



Czech Republic 2005

## Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion

Minutes

Peer Review Meeting  
Prague  
19-20 May 2005



on behalf of



**European Commission**  
**DG Employment, Social Affairs**  
**and Equal Opportunities**





## Day 1 – morning session

### *Welcome address*

**Mr Martin Zarsky, Head of the Department of Social Services at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs**, said there are four instruments in the Czech Republic to deal with social exclusion, focusing on employment, social benefits, social services, and family policy (under development).

Last autumn, Parliament adopted a new Employment Act to help long-term jobless people back into the labour market, and is discussing further social policy measures that will have an impact on the quality of life of disadvantaged groups, and therefore on social exclusion. They are based on the principles outlined in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAP/Incl).

He said the peer review of the *Field Social Work Programmes* would be assessing two aspects: services offered to people in need of support to run their lives, and services provided to groups and individuals to help them integrate, where exclusion from micro-social systems is determined by social factors such as lack of education, problems of employment, or ethnic identity.

Mr Zarsky recognised that more state support is required to ensure the success of services targeting disadvantaged people, and to guarantee that they are available as a standard provision across the Czech Republic. However, groups like the Roma are not very popular among the general public and politicians tend to neglect their interests and avoid addressing their problems. This is an issue across Europe, not just in the Czech Republic.

Mr Zarsky said it would be useful to develop a network of services, supported by national and European resources, to improve the quality of field social work. He also announced that the Czech government is this month finalising a proposal – to be submitted in the autumn – for European Social Fund support for strengthening capacity, training and supervision of field social work services for the integration of people threatened by social exclusion, delivered by municipalities and NGOs.

There are a number of quality projects aimed at Roma communities, he concluded, and the programme under review would be likely to benefit from such assistance.



### *Peer Reviews in the field of Social Inclusion Policies*

**Mr Hugues Feltesse**, representing the Social Protection and Inclusion Policies unit of the European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, thanked the Czech authorities for hosting the meeting. The Czech Republic is the first of the new Member States to organise a peer review in the field of social inclusion policies, and he applauded the government's courage in tackling a topic often regarded as controversial and very sensitive.

The 2004 and 2005 reports on social inclusion and social protection in the EU-15 and the ten new Member States show that Roma are the most vulnerable people in the EU. Their circumstances are undermined by unemployment, poor living conditions and low education, and they suffer widespread poverty and social exclusion.

The EU is established on fundamental rights and freedoms and the principle of non-discrimination. All citizens have the right to equal treatment. It aims to combine economic competitiveness with the social cohesion of different communities. "We are a union of diversity," affirmed Mr Feltesse, yet the protection provided for minority groups has come under criticism, and the current NAPs/Incl highlight the problems of access to employment, health care, education, social benefits, etc. for Roma.

He emphasised the need to reverse the impact of centuries of discrimination and exclusion. While this is a responsibility for Member State governments, it also demands a response at European level.

The EU supports civil society and national authorities through:

- A legal framework, e.g. banning overt and covert discrimination.
- A framework for cooperation in improving social inclusion policies and promoting measures to meet the needs of minorities.
- Funding: for example the new Member States have access to money through the Phare programme. Projects with particular relevance to Roma will benefit from a high degree of support.

The peer review process has three main objectives:

1. mutual learning: therefore representatives of the peer countries expect to learn more about strategies to counter the social exclusion of Roma people.



They expect a frank and objective account not only of what works well, but also of what does not work as intended, or not at all. In turn, the host country can learn from the critical remarks of the peer group.

2. to improve the effectiveness of policies and strategies: This is a vital challenge, since social inclusion policies tend to meet with some scepticism, and economic policies are often regarded as the only efficient way to reduce social exclusion.
3. to facilitate the transfer of good practice and key components of policies that have proved effective. This places a special responsibility on each participant, especially those close to policy-making, since they have privileged access to information through the peer review meeting. Information and results are also widely disseminated through the peer review website, newsletter and individual reports.

The peer review is not a competition, said Mr Feltesse. "We are interested to know how policies can be adapted to specific economic and social conditions." Although 'success' is a word to be used sparingly, the programme should be looking for success stories, or at least inspiring stories, to pass on.

The Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion has now reached full maturity, and all the planned mechanisms are fully operational. Two other instruments for the exchange of good practice and mutual learning exist under the OMC, besides the peer review seminars:

1. The transnational exchange programme supports the exchange of good practice in a given thematic area among partners from at least three different Member States sharing similar interests or policy background. Thirty-one projects are now supported under this programme for the years 2004/2005, which are mobilising more than 150 local authorities, research centres, NGOs and service providers, and more than 1,000 were involved in the submission of proposals. Eight of the 31 focus on Roma. The goal is to promote networking, dissemination of information, exchange of good practice and mobilisation of actors on a wide basis.
2. The Peer Review meetings organised by the Social Protection Committee once a year examine the NAPs/Incl. The goal is to exchange information on the challenges and strategic options of each Member State and assess how each country has managed to translate the EU common objectives into national policies.

Mr Feltesse said each peer review seminar offers an opportunity to improve the OMC process further, and therefore the Commission looks forward to receiving



feedback through the participants' evaluation survey, in order to understand the real impact of the process in each Member State, and at European level.

### *Introduction to the Field Social Work Programme*

**National expert Ms Ivana Simíková: for full presentation (EN/CZ) see annex 1.**

Ms Simíková said that although the main aim of the peer review is to assess transferability, it would be useful briefly to examine the programme's relevance.

1. relative stability: in operation since 1999 – a comparatively long time compared with other such programmes in the Czech Republic;
2. it was one of the first programmes to trigger discussion on the direction of measures targeting the Roma community, and has transferred emphasis from ethnic identity to social conditions;
3. it has enriched the overall discussion on social exclusion, because it can be used to illustrate certain processes at work in the Czech Republic.

Another important aspect of the programme under review is that its methodology has become a model and inspiration for the government's own *Programme of support for field social workers in socially excluded Roma communities*.

Although the programme targets socially excluded communities that are often defined by their ethnic identity, this is not the key principle determining the selection of clients. The programme responds to specific social needs in these areas. This might limit its transferability to other countries since the problems Roma people have may be different.

Socially excluded communities exist because of certain policies and developments. After the transition period in the Czech Republic, unemployment among the Roma soared. Some have now been jobless for more than ten years, and this produces long-term dependence on social benefits, plus problems such as debt, usury, poor housing or homelessness due to the large-scale privatisation of municipal accommodation, and lack of education.

As people become increasingly excluded, their problems get more and more difficult to resolve. They often adopt their own survival strategies. The programme targets clients who have been socially and spatially isolated for a long time, and are often unaware of the services they are eligible for.



To build trust in the social worker, the client can choose where services are delivered (at home, in the neighbourhood etc) The programme adopts an individual approach, offering rather than imposing a range of services and negotiating with clients on what they need. Ms Simíková stressed that one of the scheme's innovative points is that it operates as a partnership, taking care not to force or manipulate clients.

### **Goals**

The programme aims to increase social competences and help people orient themselves in the system, know their rights, and resolve different life situations. The ultimate goal is the full social inclusion of clients, but in many cases the workers can do no more than minimise risks and prevent situations getting worse, rather than eliminating problems completely.

Another activity involves encouraging local authorities to expand services and mobilise capacity in these areas, so that residents are aware of the opportunities available to them and authorities realise when people need help.

Objectives were established at the beginning of the programme, and have been adapted over the years.

The social exclusion of Roma people gets little recognition at national and local level, since this is not politically advantageous. Locally authorities are reluctant to cooperate. This makes it very difficult for an NGO to resolve the many problems that relate to the system.

### **Main problems**

- Citizenship
- Social benefits
- Housing
- Conflicts
- Rights and interests
- Unemployment
- Health
- Drugs addictions
- Debts, usury
- Use of income
- Truancy

Some are more prevalent than others, with low income and debt figuring prominently and yet being among the hardest to resolve.



### **Basic tools of field work**

- Interviews with client
- Assistance with the documents
- Negotiation
- Accompaniment
- Coordinating activities
- Consultations with the experts
- Contact with other institutions and organisations

The process of agreement on a case/order entails an individual analysis of the social situation of the family, working out a solution in partnership with the client, and establishing a strategy. The solution is never a final one, but is constantly adapted to the client's changing situation.

### **Themes arising from the peer group comment papers**

- Lack of relevant data to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the programme.

Ms Simíková said data exist, but there have been practical problems in analysing them.

The programme carries out its own self-monitoring and supervision, which is unusual in the Czech context.

Very often politicians and the public do not demand the evaluation of programmes. People in Need should reflect the need for monitoring for its own purposes, and to help field workers to provide professional help.

The NGO has created an educational module, and lays emphasis on regular internal and external supervision involving field workers, coordinators and external supervisors, such as psychologists.

### *Questions and comments*

The peer review participants asked about the legislative background underlying the programme, how to persuade local authorities to take action, and the impact of privatisation of municipal housing. How much liaison exists between the programme and other relevant bodies such as ministries of housing or education, and could the field work activities be transferred into mainstream social services provision? How many Roma are there in the Czech Republic, and what changes have been introduced since the launch of the programme?

Stakeholder representative **Mr Fintan Farrell** from the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) told the meeting that he has worked for 15 years with Irish



Travellers – some comparisons exist, although they have a different background and culture to the Roma.

He said that 30 years of field social work in Ireland failed to get even one traveller to secondary school, or into employment, or to diminish levels of discrimination. Subsequently, the switch to policies focusing on ethnic identity proved to be much more successful. He did not suggest the two approaches were in competition, but felt a combination of both is required.

Consequently, he was surprised to see no mention of discrimination in the list of problems. He pointed out that an unequal power relationship in negotiations between the client and social worker could lead to clients saying what they felt they were expected to say. How much does the programme contribute to collective self-empowerment of the Roma community, he asked, given that people may give different answers when brought together in a group to analyse problems?

Spain's official representative **Ms Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga**, responsible for the National Roma Development Programme, emphasised the importance of sustained funding in order to ensure the long-term continuity of such programmes.

She highlighted two key points:

1. the success of such a project depends on the commitment of the workers involved. If there is no political will it will not work.
2. full evaluation of qualitative results may take years – possibly more than a generation – reinforcing the need for long-term planning and commitment.

She argued that a multidisciplinary approach is vital in dealing with a broad range of problems. In Spain, policy is implemented at municipal level.

**Mr Zarsky** explained the structure of Czech public administration. Regions and municipalities are self-governing – the government provides funding to ensure implementation of certain strategic programmes and services known as 'community planning'. Municipalities must draft plans and consult with providers' and clients' representatives. Thus, it is mainly NGOs such as People in Need who put clients' wishes on the table.

The active support of local authorities is required to make community planning work – it cannot merely be a formal commitment.

He proposed a comprehensive methodology for training staff, and national funding for regions and municipalities who develop good practice. Cooperation



between different ministries and departments (education, housing, healthcare, etc) is required at national and local level. The governmental Council for Roma Community Affairs now operates on an interdepartmental basis.

The new legislation being drafted will lay down a framework for providing and modifying services, and for individual development plans to be drafted in consultation with each client.

The quality of social services relates to the client being the best person to decide how to resolve his or her problems. "We will try and push through this concept in the new legislation," promised Mr Zarsky. The current legal framework gives some support for field work, but it is defined in an old fashioned way, using terminology from the 1980s that does not meet modern standards.

**The Executive Director of the People in Need Field Social Work Programmes**  
**Mr Stepán Moravec** rounded off the morning session by answering questions and supplying more information about the programme.

He said countering **discrimination** is an important aspect. The main tool is legal counselling. The programme team includes four lawyers. If a social worker uncovers discrimination that can be challenged in court, People in Need provides free representation. However, clients are much more likely to suffer widespread indirect discrimination, which permeates local authorities and social services.

Focusing on the choice of an **individual or collective approach**, he explained that Roma in the Czech Republic are mainly members of a population who migrated from Slovakia in 1945 onwards, and have their cultural roots in the east of Slovakia. Not all Roma are poor or socially excluded. The programme only addresses this group, and therefore does not work with the Roma "as such".

Today's problems are the result of unmanaged migration. Most of the NGO's clients do not live in communities but in families. Kinship is the only organisational structure, and people will declare themselves to be cousins if they want to do something together.

A typical Roma housing block could accommodate 60 nuclear families with no links between them. Therefore People in Need normally avoids using the term "community" because local Roma populations do not form communities, and it is hard to identify local "leaders".

"Our approach is based on need and not ethnicity," he said, adding that most projects in the Czech Republic that have tried to organise Roma into groups have been a failure.



Social workers operate across a range of locations because – especially in Prague – Roma do not always live in communities or “ghettos”. He also emphasised that some of the forms of behaviour found in Roma neighbourhoods are not characteristic of Roma culture, but reflect ways of adapting to situations of extreme social exclusion.

**Housing** is a particular problem for all young families and people on average incomes, since there is an acute shortage of cheap housing in the Czech Republic. Therefore, if clients lose municipal accommodation it is impossible to obtain housing on the free market. In the early 1990s, most lived in state-owned flats with low rents. But these have been handed over to the municipalities and in many cases privatised. Landlords use illegal strategies to get rid of Roma families, who are seldom aware of their legal rights. In other cases where tenants fail to pay their rent on time, they are taken to court and evicted.

Very few municipalities now provide social housing, and central government lacks the power to influence them. Many Roma are forced to live in appalling conditions, with sometimes three to four families in one flat when relatives are made homeless.

#### **Links with public social services**

Commenting that it might seem strange to some of the peer review participants to be reviewing a standard social services programme, Mr Moravec explained that the field work project is innovative in the Czech context because nothing of its kind existed before in the public sector. Municipalities simply distributed financial benefits, although programmes now exist in fields such as child protection and probation. Public social workers are often untrained or overloaded (up to 300 clients each). Since municipalities have powers the NGO lacks, it has to work with them. In some places cooperation is good because People in Need is perceived as filling a gap, but in others the NGO’s workers are regarded as intruders.

#### **Code of conduct**

In 2004, a group of People in Need social workers, management staff and external experts drew up a Code of Conduct in nine chapters, dealing with complaints, rights, and the client’s written contract. The contract should ideally be signed after the third consultation at the latest, but clients are often suspicious of signing papers they may not understand, therefore it may turn out to be a major problem to have a written contract with some clients. One



of the programme's tasks is to assist clients with documentation, and this can sometimes take hours.

### **Background**

People in Need was founded 12 years ago as a humanitarian aid organisation, setting up human rights centres in a number of countries. It is now probably the largest NGO in Central and Eastern Europe.

The **Field Social Work Programmes** were launched in 1999 with rather vague objectives, identifying and employing local Roma activists as coordinators. As it became increasingly clear that people lacked the ability to fend for themselves, the organisers believed it necessary to transform the programme into a more professional service, using professional rather than ethnic recruitment criteria.

It now employs 25 social workers, eight of them Roma.

The **Field Social Work Programmes** are still a pilot project in the sense that they do not cover the whole of the Czech Republic, and in some towns there are only two social workers. As well as housing, employment is a key problem, with jobless rates of some 20% in the areas where the NGO works. There is low demand for unskilled workers, and so in this context there is little the programme can do.

The NGO faces a number of obstacles in its work:

- local politicians make hostile declarations about Roma and develop repressive measures targeted at them because this wins votes;
- municipal workers may have private economic interests that conflict with care for Roma families (e.g. property ownership);
- municipal workers do not understand the problems of socially excluded Roma, act on false information and misconceptions, or simply do not know how to deal with them;
- Even if inclusive activities and services exist, there is little or no coordination and logical connection between them.

For example, local authorities tend to place "gypsies" with good rent-payment records in the same accommodation as bad payers, out of ignorance. This housing is often more expensive, and as a result all the tenants turn into bad payers.

For instance, efforts to encourage Roma children to attend school are undermined by lack of support for families, or training offered for adults may not be appropriate for the needs of the local labour market.



In an attempt to improve coordination with municipalities and make local development plans Roma-inclusive, a new project called POLIS is to be launched, setting up a partnership with three municipalities involving local authorities, NGOs, schools, and other stakeholders. This is three-year project supported by the EU's EQUAL programme.

Mr Moravec presented quantitative data for 2003, on numbers of clients and interventions. 2004 data exist, but still have to be aggregated. In 2003, the programme carried out 11,893 consultations involving 14,355 clients. Housing was the most frequent problem. However, since 2003 the programme has been transformed into a more professional service and these statistics do not reflect today's activities. The NGO now works in 16 localities, with a further two about to be added.

Innovations include

- regular, structured supervision at all levels;
- standard documents and codes of conduct;
- compulsory training for social workers, lasting 60 hours over one year; in each of two consecutive years (2004 and 2005), the training includes ten monthly sessions of six hours for each of the three regional groups.
- tougher recruitment procedures: for example, candidates have to resolve a complicated model problem of a fictional client.

The **Field Social Work Programmes** amount to "harm reduction", concluded Mr Moravec. "We cannot change the basic situation, but we can help to avoid further deterioration." Yet problems are often more difficult to resolve once they become acute (e.g. after a family is evicted), and services could be improved if clients could be contacted or referred by local authorities when difficulties first appear.

Slovak independent expert **Mr Ladislav Babuscak** (Association of Field Social Workers) confirmed that following the Second World War, government policy led to the forced resettlement of Roma in what is now the Czech Republic, with some families still divided to this day. There are some 600 Roma settlements in Slovakia, with many problems. However, housing is not so difficult to secure. Education and training of social workers has improved, but differences of opinion arise between staff and clients over what comprises a problem, and this can lead to mistrust.

**Mr Pavel Kanka** from the Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family added that since 2002 the government has introduced new measures to counter



social exclusion. 450 social workers are employed by municipalities to work with excluded populations, with a limit on the number of clients per worker.

### **Site visits – afternoon session**

**Mr Moravec** introduced the three site visits to:

- **Prague** – here Roma families live in different areas and have less difficulty getting work, although most is ‘in the black’.
- **Kladno** – the privatisation and closure of a steel plant left a large Roma population of former workers.
- **Ústí nad Labem** – with one of the highest unemployment rates. Here the peer review participants were only able to visit one of the planned sites as the other was considered too dangerous due to a local conflict.

Peer group participants divided into three groups to make the site visits.

### **Day 2 – morning session**

#### *Feedback from site visits*

#### **Site Visit 1**

UK independent expert **Ms Iketina Danso** (Commission for Racial Equality) reported on the visit to Roma families living about 30 minutes from the centre of **Prague**. The area was damaged by the floods of recent years, but is now under renovation, and the atmosphere is generally pleasant.

However, in the street where the local authority has housed Roma families, conditions are bad, with poor lighting and rubbish strewn about.

The visitors found the families welcoming and eager to talk. In one case they met a woman with four children, living in one small room. Altogether, ten people share this space, with inadequate running water and sanitation supply. Yet the family pays rent amounting to half the cost of a five-roomed flat in other parts of Prague. The children attend a special school that was originally designed for mentally disabled children, but to which Roma children are, in



many cases, transferred in the Czech Republic, and so they will find it very difficult to get a job.

Ms Danso concluded that these conditions were symptomatic of institutionalised racism within the local authority and its attitude to the Roma as a group. After 1989, other people in the Czech Republic also found it difficult to get work, but only Roma families find themselves in housing conditions so poor that they amount to no more than a roof over their heads or “a squat”. Ms Danso was “shocked” at how racist attitudes could filter down to affect so many aspects of people’s lives in such a damaging way, and she felt the future for the Roma children is not hopeful. She was highly critical of the local authorities’ treatment of this group of vulnerable people.

Spain’s independent expert **Ms Carolina Fernández Díez** added that when she asked whether there was a social worker from the local authority available to the families, the answer was ‘no’. She was amazed that there seemed to be no social support network in the area.

Field social worker **Ms Katerina Hulová** confirmed that the People in Need Foundation provides the only services available to these families. The municipality does not want to work in this area.

## Site visit 2

**Mr Valeriu Nicolae**, stakeholder representative from the European Roma Information Office, reported on the visit to **Kladno**, and started with three questions that arose from the programme under review:

1. *What are the main problems of social exclusion?* Poverty and unemployment. Yet he felt the issue of employment is not being addressed.
2. *How many Roma workers are involved in the project?* Less than one third.
3. *What is the relationship with the government?* Liaison is poor. Contact is mainly with the local authority, but needs to be improved.

In all, Mr Nicolae said he was not very impressed with what he saw. The visitors were unable to talk to any of the Roma, and interaction with the social workers, none of whom spoke Romani, was limited. However, he said housing conditions on the first site were not bad, especially compared with those of Roma families in his native Romania.



The second location, however, was like a “container site” with public toilets and showers. Conditions were terrible, despite the presence of many children. The Roma did not appear friendly towards the social workers, and although he would have liked to talk to people, the visitors did not get out of the bus. At the third site, Mr Nicolae was able to communicate with families in Romani. He was concerned to find that the Roma social worker is not identified as part of the community, and he believed the families feel the social workers are there to make money out of them rather than to help them. In his view, it is important to have Roma people in the management of the programme to be able to relate directly to the clients.

Austrian independent expert **Ms Mirjam Karoly** felt it was paradoxical that a review aimed at finding ways to tackle social exclusion should be presented with problems apparently caused by municipalities’ exclusion policies. It was important to examine who is responsible for policies that practise discrimination and segregation. Further, it shows that a multi-dimensional approach is needed to tackle the problem of social exclusion of Roma comprehensively and on long-term basis.

### **Site visit 3**

**Ms Alonso Luzuriaga** gave her impressions of the visit to **Ústí nad Labem**, a town about an hour’s drive from Prague on the Elbe river. She reported on a good debate with a highly motivated team of social workers. It was good to see that two of them are Roma – one an activist in the community. At the beginning of the programme, the social workers were relatively ‘amateur’, but now benefit both from experience and professional training.

She noted, however, that the NGO’s office had to be locked. The visitors also met the Roma adviser to the local Mayor. Although it is clearly difficult for him to influence municipal policy, at least his presence is better than nothing. The social workers have limited contact with other local NGOs, restricted largely to drug issues.

She pointed out that Spain has adopted a positive discrimination policy for Roma, and this is important, even though it is not always popular with the public at large. Priority must be accorded on the basis of need. Many Roma have now achieved integration to the extent that society is not aware of their ethnic identity. But a new problem now concerns the arrival of Roma families from Eastern Europe who are not officially covered by existing programmes although some NGOs are working with them to diminish their difficulties.



**Mr Farrell** said there are 4-5,000 Roma people in the Ústí nad Labem area, but the programme at the site visit is targeted at about 300 who qualify as socially excluded in the neighbourhood of Nový Svet. It should therefore be possible to make progress quite rapidly using a multidimensional approach. However People in Need is working under stressful conditions with no support from local social services, so it is the NGO that has to offer the first intervention for people in very difficult circumstances.

He pointed out that some Traveller families in Ireland live in much worse conditions than those at Ústí nad Labem, demonstrating that these problems are not confined to new EU Member States.

**Mr Czeslaw Walek**, Head of the office of the Council for Roma Community Affairs, clarified the difference between the two programmes run by People in Need and the Czech government.

Under the state scheme, the government allocates money to municipalities to launch their own projects, but does not supervise or monitor social workers. Therefore, the NGO programme is more closely managed.

*Thematic expert Mr Douhomir Minev*

Mr Minev, of the Sofia Institute of Sociology and the Anti-Poverty Information Centre in Bulgaria, expanded on his discussion paper already distributed to participants. He drew a distinction between 1) assessment of the programme as a good practice, and 2) evaluation of the programme.

- 1) relates to the construction of the programme and whether it serves as a good model. Does it provide a solid basis for action?
- 2) depends on the programme's output, which is influenced by specific national and local factors.

Mr Minev suggested that the limited scale of the programme means it is in effect a pilot project. In view of this, is it possible to draw conclusions?

Some basic features of the ***Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods threatened by Social Exclusion*** could have European relevance.

He outlined two main issues for discussion:

- the programme's capacity to fill the gap between social exclusion and anti-discrimination policies. There is enough evidence to show the programme's ability to create links.



- Its impact on the way national and local institutions are performing. Good policies exist, but implementation is very weak, and subject to criticism. Probably they are not fully competent or lack the will to intervene, but they are nonetheless democratic institutions and require constructive ideas to help them improve their performance.

Highlighting key questions, Mr Minev asked:

- How effective is People in Need's programme in interacting with government and local authorities?
- How good is the interaction with clients, the local community and NGOs, especially the Roma community?
- Does it mobilise local actors?
- Does the programme promote good relationships between ethnic groups?

In his view, the programme is still at an early stage and it is too soon to see long-term results. However the efforts to improve the professional capacities of social workers through improved selection, training, and preparation of a manual are very specific and very interesting.

In response to questions about the discussion paper, he argued that even if the mechanism lacks "agreed outputs and performance measures", it is more important for it to be in existence and producing some results.

Evidence that the Czech Republic has one of the best economic performances in the EU (p.20) comes from comparative statistics for the new Member States. The country is also more egalitarian (inequalities, including income inequalities, are lower) than Romania and Bulgaria and its transitional pathway (general policy for restructuring) has many advantages.

**Ms Zuzana Zajarová**, coordinator of the Czech NAP/Incl, clarified that although the Czech poverty rate is 8%, a further 8% of people are on very low incomes. She suggested that European indicators on poverty need to be revised to take account of different structures of income distribution across all the EU-25.

**Mr Moravec** emphasised the problems of organising site visits while avoiding intruding on neighbourhoods that were already used to disturbances from police, journalists etc. He was not surprised if some of the clients did not appear friendly.

Experience has shown that the social workers need to be professional, first and foremost, regardless of whether they are Roma or not, he insisted, and



in this way they gain the clients' confidence. When asked, clients do not express a preference for Roma social workers, because they do not necessarily trust someone to whom they are not related, and their main concern is that the individual should know how to deal with local authorities and other official bodies.

He also queried what identifies a person as 'Roma'. It would be senseless to make speaking Romani a necessary qualification since most of the clients speak Czech or Slovak as their mother tongue and not Romani.

### *Comments*

**Mr Farrell** said even if the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic were getting worse, this would not mean the programme is not working. Evaluation must be contextualised in a broader assessment of the responsibilities of public authorities and the performance of other partners. It is clear that this programme on its own cannot resolve all the problems, but it is part of a jigsaw.

**Ms Fernández Díez** agreed, urging participants not to overlook the state's responsibilities. The social services are clearly not reaching certain groups, and the NGO is filling a gap, but government support should not be limited only to money. People in Need's project carries out "harm reduction", whereas a true social inclusion policy must go beyond advice and mediation to deal with basic issues such as education, employment and training. Services must be available to all on the basis of social need, whether or not they are Roma.

**Ms Krista Hegburg** from Colombia University Department of Anthropology pointed out that programmes aiming to promote active citizenship should enable people to do things for themselves, without reference to a social worker, and therefore "success" is by definition very difficult to measure.

**Mr Kanka** identified integration and anti-discrimination as missing elements in the programme. In Slovakia, integration is the prime objective, and therefore services are offered to everyone in need, not just Roma. Local authorities employ the social workers, although NGOs can also step in and fill gaps. He was interested in the Spanish public's reaction to the introduction of positive discrimination. In Slovakia, the Anti-discrimination Act providing for affirmative action in certain cases has been challenged in the courts.



Romanian independent expert **Mr George Poede** also saw the programme as a means of preventing conditions getting worse. But he felt it would need to develop new resources, to become self-sustainable, and envisage new means of promoting inclusion rather than offering isolated services. People in Need is respecting and defending people's rights, but needs to go further to achieve inclusion.

**Mr Moravec** pointed out that People in Need is not just a social work programme, but also carries out research, lobbies and works to influence government policy. It is the most visible NGO campaigning on behalf of Roma at government level, with two staff working full time with the media and an information website: (see <http://www.clovekvtisni.cz/english/infoprojekty/infoservice.php>).

The NGO aims for a systematic approach, and works with Pilsen University to produce research and materials to submit to government. The POLIS project will also get underway in three towns this year.

Mr Moravec said People in Need recognises the need for a multidimensional approach, networking, and integrated services. However, the Field Social Work scheme is not the whole solution to Roma problems, but just one project. It cannot do everything.

#### *Working group sessions on key issues*

Participants divided into three working groups to discuss three main questions:

- Group 1: The structure and impact of programmes and their evaluation;
- Group 2: The position of NGOs (Roma and non-Roma);
- Group 3: Field Social Work in relation to national and EU policies.

#### *Feedback from Working Groups*

##### **Group 1 – *rapporteur* Mr Fintan Farrell**

The group observed that the programme has developed quantitative indicators, but qualitative ones are more difficult for a number of reasons: clients do not want to be asked questions, the project responds to individual crises, and there are no other existing services to measure it against.

One means of evaluation would be to examine the quality of social work provided. In the end, a closer analysis may be more important than the figures provided. However, it is important to take account both of the programme's resources, and expectations.



**Transferability:** the programme offers services where very little already exists. Therefore it would be difficult to transfer to areas where support mechanisms are already in place.

But two especially interesting aspects are the training of field social workers and the lobbying role of the NGO.

### **Group 2 – *rapporteur* Mr George Poede**

The group felt it is important to involve Roma NGOs in projects since results are better if people with a close knowledge of the clients are taking part. While Mr Michal Kratochvil from the DROM Roma Centre in Brno suggested this is not always necessary if professional social workers are providing services based on professional standards, the general consensus was that different NGOs bring different forms of expertise that can enrich the project (e.g. can serve as a model of positive identification for the beneficiaries as shown by examples from Austria and Romania).

Involving beneficiaries in the delivery of services would also enhance the empowerment of clients and be in line with the principle of participatory democracy. When the project ends, a resource person would be available to maintain support for vulnerable people and help set up new projects.

Ms Simíková stressed that a partnership is already in existence with public authorities and NGOs. It is important for each of the partners to have a clearly defined role.

### **Group 3 – *rapporteur* Ms Iketina Danso**

The Field Social Work Programmes have been in operation for six years, and People in Need is the only organisation working in this area of activity. The group heard a detailed explanation of funding sources available to promote Roma interests in the Czech Republic, but it is clear that the money does not seem to be reaching the clients in most need.

Some of the working group participants felt this is a problem arising from the complexity of different levels of bureaucracy and the lack of local networks through which Roma can access services.

Targeted measures should be combined with mainstreamed social inclusion policies. In Spain, for example, funds are directed specifically at the needs of Roma communities.

The question thus arose of how field work can be turned into broader policy. As regards legislation, the government has not adequately implemented EU



anti-discrimination laws in such a way as to force municipalities to take appropriate action throughout the country. In the UK, for example, legislation is a key factor in countering discrimination.

Two possibilities would be to use EU legislation to improve the situation in the Czech Republic, or to offer money to municipalities as an incentive. In Spain, for instance, EU funding provides additional income for local authorities that undertake programmes for Roma.

**Mr Moravec** explained that government funding in the Czech Republic is fragmented. Different ministries provide resources only for projects in their own fields (housing, culture etc). In order to target local situations, there should be one coordinated structure to design integrated projects. The government Council for Roma Community Affairs shares this view.

He added that the NGO is very interested in the idea of employing beneficiaries as a resource. This element is currently missing, but the organisers are thinking about how to introduce it. For example in Ústí nad Labem, some of the clients work with children, and this has a positive impact on the whole neighbourhood.

**Mr Walek** said it was easy to blame the local authorities since they were not present at the peer review. But there are examples of municipalities in the Czech Republic that are cooperating and are very active on behalf of Roma residents. In Ostrava, for instance, a Roma adviser coordinates the activities of field workers. But this often depends on the attitude of local people themselves and whether the political will exists to take action at the municipal level.

### **Afternoon session**

**Mr Walek** introduced some of the ongoing activities at national level. The government just adopted, two weeks ago, a new Roma Integration Policy Concept. The earlier 2004 policy concept focused on three angles: human rights, minority rights and national identity, and social and cultural perspectives.

In the Czech Republic, Roma are not forced to identify themselves as such. In the last (2001) census, 11,800 people declared themselves to be Roma.

The government has six policy goals for the next 20 years, and realises that affirmative actions will be required to achieve them, for example on the areas of:



- Education (preparatory classes, better assistance);
- Employment (cooperation between employment offices and local authorities, creation of a specialist agency);
- Housing (social housing).

The Council for Roma Community Affairs advises the government. At regional level, Roma coordinators help to implement policy. However, most action must be taken at local level, and the government does not have power over municipal policies. Some municipalities have Roma advisers, but this is not compulsory.

The government's *Programme of support for field social workers in socially excluded Roma communities* means that municipalities can obtain government funding to employ social workers, as an affirmative action outside standard social services. Different ministries also distribute funds to NGOs, municipalities and schools for specific projects, but this is uncoordinated. The Council for Roma Community Affairs would like to have a coordinating role, but individual ministries prefer to retain control.

The long-term aim is to establish an agency to supervise activities at local level, because many municipalities do not adequately understand the problem and end up evicting or excluding Roma families.

*Relevance for and key learning elements for peer countries and stakeholder representatives*

**Bulgaria: Ms Tonislava Sotirova** (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) said Bulgarian legislation would allow for such a programme, but she suggested that in the national context, field social workers would be better employed by the government's social assistance agency.

She highlighted two key elements: the importance of a relationship and cooperation between social workers and municipal staff responsible for the implementation of local policy; and the issue of evaluation.

**Romania: Ms Cristina Trofin** (Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family) said the project is a good starting point, and has already carried out valuable work where no other assistance exists. Training is an important element – in Romania, 'health mediators' receive training before they start work in the field.

Public/private partnership is a good approach and the government should have more influence at local level.

She drew attention to the importance of prevention strategies.



Romania has a large Roma population with many problems to solve, but has scored some successes. Institutions and mechanisms include:

- The National Agency for Roma, run by the Roma secretary of state.
- The National Council to Combat Discrimination
- Roma advisers in the government and ministries of labour, health, education etc.
- The 2001 National Strategy for improving Roma Conditions set out specific measures for different ministries. The Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family has 32 measures, such as the creation of a social mediator for Roma.
- Successful public/private partnerships.

**Mr Poede** assessed the programme to be well-designed for targeting the most excluded group in society. It offers important services and has obviously helped a lot of people in the last six years. It addresses the varying needs of individuals, families and communities.

One lesson that could be applied in Romania is that it is not enough to have some Roma social workers, but that all social workers should be trained to work with Roma families.

The programme strikes a balance between services and information and supports people with low educational levels. Local strategies are needed to ensure standardised levels of provision.

**Ms Simona Lupu** from the EU Delegation to Romania explained that the EU supports mainstreaming and measures to improve institutional capacity to meet Roma needs.

Although experts exist in different ministries, there is a need for a professional network able to influence policy-making.

The Phare programme supports projects for community development at a local level, and there are local initiatives and partnerships with Roma groups.

**Slovakia: Mr Babuscak** said the programme shows that NGOs can provide an accessible service, with sometimes better results than public authorities where social workers are more restricted.

Its shortcoming is that it is not available to everyone. The Czech government needs to map the needs of the communities and match them with the resources available.

Transfer would only be appropriate to countries that do not already provide such services, which have existed in western Europe for many years.



However, the programme has been an inspiration for Slovakia, which has already taken lessons from People in Need. The Slovak Social Field Workers programme, running since 2002, operates on very similar lines but with some improvements, said Mr Babuscak: social workers come directly from the community, creating better interaction, and the programme is financed from the state budget. This means that evaluation of outcomes and impact will be important for securing future funding.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has created a fund to promote social development, setting up local partnerships of employment offices, local authorities, entrepreneurs, Roma council representatives and clients in each region, and providing money for projects.

**Mr Kanka** confirmed the success of the transferred programme in Slovakia. The site visits were very interesting, and they would be taking back the lessons learnt from the peer review.

**Austria: Ms Karoly** praised the project's proactive approach and felt this could also be applied in public services. The main lesson for her was that NGOs can develop very committed services, and she hoped the Czech government would consider how to integrate these provisions into mainstream public services.

**Spain: Ms Alonso Luzuriaga** concluded that most European countries have the same problems as the Czech Republic. The difference consists in their size and in the way they approach these problems. She identified evaluation and housing as two particular challenges.

She stressed the importance of ensuring continuity for the People in Need programme through the NAP/Incl.

Parts of the Roma community make up the poorest section of the European population. The Spanish government agreed a development programme in 1987, which came into force with funding in 1989 and is still in operation. €3 million of government funding p.a. becomes €9 million once matched by regions and municipalities. This is not distributed equally since Roma populations vary across Spain: Andalusia gets 45% of the financing. Roma NGOs and other NGOs working with the Roma community implement the projects at local level. Ms Alonso Luzuriaga drew attention to the Spanish approach of appointing Roma mediators to act as a link between local authorities and the community.



Over 25 years, it has been possible to see an improvement in conditions for Roma. "Initially, we made some mistakes," she conceded, but it was possible to learn from the experience and the knowledge of the Roma culture. Also it was evident that progress depends on long-term funding. At present, two important things are under development: the Roma State Council, which will increase participation and will give the Roma community a louder voice; and a new Roma Development Plan accommodating present needs.

**Ms Fernández Díez** supported the individual approach as the best way to help the most excluded groups of people.

She suggested that the European Commission might be able to put more pressure on Member States to improve conditions for Roma people. Resources are scarce, but the Structural Funds are one instrument and the European Parliament, currently considering amendment of the regulation governing the SF, could require Member States to target funds to social inclusion policies for Roma.

**UK: Ms Tricia Griffiths** (Department for Work and Pensions, Work, Welfare and Equality Group) described the Field Social Work Programmes as a wonderful project that was struggling to win an uphill battle.

In the UK, there is a lack of coordination between local authorities and NGOs in policies for Gypsies and Travellers, and therefore an opportunity exists to transfer the idea of working in tandem. British Travellers mainly choose not to live in houses, and therefore allocation of land is a big problem and a highly political issue. Legislation that used to compel local authorities to provide sites has been withdrawn, exacerbating the problem.

However there are some examples of good projects, working with communities on sites to set up links and networks. Some legislation exists, but the problem is to create joined-up policy covering education, health, employment etc.

There is an increased emphasis on evidence-based policy-making in the UK and across Europe. If there is no evidence of what the project is achieving, its future could be uncertain.

**Ms Danso** added that despite the 1976 Race Relations Act there is still evidence of ethnic minorities experiencing increasingly subtle discrimination in areas like education, employment and treatment by the police.



**Mr Marek Jakoubek** from the University of West Bohemia Department of Anthropology warned of the importance of terminology. In the Czech Republic there is no Roma *community* as such, he argued. In general, very little is known about Roma. People in Need offers a model to be followed since it is a pioneer in research, with better data than central government. He cautioned against focusing too much on ethnic identity in providing services to socially excluded people.

**Mr Walek** said the Czech government recognises the need to map the problem. Work will start soon, with EU funding, and should yield qualitative and quantitative results in two years.

The Peer Review made an important contribution in assisting policy development, he added. It was clear that the government must change the way it funds programmes (currently annually), and find ways to put pressure on municipalities.

**Mr Moravec** agreed that the meeting was helpful in enabling People in Need workers to take a broader view of their task. He highlighted some key points as the need to involve beneficiaries, develop local partnerships, and organise collective action.

**Mr Feltesse** thanked the hosts and all the participants in a meeting that had enabled them to share a wealth of experience.

Most Member States have similar problems, and are modest about results achieved, he noted. There is no miraculous solution to ending the extreme poverty within this group of the population.

The peer review process not only offers an exchange of good practice, but also gives the host country ideas about how to improve its own policies and activities.

He emphasised the importance of this topic at European level, building a bridge between social inclusion and anti-discrimination policies. Even when anti-discrimination legislation is in place, it must be made to work at local level, and this means implementing effective activities that mobilise actors, including NGOs, and motivating local authorities.



He summarised key lessons regarding future needs:

1. Further progress towards a proactive and tailored approach – a key component of good practice is the capacity to work with individuals, not ‘categories’.
2. Mediation between different actors.
3. Capacity-building to improve the competences of social workers and their clients.
4. Better coordination and integration of policy on social inclusion. This is a major challenge, but Member States’ NAPS/Incl must mobilise ministries to work together in this field.
5. Better evaluation, involving users, so as to be able to assess whether work is effective for the clients.

Mr Feltesse said answers vary in different countries. Follow-up is needed to explore the impact of shared policies and experiences, and it would be useful to deepen knowledge of the topic through a second peer review meeting. European Social Funding is available to support capacity-building, and the next generation of NAPs/Incl should set down timetables for addressing the social exclusion of Roma.

In June, a seminar will take place on the results of a Commission study on policy measures to ensure access to decent housing for ethnic minorities and migrants. Further research on Roma issues is pending. Mr Feltesse recalled also that eight transnational exchange projects are actually funded by the Social Exclusion Programme.

**Ms Zajarosová** felt that the meeting had achieved its aim of mutual learning, and the Czech participants had learnt a lot. She highlighted two points:

- The role of national, regional and local authorities and NGOs.  
A national project on field social work is in preparation, setting down methodology, education, and supervision.
- The need for a multidimensional approach to social inclusion, covering employment, housing, health and education and mobilising all actors. The government is currently working on this aspect.