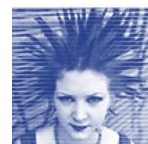




Czech Republic 2005

Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion

Comment Paper, ERIO



on behalf of

 European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities





ERIO response to the Peer Review on Roma, Czech Republic, May 2005 Prepared by Valeriu Nicolae

It is very unclear to me why this meeting is taking place at this time as the National Expert paper writes:

“The most important element from the standpoint of evaluation of the programme is its effectiveness, measured from the standpoint of success and overall impact. In this area we however run up against a number of obstacles and such an evaluation was not possible to carry out.”

Besides the fact that the most relevant issues are not assessed, there are a number of points that seem to us ambiguous and confusing. Despite very clear data on age, educational levels and gender, there is no clear indication of the number of Roma employed by the project.

The main indicators presented by the report are the number of localities and the number of contacts per social worker per month. In my opinion these are both vague and inadequate.

One element of concern is the indicators used in graphs 3 and 4: unemployment, bad housing conditions, **drugs**, truancy, **criminality**, **gambling**, bad hygienic conditions, **usury**, and **prostitution**, and the way these are addressed which, despite the claim of the author that: “the provided service corresponds to the intensity of the problems”, according to the graphs presented are in fact addressed almost in the reverse order of priorities. It is hard to understand the motivation for choosing gambling, drugs, criminality and prostitution before, for instance, legal documents related to citizenship and property plus health and education-related indicators.

There is no doubt that the programme has done a significant amount of work and most probably achieved progress, but there is hardly any evidence available to be used for a good assessment.

It is also clear to me that some of the practices are very interesting, but unfortunately it is hard – or impossible – to assess their effectiveness.



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.);

Partnership

The most important positive aspect of the project is the approach taken towards offering services to Roma as they facilitate real partnerships and interaction through mediators between Roma and local authorities. It is also a very positive step, in our opinion, that the project clearly targets Roma but does that through effective mainstreaming and equality for everybody. Social workers and NGOs can provide the links between the local and regional administrations, the national government and Roma communities, and ensure much needed access to the European Social Funds.

Involvement of the government

The funding for the project is very interesting and should be replicated, in our opinion. The fact that 70% of the budget comes from the state gives the project sustainability and should be seen as a first step in the much-needed positive practices for the inclusion of Roma. **The government contractors should be required to employ people from disadvantaged groups, especially from the target group of the project.**

Discrimination

It seems that the presented project could address discrimination in a quite effective manner. If the focus of the measures taken matches the severity of the problem (in this case employment), that would fit well with the main priority of the European Commission as declared in the Lisbon Strategy. It is unclear to me if the project relates to the antidiscrimination directives and makes use of the “incentive measures” accepted by Article 13 and recommended by Article 141.



Positive action

This is a clear model of positive action encouraged by the state, which should be applied more widely. In order to reach *de facto* equality, European and national legislation has to be supported by concrete measures meant not just to combat discrimination but achieve the much-praised equality of opportunities. Replication of positive targeted actions in old European states should be encouraged especially in the case of Greece, UK and Italy where the situation of Roma is deeply worrying.

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 project seems to fit well with the Lisbon Strategy and the National Action Plans and the JIMs of all the countries with a sizeable Roma population, and would therefore be easy to replicate. The main problem I see is the approach, and the lack of empathy that replaces the sometimes paternalistic approaches towards Roma. It is also important to use the existing partnerships and encourage them (as seems to be the case in the paper of the national expert) as well as promoting other partnerships. Roma NGOs need to be helped and stimulated to take part in the mainstreaming of issues of antidiscrimination, and the experience in the Czech Republic should be used to make sure that NGOs in charge of Roma-targeted projects (which are mainly non-Roma) build capacity within the Roma NGO partners.

In the event of replication, there is a clear need to reconsider the indicators and the evaluation and monitoring tools.

The policy needs to be designed as an answer to the problems, and the main problem according to the paper presented is employment. A much stronger component in the project needs to address employment and education towards employment (as in fact recommended by the European Commission's evaluation of Phare Programmes).



Part 3:

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

From my point of view the priority and purpose of the project is somehow ambiguous. According to the assessment, the main priority should clearly have been employment, but that is played down in the report. Not only is there practically no mention of quality employment or education towards employment in the report, but it seems that mostly the policy is focused on elimination of problems and not on capacity-building measures, which are the only way to achieve equal opportunities.

There are also no clear data on the type of partnership created between the local administration and Roma communities.

It would be interesting to know if there are any clear developments in facilitating social dialogue and the approach (if any) towards integration and elimination of anti-Gypsy prejudice.

A comprehensive approach towards the social exclusion of Roma is needed, and therefore it would be interesting to know if there are synergies with some other projects in the Czech Republic, and the way the project relates to the different policies of the government and recommendations of the European Commission, Council of Europe and OSCE focused on Roma.