

Final Report

"Roma inclusion study"

For the Financial Mechanism Office



Ljubljana, October 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study covers 47 programmes relevant to Roma inclusion in 12 countries, with a focus on the countries with the largest share of Roma (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia). The study included a review of literature and programme documentation, interviews with stakeholders in the focus countries, and online questionnaires and telephone interviews with Donor Programme Partners and authorities in the other countries. The cut-off date for data collection was March 2015.

The issue of Roma inclusion and the response of EEA donors

The 10-12 million Roma are today Europe's largest minority, of which most are EU citizens. The migration of Roma EU citizens is an increasing source of tension and public debate. Despite efforts to improve integration, many Roma continue to face poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. The EU highlighted the need for better integration of Roma, with improved economic and social conditions. Under an EU framework, member states were invited to adopt National Roma Integration Strategies, focused on the areas of education, employment, housing and health. The implementation of the national strategies is reviewed annually by the EC. In 2015, member states revised their national strategies in alignment with the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds.

The issue of Roma inclusion is also a priority for EEA donors and the 2009-2014 EEA & Norway Grants. The grants provide significant funding for Roma inclusion, and are important in helping beneficiary states to address the issue. In countries with sizeable Roma minorities – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia – Roma were included as a target group in relevant programmes. For Bulgaria and Romania, targets were set for 10 % of respectively the total allocation or of 13 relevant programme areas supporting improvement of the Roma situation. Programme Operators had to develop 'Roma Inclusion Plans' that defined the way the numeric targets would be met, and the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) pressed for high quality of the plans. In other beneficiary countries the Roma concern was highlighted in specific programmes.

Key findings from a review of current programmes

The current Roma-relevant programmes were assessed in the light of recommendations from an earlier '*Study on Roma Inclusion under EEA and Norway Grants*' prepared for the FMO in 2013. We found that the numbers of Roma NGOs applying and successful in receiving grants will be much higher than in the previous funding period. High-quality partnerships were formed in some of the larger projects between Project Promoters and local actors, such as local governments or NGOs. There were positive effects in some programmes of the emphasis of EEA & Norway Grants on mainstreaming the Roma inclusion concern where state institutions that did not have Roma inclusion as key part of their agenda increased their capacity in this area. EEA & Norway Grants are perceived by many stakeholders as a more flexible funding framework than the EU Structural Funds, with less onerous administrative requirements. They are used more extensively to fund innovative or pilot interventions with the potential for scale up or mainstreaming. There are no mechanisms in place to address scale up or mainstreaming.

Many of the programmes, including those relevant to Roma inclusion, are running behind schedule, and some may not be implemented with sufficient quality in the limited remaining time.

The available indicators for programmes are generally not defined with sufficient detail to ensure their uniform application and often do not address Roma inclusion outcomes or impact. Outcome indicators were usually indicators of output (immediate benefits directly delivered in a project) rather than outcome (measurable change in the target group). Programme-level output indicators were mostly agreed before the focus on Roma inclusion was introduced. Many focus on vulnerable groups and do not directly measure effects on Roma. Others do focus on Roma directly, counting Roma beneficiaries or outputs specifically focused on Roma (e.g. numbers of projects, events or publications). However, Roma-specific indicators are often not specified sufficiently to provide consistency in reporting. In most focus countries national authorities were hesitant to use Roma-specific targets and indicators because of concerns about the legality of targeting a specific ethnic group and collecting data on beneficiaries disaggregated by ethnicity. However, some Roma-specific indicators were agreed, even where there were various degrees of reluctance (Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia).

In Bulgaria and Romania, the key target and indicator – share of budget allocated to interventions focused on Roma – is effectively an input indicator, specifying the funding to a broadly defined area but without indicating what results to be delivered for Roma communities. The requirement to allocate a fixed share of funding to Roma inclusion was appropriate for the late introduction of the priority in EEA & Norway Grants, but some Romanian stakeholders felt that this has led to a focus on meeting the target at the expense of the quality of the programming. The Roma Inclusion Plans developed in these countries varied significantly in quality, though the Guidance Notes were well developed. The best plan described how programme activities would benefit Roma inclusion, specified reasonable indicators, and outlined meaningful steps in publicity and evaluation. In other countries there were no numeric targets, but the Roma concern was emphasised in specific programmes.

Key weaknesses in reporting are inadequate definitions and lack of processes for collecting the data. The source for data for indicators is often project reports but the quality of the data is not specified. There is no agreed definition of what a Roma NGO is, or who should be considered a Roma. There is limited comparability across countries and programmes in the same area due to the way in which the Roma-inclusion concern was added at a relatively late stage. It is therefore difficult to consolidate information on Roma inclusion in programme areas across countries.

The contribution of Roma-relevant programmes to increased capacity for Roma inclusion cannot be easily measured when programme implementation is only partly advanced. Although National Focal Points and most Programme Operators of Roma-relevant projects do not deal with Roma inclusion as a priority, interviews have indicated that Roma-relevant programmes have motivated some of them to give more consideration to Roma inclusion concerns. However, Programme Operators were reluctant to discuss changes to existing monitoring instruments in the present funding period because of the perceived complexity of existing instruments and limited experience with their use. Some national authorities voiced a need for assistance with implementing the Roma inclusion focus, in particular with regard to monitoring.

Conclusions from a review of current programmes

Conclusion 1 – There was early evidence that *EEA & Norway Grants have achieved change in the area of Roma inclusion* in the present funding period, notably the significant increase in the number

of Roma NGOs that applied for and won grant funding mostly under NGO programmes, the formation of good-quality local project partnerships, and visible effects of the efforts at mainstreaming Roma inclusion on the capacity of some national institutions.

Conclusion 2 – For *existing quantitative indicators*, the *scope for improvement is limited*, due to the advanced state of implementation of the programmes, and the limited capacity of stakeholders to make changes to the arrangements for collecting data. Where indicators cover several vulnerable groups jointly, it is difficult to extract information about Roma beneficiaries separately.

Conclusion 3 – *Roma Inclusion Plans are useful instruments*, offering benefits beyond their original purpose. The Guidance Notes have only minor shortcomings in terms of clarity and the greater challenge is for POs to develop good-quality plans complying with the guidance. Countries without numeric targets lack such a programme-level instrument.

Conclusion 4 – In all the focus countries, existing mechanisms for national-level dialogue on Roma inclusion do not appear to be sufficient in terms of frequency and depth to meet the needs of national authorities for feedback and achieving a common understanding with other domestic actors, donor embassies, and the FMO.

Conclusion 5 – EEA & Norway Grants are *suitable for innovative interventions* in the area of Roma inclusion due to their flexibility and limited administrative requirements.

Key findings from the literature review - approaches to measuring progress

In terms of **practices of other institutions**, under the **European Social Fund** the focus of the Monitoring & Evaluation framework for 2014-2020 is on gathering data that can be aggregated, and there is a clear separation of monitoring and evaluation tasks. Monitoring is counting individual beneficiaries and measuring outputs of interventions on participating individuals and entities, while evaluation covers measurement of impact. Regarding sensitive individual data, such as ethnicity, the Managing Authority determines the eligibility to participate. The **EU Fundamental Rights Agency** has developed a useful framework focused on progress in achieving fundamental rights. The Agency leads a Working Group on Roma inclusion indicators and is working on introducing the framework to monitor Roma inclusion across EU member states. Most of the beneficiary states of EEA & Norway Grants are actively engaged in the working group and are committed to the framework. A potentially relevant method of collection of qualitative and quantitative data was noted in the EU-funded Roma pilot 'A Good Start', which used **household surveys of beneficiaries** to collect baseline and end-line information.

Other potentially useful approaches to collecting qualitative data include: **Community Based Monitoring** methods, which could be used both for larger individual community interventions and where similar interventions cover larger numbers of geographic units; **Network of Monitors to Collect Data**, which was developed under SocioRoMap, part of the EEA & Norway Grant-funded Romanian RO25 programme and can therefore help fill some gaps in information on Roma inclusion; **Distributed Online Surveys**, which can be used to gather data cheaply from project stakeholders, such as social workers, teachers, police and other professionals working with Roma communities; and **Quantitative impact assessment** (experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation methods) which is suitable for well-designed innovative approaches where a larger number of similar beneficiaries is targeted.

In terms of **qualitative data collection methods**, these allow the use of findings of earlier interventions as well as more effective targeting of grant support in future interventions but require significant human and financial resources, also in terms of processing the data gathered, which can pose a burden on reporting units. **Participative methods for monitoring & evaluation** must be built into project design, and are therefore only suitable for future programming.

In terms of **setting baselines**, no baseline values are necessary for output indicators, but outcomes require an *ex ante* indicator and a baseline measurement. In exceptional cases baselines can be set retroactively – these are the projects that intervene in geographic and programme areas where previous comparative data are available, or in Small Grant Schemes and NGO Funds, where a similar programme recurs in different funding periods, information on the proportion of Roma-relevant project applications and projects funded from previous period can be used as a baseline for the current period. The highest quality data on Roma comes from a 2011 survey carried out by the UNDP and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. This survey is representative for Roma communities at country level but not at the level of lower territorial units.

Conclusions from literature review

Conclusion 6 – The Fundamental Rights Agency '**Structure – Process – Outcomes**' framework for monitoring progress towards achieving fundamental rights is particularly relevant for the EEA & Norway Grants because it connects institutions gathering data and all key stakeholders in Roma inclusion across all beneficiary countries.

Conclusion 7 – **Qualitative methods** suitable at present include **participative community-based monitoring and evaluation**. As participative methods have to be built directly into programme design, they are mainly suitable for future programming. They could be piloted in selected current projects to gather practical experience. Interim and final **surveys of selected stakeholders other than beneficiaries using online tools** are suitable even for current programmes, and can be implemented in several programmes where a similar intervention takes place in several localities.

Conclusion 8 – It was **difficult to aggregate data** across different stakeholders due to incomplete definition of Indicators. The system of project-level policy markers in use also uses definitions that are broad – a project where Roma inclusion is marked as a 'Significant Issue' or 'Fundamental Issue' can in reality correspond to a broad range of effects from insignificant to highly significant.

Conclusion 9 – **Established national approaches to defining vulnerable population** may be a suitable for targeting some programmes to marginalised Roma without explicit or exclusive targeting, which is seen as problematic by the national authorities in several of the countries with the highest proportion of Roma.

Conclusion 10 – Rigorous measurement of change requires **baseline data** – which usually need to be planned along with the intervention and collected at its start. Where baseline data are missing, these cannot be realistically collected *ex post*, not only because of the timing but also because of the limited capacity of Project Promoters and Programme Operators to change the monitoring framework in ongoing projects. For future setting of baselines, the sources available are quite limited. In Slovakia, the Atlas of Roma Communities may provide usable baseline data for some interventions. A similar effort is underway as part of RO25 '**Poverty alleviation**'. For small grant schemes the information on proportion of Roma-relevant project applications and approved projects in the previous period can be used as baseline for the current period and the current data as baseline for future programming.

Recommendations

These recommendations are in part applicable to present programming but also to Roma-relevant programming in the future.

Recommendation 1 – For existing programmes that use indicators where Roma are reported as part of vulnerable groups, ***Roma should be identified in a separate indicator*** where possible. In projects that only partially target Roma, a consistent methodology should be used to estimate the project contribution to Roma inclusion on the basis of an estimate of the proportion of Roma in the total number of beneficiaries. For policy markers at project level, for ‘Significant Issue’ there should be the expectation of a significant number of Roma beneficiaries and for ‘Fundamental Issue’, Roma inclusion or empowerment should be the explicit main focus of the project, and Roma beneficiaries should represent the majority of expected beneficiaries.

Recommendation 2 – Minor adjustments should be made to the guidance on Roma Inclusion Plans and the use of a ***programme-level instrument*** should be expanded, as this encourages POs to think through the specific mechanisms required, and to articulate them in an explicit way that allows discussion with other stakeholders. It may be feasible to extend this instrument to programmes where a concern is expressed in the MoU in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia – the PO could report explicitly on meeting the concern, which would provide an additional opportunity to discuss Roma inclusion and empowerment measures in these programmes.

Recommendation 3 – The mechanisms for ***national-level dialogue*** should be strengthened in order to speed up the iteration on Roma Inclusion Plans and exchange of other information that would help the implementation and monitoring of programmes. Further country-specific recommendations on national dialogue including specific actors to include are contained in the country reports for the five focus countries.

Recommendation 4 – A simple qualitative framework should be used to track ***innovative interventions*** financed by EEA & Norway Grants that are of particular importance in the area of Roma inclusion. It is important to ensure that the information that is best collected in the course of project implementation is available to support potential future scaling up or mainstreaming.

Recommendation 5 – Part of the ***evaluation*** effort should be focused on innovative interventions identified to gain understanding and facilitate learning for future programming. Where innovation or piloting serves as justification for a project, it is important to evaluate the success of the activities to provide the information needed for scale up. This requires an understanding of the potential channels for scaling up (e.g. which ministry is responsible for legislation and who are the key national stakeholders active in the area) and an outreach strategy. Evaluation in the present programming period can be used for promising interventions to plan more rigorous future evaluations using experimental and quasi-experimental methods that require a well-developed and documented intervention design.

Recommendation 6 – Use of the emerging ***S–P–O framework*** should be considered to identify what share of overall funding for Roma inclusion in a given country comes from EEA & Norway Grants and conversely, what share of EEA & Norway Grants focusing on Roma goes towards priorities identified in the frameworks.

Recommendation 7 – ***Participative monitoring instruments*** should be piloted to involve Roma communities in the monitoring of selected interventions,¹ and cost-effective online survey tools should be used to collect information from other participants. Participative monitoring can be piloted

¹ One such pilot started in late 2014 as part of an RO25-supported project, SocioRoMap.

with a few suitable interventions delivering services to broader communities, mobilising Roma communities to become involved in selecting indicators of success and reviewing them regularly. Online surveys can be used to gather evaluation information from stakeholders such as teachers, police, and mediators.

Recommendation 8 – *Learning across programmes and countries* should be supported. Summative annotations of projects should be shared in a standardised format (on an existing website) to make sure lessons learned are available to others tackling related interventions. There are other relevant national audiences that could benefit from having access to information on activities related to Roma inclusion.

Recommendation 9 – For future programming in countries where exclusive targeting of Roma is seen as discriminatory, **existing domestic categories of vulnerable populations** should be used. These can be combined with geographic targeting. Such an approach should be considered for targeting in future programming, where they would target disadvantaged Roma together with a few people of other ethnicities living in the vicinity, thereby avoiding raising local tensions or legal questions.

Recommendation 10 – Baselines for outcome indicators should be set as early as possible in programme preparation.