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Thematic Evaluation on IPA Support to Roma Communities

Executive Summary

June 2015



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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Objective of evaluation

Roma people are widely considered one of the largest and most vulnerable ethnic minorities in Europe. The vulnerability of large numbers of Roma people stems from their social exclusion, societal discrimination and extreme poverty.

Roma inclusion is a high priority on the EU's political agenda and that of Member States. The challenge is faced both within the EU and in the Enlargement countries.

In Enlargement countries, the EU's Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) has been one of the most important sources of financial assistance to help tackle the problems of Roma exclusion.

The Thematic Evaluation on IPA Support to Roma Communities was commissioned by DG ELARG (now DG NEAR) Evaluation Unit to "provide findings and recommendations to assist DG Enlargement [sic] in improving its programming and implementation of IPA II assistance, targeting support to Roma communities in the enlargement countries, based on the lessons learned and good practices in the programming and implementation of IPA I assistance."

The evaluation covers the eight enlargement countries for IPA I (including Croatia, now a Member State), and the seven years of IPA I programming from 2007 to 2013. This scope includes 80 identified interventions, with a total EU contribution of EUR 216 million. Of this total, some EUR 150 million was thought to be for Roma inclusion. Specific focus on EIDHR and Civil Society Facility funding was not included, although the evaluation did take these into account. Likewise, there were no specific questions on gender in the terms of reference, but again, the evaluation at the inception stage identified gender as a key issue to be taken into account.

There were in total 74 evaluation questions in the ToR under five broad headings, as follows:

- **Quality of intervention** logic, including needs assessment, relevance, design of individual interventions and overall coherence;
- **Performance of assistance**, covering impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of IPA interventions;
- **Quality of monitoring**, looking at mechanisms in place to assess impact of policies and measures for Roma inclusion, and how lessons learned are being incorporated into future actions;
- **EC Cooperation with external stakeholders** exploring how partners are selected, involved and with what results.
- Finally, the ToR asks for the **overall lessons learned and recommendations** for each of the above areas, to be applied to the process of programming and implementation for IPA II funding across the (now seven) enlargement countries.

1.2. Methodology

The evaluation was carried out by a team of four between July 2014 and March 2015. All eight countries were visited once between November 2014 and February 2015. Additional interviews were carried out in Budapest and Brussels. A total of 260 people were interviewed in person or by phone. Of the 80 interventions listed in the evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR), a sample of 25 projects was selected for detailed review according to agreed selection criteria.

Both desk and field research was structured using a set of specially designed research tools to extract the necessary information and provide the basic analysis. During the synthesis phase the team brought the basic information and analysis together, identified the key findings and issues, and developed recommendations.

Findings and recommendations were drafted and tested at a stakeholder workshop in April 2015, which included representatives of 19 government, non-governmental and international organisations. The draft final report was widely circulated, and comments from some 25 organisations were incorporated into the final report where appropriate.

1.3. EU policy and funding

The key document on Roma inclusion for enlargement countries is the “EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020”. Complementing this is a set of good practice guidelines (Vademecum) known as the “10 common basic principles on Roma Inclusion” from 2009.

All Enlargement countries except Turkey had developed national Roma inclusion strategies and all except Turkey and Kosovo had signed up to the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.

Around 1% of all IPA I funds was allocated for Roma inclusion. Nearly one quarter of this was allocated for displacement and return projects, nearly 20% on housing, and around 12% each for social inclusion/social services, education and employment. Less than 2% was allocated for anti-discrimination efforts, and less than 1% for specific women/girls or gender projects. There are wide country variations which cannot be accounted for solely by variations in strategic priorities.

1.4. Key findings

1.4.1. Quality of Intervention logic

The MIPD tool was not well adapted to the task of strategic programming. The MIPDs provided very little in terms of setting objectives and priorities for IPA support towards Roma. This vacuum had direct implications for the consistency and coherence in the programming of Roma assistance. By contrast, the Human Resources Development Operational Programmes (HRDOPs) in the countries with decentralised implementation systems (DIS) provided a much better programming framework. As a result, IPA I Component IV support to Roma had greater focus, corresponded to clearer long term priorities and offered a longer term perspective for planning and implementing Roma-specific support.

In some countries there was a perceived shift in programming from IPA 2012/2013 onwards – primarily in Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania. This was characterised by more IPA funding for Roma, with a more strategic focus and better sequencing. This is partly due to the Roma Seminars, Progress Reports and the more explicit link between accession prospects and the need to address Roma human rights.

The prioritisation of IPA funding should reside with the national government bodies charged with overseeing the delivery of the national Roma strategies. In practice, however, they often lacked the capacity and political clout to play a proactive role in IPA programming.

Three common weaknesses were identified in project designs. These were an absence of robust needs analyses, inadequate intervention logic and loosely defined indicators of achievement. The project design process does not sufficiently involve either Roma civil society or project final beneficiaries. Gender issues are rarely addressed in any substantial way in the programming.

Statistics on Roma in IPA countries are unreliable and present major challenges for programming, particularly in assessing the scale of the need to be addressed.

The new programming approach for IPA II offers significant opportunities for improved programming for Roma inclusion. More evidence, time and resources are needed for the needs assessment, programming and project design processes. In particular, consultation with civil society organisations and representatives of Roma communities needs to be more substantial and thoughtful, moving towards greater involvement of Roma communities in design.

Effective guidance is available in the form of the “10 Common Basic Principles”, although these need more detailed elaboration to apply in practice. Smaller countries’ policy capacity is weak, and needs additional support to be able to link IPA support to effective policy implementation.

1.4.2. Performance of Assistance

Efficiency

Most projects were completed to budget, either on time or with small no-cost extensions. The major factor affecting efficiency was the difficulties of land allocation for housing projects by municipal authorities.

Roma organisations had a very limited role in the implementation of IPA projects.

Effectiveness

Credible assessment of project effectiveness has proven difficult for this evaluation. This is because of poor design of indicators and means of verification, together with scarce project level evaluation.

Housing projects generally achieved their objectives in terms of providing new or improved housing, but there have been difficulties in providing sustainable livelihoods from associated activities.

Employment projects have not achieved any notable successes. However, there are several employment projects under way and it remains to be seen whether these can achieve more success. The **social inclusion** projects sampled are varied, and have quite different conclusions. The area-based modality provides a useful platform for addressing multiple concerns that are all related and mutually supporting.

Education has achieved desired institutional changes where there were clear links between national policy and IPA support. Evidence for improved educational attainment is piecemeal and anecdotal – but points strongly in the right direction. The role of the Roma Education Fund must be recognised as a force for positive policy models and practice.

Displacement projects were primarily for those displaced from Kosovo after the 1999 conflict. These projects were not designed specifically for Roma, but for all DPs, so there were no Roma-specific activities, objectives or indicators. Specifically for the Roma population, sustainability is highly questionable and there are concerns that housing projects creating (or re-creating) segregated communities.

Impact

Housing projects are expensive and relatively insignificant interventions compared to the scale of the needs. Alternative, policy level interventions, are needed if there is to be a substantial impact on the situation of Roma housing.

The **employment** projects have so far not achieved any discernible impact on Roma or wider communities. There have been no achievements in terms of institutional change or learning, and the success record at enabling Roma individuals to improve livelihoods either through self-employment or formal employment is very limited.

The one **social inclusion** project in the sample for which we can draw conclusions about impact is the Albania “Supporting Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities” example. This project is likely to achieve an impact on the target communities because of its focus on a limited geographic area and its multi-sectoral approach.

Education projects in Serbia are likely to have substantial impact over time. Education interventions in other countries have not been so successful at becoming institutionalised, and therefore their impact is likely to be limited.

Sustainable **return** to Kosovo have been questionable but hard to assess. The biggest challenge is because projects are not able to secure the necessary social and economic conditions for a sustainable return. Support for displaced people in their place of displacement is perhaps more

successful than assisting returns, depending on government policies towards integration. However, the volume of assistance for housing, employment and livelihoods is modest compared to the needs, and there are few systematic and reliable evaluations on impact of assistance.

Analyses of outputs and impact are rarely segregated by gender and age, and so any differential impact of assistance for the displaced Roma on women, men, boys and girls is not known. The assessment of the overall impact of IPA support is also hampered by the absence of reliable time-series data on the situation in Roma communities. This is the case at the project level, at municipality or county level, and at national levels.

Sustainability

Social housing models are rarely sustainable for those with no source of income other than social security benefits, and do not have adequate legal frameworks. Alternative models, such as 'village housing' and legalisation and improvement of existing settlements, have potential but need more time to prove sustainability and impact.

Sustainability of **employment** interventions is very low. Interventions focused on individuals not the environment in which the individuals lived (social attitudes, discrimination, economic development) so there were no social or systemic reforms to be sustained.

By contrast, the **social inclusion** interventions focused on systemic reform and longer term engagement with social development, hence the likelihood that they will have a long term beneficial effect.

Where **education** projects focused on systemic reform – mainly Serbia – they have been sustainably incorporated into education institutions. Short term grant-funded interventions and projects that do not have the full support of ministries of education are unlikely to be sustainable.

The **return** projects are unlikely to be sustainable. Partly this is because the context is economically poor and still discriminatory against minorities. Partly this is also because important factors were overlooked: houses built without thermal insulation, in inappropriate and polluted locations, insufficient support for livelihoods and for the receiving communities. Support for **displaced Roma in their places of displacement** – mainly in Montenegro and Serbia – did tackle some key aspects that are likely to have a sustainable impact – such as their civil documentation. There is insufficient evidence to assess the sustainability of the housing and income generation components.

Overall, the key lesson learned was that **project design determines sustainability**. In practice, this means investing more time and effort at the design stage – including greater and more meaningful participation of Roma communities – to truly understand the problems and the way in which potential solutions might work, in order to maximise benefits and sustainability later. Governments and their policies have a decisive factor in whether interventions are sustainable.

1.4.3. Quality of Monitoring

Monitoring at country, programme and project level is very poor. At country level, there are some efforts to provide indicators and data on the situation of Roma communities, but there is an almost complete lack of comparable information over time to show changes. This is critical data necessary to demonstrate whether policy and programmes are having the desired impact.

Reporting for the Roma Decade – both government and civil society shadow reporting – was helpful in identifying activities and policy changes, but not in demonstrating whether there were actual changes to Roma living standards.

MIPDs, as noted above, were not well suited to the task of strategic programming, and this included a total absence of appropriate indicators as far as Roma inclusion was concerned. The IPA I Operational Programmes were better, but because there was little Roma focus, there were no appropriate indicators. Programme monitoring mechanisms focused on activities rather than

impacts. At project level, again, monitoring focused on project implementation, mostly through the ROM mechanism. Project achievements in terms of impacts were rarely reported.

The four goals set by the EU Framework on Roma Inclusion Strategies provides a simple minimum requirement for monitoring systems, and should be the basis for future work to ensure that the necessary data is captured.

1.4.4. EC Cooperation with External Stakeholders

Relations between the EC and international organisations is generally positive and constructive. In cases where international organisations implement IPA funded projects there are concerns that they are substituting for national expertise and capacities, and not doing enough to support development of these capacities. Where there are direct grants to international organisations there is insufficient transparency and accountability.

With national governments, the EC and delegations/offices have good relations. Small countries have insufficient capacity in the field of Roma inclusion to play a strong role in strategy and programme design.

Roma civil society organisations are not sufficiently involved in programming, implementation and monitoring of IPA assistance. Sector approaches are diluting attention on specifically Roma issues (which cross sectors) and are undermining the potential for coherent programming and donor coordination.

More needs to be done to promote the participation of Roma civil society organisations in policy formulation, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In particular, there needs to be investment in the capacities of Roma civil society organisations to build their sustainable capacities to provide a voice and accountability role at both local and national levels. Local level governments need to be more involved, especially given the key role that they have to play in implementing the majority of measures.

1.5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation, the evaluation team have identified the following strategic priorities necessary for the IPA II funds to perform better than those of IPA I in terms of promoting Roma inclusion:

- **Political commitment** – both the European Commission and the accession countries must demonstrate through rhetoric, financial allocations and action that they are determined to tackle the specific problems faced by Roma communities throughout the enlargement countries.
- **Monitoring** – both the European Commission and the accession countries must monitor progress towards achieving the goals set in the EU Framework for Roma integration.
- **Civil Society** – a strong, independent and sustainable civil society with effective advocacy capacities is essential for maintaining the momentum of reform for improvement of institutions and society necessary for greater Roma inclusion and equal citizenship.
- **Gender** – the problems faced by Roma women and men, girls and boys, are not identical; policies, solutions and monitoring must take account not just exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, but also issues faced because of gender and age. These dimensions must be reflected also in monitoring data.

These strategic priorities are important to bear in mind when considering the report's recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The European Commission should formally remind accession countries of the obligations of future member states to comply with the **EU Framework for Roma integration and its four measurable goals**. The EC should request accession countries to ensure that they have the monitoring mechanisms in place to assess progress annually against these four goals.

Recommendation 2: Each EU Delegation/Office should ensure that there is a designated and named **Roma Focal Point**. This person would be the key link between political and operational aspects of the EU's work to support Roma inclusion, and ensure coherence of IPA II strategies with national strategies for Roma inclusion.

Recommendation 3: The European Commission, in cooperation with the enlargement countries, should prepare an internal working document (**'IPA II Roma strategy'**) for each enlargement country which sets out how the EC will use IPA II support over the period 2014-2025 to assist the countries to achieve their Roma inclusion goals as defined in the national strategies for Roma inclusion.

Recommendation 4: The European Commission is urged to ensure that there is an identified **gender focal point** in each delegation/office. The EC is also recommended to urge enlargement governments to identify gender focal points in the National IPA Committee (NIPAC), if they do not already exist. The EU Delegation/Office focal point on gender should then work closely with the NIPAC gender focal point in order to ensure improved quality of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation from a gender perspective throughout the IPA II cycle.

Recommendation 5: IPA II should support the one or more initiatives to **strengthen policy capacities in the enlargement region**. Initiatives need to be longer term, rooted in local experience and with strong mechanisms to feed back policy findings and recommendations to practitioners in government and civil society. Multi-beneficiary funding would be well suited for this purpose. Roma individuals and civil society organisations should be involved as far as possible, and collaborative links made between practitioners in civil society and government and between countries.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen quality assurance of programme design. All draft programmes and action designs need to be reviewed by appropriately experienced and qualified people to ensure compliance with the 10 Common Principles, and to provide input based on relevant evidence from policy and practice. The European Commission should develop procedures to ensure that this happens.

Recommendation 7: The European Commission, for each of the enlargement countries, should set out a strategic approach to **developing the capacities of civil society** in support of Roma inclusion. The goals of these strategies should emphasise i) the role of civil society in advocacy and accountability, ii) Sustainability of civil society organisations, and iii) the role of civil society in service delivery and project implementation.

Recommendation 8: Programming for IPA II actions should strongly consider medium to long term actions focusing on **integrated actions in local areas** with relatively high Roma populations. Roma populations tend to be geographically concentrated, so lend themselves to this kind of area-based (or geographically focused) interventions.

Recommendation 9: The European Commission should support the enlargement countries to develop and operationalise appropriate **monitoring systems** which will adequately capture information to monitor the achievement of each of the goals set out in the EU Framework for Roma Integration.

Recommendation 10: IPA II interventions for Roma inclusion should be **routinely evaluated** – both at mid-term and ex-post.

Recommendation 11: The European Commission should consider the following areas as of particular priority and suitability for **multi-beneficiary** support: i) Regional policy development and research, ii) Support for Roma civil society, networks and partnerships; iii) Support for national statistical and monitoring systems.