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“Reinforcing Policy Learning for Roma Inclusion”

European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network

Joint report on the use of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion based on country-by-country meetings

April 2014

Key Findings and Proposals



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The report is based on the information gathered in the context of country-by-country meetings organised in each of the eight countries participating in the European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network “Reinforcing policy learning for Roma inclusion” (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain), complemented by the information and data collected through desk-research. The country-by-country meetings, held between mid-September and end October 2013, gathered a reduced number of key actors in the planning and implementation of Structural Funds and in the development of Roma policies at national level. It is important to highlight the diversity and imbalances as regards the information which was available and could be gathered in each of the countries analysed.

DISCLAIMER:

This report has been drafted in the context of the European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network “Reinforcing policy learning for Roma inclusion”. This initiative is funded with support from the European Commission (Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Directorate-General) under the call for proposals “Reinforce learning networks for a more effective implementation of transnational actions under the ESF 2007-2013” and from the Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, which provides the co-financing. The sole responsibility of this report lies with the author and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.



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Table of contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Executive summary: Key findings and proposals
 1. Managing model and approach to Roma inclusion
 2. Areas of intervention
 3. Implementation mechanisms and major difficulties
 4. Alignment between policies and funds
 5. Coordination mechanisms
 6. Participation of stakeholders in the programme cycle
 7. Monitoring, results and impact



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I. Introduction

This report has been drafted in the context of the **European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network “Reinforcing policy learning for Roma inclusion” (the so-called EURoma+ Network)**. It is one of the key tools of the Network to achieve its goal of transferring the knowledge gained on the use of Structural Funds (SF) for Roma inclusion in the current programming period (2007-2013) to the upcoming one (2014-2020). Building upon the lessons learnt in the current period, the report elaborates policy messages and proposals for the upcoming one.

About the Network

The EURoma+ Network was launched in May 2013 with the aim of reinforcing the work done by the **European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds (EURoma Network)**.¹ The EURoma+ Network aims to increase the impact and effectiveness of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion by achieving, through transnational cooperation, a higher political commitment for the planning process of the 2014-2020 programming period and ensuring that the lessons learnt during the current programming period are incorporated as policy decisions in the next one.

Led, and co-financed, by the Spanish ESF Managing Authority (Ministry of Employment and Social Security), the Network gathers the Heads of the ESF Managing Authorities and National Roma Contact Points from 8 Member States (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain) together with European Commission representatives. The Network Technical Secretariat is hosted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG).

Why this report?

We are at a **critical juncture** in this moment of transition between the current (2007-2013) and next (2014-2020) Structural Funds programming period. The decisions taken in 2013 and 2014 regarding the Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) will have long-term implications as they will guide the Structural and Investment Funds interventions for the next seven-year period.

¹ The EURoma Network (*European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds*) was created in 2007 by the Spanish European Social Fund Managing Authority and the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) (acting as Technical Secretariat), with the aim of promoting the efficient use of Structural Funds for the social inclusion of the Roma population. The Network brings together Managing Authorities of the Structural Funds (principally ESF) and bodies responsible for Roma policies in 12 Member States. Detailed Information available at: <http://www.euromanet.eu>



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The European Union (EU) has witnessed the emergence of a **favourable EU political context for Roma inclusion** with the development of an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). The Europe 2020 Strategy targets² also concern the Roma inclusion and are due to be reflected in the National Reform Programmes (NRPs). In addition, the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSR) addressed by the European Commission to some Member States also refer to the Roma population.

However, today, the challenge is to reduce the gap between this positive policy framework and its implementation on the ground. This would imply framing the NRIS in the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Semester process (Annual Growth Survey, National Reform Programmes and Country-Specific Recommendations). The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) can be a crucial financial tool at the disposal of Member States to implement these policies and to achieve their goals.

The European Commission³ and the European Council⁴ have explicitly referred to the European Structural and Investment Funds as a key instrument to be employed by Member States to foster Roma inclusion. In particular, the **recent Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures**⁵ recommends that Member States *“take appropriate measures to include Roma integration among the priorities in the Partnership Agreements on the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014-2020.”*

The Cohesion Policy Package and the Regulations for the next programming period⁶ imply substantial progress, opening up a wide range of opportunities for a more efficient use of Structural and Investment Funds for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma, in the next programming period. The **ESF Regulation**⁷ **establishes for the first time one specific Investment Priority focused on “Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma”** under the Thematic Objective “Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty”. The General Regulation⁸ proposes that the Partnership Agreements also set out *“where appropriate, an integrated approach to addressing the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty or of target groups at highest risk of*

² Three of the five Europe 2020 targets proposed at the European level (EU Member States have also defined their own national targets under this heading) are directly relevant to the situation of the Roma: employment (75 % of the 20-64 years old to be employed); education (reducing school drop-out rates to below 10 %, and at least 40 % of 30-34 years old completing third level education); poverty/social exclusion (at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion).

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52012DC0226:en:NOT>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/national-strategies/index_en.htm

and http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122100.pdf

⁵ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/139979.pdf

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/legislation/index_en.cfm

⁷ <http://new.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1304>

⁸ <http://new.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303>



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discrimination or social exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities, persons with disabilities, the long term unemployed and young people not in employment, education and training” (Art 15, 2 (a) (iii)).

As shown by the previous EURoma report on *Roma and Structural Funds* (2010)⁹, in the 2007 – 2013 programming period there has been an increasing number of programmes and projects targeting Roma, which has allowed to experiment and gain knowledge on the use of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion. In order to take full advantage of the potentialities of Structural and Investment Funds in the upcoming period, the planning process shall build upon the knowledge and lessons learnt during the current programming period and concentrate objectives with a view to achieving a more effective use of these funds for Roma inclusion.

About the report

The present report aims to identify the lessons learnt in the 2007-2013 programming period in order to transform them into policy messages to be transferred to the 2014-2020 period. In particular, it has a two-fold objective:

- **Take stock about the use made of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion during the 2007-2013 programming period** in the eight countries participating in the EURoma+ Network. It analyses how countries have addressed issues such as the managing model and approach to Roma inclusion, the mechanisms for implementation, the monitoring and evaluation, and the consultation and participation of stakeholders, among others. It mainly focuses on the main advances as well as the limitations and difficulties encountered in each of these areas and how countries are tackling them.
- **Make proposals and recommendations for the 2014-2020 programming period both for the planning process and the implementation**, based on mutual learning and previous experiences of the different countries as well as the lessons learnt during the current programming period (i.e. work done by the EURoma Network).

Methodology

The report builds upon **country-by-country meetings** organised in each of the eight countries taking part in the Network (one per country). This one-day meetings aimed, through an open and interactive discussion, to gather information on the use of Structural and Investment Funds for Roma

⁹ http://www.euromanet.eu/upload/59/60/EUROMA_REPORT_web.pdf



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integration during the current and the upcoming programming period but also, and mainly, to promote a reflection and debate among stakeholders about the key challenges and shortcomings and possible ways to address them. They gathered a reduced number of key agents in the planning and implementation of Structural Funds and in the development of Roma policies, including European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund Managing Authorities, National Roma Contact Points, and other relevant actors (such as Intermediate Bodies, local and/or regional administrations/civil society organisations...). A questionnaire sent prior to the meetings was used as basis for the information-gathering and reflection process, in order to harmonise the contents of the country meetings so as to be able to compare results.

Meetings were organised between mid-September and end October 2013. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that the information and analysis contained in this report is limited in time (covering only the developments in the countries until the moment when the country-by-country visits took place) and in scope (mainly based on the information gathered during the visits and the desk-research made by the Technical Secretariat to prepare the meetings).

Another relevant element to take into account is that not all countries were at the same stage as regards their preparation of the 2014-2020 programming period and the development of the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes. As a consequence the level of information obtained in each of them differs and in some cases it is difficult to fully assess how the different elements will be addressed in the upcoming programming period as well as to make comparisons between countries.

Expected use

This report is expected to have a three-fold use:

- To be a key element for the process of exchange of information and mutual learning between Member States. Member States will have the opportunity to learn about each others' experiences and notably the limitations and difficulties faced and the strategies used to cope with them.
- To serve as a reference regarding the state-of-play of participant countries, including the key areas which should be addressed, and the types of actions which could be undertaken to improve the situation.



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- To compare at the end of the project how the main objectives of the project have been achieved by reviewing the extent to which the proposals and recommendations have been integrated in the Member States' Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes, which should be already published by the end of the project (1st February 2015).



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II. Executive summary: Key findings and proposals

This report addresses, in specific sections, the different aspects to be considered when preparing the upcoming European Structural and Investment Funds programming period, notably the managing model and approach to Roma inclusion in OPs, the main areas of intervention, the implementation mechanisms in the OPs, the coordination mechanisms, the alignment between funds and policies and the monitoring and assessment of results and impact. Before reviewing the key findings and proposals, a number of general considerations should be taken into account:

- 1. More relevance in policies.** Roma-related issues have acquired an increased relevance on the Structural and Investment Funds agenda of Member States in recent years. The volume of funds targeting Roma has increased significantly, and Roma are more visible in Operational Programmes, both through targeted actions or mainstream interventions to disadvantaged groups.
- 2. Increasing commitment by Member States.** In general terms, Member States involved in the process of elaboration of this report manifest their willingness to reinforce Structural Funds interventions in order to address Roma needs. Nevertheless, the challenges ahead in the upcoming programming period are enormous, considering the situation of poverty, exclusion and discrimination that Roma population is facing in the European Union. Against this background, whereas there is a clear commitment, substantial doubts remain about what to do and how to do it in order to achieve the highest impact.
- 3. Different contexts and realities condition the answers.** The different national contexts and realities (demography, social situation, administrative organisation, weight and characteristics of the Roma, experience in the Structural Funds management, capacity of the actors...) condition the answers given and the development of interventions. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that could be implemented in all countries, but a wide and rich range of responses and formulas.
- 4. The risk of the economic crisis.** The current context of economic and financial crisis is having high impact on the process of Roma inclusion in general and on the process of management of Structural Funds in particular. Many countries point out the challenges brought by the crisis, ranging from the difficulties regarding the implementation of actions due to the lack of available financial resources, to the new social context where Roma needs become invisible as increasing



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number of vulnerable persons and groups arise. In this context, in some cases targeted actions appear less legitimated; in others, the increasing severe exclusion takes some countries to focus more on covering basic and urgent needs rather than to provide structural conditions to overcome such difficulties.

- 5. Progress in terms of planning but not so much in terms of practical implementation and results.** In general terms, this programming period has witnessed significant advances in terms of planning; however, we are still lacking further progress in terms of implementation and actual impact. The gap between planning and implementation seems to be mainly linked to elements such as the limited experience in the implementation of Roma projects and the scarce knowledge of the target group, the lack of capacity of the actors involved and, many times, the inadequate identification of those more competent to fulfil the responsibilities assigned, along with administrative burdens and bottlenecks.
- 6. Little alignment between policies and funds.** The approval of the National Roma Integration Strategies by Member States has not implied substantial changes in the implementation of the Structural Funds that would have ensured the full alignment between funds and policies. Nevertheless all countries covered by this report declare their plans to take into account the National Roma Integration Strategies in the next programming period. In addition, an increased cooperation between the ESF/ERDF Managing Authorities is foreseen and in some countries there are even plans to reinforce or launch multidimensional projects supported, or complemented, by several EU Funds. However, planning for the next programming period show once more that the Structural and Investment Funds will most probably not be fully aligned with the National Roma Integration Strategies.
- 7. Limited increase as regards the types of funds used.** The European Social Fund remains the main funding source for the interventions related to Roma. While it is true that there is an increasing use of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the use of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is almost absent.
- 8. Critical elements for success.** Despite evident difficulties in the implementation, there is an increasing understanding of the Structural Funds and of the critical elements for ensuring their successful use, which in fact are similar in all countries. Long-term projects, integrated approach, active involvement of the Roma, adequate institutional capacity, close cooperation between administrations at all levels (both at horizontal and vertical level) and partnership with other relevant actors, deep knowledge of the Roma issue, are among the most important factors for Structural Funds interventions to succeed (or fail) in contributing to Roma inclusion.



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- 9. Particular attention to the involvement of relevant actors and the partnership principle.** There have been certain improvements as regards stakeholders' participation, moving towards a more structured and coordinated involvement; however there is still room for improvement moving from a formal partnership to real involvement and cooperation. Taking full advantage of instruments such as the recently adopted European Code of Conduct on Partnership should allow making progress. Now that the next programming period is being defined, it is the perfect moment to ensure that the partnership principle is fully taken into account and is applied throughout all the phases, from the planning to the monitoring and evaluation.
- 10. Administrative burden.** Participant countries have insisted on the risk of ineffectiveness due to the increasing administrative complexity in the management of the funds. Despite pretended simplification in the Regulations, daily experience demonstrates that at the national level the administrative rules become more important than the results. The systematic delays, the fiscal constraints of the administration to provide funds in advance, the difficulties for the co-financing and the limited possibilities to allocate funds to final beneficiaries in the long-term, appear to be major difficulties, in many cases resulting in non-implementation and de-commitment of the Operational Programmes.
- 11. Enough information about implementation, poor feedback on achievements.** There is a general awareness about the need for more accurate and updated information on results. Progress has been made in the processes and mechanisms to gather information on concrete achievements of the Structural Funds interventions on Roma, but there is still much to be done as regards monitoring and evaluation. The lack of indicators and data continue to be at the origin of the absence of reliable and proven results.
- 12. The need for external support (from the European Commission) and cooperation.** All countries insist on the need for an increased support from the European Commission. They call on the Commission to provide more practical orientations and guidelines during the planning process of the OPs (including, for example, the identification of indicators and mechanisms for data collection) and ongoing support during the implementation phase, especially by fostering institutional capacity. The cooperation between countries, by developing systems of mutual learning, peer reviews, exchange of knowledge and working methods, has been considered of high importance for overcoming common difficulties and for contributing to qualitative progress.



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Key findings and proposals

This chapter highlights the key findings of the country-by-country visits and puts forward a number of proposals and ideas which could help address the main areas to be considered when preparing the upcoming programming period and notably the challenges raised in each of them in order to achieve a better use of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion.

Managing model and approach to Roma inclusion

- ▶ In the framework of the Structural Funds Regulations, Member States may choose different managing models according to their respective administrative situations. During the *current programming period*, in the eight countries analysed there has been a **generalised prevalence of a public, centralised managing model**. Only in one case, Spain, the ESF-funded Fight against Discrimination Operational Programme is managed by a public-private partnership (5 public bodies and 5 non-profit organisations). Most countries have opted for a centralised managing model (regional implementation is managed at national level); except those with a high degree of decentralisation (Spain and Italy), together with Greece (5 regional OPs) and Czech Republic (9 regional OPs), which have decided to use a managing model combining national and regional OPs.

Most countries only foresee minor changes for the *upcoming programming period*. The Czech Republic is, however, considering moving from a structure with national and regional OPs to one only with national programmes. Even if there is no impact assessment of each of the models, it seems that the main challenge for the countries with a centralised model is the potential risk of widening the existing distance between the national and the local level as regards the implementation; while for those countries with OPs at regional level the main risk is to fail to achieve the full alignment between regional OPs and national strategies and priorities. In order to make progress in the *next programming period* it is essential to address these challenges by, in the case of the centralised model, reinforcing communication and coordination channels at vertical level, and in the case of the decentralised model, increasing the monitoring role of the National Roma Contact Point who, together with Managing Authorities, ensure that Roma priorities are considered not only in the national OPs but also in the regional ones.

- ▶ Although there are no specific OPs for Roma in the countries participating in this report, a **significantly higher attention given to Roma issues in general Operational Programmes is perceived**. It has been widely stressed how Roma are being targeted in an increased number of OPs and to a larger extent than previously. In some cases there are dedicated lines of



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intervention for Roma within some of the programmes; in others, Roma are included within general lines of intervention. The same trend is observed for the *next programming period*.

The inclusion of Roma issues in general Operational Programmes is commonly perceived as an effective way of promoting mainstreaming of Roma issues in different areas.

- ▶ In the *current programming period* there is a **generalised use of European Social Fund (ESF)** aiming at the promotion of Roma inclusion. Funds related to the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** have only been used to a limited extent and mainly in relation to investments in basic infrastructure and urban regeneration; only in a few cases they have been used for construction and/or renovation of housing such as in the Slovak Republic. According to the information gathered the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** has not been used for Roma inclusion in this programming period.

As regards the use of ERDF, five out of the eight countries analysed have declared the use of this fund for Roma inclusion. In these cases we can find different managing models, usually single OPs in which ESF operations are complemented with ERDF ones (in Hungary, for example, the key Operational Programmes for Roma inclusion -the Social Renewal OP and the Social Infrastructure OP- allow for the combination of ESF and ERDF funds). However, the multi-fund option has not been considered in any case.

For the *next programming period*, countries recognise the importance of using the whole potential offered by European Structural and Investment Funds and clearly envisage a wider use of all funds. Nonetheless only the Slovak Republic is considering using multi-fund options, and only Romania plans to use EAFRD for Roma inclusion.

- ▶ In the *2007-2013 programming period*, **countries seem to follow a combination of targeted, mainstreaming and, only in some cases, territorial approaches. No major changes are foreseen in this regard** for the *next programming period*. There is a consensus on the need of having a combination of various approaches according to national, regional and local circumstances rather than one single model. While targeted actions are easy to identify, in many cases it is difficult to recognise whether and to what extent mainstreaming and territorial approaches are benefiting Roma in practice.
- ▶ There seems to be a **positive trend towards a model in which Roma issues are considered with an explicit but not exclusive approach**. There is progress regarding the inclusion of Roma as a target group as well as the existence of specific actions for Roma. There appears to be an increasing awareness on the need to mention Roma explicitly in order to ensure that Structural Funds interventions reach them. In most of the countries Roma are named as beneficiaries in one or several OPs. However, the targeted actions are in many cases limited to certain and



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concrete interventions. While welcoming this positive trend towards an *explicit but not exclusive approach*, it is important to bear in mind the **need to ensure that Roma also become beneficiaries of other general measures and OPs**. Targeted actions are conceived to compensate existing disadvantages and imbalances, but they have a limited impact. For the mainstreaming approach to be effective, it is very important to develop a detailed planning process identifying how the different actions foreseen in the OPs will reach Roma, how activities and working methods will be adapted -when necessary- to Roma needs, how information about results and Roma participation will be gathered, and how the active participation of Roma will be guaranteed. Otherwise, there is an evident risk of not reaching Roma despite the initial intentions.

Areas of intervention

- ▶ In the *current programming period*, the actions targeting Roma, whether directly or indirectly, revolve around **three predominant areas of intervention, notably employment, education (more recently) and community-level social integration**, which in many cases are addressed in dedicated thematic Operational Programmes or priority axis. Other areas such as health care or housing seem, except in some cases, to be considered to a lesser extent and are included in programmes and initiatives following a mainstreaming approach. Increasing the quality and accessibility of social services is also regularly mentioned as an area of relevance for Roma integration.
- ▶ As already mentioned, initiatives in the area of **housing** are limited and basically linked to urban regeneration and basic infrastructure and not so much to the construction/renovation of houses. The potential of the amendment of **article 7.2. of the ERDF Regulation** for housing interventions has been clearly underused. Six countries (Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain) make an explicit reference to the possibilities opened by art. 7.2 in their National Roma Integration Strategies, but there remains a lot to be done as regards the actual implementation; only some countries have started its implementation in the current period and, as it is quite recent, it is difficult to evaluate its impact. It is alleged that the amendment was introduced in the middle of the programming period (2010) when all interventions were already planned, and that Managing Authorities lack practical guidelines and tools for the implementation.

For the *next programming period*, although the ERDF Regulation does not include a specific article similar to the current article 7.2., it allows for similar interventions in the area of housing through the urban and economic regeneration. Some countries which have already started to



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work with article 7.2. in the current programming period are planning to continue with the work in this area in the next one (e.g. Hungary).

- ▶ Despite increasing openness to use Structural Funds in different areas, **there is a need for a wider scope** in the *next programming period*. Employment, education and social inclusion remain outstanding areas of investment concerning Roma. Actions related to child poverty and early childhood development are also given particular attention by some countries. Some positive trends are perceived, such as efforts to combine social / soft measures with hard measures using a more integrated approach and a growing attention given to housing interventions and urban regeneration; operations in the area of social housing are also being considered by some countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovak Republic). Specific interventions with Roma migrants have only been referred to during the *current programming period* in two countries analysed (Italy and Spain) and it is still undefined if these specific actions will be included in the *next programming period*, either in these two countries, or others.
- ▶ In the *current programming period*, in many cases, notably in situations of high poverty and segregation, particular attention has been given to initiatives aimed at addressing the existing basic needs of the Roma and ensuring the **provision of necessary social services**. It also seems that increasing the accessibility to social services, especially in segregated settlements, will remain a key area for some countries in the *next programming period* without considering going one step forward.

It is important to bear in mind that while these “palliative measures”, when successful, contribute to improving the living conditions of the Roma, they maintain the segregation and do not **contribute to a real integration of Roma**. Programmes should go beyond covering the basic needs and the access to, and provision of, social services, and invest in key areas that promote social inclusion, such as employment and education. Structural and Investment Funds should be used as a strategic tool to promote structural and ambitious social changes. Indeed, Structural and Investment Funds provide the adequate framework, conditions and resources so as to **launch pilot projects** during the *upcoming programming period* aiming at the eradication of segregated settlements.

In those geographical areas where there is a high concentration of Roma, short-term interventions to improve the living conditions should be combined with medium/long-term interventions aimed at finding sustainable solutions to ensure that these areas become fully integrated in the territory and that the persons living in them enjoy the same opportunities as any other citizen.



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- ▶ Although during the *current programming period* **equal opportunities and non-discrimination** are integrated in many OPs as horizontal principles, the general impression is that no substantial or tangible achievements have occurred in these areas. This proves that the inclusion of horizontal priorities in the design of OPs is not a guarantee of their implementation. Since Regulations for the *next programming period* give more importance to these cross-cutting issues and all countries are committed to make further progress in this area, particular attention should be given to monitoring how these principles are translated into practice. Proposals to ensure an effective monitoring range from involving the Equality Bodies and human rights organisations active in combating discrimination in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Operational Programmes, adopting positive actions to prevent or compensate the disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic discrimination, and including awareness-raising actions within OP interventions, to providing data disaggregated by gender and information of the achievements.
- ▶ Decisions taken on key priority areas of intervention are increasingly based on **research and analysis**. Most countries analysed have declared the relevance of the research made to inform the decisions taken. Accurate and up-to-date information in the form of maps, studies, reports, etc., is considered as a key for implementing more effective, results-oriented and targeted measures and interventions responding to the real needs of Roma. Most countries have declared that recent research on the socio-economic situation of the Roma has been a source of information in the planning process of the future OPs and some countries (Czech Republic and Greece) have even made use of Technical Assistance to finance this research, which is an option available to all countries.

Implementation mechanisms and major difficulties

- ▶ As regards the **main actors in the implementation**, **Intermediate Bodies (IBs)** play a crucial role as they are entrusted with the management and implementation of part of OPs on behalf of the Managing Authorities. Structural and Investment Funds Regulations allow for a wide variety of options regarding Intermediate Bodies. Elements such as the nature of the body, its role, responsibilities as well as its capacity and knowledge, have an impact on the way the body performs and on its capacity to contribute to a successful use of Structural and Investment Funds.

In the *current programming period*, countries analysed in this report have mainly opted for public and generalist Intermediate Bodies. Only in one case (Spain) private Intermediate Bodies have been involved. Although most countries have opted for generalist IBs, a few have realised



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that the management and implementation of certain programmes may require a certain degree of specialisation. It is the case of Spain where a specialised civil society organisation was entrusted as IB, Bulgaria and its Social Assistance Agency, and the Slovak Republic, which decided to set up two specialised implementing agencies (the Social Development Fund in the area of social inclusion and the Social Implementing Agency in the one of employment).

Countries do not foresee major changes in this respect *for the next programming period*. Regardless of the nature of the body (public/private, generalist/specialised), what is important is to identify the body that is best placed to fulfil the role assigned. A key element should be its proven capacity and experience in the management and implementation of Structural Funds operations, and if these two elements go hand in hand with a good knowledge of the field covered, a better management and implementation of OPs could be ensured. In this regard, it is of great importance not to mix the management capacity with the representativeness role.

- ▶ A wide variety of **beneficiaries** are identified in the *2007-2013 programming period* ranging from public organisations (municipalities, public agencies) to academic institutions (schools, universities, kindergartens) and civil society organisations at national, regional and local level. When it comes to the beneficiaries, there is a recurrent reflection on whether the management of Structural and Investment Funds should be opened to as many beneficiaries as possible – which would in turn translate into a large number of interventions but with a small scale - or whether the access to the Structural Funds should be limited to a smaller number of beneficiaries – and interventions- but with a higher potential for impact.

In the *current programming period*, most countries analysed have opted for the first option, i.e. opening up the participation of beneficiaries to as many stakeholders as possible, including small public and private stakeholders at local level, with the aim of cooperating with actors which are closer to the Roma local communities. To this end, they have delivered Structural Funds through small and short/medium-term grants. However, it is widely acknowledged that this choice is related to two main challenges with impact on the effectiveness of the funds: firstly, the fragmentation of resources and as a result a reduced impact; secondly, the lack of capacity of the small stakeholders to manage the funds.

Aware of this, countries are making efforts to strike the right balance between achieving a real impact and ensuring a wide access. Both in the *current and the upcoming programming period* a general trend to combine these small projects, which can be undertaken by public or private bodies with less capacity, with bigger projects with a higher potential for impact, which can be undertaken by organisations with proven capacity and experience, is being considered.



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- ▶ The access to Structural Funds is directly linked to the **need for institutional capacity**. A recurrent challenge detected in all countries is the lack of the necessary skills for an effective involvement of many beneficiaries, especially those who are in a better position to reach Roma, which limits their capacity to access and implement Structural Funds. This is particularly relevant in the case of local authorities and civil society organisations (particularly Roma organisations). Some countries have already undertaken initiatives to improve the capacity of stakeholders as regards the access and use of Structural Funds. For example, the Czech Republic created in 2008 the *Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities* (currently called *Agency for Social Inclusion*) with the aim of providing assistance to municipalities in the preparation and implementation of projects or action plans which target socially excluded Roma communities, including the identification and implementation of the funds available for these projects, notably EU funds.

In the *upcoming programming period*, some countries are considering the development of further initiatives to address this challenge. Two relevant instruments at the disposal of all Member States to promote access to Structural and Investment Funds and the capacity-building are the global grants and the technical assistance. But unfortunately, it seems that their potential is not, and will not be, fully used.

- ▶ Particular attention should also be paid to the **challenges and barriers that organisations face when implementing the funds**. These include the co-financing required, the level and moment of payment of the pre-financing as well as the delays in payments and the complexity of the management systems. Aware of these challenges, notably in the current context of economic and financial crisis, countries are trying to explore different options for addressing them in the *upcoming programming period*. As regards co-financing, Italy has envisaged a mechanism that allows central administration to provide the necessary co-financing to regional OPs of Southern regions to ensure implementation. Options considered in other countries include the use of different co-financing rates according to the type of beneficiaries. Concerning pre-financing and payments to beneficiaries, Managing Authorities are trying to find flexible ways to overcome the abovementioned problems. Bulgaria is considering creating a special fund at the disposal of beneficiaries which have cash flow problems to ensure the financing of interim and final payments.
- ▶ In the *2007-2013 programming period*, the **mechanism for allocation of funds** most commonly used by countries has been the calls for proposals issued by Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies. The only exceptions are Spain and the Slovak Republic. In the Spanish case, through the ESF Multiregional Operational Programme Fight against Discrimination 2007-2013, 10 entities (5



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national public bodies and 5 non-profit organisations) act as Intermediate Bodies and are entrusted with the management of funds for the whole programming period, according to several selection criteria (mainly related to previous experience and proven technical, administrative and financial capacity). In the case of the Slovak Republic there is a mixed system combining long-term national projects under direct contracting (to the Implementing Agency Social Development Fund) and calls for proposals aimed at low-scale projects. It seems that countries do not foresee major changes for the *next programming period*, even if Regulations are open to the combination of different models and mechanisms.

- ▶ The generalised system of calls for proposals has had a clear impact on the implementation of the Structural Funds and notably on aspects such as the **type, duration and dimensions of projects**, which have been a recurrent issue for reflection for Managing Authorities. Although the duration and dimensions of projects vary, a general trend to implement small, short/medium-term projects, ranging from 6 months to 3 years is observed in the *current programming period*. For the *upcoming programming period*, although countries do not foresee any major changes as regards the mechanisms for allocation of funds (with the system of call for proposals as the most commonly used), there is a positive clear trend to move towards projects with an increased length and financial allocation, which in principle should have a higher potential to achieve a real social change and may, in the medium run, become part of, or complement, local, regional or national policies.
- ▶ In the *current programming period*, a few countries have valued the option of testing new approaches through the **implementation of pilot projects**, with a view to scaling them up if they achieve positive results. Nevertheless, despite the initial plans, in practice, the scale up and generalisation of projects has not taken place in general terms, mainly due to the lack of the necessary mechanisms (as a result of the lack of resources or of measures to evaluate the results). Setting up the necessary mechanisms for the continuation and scale up of successful projects, providing the necessary resources and enabling the evaluation of projects and the introduction of adaptations where appropriate is an opportunity that countries should further explore for the *next programming period*.
- ▶ The integration of the Roma community requires a **multi-dimensional and integrated approach** (both in terms of interventions and of combination of funds) with a view to effectively address the complexity and interdependence of the problems currently affecting the Roma population. In the *current programming period*, there was a general awareness about the importance of applying an integrated approach to programmes and interventions and a clear trend to conceive them following this approach. Four examples of this approach are the Slovak Republic, through



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the so called “complex approach” to ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’, the Czech Republic through the Integrated Operational Programme, Hungary and its pilot programme “Complex Programme for the Settlements” and Bulgaria, which even decided to undertake a reprogramming in order to include this integrated approach and combine ESF and ERDF funding for two schemes: “Support for the provision of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and low-income populations and other disadvantaged groups” and “INTEGRA”. The key challenge was the implementation, arguably due to the lack of experience and knowledge on how to implement such an approach in practice and, in some cases, the weaknesses in the design of the approach.

Indeed, for the *2014-2020 programming period*, most countries are considering the use of an integrated approach as a key priority but its practical management remains a challenge. In some cases it is considered as a general approach to be used in the different Operational Programmes; in others it is considered as a requirement. For example, in the Bulgarian Human Resources Development Operational Programme, in order to be approved, actions under the investment priority “Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma” should be conceived with an integrated approach and compulsorily address at least two of the four defined areas of intervention, namely improving access to employment, ensuring access to social and health services, developing the capacity of the local communities and overcoming of the negative stereotypes, improving the access to education for the marginalised groups (the first two are compulsory). Another example of these efforts towards more integrated interventions is Greece where, in the next programming period, regional OPs will combine ESF and ERDF funds.

The new Regulations propose new mechanisms for implementation and strengthen some of the existing ones in order to facilitate the integrated territorial approach and to support local actions. The following can be very useful when addressing Roma needs from a micro-territorial perspective: Community-led local development (CLLD)¹⁰, Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)¹¹, Joint Action Plans and Integrated Operations. These instruments may have a real impact on Roma inclusion if (1) they are planned from the very beginning of the process, (2) sufficient resources are allocated and (3) clear practical guidelines as regards the design and implementation of these initiatives are provided.

- ▶ A valuable instrument foreseen to open up the opportunities of the Structural Funds to groups and communities experiencing poverty is the **global grants**, which is foreseen both in the Regulations of the *current and the upcoming programming periods*. This instrument could help

¹⁰ http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/en/clld_en.cfm

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/iti_en.pdf



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address the widely acknowledged difficulties that some key stakeholders for Roma inclusion, for instance, municipalities or NGOs, experience in accessing Structural Funds mainly due to lack of capacity. However, despite their potential and proven track record when used in the previous periods and in other contexts, this instrument has been remarkably underused. In the *current programming period*, Member States have been extraordinarily cautious in using this mechanism arguably due to a lack of awareness on this instrument, a lack of understanding on how to use it in practice and/or because it was, in many cases, perceived as a complex tool. Moreover, some Managing Authorities recognise their lack of organisational capacity to manage global grants. For the future *2014-2020 programming period*, countries are aware about the relevance of using all available instruments, including global grants, but they feel that they lack further guidance on how to use it correctly in practice. Except for the Slovak Republic, no country plans to use global grants.

- ▶ **Technical Assistance** is another relevant tool with a potentially important role in the quality use of Structural and Investment Funds. In the *2007-2013 programming period*, the Technical Assistance budgets at the disposal of countries have not been fully used. In addition, countries have not used its total potential by limiting the use of these funds to certain beneficiaries and certain activities. Only the National Roma Integration Strategies of two of the countries (Bulgaria and Spain) explicitly mention the use of EU Technical Assistance. And only a few countries have spent part of the funds available on studies or research on Roma (e.g. Greece, Czech Republic). On the other hand, while Structural Funds Regulations allow for the use of Technical Assistance by Managing Authorities but also by beneficiaries in general, only in isolated cases these funds have been made available to actors such as municipalities, civil society organisations, etc. In the *2014-2020 programming period*, Technical Assistance is still mainly considered for the use of Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies for activities such as training, evaluations, analysis and reports. Only Romania is considering making Technical Assistance available to beneficiaries through the creation of a database of experts which would provide technical assistance during the project cycle to the final beneficiaries.
- ▶ **Transnational cooperation** brings great potential to improving the use of Structural and Investment Funds for Roma inclusion in all Member States. However, despite initiatives like the EURoma Network, transnational cooperation seems to be underused in the *current programming period*. Some countries mention the transnational cooperation as regards Roma inclusion in their OPs (Spain, Czech Republic), some others (Italy) whether mentioning them or not, plan to carry out transnational cooperation for the transfer of good practices related to the social inclusion of Roma. The potential of the transnational cooperation for Roma inclusion should be further explored in the *upcoming programming period*.



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Alignment between policies and funds

- ▶ For policies to be effective, the allocation of the necessary financial resources is needed; and in turn, for financial resources to be effective, they need to be allocated according to policy targets. Structural Funds have been pointed out by the European Commission as a crucial financial instrument for the implementation of the **National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS)**, which should be seen in the context of the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, the National Reform Programmes and the global Semester Process. There is a clear progress as regards the alignment in the *upcoming programming period*, in which Operational Programmes of relevance for Roma mainly follow the Thematic Objective 9 “promoting social inclusion and combating poverty”, which should contribute to achieving some of the Europe 2020 targets.

In fact, all countries analysed referred to the Europe 2020 Strategy as a guide for the planning process of the Structural Funds. And indeed, most countries focus on Thematic Objective 9, and specifically on the investment priority “Integration of marginalised communities such as Roma” when planning the use of the Structural and Investment Funds to achieve **EU 2020 targets**. However, the fact that Roma are considered as a target group within one specific thematic objective should not prevent from including them in others as established by the Common Strategic Framework. In fact, it is highly recommended to target Roma social inclusion and equality from different perspectives, not only as one of the most excluded groups but also in the context of mainstream policies and programmes. In particular, there are three other investment priorities of relevance for Roma: “Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility” (number 8), “Investing in education, skills and lifelong learning” (number 10) and “Enhancing institutional and administrative capacities” (number 11). The **inclusion of Roma issues under different priorities**, going beyond the consideration of Roma from the point of view of extreme exclusion, would certainly contribute further to the achievement of the objectives in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

- ▶ It seems that in the *current programming period* there is little alignment between Structural Funds and the **National Roma Integration Strategies**. The approval of the NRIS has implied a step forward for some countries in terms of policy design. Nevertheless, in most countries, although there seems to be a political commitment to comply with the objectives set in the Strategies, their adoption has not led to any revision of the Operational Programmes or at least to major changes.



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In the *upcoming programming period*, countries affirm that the National Roma Integration Strategies have been or will be taken into consideration in the programming of Structural and Investment Funds. For instance, most of the Managing Authorities foresee interventions focused on employment and education, two of the four main fields of action proposed by the European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. However, investments in the other two fields, healthcare and housing, are quite vague or considered to a lesser extent. On the other hand, interventions to address the cross-cutting issues of equal treatment and non-discrimination, even if claimed to be prioritised, continue to be clearly undefined.

It is the role of the European Commission to monitor that the planning and implementation of the Structural and Investment Funds are fully aligned with the NRIS. At national level, this responsibility should be assumed by the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP). However, the assumption of this responsibility is not always possible taking into account that in some countries the role of the NRCP is very weak, or merely formal, or they lack the political leadership and administrative capacity to fulfil these tasks. A revision of such competences and capacities should be considered as a step forward in ensuring a correct alignment between policies and funds.

Coordination mechanisms

- ▶ An appropriate coordination between administrations both at horizontal (between departments working in different areas) and vertical (between the central, regional and local) level is a prerequisite for an increased efficiency and impact of Structural and Investment Funds on Roma inclusion. Despite certain progress, this is an area where many weaknesses remain and further efforts are needed in the upcoming programming period. Over the last years, most countries have set up **institutional mechanisms to tackle the inclusion of the Roma community** (e.g. specific bodies, agencies); the challenge now is to find **ways to link these mechanisms with the Structural Funds**. Over the *current programming period* countries have realised about the need to improve the connection between these two areas. Some countries have opted for addressing Structural Funds for Roma inclusion in the context of existing structures dealing with Roma-related issues; in others, specific *ad hoc* mechanisms and bodies have been set up. In general terms, while progress is more evident in the coordination at horizontal level, there are still remaining challenges and areas of improvement, notably as regards vertical cooperation, which countries have started to address in this programming period and plan to address further in the upcoming one.



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While having the adequate structures is a precondition for a proper coordination, countries should also reflect on the quality and content of the working process if progress is to be made in the *upcoming programming period*. As regards **the structure**, either by creating *ad hoc* structures for the specific coordination between Structural Funds MAs and those responsible for Roma issues or by including regularly the Structural Funds in the agenda of wider structures on Roma, the combination of mechanisms at political and technical level seems to be the most valuable formula. The first ones set the general framework for action and guarantee the political commitment; the second ones are in charge of translating the policy decisions into actions. Synergy between both structures is essential. A clear formal **framework for cooperation** should be set since the beginning of the process, including a clear definition of the actors involved, their roles and responsibilities as well as a shared agenda, objectives and work plan to guide actions. Mechanisms to implement this framework are to be established already in the planning process, not only in the implementation phase.

Participation of stakeholders in the programme cycle

- ▶ The **involvement of a wide range of stakeholders** is a key element in achieving greater impact of programmes and policies. Structural and Investment Funds Regulations for the next programming period (art. 5 of the Regulation on Common Provisions for the Structural Funds) pay particular attention to the involvement of relevant stakeholders in all the process. As regards Roma and Structural and Investment Funds, relevant partners include civil society organisations (including Roma and organisations working with Roma), public administrations at all levels (from the national to the regional and local levels), bodies responsible for the equal treatment and equal opportunities as well as other institutions such as academic organisations.

During the *current programming period* there have been certain improvements as regards stakeholders' participation, moving towards a more structured and coordinated involvement. However, there is still room for improvement. Countries analysed are aware of the necessary elements and processes to make progress in the *next programming period*, including extending the participation to the whole project/programme cycle (from planning, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation), advancing towards structured mechanisms for involvement of stakeholders, establishing a process and methods that allow for an active and quality partnership (going beyond informative sessions and moving towards real consultation and partnership), promoting Roma participation, while involving other stakeholders which could have an impact on the improvement of the living conditions of Roma and may contribute to mainstreaming Roma issues into more general fields, and further investing in fostering the



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capacity of potential partners (using, for example, available instruments, such as global grants and Technical Assistance). It remains to be seen how these elements and processes could be implemented in practice.

Monitoring, results and impact

- ▶ There is a general consensus on the **need for effective monitoring and evaluation** of Operational Programmes and their interventions in order to count on accurate information on whether Structural Funds are meeting the expected goals regarding inclusion of Roma. In the *current programming period* there has been a general concern and open debate on how to improve the methods to identify where and how the interventions are taking place and to what extent they are benefiting Roma. It is important to make a distinction between the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects, which allow assessing progress against objectives set, and the assessment of the context and state-of-play, which allows identifying the needs and evaluating general impact.
- ▶ For the **monitoring of the implementation of programmes and projects**, the setting up of indicators for data collection (ethnic data collection) is required. The controversy about the possibility of **collecting data on ethnic origin** remains a recurrent issue. As different reports have demonstrated, there is a general misperception and narrow interpretation of relevant legislation in this area. Although it may be difficult in some cases, it is legal to gather this type of data, as long as certain safeguards are respected. Countries have explored different methodological approaches to overcome this challenge; however, some of them have demonstrated important limitations, notably the self-identification by the beneficiary. Some countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain) are already including indicators on Roma participation in the *current programming period*, mainly using the optional self-identification and focusing on those programmes in which Roma are expected to be beneficiaries. Most countries are making efforts to achieve the right way to incorporate an accurate monitoring system in the *upcoming programming period*, highlighting the importance of establishing the appropriate indicators from the very beginning of the process. The European Social Fund Regulation 2014-2020 proposes a number of minimum quality standards and a set of compulsory common indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Evaluations are considered of particular relevance in order to have information for, whenever deemed necessary, redesigning approaches, resetting priorities and reallocating resources. Some countries have limited the evaluations to the compulsory ones; others have decided to



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undertake specific evaluations on Roma-related measures (Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain).

- ▶ As regards the **analysis of context and impact on the ground**, this practice is considered to be very positive as it allows designing more oriented actions based on real needs as well as legitimate to undertake new policies. For the *upcoming programming period*, many countries are planning to design their programmes and interventions building upon the outcomes of analysis, studies and maps that they have undertaken in the current programming period or that they are planning to undertake. Some of these initiatives are, or have been, funded with Technical Assistance.
- ▶ Given the difficulties encountered by most countries to monitor and provide information about results of programmes on Roma, it seems that progress in the *upcoming programming period* could be made by **advancing towards a model combining different options** (setting indicators in programmes disaggregated by ethnic origin, evaluations and analysis of context), by reinforcing transnational cooperation in this field and by considering the support and guidance of the European Commission or specialised bodies, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).