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Douhomir Minev

**Field social work
programmes in neigh-
bourhoods threatened
by social exclusion**



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Table of contents

Executive summary	3
1. The issue	8
2. The European context	9
3. The good practice example	14
3.1 Goals of the good practice	15
3.2 Problems to be solved	16
3.3 Social services provided by the social workers	17
3.4 Targeting of services	19
3.5 Training for field social workers	21
4. Relevance for and transferability to other national contexts	22
4.1 The programme as good practice in providing social services	22
4.2 Specificity of the social work: improving the situation of Roma	24
4.3 Impact upon citizenship (indirect anti-discrimination effects)	26
4.4 Direct anti-discrimination effects	28
4.5 Transferability	28
4.6 Limits of the programme's impact	30
5. Conclusions and lessons learnt	32
5.1 Feedback from the participants	32
5.2 Relevance of the programme to the EU policies' effectiveness	33
5.3 Creating "the vital link"	34
Bibliography	36
Annex	37



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Issue

The issue to which the good practice is designed to react is spatial concentration of excluded people in so-called socially excluded localities - groups of houses, streets, neighbourhoods or larger localities in the cities and municipalities. Roma are very often the largest group of residents in these localities. The phenomenon of socially excluded localities (inhabited predominantly by Roma) is not absolutely new for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, however in recent years the formation of such localities has intensified considerably. The increase of the number of such localities, their expansion, and the worsening of the situation in these localities might be regarded as a next stage in the continuing deterioration of the situation of Roma. Such spatial concentration intensifies the absence of social competence of the residents, limits their access to different forms of governmental and non-governmental institutional assistance and leads to numerous deprivations of individuals, families and entire communities. More specifically, in the socially excluded localities the access to good-quality education is impeded; the chances of finding a job are limited; the housing accommodation is of low quality; the infrastructure is in a poor condition. Usually the Roma living in such localities are subject to discrimination as well. The problem becomes more complex by the fact that local authorities do not have sufficient resources or stimuli available for improving this situation. Consequently the local authorities do not use to a sufficient degree the existing opportunities of introducing changes for the better, and are often criticized for it. Furthermore they sometimes show hostility to Roma, treat them badly and resort to discrimination practices. In certain cases municipal officials may have private economic interests that conflict with care for Roma families; municipal officials do not understand the problems or how to deal with them; there is no coordination between different activities and services.

In addition, other institutions sometimes also become a source of discrimination practices. In this way the institutions create a specific aspect of social exclusion – the individual becomes “invisible” to the institutions, and the institutional ineffectiveness maintains the state of social exclusion. In such an environment people choose short-term life strategies and in this way emerges a subculture with rules and values that show elements of the culture of poverty. Social exclusion is further intensified and creates socio-economic conditions for ethnic



segregation by location. That is why the dynamic of socially excluded localities is not only a sign of the ongoing worsening of the situation of Roma, but it also creates social mechanisms which might reproduce the current situation in the future. This risk emphasizes the need for effective interventions aimed at eliminating or, at least, limiting the effect of said mechanisms.

The Programme

The programme of the non-governmental organization People in Need, Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion, is an attempt to cope with the above mentioned phenomena. It adopts an individual approach, offering a range of services, negotiating with the client on the basis of his or her wishes and needs, and agreeing in partnership on a plan of action which is constantly reassessed and revised.

The clients of the Programme are members of locally defined socially excluded Roma communities. Selection of clients is not based only on the ethnicity of the clients, but on their social and economic situation and that of the locality in which they live.

The main goal is to increase people's social competences, help them orient themselves in the system, and work out practical and long-term solutions that will lead towards social inclusion. The programme currently employs 25 social workers, eight of them Roma, in 16 localities, and this will rise soon to 30 with the addition of two new areas. Although at the beginning of the programme, many of the workers were activists from local communities, the service is now more 'professional', with tougher recruitment procedures and a compulsory training module of 60 hours over one year.

The Programme is based on the assumption that residents in the socially excluded Roma neighbourhoods have more difficulties to access institutionalized social services (due to institutional ineffectiveness, discrimination or lack of information: the client does not know about services, or the provider does not know about the clients). That is why residents of these neighbourhoods need specific social services, which the existing social system is not able to provide. The main instrument for provision of services is field social work, throughout which the field worker seeks out the clients and offers them services. Specifically the Programme is aiming to change the attitude of the municipalities to



the socially excluded localities, and to create a basis for clients' participation in community planning and decision making.

The contacts between the client and social worker are initiated by: the client himself; the social worker; another institution. After the initial contact and the selection of the client, the further interaction between the client and the social worker is based on a specific contract. The programme sets out to tackle the wide range of problems confronting the most disadvantaged Roma families through:

- A) Short-term services – for instance, assistance for asserting rights and interests (when legally defined rights are denied) through advice, specialized legal assistance, etc.; support for citizenship (in cases where the client does not have citizenship in the Czech Republic); assistance in cases of unemployment, housing problems, health care, drug addiction, etc.
- B) Long-term assistance – in the case of non-payment and debt; for better use of income, better attendance of children at school, etc.

People in Need also carries out research and lobbying activities on behalf of the Roma.

The discussion

The peer review participants discussed the legislative background of the Programme and the possibilities to persuade local authorities to take adequate action. Discutants emphasized that the government has no power to force local authorities to take action in this area. Support for Roma communities is often unpopular among the wider population, and is therefore regarded as politically disadvantageous. There was strong criticism of municipalities' failure to confront these problems. Special attention was paid to the impact of privatisation of municipal housing on the living conditions of Roma.

There was also intensive debate on whether the social exclusion of Roma people should be approached primarily from a social or an ethnic standpoint. Two opposing opinions were expressed in this regard. One side pointed out that not all Roma in the Czech Republic are poor, and that therefore the clients should be assessed primarily on their social status. The other side highlighted the experience of Ireland, where policies in support of Travellers were much more successful once they identified the issue as an ethnic one, with discrimination as a major factor.



Many participants felt that a combination of anti-discrimination and social inclusion approaches would be required: the **link between anti-discrimination policies and social inclusion policies is vital**. The case of the Roma community presents the need for effective links very clearly. As a result of this, the discussion of the Programme focused on the question whether such a link exists in the Programme and the way in which it can be created. The discussion demonstrated the possibility of combining the various policies and approaches, and succeeded in identifying important aspects of an overall mechanism of linking in a better way not only the anti-discrimination and the social inclusion policies, but also the two approaches (the “individual” one and the “collective” one) in order to improve the situation of Roma. Maybe this is one of the most important achievements of the Peer review.

The discussion highlighted several important aspects of the Programme:

- the specificity of the social work done under the Programme;
- the adaptation of social work to the specificity of Roma clients;
- the presence of anti-discrimination elements in the Programme (and the inclusion of these elements within the social work);
- the impact which the Programme has upon improving the effectiveness of the institutions (the local authorities, in particular);
- the impact of the Programme upon the civil status of the clients.

These are the main components of the mechanism that links the anti-discrimination policies and social inclusion policies which the Programme contains, although implicitly.

The second important group of components of a “binding” mechanism comprises the links between the Programme and other instruments of the overall Czech policy for improving the situation of Roma. In this respect, the importance of good coordination between the different tools was underlined, and especially the coordination with other specialized programmes for Roma, which would allow for greater synergy and final impact. In practice, the coordination would make it possible to achieve a level of multidimensional effect which is difficult to achieve within the framework of one Programme only. Legal counseling was mentioned as a direct anti-discrimination impact of the Programme. The programme team includes four lawyers and when a social worker discovers a case of discrimination that can be challenged in court, People in Need provides free representation of the person subject to discrimination.



Although the participants emphasized the multidimensional character of the intervention exerted within the framework of the Programme, they pointed out the restricted impact of the Programme on the general situation of the clients. Given the gravity of the problems and the limited resources available it can perform no more than “harm reduction”, ensuring that clients’ situations do not deteriorate further, rather than achieving full social inclusion.

Transferability

Overall, the peer group found many positive elements in the Czech programme. They praised its design and objectives, and agreed that it was carrying out invaluable work in helping some of the most vulnerable people in Czech society. However, most felt that since it could be said to provide a minimum level of harm reduction it could only be usefully transferred as a whole into contexts where no provision already exists.

Some aspects highlighted as transferable were:

- Organisation of the programme by an NGO, which allows for independent lobbying on Roma issues
- The public/private partnership model
- Commitment and enthusiasm of social workers
- A proactive approach to identifying and reaching out to vulnerable people
- The training module and standard documents and codes of conduct for workers
- The partnership with clients in addressing the different needs of individuals, families and communities.



1. THE ISSUE

The good practice under review is concerned with the concentration of excluded people in so-called socially excluded localities - groups of houses, streets, neighbourhoods or larger localities in the cities and municipalities of the Czech Republic. Roma are very often the largest group of residents in these localities. The phenomenon of socially excluded localities (inhabited predominantly by Roma) is not absolutely new for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, although in recent years the formation of such localities intensified considerably in these countries. The increase in the number of such localities, their expansion, and the worsening of the situation in these areas might be regarded as a next stage in the continuing deterioration of the situation of Roma. Such spatial concentration intensifies the absence of social competence of the residents, limits their access to different forms of governmental and non-governmental institutional assistance and leads to numerous deprivations of individuals, families and entire communities. More specifically, in the socially excluded localities the access to good-quality education is impeded; the chances of finding a job are limited; the housing accommodation is of low quality; the infrastructure is in poor condition. Usually the Roma living in such localities are subject to discrimination as well. The problem is complicated by the fact that local authorities do not have sufficient resources or stimuli available for improving this situation. Consequently the local authorities do not use to a sufficient degree the existing opportunities of introducing changes for the better, and are often criticized for it. Furthermore they sometimes show hostility to Roma, treat them badly and resort to discrimination practices. In certain cases municipal officials may have private economic interests that conflict with care for Roma families; municipal officials do not understand the problems or how to deal with them; and there is no coordination between different activities and services.

In addition, other institutions sometimes also become a source of discrimination practices. In this way the institutions create a specific aspect of social exclusion – the individual becomes “invisible” to the institutions, and the institutional ineffectiveness maintains the state of social exclusion. In such an environment people choose short-term life strategies and in this way emerges a subculture with rules and values that show elements of the culture of poverty. Social exclusion is further intensified and creates socio-economic conditions for ethnic segregation by location. That is why the dynamic of socially excluded localities is not only a sign of the ongoing worsening of the situation of Roma, but also creates social mechanisms which might reproduce the current situation in the future. This risk emphasizes the need for effective interventions aimed at eliminating or, at least, limiting the effect of said mechanisms.



2. THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

In spite of the indisputable differences between the countries, the situation of Roma, and especially their situation in the new member states (and in those which are about to become part of the EU) provides reasons for special concern. What is typical of all member states is that the profile of poverty and social exclusion of Roma considerably differs from the profile of poverty and exclusion of the largest part of the population. This resemblance between “old”, “new” and acceding countries deserves special attention, as it poses a number of questions related to the bad situation the Roma live in. Along with it, a number of other questions arise relating to policies for improving their situation. For instance, the situation of Roma in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be explained as follows: “While most Roma populations played a full part in the labour force during the Communist period, the collapse of the regime led to both economic crisis and consequent dramatic rise of overt racism. The impact has been dramatic on the living standards – housing, health, education – and human rights of the Roma” (Daniel C. Vaughan-Whitehead, 2003, 64). The Roma have been most affected by unemployment – with an unemployment rate of 70 per cent, even more in some areas (Hungary, Bulgaria) where they were the first to fall victim to restructuring and layoffs. The only way to survive for most Roma is to work in the informal economy, with its very low skill requirements, uncertain and temporary work, and poor and irregular income, generated very often by illegal activities. Companies in construction, agriculture, restaurants, and other traditionally labour-intensive activities also offer them unofficial and very low paid jobs. The percentage of Roma who have no access to social insurance systems is extremely high, and as a result they will not qualify for future pensions. It is also well known that Roma children have limited access to education; they leave school at an early age; the number of Roma graduating from higher school is very low, etc. Although this explanation, grounded on the collapse of the former regimes, is valid for central and eastern Europe, a similar situation is also observed in the “old” member states that have not gone through radical societal changes. Thus, for instance, about 30% of the approximately 650.000 Spanish Roma are facing situations of social exclusion, 25% of the 31.000 Travellers in Ireland live without access to running water, electricity or refuse collection, estimates suggest that 80% of Roma children in Greece are illiterate (EAPN Comment Paper).

Discrimination is a common key feature faced by Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities in all EU member states and it is largely a reason for the situation



in which Roma live. All this explains why the situation of Roma is really a serious problem which requires the active intervention for its being improved, and why the EU has undertaken such extensive political measures in this field. The social differentiation within the group of Roma is extremely high. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not been studied profoundly. However, certain studies show that the social inequalities within the group itself considerably exceed the inequalities characteristic of the country in which they live. Undoubtedly, this poses special requirements regarding the policies of improving the situation of Roma. While each country should have its own priorities in relation to combating the exclusion of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities, policies at EU level in relation to Roma, Gypsies and Travellers should relate to the whole of the EU territory. It is also essential that the approach to this work recognizes the diversity within the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities and does not create hierarchies within the diverse populations, which make up these communities.

The EU supports civil society and national authorities in their efforts to improve the situation of Roma through:

- A legal framework, e.g. banning overt and hidden 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.

Despite the political efforts at EU level, an assessment of the implementation of EU Roma-related policies demonstrates a large variety of deficiencies of the process and effects that are not satisfactory. A recent Commission study emphasizes that while those new Member States with significant Romani populations did name Roma explicitly as a target group for their social inclusion policies, only five old Member States named Roma as a target group within their National Action Plans. Moreover, some groups suffering discriminatory treatment as „Gypsies“ or similar such as Travellers in the Republic of Ireland – are not yet fully covered by the ban on discriminatory treatment on grounds of race or ethnic origin (The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union, 2004). It seems that, even in situations in which the needs of a minority have been identified clearly, the level of policy response is often inconsistent with the level of assessed need.



The authors of the study also point out that where Roma-specific policies exist, few have yet to demonstrate durable impact. The results are not nearly to the level required under current anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies. Most of the policies in Central and Eastern Europe remain under-funded, at very preliminary stages of implementation, and often resemble more a menu of desired outcomes than viable and realistic policies. There also appear to be significant deficiencies in terms of targets for assessing the success of existing policies; it is difficult to see to what standards policy makers aspire in the implementation of many Roma-related policies. Consultation with Roma and Roma participation in the design and implementation of policies intended to benefit them is currently very modest, when existing at all, and generally hesitant. Moreover, EU Member States have in some cases adopted measures which eliminated previous gains.

A very powerful force for undermining social inclusion projects targeting Roma is local opposition. Local authorities frequently block implementation of projects aimed at improving the situation of Roma. Such cases generate serious concern about the capacity of authorities to implement EU policy well, particularly through structural funding. Conclusions of recent assessment of Phare programming on Roma include the observations that:

- Phare programmes clearly demonstrated that existing policies and practices in central and eastern Europe were failing Roma. The overall lack of vision and direction means there was no clear underpinning policy direction or commitment.
- As an outcome of EU and other external pressure, issues facing Roma have moved to a position of higher priority. At the same time it has become much more political and partisan, and the operational environment surrounding policy making for Roma integration remains fragile.
- In current systems there is a lack of capacity, understanding and professional expertise to deal effectively with the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the problem. There is a vast gap between the policy level, including proportionality, and operational reality.

Research undertaken for the mentioned assessment indicates that in a number of areas these conclusions are relevant for Roma policy in many if not all of the Member States.

Courts are often criticized: "courts may not yet be ready to play a leading role in enforcing statutory equality duties" (Cohen,B. 2005, 13). Discussing the



problem that the legislation mentioned above is not applied effectively, some experts specify that in most countries the attorneys and judges do not have a sufficiently good qualification in the field of legal concepts of discrimination. Because of this, in a lot of cases exclusion, segregation and violence remain unpunished. Thus the effectiveness of the structures that have to translate into action the decisions legislated on the highest political level attract strong criticism: the courts; the governments (specifically for the lack of strong enough Roma-related components of the social inclusion policies); local authorities (for the opposition to social inclusion projects targeting Roma).

How to explain these problems? Probably there are many explanations, but two of them (besides the low qualification of attorneys and judges) are mentioned below. The first one concerns the possibility of a paradox mentioned by Claude Cahn. "Where groups are despised and subject to discrimination, governments may adopt positive measures on their behalf; but if the governments concerned are democratic, it is highly unlikely that the public at large will endorse such measures, and hence unlikely that they will be adopted" (Cahn, Cl., 2005, 18). From this point of view the adequate response is to establish and expand a rights-based anchor for positive action.

Another possible explanation is related with the links between the social inclusion direction and the other directions for improving the situation of Roma. The discrimination mechanisms are widely discussed and seem to be clear. This allows to formulate adequate policies. The exclusion mechanisms are not a subject of such intensive debate. Due to a certain vagueness regarding the mechanisms, difficulties are encountered in the assessment of the policies' adequacy to alleviate exclusion. In the application of the two lines in Roma-related policies, there also exist certain differences. The application of the policies toward increasing individual and group rights is subject to serious criticism, mainly directed against the basic structures which have to ensure the application of the policies. As for the policies related to the broader perspective of social inclusion, the debates seem to be focused on the formulation of the policies rather than on the process of their application.

These differences create the grounds on which there occurs a gap between the policies of reducing poverty and social exclusion, and the anti-discrimination policies. It is not sure whether the two types of policies are coordinated, whether the coordination creates expected synergies, and whether the insufficient efficiency of the social inclusion policies does not give rise to certain



effects, which in their turn impact on the anti-discrimination policies. Finally, the explanation of the above mentioned situation is related not only with interactions between ethnic groups but with dynamics of their boundaries. Barbara Cohen emphasizes clearly the risk of assimilation and erosion of group membership, generated by the “color blind” approach (Cohen, B. 2005). The alternative approach to the “color blind” one is not only pluralism, but also strengthening the boundaries of the group, strengthening the markers that are specific for the group. In this way a dichotomy is created: assimilation versus strengthening of group’s boundaries to create a ground for pluralism. The question is whether the dichotomy is not exaggerated? Does strengthening of civil rights and citizenship necessarily mean assimilation of the group, if it is not supplemented with strengthening of the group’s markers and boundaries? How compatible are pluralism on the one hand and ethnically differentiated implementation of social, economic and cultural rights on the other hand? Obviously the most important question is: are there ways to reconcile these seemingly opposite views and approaches?

11 See Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, SEC(2005)69



3. THE GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

People in Need's *Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods threatened by Social Exclusion*, is in operation since 1999 and aims at assisting Roma families, many of whom suffer the highest levels of social exclusion in the country. The good practice is embedded in and expresses some important trends of the Roma-oriented policies in Czech republic. The general framework of Roma integration policies in Czech republic is outlined in "The Roma Integration Policy Concept in the Czech Republic", approved by the Government of the Czech Republic. The concept points out that "the Government approaches Roma affairs from three aspects – human rights, national identity (ethnicity), and the broader socio-cultural perspective".

The first aspect aims at providing all citizens of the Czech Republic with the opportunity to exercise all individual rights fully and without discrimination, these being the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, and the international conventions on human rights which the Czech Republic has signed.

The second perspective is based on the specific rights of national/ethnic minorities (including the collective rights) as defined in Chapter III of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and in the Frame Convention on National Minorities Protection. There also exists explicit regulation of these specific rights.

The third perspective – the socio-cultural one – is based on the broader concept of "Roma community", which differs from the term "Roma national minority". The governmental concept defines the members of Roma national minority on the grounds of "an active desire to be regarded as members of this minority and to develop the language and culture of the minority"; a member of the Roma community is everyone "who is identified by the majority as a member of this socially and ethnically defined group".

Along with it, the governmental document "...generally focuses on social matters (employment, social welfare, and housing)". In 2005 the Government adopted a new Roma Integration Policy Concept. The new concept does not change the principal starting points of the former approach of the government. It offers an update of priorities and specific procedures and new solutions, and



emphasizes the urgent need for changes in the Roma situation, particularly the reduction of their unemployment, the improvement of their housing conditions and subsequent state of health, the prevention of social exclusion of Roma communities and elimination of its consequences. The reality shows that apart from the questions relating to the ethnic identity of the Roma, the Roma community was deeply affected and their daily life much more influenced by problems of social exclusion. The emphasis on the urgent need to reduce social exclusion does not represent a return to assimilation policies, as this emphasis on integration in the social and economic sphere has been sometimes interpreted. On the contrary, the Concept underlines the respect to Roma culture by a new suggestion - taking into account that, unlike other national minorities, in its efforts to preserve and develop its own language and culture, the Roma national minority cannot rely on the existence of institutions in mother countries. An example of such approach is the support that has been provided in the past years to the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno as an institution that plays a principal role in the preservation of the cultural heritage of all Roma, and not only those living in the Czech Republic. Another significant example is the support to the Roma festival Khamoro.

3.1. Goals of the Good Practice

The most general orientation of the programme is to develop the personal disposition of the client in order to enable him to cope with life situations and to enlarge his access to relevant information and services. The social work performed within the frame of the Programme is aiming both to produce change on the individual level and to improve the network of offered services in the locality, which helps the organizations and community development as a whole.

The general goals of the Programme are:

1. To improve the social mobility of the specific client and his ability to manage his life independently.
2. To act as an intermediary for the client for services and activities, which are locally available, but the provider does not know about the client or the client does not know about the services.
3. To initiate structural changes and the healing process in the community.
4. To minimize the risks associated with life in the socially disadvantaged environment.



5. On the local level to change the attitude of the municipalities to the socially excluded localities, participate together with the client in community planning and decision making.
6. To cooperate with the subjects who are able to initiate and carry out the development programme in the localities: community programmes (in the sense of community organizing), education programmes, employment programmes, health-care programmes, programmes to develop housing, and prevention programmes for the protection of existing housing.

Throughout these aims the programme also tries to fill in the existing gap between general social assistance at disposal of the socially excluded individuals, families and communities and their capacities to make use of these services.

3.2. Problems to be solved

Problems which are typical for the residents of the socially excluded localities and which the field social workers most often help to solve:

- **Citizenship:** In many cases inhabitants of the socially excluded localities are immigrants without citizenship in the Czech Republic. The lack of citizenship is one of the main factors of exclusion.
- **Social benefits:** legally defined rights of individuals and/or families to social benefits are denied and as a consequence they don't receive the benefits.
- **Housing:** a particular problem in the socially excluded localities, since there is an acute shortage of cheap housing in the Czech Republic. So 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.
- **Conflicts between families, within the families etc.**
- **Unemployment rates in socially excluded localities are very high and the chances for employment are insignificant. Often the inhabitants searching for jobs are subjected to discrimination.**



- Health problems: inhabitants of the localities have serious health problem, combined with restricted access to health care;
- Non payment of debts, drug addiction etc. are widespread phenomena in socially excluded localities.

The NGO that implements the Programme faces a number of obstacles in its work: local politicians make hostile declarations about Roma 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 or know how to deal with them; there is no co-ordination between different activities and services.

3.3. Social services provided by the social workers

The social workers provide both services of short duration and over a longer period. Services of short duration include:

- *Citizenship*: The worker advises in cases where the client does not have and needs state citizenship in the Czech Republic (this concerns primarily immigrants).
- *Social benefits*: The worker solves primarily situations where the family does not receive their legal social benefits.
- *Housing*: The worker helps the families to improve unsatisfactory living conditions.
- *Conflicts between families, clients, and the surroundings, targeted communities and surroundings etc.*: The worker negotiates to help to lessen the conflict.
- *Assistance for asserting rights and interests*: The worker negotiates, monitors negotiations and tries to support when possible. He helps to lessen the conflict, and at the same time follows the interests of the clients. The worker provides basic advice, arranges specialized legal assistance, supports the clients in discussions and influences the course of discussion by his presence.
- *Employment*: Involving the unemployed client into various activities beneficial for the given locality with the goal of maintaining and developing their employment competence and motivation.
- *Health problems*: Assistance in cases of long-term illnesses, handicap or disability in the form of providing guidance to the relevant organization providing health and social care.



- *Drug addiction:* Monitoring and an offer to arrange specialized assistance in the contact centers.

Other services are provided for a longer period, such as:

- *Non-payment and debt:* The worker meets with the client with the goal to internalize the necessity to pay one's obligations – rent, services, food in school etc. They negotiate together on the payment of debts. They negotiate with the municipalities and owners of the housing for a more advantageous approach to the debtor.
- *Use of income:* The worker meets with the clients and where it is appropriate teaches him with the goal to increase his ability to effectively handle his income, ensure from his given income his basic needs and at the same time to not go into debt.
- *Attendance of children at school:* The worker searches for children who have problems with regular school attendance, negotiates with the participating parties and helps with the goal of removing the causes of this state.
- *Preparing the household with children:* The workers help families, where there are not the conditions in the household for preparing children for going to school, and in some cases provides volunteers for tutoring.
- *Increasing possibility for education of children and their being successful:* The worker meets with the client and their children about the possibility of further direction and supports for students in remedial schools, who have the motivation and possibility to enter the primary school.
- *Employment:* Assistance motivating the clients while looking for employment and maintaining it.
- *Health problems:* Monitoring the hygienic situation and helping to improve it.
- *Usury:* The worker monitors the practices of usurers, explains to the clients the destructiveness of these loans, and cooperates with the organs responsible for criminal proceedings if necessary.

At the level of the community the Worker intervenes in the following ways

- Seeking co-workers in the targeted community or surrounding;
- Expanding the activities of other clients inside the targeted community;
- Leading and coordinating volunteers and co-workers, arranging contact and communication between the community and external subjects;
- Mediation and facilitation activities among the community and organs of the state administration and municipalities or other subjects;



Graph 1 in the Annex shows that the provided service corresponds to the intensity of the problems. The exception is represented in the area of unemployment, which is perceived as the most serious, however it is addressed as a small percentage of the service. This corresponds to the limited authority and tools that the field workers can use to solve this problem for their clients.

3.4 Targeting of services

Clients of the Programme are members of the spatially defined socially excluded Roma communities. Criteria for selection of the clients are: specific social characteristics (mainly individuals or families from the lowest income levels, with long-term unemployment, and people dependent on the benefits of the state social system and other services); social characteristics of the locality in which he lives (high level of risks of social exclusion). Ethnicity is not considered to be the deciding factor, rather only a risk factor.

The field social workers identify and contact the clients in different ways:

- a) The client contacts the field worker himself directly
- b) An employee at another institution refers the client.
The cooperating organizations that recommend the clients for the services are informed that this does not give them a special position. The protection of the rights of the client is superior to the interests and demands of the cooperating organization.
- c) The field worker is requested by another institution to offer the client services (In this case one must be aware primarily of the risk of violation of privacy of the client, because they did not request this contact. Even in this case, the client has the right to reject services without there arising negative consequences from this or his decision.
- d) The Field Worker actively contacts the people in the targeted locality and offers them services.

During the first consultations with the client, the field worker establishes a "picture" of the entire situation, identifies the problem and its causes; elaborates general scheme of activities that have to be performed over the course of cooperation in order to address the problem(s). The field worker also has to reveal the client's opinion concerning the possible steps, which the client is willing and capable to undertake. At the same time the client receives information about the character and course of the services (offer), rules and free provided services (including the rights and responsibilities of the client), about the rules of cooperation, and possibilities to complain.



At this stage the worker has to receive the client's approval on the scheme of activities, they will fulfill together, the main goals of cooperation and the partial goals and steps. The client must agree on the method for solving the problem and the way hi will participate. Social workers try to involve as much as possible the client in the process in order to provide him the opportunity to learn as much as possible. If the initial consultations are successful and the worker and the client achieve consensus, they sign a contract for their future cooperation. During each next consultation the two participants evaluate together, how successful they were at achieving the established partial goal for the previous period, and specify the activities they have to undertake separately and together for the next period.

Graph 2 of the Annex shows that the number of localities in which the programme is active rises to 2002 and then begins a gradual decline. Reduction of the number of localities is due to organizational and financial limits of the organization and the attempt to have at minimum 2 field social workers in a locality. The management of the programme stated that they have been contacted by representatives of other regions about the services of the field workers, however at the moment there is no possibility to include them.

From the standpoint of **sustainability of the programme** it is possible to state that the majority of localities (67 %) have been incorporated into the programme for at least 5 years (7 years of entire functioning of the programme). The selection of the localities for incorporation into the programme is based on requests from representatives of the municipality or the local community, or can be initiated by the NGO itself based on information about the basic events in a locality, such as for example the mass privatization of the housing fund or natural disasters such as for example floods.

In addition to the realization of the field social work the immediate goal of the programme was primarily the **establishment and stabilization of the position of the field social workers on the levels of the individual municipalities**. The support for the establishment of these positions is realized primarily from financial grants for those positions, which represent 130,000 CZK each year. The field workers are usually incorporated into the structure of the department of social affairs in the individual municipal offices. The workers solve in the given localities problems of a similar character as the employees of the organization People in Need. This structure is expressed in Graph No. 3. (% of the localities incorporated into the programme in which are found the given problem). From



the presented graph it is evident that (with the exception of prostitution and usury) the presented problems occur in a majority of the localities. Most often evaluated as very serious are unemployment, poor housing and poor hygiene conditions.

3.5 Training for field social workers

People in Need developed a specific educational module for the field workers employed in the programme, which they are obliged to take. The need for such a module is twofold. First of all, many people from the community of Roma background performing as laymen were employed in the programme from the start and were working as field workers. Their role was important especially in the beginning of the programme when it was essential to establish contacts in the socially excluded localities and gain trust. These people in a majority of cases only had basic education. As the work of the field workers gradually became defined and had the ambition to become a professionally provided service, it became essential to increase the educational and practical background of employed people.

The second reason was that the gradual professionalisation of the services of the field social work in the socially excluded localities were shown to be services that were specific, complex, which among other things in itself carried many borderline situations and required not only education and knowledge, but also practical skills and professional discipline.

Within this context the Institute for the Evaluation, Supervision and Education in cooperation with the non-profit organization created an education module. The module contains 60 hours of training in the course of one year. It had two levels. The first level aims at acquiring the basic theoretical information and practical skills for the system of field social work. The second level offers special themes associated with the performance of field social work and has 3 blocks: a theoretical block, a block of applications on the standards of service in the field social work and a block of training for specific skills characteristic of the basic demands of the field social workers. The education takes place during working hours but also requires home work. The graduates, those who have completed 90% attendance, all home work and successfully passed the test, receive a certificate. Those who are not successful must take the education module again. The goal is that all field social workers employed in the programme will successfully complete this programme.



4. RELEVANCE FOR AND TRANSFERABILITY TO OTHER NATIONAL CONTEXTS

The Programme invites discussion of two separate aspects of good practice, in the field of providing social services, and in the field of improving the situation of Roma – and demonstrating the connection between these two aspects.

4.1. The programme as good practice in providing social services

The discussion has shown that the Programme is applied under circumstances which usually create pressure for good practice in social services: increases in unemployment and poverty; escalating needs for social services; inefficiency in the administration of social service programmes; reduced capacity of family to cope with emerging social and economic conditions etc. The Programme presents well-known basic features of the good practices in providing of social services: transparent process of decision-making; multidiscipline teams; effective standards.

However, some of the basic features of good practice in the field of social services are either slightly presented in the Programme or not presented at all. First, the collaboration with local authorities and civil society is limited. Second, the formal and informal networks with other providers are rather limited. Third, the evaluation process was conducted, however, the work connected with it was not finished and the representatives of the Programme presented only partial information on the effects that were achieved.

The discussion of the Programme made it possible to identify other features of its being good practice in providing social services. The pro-activity was especially underlined by the participants in the discussion. Many of the participants emphasized the multidimensionality of the Programme. It addresses the varying needs of individuals, families and communities. The Programme offers important services and has obviously helped a lot of people of the last six years.

4.1.1. Innovative aspects

Some of the innovations that have been mentioned are:

- regular, structured supervision at all levels;



- standard documents and codes of conduct;
- compulsory training for social workers, lasting 60 hours over one year;
- tougher recruitment procedures: candidates have to resolve a complicated problem.

Other traits of the innovativeness of the Programme can be found by comparing it with the basic features of the reforms in social work:

- Improved transparency and better understanding of basic problems of Roma situation and its improvement. The Programme contains a special emphasis on development of scientific base for intervention. On the one hand, the Programme has been developed and is applied in close collaboration with researchers. The Programme itself comprises the conduct of a number of researches, which have contributed to studying the mechanisms of social exclusion of Roma. Thus, the Programme not only has its scientific base, but also contributes to further development of the scientific base of the policies.
- Considerable influence upon the process of policy formation. What has contributed is not only the high level of knowledge in the field of operation of the Programme, but also the active connections with the government. It may be stated that results and findings of the Programme influenced authors of the new (2005) Policy Concept in the way that more emphasis is put on social inclusion.
- Improves education. Field social workers who have been engaged in the work under the Programme have undergone special training. What is more important is that, within the framework of the Programme and on the grounds of the studies conducted and the experience gained, a special book for training field social workers has been prepared.
- Raises awareness of rights. As it has been pointed out, the Programme puts emphasis on raising the social competence of its clients. The Programme achieves it by way of enriching their knowledge of existing rights, dissemination of knowledge of these rights and mechanisms of realization of these rights. In practice, the Programme also conducts an “invisible” practical training of its clients for overcoming the barriers, which hinder the practical enjoyment of legal rights.
- Establishment and implementation of new intervention criteria. Actually, the criteria applied for the selection of clients are well known in social work, however the Programme uses a specific combination of intervention criteria which make it possible to be precisely oriented to distressed areas, persons in poverty and social exclusion, and persons facing additional difficulties due to their ethnic group belongingness.



It is important to underline that the said features of the Programme are regarded as essential characteristics of the reforms in social work (E. Fultz, M. Tracy, 2004, 31). This coincidence in itself characterizes positively the Programme and makes it possible to regard it as a mechanism of considerable improvements in the field of social work. The “self-development” of the Programme is also an interesting aspect. To a great extent it is an example of “learning by doing” practices. The Field Social Work Programmes were launched in 1999 with rather vague objectives, identifying and employing local Roma activists as coordinators. Since 2003 the programme has been transformed into a more professional service and due to this statistics do not reflect today’s activities. Objectives that were established at the beginning of the programme have been adjusted over the years.

4.2. Specificity of the social work- improving the situation of Roma

The Programme has certain specificity as social work – it does not provide social services in the traditional meaning of this term. The Programme is focused on improving the access of Roma to social services, without changing the general legal framework and without providing additional general social services to Roma. Thus it plays the role of a bridge between social services (social assistance, social policy) and the use of these services, providing assistance in achieving an equal degree of enjoying the available social rights. The unequal enjoyment of available rights might be due to various reasons, such as: inefficiency of the institutions; specific attitude to Roma – discrimination; personal reasons. The Programme envisages these reasons for the unequal enjoyment of rights – the inefficiency of the institutions, discrimination and personal reasons. The effect of the Programme is not focused on providing the social service, but rather on realising the right to have these services provided. It can be said that the Programme is a means of improving the enjoyment of the services provided by general policies and by social assistance and social policy, in particular. Because of these particularities, the effects to be expected from the Programme are only those achievable within the framework of the existing policies on the limiting of poverty and social exclusion.

Along with it, the Programme also contributes to solving the main problem outlined in the studies of the situation of Roma – the inefficiency of various institutions, including the local authorities, in particular, and the discrimination practices applied by the latter. “Another activity involves encouraging local



authorities to expand services and mobilize capacity in these areas, so that residents are aware of the opportunities available to them and authorities realize when people need help”.

Thus, the Programme presents a special version of affirmative action – privileged provision of assistance for achieving equal opportunities to access universally offered services. One of the experts writes: “This is a clear model of positive action encouraged by the state”. The main activities under the Programme are aimed at creating equal opportunities – equalization of the chances for access to services provided within the existing general policies. This version of affirmative action makes it possible for the Project to overcome the combination of ethnically selective and socially imprecise orientation of the assistance. The combination sometimes gives rise to criticism, and even opposition both at national and local level. Along with it, the Programme solves in an interesting way the problem of the link between “the social” and “the ethnic”, between anti-discrimination policies and social inclusion policies.

4.2.1 Involvement of the beneficiaries

The programme aims to increase social competences and help people orient themselves in the system, know their rights, and resolve difficult life situations. The ultimate goal is the full social inclusion of clients, but in many cases the workers can do no more than minimize risks and prevent situations from getting worse, rather than eliminate problems completely. The discussion of good practice outlined various aspects of involvement of the beneficiaries. One of them is grounded on the specific relationship between the field social worker and the client.

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. The national expert stressed that one of the scheme’s innovative points is that it operates as a partnership, taking care not to force or manipulate clients.

Another aspect of the field social work is connected with the direct and active involvement of the beneficiaries, not only during the time they receive the respective service, but also when such a service is provided to other beneficiaries. Emphasis was put on the possibility and need of enhancing this second



aspect of involving the beneficiaries. 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.

Emphasis was also put on a third aspect of the involvement of beneficiaries. While the project under review seems certainly to take an active citizenship approach it is not clear how much the project encourages collective independent organizing within the Roma community. This would allow for collective analysis of their situation to be developed which is a prerequisite for their involvement in more direct forms of civil dialogue and participatory democracy. Such strong feelings of collective identity can be one of the strengths, which can be built on to ensure successful outcomes from work with the Roma community. The participants agreed that, from the viewpoint of stimulating local social capital and the development of local community, the Programme does not offer sufficiently effective impact.

4.3. Impact upon citizenship (Indirect anti-discrimination effects)

Clients of the Programme are much more likely to suffer widespread indirect discrimination, which permeates local authorities and social services. The Programme seems to exert a strong influence against this type of discrimination. One aspect of this influence is the impact of the Programme on the local authorities' activities. Another aspect of its influence is related with the specifics of the social work provided by the Programme.

The above-mentioned features of innovativeness of the Programme in the area of social work allow us to identify a shift of focus away from macro-structure towards the individual and his or her preferences. It is also a shift from hierarchically structured bureaucracies that are regarded as the most effective structure for translating what has been legislated on the political level. Another aspect of this shift is the reconstruction of the relationship between client and professional when both of them adopt the status of citizen. This new type of social work is much "larger" than the traditional one: it not only provides social services and supports social rights, but it is based on citizenship and stimulates and "provides" civil rights. This is social work, which produces social services and citizenship simultaneously. Comparing this shift with the implementation



of Roma-related policies and legislation we can see that Roma-related policies and specifically their implementation are facing problems related with the main components (courts, national governments, local authorities) of the structure that have to translate into action what has been legislated on the political level. From this point of view perhaps the most important advantage of the project is its capacity to overcome these dysfunctions of the “translating” structures that are emphasized by their critics.

The Programme provides clear evidence of restructured relationships between client and the field social worker. Despite the use of the term “client” in the description of the project, in fact there is formally an equal and general relationship between a citizen and a citizen. The main components of this relationship are: the clear statement that “the protection of the rights of the client is superior to the interests and demands of the cooperating organization”; the extensive implementation of consultations with the client; the accent on cooperation and the attempts of the field worker “to empower the client to the highest level possible in order to achieve individual agreement upon steps”; the special cooperation on the order (“The worker and the client work on his own solution so that the client participates as much as possible”). Although the user is not directly incorporated into the decision making about provided services, there is a strong enough basis for maintaining a relationship between citizens – signing a contract between social worker and user. Additionally, one of the problems which the worker is dedicated to directly, for a short period of time is citizenship-advice in cases where the client does not have but needs state citizenship in the Czech Republic.

Second, most of the services provided within the framework of the project are closely related to reducing discrimination and exclusion and strengthening of human rights. This seems to be true for legal advice, social advice, mediation, facilitation, activities between the community and organs of state administration and municipalities, schools or other subjects, and acting as an intermediary for other services. The accent on the legal education of the Field Worker in the form of seminars as well as their continuous contacts with lawyers are also relevant to the reducing of discrimination.

In addition the project provides a model for intervention that combines anti-discrimination and social exclusion. The provision of specific services within the framework of the project complements the provision of social services by the state structures. This combination seems to transform the character of



the general social work - it really “produces” citizenship and social inclusion simultaneously.

Third, the project takes advantage of another achievement of social work developments: it avoids the problems related to the functioning of the structures that have to implement policies, transforming policies into action. This concerns not only the insufficient effectiveness of the structures, but also the possibility to avoid or at least to alleviate a fundamental problem: the lack of possibilities for the service users to gain influence on the functioning of the organization that provides services. In this way the Programme contributes to profound changes in the very essence of social work, stimulating the specific development of civil, social and political rights. In this way the Programme provides an interesting contribution to the discussion in the Czech context about the practical impact of the connection between ethnicity and social exclusion, respectively welfare and ethnic identity.

4.4. Direct anti-discrimination effects of the Programme

The fight against discrimination is an important aspect of the Programme. The main tool is legal consulting. The programme team includes four lawyers. If a social worker uncovers discrimination that can be challenged in court, People in Need provides free representation of the person subject to discrimination. Another particular feature of the social work under the Programme also adapts it properly to assisting Roma. The way of selecting clients, based on social criteria and without ethnical orientation, allows to identify those Roma who are in need. This type of selection facilitates the overcoming of negativism on the part of local authorities and other groups. Some participants suggested avoiding focusing too much on ethnic identity in providing services to socially excluded people. The “internal” social differentiation of the group of Roma is taken into account. The assistance is directed exactly to the individuals in need.

4.5. Transferability

The favorable economic and political conditions form an important feature of the national context. The Czech Republic is among the best performing countries in the EU with a risk of poverty around 10%, together with Sweden, Denmark, Slovenia, Finland and Netherlands.... Indeed, the Czech Republic has a rate



just behind that of the best performers among the Member States (Atkinson, A. et al., 2005, 54, 55).

The transition period in Czech Republic has not resulted in high increase of inequalities and the country is rather “egalitarian”. This widens the opportunity to clearly identify the dimensions of social exclusion on which its performance is relatively less satisfactory, to outline poverty pockets and to concentrate on these. The National Action Plan of Czech Republic (2004-2006) sets out key challenges: to respond to the ongoing structural changes; to support the long-term unemployed in seeking employment; to address the disadvantage in education for groups at risk of social exclusion, to adapt the social protection and health care systems and to improve access to affordable good quality housing.

Another important aspect of the national context is the simultaneous implementation of other projects aimed at improving the situation of Roma. For instance, the Czech organization Life Together has developed successful projects related to combating usury in Romani communities (The situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union, 2004). 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. Three examples of good work in the area of social integration of the Roma are incorporated into the National Action Plan for social integration in the Czech Republic for 2004 – 2006, and the Programme of the People in Need is one of them.

A third characteristic feature within the national context consists in the presentation of other good practices by the Czech Republic in the field of social services provision. In the discussion of the said good practices certain characteristic features have been pointed out, and they seem to be present in the projects of most of the Czech NGOs:

- striving for support to and ascertainment of respect and dignity (services promote individual rights and responsibilities;
- services lead to inclusion and integration with the family, etc.);
- user confidence (reliable services; accessible services, understandable conditions and requirements;
- provision of services on the basis of clear standards); well organized and professional administration (Vylitova, M. 2004, 85).



4.6 Limits of the Programme's impact

The picture described above poses two important questions: one concerning the framework of the Programme, and the other one concerning the main aspects of the Programme delineating it as a good practice. The first problem is an important one: it should be clearly pointed out what the limits of the objectives and impacts of the Programme are and what can be expected from the Programme. Thus the assessment of the Programme will not be overcharged with excessive expectations, neither will there be sought any effects to which the Programme is not addressed.

In connection with it, the participants have stated that the Programme is not the only tool of the policies on improving the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic. The other tools of these policies should also be taken into account in the course of analysis of the Programme.

Besides, the Programme does not include all the trends in the policies (of the EU and the Czech government) and therefore it is important to define its scope precisely in order to avoid any excessive expectations. For instance, the following is beyond the framework of the Programme: the "cultural" development; community organization; promotion of group minority rights. The Programme is not all-embracing from the viewpoint of the problems it addresses. These limits have been clearly pointed out in the course of its discussion. Comparing the spectrum of problems the Programme addresses and the main problems determining the situation of Roma in the EU (and in the Czech Republic) it can be pointed out that the Programme relates only to a limited part of the general problems. In connection with the limits of the Programme other questions occur – those regarding the way in which the Programme interacts with other tools of the policies on improving the situation of Roma, and the synergy effects that may result from these interactions.

The question regarding the main aspects of the impact of the Programme is important because good practices in the provision of social services have already been presented. The Czech Republic has also taken part and has presented such practices. Due to that, the discussion of the Programme cannot be kept only within the field of providing social services – this would just add one more practice to those which have already been discussed, however, it might be misleading in the assessment of the Programme, as the interest for it relates not only to the provision of social services. Obviously, the interest for the Pro-



programme is greatly determined by the connection between the Programme and the policies on improving the situation of Roma. Secondly, the interest for the Programme arises from the specific nature of the services provided.

It has especially been underlined that the Programme is one of a predominantly preventive nature – it aims rather at limiting the further worsening of the situation of Roma than at contributing to the improvement of their situation. The role of the Programme as a means of control over the basic mechanisms of social exclusion and impoverishment becomes evident. Due to its preventive orientation, the Programme has a role to play in influencing the conditions of general increase of poverty and exclusion, not only concerning Roma, pointing out the insufficient effectiveness and mistaken expectations of the general policies on limiting poverty and exclusion.

Overall, the peer group found many positive elements in the Czech programme. They praised its design and objectives, and agreed that it was carrying out invaluable work in helping some of the most vulnerable people in Czech society. However, most felt that since it could be said to provide a minimum level of harm reduction it could only be usefully transferred as a whole into contexts where no provision exists so far.

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.

Some aspects highlighted as transferable were:

- Organization of the work by an NGO, which allows for independent lobbying on Roma issues.
- Public/private partnership model
- Commitment and enthusiasm of social workers
- Proactive approach to identifying and reaching out to vulnerable people
- The training module and standard documents and codes of conduct for workers
- The partnership with clients in addressing the different needs of individuals, families and communities
- The lobbying role of the NGO at governmental level and in the process of policy formulation.



5. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

5.1 Feedback from the participants

Three working groups have discussed the key points which were identified during the Peer review. One 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. Participants suggested that 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 into account the programme's limited resources and develop matching expectations.

The second 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.

The participants in the third group pointed out that Field Social Work Programmes have been in operation for six years. The group heard a detailed explanation of funding sources available to promote Roma interests in the Czech Republic, but it is clear that in some cases the financial resources do not reach 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. Participants agreed that targeted measures should be combined with mainstreamed social inclusion policies. In Spain, for example, funds are directed specifically at the needs of Roma communities.

Mr Feltesse pointed out that 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.



Some of the key lessons to be learned from the programme are:

1. The proactive and tailored approach – a key component of good practice is the capacity to work with individuals, not ‘categories’.
2. Mediation between different actors and institutions
3. The need for capacity-building to improve the competences of professionals and clients
4. Better coordination and integration of policies at all levels. This is a major challenge, but Member States’ NAPS/Incl must mobilise ministries to work together in this field.
5. The importance of evaluation, involving users, so as to be able to assess whether work is effective for the clients.

5.2. Relevance of the Programme to the EU policies’ effectiveness

Some of the participants underlined the relevance of the Programme to the Lisbon strategy, the National Action Plans and the Joint Inclusion Memorandum. Although well-formulated European policies exist, however, they are not applied appropriately. This creates an intensive political debate, accompanied by poor results for which the criticism is aimed at the institutions (local authorities, courts and national governments).

Although the characteristic feature of the Programme is the street level social work, the contribution of the Programme seems greater and goes beyond this frame. The Programme to some extent reconstructs relationships between the individual and the institutions. The individuals might be “invisible” for the institutions which they need and depend on. This is due not only to the lack of confidence and fear associated with undocumented situations, personal difficulties, etc. An important reason for the individuals being “invisible” for the institutions can be found in the institutional dysfunctions and the “gaps” between the institutions. The institutions themselves are able to complicate a life situation to an inconceivable degree. From this point of view it is important to underline the comparatively broad scope of the help offered, which is oriented to the interactions between individuals and institutions.

In its interaction with local communities and local authorities, the Programme has also succeeded in overcoming controversies or opposition. The most probable reasons for this might be the following ones:

- the way in which the clients are selected (the possibility of challenging the selection is limited);



- the nature of the help provided and the way in which it is provided (the competition between individuals and groups is limited);
- addressing the urban areas with high concentration of poverty and exclusion (where local authorities are probably more inclined to collaborate and accept such help).
- the Programme “avoids ethnicising a social problem, but on the other hand, it is not blind for the frequent incidence of social exclusion and ethnicity”.

The interaction between national government and the non-governmental organizations performing the Programme is also interesting – the opinions of NGOs have been adopted on the key points of a policy and consensus has been reached. This is important for the process of formulating the policies in each country of the EU. Besides, the way in which the consensus has been reached is of great interest because of the effective contribution of a reputable and competent scientific community.

Studies of Czech researchers show that the exercise of political rights on the part of Roma is often deformed. Promoting social, economic and civil rights, the Programme does somehow have its effect upon political rights as well – it can be expected that the Programme creates conditions under which these rights are better exercised. In the opinion of some participants, the government has not 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 to improve the Situation of Roma have been emphasized: to use EU legislation, and to offer financial resources to municipalities as an incentive. In Spain, for instance, EU funding provides additional income for local authorities that undertake programmes for Roma.

5.3 Creating “the vital link”

There was much debate about whether the social inclusion of Roma people should be approached primarily from a social or an ethnic standpoint. Whereas the programme’s Executive Director pointed out that not all Roma in the Czech Republic are poor, and that therefore the clients should be assessed primarily on their social status, other participants highlighted that some policies were



much more successful once they identified the issue as an ethnic one, with discrimination as a major factor. The main controversy derived from the fact that the Programme combines the emphasis on the ethnic minorities (Roma integration) with a focus on distressed areas and implementation of a specific type of social work. This complex interweaving of trends and means of impact is clearly seen in the observations made by various participants: "It is the first Programme to put into place a system of measures for social integration through field social work with an emphasis on the ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic"; "The Programme has transferred emphasis from ethnic identity to social conditions"; "Although the programme targets socially excluded communities that are often defined by their ethnic identity, the key principle determining the selection of clients is not their ethnic origin. The programme responds to specific social needs in these areas".

Thus, the Programme seems to be in a unique position in which several areas and lines of influence are linked. The **link between anti-discrimination policies and social inclusion policies** is vital. Roma are a community which present the reality of the need for such a link very clearly. Learning to make effective links between the policies of social inclusion and anti-discrimination policies will have implications for other EU member states. A number of examples illustrate the importance of this link. For instance, 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. The two approaches were in competition, but a combination of both is required.

This provides a ground for criticism versus the Programme. Discrimination is not mentioned in the list of problems that the Programme is facing. Within this framework there also arises the question of how much the programme contributes to collective self-empowerment of the Roma community, given that people may give different answers when brought together in a group to analyze problems? The capacity of the Programme to create a link between anti-discrimination and social inclusion was a major point of debate. It showed the possibility of combining the various policies and approaches, and succeeded in identifying important aspects of an overall mechanism of binding in a better way the two policies (the anti-discrimination one and the social inclusion one) and the two approaches (the "individual" one and the "collective" one) in improving the situation of Roma:



- the specificity of the social work done under the Programme;
- the adaptation of social work to the specificity of Roma clients;
- the presence of anti-discrimination elements in the Programme (and the inclusion of these elements within the social work);
- the impact which the Programme has upon improving the effectiveness of the institutions (the local authorities, in particular);
- the impact of the Programme upon the civil status of the clients.

This is a main group of components of a mechanism of binding the anti-discrimination policies and social inclusion policies which the Programme contains implicitly. The second group of components of a “binding” mechanism comprises the links between the Programme and other tools of the overall policy on improving the situation of Roma:

- the importance of good coordination between the different tools
- the coordination with other specialized programmes for Roma, which would allow for greater synergy and final effects. In practice, the coordination would make it possible to achieve a level of multidimensional effect, which is difficult to achieve within the framework of one Programme only.

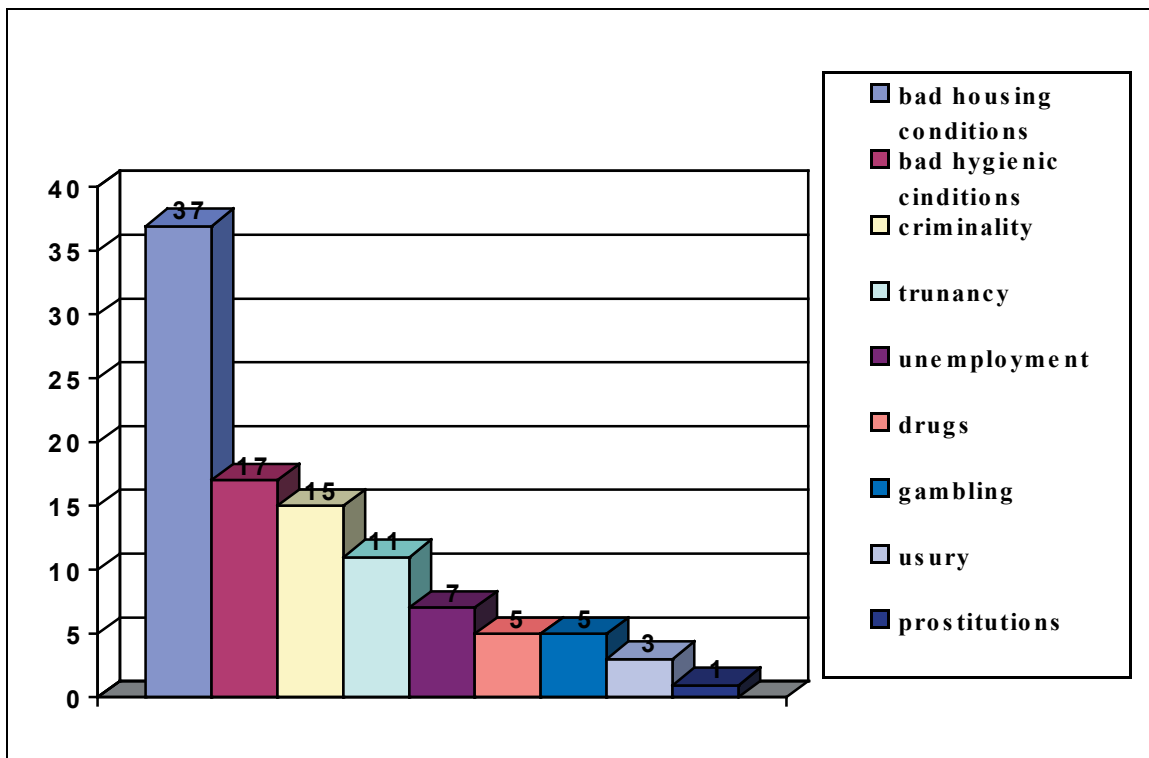
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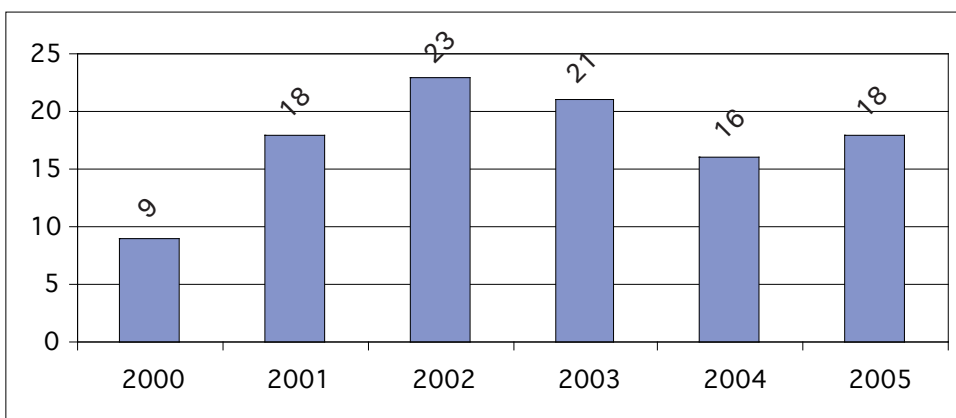


Annex

Graph No. 1: Percentage of provided services in the individual areas (in %)



Graph No. 2: Dynamics of the number of localities incorporated into the programme in the years 2000 – 2005





Graph No. 3: Percentage of the localities incorporated into the programme in which the given problem is found.

