

Ladies and gentlemen,

Saying how happy I am receiving this award on behalf of the team and all those who contributed to the report would be wasting your time. It is too obvious. What I would like to say is **why** I am particularly happy to receive the award in **this particular category**.

Some ten years ago a friend of mine and one of the co-authors of the report, Nikolay Kirilov, shared with me a brief conversation he had with his son (then 3-4 years old I think). His son asked him a simple question: “Why does the blacktop road end in the front of the neighborhood?”

The neighborhood was a Roma neighborhood in the city of Lom in Bulgaria and it was not just the road that was not entering it – the same was with sewage, tapped water. Using UNDP jargon we would say –development **opportunities were not reaching the neighborhood** and its people were lacking access to access to education, health, employment.

The simple question does not have a simple answer though; or could have various answers with often mutually excluding logic and argumentation. But answering this question is a **necessary precondition** for bringing the road into the neighborhood. To make the issue even more complicated, no answer would be correct if it is not comprehensive and does not bring together all those mutually excluding arguments together in a pragmatic and consistent approach. Otherwise it would be difficult if possible at all to move from wishful thinking towards **pragmatic action** for tangible and measurable improvement.

This was exactly the team’s objective: changing the dominating paradigm on Roma plight, making the policies for its improvement closer to **pragmatic thinking with clear and tangible outcomes** was even more important than producing an analysis meeting highest standards.

This is why I would like to express my gratitude for this award and the recognition of our attempt to provide a proper **pragmatic focus of Roma-targeting policies**.

At the same time I am aware that this is **just the beginning**. Changed policy focus is just a minor step. At the end of the day what matters is having people’s opportunities and life improved. This is still to come and I hope we are a bit – one step at least – closer.

Thank you