria
- One focus group with four Roma community social workers working with the Roma community of Pazardzjik, Bulgaria

Sample recruitment criteria for the focus groups

The common sample criteria for both focus groups were that each focus group should consist of participants with similar social background. This, according to Hennink et al. (2011, p. 150), refers to the homogeneity of the focus group. The strength of a homogeneous focus group that I have tried to achieve lies in the assumption that participants with similar background are more likely to express their views in front of the other participants. On the other hand, participants with different backgrounds who feel that others in the group are of a higher status would be more hesitant to share their views (Hennink et al., 2011).

The selection was purposive.

The main criteria for selection of participants were that the participants

- were within a certain age range,
- had similar socio-characteristics, and
- were comfortable to talk to me (Rabiee, 2004).

The Roma mothers' focus group:

- Mix of age within the range 21–64
- All of them living in the neighbourhood and connected with the NGO Napredak

The Roma social workers' focus group:

- Mix of age within the range 21–64
- All of them connected to the work of the NGO Napredak
- All of them having experiences working with this particular Roma community

Timing of fieldwork:

- 15–17 October 2011

Location:

- Kvartal (neighbourhood) Iztok, Pazardzjik, Bulgaria

3.5 Strengths and weaknesses of the interviewing techniques

Considering that the strengths and weaknesses of any research method are intertwined (Morgan, 1988), I will present here the strong and weak sides of the interviewing techniques I have used to conduct my study.

3.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of focus-group interviewing

Practical strengths and weaknesses

The practical strength of focus-group interviewing lies in the fact that they are easy to conduct, and it is cheap and quick (Morgan, 1988). “Cheap and quick” here refers to the actual conducting of the interviews and not to the transcript typing, which, to the contrary is slow and time-consuming, as well as to the transcript analysis (ibid., 1988).

I encountered no problems in the recruitment of participants. The assistance of the leader of the NGO Napredak contributed to the achievement of the composition of the focus groups as planned according to my criteria.

The price one pays for the ease of conducting focus groups is that focus groups are not based on natural settings. In such way, there will always be some uncertainty about the accuracy of what the participants say (Morgan, 1988).

Procedural strengths and weaknesses

When it comes to the strength of the procedure of the focus-group interviewing, Morgan (1988, p. 21) argues that this is the ability to explore topics and generate hypotheses.

A researcher who uses the focus-group interview technique has less control over the data that is generated compared with the data from individual interviews (Morgan,

1988). It is also more difficult to define patterns of the discussion compared with individual interviewing (Flick, 2002). This is why Flick (2002) argues that it is almost impossible “*to design relatively common conditions for the collection of data in different groups involved in a study.*” During the inquiry, I tried to ask the same questions both focus groups in order to obtain as varied information as possible. It was not easy to manage the conversations and direct them in a desired course. Some results from the interviews of both focus groups overlapped, but some did not. The information I obtained, I believe, made me create a quite comprehensive master’s dissertation enveloping many sides of the daily life of the Roma people I interviewed.

Core strengths and weaknesses in focus-group interviewing

Essentially, the strengths of focus groups come from the opportunity to collect data from group interaction on a certain topic (Morgan, 1988).

The aim of my research to provide information about a range of ideas and feelings that my respondents have on issues concerning their inclusion into the mainstream Bulgarian society was served also by the choice I made to interview two different focus groups.

The accounts given by the Roma social work professionals, although different from the accounts given by the Roma mothers, complemented each other.

This technique of interviewing gave me the opportunity to collect data both voluntarily given by the respondents and requested by me as a researcher (Morgan, 1988).

The discussion achieved in both focus groups, I believe, covered the initial goal of focus-group interviewing—that is, to create a group discussion that resembles a lively conversation among friends and neighbours (Morgan, 1988).

3.5.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the one-to-one semistructured interview

I partially recorded the one-to-one semistructured interview conducted with the coordinator of the NGO Napredak, Mr. Plamen Tzankov. The interview started at his office, where I type-recorded it. Unfortunately, the interview was interrupted, and we continued later over lunch.

I informed him prior to the interview what the interview would be about and informed him that I would like to record the interview as well. He was also informed in what way the information obtained would be used for.

As I said earlier, this interview was not planned in the planning phase of the research, but I felt it was necessary to carry it out.

The NGO Napredak was having trouble financing their projects. Consequently, many families and their children who previously depended on the services provided by the NGO were now left without help and hope. Therefore, I interviewed Mr. Plamen Tzankov in an attempt to explore why things took this unexpected turn.

On the positive side, I did know Mr. Tzankov from before, and this I account as a strength in terms of the fact that he trusted me and he gave me the information I needed (without, I believe, hiding too much from me). However, a negative side related to obtaining information was the fact that the interview was interrupted and I did not get to type-record the interview fully.

In interviewing Mr. Tzankov, I was concerned with a potential failing conducting the actual interview. To interview an expert in the field carries many responsibilities for the researcher. For one, one must be well prepared and be able to lead the conversation so that the expert does not take the lead (Flick, 2002, p. 167–169). The latter, indeed, I found most challenging.

3.4 The planning phase of conducting the research

3.4.1 Determining the size of the focus groups

According to Morgan (1988), the first important thing in planning group interviews is the format of the group. To determine the number of the respondents in each group, I

have considered that using small focus groups would give me the possibility to capture and produce a dynamic of higher involvement in the life of the group (Morgan, 1988). Smaller focus groups also give an opportunity to sense the reaction of each individual (ibid., 1988).

Even though the focus group of Roma mothers consisted of five members and it is accounted to be a small focus group (Flick, 2002), there was demonstrated a good variety of attitudes and opinions. Even though all interviewed Roma mothers were unemployed and striving to meet ends, a mother of six children, for example, who lives in the “ghetto within the ghetto,” has a different perception of what difficult life is from a mother who lives in a relatively big house and has one child. Therefore, in the planning phase I restricted myself from inviting more respondents to participate in the group.

3.4.2 Determining the source of participants for the focus-group interviews

In selecting participants for focus groups, the issue is sample bias (Morgan, 1988). As researchers, we can experience sampling bias when a sample is collected in such a way that some members of the intended population are less likely to be included than others. It is opposite to random sampling where all individuals have equal chances to be selected (ibid., 1988). I am fully aware of the fact that my study cannot be externally valid and the results cannot be used to generalize to the rest of the population. The initial aim in the study was mainly to address the internal validity—similarities or differences found in the sample at hand (Flick, 2002).

The choice I made to interview mothers and not fathers, for example, was based on the presumption that women in general (not only Roma women) have the responsibility to bring up their children and are more involved with them. The mother’s responsibility on an everyday basis with the health, schooling, and socializing of their children inevitably leads to a bigger involvement in society compared with that of the father’s (Madriz, 2003). At the same time (Roma), mothers in general who stay at home and only take care of their children have bigger chances to become and stay isolated from the society (ibid., 2003). This is, in general, opposite to Roma fathers’ social life particularly because of their role as providers for their families. In such way, fathers have better

chances to be part of the wider society and consequently to be better integrated in terms of employment and socializing within the mainstream society. For an illustration, none of the participants of the focus group of mothers was employed at the time of the interviewing, and all of the community social workers who were all men were employed or had relatively steady connection to the labour market.

My initial desire was not to mix the different participants when it comes to variables such as sex, race, age, and social class (Hennink et al., 2011). I have been aware prior to the study of the fact that gender in Roma society plays an important role in social life. Basing my selection criteria on Roma cultural perceptions and sensitivity on that matter, I decided not to mix the focus groups on gender criteria. In this way, I thought I would minimize the chances of affecting the information conveyed (Morgan, 1988).

Considering the age of the participants as a criterion for the selection of the members in the Roma mothers focus group, I wanted to ensure a range of different opinions, and therefore, I invited a very young (21-year-old mother) and a relatively old participant (64-year-old grandmother). I have considered prior to the interview session that because of the age difference, there could emerge difficulties in the interaction (Morgan, 1988). I kept in mind this challenge as a moderator of the conversation. An effect I observed during this particular interview was that the young participants did not interrupt the oldest participant. Interruption occurred between the women in the same age group. I interpret this incident in terms of respect for the elderly, which is a present cultural issue in any Roma community.

In the focus group of Roma social community workers, the recruitment happened on criteria based on occupation and knowledge within the area of Roma integration. They were all connected with the local nongovernmental organization Napredak, and two of them were also employed in the Social Services Agency. The other two participants were only involved in the community work organised by the NGO Napredak.

3.5 Procedure

The disposition of the two focus-group interviews and the one-to-one interview was semistructured. Semistructured interviews are flexible and generally use a framework of

themes that the interviewer explores. Compared to structured interviews where questions are set beforehand, semistructured interviews provide a certain degree of freedom for the interviewer to ask questions, which are adjusted to the interview context, and to the interviewees (Flick, 2002).

3.5.1 Procedure of the focus-group interviews

According to Hennink et al (2011), the researcher has to fulfil a set of tasks in order to ensure that the focus-group interview is conducted properly.

I made sure that the following introductory tasks were fulfilled:

- to welcome and thank the participants for attending
- to introduce myself and the thematic field of the interview
- to explain how the information would be used as well as to explain how long the interview was going to last (Hennink et al., 2011)

The focus-group interviews were type-recorded. Ethical questions such as to confirm that all of the participants were comfortable with the recording device as well as their consent for recording the interview were taken in account (ibid., 2011).

One cannot say how a group discussion should proceed because, essentially, this is a result of the dynamics developed within a specific group (Flick, 2002, p. 117).

According to Hennink et al., (2011), it is important that all participants contribute with their opinions, and they have to be encouraged to do that. I did experience that in both focus groups there were participants who were dominant. To manage and ensure a diversity of opinions, I encouraged participation of all members of the focus groups. The dynamic of each focus-group interview was different in terms of what issues were regarded from the group as most problematic. Even though the problems identified by the two focus groups were similar, each group emphasized different issues relevant to the topics brought up in the interview.

I tried to use the same set of questions in both focus-group interviews. The interviews started with the presentation of the concept of social inclusion in general. I emphasized equal inclusion and equal rights for all Bulgarian citizens into the labour market,

education, and social and health services. The interviews were divided into four main parts as the questions followed these main areas of social life. Additional questions about the role of the NGO Napredak were brought up in relation to its contribution to the inclusion process. The focus group of Roma mothers were also asked questions about their perception of their general well-being.

Each of the focus-group interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours.

3.5.2 Procedure of the one-to-one semistructured interview

Prior to the interview, I called Mr. Plamen Tzankov to set up an appointment for the interview. The interview had an open, semistructured disposition, and I had prepared a theme interview guide, which I handed to him to make him acquainted with the nature of the questions.

Besides the small talk we had at the beginning of the interview, I tried to keep true to the role of an interviewer. I experienced that to listen carefully and ask follow up questions and to respond and show empathy was only a natural thing to do in the given setting. This of course helped a lot to motivate my respondent to tell details (Hennink et al., 2011; Wengraf, 2001). From the first two focus-group interviews I learned the news that the funding of the NGO Napredak has been held back and that all Roma integration projects have been frozen at the moment. Instead of going into details about the Roma integration projects, which at that moment were not functioning, I concentrated mainly on my respondent's personal view on how he thinks the process of inclusion of the Roma community would proceed from now on. What challenges except the lack of money he sees have relevance to the process of Roma integration in general?

The eagerness of my respondent and the knowledge he possess helped me build a good picture of the situation of both this particular community and the situation of Roma in general.

3.6 Determining the level of the researcher involvement

My involvement during the interviews of the two focus groups and the one-to-one interview varied on a scale from very low involvement (in the case of the two focus groups) to semi-involved (in the case of the one-to-one interview).

The low involvement during the two focus-group interviews was due to the initial desire and planning to let my participants speak for themselves. It was not very easy at times, and after I heard the type records, I found out that I could have been less talkative at times.

The interview with the Roma mothers started as planned. During the course of the interview, I experienced that two well-spoken women took over the group. In order to make room for the other three women to speak, I had to intervene a couple of times.

There was another issue that I had to consider during this specific interview with the Roma mothers and that I did not experience during the interview with the Roma community workers. I felt that I had to minimize as much as possible the distance between the participants and myself.

I, as Bulgarian who lives and studies abroad, contributed to a certain kind of distance I felt in the beginning. For me it was important to minimize it as much as possible because I felt that the power relation between them and me could play a negative role on the outcome of my interview (Madriz, 2003). With this, I mean I presented myself in the beginning as a woman who works and studies abroad, but at the same time, I accentuated my roots more. I spoke about my compassion for people in difficult situations, especially the Roma women.

The relationship between the group of women and me might have started as a vertical one in the way they experienced my presence, but after I revealed myself as one of them, I think the tension dropped. It was important for me that these women felt comfortable and expressed themselves on matters that clearly concern their everyday lives.

In the case of the focus-group interview with the community social workers, I had the clear role of asking questions. I started the interview with the idea that these men were competent in what they are doing. I told them that I wanted to learn from them and their experiences as to how they see as professionals the course of Roma integration in Bulgaria and in this particular Roma community. The interview was successful in terms

of free expression of opinions and different inputs from the four respondents. I also experienced that some questions that I had written beforehand, I did not get the chance to ask because the informants talked about the issues in the course of the conversation.

In the case of the one-to-one interview with Mr. Plamen Tzankov, to whom I have been previously related in connection to my first study, my role as a low-level involved researcher was again not difficult to fulfil. The fact that he knew me from before helped him open up and speak seemingly without restraint about the matters I was interested in.

3.7 Assessing the legitimacy of the study

3.7.1 Credibility

The underlying ontological assumption in this study that reality is socially constructed predisposes that the credibility can be established only by the participants in the research (Flick, 2002).

Since from this perspective, the idea of qualitative research is to portray and recognize the issues of interest from the participant's eyes; the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results.

A central problem in assessing the validity of the qualitative research, according to Flick (2002), *“is how to specify the link between the relations that are studied and the version of them provided by the researcher.”*

A central issue concerning assessing the validity of this particular research is the critical question of *“Is my version of interpretation grounded in the versions given by the respondents?”* (Flick, 2002). *“How are my interpretations empirically grounded in those interpretations of my respondents?”* This, according to Flick (2002, p. 223), can be verified if the researcher involves the participants of the study. There is a twofold problem related to such *“communicative verification.”* First, Flick (2002, p. 224) postulates a question of how can a methodological procedure of communicative validation be created in such way that it is true to the study issues and the respondents’

perspectives. The second question is related to how the questions of grounding data and results can further be answered beyond the respondents' agreement?

Therefore, I can conclude that

- the validity of the knowledge provided by this specific research cannot be assessed with certainty,
- my assumptions about the studied phenomena can only be suggestive, and
- my research can only claim that it is presenting reality and not reproducing it (Flick, 2002).

3.7.2 Generalization

Generalization refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Flick, 2002).

The nature of my study—namely, the theoretical account of grounded theory—calls more to pay attention to interpretations because they have a stronger evidential base, and as the focus is still on the initial study, generalizations are not the main concern (Flick, 2002).

4. Presentation and discussion of the findings from one-to-one semistructured interview with the coordinator of NGO Napredak, Mr. Plamen Tzankov

I will begin with the presentation and discussion of the results from the one-to-one interview with Mr. Plamen Tzankov, head of NGO Napredak. On the background of these results, I will present and interpret in the next two sections the results of the two focus-group interviews.

4.1 About the Roma community in the city of Pazardzjik

According to Mr. Plamen Tzankov, the coordinator of NGO Napredak, the size of the Roma community in Pazardzjik is approximately twenty thousand people. Information about the size of the Roma community in Pazardzjik is also available in the report *Roma and Traveller Inclusion in Europe. Green Questions and Answers* (Green European Foundation, 2011). It supports the statement given by Mr. Tzankov.

The Roma community in Pazardzjik is a mixed community regarding religious affiliations (Orthodox Christians and Muslims). The spoken language is Romani (the native Roma language), mainly spoken by the Christian Roma, and Turk, spoken by the Muslim Roma. The Roma people use the Bulgarian language mainly in their interactions with the Bulgarians. The interview was conducted in Bulgarian language.

It is situated outside the city of Pazardzjik; it is a slum-like and bears many of the traits of a typical Roma ghetto. It is divided in two sections: main and secondary.

The main part consists of houses and blocks built during the communist regime. One can see houses similar to those common in the Bulgarian population. Some are better furnished, while others lack even the basics.

The secondary part is what I described earlier in the theory section as “*ghetto within the ghetto*” (see 1.4.4). It consists of roofless houses (shacks), mud, and dirty water running in open streams across the area with the lack of sanitation facilities clearly visible.

The shacks comprise of a basic common room used for everyday living and sleeping. They lack the most basic furniture, like beds. There are no sanitation facilities, access to clean running water, electricity, or cooking facilities. All cooking takes place outside on open fireplaces. Many people suffer bad health due to the lack of basic facilities and poor life conditions. According to Green European Foundation (2011, p. 30), “*almost half of Roma (in Bulgaria) live in dwellings with no water supply. 75 per cent of households do not have access to sewage. Over 33 per cent of Roma population permanently live in frame-built houses.*”

Though it is worth to mention that “*there are no available official statistics in Bulgaria on the number of Roma living in segregated settings. According to the Open Society Institute, the majority of Roma live in segregated neighbourhoods (ghettos)*” (European Union Agency for fundamental rights, 2009).

4.2 The experiences of Mr. Plamen Tzankov about the challenges in the process of inclusion of Roma in Bulgarian society

4.2.1 Accounts of racism and discrimination against Roma

In this report, I use the social science definition proposed by Blank, Dabady, & Citro (2004) of racial discrimination, which includes two components: (1) *differential treatment on the basis of race* that disadvantages a racial group and (2) *treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race* that disadvantages a racial group.

I would like to start with the conception that the national census in Bulgaria is not based on which ethnic group people belonging; citizens choose if they want to identify themselves with a specific ethnic group (Bogdanov & Zahariev, 2011, p. 8).

The impression Mr. Plamen Tzankov has is that many of Bulgarian Roma do not identify themselves as Roma. In most cases, according to him, authorities identify Roma on the background of permanent addresses. This means that if someone, regardless of ethnicity, lives in a so-called Roma living area, they are automatically identified as Roma in the national population census.

Therefore I would say Roma discrimination is common for Bulgaria even in this sense. To be racially identified straight from the authorities without being given the possibility to identify yourself as to what ethnic group you feel you belong is a long-existing issue here in Bulgaria.

The opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov is that the Bulgarian State and its institutions do not always treat ethnic diversity in a tolerant and respectful manner. Quite on the contrary, despite the newly enacted antidiscrimination polices, many of the institutions

in Bulgaria still act as though their aim is to rather assimilate Roma than include them in the social space. According to him, *“there is an existing attitude among many people with different levels of power that forced assimilation of ethnic minorities could lead to something good in this society.”*

It is a fact that Bulgaria has enabled certain legal arrangements that allow minorities to maintain and develop their culture, religion, language, and other identity markers; but the ruling discriminatory attitudes among Bulgarians work against this overarching principle (World Bank, 2005b). According to the opinion of Mr. Tzankov, the Roma minority, for example, now do have their own religious temples, cultural associations, and nongovernmental organisations; but until they are recognized among Bulgarians, they remain meaningless.

Therefore, I think that I can open a space for the term “institutional racism” in the sense that it has been defined by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in Britain (Giddens, 2006) and which my respondent believes would remain in the consciousness of the government, the people in power, and the majority of Bulgarians.

Institutional racism is the *“the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin.”* It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping, which disadvantage the minority ethnic people (ibid., 2006).

While discrimination refers to actual behaviour towards a group (or individual) that disqualifies members from this group from opportunities open to others, institutional discrimination on ethnic grounds refers to racism, and it suggests that racism is embedded in society’s structures (Giddens, 2006, p. 492).

“Many Roma would identify as Roma, and many would not. All of us, we are Bulgarians because we are born in this country. We pay our taxes here. Our children are born here too. We are not foreigners, and we should not be treated as second-class citizens. But the fact is that many Roma are ashamed to identify themselves as Roma because they know they will be treated as Roma, and the experience is, mildly said, not nice,” said Mr. Plamen Tzankov.

To be treated as Roma in Bulgaria concerns the perception of stigmatization and the social disadvantage of being Roma (Zhelyazkova, Kosseva, & Hajdinjak, 2010), and therefore, many Roma would rather not identify themselves as such.

In this sense, the concept of “identity” can be used to refer to a sense of self-integration in which different aspects come together in a cohesive whole. Erik Erikson first introduced this understanding of the concept in his model of psychological development (Passer & Smith, 2001).

Racial and ethnic identity is also learned quite early in life. Like gender identity, racial identity is heavily influenced by the stereotypes and belief systems prevalent in society. *“‘Social identity’ refers to those characteristics of a person that are distinct in terms of his or her group memberships. For many people, ethnicity is a fundamental aspect of self-identification and becomes an important social identity”* (Deaux, 2002).

The World Bank (2005b) reports that social discrimination is a routine part of Roma everyday lives, and the positive aspects of being Roma are distorted by the stigmatization and social disadvantage associated with being Roma.

In this relation, Plamen Tzankov said further that *“it is not only important to Bulgarians to preserve their culture—it is also important for Roma people to preserve their culture and music, to take care of the ‘Gypsy soul.’”*

To me, as a social worker and a researcher, the idea of social integration is, first and foremost, connected to recognizing individual differences, different identities, and the values and rights associated with it. Identity in this sense is the link between structure and agency. Inequality affects the individual, not only in terms of the societal limitations to action and choices, but also in terms of the internalization of negative social values about identities. This can lead to a loss of self-belief and purpose in life and can disturb the sense of entitlement to fair treatment (Ferguson, 2008). Many Roma would depict the experiences of their lives in such terms.

4.2.2 The work of NGO Napredak

Community social work

Lifting up the Roma community in Pazardzjik has been one of the main goals of the NGO Napredak. In this section I will describe in brief the practices and visions of the coordinator of the NGO as well as the obstacles he experiences in his work.

Mr. Tzankov said that *“earlier, Roma were part of the economic system [before the political changes in 1989 in Bulgaria]. In the years of communism they were more or less integrated, I would say, but of course back then, enterprises were functioning. They had the possibilities to build houses and to support their families. They all had a place in the society. Nowadays everything is different. There is no place for them [Roma]. This is what we [the people who work in NGO Napredak] are trying to work towards to ‘reintegrate’ Roma in Bulgarian society, to make a place for them.”*

By referring to the past communist regime in Bulgaria, he meant that the communist government employed various measures to include Roma into the country’s socioeconomic system. They received housing and access to health care and education and were included into the labour market (Zhelyazkova et al., 2010).

However, with the democratic political system in Bulgaria (after 1989), Roma lost their jobs, and ultimately, a big percent became long-term unemployed, which played a big role in losing their place within the social space in Bulgaria.

According to Mr. Plamen Tzankov, very few Roma communities in Bulgaria have received so much help as the one in Pazardzjik. The work of this particular NGO is genuine and speaks for itself, asserts Mr. Plamen Tzankov.

“Many Roma NGOs pretend to work with the Roma communities,” he said. The work of the NGO Napredak is extensive, and because of the results and the quality of work, it managed to survive and work on the field for a long time. It carries out extensive programs encompassing help on all levels.

Therefore, the objectives and the practical work of the NGO Napredak are mainly about community social work (Hutchinson, 2005). According to Hutchinson (2005), community social work should be done from a holistic perspective and should take into account the needs, expectations, and abilities of the specific community. Community work is a dynamic and complex process of planning, organizing, and coordinating. All this should happen together with the people whom the work is concerned with. In this

sense, Mr. Tzankov said also that *“the programs need to be specifically designed for Roma in order to encourage integration on the basis of respecting ethnic differences; the programs need to be designed from the inside out, not the other way around.”*

All working projects are concerned with uplifting the Roma community and ultimately aiming at Roma inclusion. If a project is imposed from outside and is not concurrent with the real needs of the specific Roma community, it is doomed to fail. If an integration project is to be successful in its implementation, it is vital to take into account the specificity of the particular Roma community.

The main visions of the NGO Napredak are solving social, economic, health, educational, and cultural problems by means of working out plans and programs designed and carried out by the Roma population themselves. Empowerment strategies and the real involvement of Roma population are the ground principles of the community social work carried out by the workers in this nongovernmental organization.

Plamen Tzankov added, *“To work towards integration goals with a Roma community means to work not only for but also with the Roma community, and it is the most important factor to success.”*

On the other hand, Mr. Plamen Tzankov criticized the Social Services Agency for inflicting and forcing integration programs on the Roma population. *“For example, there was recently organized a beginner course for use of computers. These people [Roma who were included in this course] have no computers at home, and they will never have one. What is the point of such a course? [Social] integration for Roma will not happen only by recruiting members from the ghetto to teach them how to use computers. Roma living in this ghetto do not have the required education for jobs which include the use of computers. In my opinion, the whole thing is so out of touch with reality.*

Mr. Tzankov continued, *“However, social services do their job in a way that the state requires them to do, but if they collaborate with the NGOs and use our experiences and knowledge, inclusion of Roma in Bulgarian society will certainly turn out in a positive direction.”*

The work towards inclusion of Roma ought to start deep down at the roots of the challenges. Six years ago, the NGO Napredak started three projects towards Roma integration:

- Desegregated education for Roma children
- Raising awareness
- Accommodation for all

The first project, “desegregated education for Roma children,” addresses the institutional segregation of Roma children in the Roma community of Pazardzjik. Segregation of this kind occurs when Roma children are placed in separate classrooms or separate schools. Roma children may experience actual segregation due to the isolated location of their communities. Some children in these areas simply do not go to school. Fewer resources and facilities and lower education quality usually mark functioning schools in the majority of Roma areas. Such schools also set Roma children back by isolating them from the national language and mainstream culture (Farkas, 2007).

The project consisted of a couple of effective activities that helped Roma children from the Roma community in Pazardzjik to attend desegregated schools outside the territory of the Roma community.

- NGO Napredak guaranteed school bus transportation, aiming regular attendance of school activities by Roma children. A hundred and sixty-four children were using the school buses.
- Appointed school mediators followed Roma children to desegregated schools. According to Plamen Tzankov, school attendance has risen since the organization started working with this project. The roles of the educational mediators were not only to be physically present at the schools but also to enable communication between the school and the parents. Once a month, the NGO Napredak organized parent meetings at the cultural centre. They were obligatory for those parents whose children were transported to desegregated schools.
- The meetings were held in order to coordinate and supervise the parents. Mr. Plamen Tzankov said, *“The real participation of the parents in the process of education is important, and it raises their awareness of the importance of*

education.” Many of the parents, as a result, have started attending basic courses in reading and writing the Bulgarian language.

- In after-school activities, Roma assistants hired from the Roma community took care of the children in the cultural centre on the territory of the neighbourhood.

The NGO Napredak works also with the parents of the children who attend desegregated schools. According to Mr. Plamen Tzankov, school attendance has risen since the organization started working with the Roma community. The educational mediators and assistants covered the special needs of the Roma children. Their role was not only to be physically present at the schools but also to enable communication between the schools and the parents. Every month there were organized parents’ meetings at the cultural centre, and they were obligatory for those parents whose children were transported to the desegregated schools. The meetings were held in order to coordinate and supervise the parents. Mr. Plamen Tzankov said, *“The real participation of the parents in the process of education is important, and it raises their awareness of the importance of education.”* Many of the parents as a result have started attending basic courses in reading and writing the Bulgarian language.

My respondent raised another issue connected with education of Roma children. *“The lack of professional qualification among Roma and the undervalued importance of education I think is a major stumbling block on the way towards integrating young Roma.”*

To underestimate the role of education is partly due to Roma’s culture, he said. For example, marriage at 13–16 years old for girls and 15–18 years old for boys is a way of controlling young people’s sexuality. During this age, sexuality becomes stronger. Traditional Roma culture requires sexual intimacy to be a function of marriage. However, when girls have their first menstruation, many Roma parents withdraw them from school.

However, the work of the organization also includes programs aiming at raising the awareness of young people in what marriage and sexuality is and how to choose what one wants in life. Linked to these issues is the second project, “raising awareness.” Through different courses, activities, groups, and gatherings including members of Roma families, the NGO Napredak aims to raise the consciousness level of the Roma community in Pazardzjik.

The cultural centre, used as social arena, accommodates different groups:

- Groups for illiterate parents
- Groups for young Roma adults specifically organized to concentrate on issues such as early marriage among Roma, sex, gender relations, and early dropout from schools
- Obligatory meetings organized for parents whose children attend desegregated schools

The third project, “accommodation for all,” is concerned with accommodating families with numerous children who live in the *ghetto within the ghetto*. The project has been carried out in cooperation with the PHARE Project: “improvement of the situation and inclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities with a special focus on Roma.” The project’s focus is to improve the social integration of disadvantaged ethnic minorities by upgrading the existing public infrastructure and measures for legalizing constructions (European Union Agency for fundamental rights, 2009).

Twelve houses were built to accommodate some of the Roma families who live in appalling conditions and have many children. The project addressed issues such as providing housing for Roma, creating sewage and clean running water system, electrification, and road access.

The houses were built according to the needs of these Roma families. The structure of a Roma family includes not only the husband and the wife but also the members of the expanded family. Parents, children, and grandparents usually live together. Mr. Plamen Tzankov said, “*In the design of an integration project, one has to keep in mind, Roma have different understanding of what family in comparison to Bulgarians. Roma families are big, and all members usually live together. We are trying to take into consideration this specificity when building housing.*”

However, “*the results that we managed to achieve with this project [house building] are far from what we desired initially for the Roma community. There are so many other people left living like animals! But the money was not enough.*” All efforts for the last decade to integrate Roma people are under threat from cuts, reported Mr. Plamen Tzankov. Lack of finances damaged the projects. It also affected the Roma community.

As a result from the financial cuts, school buses could not continue to transport the children to desegregated schools. The culture centre closed its doors too. The kindergarten and the after-school activities for Roma children had to be abandoned. The housing project now has the lowest priority.

4.2.3 Is Roma inclusion happening?

The state, the NGO sector, and Roma people

According to my respondent, “*real*” Roma integration and “*intended*” Roma integration are two different things, and unfortunately in Bulgaria, there is a lot of work to be done in order realize these intentions (Bogdanov & Angelov, 2007).

The opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov is that “*the Roma integration in theory is a very well-thought and planned deed, but unfortunately, it seems to be only theoretical work for now. In practice, Roma integration is not happening whatsoever. A lot of programs are failing, and lot of money is wasted. There is no coordination between the institutions and the NGOs. Differences in visions and methods make us do things differently and criticize each other for the wrong things. We should concentrate on the end result and not on the methods. I mean that if we all want the same thing, and this is to include Roma in the job market, we all have to coordinate our efforts and not work against each other.*”

Bulgaria has many strategic and operational documents related to Roma integration (see 2.3.1). The most important among them are the Framework Program for the Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society and the National Action Plan under the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (Bogdanov & Zahariev, 2011).

As a general conclusion, Bogdanov and Zahariev (2011, p. 9) point out that “*the Bulgarian Government has been very good at producing strategic documents [in regard*

to Roma integration] and even at involving Roma representatives in the formulation of objectives and priorities,” but the challenges for the government have been linked to the implementation of these strategies. True financial dedication and provision of adequate resources are central problems, and the provided resources for the National Program for the Improvement of the Living Conditions of the Roma were simply inadequate to produce any visible impact at national level (Bogdanov & Zahariev, 2011).

However, Bogdanov (2009) considers that the work of the NGOs is one of the essential problems in Bulgaria in the process of social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Most NGOs, he states, are placed in a dependent position since available resources and power are concentrated basically in the hands of the public administration. The NGO sector has become divided into two types of organizations. First, organizations that are service providers and depend entirely on government funding, which is the case of the NGO Napredak. Second, organizations for the protection of human rights and various independent research agencies, which are funded from abroad and thus are not dependent on the government. According to Bogdanov (2009), there is no clear system for involving stakeholders in discussions on issues regarding social inclusion. Their participation is chaotic and unstructured, and in many cases, it is based on the participants’ goodwill and cooperation. In addition, the lack of institutionalized networks of civil society organizations hinders their involvement in the different phases of the process. The NGO sector in Bulgaria has inadequate resources and capacity to carry out efficient advocacy campaigns to improve social inclusion policies. Different organizations working in the area of inclusion have different visions on how to participate in the process to influence policies related to social protection and social inclusion. Very often, these differences result in unstructured and ambiguous messages addressed to the state institutions. He states that there do exist an attitude of underestimating the consultation and dialog process as such. There are many examples that can be quoted, he says, in terms of lack of stakeholder discussions and how important decisions were made at the sole discretion of the state administration (Bogdanov, 2009).

Mr. Tzankov’s sole opinion supports that there is no existing dialog between the state institutions and the NGOs. This in turn, he says, results in numerous problems for the

Roma population. For one, he named the tendency of the social workers working in social services to lack clear vision of the real problems of the Roma people in Bulgaria.

“It is evident in the policy of the state social care providers. For example, training and qualification programs run by the social services office should improve in their quality in order to meet the real needs of Roma. Even though social services assist Roma with different financial benefits, they are far away from being sufficient measures to accomplish the inclusion goals. The small amount of money called ‘social help,’ which is aiming to relieve some from ‘hunger,’ does not necessarily serve the goal of inclusion,” he said.

Therefore, my opinion as a researcher is that successful Roma inclusion resting only on the state policies cannot be expected. Dialog between the third sector and the state is needed. However, evidence suggests that the lack of critical analysis of social policies is an essential problem for Bulgaria (Bogdanov, 2009). Even when certain critical analyses are available, follow-up discussions are rarely organized to draw out lessons learned and to outline the main trends in policy change. Government institutions still avoid looking for critical and independent expert opinions on different programs. Critique is often considered a negative assessment of the work of the administration and not an opportunity to promote discussion on specific topics (ibid., 2009).

On the one hand, the lack of dialog between the state and the third sector makes the issues of inclusion of Roma very difficult task. On the other hand, as Mr. Plamen Tzankov explained further, stands the institutional discrimination. He expressed himself mildly saying that there is a sort of unwillingness of the major part of Bulgarians (including social and health workers, teachers, police, etc.) to accept Roma in the society and to work in cooperation with Roma.

Thirdly, left alone, the Bulgarian state and its institutions and the problematic issue of creating a space for dialog, Mr. Plamen Tzankov mentions another vital challenge for the successful Roma inclusion on the local level.

The process of receiving subsidies has become a lot more complicated than it used to be. Many NGOs are being created at the moment only for the reason to benefit from the EU funds. The money are used by these NGOs to open expensive offices and pretend to work. Many of these new

open NGOs have never been to a Roma community. Why do they get funded then? you would ask. I will tell you why. It is because they are educated well to apply for EU fundings, and this is why they stand far ahead of us in managing to fund their fictitious work.

According to my respondent to the program PHARE (European Commission, 2012b), in 2010 the Roma funding exceeded 70 million euros. The money is granted particularly to the processes of Roma integration, he says. He claimed that the EU Roma funds do not directly reach the Roma communities—they are being misused for personal gains.

Similarly, Bogdanov and Zahariev (2011) name a variety of obstacles at the microeconomic and macroeconomic levels in the use of the EU structural funds to support the integration of Roma and to complement national and international fundings. One of the mentioned obstacles is that recipients of EU Roma funds (such as Roma NGO organizations) targeting Roma integration have low administrative capacity. Another is that the government impedes the work of the NGOs with the way programs and projects are administered. Government lays too much administrative burden on the beneficiaries, which many NGOs cannot handle (ibid., 2011).

However, Bogdanov and Zahariev (2011) argue that it is not procedural issues that stop Roma integration but structural.

According to Mr. Plamen Tzankov, the misuse of the EU funds for personal benefit is only one side of the challenges Roma integration faces. Another bigger challenge is the racism and the discriminatory attitudes towards Roma. The racist attitudes Bulgarian society has as a whole in relation to Roma reflect the lack of political will to include Roma in the public space.

My theoretical interpretation of this issue reproduces the issue of society versus individual, which I opened earlier in the thesis—namely, that social structures and political power do dictate to a big degree the terms of action for individual agency (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003).

Mr. Plamen Tzankov named the lack of political will as one of the main challenges towards a successful Roma integration.

A lot depends on the politicians. Until they do not recognize the necessity to improve the situation of Roma, nothing will come out of the 'big' strategic plans for inclusion."

Kolev, Grigorova, and Dimitrov (2010) express similar opinion that the EU funds cannot exchange the lack of political will for the implementation of the integration programs in Bulgaria. Funding the projects is of course a start, but it is not enough. The authors do hope, on the other hand, that integration projects can become a tool to ignite the necessary political will in the process of the Roma inclusion.

In accordance with the opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov, from the report "Attitudes towards Roma in Bulgaria" (World Bank, 2005a), it is clear that any government-sponsored initiative for improving the situation of the Roma will be met with resistance at the local level because of deep-rooted and widespread intolerance (Rosenfield, 2010).

4.3.2 Challenges for NGO Napredak

Financial funding

The main challenge for Mr. Plamen Tzankov is funding the work of the NGO Napredak. *"The challenges we experience on the local level are results of the whole Roma integration policy [in Bulgaria]. It cannot be different, but if I have to speak about particular challenges now, it is the financial cuts. Once we overcome this issue, we can continue working."*

The problem, according to my respondent, is although the European Commission wants to fund Roma projects, there is some resistance in working with the Roma NGOs. The tendency is that intermediary organisations are given huge funds, and a very small part goes to the Roma NGOs. The opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov is that this is due to the existing corruption and abuse of finances from numerous fictitious Roma NGOs in Bulgaria.

According to Kurzydowski (2011, p. 46), the National Operational Programs (which manage the EU funds on the national level according to EU regulations) and the

European Commission are the main funding source for civil society organizations in general. He points out three identified difficulties to receiving funds:

- *EU funds have different mechanisms, approaches, and rules for receiving funding.*
- *Civil society organizations often need cofinancing.*
- *There have been delays and issues with payments under the Operational Programs.*

This, according to Kurzydłowski (2011), obstructs the adequate functioning of civil society organizations and their development in Bulgaria.

The message Mr. Plamen Tzankov wanted to put through is that the structural EU Roma funds are not accessible for small local Roma organizations in Bulgaria. These structural EU funds are supposed to ensure that support is provided for the disadvantaged Roma groups, and that must be a simpler access to grants for the Roma NGOs.

4.3 The opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov about the future of Roma inclusion in Bulgaria

To summarize the opinion of Mr. Plamen Tzankov about the challenges to Roma inclusion in Bulgaria, I identified five main challenges—namely, lack of sufficient education among Roma, long-lasting unemployment and poverty, lack of political will to dialog with Roma organizations, difficulties in funding Roma inclusion projects, and deeply rooted racism in Bulgarian society. Roma inclusion is a complex process, but in this process, it is important to pay most attention to these grassroots organizations working on a local level because it is their work that reaches the real needs of the Roma people. It is they who engage with Roma empowerment and have the capacity for making real difference in the life of Roma.

5. Results from the first focus-group interview – Roma mothers

Respondent A is a 26-year-old widow whose husband died six years ago. She lives together with her daughter and her in-laws in a relatively big house. She is unemployed. Her daughter suffers from a heart disease.

Respondent B is a 27-year-old unemployed mother of two children. She lives in a communal flat. Her husband is working abroad. One of the children is at school age, but she does not attend school anymore as she has fulfilled fifth grade already. The youngest suffers a condition of severe asthma, a boy whose medical condition requires constant help. She pulled her youngest from desegregated school (due to abuse by other children and insufficient help from the schoolteachers) to the “Roma school” on the territory of the Roma neighbourhood.

Respondent C is a 21-year-old unemployed mother of two children. She lives together with her husband. Her family is relatively better-off compared to the rest of the respondents. Her oldest child attends mixed school in the city of Pazardzjik.

Respondent D is a 31-year-old unemployed mother of six children. She lives at the end of the neighbourhood in the so-called “*ghetto within the ghetto.*” The family members share two rooms with no sanitation facilities and electricity. Three of her children are attending mixed school.

Respondent E is a 64-year-old mother who is also a grandmother of six children. She was employed during the communist regime, but since the political changes in Bulgaria

after 1989, she has been unemployed. She lives together with her husband, their son, and his children.

Table 1

PERCEPTIONS OF ROMA MOTHERS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

THEMATIC CODES and Subcodes

Illustrative text

ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

Ethnic discrimination by the government

They [the government] don't have the right to segregate Roma children. Let all children study together! Why do our children [Roma children] should be separated [from Bulgarian children]?

—Respondent E

In general, our minority [Roma] is isolated, and I think it is so on purpose [the government and Bulgarians do not

allow us to be part of society]. [And] our children are isolated too.

—Respondent D

Say, if the politicians get 200 leva [100 euros] salary, what would become of their children, and what schools would they go to? How would their quarter [neighbourhood] look like? I am speaking honestly now, they will stand lower than us [Roma].

—Respondent E

Some minister says on the TV that we are different [from Bulgarians], inferior [to them]! [And] the Bulgarian children hear what appears on the news, and they learn from them. What culture is this? It is pure discrimination. This is why our children are not accepted [included] at schools.

—Respondent E

Ethnic discrimination by local authorities whose remit includes school bus service

[The school bus] coming from the villages [outside Pazardzjik] drives only five children from there [from the near

villages]. It could, you know, pass through our neighbourhood to take our children on board. It passes by but it doesn't stop. It stops on the next bus stop where the Bulgarians live to take the Bulgarian kids on board, but not the Roma kids.

—Respondent C

Why there are school buses for the Bulgarian children in town, but for our [Roma] children there are not?

—Respondent E

Ethnic discrimination by the staff at desegregated schools

The teachers [at the mixed schools] have to pay more attention to my kid to help him out. He can't think like an adult. He cannot manage by himself. He needs help. [But] they [teachers] do not care. They simply don't care. The kid needs extra help, and he does not get it. This is why I decided to change schools. Now he is here at the Roma school, in the neighbourhood. I know the school is bad for him, but what use does he have from the Bulgarian school if he is to be mistreated every day?

—Respondent B

My children also went to the Bulgarian schools, but I will tell you that they have never experienced such disrespect. My grandchildren are attending Bulgarian schools now, but they do not have it good there. Nowadays, I think the last years especially, people lost their morals and we all suffer from this. Before the changes in Bulgaria (1989), things were different and there was a place for us. Now, everything is lost. Whatever we had, we lost it.

—Respondent E

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Frustration with the government

I would like to ask one question: how do politicians dare to talk about Roma integration when there is no money for a [school] bus for our children? Isn't it ridiculous?

—Respondent B

Politicians also say that “Gypsies” don’t send their children to school. It is not true! We want our children to study and learn, but where is the goodwill of the society to accommodate us?

—Respondent B

If the government want us to be “integrated,” why they do not allow us and our children to do so?

—Respondent E

Desire for inclusion in Bulgarian society

Hmm, therefore we send our children to Bulgarian schools. We do want them to strive like the Bulgarian children. We want our children to get ahead in life and live like the Bulgarian children. [But] the situation is hopeless, I think. Our children will have different a fate because no matter how good they are at school, they are always treated like “Gypsies.”

—Respondent C

“I went to withdraw my children from the Bulgarian school too, but the headmaster did not allow me. He said they will

arrange a school bus. [But look] one and a half months passed already, and nothing happened yet. I want them [the children] to stay there [at the Bulgarian school], but there is no transportation for them. Buses have to be arranged because, if not, I will have to move them to the Roma school here.

—Respondent D

[And] our kids have to learn and study and be good at school, you see, not only the others [the Bulgarian children]. School is good for them because they have to find a job one day when they grow up. With no school, no job.

—Respondent A

Even my daughter says, “I don’t want to move to this ‘Gypsy school’ [segregated Roma school on the territory of the Roma neighbourhood]. I want to be with my teacher [the teacher at the Bulgarian school].” She apparently likes it there [at the Bulgarian school].

—Respondent C

Our kids have Bulgarian friends as well [not only Roma friends], and I mean it is

good for them. The teachers at the “Bulgarian school” are good and strict. Our kids learn well there. The teachers at the Roma school are no good. It is messy at the [Roma] school, and the children do not listen to the teachers.

—Respondent D

This is why they [the Roma children] go to these schools [not-segregated schools], to be to the level of the other [Bulgarian] children. We want them to graduate high school as well. It is important when they enter society to know how to behave.

—Respondent A

If children graduate here in the Roma school, they cannot continue their education further. The other schools do not recognize the education from the Roma schools. It is too bad, you know. Children cannot go to upper grades.

—Respondent B

**FEAR CONCERNING
DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS**

Fear of bullying at school

Our children are doing very well at school [Bulgarian school], but sometimes the Bulgarian kids create problems for them. [Of course] there are some [Bulgarian kids] who are nice, but there are some who are really bad to them.

—Respondent D

When there are such problems [physical and verbal abuse], of course you don't want them to go to school. It is better to send them to [the Roma school] here at the neighbourhood.

—Respondent B

My kids are going to Bulgarian school, but without the school mediators, I am afraid to send them there. They get called names and are treated with no respect sometimes. I get worried sick for them.

—Respondent C

I am also afraid that without the

educational mediator, my children will be beaten there. The mediators help our children and talk to the teachers when necessary.

—Respondent D

Sometime ago, my daughter wet herself with fear after a bullying episode at school. It is no good for the kid to be afraid for their life.

—Respondent C

My kids have also had nightmares in the night caused by fights between Bulgarian and Roma children at school. It is so painful for me to see that my child is fearful.

—Respondent D

My grandchild is asking me, “Why, Granny, the Bulgarians want to make soap out of us?” She is a little child, seven years old. [And] she is asking that because this is what appears on the news. This is what the Bulgarian parents teach their children. [And] at school they treat our kids badly, insult them. A lot of Bulgarians behave like the “Nazis” did. No respect to us whatsoever. This is the society we live

in now. Fear and injustice.

—Respondent E

My child came back from school the other day and asked the same question: “Why do they [Bulgarians] say ‘death to all Gypsies’?” You understand that when a Bulgarian child hears from its parents such words, they wouldn’t make friends with a Gypsy child. They will be bad to our kids, and I mean it is a horrible thing to experience.

—Respondent C

The Bulgarian children think that they are somehow superior to our children, and they call them with dirty words. Why should our [Roma] children be friends with them then? [And] of course children will fight [at school] because who has the right to offend you and judge you?

—Respondent B

My child is desperate, and he says he doesn’t want to go to school anymore. What are you supposed to do then? You cannot press him. I talk to him every day, to make him show some will to continue to go to school. [But] I understand him on

the other hand. He is a child, for God's sake. He wants to have friends too, and he does not want to be bullied at school by Bulgarian kids.

—Respondent B

Anxiety regarding being unable to overcome financial and practical problems

I can say that we are happy with the education in the Bulgarian schools. The only problem we have is the transportation to the schools. I am so worried that I can't even sleep at night. I do not want to transfer my child back to the Roma school. Another problem is that we don't have money for bread sometimes. To feed the children is difficult because there is simply no money for bread. My children have never gone to bed hungry, but so many others have.

—Respondent C

I am saying it again, I want my child to continue to study at the Bulgarian school, but I even went to sign my child off that school. Despite her and my wish. The reason is that I cannot go so far. The school is at the other end of town. Without a school bus, it is impossible for me to

take her there, and she is not safe going there alone. I have another younger child, a baby, to attend to as well, and that is why I cannot be there for her always.

—Respondent C

One can say that it is OK to walk to school. It is OK, I guess, for now. Even though the school is far away, I let her walk alone. [But] now it is warm and the day is long. I cannot imagine what will happen when the winter comes. My child has a sick heart; she cannot walk so far. She gets tired from walking.

—Respondent A

Everything is so expensive nowadays. The child support we receive is not even enough for schoolbooks. Our children don't get pocket money like all the other children. How would this problem also be solved [the lack of school bus], I don't know.

—Respondent D

To go to school is expensive, you know. Books cost money, and everything else at school is expensive. Clothes, for example, the children have to be dressed properly at

school. But we don't have money for all these. Can you imagine how the child would feel like if I send him with old clothes at school?

—Respondent B

**SATISFACTION WITH
DESEGREGATED (MIXED)
SCHOOLS**

Satisfaction with the quality of education in desegregated schools (also called by Roma mothers “Bulgarian schools”)

I want my kids to continue in that school [Bulgarian school]. They do so fine there.

—Respondent D

I want them to know everything and to study well. It is therefore our children attend the Bulgarian schools.

—Respondent D

My daughter is doing so well there [at the desegregated school]. She comes back home with excellent marks. She doesn't want to be transferred to the Roma school.

—Respondent C

We don't want to take the children away from those [Bulgarian] schools; our children do really well [there].

—Respondent E

Until now, [until] fourth–fifth grade, they [our children] have been attending good schools [Bulgarian schools]. Why take them away and stick them into the Roma school here, where they will forget how to read even. Therefore, we keep them there.

—Respondent A

With the help provided by the NGO Napredak regarding school attendance (but called by the mothers as “the organization”)

A whole year before my child started [primary] school, she attended preschool here at the organization (NGO Napredak). She could not speak Bulgarian at all. We speak Turkish at home. Mr. Plamen came to me, and he took my daughter here at the cultural centre. They helped her to start speak Bulgarian. Now she is doing so well. She has gained excellent marks at school.

Without Mr. Plamen, she would not be like this now.

—Respondent C

We didn't worry so much when there were school mediators and after-school activities. Now things are different. There is no after-school activities, there are no school mediators, there are no kindergarten, there is nothing left.

—Respondent D

We were so happy when the [school] mediators worked at the organization [NGO Napredak]. They looked after our children. They came every day to fetch the children. They told us how their day was at school and what homework they had. We felt our children were safe then.

—Respondent A

It is true that some of the Bulgarian kids don't treat well our children, but we were not worried before so much because the mediators did watch them at all times.

—Respondent E

Table 2

FACTORS PERCEIVED BY ROMA MOTHERS TO OBSTRUCT THEIR WELL-BEING

THEMATIC CODES and Subcodes

Illustrative text

PROBLEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE

Marriage

The husbands of most Roma women who are alone with their children are abroad. It is so difficult to be a lone mother because the people look at them in a different way. [But] there is no other way, you see. My husband is abroad, and I know that it is for the best. He sends money home when he has a job there.

—Respondent E

It is very, very, very rare that someone from our [Roma] minority contracts a marriage.

—Respondent D

We don't trust our men. I, for example, don't want to marry him [to contract a marriage with him].

—Respondent B

[On a contrary], I want to contract my marriage with him [respondent's husband], to have control over him. Look at the Bulgarians, they all do marry. Almost all Bulgarians contract their marriage. When a man is unfaithful and the woman leaves him, at least she has the house for her and the children. I do mean it is better with wedlock.

—Respondent C

It is good to have a family, but look at our men [Roma men]. They don't have jobs. They cannot provide for their families.

—Respondent D

For example, my husband is abroad a whole year now. I am a young mother but without a husband. What kind of family is that? I have children but no husband. It is very difficult to be alone. I've got to be a mother and a father at the same time.

—Respondent B

It is no good for the children to grow up

without a father.

—Respondent B

Parenting

I've got to be a mother and a father at the same time.

—Respondent B

Nowadays the young [women] are wiser [than before], and they don't [want to] have many children. I mean, it is in a way correct not to have many children even though we are taught by our mothers that a good wife has many children. [But] why should I, for example, give birth to more children? When there is no bread in the house and they go to bed hungry, what life is that for them?

—Respondent C

I am a widow. I don't receive any social assistance. It is only the help from my parents whom I mostly rely on. It is difficult, you know, to be a lone parent of a sick child without having money to support him.

—Respondent A

We cannot provide for our children what they need. To be a parent nowadays is a very difficult thing.

—Respondent C

I am helping my children [and my grandchildren] with anything I can.

—Respondent E

Children are very important for us Roma. They [children] are a blessing for the family. Every woman wants children, but this is the problem nowadays with the young women. They realize that it is more of a burden to have children rather than a blessing. Therefore, young (Roma) women who think wisely will not have more than one or two children.

—Respondent E

Life issues

Our houses are illegal, and we can't do much about it [to legalize them]. We don't get social assistance either

because of this. How are we supposed to live? I have six children. We live in two rooms at the end of the quarter. How can one manage with six children in two rooms, with no bathroom and electricity? We don't have clean running water either. Come and see for yourself.

—Respondent D

Sometimes young families build one or two extra rooms, you know. They try to provide a shelter for their children. They have to stay somewhere, you see. Can't live on the street. With no electricity and no water and yet the young [Roma] families do not protest [they put up with the situation], as long as there is a roof on their heads.

—Respondent E

Our situation is very difficult. We can't buy medicines for the children. We cannot give them money for school activities. [And] food of course, it is a big problem too.

—Respondent A

PROBLEMS WITH HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Access to medical care

She [a Roma mother in the neighbourhood] didn't have money for abortion, and therefore, she simply gave birth to the child.

—Respondent A

The situation with the hospitals is that when you have money, you are admitted, you know, and they treat you. When you don't have the money, you can't be admitted.

—Respondent B

We don't have health insurance [because] we are unemployed. We cannot just go to the hospital or to the doctor [because] we have to pay for the services.

—Respondent A

Why there are not free medicines for our children, like in the other countries?

—Respondent B

Poor treatment

They [hospital attendances] have made up their minds about us [Roma people], and that's it. You cannot change their mind. They call us "dirty Gypsies" at the hospitals.

—Respondent D

Last year, I was with my little daughter in the hospital. There were these kids admitted as well—two young, very young [Roma] kids. They could not have been older than year and a half. Tell me, is it right? The hospital attendant hit one of them because he was crying too much.'

—Respondent C

Do you know how they [hospital attendants] feed them [the Roma children who stay at the hospital]? So quickly and carelessly! They [hospital attendants] almost pour the food into the children's mouths. The poor kids had not swallowed the food yet, but they keep on feeding them. I wouldn't leave my own child alone at the hospital.

—Respondent D

My child [for example], she made caca [when we were admitted once at the hospital], but I was out of the room for something. The mothers in the room told me that the assistant washed him with ice-cold water. It was cold out; it was winter. If I was only there to see.

—Respondent B

You have to see how the hospitals [hospital personnel] treat our children [Roma children]! Even a Bulgarian woman was repelled, and she argued with the hospital personnel. She stood against them [the hospital personnel] [to defend] a Roma child; she argued with them.

—Respondent B

**PROBLEMS WITH
(UN)EMPLOYMENT**

Discrimination

Nowadays employers throw us out from everywhere. What are we supposed to do? We cannot find any jobs because the jobs are not enough and they [Bulgarian employers] make sure jobs are given only to Bulgarians. They do not want to give us jobs, and they do it on purpose. During the communist time, there was work for everyone.

—Respondent E

No one hires “Gypsies” anymore.

—Respondent D

Why don't we have rights [on the labour market]? I think [it is] because we [Roma] keep quiet and we do not strike. Therefore, no one pays attention to us!

—Respondent B

I am unemployed, but I do want to work. I want to be able to provide for my child. I will work as a cleaner if necessary, but no one wants to hire “a Gypsy.” There is no place for us [Roma]—we are mere

nobody.

—Respondent A

There is no work for us [Roma]. The government increases the prizes of everything. [At the same time] the government wants us to pay for electricity, water, health insurance, and taxes. How to pay our bills when we are unemployed?

—Respondent A

If you are very lucky and your skin is lighter, you can find a job as a cleaner because they tell you, you look like a Bulgarian. Despite the job, I say, you would still have problems supporting your family. Who can survive with a salary of 160 leva [80 euros]?

—Respondent A

The problem for all of us [Roma] is unemployment. Young and hardworking [Roma] men do not have jobs. No one wants to hire them; they cannot provide for their wives and children.

—Respondent D

There are some Roma women, though,

Underpaid labour

who work in the private farms. [The wage] they usually get is 10 leva [5 euros] per day. Other Roma women sweep the streets. I would very much like a similar job even though it does not pay much, but it is difficult to find one; no one hires “a Gypsy.”

—Respondent D

If you work for a private entrepreneur, for example, you are not guaranteed to receive your wages at the end of the day. The money they pay you is little and never enough to cover your needs. My husband, for example, is struggling now to get his money from his boss. He [the boss] doesn't like paying.

—Respondent C

Some Roma women work in the agriculture fields here close to Plovdiv. I have worked there too before, but now I cannot because I have a small babe to look after. They [other Roma women] work together with their children, but the money they earn is not enough to pay even for the food for the family. It is only a temporary job, which pays at about 5 leva per day [2.5 euros]. The women are treated very badly there, but they can't

raise a complaint because they need this 5 leva to feed their children at the end of the day.

—Respondent D

Child labour

Yes, there are some people from the Roma neighbourhood who do not let their children go to school, but this is only because the children have to work together with the parents. [Besides] it is expensive to go to school, to cover expenses for textbooks, school materials, food, and so on.

—Respondent C

EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL SERVICES

Insufficient social assistance and child support

Social services do not help us. We do not receive social assistance. We receive only child support [which is] 35 leva [17.5 euros] per month. The money is not enough because only the bread costs 2 leva. My children have to eat, to be dressed, to be sent to school. Is all this

supposed to be covered with the 35 leva?

—Respondent C

It is going to be six years now since I became a widow. It is just my child and me now. I receive some money for the child. It is about 160 leva [80 euros] I get. My child has a sick heart and has to be taken to the hospital in Sofia once a month. The money I get is not enough to cover even this trip.

—Respondent A

I am a lone mother. No one helps me from social services. They do not let me apply even for social help. I get only child support.

—Respondent B

Denied access to social help

I have six children, and all I receive is child support for them. Because I do not have an address, I cannot apply for social assistance.

—Respondent D

We have to almost live in empty houses like in prison to be granted social help. A neighbour of mine did not have

anything; her house was in a horrible condition, and now she receives help from them [social services]. They gave her everything, and they even found her a job. [But] because I have a house and a TV at home, they [social services] would not grant me any social assistance.

—Respondent A

Discrimination

The women from social services [Social Services' Control Commission] came to my house once. They opened the doors of all the rooms [in the house] to write down what we have at home and what we don't have. They don't have the right to do that, you know, but they do it.

—Respondent B

They [the social workers from Social Services' Control Commission] do not have the right to do that [to come inside Roma houses], yes! [But] they do it anyway because social services do not want to give us [Roma] social assistance. I am convinced that they come to check our houses on purpose. It

is humiliating, you know.

—Respondent E

They [social workers from Social Services] came to check our house too. She [the social worker] saw a picture of my wedding on the wall. There I am wearing my wedding dress. My mother keeps that photo on the wall. [The social worker] told her, “So you had money for a wedding and you don’t have money for coal now.” Because of this wedding picture, we did not receive financial help for coal for the winter.

—Respondent B

You know that we [Roma] do not contract our marriages. No Roma woman has a contracted wedlock. [But] social workers think we do it on purpose to benefit from the state.

—Respondent E

Table 3

**FACTORS THAT WOULD, IN THE OPINION OF THE ROMA MOTHERS,
CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WELL-BEING**

THEMATIC CODES and Subcodes *Illustrative text*

FULFILMENT IN LIFE

Family's well-being

If we didn't have the children to bring joy in our lives, I don't see what else could make us happy.

—Respondent C

Children are very important for our minority. They bring joy.

—Respondent E

At least we were not worried when Mr. Plamen opened "the organisation." The children had where to go. They didn't stay on the streets, and we had it easy on our minds.

—Respondent D

I am glad to have support from my in-laws because they help me with my sick

child.

—Respondent A

When there is food and clothes for our children, then we are happy.

—Respondent D

I love my husband. The man provides for us, but I would like to find a job as well. He works whatever he finds. Luckily, we have not been left hungry.

—Respondent C

The family is very important for us [Roma].

—Respondent E

Desire for equal treatment

We want our families to be helped the way Bulgarians are helped [by the state]. We have children too, and we want them to have things as all the other children.

—Respondent D

There will only be a life for us [Roma] when they [Bulgarians] stop talking bad

about us on TV. They [Bulgarians] have to cast away the hatred from their hearts. They have to stop hating us. The only thing we want is more respect.

—Respondent D

I was the only “Gypsy” in the class at school. Nobody harassed me back then [during socialist time in Bulgaria]. Back then, all of us [Bulgarians and Roma] were more or less on the same level [economic level]. Anyone and everyone had to work. We were free, and we had enough of everything (food, money, and a house). No one could think of doing wrong to other people, of stealing, of killing. Unfortunately, now it is different. We [Roma] don’t have rights. I wish that the children of my children have a better future.

—Respondent E

6. Discussion of the results of the first focus-group interview – Roma mothers

Three tables emerged from encoding the data. Encoding was done inductively.

In Table 1, titled “PERCEPTIONS OF ROMA MOTHERS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN,” I identified four main thematic codes and nine subcodes.

In Table 2, titled “FACTORS PERCEIVED BY ROMA MOTHERS TO OBSTRUCT THEIR WELL-BEING,” I identified four main thematic codes and eleven subcodes.

In Table 3, titled “FACTORS THAT WOULD, IN THE OPINION OF THE ROMA MOTHERS, CONTRIBUTE TO WELL-BEING,” I identified one thematic code and two subcodes.

6.1 Discussion of the results in Table 1: “PERCEPTIONS OF ROMA MOTHERS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN”

Table 1, “PERCEPTIONS OF ROMA MOTHERS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN,” contains thematic codes that condense and abridge these parental perceptions.

Each thematic code (e.g., ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION) is further divided into thematic subcodes (e.g., ethnic discrimination by the government). I have generated thematic codes and thematic subcodes from the verbatim interview transcript. I have also provided relevant and illustrative text from the transcript that, based on my analysis, corresponds with the thematic codes.

ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The first thematic code in Table 1 is **ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION**. Thereafter, I have used three subcodes in order to distinguish key strands within the area of ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION. These are “**ethnic discrimination by the government,**” “**ethnic discrimination by local authorities whose remit includes the bus service,**” and “**ethnic discrimination by the staff at desegregated schools.**”

Ethnic discrimination by the government

The subcode “**ethnic discrimination by the government**” reflects the opinion of the Roma mothers I interviewed in my little case study in regard to whom do they blame for the educational segregation of their children.

Considering parents’ frustration with the government and the political system in general, it is clear that they blame the politicians for creating an educational apartheid that works against Roma children.

Morrow and Torres (1995) argue that segregated schools reproduce existing divisions in society—in this case, the lower ethnic status of Bulgarian Roma, compared to the more privileged status of “ordinary” (i.e., non-Roma) Bulgarians. Roma mothers experience unequal treatment on an everyday basis and feel helpless in their constant attempts to overcome everyday obstacles created by the ignorance of the Bulgarian government in relation to educating their children.

As a researcher, I think that the problem my respondents refer to is largely caused by existing political unwillingness in Bulgaria to implement the existing antidiscrimination laws and work according to the European recommendations towards Roma inclusion.

To support my assertion, I would like to refer to bigger research projects. For instance, the lack of political will towards the inclusion of Roma in education is registered among other reports in the newly issued UNICEF’s position paper “The Right of Roma Children to Education” (2011). It states that along with 12 other European countries, Bulgaria also signed the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The Decade Declaration has the goal to bring together governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and Roma civil society in joint efforts to combat the poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination suffered by Roma. Focusing

on social areas such as education, health, housing, and employment, national plans have been developed aiming at the inclusion of Roma in the socioeconomic life of the wider society.

However, in spite of signing the Declaration of the Roma Decade, national decade offices are inclined to be poorly integrated within government ministries and do not possess the political power or staff to set agendas and push for the implementation of policies (UNICEF, 2011).

UNICEF (2011) reports that adopted Decade Action Plans do not inform sufficiently the government in the process of policy developing and decision making. Roma desegregation programmes and projects that are presently running are not monitored. Governments fail to prioritize and consider the specific needs of Roma for their inclusion into the educational system, and appropriate platforms and mechanisms for Roma communities to voice their concerns and influence decisions are still largely missing. Even when measures and policies have been drafted to improve Roma education, there has been a lack of political will to ensure their implementation. Governments are being criticized that integrated policies that aim to address issues such as discrimination, for example, are being thought of in terms of projects and sporadic measures and not in terms of a long-term inclusion policy. Monitoring and evaluations of initiatives to address education for Roma children also remain inadequate.

With concern to theoretical framework, neo-Marxist sociological approaches within conflict theories interpret socialization processes at school as being dictated to satisfy the dominant social group interests (in this particular case, majority of Bulgarians). Differences between social groups are interpreted not so much in terms of economics and motivations but in terms of culture. According to this view, social classes are usually characterized by their relationships to the means of cultural production. The school is, in this sense, an agency that ensures the reproduction of power relations between the social classes. In particular, the arrangement and sorting of pupils into tracks or sections of curricula or into school sectors is what forms the basis of the differentiation of individual socializations. In this sense, the school plays a role in sorting the pupils according to the pupils' social origins (Bulle, 2008, p. 105; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

According to this theoretical approach, one is entitled to assume that Roma-segregated schools serve an overall political trend to keep the Bulgarian citizens from Roma origins apart from the mainstream Bulgarian society.

As a researcher, I see this practice as highly discriminative, and it is working counter to the aims of an inclusive state policy.

Support for my statement is found among other research projects. ERRC (2004), for example, concludes that persistent patterns of segregation of Roma in education exist. Further, ERRC (2004) points out that all governments of surveyed countries (including Bulgaria) fail to confront the issue of Roma educational segregation with adequate legislative and policy measures. Common for all five countries in the research is that governments deny racially based segregation of Roma in education. In most cases, government action, including the Bulgarian government, aimed at desegregating the school system, rather pursues improvement of the quality of education within the segregated school environment.

Relying on Roma mothers' answers and the data I have gathered from different sources, my opinion is that until the Bulgarian government takes seriously in its political agenda the inclusion of Roma students in mainstream schools, Roma students will be excluded from the educational system, discrimination will persist, and Roma parents will continuously feel that their children are mistreated systematically in the school system. Roma mothers' feelings that the Bulgarian government fails them will not change until Roma segregation in the school system is combated.

Ethnic discrimination by local authorities whose remit includes the bus service

The subcode “**ethnic discrimination by local authorities whose remit includes the bus service**” echoes the disappointment that the five Roma mothers expressed with regard to this so-called “service.” I say “so-called” because the mothers point at that service as, at best, inadequate and, at worse, nonexistent.

As I described earlier (see. 4.2.2), the last decade the NGO Napredak has been working tightly with the Roma community in Pazardzjik towards Roma's desegregation. Because of financial cuts in 2011, the NGO Napredak could not continue with the implementation of the school desegregation project. The project had an overall objective to transfer children from the Roma ghetto school to mixed (Bulgarian mainstream)

schools, where Roma children would study in an inclusive environment. The project's aim was to provide better education for Roma children and ensure their socialization in a multicultural environment from an early age. As part of fulfilling this objective, the school desegregation project used to provide Roma children with various services to facilitate this process. Among other services (such as ensuring Roma children's safety at schools, providing textbooks and other study materials, food organization of extracurricular activities, and work with the parents), transportation of Roma children to the mainstream schools was granted by NGO Napredak. After the financial cuts, the bussing of Roma children ceased.

At the time of the interview in October 2011, the municipality of Pazardzjik had not yet provided alternative services for the Roma children.

The Roma mothers I interviewed experienced the lack of transportation services for their children to mainstream schools as unfair and unequal treatment by the local municipality. School buses and other means of transportation for Bulgarian children are, according to Roma mothers, available in the other parts of the city.

As a researcher, I think that the problem Roma mothers are concerned with is a result of a gap between political rhetoric (namely, the intention to provide efficient bussing and other services for Roma children living in segregated Roma ghettos) and major shortcomings in the infrastructure (notably, lack of local funding and political indifference).

According to the European Commission (2010a), for successful Roma desegregation policies and programs to achieve Roma inclusion, it is necessary that strong political will at national and local levels exist. Local policies and actions are needed as Roma inclusion cannot be entirely a national-level concern, states the document further.

Bussing Roma children to mainstream schools is the responsibility of the local municipality as well as it is a responsibility of the state to provide the necessary funding.

To realize the goals of an inclusive policy for Roma, European Commission (2010a) recommends that local authorities, which are important carriers of the implementation of the political policies, take up reform efforts prescribed in the national course of action, including

- *“consultation and participation of local authorities in national policy-making processes,*

- *direct partnership between national and local authorities through mentoring or other formal partnership systems,*
- *provision of training and skills development relevant to program implementation,*
- *facilitating networking and sharing of practice and experience from other locations,*
- *fostering good relations with local civil society organisations,*
- *facilitating outreach with local non-Roma, and*
- *including non-Roma as beneficiaries of programs to promote a community approach to inclusion,*
- *adopting and enforcing sanctions where authorities demonstrate opposition to social inclusion goals.”*

Despite the European Commission’s recommendations, very little, if not anything, points out that the local municipality of Pazardzjik works towards these goals.

Ethnic discrimination by the staff at desegregated schools

The children of the interviewed mothers are all, except one, attending desegregated schools (Bulgarian schools). The term “desegregated schools” I use as a synonym of “ethnically mixed schools” and “Bulgarian mainstream schools.” Roma mothers refer to these schools as “Bulgarian schools.”

However, experiences of inferior treatment of Roma children at mainstream schools are evident in the stories of all interviewed respondents. For example, some of the stories I heard from the mothers I interviewed tell that the teachers in the mixed school would pay more attention to Bulgarian children with the lessons and less to Roma children. Other stories tell that Roma kids are put at the back desks in the classroom, and many Roma children are treated by the staff at schools with neglect and disregard.

If one were to consider the discrimination Roma children experience at school from an inclusive perspective in accord with the guidelines UNESCO provides in this particular

area (UNESCO, 2009), one has no other choice but wonder if inclusive education is a concept familiar to the Bulgarian school system.

The literature in this field defines inclusive and multicultural education as a concept embracing the idea that all students—regardless of their ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks, 2009). Multicultural education tries to endow students with educational experiences that allow them to sustain commitments to their community cultures as well as acquire the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital needed to function in the national civic culture and community (Banks, 2009). According to Banks (2009), multicultural theorists view academic knowledge and skills as necessary but not sufficient for functioning in a culturally diverse society.

One of the dimensions of multicultural education proposed by Banks (2009) is *equity pedagogy*. *Equity pedagogy* assumes that students from diverse cultures and groups come to school with many strengths. It rejects the idea that students with culturally different backgrounds are inferior and inadequate. Instead of focusing on changing student's behaviour so that it is more congruent with mainstream school culture, multicultural education makes learning relevant to the cultural knowledge of these students. It is the responsibility of the teachers and staff at schools to restructure the culture and social organization of the school so that students from diverse groups experience equality (Banks, 2009; Brint, 1998).

However, discrimination from the staff at schools means for Roma mothers that their children do not experience equal treatment at schools. The Roma mothers I interviewed feel that their children are expected to be like the other Bulgarian children—in other words, to acquire the dominant culture of the school—but the school does not legitimize the Roma children's culture. These experiences lead Roma mothers to a kind of opposition to the school institution as a whole. Banks refers to it as a form of assimilation, and it involves the risk of complete eradication of cultural differences and cultural identification. The Roma mothers I interviewed showed their cultural pride of being Roma in many ways, and they showed a clear desire that their children be treated with respect at school.

As a researcher and as a Bulgarian, I think that racist attitudes, especially deep-rooted prejudices against Roma in general, prevent a development of a multicultural and inclusive environment at schools.

To change a racist environment at school also requires changes in a society that initially start with political changes (Anis & Haan, 2008). The preference for national politics for the melting pot (integration, which is associated with assimilation) or inclusion plays a role as a divider between those who see different cultures as a problem and those who see it as a resource. Some teachers might see the multicultural classroom as problematic in terms of inclusion, and others might see it as a field where the diversity of resources is worth working with (Baker, 1997; Farkas, 2007).

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The second thematic code in Table 1 is SOCIAL INTEGRATION. I have identified two subcodes in order to distinguish key strands within the area of SOCIAL INTEGRATION. These are “**frustration with the government**” and “**desire for inclusion.**”

Frustration with the government and desire for inclusion

The parents’ frustration with the government is once again an issue in the analysis of the second thematic code related to education—SOCIAL INTEGRATION. It is apparent that the parents blame the government for not ensuring access to equal opportunities for Roma children compared to the privileged position Bulgarian children have in regard to education. Roma mothers identify as a main barrier to their and their children’s inclusion the government’s unwillingness to help them in the process. They clearly see the advantages of having their children in so-called “Bulgarian schools,” and most of them intended, at the time of the interview, to keep their children in mainstream schools if the financial and practical issues were resolved.

They claimed that the government and the local authorities hinder their children to attend school and after-school activities by not providing the necessary help in the form of a school bus, for example.

The lack of political will to help Roma children to be included in the education system was an issue Roma mothers brought up several times during the interview. During the

interview, all Roma mothers showed desire to be treated and accepted in Bulgarian society with respect. They expressed desire to be treated like Bulgarian citizens and not like “Gypsies” in terms of opportunities, possibilities, and privileges in all social spheres.

As a researcher, I think that if the Bulgarian government really wishes to develop a more egalitarian and inclusive society, which is more respectful of differences, then it needs to work primarily towards inclusive schooling for all children as a means for the social inclusion of all Roma. It is essential that pupils from an early age are given the opportunity to develop and experience these values in their education (Guijarro, 2008).

With regard to theoretically framing the issue at stake, Guijarro (2008, p. 6–9) differentiates between “an integration approach” and “an inclusion approach.”

According to the author, the integration approach assumes policies that are regarded as a responsibility of special education and aims to ensure the right of disadvantaged students to study in mainstream schools. Students themselves have to adapt to the existing school environment regardless of their mother tongue, culture, and abilities. Education systems at large resist structural change. He appeals for more care for the needs of every particular student creating individual programmes, differentiated strategies and materials, special education teachers, etc., rather than reconstructing those factors, which are barriers to the inclusion of all (Guijarro, 2008, p. 7).

The inclusion approach, on the other hand, “*is intended to realize the right of all students to high quality education, focusing on those who due to differing reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized*” (ibid., 2008). It has a different focus than the integration approach. It focuses on “*the transformation of education systems and schools so that they can cater for the diversity of students’ learning needs resulting from their social and cultural background and their individual characteristics as regards learning motivations, abilities, styles and rhythm*” (ibid., 2008, p. 7).

Inclusive education requires an approach to education where all barriers to learning for all children are identified and removed. This means that inclusive education must strive towards increased participation of all those children with disadvantages, whether this is a result from poverty, disability, minority ethnic status, or other characteristics assigned

significance by the dominant culture (Ballard, 1999, p. 2). It is the school that has to be adapted to the needs of every student because all students are different.

The Roma mothers' desire for their children to be accepted well at mainstream Bulgarian schools and treated with respect to their cultural background seemed to me a dream for them that they did not believe will come true. As a researcher and a professional, I can envision a social change towards inclusive education, but in my opinion, Bulgaria has a long way to go before Roma children enjoy the privileges of equality in education.

My findings and interpretations of the results of my case study correspond to the findings of a report issued by Save the Children (2006), which examines the situation in Bulgaria regarding the future of inclusive education. Save the Children (2006) shows that some legal and institutional provisions have been made towards changes in the education of Roma children. Necessary strategic documents, plans, and programmes have been developed, and objectives, priorities, and guidelines have been set in terms of educating Roma children. However, despite this, an overall and representative review of what is done so far has not yet been carried out. Moreover, despite stated political will to combat segregation in the education of Roma children, the practical results are not sufficient. Segregated schooling still exists.

The Roma mothers' desire to be treated respectfully and enjoy privileges of equality will not be realized until Roma social inclusion becomes a real political agenda.

SATISFACTION WITH DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS

The thematic code **SATISFACTION WITH DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS** (Table 1) captures the general satisfaction that Roma mothers' experience regarding the quality of education in the desegregated "Bulgarian schools" and with the work of the nongovernmental organization Napredak. As stated earlier (see 4.2.2), the NGO Napredak does play an important role in the social life of the Roma community in Pazardzjik. The educational projects directed to help the Roma community are described earlier (see 4.2.2).

Satisfaction with the quality of education in the desegregated schools (also called by Roma mothers “Bulgarian schools”)

According to the Roma mothers I interviewed, their children would achieve and profit more in terms of schooling and future life chances staying at “Bulgarian schools” and stay behind other children if moved to “Roma schools.” The subcode “**satisfaction with the quality of education in the desegregated schools (also called by Roma mothers ‘Bulgarian schools’)**” reflects the opinion of the Roma mothers I interviewed about their children’s future in life. As mentioned earlier, the children of all Roma mothers I interviewed, except one, attend mixed schools. The mothers expressed an overall feeling of satisfaction with the education and school activities at these schools, and it is understandable that they wish to keep their children there. However, at the time of the interview, the Roma mothers expressed their fears that their children might have to be moved to the Roma/ghetto school at the territory of the neighbourhood. Roma mothers perceived this as a real threat to their children’s future. All Roma mothers referred to the Roma school as a “bad place” for their kids. According to them, if their children have to be moved to the Roma school, they would lose the chance for better opportunities in life. Studying in mixed schools is, according to the Roma mothers, necessary for the future development of their children.

Roma ghetto schools are featured as poor educational institutions not only by the Roma mothers I interviewed but also by research on the field. For instance, Save the Children (2006) argues that Roma children in these schools remain illiterate even after they have graduated fourth, fifth, and even seventh grades. Children who attend Roma schools are not likely to learn the obligatory curriculum, and therefore, the Roma mothers I interviewed were all inclined to have their children at mainstream schools and not at Roma schools.

Also, according to the Roma, expectations for children in mainstream Bulgarian schools are higher as the quality of education in these schools is higher than the education in “ghetto/Roma schools.” Save the Children (2006) has also documented similar findings.

With regard to the literature on educational life chances, teachers’ expectations are assessed as an important factor in students’ performance. Therefore, Roma mothers are satisfied with the progress their children make in mixed schools. In this context, Meigham and Siraj-Blatchford (1997, p. 309) argue that “*pupils tend to perform as*

well, or as badly, as their teachers expect. The teacher's prediction of a pupil's or group of pupils' behaviour is held to be communicated to them, frequently in unintended ways, thus influencing the actual behaviour that follows."

Educational and life chances in general are not only related to schooling but also linked to factors such as “*gender, social class, ethnicity, size of family, parent's education, and membership of any minority seen as 'special'*” (Meigham & Siraj-Blatchford, 1997, p. 314). This notion brings me again back to the main message of what the theory of social reproduction conveys. In short, those who are already advantaged by the social system are those who are most likely to be selected by it and the opposite—those who are disadvantaged are not likely to succeed in life (Brint, 1998; Morrow & Torres, 1995). To ensure equal educational life chances to all students is an important part of an inclusive and high-quality education (UNESCO, 2009). Providing equity and quality in education would hinder the reproduction of the students' inequalities and would minimize the effect of determining their future options in life (Guijarro, 2008).

However, even though Roma mothers showed a degree of satisfaction with the quality of education in mainstream Bulgarian schools, they also expressed their fears for their children there.

FEARS CONCERNING DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS

The third thematic code **FEARS CONCERNING DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS** (Table 1) and the subcodes “**fear of bullying at school**” and “**anxiety for being unable to overcome financial and practical issues**” mirror a negative aspect of Roma mothers' perceptions about educating their children in mainstream schools.

Fear of bullying at school

According to literature on victimization at schools, bullying is described as a wilful act of aggression and/or manipulation by one or more people against another person or people. It can last for a short or long period and is an abuse of power (Sullivan, 2000).

Some children are picked out to be bullied because of particular identifiable characteristics that set them apart. For example, racist bullying is usually aimed at minority groups. It is an abuse of power involving physical or psychological bullying, or both, to demean or cause harm. A common form of racist bullying is racist name-calling (Sullivan, 2000).

For example, all the five Roma mothers I interviewed expressed at one point during the interview that their children were called “dirty Gypsies” at school. All the Roma mothers reported cases of picking on Roma children by other ethnic Bulgarian children. Some Roma mothers reported also some of the symptoms children often experience when they are being bullied, particularly anxiety, bed-wetting, and nightmares (Sullivan, 2000).

The fear Roma mothers feel about sending their children to “Bulgarian schools” is mostly a fear of physical abuse at school by other children. Roma mothers fear foremost for the physical well-being of their children.

Maslow’s model of the hierarchy of needs (Passer & Smith, 2001) is useful to explain some of the possible effects of bullying. If children are bullied, their safety needs have not been met. Instead, they spend their time trying to avoid future bullying. The physical bullying has also detrimental effects on the emotional state of children. It affects the children’s well-being negatively, creating stress, anxiety, depressions, and low self-esteem, for example. It is likely for the bullied children to be excluded and isolated. In this way, children are being deprived of the opportunity to make friends and experience normal interaction in the early stage of socializing in the wider society. This means, on the other hand, that children are being denied the opportunity to experience normal relationships at school, which in turn will almost certainly play a negative role regarding the development of social intelligence. Further, it may damage cognitive development (Sullivan, 2000).

However, my opinion as a researcher is that bullying at Bulgarian schools must be taken seriously because it affects not only the victim but also the parents and the friends of the victim. It affects the school itself as it is no longer perceived by other students as a safe place, and over time, it damages the wider community within which the school exists as it gives a message to the “bullies” that they can carry out their bullying outside school (Sullivan, 2000).

Research shows (Sullivan, 2000; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004) that bullying at school can be addressed and stopped, and it is an important step in carrying out a successful inclusive education policy. Planning, developing, and implementing antibullying programmes at school can not only help Roma children to be included in the education system but also help Bulgarian children to grow up in an inclusive environment.

As a researcher, I think that parents' subjective evaluation of their children's well-being at school takes precedence over academic achievements. For instance, one of the five interviewed mothers withdrew her child from the mixed school because of bullying. As a researcher, I also think that the well-being of the child at school is decisive for the Roma parental attitude to educating their children in mixed schools. Racist attitudes and bullying at school endanger Roma children's well-being at school and in turn jeopardize Roma children's inclusion.

Anxiety regarding being unable to overcome financial and practical problems

The second thematic subcode **“anxiety regarding being unable to overcome financial and practical problems”** communicates the financial difficulties Roma families experience and the effects the child is perceived to experience in his/her everyday life at school. It is worth mentioning here that the perspective I adhere to is not child-centred but family-centred. I recognize a necessity for a child—centred research on issues such as how the child herself or himself experiences family financial difficulties in this particular Roma neighbourhood.

Roma mothers made it clear during the interview that due to family's financial difficulties, bullying at school and the lack of help from the local authorities to provide school bussing, their children might be forced to attend the Roma/ghetto school. This would mean a step backwards for the inclusion of these children in Bulgarian society. Seeing that the municipality of Pazardjik does not provide any incentives for Roma parents to keep their children in mainstream schools for the Roma mothers, it means unaffordable additional costs. Without a school bus, the individual Roma family needs to pay extra money for transportation. For many Roma parents, I would assume that enrolling the child in the local Roma school would cut generally the costs for the family.

One of the reasons one of the interviewed Roma mothers enrolled her child in the local Roma school is extra and unbearable costs for the family's economy. Save the Children (2006) reports that regardless of the low quality of education, ghetto schools usually accept children's absences without valid reasons, children can attend barefoot, the dress code is not as strict as in mainstream schools, and they are also close to home and children are able to have meals there.

My opinion, based on the findings of my research, is that having no financial means to support the educational needs for their children, Roma parents might choose against their will to enrol their children in Roma schools.

6.2 Discussion of the results in Table 2: "FACTORS PERCEIVED BY ROMA MOTHERS TO OBSTRUCT THEIR WELL-BEING"

In Table 2, titled "**FACTORS PERCEIVED BY ROMA MOTHERS TO OBSTRUCT THEIR WELL-BEING**," I identified four main thematic codes—namely, **PROBLEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE**, **PROBLEMS WITH HEALTH CARE SERVICES**, **PROBLEMS WITH (UN)EMPLOYMENT**, and **PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL SERVICES**. Table 2 reflects the perceptions of Roma mothers concerning factors preventing them from positively experiencing their own lives in different social areas.

According to Diener (2009), the literature of well-being is concerned with how and why people experience their lives. Subjective well-being is not the same as happiness. It is a broader category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, life domain satisfactions, and a global judgment of life satisfaction. It consists of two components: an *affective* part, which refers to both the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect, and a *cognitive* part. The affective component is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings. The cognitive element is an information-based assessment of one's life for which people judge the extent to which their life is satisfactory (Diener, 2009).

It is common to think about people's well-being in positive terms, but well-being is not only the absence of pain and discomfort. It requires that the basic needs are met, that the

people have a sense of purpose, and that they feel able to realize their goals and at the same time contribute to the wider society.

I have therefore divided the discussion of the well-being of my respondents into two tables. The first one shows the negative side of my respondents' subjective view of their well-being, and the second one shows the positive factors.

Life satisfaction is the cognitive evaluation of subjective well-being (Diener, 2009). According to Diener (2009), life satisfaction assessments may be domain specific (e.g., satisfaction with work, marriage, or clothes) or global (e.g., all aspects of a person's life). The global life satisfaction by domain assesses a person's satisfaction with specific life domains such as income family, social relations, job, and health; it also includes a global question about their own life satisfaction (Kapteyn, Smith, & Soest, 2010).

In this dissertation, life satisfaction is generally assessed by asking respondents questions in the following life domains: education, family life, health, employment, and social services.

Each thematic code in Table 2 represents a life domain (e.g., family life or [un]employment) and is further divided into thematic subcodes representing Roma mothers' experiences in this specific life domain.

PROBLEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE

The first thematic code in Table 2 is **PROBLEMS WITH FAMILY LIFE**. Family life is at the heart of daily experiences for the majority of the people, and the quality of family relationships is regarded as most important for quality of life (Greve, 2010). Considering Roma mothers' answers, I have used three subcodes in order to distinguish key strands within the area of family life. These are “**marriage,**” “**parenting,**” and “**life issues.**”

Marriage and Parenting

The two subcodes **marriage** and **parenting** reflect the Roma mothers' problems regarding experiences of marriage and parenting.

It is interesting to note that for the Roma mothers I interviewed, the words "marriage" and "parenting" bore similar connotations. They used the two words interchangeably during the interview. To be married logically included for them parenting.

I therefore decided to analyse these two subcodes simultaneously.

Even though I recognize that Roma culture carries specific family values that influence largely the life of Roma mothers, I chose not to focus on that in this discussion. This is partly because it is a vast theme and partly because it would be hard to talk about the traditional Roma family and traditions regarding marriage in this context. As Liégeois (2008) points out, different Roma groups have different traditions regarding marriage. Marriage traditions and cultural meanings in relation to marriage are found to be differing across different Roma groups. Liégeois (2008) underlines that in general the feelings of collectivity, togetherness, and solidarity to the members of the Roma family are essential to their understanding of marriage.

Roma mothers who took part in the focus-group interview expressed a form of discontent with the weakened structure of the traditional Roma family. With the term "weakened structure of the traditional Roma family," I mean that the families of the Roma mothers I interviewed lack at least one parent in the daily upbringing of the children. Three of my respondents consider themselves as lone mothers. They reported concern that their families suffer from the lack of a male figure. Without husbands in the household, all three women stated that they were overburdened with responsibilities, and a partner in their life would have helped a great deal with the upbringing of the children. Pressed by the circumstances, they have to deal with their difficult situation alone.

According to them, lone mothers in general are considered deficient parents in the Roma community. Even though in recent years, they told me, lone motherhood is a frequent case in the Roma community, they feel that others are constantly judging them. This they consider as an emotional stress factor in their daily life. Stolzenberg and Waite (2005) argue that lone parents are more likely to experience deprivation and insecurity than married or cohabiting partners.

Counter to the experiences of the lone Roma mothers are the experiences of the two other Roma mothers who cohabit with their husbands. They reported more positive experiences of their marriages than the lone mothers. Stolzenberg and Waite (2005) show also in their research that good marriage is a source of emotional support and happiness.

The three lone Roma mothers reported mistrust to Roma men in general, partly because in their opinion that Roma men do not participate in the family life in general and partly because Roma men are unable to provide economic security for their families.

According my respondents, those Roma men who leave their families usually work overseas or in bigger cities in Bulgaria. Living away from their families, Roma men are experienced to be unreliable with regard to keeping the family together. All three interviewed lone Roma mothers reported feelings of helplessness regarding rearing their children without a husband and literally no means to cover their own and their children's daily needs.

Indeed, families exist in a broader economic, social, and cultural context that itself changes over time (Olson, 2011, p. 7). Changes occurring in Bulgarian society affect Roma families as well as Bulgarian families. Economic instability in Bulgaria drives people away from their families in search for jobs. Research shows that labour migration of Bulgarian citizens with Roma background does not differ from that of ethnic Bulgarians. It has been documented that the main reason for both Bulgarians and Roma living abroad is employment (Angelov & Vankova, 2011; Tomova, 2011).

According to a recent survey, 84 percent of Roma who have spent time abroad have done so in order to work. This has been the case for 73 percent of Bulgarians who have been abroad in the last 20 years, which suggests that employment is an even more important reason for emigration among Roma than among Bulgarians (Angelov & Vankova, 2011, p. 4).

The Roma mothers I interviewed claimed that lone motherhood, for example, where the woman is not a widow, is a frequent case among the Roma community. The Roma mothers pointed out that the main reason for that is work abroad.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002, p. 3) define "transnational families" as "*families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create*

something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'family hood', even across national borders." Certainly, according to the definition of transnational families, Roma mothers do not have the status of lone mothers. However, they do perceive themselves as lone mothers, and therefore, I chose to address them as such.

For the lone Roma mothers I interviewed, these new forms of families and family dynamics have immense implications. For instance, the image of a big and united family characteristic of the traditional Roma culture is ruined for many of my respondents.

According to Olson (2011), changing family forms and new family relationship dynamics affects the perceptions of the subjective health and well-being of family members. As a researcher, I think that in the case of the lone Roma mothers I interviewed, experiencing lone parenting as weakened family ties in addition to living in poverty means a struggle not only in economic terms.

Another issue my respondents were concerned with in relation to marriage was that Roma marriage differs from Bulgarian marriage. The difference in essence is that Roma marriage is not contracted. Studies by Marushiakova and Popov (2000) also point that Roma marriage is a form of cohabitation with strong emotional bonds, but it is not legitimately contracted. The official character of the Roma marriage is an exception rather than a norm. The Roma people in general do not recognize the official civil or church marriages because for them the marriages become legal with the very wedding party, done in front of the eyes of everyone in the Roma community. A big wedding party is a form of legitimizing the Roma marriage within the Roma community, and it is sacred and unbreakable.

According to my respondents, this unofficial character of Roma marriage does not contribute to the provision of security to women in terms of legal rights on the property of her husband or the in-laws' family. Lack of material and emotional security in marriage gives little feeling of happiness to the interviewed women.

Despite this, all interviewed Roma women reported that they are the ones who have the daily care for their children or grandchildren. The responsibility for the domestic work

and child care belongs to Roma women since Roma men (cohabiting with Roma women or not) do not participate.

As a researcher, basing my opinion on data obtained from the interview and literature on the field of Roma culture (Liégeois, 2008, p. 71–77), I think that deeply rooted Roma cultural values—namely, to cherish the big family—contribute to pressure for some of the interviewed Roma women. Most of the Roma mothers I interviewed reported a negative mind-set towards having more children. Due to poverty and financial difficulties, the interviewed women did not consider increasing the number of members of their families. They felt unable to respond accordingly to the Roma cultural values and expectations to have large families.

Only one of the five interviewed Roma women reported to have more than two children (in her case six). This particular respondent did not express her opinion on the matter.

However, the European Commission (2009) has documented the issue of Roma birth rate. The reported data show that Roma birth rates are declining due to a variety of socioeconomic factors.

As a researcher, I think that the main challenges in marriage my respondents referred to (namely, lone motherhood and feelings of emotional and financial insecurity) largely account for the negative aspects of the experiences of marriage. The Roma women who cohabit with their partners, on the other hand, experience marriage positively. They feel more secure and happier despite the harsh economic situation.

Life issues

The subcode “**life issues**” echoes the living situation of the Roma women I interviewed regarding problems in their domestic life. Recognizing the importance of the material elements of family life, the Roma women I interviewed focused mainly on practical issues such as lack of food and clothing for their children as well as poor conditions of their housing.

Considering the problems reported by the Roma mothers through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, one has to take in account that before the basic needs of these families are met, the members cannot move on to satisfy needs of higher hierarchy (Passer & Smith,

2001). Therefore, it is understandable that the most pressing problems for the Roma mothers I interviewed were satisfying the basic needs of their families.

According to Ringold et al. (2002) poverty prevents the majority of Roma from accessing adequate housing and nutrition.

The inability to buy food was a consistent issue brought by the Roma mothers. They reported that this was the worst problem for their families.

Indeed, in the conditions of economic crisis in Bulgaria, high rates of unemployment and insufficient income some of the Roma families survive, only relying on social assistance. On the other hand, others are even denied social assistance on different grounds (Open Society Institute Sofia, 2008).

Roma poverty is well documented in research. For instance, Ringold et al. (2004, p. 27–30) state that compared with other European countries, the highest absolute poverty level among Roma households lies in Bulgaria. At the lower line at US\$2.15, 41 percent of all Roma households in Bulgaria are found to be poor and at the higher line of US\$4.30 per capita, and 80 percent of Roma households in Bulgaria are poor. Relative poverty among Roma households is measured to be about 37 percent in Bulgaria.

One of my respondents reported living in an illegally built dwelling, and according to her, there are many others who do live in similar conditions.

The Roma people who inhabit such dwellings have limited access to social services as residency and ID papers are requested for social assistance benefits (Ringold et al., 2004, p. 34). Because of the illegal state of the dwelling, the Roma mother reported that there is no electricity or running clean water at her disposal. Many Roma people living in such conditions (as well as her family) illegally channel water and/or electricity into their settlements (Ringold et al., 2004, p. 35).

In essence, my findings correspond with the findings of other bigger studies on Roma poverty (see, for instance, Ringold et al., 2004; European Commission, 2010b). As a researcher, I think that the problems Roma mothers reported in the interview (namely, lack of food and poor conditions of their shelters) are problems that largely come from the new democratic organisation of the welfare state in Bulgaria.

In this regard, studies (Bohnke, 2005) point towards strong correlation between life satisfaction and national welfare.

According to Bohnke (2005), irrespective of the general welfare, analysis has shown that material living conditions have the greatest impact on subjective well-being. Life satisfaction and happiness are mostly influenced by people's opportunities to achieve a

decent standard of living and to escape poverty. In my opinion as a researcher, it is the bad living conditions my respondents reported that account for the low level of satisfaction with life.

PROBLEMS WITH HEALTH CARE SERVICES

The second thematic code in Table 2 is **PROBLEMS WITH HEALTH CARE SERVICES**. Health is a central indicator of assessing the quality of life of individuals (Bohnke, 2005).

In the discussion of the thematic code **HEALTH CARE SERVICES**, I identified two key areas in health care services that the Roma mothers I interviewed found for the most part problematic. These are **“access to medical care”** and **“poor treatment.”**

Access to medical care

The subcode **“access to medical care”** includes perceptions of the Roma mothers I interviewed of their health and the health care services. The problems Roma mothers referred to concerning their health and the services provided by the health care system were mainly linked to inability to pay for health insurance, medicines, and hospitalization.

It is important to bear in mind that the organizational health care system in Bulgaria is a mixture of centralized and decentralized structures, and a considerable part of the health care facilities are privatized (Georgieva, Salchev, Avdeeva, Dimitrova, & Dimova, 2011). The financing of the Bulgarian health care system is based on compulsory health insurance. Assistance for the unemployed and poor, pensioners, students, soldiers, civil servants, and other vulnerable categories are covered by central and local budgets since the permanently unemployed and the ethnic minorities such as Roma are excluded from the system (Georgieva et al., 2011).

Statistics show that around one million Bulgarian citizens do not have health insurance. In most cases, these people are in need of social assistance but are not entitled to it.

They are usually from low-income groups or groups without any income and are not able to pay the contributions. They belong to the population groups that do not benefit from the compulsory health insurance system and cannot afford to pay for private medical care (Georgieva et al., 2011).

All of my respondents in the focus group of Roma mothers fall in this group of people who do not benefit from the compulsory health care insurance.

As a researcher, I think that an equal access to health services for the Roma people must be compensated for the initial existing social inequalities in Bulgaria. Roma and non-Roma population who suffer from long-term unemployment should be offered medical care as the rest of the Bulgarian citizens.

Similarly, the European Commission (2009) has documented that Roma in Europe have in general poorer health than non-Roma.

Theoretical perspectives that account for health inequalities and believe that the state should play a major role in the provision of health care argue that health should be seen in its social context (Taylor, 2010). According to this theoretical view, individuals are seen as a part of a social context. On this basis, public health is a shared responsibility—the individual self has the responsibility to live a healthy life, but the state has the responsibility to provide health care services to all its citizens. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization, the human right to health includes at its minimum access to medical care (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and World Health Organization, 2012).

The Human Rights Committee (2012) states, *“The right to health is a fundamental part of our human rights and of our understanding of a life in dignity.”* It is important to note that the right to health is a fundamental right to all, and a difficult financial situation of a particular state does not release it from having to take action to realize the right to health (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and World Health Organization, 2012). Further, the document states, *“It is often disputed that States that cannot afford it are not obliged to take steps to realize this right or may delay their obligations indefinitely. When considering the level of implementation of this right in a particular State, the availability of resources at that time and the development context are taken into account. Nonetheless, no State can justify a failure to respect its obligations because of a lack of resources. States must guarantee the right to health to*

the maximum of their available resources, even if these are tight. While steps may depend on the specific context, all States must move towards meeting their obligations” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and World Health Organization, 2012, p. 5).

The European Commission (2009) also reports that Roma health in general is more inclined to be affected by social and economic factors than the health of the advantaged groups in Bulgaria. This is largely due to a combination of factors such as poverty, unemployment, and low education level.

My personal position as a researcher is that public health in principle is a social product, and as such, the state has the responsibility to provide care for the health of its nation. I also argue that the state should invest more in social housing for Roma and that significant improvements on the living conditions are needed. Poor health comes in many cases, hand in hand with poverty (European Commission, 2009). It is also my opinion that it is necessary for the Bulgarian state politics and for the majority of the Bulgarian health care personnel to move away from blaming Roma for their own poor health and to recognize that bad health often stems from people having to cope with poor living conditions.

Health inequalities in the case of Roma show only one side of their unequal position in Bulgarian society.

I therefore support a position that health inequalities should be seen in the context of the social policies. If, for example, the Bulgarian government intervenes to improve the access to health care for Roma, it might have positive results for Roma health, and this in turn should help to reduce levels of dependence upon welfare benefits (Taylor, 2010).

Poor treatment

The subcode “**poor treatment**” reflects Roma mother’s perceptions of unfair and discriminatory treatment and practices in the health care facilities. The Roma mothers I interviewed expressed shared feelings of mistrust to the hospital personnel in regard to the treatment of their children. All Roma mothers I interviewed had experienced poor treatment in hospital facilities.

As a researcher and a Bulgarian, I think that the problems Roma mothers refer to are largely results of negative and stereotypical views that the Bulgarian society have about the Roma minority population. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002, p. 8), health systems may also engage in the same stereotyping found in the society at large, thus reinforcing discrimination or even exacerbating it. In this regard, there is an increasing recognition of the need to sensitize and train health professionals about human rights, with particular emphasis on freedom from discrimination, and how to address this in all its dimensions in practical situations.

Therefore, I see special training for health care staff an important step to improve attitudes towards the Roma people and to ensure that they understand what they need to do to avoid discriminating against the Roma people.

PROBLEMS WITH (UN)EMPLOYMENT

The third thematic code in Table 2 is **PROBLEMS WITH (UN)EMPLOYMENT**. It represents the difficulties Roma mothers experience regarding entering the labour market and the immediate perceived consequences of being unemployed long-term.

The Roma mothers I interviewed associated their unemployment mainly with discrimination on ethnic grounds. For them, the main (and only) income source is social help and/or child benefit allowances. Four of the five Roma mothers I interviewed have very little or no experience on the labour market. None of them had been employed full-time. The local labour agency had previously offered some of them short-term cleaning jobs. Some of the interviewed women had looked for jobs without the help of the labour agency in the informal economy—mainly in the agricultural sector. The oldest respondent of the group of mothers is a pensioner. She has been unemployed for more than a decade before she retired. Her employment experience had mainly been during the communist regime in Bulgaria.

As a researcher, I think that the lack of qualifications to enter the labour market can be a relevant hindering obstacle in the case of the interviewees. However, Roma mothers expressed shared opinion that they will accept any kind of job that would give them an

income. Most of the Roma mothers assumed that a cleaning job would terminate their life-long unemployment status and give them a possibility to earn a living.

Indeed, the link between income and well-being rests on the assumption that income allows increase in consumption and consumption increases utility (Diener, 2009). Studies about subjective well-being mention material conditions and consumption as most relevant (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009). Therefore, the relation between unemployment and well-being lies in the economic assumption that employment is associated with prosperity (Fray, 2008, p. 45).

Considering the subjective well-being of the Roma mothers I interviewed, the welfare consequences of personal unemployment can be seen as effects of their involuntary unemployment. There is also evidence in research that supports that unemployment reduces people's happiness (Fray, 2008, p. 47).

According to the Roma mothers I interviewed, unemployment results primarily in financial distress, and this is a major psychological stressor.

I identified three subcodes representing key areas regarding the experiences and views of Roma mothers on the labour market—namely, “**discrimination,**” “**underpaid labour,**” and “**child labour.**”

Discrimination

According to the Roma mothers I interviewed, unemployment among Roma in general is due to ethnic discrimination on the labour market. The respondents expressed opinion that the recent economic crisis in Bulgaria made things worse for Roma. Unemployment rates are high, and jobs are scarce and primarily distributed among ethnic Bulgarians.

In point of fact, data from different researches (Ringold et al., 2004; Crepaldi, Boccagni, Barbera, & Naaf, 2008) show that high unemployment rates among Roma are in general the cause of great dependency on social welfare benefits. In consistency with the perceptions of the Roma mothers I interviewed, data shows that prejudice and discrimination on the labour market is one of the obstacles employers and coworkers often show by not tolerating Roma workers. Other barriers for Roma to enter the labour

market are low level of education, low skills, and irregular work habits (Ringold et al., 2004; Crepaldi et al., 2008).

Although Bulgaria has adopted antidiscrimination legislation consistent with International Labour Organization conventions, the Roma mothers I interviewed reported experiences of discrimination on everyday basis. One of the respondents explained that if a Roma person has lighter skin colour and could pass for ethnic Bulgarian, eventually, he or she could find a job, but the rest who have darker skin colour do not stand a chance on the labour market.

As a researcher, I think that attitudes of this kind have a strong effect on one's readiness to apply for jobs. It is difficult to maintain a strong motivation to enter the labour market if one feels that one is consistently discriminated against. Therefore, I assume that the Roma mothers I interviewed do not feel discriminated without a reason.

Research (ERRC, 2007b) shows that there is strong evidence of institutional racism in the labour market structures. Data shows transparent display of racism and prejudices against Roma. Existing negative stereotypes of those working in Labour offices and different institutions dealing with Roma unemployment bring to question the capacity to deliver unbiased and professional service to unemployed Roma. In fact, EERC (2007b) shows that labour agency offices apparently overlook discrimination against Roma, respecting the employers' demand not to offer positions to Roma job seekers.

Labour office officials explain their actions based on the concern to save the individual Roma job seeker from humiliation of being rejected and refused the job. The effect of such passive behaviour sends in fact a wrong message to employers. Labour offices' failure to challenge employers who refuse to hire Roma is making an unacceptable situation even worse (EERC, 2007b). Moreover, deeply rooted prejudices against Roma are evident in labour offices' arguments that positive discrimination is not necessary because discrimination against Roma does not exist. Labour offices have adopted a "blame the victim" attitude. Roma are blamed for being unemployed because of low education, for example. Labour offices' officials argue that the current situation on the labour market, which ensures that non-Roma candidates are preferred to Roma candidates, is the right one (EERC, 2007b).

As a researcher, I think that the Roma mothers I interviewed have the right grounds to assess their situation on the labour market as unequal and marked by discrimination. Their personal experiences of discrimination on ethnic grounds are supported also by

findings of research on the field (EERC, 2007b; Tomovska, 2010; Milcher & Fischer, 2011; UNDP, 2012).

In my opinion, the political intentions to integrate Roma on the labour market as well as in other social arenas deviate significantly from actual actions. As long as discrimination against Roma persists, equality in employment will not be achieved. Positive action is necessary, but it requires dedication and cooperation between all strands of the labour market. Therefore, legislators, policy makers, and employers have the responsibility to enforce antidiscrimination laws to guarantee recruitment practices and workplaces free of discrimination (EERC, 2007b).

Underpaid labour and Child labour

The two subcodes “**child labour**” and “**underpaid labour**” reflect Roma mothers’ experiences with paid work.

Studies on Roma unemployment rates across Europe suggest that Roma unemployment is below the 95–100 percent levels that are often reported. This is because Roma respondents often understand “employment” to mean a “steady job” rather than the broader notion of “income-generating activities.” This explains why self-reported subjective unemployment rates often substantially exceed conventionally defined ones. Roma who are involved in nonwage income-generation activities, in the shadow economy or in subsistence agriculture, often describe themselves as unemployed. This is why subjective and broad unemployment rates differ substantially (O’Higgins & Ivanov, 2006).

All the Roma mothers I interviewed reported that they have some experience working in the informal economy sector. Roma mothers reported that they and/or their spouses have been working in the agricultural or construction sector with no job contracts at all. The Roma mothers I interviewed reported as well that the labour is hard and underpaid. EERC (2007b) presents results based on interviews with unemployed and employed working-age Roma in five countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia). Keeping in mind that the study does not discuss the representativeness of the sample to the general Roma population (neither does my study), it provides an indication as to the most common occupational categories among the Roma, where a significant group has reported unskilled labouring as their occupation.

There is also evidence that Roma women are more likely to be clustered in insecure and underpaid jobs (e.g., cleaning, etc.), with few (if any) benefits. Roma women are also more often working in unregistered economy (informal door-to-door trade, private house informal cleaning, production of traditional handicrafts and agriculture), often as primary family breadwinners (CSES, 2011, p. 21).

Even though the Roma mothers I interviewed did not pronounce whether their own children have been involved in work, they reported for other Roma women from the neighbourhood to have been taking their children to work in the agricultural sector. Even though some studies have paid attention to Roma children in labour (UNICEF, 2007), I think that more efforts should be employed to measure in more definite terms the size of the working Bulgarian Roma children.

For instance, UNICEF (2007) argues that child labour is largely a consequence of lack of real access to good education. If it had existed, many of the working children would not have started work. In addition to reducing their chances of studying, the work shortens their childhood and places considerable physical and emotional burdens upon them.

As a researcher, I think that Roma underpaid work in the informal economy (black market) indicates a high level of vulnerability of Roma in the labour market in general. The lack of job security at a discriminating labour market in Bulgaria and the instability of otherwise low income force some Roma families to send their children to start working instead of sending them to school. Child labour, in general, has devastating implications for the children's physical and mental health, which impedes their future lives. It is also a violation of children's rights as well as it hampers their inclusion into society.

PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL SERVICES

Insufficient social assistance and child support, denied access to social help, discrimination

The thematic code **PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL SERVICES** in Table 2 echoes Roma mothers' experiences dealing with social workers and the social services office.

The three subcodes underline three problem areas Roma mothers identified in their dealings with social services. I would prefer to discuss the identified problem areas simultaneously. As a researcher, I think that all of these areas are intertwined and result from the organization of the social welfare system in Bulgaria.

The means-tested character of welfare and child benefits determines largely the negative outcome for receiving social assistance by Roma mothers. In the assessment of the economic situation of Roma families, social workers' decisions are biased by prejudices that result in discriminative attitudes and practices. However, even when some Roma families are included in the social assistance scheme, the amount of the benefits is far from sufficient to ensure the well-being of a family (Bogdanov & Zahariev, 2011; Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2012).

What follows next is a rationalization for my hypothesis. I have used different sources to explain how the social welfare system in Bulgaria is organized, who benefits from it, and why the Roma mothers I interviewed are excluded.

The architecture of social protection policy in Bulgaria comprises two levels: social insurance and social assistance (Christova & Spidla, 2005).

The **unemployment benefits** have the nature of insurance compensations. The persons entitled to receive such benefits are those who have been insured for the event of "unemployment risk" (Christova & Spidla, 2005). None of the Roma mothers I interviewed fall into this category.

The second level of social protection is **social assistance**. Social assistance in Bulgaria comprises monthly social benefits, targeted benefits, one-off benefits, family benefits for children, and provision of social services. The guaranteed minimum income is of major importance and serves as a basis for granting social assistance payments through the social assistance system. Persons usually categorized as eligible are long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, lone old-aged persons, lone parents, etc. (Christova & Spidla, 2005). Three of the Roma mothers I interviewed were dependent on social assistance.

Social assistance in Bulgaria is means-tested. Social assistance benefits are sums of money in cash and/or in kind that complement or substitute the own income of recipients up to the level that would enable them to satisfy their basic needs (Christova & Spidla, 2005).

However, a number of Roma people without permanent addresses are formally excluded from the social assistance system (Christova & Spidla, 2005). One of the Roma mothers I interviewed was excluded from the social assistance system. Because of the illegal status of her housing, her family does not have an address registration, and this deprives her family from the right to permanent address. Her family, however, is granted child benefits. **Family benefits for children** are part of the social assistance system in Bulgaria, and since the beginning of 2004, they have been administered by the Social Assistance Agency. The main objective of these benefits is to encourage the raising of children in a family environment and school attendance (Christova & Spidla, 2005). However, in Bulgaria employment is not an eligibility condition for receiving child benefits. Child allowances in Bulgaria are also income tested. Benefit levels are low, and the benefit has only a very modest effect on boosting the income of families, especially that of one-child families. The benefit should disproportionately benefit families with three or more children, such as the Roma, but the benefit is too low to change consumption levels of families significantly (Gabel, 2008).

In addition to social assistance, there are also targeted **heating benefits** for the low-income population during the winter months (Christova & Spidla, 2005; Gabel, 2008). This benefit is also means-tested, and all of the Roma mothers I interviewed have at least once applied for it. According to Christova and Spidla (2005), these benefits are not income-complementary, unlike other social benefits. It is important to note that the targeted heating benefits program is the most comprehensive and large-scale program within the social assistance system. It enjoys the approval of the public because it concerns assistance for low-income groups and provides the required social protection during the winter period for those who need it.

The World Bank (2009) reviews the **guaranteed minimum income** and the **heating allowance** as the two main antipoverty programs in Bulgaria. According to the World Bank (2009), these revenues do provide significant cushion to the poor and vulnerable, but their impact on poverty is evaluated to be rather small. The size of the benefits is not sufficient to lift the recipients above the poverty or even extreme poverty thresholds. As

a result, their performance does not reduce the poverty level in any significant way. The amount of the heating allowance is based on assessment of the household type; the beneficiary's age, ability to work, and disability status; and the presence in the household of children, their ages and disability status, and so forth. The monthly amount of the energy benefit is determined based on norms of minimum consumption of electricity, district heating, wood, or coal in the heating season.

However, according to the Roma mothers I interviewed, heating benefits are not granted according to the needs of their families and are often biased by discriminatory assessment of social workers.

Many Roma households in Bulgaria depend on social assistance benefits, although such benefits are often inadequate to cover for the basic needs of the families. According to the study "Ethnic Minority and Roma Women in Europe: A Case for Gender Equality?" the *"high inactivity and unemployment rates are a cause of dependency on social assistance benefits. Informal and occasional employment prevents the Roma from accessing unemployment benefits or other contribution-based benefits. This is particularly the case for Roma women, who are more likely to be inactive or unemployed. In some countries, the lack of identity documents (which is the case of many Roma) prevents their access to social assistance and other benefits. The difficulties in accessing social care services leave the care burden completely on Roma women"* (Corsi, Crepaldi, Lodovici, Boccagni, & Vasilescu, 2010).

Despite the widespread prejudice that many Roma are getting large social benefits, the reality seems much different. According to Bogdanov and Zahariev (2011), very few of the Roma receive social benefits. It is only about 15 percent of all Roma in Bulgaria who are entitled to receive social benefits. The Roma families who are granted any form of social assistance are actually much less than those who are not granted. Restrictive means within the social system as well as lack of information prevents many poor Roma families from receiving social benefits (Bogdanov & Zahariev, 2011)

As a researcher, I think that the Bulgarian welfare state violates the rights of any person who is without adequate resources to have access to the social assistance provided by the state. By not ensuring a minimum level of income for families and persons in disadvantaged positions, the Bulgarian state again shows lack of real commitment to

integrate Roma. A state that wishes a more egalitarian and fair society must ensure that everyone has equal access to welfare services.

6.3 Discussion of the results in Table 3: “FACTORS THAT WOULD, IN THE OPINION OF THE ROMA MOTHERS, CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WELL-BEING”

In Table 3, titled “**FACTORS THAT WOULD, IN THE OPINION OF THE ROMA MOTHERS, CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WELL-BEING,**” I identified one thematic code, namely, **FULFILMENT IN LIFE**, and two subcodes: “**family’s well-being**” and “**desire for equal treatment.**” Table 3 reflects the perceptions of Roma mothers concerning factors that would contribute to positively experience their own life.

FULFILMENT IN LIFE

Family’s well-being and desire for equal treatment

To assess the overall fulfilment in life of Roma mothers, I asked them these questions: “What factors determine the happiness or satisfaction in your lives?” and “Do you feel happy in general?”

The following discussion provides a brief overview of the categories that were used to group what respondents identified as the factors contributing to their well-being.

Factors that would contribute to Roma mothers’ well-being:

1) Family’s well-being

- a) The importance of finances was mentioned as one of the main factors for the well-being of the family. It was obvious that Roma mothers saw money as the foundation of well-being that provides access to other factors that influence the well-being of the family.

- b) Meeting the basic needs for their children such as food, heat, clothing, and housing was another important factor mentioned by Roma mothers necessary for the state of well-being for their families. According to Roma mothers, meeting the basic needs would guarantee them further the possibility to have a peaceful family life as the stressors caused by the lack of the basic resources and needs are avoided.
- c) Employment was emphasized as an essential factor to family's well-being. A secure job that could provide monthly income security was a factor important to Roma mothers. Unfortunately, employment was seen as an unattainable goal in life.
- d) Interpersonal relationships and family relationships in particular were regarded by respondents as a contributing factor to well-being and identified as either having positive or negative effect depending on the nature of the relationships and the presence or absence of a father figure in the family. Marriage was seen as a positive factor in the personal well-being. Children were considered by all respondents to be a great source of happiness.

2) Desire for equal treatment

a) Public life

Some respondents recognized the influence the democratic governments after the fall of socialism in Bulgaria had on their lives. Politics, politicians, and media were mentioned as factors that determine the overall life chances of Roma.

Roma mothers recognized that there were many negative effects to the everyday life of the individual Roma family in not implementing the laws in Bulgaria. Economic and political instability and bad provision of services (health and social services) contribute to a low satisfaction level with life.

Respondents reported mistrust in the political institutions. Some of my respondents perceived the new democracy in Bulgaria as a form of governance that robs Roma of freedoms and rights. Instead of enabling and giving possibilities, the democratic state of Bulgaria was described as disabling and damaging the possibilities in their lives. The Bulgarian state was perceived as unfair. The media was perceived as disrespectful to Roma in general. It was also

said that the lack of law and order in the country influenced negatively the individual's personal life.

Roma mothers experienced the inconsistency of the Bulgarian state's intentions to "integrate" Roma and the actual results of alienation between the Roma minority and the Bulgarian majority as unfair and discriminative treatment in every area in their everyday lives. Authorities were perceived as lacking the will to protect Roma, which in turn contributes to insecure and uncertain experiences of life in general.

Discrimination from authorities (especially social and health services) adds an extra bitter feeling of being second-class citizens without rights and freedoms.

I would conclude that income, family, and discrimination are the three key factors affecting the life satisfaction of Roma mothers that have a direct and immediate connection to the perception of their well-being.

7. Results from second focus-group interview with community social workers of Roma origin

RESPONDENT A is a 43-year-old man of Roma origin. He has 11 years of experience working with the Roma neighbourhood as educational coordinator. He is employed by the social services office specifically for the needs of the Roma population—working in the so-called "Gypsy office." He lives in the city of Pazardzjik, outside the Roma neighbourhood. He has two children and a wife, who is employed. His children attend ethnically mixed schools.

RESPONDENT B is a 47-year-old man of Roma origin. He is working presently as a social worker in the social services. He has had long relation to the NGO Napredak. He was employed as a consultant in the office of the NGO Napredak. His wife is unemployed, and his children are living and working overseas.

RESPONDENT C is a 27-year-old Roma man who has been working for the NGO Napredak for the last 7 years as a school mediator and community facilitator. He is not married and for the time being is unemployed.

RESPONDENT D is a 22-year-old man from Roma origin. He was unemployed at the time of the interview. He used to work for the NGO Napredak as a school mediator and community facilitator. He is married. His wife is unemployed, taking care of their young child.

Table 4

CHALLENGES TO ROMA INTEGRATION—OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ROMA COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKERS

THEMATIC CODES and Subcodes

Illustrative text

EDUCATION

High costs

Firstly, more efforts have to be put in the education of Roma people. There is a myth [among Bulgarians] about Roma that they don't want to let their children go to school. I don't agree with this myth because based on my experience, almost 90 percent of the children in this neighbourhood go to school. Those who do not attend school are too poor.

—Respondent A

Many [Roma parents] are too poor, and they don't have the financial resources to send their children to school. Most of the people here [Roma people in the neighbourhood] live in outrageous poverty. This is why some [Roma] parents cannot send their children to school. These Roma families don't have a table and chairs in their homes. Parents cannot provide the necessary facilities to their children to sit and do their homework.

—Respondent B

There is a simple explanation to everything you see. Some Roma parents don't send their children to school because they cannot afford even to feed them. Despite this [poverty],

many Roma parents do their best to send their children every day at school.

—Respondent D

It is important for our neighbourhood to have a kindergarten where the children could start learning Bulgarian language as early as possible or at least two or three years before they start school. You could not expect a child who doesn't know Bulgarian to succeed at school, could you? The lack of knowledge of Bulgarian language affects the integration of the Roma children from an early age. When the child passes in the fifth grade, he or she knows Bulgarian well, but the problem is that the child is so far behind with the schoolwork that it is irreversible in many ways.

—Respondent B

Insufficient knowledge in Bulgarian language

You cannot expect a child who speaks only Turkish or Romani at home to go to a “Bulgarian” school and achieve top grades. It simply won't happen! This is why it is important to start working at very early age with those Roma children who do not speak the Bulgarian language.

—Respondent D

In my view, there is also a big fault in the whole education system in this country. Teachers push Roma children to the next grade only to report success. Roma kids don't have the necessary knowledge to pass their exams. Teachers let them finish school without proper education.

—Respondent A

It is wrong to separate [segregate] children the way the system allows it. I have a feeling that the education system encourages the segregation of Roma schools. Without doubt, it does not help the integration of the Roma children at all.

—Respondent B

Can you imagine that there are children who graduate here [at the Roma school] and they are literally illiterate? It is outrageous. But the [education] system allows it.

—Respondent A

Bullying and discrimination at school

Because of so many incidents of bullying in the “Bulgarian” schools, some Roma kids do not want to go there. [And] of course, parents return them here to the Roma school.

[Because] they [parents] feel that their children are safer here, at the neighbourhood.

—Respondent A

It is true that there are many conflicts between Roma and Bulgarian children at school. It can get very ugly sometimes. I have seen a lot.

—Respondent D

The teachers, you see, they sometimes take the side of the Bulgarian kids even though it wasn't the Roma kid to blame.

—Respondent C

My daughter was in a [ethnically] mixed kindergarten from when she was three years old. Now she goes to "Bulgarian" school, and she is the only Roma child in the class. [And because] I want to make sure that she does as well as the rest of the children in the class, I sit with her every afternoon for two hours to help her with her homework. I have to make sure she won't be picked at school for she is Roma. I don't want the other kids to offend her.

—Respondent A

FAMILY

Family social work

If a parent is not interested in the development of her child, she [the parent] stops the integration of the child. To integrate the children means to integrate the parents first, or rather at the same time to work with parents and children. [Because] the parents have to be integrated in society for a child to be integrated too.

—Respondent A

The organization [NGO Napredak] used to work with the Roma mothers of children at school age. We were trying to prevent early school dropouts and to teach Roma mothers how important it is to keep their children at school.

—Respondent B

I was an educational coordinator for the last eleven years here in the organization [NGO Napredak]. Every week we used to have meetings with the parents. Some used to come but some did not. There was a woman who did not attend the meetings even once. It was

irritating for me that she didn't show any interest in her children. There was time when she had to apply for social help in the social office, and, as you know, the organization [NGO Napredak] helps in filling out the forms. She came here for help. I saw her, and I asked the people who worked here to leave her form at the end, you see. I didn't want them to help her right away on purpose. After she waited for two hours, she started being impatient and tried to pick a fight with us. Then I got my chance to teach her a lesson. I told her that if she didn't stop her kids from going to school now, she wouldn't need us to help her to fill out a simple form. [Because] she could have asked her kids for help.

—Respondent A

EMPLOYMENT

Socialization through work

The second most important factor for successful Roma integration [after the education] is employment. For it is at work that one gets contacts with Bulgarians, and also in this way, Bulgarians will see that we [Roma] can work.

—Respondent A

The question is how to integrate those Roma people who do not literally leave the Roma ghetto. Some Roma literally do not leave the ghetto. They do not have a job and are not occupied with any meaningful activity outside the ghetto, so what is the point leaving the ghetto? I ask. They don't have the chance to create contacts outside the ghetto. They only communicate with the people from the neighbourhood, and this is a bad thing because they do not know what it is to work and deal with people.

—Respondent C

Exclusion from the Labour office

Unemployment in the neighbourhood is over 90 percent, but according to the labour office, unemployment almost does not exist here. The reason for that is that in order to be registered as unemployed, you have to go to the labour office and sign your name once a month. The moment someone forgets to go at that day to sign at the labour office he/she is automatically excluded from the register for a whole year. The problem is that that same person does not have the right to receive unemployment benefits for a year ahead. As long as the labour office's statistics are concerned, this person is not unemployed.

—Respondent A

Even if one is registered at the labour office and is showing up every month and asks actively for a job, it does not mean that the labour office officials will help him find a job. They seem not to care about people in general and even less for “Gypsies.”

—Respondent C

It is actually very sad that the labour office people stop us [Roma] and discourage so many from finding a job.

—Respondent B

Complex reasons for Roma’s unemployment

The reasons for Roma high-level unemployment rates are many. In my view, it is mainly the low education level among Roma [that keeps them out of work]. [However] there is also the ongoing economic crisis to be considered. It is important for us [Roma social workers] to work with our people and teach them that education will make their chances better. [But of course] it is not an easy task.

—Respondent B

**SOCIAL SERVICES AND LOCAL
LABOUR OFFICE**

Insufficient social subsidies

It is a fact that Roma parents receive subsidies from the social office if their children attend school and that these subsidies cease if the children stop attending school. The amount I am talking about is 35 leva (17.5 euros), and you can imagine how little it is. In my opinion, the amount has to be raised every year if children manage to pass to upper grade. The amount is not even enough to buy textbooks.

—Respondent A

It is one thing that the social subsidies are too small, but another problem is that even people who are entitled to them are not granted.

—Respondent B

Inadequate qualification programs

There is this practice in social services together with the labour office to organize

programs to make you believe that they find jobs for the Roma. You know what they do? They hire, for example, 30 Roma people, and in six months, they fire them. In two to three weeks they call them again and hire them again, the same people, you see . . . ! At the end of the year, they report that they have hired 60 Roma people.

—Respondent B

For example, there was a computer course organized recently by social services for Roma people who are illiterate, people who barely graduated fifth grade. I would like to ask why. It is because the ministry requires them to execute this project. And social services does as they are told; they don't care if this is adequate for the Roma whatsoever!

—Respondent A

The national programs for social inclusion of Roma in employment, education, and housing are failing across the whole country. My opinion is that they are failing because the money does not reach the individuals. The money disappears before they reach their aims. It might be because of corruption, or it might be insufficient funding, but whatever it is the reason, they do not help the Roma.

—Respondent A

Discriminatory legislation

The “social” politics, for instance, and social services, of course, have put in motion a new law recently, which in my opinion is directed especially against the Roma who live in the ghettos. Now it is required to have a document for the deed of your property only to be able to apply for social assistance. It is known by everyone that 90 percent of the houses in the ghettos are illegally built. If I have to spell it for you, it means that 90 percent of Roma in this neighbourhood cannot apply for social help, and they cannot vote. I truly believe that this law was enacted only to make it difficult for the poorest of Roma people and to deprive them of their rights.

—Respondent A

Every day there are people coming to ask if they can legalize their houses because they need to apply for social help, and the social office says that they can't help them with that.

—Respondent B

On the one hand, in the media, for example, one hears about the integration of the Roma and how much money the state uses on this

Institutional discrimination

agenda, but on the other hand, the parliament carries out new laws directed against Roma. It feels like the Bulgarian state and ministers have double standards.

—Respondent B

I work in the social services, and I claim that the way Roma are treated there is horrible. I work in the so-called “Gypsy office,” where only Roma come. We serve only the Roma population. You tell me, how are we so different from the rest that we need a special office? We are Bulgarian citizens too.

—Respondent A

Another thing is that if you want to apply for social help, you need to go through hell. It is only for the application form, you wait two or three hours. Once you have gotten the empty application, you have to fill it out. People come to the organization for help. Then, next day you have to go back to town to deliver the form, and if they [social workers] find the smallest mistake in the forms, they return them to the people instead of helping them correct it. It is not right, you see—a treatment like that!

—Respondent A

8. Discussion of the results of the second focus-group interview with Roma social community workers

8.1 Discussion of the results in Table 4: “CHALLENGES TO ROMA INTEGRATION—OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ROMA COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKERS”

Table 4, titled **CHALLENGES TO ROMA INTEGRATION—OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ROMA COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKERS**, contains thematic codes that summarize Roma community social workers’ experiences and opinions about matters they find challenging in their work with the Roma community in the city of Pazardzjik.

EDUCATION

The first thematic code in Table 4 is **EDUCATION**. I have used three subcodes to differentiate key strands within the area of EDUCATION. These are “**high costs**,” “**insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language**,” and “**bullying and discrimination at school**.”

High costs and insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language

The subcodes “**high costs**” and “**insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language**” reflect Roma social community workers’ opinion on the reasons why Roma children do worse than Bulgarian children at school.

The main reason Roma children stop attending school, according to my respondents, is that the costs for school activities and education (fees, transport, books, etc.) are too high.

The results from the focus-group interview with Roma social community workers line with the results from the focus-group interview with the Roma mothers.

Both focus groups expressed opinion that the costs of schooling children are too high. As a researcher, I perceive and interpret the answers of both focus groups in a way that allows me to argue that poverty is a central obstacle to progress in educating Roma children.

According to the opinion of the Roma social workers, another main barrier is that many Roma children start school equipped with insufficient knowledge in the Bulgarian language to proceed with normal school activities. There was consent among the Roma social workers that it is usual for Roma children in Bulgaria to speak Romani or Turkish language at home, and therefore, Roma children lack the necessary language skills in the Bulgarian language by the start of obligatory schools. The Roma social community workers stressed the importance of ensuring access to preschool facilities as one of the most important factors for developing the language skills of Roma children. Their future successful inclusion at school was considered by the Roma social workers as a consequence of the level of knowledge of Bulgarian language.

Open Society Institute (2007) confirms the existence of this particular matter. Research shows that the underdeveloped and inadequate system of preschool institutions in Bulgaria is currently insufficient to cover the need of early formal education, which is a necessary condition for the Roma children's adaptation to and success at school.

The Roma social workers I interviewed were critical also towards the educational system in Bulgaria with regard to its failure to promote quality education for the Roma children. They shared opinion that the school system allows to discourage Roma pupils from studying by not tightening schools' practices and letting Roma pupils pass to the next grade without having obtained the necessary knowledge. My respondents shared also opinion that many Roma children graduate from school illiterate.

Current NGO-conducted research makes also evident that Roma students in segregated schools accomplish a lot less on tests in mathematics and the Bulgarian language than do their counterparts in integrated schools. Literacy rates for Roma children are inferior to those for the majority population. In particular, Roma pupils who have attended segregated schools show much lower literacy level, possibly because their presence at

such schools is poorly supervised, the quality of education is low, and students can pass from grade to grade without meeting basic standards (Open Society Institute, 2007).

As a researcher, I think that the Roma community workers refer to structural challenges concerning the inclusion of Roma children at school. The Roma social workers paid more attention to factors challenging inclusion within the education system than factors concerning, for example, parental control. Factors regarding the motivation of Roma pupils themselves, the role of the Roma parents, and the influence of the Roma community were not exposed to discussion either.

Such challenges, however, are thought to be also of importance according to some studies. For example, the European Monitoring Centre of Racism and Xenophobia (2006) concludes that structural as well as cultural and family-related aspects influence the inclusion of Roma pupils in the education system (EUMC, 2006).

Bullying and discrimination at school

The subcode “**bullying and discrimination at school**” reflects the experiences and opinions of the Roma community social workers with regard to the challenges encountered in their work towards the inclusion of Roma children in desegregated (mixed) schools.

The Roma social workers I interviewed have witnessed multiple cases of conflicts between Roma and Bulgarian children at school. The cases of bullying, harassment, racial slurs, and at times inadequate conduct of teachers who do not address appropriately normative and behavioural differences clearly show the existence of racism and discrimination at schools.

Such phenomena are highlighted in several studies and reports. Examples for such reports are ERRC (2004) and EUMC (2006). If such issues are tolerated by teachers, they can develop to become very serious and could have far-reaching effects on social cohesion and integration efforts (EUMC, 2006).

As a researcher and a Bulgarian, I think that the problem of bullying and discrimination of Roma children at school is a result of many social factors, some of them concerning the racial attitudes of Bulgarians themselves who are altogether unwilling to accept

Roma as equals. Therefore, in my view, the change of the attitudes among Bulgarians should happen at the school grounds, where dealing appropriately with racial harassment must be an important part in the moral education of pupils. Schools should have structures and procedures in place to allow everyone, teaching and nonteaching staff, other adults in the schools, and pupils, to be able to play a role in tackling racist incidents (Portsmouth City Council, 2009).

Clear procedures, specific to the school, should be developed in consultation with the staff, governors, pupils, and parents. Familiarisation with the procedures will be needed for all the staff, governors, lunchtime staff, administrative staff, parent helpers, playground staff, caretakers, and any other adult working visiting the premises on a regular basis. Regular training is therefore an essential element in the development and implementation of the policies, procedures, and practices (Portsmouth City Council, 2009).

FAMILY

Family social work

The second thematic code in Table 4 is **FAMILY**. I have used one subcode: “**family social work.**”

The subcode indicates that Roma parents’ literacy according to the Roma social workers I interviewed is a key factor for the social inclusion of Roma children in the future. It also reflects the approach the Roma social workers adhere to in their work with Roma families.

Based on the opinions and work experiences of the Roma social workers I interviewed, the main challenges Roma families experience in their social inclusion in Bulgarian society are connected with illiteracy and resulting lack of motivation for inclusion. The stories the social workers told indicate that their practical fieldwork is directed towards increasing the motivation towards inclusion by a variety of means. Therefore, according to the Roma social workers, to carry out services enveloping the family as a unit is an important task in the process of integration.

From a child development perspective and the basic need of children to have a good start in life, the process of social inclusion in the wider society of Roma parents should be carried out on mesosystem level. I use the term mesosystem in the sense Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines it as “*a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (e.g., for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)*” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). In this sense, one argues that the stronger the links between different settings are, the more positive the influence will be on the child’s development. For example, the initiatives of the parents’ involvement in linking school with the home domain would determine the quality of the child’s mesosystem.

However, according to EUMC (2006), the following factors explain the lack of motivation of some Roma for inclusion.

Language and cultural differences

The challenge regarding the comprehension of the official national (majority) language affects the educational attainment of Roma pupils and their inclusion in the wider society. The same is true for culturally based differences in values, experiences with formal education, religion, etc. Roma children that grow up within extended family structures could have limited contact to the national language. However, cultural identity as an essential component of personality and a necessary elements for the development of social relationships should be recognised and respected by schools (EUMC, 2006).

Participation in preschool programmes

Roma children rarely participate in preschool programmes. Partly this is related to traditional family values and the fear that early socialisation outside the kinship group could alienate the child from its cultural traditions. However, preschool education is crucial for later academic achievement since it prepares children to function in a school environment and fosters the learning of the country’s dominant language (EUMC, 2006).

Socialisation, learning patterns, and fear of assimilation

In Roma communities, socialisation and learning are based on the freedom to explore and learn rather than to follow rules in a confined environment, the needs of the community are considered more important than the needs of individuals, decisions are reached by consensus rather than by obedience to an established hierarchy, verbal skills are more highly valued than writing and reading skills, applied knowledge is considered more important than abstract knowledge. In some cases, Roma parents could fear that participation in education and indeed educational success could alienate their children from their culture (EUMC, 2006).

Parental background and aspirations

The educational level of the parents affects their capacity to support their children in their homework. Furthermore, research suggests that pupils' low educational attainment can also be attributed to the overall low socioeconomic position of their parents. It has also been argued that Roma parents do not always link scholastic success to economic and social success and thus could place a lower value to scholastic achievement (EUMC, 2006).

EMPLOYMENT

The third thematic code in Table 4 is **EMPLOYMENT**. I have used three subcodes to locate the main challenges the Roma social workers experience in their work towards Roma inclusion. The subcodes are “**socialization through work**,” “**exclusion from the labour office**,” and “**complex reasons for Roma unemployment**.”

Socialization through work

The subcode “**socialization through work**” indicates an awareness of the Roma social workers that the Roma inclusion is about participation on the labour market, and it is seen as beneficial to the whole society.

Work socialization is defined as “*the process of learning to labour in paid employment and conforming to the associated ideological structures: internalizing the norms, values and culture of the work place; accommodating to power and authority relations at the work place; acquiring the skills of secondary relationships; complying with the particular role and functions allocated to the individual worker; and adopting the behaviours preferred by the employers (such as punctuality, team spirit, loyalty). More generally it involves learning to value the attitudes that reinforce the worth of work in general and the skills involved in doing particular jobs*” (Marshall, 1998, p. 709).

The view expressed by the Roma social workers corresponds with the functionalist perspective that sees socialization as essential for the integration of society (Marshall, 1998, p. 625). In this sense, the work has the power to socialize the people through different channels. For instance, people spend a very large part of their lives at work, and in principle a lot of the social interaction occurs at work. In this way, a system of norms and social ideas is conveyed by work and internalized by the worker. Work allows the individual to play an active part in creating socially valuable goods and gain social status and prestige. It also provides a time structure to day, week, year, and even life. Last and not least, with the financial compensation from work, the vast majority of people meet their material needs (Frese, 1982). Therefore, to be at work and connected with the majority of population plays a vital role for the inclusion of Roma.

The Roma social workers I interviewed also acknowledge the social problem of stigmatizing Roma in general and the harm it does to both groups—the Roma minority and the Bulgarian majority. If Roma are included on the labour market, the Bulgarians will see that Roma have the labour power, and this in itself is a positive impact on the inclusion process. Research has also shown that there is a high level of existing prejudices between the two groups which as a single factor prevents many Roma from being included on the labour market (Crepaldi et al., 2008). If one were to consider the predicament of the Roma social workers on the grounds of cognitive theory (Allport, 1954), one can argue that to change the attitudes of people toward others, there needs a contact between them. The contact hypothesis, or intergroup contact theory, argues that

under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. Contact would change the attitudes in both groups, and attitude change would lead to behaviour change. On the other hand, it would also increase opportunities for friendship development. Ultimately, a more integrated society implies more equal opportunities and rights for all human beings as well as working constantly towards improving the life chances of all its citizens (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005).

Exclusion from the labour office

The second subcode, “**exclusion from the labour office**” denotes a couple of problems reported by the Roma social workers I interviewed.

- 1) The majority of working-age Roma residing in this particularly marginalized community in Pazardzjik are unemployed but are out of the unemployment register. As a result, many do not receive unemployment benefits as job seekers.
- 2) The respondents in the interview stated that many jobless Roma have largely given up looking for jobs as the main reason for this, according to their opinion, is discouragement. Statements from my respondents point towards mistrust to the labour office and their will to engage in helping Roma to change their unemployment status. Experiences of open discrimination by officials lead to sceptical attitudes and discouragement to seek and actively develop marketable skills for the job market.

As a researcher, I think that the problems the social workers refer to result from the general exclusion and discrimination of Roma from the mainstream society.

Exclusionary practices are closely linked within a long mainstream tradition of not seeing the Roma population as equal fellow citizens (Crepaldi et al., 2008). However, xenophobia, “anti-Gypsyism,” and attitudes of this nature harm not only the real possibilities for employment of Roma people but also the real inclusion of Roma into the mainstream society (ERRC, 2007b).

Secure employment for Roma people is significantly hindered by prejudiced behaviour and popular beliefs that unemployment and idleness is a situation that many Roma have chosen by themselves. These stereotypical views spring negative attitudes that Roma do

not deserve or do not want to work. It is not unusual to hear from professionals and high-ranking government officials blaming Roma unemployment on Roma culture, their lifestyle, and lack of discipline and motivation to work. Many people from the majority will say they are unreliable and lazy and prefer to live on social assistance rather than earn a living (ERRC, 2007b).

Complex reasons for Roma unemployment

However, the third subcode, “**complex reasons for Roma unemployment,**” expresses the attempt made by one of the Roma social workers I interviewed to summarize the situation and reasons for Roma unemployment.

In short, two reasons were mentioned as main factors playing a significant role in Roma unemployment—namely, the economic crises in Europe and the low education level among Roma. In essence, these results correspond with the study carried out by the European Roma Right Centre, “The Glass Box: Exclusion of Roma from Employment” (2007). According to this particular study, there are no official statistics that quantify the scale of Roma unemployment, and there are no labour market intelligence systems to provide sophisticated analysis of the configurations and patterns of Roma unemployment or employment (ERRC, 2007, p. 15). However, the study argues further that the mass Roma unemployment is most frequently considered to be a consequence of supply-side factors and deficiencies in unemployed Roma. The study specifies also that challenges such as low education and no marketable qualifications play a significant role in Roma’s weak chances for employment. Many of Roma possess out-of-date skills, which make them virtually unemployable. Roma who live in isolated communities with poor transport links have also limited access to jobs or information about jobs. On top, there is the added impact of discrimination and the negative stereotyping about Roma, which makes unemployment and labour market exclusion an overwhelming problem for many working-age Roma (ERRC, 2007; World Bank, 2005a).

SOCIAL SERVICES AND LOCAL LABOUR OFFICE

The fourth thematic code in Table 4 is **SOCIAL SERVICES AND LOCAL LABOUR OFFICE**. I have used four subcodes to present the experiences Roma social workers have with the procedures, social assistance programmes, and institutional arrangements for delivering income support and other benefits to Roma. The subcodes are **“insufficient social subsidies,” “qualification programmes,” “discriminatory legislation,”** and **“institutional discrimination.”**

Insufficient social subsidies

Considering the first subcode, **“insufficient social subsidies,”** the Roma social workers expressed opinion that many of the social grants Roma receive are scarce. One of the social workers I interviewed was particular about the “monthly child allowance.” In his view, the amount of money Roma families receive for having their children at school is not enough to encourage these families to keep their children at school.

Although it is not an antipoverty program, “monthly child allowance” is an important part of the social safety net for poor households in Bulgaria. It is intended to help families with children up to the age of 18 (if attending school) and is based on an income test. Eligible are only families with monthly income below a per capita income threshold. Until the end of 2012, this benefit of 35 leva (approximately €17) per child was offered only to low-income families. From 1 January 2013, it will be paid to all children attending primary and secondary school to a maximum age of 20 years (European Union, 2013).

The opinion of the social workers that this particular grant is insufficient for the needs of a child attending school is in line with the report presented by the World Bank (2009) and the study by Tasseva (2012), “Evaluating the Performance of Means-Tested Benefits in Bulgaria.” Tasseva (2012) shows that the social means-tested benefit system in Bulgaria is failing to reach those most in need.

Inadequate qualification programs

The second subcode, **“inadequate qualification programs,”** echoes the negative attitude the social workers I interviewed held against the efficiency of the programs and measures for professional training and qualification of Roma. According to the social workers I interviewed, the training that is on offer for Roma adults is of poor quality. In my view as a researcher, this threatens the effectiveness of the training programs that are being undertaken. It seems, in addition, that “quantity” is prioritized over “quality.” For instance, the Roma social workers I interviewed expressed concern that despite that many Roma people from the neighbourhood Iztok attend training and qualification courses, there are no real results in changing their unemployed status. A lot of these people who, for instance, attend the computer training course never use a computer after the end of the course.

The number of trainees and what they are trained for does not seem to be based on demand according to my informants; instead, it seems to be a supply driven by the training institutions. In my opinion, unemployed individuals (Roma or non-Roma) would continue being unemployed until the quality of the professional qualification programs improve.

Dimitrov (2012) examines in his study “Youth Unemployment in Bulgaria” relevant unemployment issues in Bulgaria. One of the main findings shows *that “it is not active labour market policy overall but the details of particular programmes that should be examined. Some programmes that are unattractive or have inadequate management because of procedural obstacles and restrictions lead to poor results.”*

It shows that there are existing labour programmes in Bulgaria that are meant to relieve unemployment, but the management of these programmes needs to be reconsidered to be successful.

Discriminatory legislation

The third subcode, **“discriminatory legislation,”** expresses concern and frustration about the double standards of the Roma integration politics in Bulgaria. The examples the social workers presented show that Roma inclusion in Bulgaria is in many ways obstructed by specific legislations.

According to my respondents, in general, the Bulgarian authorities lack problem-solving capacity and will to include Roma in the residential registers. This in turn deprives Roma from the possibility to vote in the national elections.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (2012) presents the problem described by the Roma social workers I interviewed and gives an explanation about this particular discriminatory law. It states that *“changes to the Election Code required people to prove their address registration by presenting a property ownership deed, rental contract or written owner consent at the Civil Registration and Administrative Services directorate in order to receive identity cards. While its purpose was to limit the phenomenon described as ‘voting tourism’ (the practice of people voting in a different area to the one they live with the purpose of altering the outcome of the vote), the law barred thousands from access to a number of services, including healthcare and social assistance. This law disproportionately affected Roma, since they represent the majority of people living in illegally built houses. Furthermore, during the municipal and presidential elections in 2011 many Roma were barred from casting a vote since they could not be issued identity cards, thereby severely violating the very foundations of democracy.”*

This, in my view, constitutes one big issue concerning noncompliance with the human rights directives by the Bulgarian state.

Institutional discrimination

The last subcode, **“institutional discrimination,”** represents the opinion of the Roma social workers I interviewed that the Bulgarian state applies double standards in the Roma integration politics. The examples given by the social workers show the existence of biased and unfair treatment of Roma people as clients in the Social Services Agency. Once again, institutional discrimination and racism are the issues at stake regarding Roma inclusion.

If Roma were treated equally with the rest of the Bulgarian population, why would social services in Pazardzjik have an office called “the Gypsy office”?

The Roma social workers I interviewed expressed opinion that the allocation of a special office dealing only with Roma people is unacceptable. They perceived the

practice as discriminatory. On the other hand, they recognized the necessity of allocating a service specialized for the needs of Roma equipped with the needed knowledge and sensitivity to address these needs in effective and culturally appropriate ways. However, an office called the “Gypsy office” works against this purpose as it singles out Roma in a negative manner.

My impression and opinion, based on the findings of my study, is that the Bulgarian welfare policies fail to provide professional services to the Roma people by segregating them into a special office whose existence reinforces once again the existing stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination against Roma.

9. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to find an answer as to why the process of inclusion of Bulgarian Roma in Bulgarian society is ineffective and how this affects the Roma people in their everyday life dealing with the wider society. Despite all the enacted strategies and Roma integration programs, more than 80 percent of the Roma people in Bulgaria live in segregated settings, struggle with poverty, and are unemployed long-term. This study explored the views of a group of Roma mothers, a group of Roma social workers, and a Roma activist—the head of the nongovernmental organization Napredak. Their experiences and opinions served as a ground not to find the “truth” about Roma inclusion but to hypothesize what is going on.

In summarizing the findings of my research, I would definitely say that experiences of discrimination were reiterated matters discussed throughout all three interviews.

Discrimination is perceived by the Roma people I interviewed as one of the most significant barriers impeding their efforts to overcome the socioeconomic difficulties they experience and respectively acquire a satisfactory quality of life. They perceive their exclusion as a consequence mainly derived from

- existing negative attitudes against Roma among the majority of the Bulgarian society,
- existing institutional discrimination, and
- unwillingness the government shows to actively follow the goals of the strategic Roma inclusion programs.

The reported experiences of ethnic discrimination and racism contribute to a low satisfaction level with life among my respondents, which ultimately results in decreasing the chances for inclusion in society.

Discrimination is actively experienced on all levels by the Roma people I interviewed:

School

- Poorer quality of education at Roma schools in general
- Educational segregation
- Experiences of ethnic discrimination by the staff at desegregated schools
- Political indifference in funding projects aiming to dissolve educational segregation

Health care system

- Refused medical care
- Refusal to prescribe free medicines
- Poor treatment of Roma patients

Employment

- Ethnic criteria applied to employment
- Ethnic criteria applied to vacancies
- Employers' refusal to hire Roma

Social Services Agency

- Denied access to social help

- Separate office allocated for Roma social clients
- Discriminatory attitudes

Labour agency

- Inadequate professional qualification programs that are depriving Roma from real employment opportunities
- Negative stereotypes resulting in biased and unprofessional service to unemployed Roma
- Lack of incentives and will to encourage employers to hire Roma

Government policies

- Misuse of state and EU structural Roma funds for personal benefits
- Discriminatory legislation depriving Roma from legalizing their dwellings and the right to vote
- Lack of political will to implement and finance the enacted Roma inclusion strategies and programs

Local authorities

- Lack of local funding and indifference to overcome discrimination practices at local level—for example, lack of funding school buses to help school desegregation

The Roma mothers' views on how their lives may be improved and the views of the Roma social workers on the challenges to Roma inclusion embrace concerns requiring attention such as the following:

1) Finding solutions for the long-term unemployment

Long-term unemployment closely affects the lives of the Roma mothers I interviewed. They perceive their and their partners' unemployment status as a main cause for the socioeconomic challenges they experience. The fact that the Roma mothers I interviewed are unemployed long-term explains why they are ineligible for unemployment benefits and thus must rely on minimal social assistance. Long-term

unemployment, on the other hand, is perceived by the Roma social workers I interviewed as one of the main obstacles to Roma inclusion. The nature of Roma unemployment is seen by the Roma social workers as a kind of cycle starting off the point of low education that leads to low competitiveness in the labour market combined with discriminatory practices and limited access to jobs.

On the other hand, the Roma mothers I interviewed accentuated mostly experiences of discrimination and left out of account their employability. However, on the basis of the results of my study, it is difficult to conclude where one can draw the line between low skills and resulting unemployment and labour market discrimination. Reasons for Roma exclusion of the labour market might as well be a combination of these and other factors which did not appear in my inquiry.

2) Dissolving the segregated education

To put it plainly, segregation of Roma children in Bulgaria still exists. It is unacceptable and damaging. It exists despite the Framework for National Roma Integration.

Roma children who attend integrated Bulgarian schools risk being transferred to Roma schools or simply drop out because of major shortcomings in the infrastructure, bullying at school, or daily experiences of racism. Segregated education affects the fate of many Roma children quite unfavourably. These are the children of Bulgaria who are cast out of the Bulgarian society. The “integrative school system” in Bulgaria does not seem to accommodate them in an inclusive way, and with that, it strips them of all chances for future development

The participants in this study repeatedly expressed concerns about the overwhelming amount of ignorance and unwillingness of decision makers and stakeholders to change the Roma situation and break this cycle of unfortunate attempts to “integrate Roma.”

3) Improving the quality of the professional qualification programs

According to the interviewed Roma social workers in my study and the review of existing research, lack of adequate education, qualifications, and skills is one of the major reasons many Roma in Bulgaria are unemployed. To deal with the unemployment, the labour agency organizes professional training courses to increase the abilities for employment of unemployed, uneducated, and unqualified persons.

However, once again, the intentions of the government do not meet the expectations and the immediate needs of the Roma people. The quality of the professional training programs is not provided, and results are not analysed and, in addition, are barely accessible for the public. Providing formal services of low quality is hardly the way to the inclusion of people in a disadvantaged position in society.

In addition to the challenges listed above, there are also some concerns raised by the coordinator of the Roma NGO Napredak, Mr. Plamen Tzankov. These challenges relate again to the incompatibility between the intended goals and the methods in the process of Roma inclusion and concern the insufficient funding of grassroots Roma inclusion projects.

1) Insufficient funding

In Bulgaria, as mentioned many times before, there are now enacted many strategic Roma integration plans and programs. However, my respondents' opinion is that national-level Roma policies and strategies are very unlikely to be effective unless some mechanism is found to implement them at the local level. NGOs work primarily at local level, at the grassroots level. The local level is the level at which Roma can most easily organise to exercise their rights, represent their interests, and engage collectively in civic processes. The local neighbourhood is the level of meaning in most people's lives that they know, care about, operate in, and feel they can have some direct control over (Oakley, 2005).

Therefore, national policy makers should be willing to support local-level Roma NGOs, but the reality is again different. Despite the fact that funding Roma inclusion projects is vital to Roma empowerment, lack of finances not only hinders that but also threatens the process of building partnerships between public authorities and Roma communities. With no subsidies, the actual implementation of the Roma inclusion strategies at the grassroots level is hardly possible. Therefore, Mr. Plamen Tzankov appeals for simpler access to grants for Roma NGOs. By funding small projects, integration policies aiming to combat Roma exclusion and disadvantage would become more sustainable. It will benefit the Roma people and progress will be made.

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Appendices

Questions for the one-to-one semistructured interview with Mr. Plamen Tzankov

Tell me about the work of the NGO Napredak. What has happened to the inclusion projects?

What do you think will happen in the future to the inclusion of this particular Roma community?

What are the challenges in the Roma inclusion process?

How do you see the process of Roma inclusion in Bulgaria in the future?

Questions for the first focus-group interview with Roma mothers

How are things going in your lives in the neighbourhood?

Let us consider the areas in life where you meet most challenges? Examples of such areas can be schools your children attend, family life, hospitals and hospitalization, jobs, social services, the NGO Napredak.

Let us turn our sight now to these areas in your lives that make you happy, where you feel satisfied with your lives. What do you think would positively contribute to the feeling of you being happier and more satisfied?

Questions for the second focus-group interview with Roma social workers

Would you identify for me the challenges in your work towards Roma inclusion in Bulgaria? What do you think works, and what do you think does not in this process, and why?

Can you please review your experiences with

- the schools regarding Roma children,
- your work as an employee in Social Services Agency and in NGO Napredak, and
- the situation of Roma on the labour market (challenges and possibilities)?