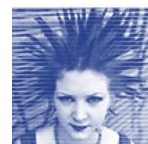




Czech Republic 2005

**Field social work
programmes in
neighbourhoods
threatened by
social exclusion**

Comment Paper, EAPN



on behalf of

 European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities





EAPN response to the Peer Review on Roma, Czech Republic, May 2005

(Using the standard structure for the comments and questions papers of the Peer Countries)

General Comment:

While the standard structure for the comments and questions of the Peer Countries does not fit exactly with the reality for EAPN (as a European Network) we use this structure as it is probably the best to facilitate some common reflection at the Peer Review event. However our views will necessarily be more general given our particular role. In some cases it could or should be that members of our National Network should also have had the opportunity to contribute to the Peer Countries response to this questionnaire as in many countries we have members who work with and for members of the Roma and Traveller communities. In the context of the transnational exchange programme under the Community Action Programme on social exclusion a number of our members are involved in a specific project which seeks to ensure that Roma and Traveller issues are dealt with more effectively in the context of the development, implementation and evaluation of National Action Plans on inclusion. Some preliminary findings from this project will assist EAPN in making its contribution to this Peer Review. In addition EAPN (Europe) under the same programme is part of an exchange on 'mainstreaming social inclusion'. Learning from that exchange also has implications for this Peer Review exercise.

I think also that this standard form could be adjusted. It seems to me that there needs to be a part which allows one to raise questions about the practice which is been peer reviewed before asking questions relating to transferability.

Part 1: A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the policy/measure to the peer country (e.g. what social inclusion problems in the peer country it could potentially solve, the extent to which it fits with the policy and legislative system in the peer country, etc.);

As pointed out in the expert paper this practice has potential relevance in most, if not all, EU member States for the following reasons:



- The issue of Roma is not just an issue for the Czech Republic, or even the new EU Member States but is an **issue for most EU Member States** (30% of the approximate 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). Therefore 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 recognises the diversity within the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities and does not create hierarchies within the diverse populations which make up these communities.
- **Discrimination** is a common key feature faced by Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities in all EU member states. This Peer Review in attempting to address such a reality should have relevance to other member states. It should also stress the importance of a full and determined implementation of the article 13 directives.
- 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 these two types of policies will have implications for other EU member states.
- The question of **urban areas with high concentrations of poverty and exclusion** are a feature of many cities within EU Member States. In trying to tackle this problem in an integrated way this project offers potential lessons which can inform actions in other cities.
- **Gender mainstreaming** is a requirement for all EU supported initiatives but more importantly it should be a part of all actions and policies. Tackling the exclusion of Roma communities has also got a gender dimension. This Peer Review exercise could help us to see the importance of mainstreaming gender concerns in concrete situations of exclusion and inequalities.

Part 2: A brief assessment of the potential transferability of the policy/measure (as a whole or parts of the approach) to the peer country and of the likely conditions for its application;

- The **street level social work** approach should offer lessons about how to reach individuals and communities who will not come into contact with services available for reasons of discrimination, fears associated with un-



documented situations, or personal difficulties which prevent their connection to services available.

- The question of targeted services is much debated in many EU member states. This Peer Review could raise interesting questions in relation to this approach and in particular the question of the **link between targeted initiatives and mainstream services**.
- The approach taken in the practice of Peer Review should begin to change the dynamic of interaction from one where the Roma are seen as people with problems to one which **recognises the capacities and aspirations of Roma populations** and this should transfer into actions that facilitate their participation and that counteract the negative stereotypes widely held in relation to the Roma community. It remains for EAPN a question as to whether the practice being Peer reviewed has such a focus.
- The project on which the Peer Review is based is a very concrete example of how the EU Inclusion Strategy (built on National Action Plans on Inclusion) can give momentum and support to concrete actions to fight poverty and social exclusion. The importance of seeing such concrete actions within National Action Plans should help to ensure that **National Action Plans become even more relevant**. The importance of broad objectives covering the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion is also highlighted by this practice.

Part 3: A note of any important questions about the policy/measure that are being raised and debated in the peer country.

- It is unclear to me as of yet where the 'problem' that is to be addressed by the action under the Peer Review is located. It is unclear how much the project contributes to an analysis of the obstacles and barriers that the majority community and the public institutions place on the Roma community. This question is reflected very well in the expert's paper when he writes about the need to look at the factors which create exclusion. Is the problem seen as the lack of capacity within the members of the Roma community or is the 'problem' located in the barriers that prevent Roma from accessing service or resources? This question is a key question underpinning all efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion: is it primarily **a structural problem or is it a problem of the personal capacities** of the people experiencing poverty and social exclusion? Depending on the answer to this question the approaches will vary considerably. While all experience in fighting poverty and social exclusion would tell that it is a structural



problem there emerges again, at this time, a strong degree of blaming the individuals for their own situations of poverty and exclusion.

- The question of **civil dialogue and participatory democracy** are much debated now. While the project under Peer Review seems certainly to take an active citizenship approach it is not clear how much the project encourages collective independent organising within the Roma community that allows 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. Perhaps a reflection on how much the Peer Review project takes this approach could be part of this Peer Review exercise.
- While the process to ensure a **mainstreaming of social inclusion** is not so well developed the political idea of mainstreaming has found a strong place within the responses to the reality of poverty and social exclusion. The Peer Review should examine what the experience and lessons for mainstreaming can be based on this concrete reality of the exclusion of large sections of a particular community.
- **Quality employment** is a key issue for tackling poverty and exclusion. Increasing the participation in quality employment of communities experiencing disadvantage and discrimination is essential. This Peer Review exercise should raise questions and lessons for developing a successful approach in this regard.
- The question of **inter generational poverty** is much debated at EU level. This Peer Review should help to highlight this reality and help to identify key solutions to addressing this reality.
- The importance of the involvement of NGOs in fighting poverty and exclusion is often stressed; on the other hand there is often an 'attack' on the role of NGOs. This project can offer some important concrete examples of the advantages and the limitations of NGO involvement as well as the resourcing of NGO participation and an exploration of the different type of roles played by NGOs. This has relevance to a much larger debate about the **role of NGOs** in modern democracies.
- The question of **measuring progress in social inclusion** with the associated questions of targets, indicators and monitoring are much debated at EU and Member State level. The importance of such an approach for the work with Roma and Travellers is essential. This Peer Review should also help us to ensure that such considerations are applied at all stages of projects aimed at the inclusion of Roma and Traveller communities.