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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

Full Report



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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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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.

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



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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 capacity of potential partners (using, for example, available instruments, such as global grants



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



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- ▶ 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).



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III. Current state-of-play and plans for future programming period

The report is divided in sections addressing the different aspects to be considered when preparing the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) programming period, notably the managing model and approach to Roma inclusion in Operational Programmes, the main areas of intervention, the implementation mechanisms in the OPs, the coordination mechanisms, the alignment between funds and policies and the monitoring, results and impact. Each of the sections provides information on the key trends identified in the current and upcoming programming periods as well as on the main shortcomings and challenges faced and how countries are addressing them in the current programming period or planning to address them in the next one.

The report also points out to some examples illustrating specific cases from Member States. While in general terms there are no single solutions that could be implemented in all countries, and projects and programmes need to be adapted both to the different national contexts as well as to the situation of the Roma living in them, these examples could serve as an inspiration and a trigger for the search of the most adapted solutions for each country.

1. Managing model and approach to Roma inclusion

In the framework of the Structural and Investment Funds Regulations, Member States may choose different managing models according to their respective administrative situation and to the challenges they are facing. They may also approach the Roma needs in different ways. This chapter reviews the different managing models used by the countries analysed and how Roma needs are considered in their Operational Programmes.

1.1. Managing model

The selected management model may influence, for good or bad, later results of programmes in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. The role that public and private organisations play is different from country to country. In some countries the Operational Programmes are implemented at the national level, while in others, there is a mixed model involving the national and the regional levels. In some cases the Operational Programmes foresee specific actions for the Roma, while in others Roma are considered as one of the target groups among other groups in need.



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Although there are no assessments of the impact of the different managing models in the results of the programmes in the **current programming period**, the specific and different experiences of the countries could serve as a reference for others in the path to improvement. In general terms, in the **upcoming programming period** countries do not foresee major changes as regards the managing models, which they consider the appropriate ones for their national contexts. Only a few countries are planning some minor changes in the Operational Programmes mainly aimed at achieving further effectiveness as explained below.

➤ Prevalence of public management

In the **current programming period**, in most countries OPs are managed by public institutions, notably ministries or departments responsible for employment, social inclusion, education or other social policies. Non-governmental organisations and private organisations are involved as final beneficiaries but scarcely as Intermediate Bodies. This model of public management remains the preferred model for most countries in the **upcoming programming period**.

A public-private partnership model for the management of Structural Funds has only been used in **Spain**. Through the ESF Multiregional Operational Programme *Fight against Discrimination* (programming periods 2000-2006 and 2007-2013), five national public bodies and five NGOs act as Intermediate Bodies and are entrusted with the management of funds for the whole programming period. While only used in one country, the model of a multiregional programme, jointly managed by public and private bodies, that allows providing funding for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma, throughout a seven-year long period is highly valued by different actors as an instrument that provides good results and allows for the development of joint and long-term actions for the inclusion of these groups. While the final structure of this OP in the upcoming programming period is still unknown, it seems that Spain is planning to maintain this model of public-private partnership, although with some modifications: the current ESF Multiregional Operational Programme *Fight against Discrimination* will be replaced by a more general Operational Programme on Social Inclusion.

Structural and Investment Funds Regulations for the current and next programming periods encourage the active participation of the relevant stakeholders in the complete cycle of the OPs (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). Public-private partnerships, as well as the active involvement of the relevant actors, have demonstrated multiple advantages in the management of the EU funds. In the **current programming period**, some countries have involved, with different results, to a certain extent the civil society organisations in the implementation of the programmes and most of them stress the need to continue further in this direction. Nevertheless



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many of them point out to the fact that the management of EU Funds is a difficult task which requires a high level of institutional capacity and expertise. Therefore the effective participation of relevant actors, including Roma organisations, should go along with adequate training and support, and the responsibilities of the organisations working with Roma have to be in accordance with their capacity and expertise.

➤ A trend towards a centralised management

In the **current programming period**, most countries have opted for a centralised public management, where implementation at regional level is managed at the national level. Only a few countries have decided to apply a model of decentralised public management combining national and regional OPs, notably those countries with a high degree of decentralisation (**Spain** and **Italy**), and two others: **Greece** (5 regional OPs) and **Czech Republic** (9 regional OPs).

In addition, according to the information provided, it seems that in countries with national and regional OPs, Roma issues have featured to a greater extent in national Operational Programmes rather than in regional ones, even in the countries where there is a high degree of decentralisation. However, there is little information on whether and how Roma are considered in regional programmes. In the case of **Italy** and **Spain** some regional OPs do include explicit actions targeting Roma. In **Italy**, for example, 90% of the total Structural Funds budget is implemented at the regional level, only what is considered structural, is developed at national level. Therefore, many of the actions for Roma occur at regional level.

In the **upcoming programming period**, countries plan to pursue the same approach as regards the centralised/decentralised management and the structure of national/regional OPs. Only a few of them are considering some changes with a view to overcoming challenges faced in the current programming period. For example, **Greece** is planning to give more capacity and autonomy to the regional Operational Programmes to avoid that, as happened in the current programming period, the challenges faced at national level due to the current financial and economic situation have an impact on the actions at regional level. On the contrary, **Czech Republic** is considering moving from a structure combining national and regional programmes to one only with national programmes, in which the managing authorities at national level will be the ones in contact with the regional level. As pointed out by stakeholders, this model implies the potential risk of widening the existing distance between the national and the local level and that the lack of intermediaries (i.e. Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies) between these two levels becomes a barrier for the access and effective use of funds.



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In general terms, it is observed that while at national level it is more evident the assumption of responsibilities as regards Roma priorities, at regional level such assumption is difficult to achieve, and it is even more difficult to get information as regards actions targeting Roma inclusion. The limited information, together with the lack of a clear mandate and competencies of the Managing Authorities to encourage regional OPs to follow certain guidelines, and the absence of adequate communication channels between the national and the regional levels, appear to be the major difficulties.

The monitoring role of the National Roma Contact Points (NRCP) is crucial to overcome these difficulties by ensuring that Roma priorities are considered not only in the national OPs but also in the regional ones. This is particularly important in countries with a high degree of decentralisation in which regional OPs play a central role. Structural and Investment Funds Managing Authorities at national level could work together with the National Roma Contact Points to provide information and guidelines to the regional authorities as regards the consideration of national priorities and commitments at the regional level.

➤ Different forms of addressing Roma needs in the OPs

In the *current programming period*, most countries have opted for including, to a different extent and in different forms, actions related to Roma within general Operational Programmes - in a single one (e.g. **Bulgaria**) or several (e.g. **Czech Republic, Slovak Republic**)- instead of developing a specific OP (or part of it) targeting Roma. This is perceived as a way of promoting the mainstreaming of Roma issues in different areas. Although there are no specific Roma OPs, a significantly higher attention given to Roma issues in the general Operational Programmes is perceived and participants in the country meetings stressed that Roma are targeted in an increased number of OPs and to a larger extent.

Roma are mainly addressed in Operational Programmes covering areas such as human resources development (e.g. **Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, Romania**) or human resources and employment (e.g. **Czech Republic**), employment and social inclusion (e.g. **Slovak Republic**), skills for the development (e.g. **Italy**), fight against discrimination (e.g. **Spain**), education (e.g. **Slovak Republic, Greece**), regional development (e.g. **Bulgaria, Slovak Republic**), education for competitiveness (e.g. **Czech Republic**), economic growth (e.g. **Slovak Republic**) or entrepreneurship (e.g. **Greece**). It is worth mentioning the unique case of the *Integrated Operational Programme* in the **Czech Republic** (ERDF), where there are specific actions for Roma in two intervention areas related to urban regeneration.



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In some cases there are dedicated lines of intervention for Roma within some of the Operational Programmes (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Czech Republic**, **Romania** and **Slovak Republic**); in others, they are included within the general lines of intervention. In the case of **Spain**, Roma are a specific target group, along with other vulnerable groups, of the ESF Multiregional Operational Programme *Fight against Discrimination*, which aims to support sectors of the population furthest away from the labour market and most at risk of discrimination.

The same trends are observed in the **next programming period**. Roma interventions will feature in general OPs rather than in dedicated Roma OPs. General Operational Programmes will cover areas similar to those of the current period, although a few countries foresee certain changes including:

- Changes in the Operational Programmes addressing Roma, e.g. in **Romania**, the current *Human Resources* OP will become the *Human Capital* OP; in **Czech Republic** the *Human Resources and Employment* OP will become the *Employment* OP; in **Spain** the current *Fight against Discrimination* OP becomes the *Social Inclusion* OP.
- Reduction of the number of Operational Programmes addressing Roma, through the combination of the areas covered by different OPs into a single one, with a view to simplify the management. It is the case of the **Slovak Republic** that plans to address all issues related to Roma under one single Operational Programme (*Human Resources*) instead of several as in the current period.

All countries have reported an increasing consideration of Roma as beneficiaries of the Operational Programmes. The inclusion of Roma issues in general Operational Programmes, instead of having a specific Operational Programme targeting Roma, is generally perceived as an effective way of promoting the mainstreaming of Roma issues in different areas. Nevertheless it is worth noting that for this 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 the Roma needs, how information about the results and about the Roma participation will be gathered, and how the active participation of Roma will be guaranteed.

➤ Single fund, multi-fund and complementarity between funds

In the **current programming period**, there is a generalised use of the European Social Fund (ESF) for the promotion of Roma inclusion, notably in relation to employment, education and social services. Funds coming from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) have only been used to a



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limited extent 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 (e.g. **Slovak Republic**). According to the information gathered, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has not been used for Roma issues in this programming period.

Only some countries declared to use ERDF for Roma inclusion. In these cases we can find different management systems, usually single OPs in which ESF operations are complemented with ERDF ones, but the multi-fund option has not been considered in any of the countries analysed. In **Hungary**, for example, the key Operational Programmes for Roma inclusion –the *Social Renewal OP* (ESF) and the *Social Infrastructure OP* (ERDF)- allow for the combination of ESF and ERDF funds. In the **Slovak Republic**, ERDF is applied by the *Regional OP* measure 4.1c. *Regeneration of settlements*. In **Greece** ERDF funds are used in some regional OPs that include Roma as a target group. The *Integrated Operational Programme* (financed by ERDF) of the **Czech Republic** is the one that more evidently addresses Roma inclusion by implementing specific actions for Roma in two intervention areas, combined with ESF soft measures. **Bulgaria** has decided to carry out a reprogramming in order to be able to use the *Regional Development OP* (ERDF) to complement the *Human Resources Development OP* (ESF) in the framework of the new “INTEGRA” scheme, and the pilots to implement the integrated approach that are being carried out in 4 municipalities. Another interesting initiative comes from the **Italian** region of Toscana, which has developed a regional programme where Roma have been included. This region has recently requested a change in its *Regional OP* to introduce multi-fund interventions for Roma inclusion financed by ERDF. In **Romania**, some changes have been introduced in the *Regional OP* (with national scope), which is funded by ERDF and deals mainly with infrastructure, during the current programming period to allow using social/soft measures in the interventions aimed at deprived communities.

On the whole, and despite some spotted experiences, it seems that the potential of ERDF for Roma inclusion has been underused. In most cases, ERDF has been applied through a territorial approach, but not always having Roma as target group. It is not clearly known to what extent these programmes have benefited Roma.

In the **next programming period**, countries recognise the importance of using the whole potential offered by the European Social Fund (ESF) but also the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and other financial instruments and envisage a wider use of all ESI Funds. It seems that there is a generalised commitment to increase the role of ERDF in the use of ESI Funds for Roma inclusion, but it is still unclear how it can be best used. The **Slovak Republic** is the only country that is considering the multi-fund option (ESF+ERDF). The **Hungarian** *Human Resources Development OP* will continue using ESF and ERDF. The **Czech Republic** will maintain the *Integrated Operational Programme* (ERDF),



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combined with ESF soft measures but with an important change: this OP will include social housing interventions. This is also the case of **Bulgaria**, which is committed to maintain the integrated schemes (combining ESF and ERDF). **Spain** foresees the use of URBAN for urban regeneration using the potential of ERDF to promote Roma inclusion. **Romania** will have an axis within the *Regional OP*, financed by ERDF, dedicated to social inclusion of marginalised communities, including Roma, which is expected to be implemented by using Community-led local development (CLLD) initiatives. **Romania** is also the only country that is considering the possibility of using the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development for Roma inclusion.

1.2. Approach

The debate on how to approach Roma policies and Roma needs has been long standing in the EU in previous years. In June 2009 the Council of Ministers in charge of Social Affairs annexed to their conclusions the *Ten Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion*¹². Principle number 2 (*explicit but not exclusive targeting*) and principle number 4 (*aiming for the mainstreaming*), have been named as the most suitable and complementary approaches for the Roma policies. This section describes how both approaches are followed in the implementation of the Structural and Investment Funds, complemented in some cases with the territorial approach.

➔ Mainstreaming, targeted and territorial approaches: the most common models

Modalities that Member States can use to develop Operational Programmes inclusive to Roma are diverse. The most common ones are the mainstreaming, targeted and territorial approaches as defined below. Based on the experiences and literature analysed, some general guidelines and recommendations on the use of each of the models are pointed out, including some positive aspects and risks to be taken into consideration to select the most appropriate model for each situation.

- The **mainstreaming approach** means taking into account the needs of the Roma in fields or areas covered by different thematic OPs aimed at all citizens, understanding that it is not enough to have thematic OPs with actions theoretically opened to all citizens, nor to merely name the Roma as potential beneficiaries of the interventions, it is necessary to design comprehensive Programmes which are adapted and inclusive of the diversity of realities and circumstances and tackle all of them coherently. When used properly, programmes under the mainstreaming approach are more inclusive and lead to normalisation, have higher impact and easier connection with mainstream services. But the risks are considerable. The main one is not reaching Roma despite the initial intentions, and even having a perverse effect resulting on the exclusion of Roma

¹² <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/the-10-common-basic-principles-on-roma-inclusion-pbKE3010317/>



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from the policies aiming to the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. The lack of adaptation throughout the whole process may lead to reducing the potential impact. It is also important to note that under the mainstreaming approach it is more difficult to monitor the results and impact of the programmes on Roma beneficiaries.

- The **targeted approach** implies focusing on Roma and implementing measures specifically tailored to their needs, or focusing explicitly on disadvantaged groups including Roma. ‘Explicit but not exclusive’ Roma targeting, while including other groups in similar socio-economic circumstances, has proven to be one of the best ways of tackling Roma socio-economic integration. It guarantees that Roma are the focus of the programme and allows carrying out adapted and flexible measures, including tools tailored to the needs, which usually lead to greater engagement and active participation on the part of the beneficiaries. Moreover, it is easier to gather information, including ethnic data collection, to prove results. On the contrary, it has the risk of contributing to the segregation of the Roma population, establishing parallel services to the mainstream ones and/or duplicating them, limiting its potential impact if programmes are not well connected to the mainstream services.
- The **territorial approach** aims at covering the specific needs of the geographical areas, sometimes micro-territories at the greatest risk of poverty, and as a consequence tackle the needs of groups at risk of exclusion and discrimination living in these areas, as it is the case of the Roma. The territorial approach could be applied in both the mainstreaming and the targeted approach and it is appropriate for implementing the integrated approach. It is particularly suitable in cases where there is a high concentration of Roma in specific areas (urban or rural) or for segregated urban or rural settlements. The territorial approach requires the active involvement of the local institutions, including local communities, and is more efficient when developed in a framework of integrated policies and local development plans. The risk of the territorial approach is related to the poor capacity of the local institutions, as well as the limited coordination and involvement of the actors.

Which models are followed by Member States?

In the **current programming period**, countries declare to follow a **combination of targeted, mainstreaming and, only in some cases, territorial approaches**, and they foresee **no major changes for the next programming period**. While targeted actions are easy to identify, in many cases it is difficult to assess whether and to which extent the mainstreaming and territorial approaches are implemented in practice.



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Roma are considered as an **explicit target group/direct beneficiaries** or as **indirect beneficiaries**, which may benefit from the funding available for socially vulnerable or excluded communities of the OPs. There are only a few countries in which **Roma are not mentioned explicitly or are mentioned in a subtle way**, arguably due to reasons such as the tradition, the fact that Roma are not recognised as a minority or that the percentage of Roma is not significant. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Roma have not been beneficiaries of the Operational Programmes in these countries.

There seems to be some divergences as regards the conceptualisation of terms such as explicit target group, or direct/indirect beneficiaries, which at the end of the day make the comparison of the country approaches imprecise.

In the case of **Bulgaria**, for example, the current *Human Resources Development OP*, which has a national scope, includes a specific chapter on Roma. A new *Human Resources Development OP* is also foreseen for the 2014-2020 programming period, in which specific actions will be undertaken under the investment priority *Integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma*, using an explicit but not exclusive approach. The new scheme called “INTEGRA”, launched in 2011 and foreseen to continue in the next programming period, combines interventions from the *Human Resources Development OP* with interventions under the *Regional Development OP*, with Roma mainstreamed as indirect beneficiaries.

The **Czech Republic** is also an example of a model of combination of different approaches. In the current programming period, Roma are mainly featured in the ESF *Human Resources and Employment OP*, in the *Education for Competitiveness OP*, and in the ERDF *Integrated OP*. In the first case, Roma are indirectly mainstreamed as part of vulnerable groups, but there is also a specific area of support, in which Roma are explicitly targeted (3.2. *Support of the social integration of members of the Roma communities*). In the *Education for Competitiveness OP*, Roma are mentioned within the priority axis of initial education as one of the target groups, using again an ‘explicit but not exclusive’ approach. Finally, the *Integrated Operational Programme* follows a territorial approach, being Roma one of the target groups in two intervention areas. For the upcoming programming period, the Czech Republic foresees a slight change of approach. The Partnership Agreement does not mention explicitly Roma, but “social excluded” or “social excluded localities”, which indicates a trend towards more mainstreaming and territorial approach. The *Human Resources and Employment OP* becomes the *Employment OP*, and it does not foresee a specific area of support for Roma, as in the current programming period, but specific calls for proposals for actions promoting Roma inclusion. In the future *Integrated OP* as well as in the *Education OP*, Roma are mentioned as one of the target groups, following an explicit but not exclusive approach.



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In the **Slovak Republic**, Roma are targeted as one of the vulnerable groups in the current *Employment and Social Inclusion OP* (Priority Axis 2- Social Inclusion), using an ‘explicit but not exclusive’ approach. In the *Education OP*, Roma are explicitly targeted in Priority Axis 3. *Support to Education of Persons with Special Needs*, within measure 3.1. *Raising the educational level of members of marginalised Roma communities*. And, again, Roma are explicitly targeted as direct beneficiaries in the *Regional OP Measure 4.1. Regeneration of settlements – projects of development of the municipalities with Roma settlements in the rural environment*. With some minor changes, the Slovak Republic foresees a similar approach for the upcoming programming period, with the *Human Resources OP* resulting from the merge of several of the currently existing OPs where Roma are again targeted in specific priority axes: *Integration of Roma marginalised communities: education, health problems, social enterprises/microcredit (ESF)* (number 5), and *Integration of ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’ investment: promote physical infrastructure and social entrepreneurship (ERDF)* (number 6). According to the Slovak Republic authorities, the ‘explicit but not exclusive’ targeting, together with the territorial approach, seems to be the adequate option for the country.

The horizontal priority ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’ used in the Slovak Republic is a case worth noting. With this priority, to be respected in all OPs in the 2007-2013 programming period, the government intends to create the preconditions for an efficient use of assistance from the Structural Funds for addressing the problems of ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’. Political responsibility for this priority was initially borne by the Deputy Prime Minister for Knowledge Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. Currently, the coordinator of this priority is the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities, which is part of the Ministry for Interior. In the next programming period there will be two priority axes (number 5 and 6) devoted to ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’ within the multi-fund *Human Resources OP* in the context of which the experience of the complex approach of the 2007-2013 programming period will be applied.

In the case of **Romania**, the approach to Roma inclusion used in the design of the current OPs was a combination of targeted and mainstreaming approaches, while the territorial approach was not really relevant. Roma are mainly featured in the *Sectoral Human Resources Development OP*, basically in Priority 6. *Social Inclusion, targeting vulnerable groups, including Roma*. Even if the structure of the OPs for the next programming period is still being discussed, it seems that Romania will opt for following an ‘explicit but not exclusive’ approach within the future *Human Capital OP*, which will replace the *Human Resources OP*.

In **Spain** the approach used was a combination of targeted interventions (the most common ones) and mainstreaming approach. At national level, Roma are a specific target group within the current



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Fight against Discrimination OP, which includes also interventions with other disadvantaged groups. At regional level, Roma are specifically mentioned in four regional OPs, and they are considered beneficiaries in other regional OPs. For the upcoming programming period, even if the design of OPs is not yet closed, it seems that Roma will continue to be a target group within the more general *Social Inclusion* OP, using again an explicit but not exclusive targeting.

In the case of **Hungary**, Roma are mainly featured in the *Human Resources Development* OP, where there are some interventions explicitly mentioning Roma as part of other disadvantaged groups. Hungary is the country where probably the territorial approach is more visible, since interventions are based on the identification of disadvantaged localities. For the upcoming programming period, the *Human Resources Development* OP will continue to gather interventions aimed at Roma inclusion, being considered as direct beneficiaries as part of vulnerable groups.

In **Italy**, Roma are included within the group of “disadvantaged people” and mainstreamed in general programmes at national level. At regional level, some OPs (Liguria, Abruzzi and Calabria) include Roma as target group, while in others Roma are considered as part of vulnerable groups. For the upcoming programming period, Italy is considering to maintain the mainstreaming approach while introducing the territorial perspective.

In **Greece**, Roma are considered as part of “socially vulnerable groups”, in particular as “individuals with cultural and religious differences” and mainstreamed in general programmes. Since Roma are highly concentrated in certain areas, the territorial approach is applied by regional OPs, considering Roma as one of the vulnerable groups. This combination of mainstreaming and territorial approach is foreseen again for the upcoming programming period.

In general terms, it is observed that Member States follow a combination mainstream (the most common ones) and targeted interventions, along with a territorial approach to Roma inclusion. It is widely acknowledged that there is no single “right” approach; the important thing is to ensure that Roma are effectively reached. However, there seems to be much confusion when defining the approaches and how they are implemented in practice. Further efforts are therefore deemed necessary to promote an increased understanding of each of the approaches and to facilitate the identification on their implementation on the ground. In the case of the mainstreaming approach, further efforts are also needed to ensure that Roma issues are really mainstreamed in the general programmes, and effective achievements in Roma inclusion can and should be monitored and evaluated.



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Generally speaking, a positive trend towards a model in which Roma issues are considered with an **'explicit but not exclusive approach'** should be acknowledged. There seems to be an increasing awareness on the need to mention Roma explicitly in order to ensure that Structural and Investment Funds interventions reach them. However, some countries will continue with the approach of not mentioning Roma explicitly. While we acknowledge that, as in the case of these countries, it is possible to develop interventions for the benefit of Roma without directly referring to them as a target group, there is a risk that this lack of concretisation leads to leaving out the inclusion of Roma in such general approaches.



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2. Areas of intervention

Deciding on the areas of intervention and whether they are considered individually or through an integrated approach is a critical choice for ensuring that the funds are used in an effective way to address the relevant areas for achieving Roma inclusion. The European Commission Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies¹³ stresses that the key areas of intervention for Roma inclusion are education, employment, healthcare and housing. Furthermore, the Communication recommends following an integrated approach, to pay special attention to those territorial areas where Roma are concentrated and to combat discrimination.

In general terms, thematic Operational Programmes, focusing on one single area of intervention, are the most commonly used; only in a few cases, Operational Programmes address different areas of intervention from an integrated approach.

When reviewing the actions targeting Roma, whether directly or indirectly, **three predominant areas of intervention are identified, 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 particular cases, to be considered to a lesser extent and 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; however in many cases it is not specified how it is addressed.

How are the different areas of intervention addressed in the 2007-2013 programming period?

EMPLOYMENT
<p>Employment interventions are mainly funded through the European Social Funds. They primarily focus on training activities and access to the labour market and labour adaptability, with particular attention paid, following recent trends at EU level, to the areas of self-employment, social economy and entrepreneurship, including the creation of cooperatives and social community work. This is combined with actions related to public and sheltered employment. A few employment programmes target individuals though personalised insertion pathways to the labour market.</p>

¹³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173:en:NOT>



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TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Education is a relatively recent area of intervention and it is mainly covered by ESF funds. Actions related to inter-cultural education, prevention of early school leaving and bridging the gap between formal schooling and access to the labour market are prioritised by Member States. To a great extent, actions are mainly focused on those with lower levels of education, notably early education, and the higher levels (even in compulsory education) seem to be disregarded.

HEALTH

Health interventions are scarce and mainly mainstreamed into different ESF Operational Programmes and axis of intervention aimed to cover the basic health needs of Roma, and not so much to contribute to an active promotion of health.

HOUSING

Initiatives in this area are limited and basically linked to urban regeneration and basic infrastructure and only in limited cases to the construction/renovation of houses (e.g. **Slovak Republic**). Only in a few countries interventions related to social housing are considered (**Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovak Republic**).

These interventions are notably undertaken with ERDF funds, involving hard projects, and only in some cases are linked to soft measures (ESF) using a more integrated approach. This is the case of **Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Romania**, which during the current programming period has made changes in the implementation of ERDF in order to use social/soft measures for deprived communities. **Italy** has also used ERDF at regional level.

The potential of the amendment of article 7.2. (ERDF Regulation) has been clearly underused. Two main reasons are pointed out by stakeholders: the fact that the amendment was introduced in the middle of the programming period (2010), when all interventions were already planned, and the fact that Member States/Managing Authorities are not sure about how to implement it in practice. Participants at the country-by-country meetings would welcome more practical guidelines and tools from the European Commission to make progress on the ground.

Several Member States (**Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain**) make an explicit reference to the possibilities opened by Art. 7.2. of the ERDF Regulation in their National Roma Integration Strategies. However, there remains a lot to be done as regards the



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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.

For example, **Slovak Republic** took an opportunity of the amendment of article 7.2 for housing interventions and started a pilot project related to the development of housing infrastructure using Structural Funds (particularly, from the *Regional OP*). This project includes also the construction of flats for rent for marginalised groups. The call for proposal was launched in December 2013 and 21 towns and villages are allowed to file an application.

Hungary launched a pilot programme, the so-called “Complex Programme for the Settlements”, which uses the possibilities offered by ERDF article 7.2 to develop integrated housing interventions combining ERDF and ESF funds.

OTHER AREAS

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 the 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.

In addition, some countries, such as **Greece**, have also pointed out to the ongoing reflection on whether and how the Structural Funds, and notably the European Social Fund, could contribute to



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addressing the **basic needs** that are appearing in the countries as a consequence of the current financial and economic crisis. While it is widely recognised that a demand-driven approach is important to enhance ownership and cover the emerging needs, it is also acknowledged that the potential of Structural Funds to achieve more ambitious objectives which contribute to having a bigger and long-term impact should not be lost. There is the risk to focus on the basic needs and leave aside the strategic priorities of the ESI Funds, notably the ESF, to promote social investment with the final aim of achieving social promotion. There is a need to find the right balance between covering the urgent and basic needs, while maintaining the strategic priority of social inclusion.

What progress is expected in the 2014-2020 programming period?

In the **upcoming programming period 2014-2020**, interventions related to Roma are mainly considered under Thematic Objective 9 of the Structural and Investment Funds Regulations *Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty*, supported by the ESF and complemented by the ERDF and the EAFRD. Employment, education and social inclusion remain outstanding areas of investment (with employment as a key area given the high levels of unemployment in each of the countries concerned). However, some positive trends are perceived, which should contribute to addressing the existing challenges and having a higher impact:

- There is a general consensus among stakeholders about the importance of tackling the four key related areas of employment, housing, education and healthcare to achieve the full integration of Roma.
- Efforts to combine social/soft measures (ESF) with hard measures (ERDF) using a more integrated approach will be pursued.
- Some further developments are considered in relation to the less developed, and in many cases segregated, areas (e.g. physical regeneration, housing), although no changes are perceived in others (e.g. health).
- There seems to be a growing attention given to housing interventions and urban regeneration, areas in which the opportunities offered by the Structural and Investment Funds, notably article 7.2., seem to have been underused to a greater extent. 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 work



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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**).

Operations in the area of social housing are also being considered by some countries (e.g. **Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary** and **Slovak Republic**). For example **Slovak Republic** is planning the operations in the area of social housing for next programming period (Priority axis 6. *Technical infrastructure in municipalities with presence of marginalised Roma communities*, Specific objective 6.1.1 *Increase the share of Roma households with access to housing and utility lines among the total number of Roma households in the territory where marginalised Roma communities are present and secure the access to drinking water in municipalities with segregated and separated MRC- transitional housing programme within the framework of social mobility and integration of MRC*).

- In addition some countries are considering including operations with Roma in other areas: for example **Italy**, in the social innovation programme, or **Hungary** that foresees to include a specific line of intervention related to anti-segregation and anti-poverty (following a territorial approach). Actions to address child poverty and promote early childhood development, including in segregated settlements, will also remain key areas of support in some countries.

Other challenges to be tackled:

Based on the information from existing studies and reports as well as the input from stakeholders during the country-by-country meetings, a number of challenges to be tackled in each of the areas can be identified, namely:

- **Employment.** Key challenges to be addressed in future are the development of individual pathways (rather than one-off measures) targeting job-seekers and closer cooperation with enterprises in the areas of vocational training and employability. Bridging education with professional training and employment, mainly in the framework of the “Youth Employment Initiative”,¹⁴ is also a priority as many Roma do not manage to succeed in the school system and, as a result, they do not acquire the necessary professional training and lack professional experience.
- **Education.** A key aspect in this area is the existence in some countries of segregated education centres and classes. Structural and Investment Funds actions should not contribute to further promoting these practices, but should on the contrary contribute to eliminating them. The

¹⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1829&furtherNews=yes>



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elimination of segregation in education centres and the inclusion of Roma children in mainstream education, early targeting of Roma children and youths (e.g. preparatory classes in the national language and after-hours school support targeting Roma women and their children) in order to avoid early drop-out as well as the improvement of the attainment in education should be, along with adult education, priority areas for future.

- **Health.** Further attention should be paid to this area, which should not be only considered as part of other interventions but also as an independent area. For instance, the access to the health care services, the vaccination programmes as well as the measures to create and improve healthy habits should be supported by the Structural and Investment Funds.
- **Housing.** Integrated actions in marginalised areas using substantial financing and the combination of EU funds should be considered as a major priority for many countries. This means through the articulation of investments in education, employment generation and access to healthcare with the pivotal development of basic infrastructure, including the rebuilding and renovation of housing. Barriers for the implementation of these operations should be removed by taking into account the lessons learnt during the current programming period, notably the limited use of article 7.2. of the ERDF Regulation.

Other **key areas** to be considered as regards housing interventions are infrastructural (including sanitation) and environmental improvements in Roma communities, integrated actions for improving physical and housing conditions in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of Roma as well as desegregation and urban planning.

Horizontal principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination

In the **current programming period**, most countries have included equal opportunities, including gender equality, and non-discrimination as horizontal priorities that should be taken into account in the Structural Funds. In some cases they are considered as horizontal principles to be applied in all funds; in others, they are only related to a specific area of intervention (e.g. employment). This is the case in **Italy**, for example, or the **Slovak Republic** in which equal treatment represents a cross-cutting priority within the 2007-2013 OPs and the values of relevant indicators are collected and reported within Annual Implementation Reports (for national projects). In **Romania**, the ESF *Human Capital* OP includes cross-cutting measures such as actions to combat discrimination. In **Hungary**, counting with integration and non-discrimination plans at local level is a precondition for receiving funding from public authorities (national or European funding).

However, it seems that these principles have been mainly observed in the design of the Operational Programmes and it is not clear how they are applied in practice. In some cases it seems that they are



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quite theoretical, with a general lack of monitoring and effective evaluation. The general impression is that no substantial or tangible achievements have occurred in these areas and that the inclusion of horizontal priorities in the design of OPs is not a guarantee of their implementation.

Structural and Investment Funds Regulations for the **upcoming programming period** give more importance to these cross-cutting issues and all countries are committed to make further progress in this area. According to the Common Provisions Regulations¹⁵, *each operational programme, except those where technical assistance is undertaken under a specific operational programme, shall, subject to the Member State's duly justified assessment of their relevance to the content and objectives of the operational programmes, include a description of:*

(b) the specific actions to promote equal opportunities and prevent discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation, design and implementation of the operational programme and in particular in relation to access to funding, taking account of the needs of the various target groups at risk of such discrimination and in particular the requirements to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.

(c) the contribution of the operational programme to the promotion of equality between men and women and, where appropriate, the arrangements to ensure the integration of gender perspective at operational programme and operation level.

However, particular attention needs to be given to monitoring how these principles are translated into practice. In order to ensure that they are fully respected, their fulfilment should be checked from the beginning of the planning process of programmes and projects. Proposals range from involving the Equality Bodies and human rights organisations active in combating discrimination in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the funds, adopting positive actions to prevent or compensate the disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic discrimination, including awareness-raising actions, to providing data disaggregated by gender and information of the achievements.

Research-based decisions

It is interesting to note that many countries have declared the relevance of research made to inform 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. **Hungary**, for example, is a country with an

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/legislation/index_en.cfm



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extensive tradition to carry out research, mainly with a territorial approach, in which Roma are one of the target groups, aimed at informing the design and implementation of Structural Funds. A poverty map is currently underway. In the case of the **Slovak Republic**, the *Atlas of Roma communities*, released in September 2013 with the aim of mapping 'Marginalised Roma Communities', has been a source of information in the planning process of the future OPs. The *Analysis of socially excluded Roma localities* carried out in the **Czech Republic** in the year 2006, and being updated for 2015, has also informed decisions taken on the use of Structural Funds. In **Spain**, different studies on employment, education, health and housing referred to in the National Roma Integration Strategy, have also served to orientate decisions on Roma inclusion, including the use of Structural Funds. **Romania** is working with the World Bank to prepare a diagnostic study on Roma needs which will also serve to inform future measures, including the use of the Structural and Investment Funds.

It should not be forgotten that Structural and Investment Funds are not just financial resources, as they help to streamline policy decisions and achieve complementarity between what is already done and what can be done. Researches contribute to inform these policy decisions as well as to assess the consistence between objectives proposed and resources available.



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3. Implementation mechanisms and major difficulties

When preparing the Partnership Agreements and the Operational Programmes, Member States should take a series of decisions regarding the management and implementation mechanisms for the delivery of Structural and Investment Funds. This section covers the key elements to be considered in this sense. Firstly, it analyses the main actors involved in the management and implementation of Structural and Investment Funds; secondly, it identifies critical barriers and bottlenecks in the implementation; finally, it points out to some instruments at the disposal of Managing Authorities which could facilitate the achievement of successful results of the programmes and which in most cases are underused.

3.1 Main actors: Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries

Structural and Investment Funds Regulations establish broadly the different categories of actors and their responsibilities. In this framework each Member States can decide on the bodies (institutions) that can be considered under each of the categories. Choices made in relation to the actors, their capacities and the development of their functions, condition the management and implementation processes as well as the final results. At this moment of change between the current and the upcoming programming period, there is an excellent opportunity to review the whole process. However, in many cases, it seems that this reflection is not taking place and there rather seems to be a continuation of the options used in previous periods.

➤ The Managing Authorities

Although Managing Authorities, as defined in the Structural and Investment Funds Regulations, have a technical role assigned, usually as administrative units, they can play a critical role in significant decisions such as how the different OPs will tackle Roma needs, the definition of the indicators, the preparation of the reports, the relations with Intermediate Bodies and other key stakeholders, etc. For an adequate approach of the needs of Roma in the Operational Programmes, it is very important that the Managing Authorities understand correctly the Roma policies and that they establish a close cooperation with the National Roma Contact Points, the relevant institutions working with Roma and the civil society, including Roma organisations.



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➤ The Intermediate Bodies

Intermediate Bodies play a crucial role as they are entrusted with the management and implementation of part of the Operational Programmes on behalf of the Managing Authorities. They act as a link between the latest and the final beneficiaries in their role of informing potential beneficiaries, selecting projects and generally monitoring implementation. It is important to bear in mind that Structural and Investment Funds Regulations allow for a wide variety of options regarding the Intermediate Bodies of the Funds. Elements such as the nature of the Intermediate Body (public or private), its role, responsibilities as well as capacity, have an impact on the way it performs and its capacity to contribute to a successful use of the Funds.

In the **2007-2013 programming period**, public institutions with responsibilities in the areas of employment, education or other social policies have been acting as Intermediate Bodies; only in one case (**Spain**), private Intermediate Bodies have been involved. A recent external assessment on the management of the Spanish *Fight against Discrimination OP* carried out by the private Intermediate Bodies shows that not only they have achieved positive results in terms of labour market integration of the target groups they cover (including Roma), but that they have also brought a number of added values to the OP. These positive elements concern the adapted working tools and methodologies, the institutional capacity to mobilise new resources and a wide range of public and private actors (creating a broad and lasting partnership around the social and labour inclusion programmes), and the capacity for innovation and adaptation to the social, business and institutional context.

In the **2014-2020 programming period**, in general terms it seems that decision-makers do not perceive the need for changes as regards Intermediate Bodies, and as a result they foresee the participation of similar bodies to the ones involved in the current period. There will be only minor changes in relation to the role played by the bodies, for example, in the case of **Bulgaria** the Ministry of Education will become Managing Authority instead of Implementing Body; in the **Czech Republic** it has been decided that, in order to simplify the structure, the Management Authorities will also play the role of the Intermediate Bodies. Most countries have opted for generalist Intermediate Bodies. A few have however realised 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 Intermediate Body, **Bulgaria** with 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 related to employment).



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Regardless of its 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. The selected body should be endowed with the necessary mandate, competences as well as sufficient human and financial resources to play this role. For both private and public bodies, a key element should be their proven capacity and experience in the management and implementation of Structural Funds operations. If the management capacity goes hand in hand with a good knowledge of the field covered, it contributes to a better achievement. The specialisation/expertise of IBs as well as their capacity to generate credibility and to adapt to circumstances should also be considered as it contributes to a better management and implementation of the OPs. In this regards, it is important not to mix the management capacity with the representativeness role. Bodies representing the Roma community should be welcomed in the management of the Structural and Investment Funds when they gather all capacity requirements.

➤ The beneficiaries

A wide variety of beneficiaries are identified in the **2007-2013 programming period** ranging from public organisations (e.g. municipalities, public agencies) to academic institutions (schools, universities, kindergartens) and civil society organisations at national, regional and local level. In many cases, projects are implemented in partnership between different organisations. When it comes to the beneficiaries, there is a recurrent reflection on whether the management of Structural Funds should be open 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 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 have opted for the first option, i.e. opening up the participation as 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 leads to two challenges with an 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



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by organisations with proven capacity and experience, is observed. There is also an increased understanding that in order to achieve a higher impact, the management of Structural and Investment Funds shall be opened to the organisations in a better position and with the necessary capacity and experience to manage these Funds. In parallel, alternative ways should be used to promote a wide access to the funds to organisations with less capacity, as beneficiaries of the actions undertaken or through access to small grants, through global grants or other formula.

The access to Structural and Investment Funds is directly linked to the **need for institutional capacity**, following the ESI thematic objective 11 aimed at “*enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration*”. The lack of skills of many beneficiaries, especially those who are in a better position to reach Roma, to have access and implement Structural Funds interventions is a recurrent challenge detected in all countries, which limits their involvement. This is particularly relevant in the case of local authorities and civil society organisations. Some countries have already undertaken initiatives to improve the capacity of stakeholders in the access and implementation of Structural Funds.

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. During a three-year period, the Agency provides a comprehensive support to municipalities divided in three steps: firstly, research and analysis, development of a local strategy and advise on financial resources; secondly, project management and launch of activities; and thirdly, project management, supervision and analysis.

In the **upcoming programming period**, some countries are considering the development of further initiatives to address this challenge. For example, the creation of information services at regional level providing technical assistance for capacity-building of municipalities to develop holistic approaches and better monitoring systems (**Greece**) or the setting up of a database of experts which provide technical assistance for future projects at local level (**Romania**).

Two relevant instruments at the disposal of all Member States to promote access to Structural and Investment Funds and improve the capacity-building are the global grants and the Technical Assistance. However, as it will be explained later, their potential is not fully used.



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3.2 Critical barriers and bottlenecks in the implementation

Particular attention should also be paid to the **challenges and barriers that organisations face when implementing the funds**, notably the co-financing required, the pre-financing and payments and the complexity of the management system.

➤ Co-financing

Although other problems such as the ones analysed below may be more relevant (e.g. pre-finance), the co-financing required by Member States (which vary from region to region) is indeed a problem for many stakeholders. Aware of this challenge, notably in the current context of economic and financial crisis, countries are trying to explore different options for addressing it. For example, **Italy**, following the previous low levels of absorption in the South, has envisaged, both for the current and the future programming period, a mechanism which allows the central level administration to provide the necessary co-financing to ensure the use and implementation of Structural Funds (the so-called “*centralización forzosa subsidiaria*”). Other options considered consist in having different co-financing rates according to the type of beneficiaries. In some countries, co-financing is a minor problem since the percentage required is very low or inexistent for certain beneficiaries.

➤ Pre-financing and payments to beneficiaries

In the **current programming period**, several challenges are observed in this area, which is perceived as one of the most problematic ones. These include low amounts provided as pre-finance, bank guarantees requested for the project to be approved, slow interim payments and suspension of payments to beneficiaries if the European Commission suspends payment to the country.

In the **next programming period**, Managing Authorities are trying to find flexible ways to overcome these problems such as increasing the financial support for implementing bodies. For example, for the next programming period, **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.

Another key aspect to be considered should be to ensure that the amount allocated at the beginning of the project is sufficient for allowing beneficiaries to count on enough cash flow for the implementation of the activities linked to the project. Guaranteeing timely reimbursements during the programme cycle is another critical issue for the regularity of the activities.



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➤ Complexity of the systems

It is widely perceived that systems are too complex, with too many requirements (something that is further stressed in countries such as **Greece** which have to comply with many EU requirements in the current context) and that there is a need for further simplification and changes in the legal, institutional and procedural frameworks for the next programming period.

In the **current programming period**, countries have already started a reflection on how to achieve an increased simplification, which should feed into the decisions taken for the **next programming period**. Some proposals for simplifying mechanisms and solving implementation bottlenecks pointed out are as follows:

- Application of simplified cost options such as flat rates, lump sums, unit cost based financial management, which are considered as beneficial both for the organisations managing the funds (Managing Authority, Intermediate Body) and the beneficiaries. Unit cost based financial management has been applied for social field work in **Slovak Republic** in 2011. A unit cost was introduced for one month of work of one social field worker, covering salary, office cost, travel, etc. According to future ESF Regulations *“grants and repayable assistance for which the public support does not exceed EUR 50,000 shall take the form of standard scales of unit costs or lump sums”*.
- More flexibility for cross funding.
- Improvements in the public procurement legislation, although in many cases these are not issues related only to the Structural and Investment Funds but depend on the general national legislation.
- Limiting the elements and requirements of the calls.
- Simplification of guidelines for applicants.
- Reduction of the documentary requirements.
- Extension of the deadlines.

➤ Mechanisms for allocation of funds

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 case of **Spain**, through the Multiregional Operational Programme *Fight against Discrimination 2007-2013*, 10 entities (five national public bodies and five NGOs) act as Intermediate Bodies and are entrusted with the management of funds for the whole programming period, following a selection criteria (mainly



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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 approaches.

➤ Duration and size of the projects

The generalised system of calls for proposals have 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 recurrent issues 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 can be observed in the current programming period. These calls are in some cases also combined with long-term grants (e.g. **Romania** combining grants of 500,000 Euros with grants of 5 million Euros, **Bulgaria** combines projects of 18-24 months with some institutional capacity schemes of longer duration of 3-5 years).

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 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 or complement local, regional or national policies. Based on the experience of the current programming period, there is a general consensus that, while allowing reaching a high number of beneficiaries, the short/medium-term calls lead to fragmentation of resources and in turn to a decreased impact.

Once more, the question is whether the important is focusing on achieving the maximum impact on the use of Structural and Investment Funds or whether it is the access and distribution of Funds between as many organisations as possible. The general consensus seems to be a combination of the two in order to strike the right balance between achieving a real impact and ensuring a wide access, while keeping in mind that the functioning and objective of the two types of grants differs.

While Structural and Investment Funds should be flexible enough to address emerging needs during the programming period, in order to have a real impact and ensure sustainability, actions should be



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based on a medium/long-term planning and strategy. In **Hungary**, the *Social Renewal* OP combines the seven-year long-term planning of the OP, with action plans covering 3-4 years.

3.3 Exploring opportunities and fostering innovation

When implementing Structural and Investment Funds, countries may also explore forms of intervention as well as mechanisms others than those foreseen in the Regulations that can be better adjusted to the Roma needs and contribute to obtaining better results and support innovation.

➤ Pilot projects

In the **current programming period**, 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. For example, **Italy** launched pilot projects of an approximate duration of two years with a view to extending them throughout the whole programming period if they were considered successful. In **Bulgaria**, pilot projects were launched under the *Human Resources Development* OP (“INTEGRA scheme”).

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).

It is true that some countries are considering scaling up the pilots that started in the **current programming period in the upcoming one**, while planning to maintain and extend the use of pilot projects. They are also planning to do the same with other initiatives that, while not started as pilots, have proven their value. For example **Bulgaria** is considering extending one of the institutional capacity schemes if it proves to be effective and successful. **Bulgaria** has also included in the OP relevant for Roma a special section presenting lessons learned from the 2007-2013 programming period and used it in such a way that other municipalities will be able to implement similar integrated projects. Experience shows that to ensure the continuation and scale up of successful projects –pilots or not- it is essential the setting up of mechanisms and resources that enable the evaluation of the projects, the introduction of adaptations where necessary and their generalisation if considered appropriate.

Considering that Roma inclusion will not be solved from one day to another, sustainability of projects is essential. A combination of mechanisms that enable piloting and experimentation within the OPs



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with mechanisms that guarantee that projects that prove to be successful can be maintained throughout the whole programming period, could contribute to achieving this sustainability.

➤ **Multidimensional and integrated approach**

The integration of Roma community requires a multi-dimensional and integrated approach (both in terms of interventions and of combination of funds) to effectively address the complexity and interdependence of the problems currently affecting the Roma population. According to the Common Provisions Regulation, *“the Partnership Agreement shall indicate an integrated approach to territorial development supported by the ESI Funds or a summary of the integrated approaches to territorial development based on the content of the programmes, setting out, among others, 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 discrimination or social exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities, persons with disabilities, the long term unemployed and young people not in employment, education or training”*.

In addition, the operational programme *“shall specify, where appropriate, the identification of whether and how it addresses the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty or target groups at highest risk of discrimination or social exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities, and persons with disabilities, and where relevant the contribution to the integrated approach set out in the Partnership Agreement.”*

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. However the challenge was the implementation arguably due to the lack of experience and knowledge on how to implement the integrated approach in practice and in some cases the weaknesses in the design and implementation of the approach. As a result, some spotted experiences are identified but with little impact. It is the case for example of the so called “complex approach” launched in the **Slovak Republic**, where through “Local Strategies of Complex Approach”, municipalities are direct beneficiaries of 6 OPs (ESF + ERDF). However, the impact of this initiative seems to be low due mainly to difficulties in the harmonisation of the calls for proposals. In its effort to promote the integrated approach, **Bulgaria** undertook a reprogramming and launched two schemes – the “INTEGRA” and the *“Support for the provision of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and low-income populations and other disadvantaged groups”*- combining interventions from the *Human Resources Development OP* (ESF) and the *Regional Development OP* (ERDF), being Roma mainstreamed as indirect beneficiaries. The “INTEGRA” scheme is the first one



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combining measures of several priority axes including interventions in the field of housing, access to labour market, education, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

An integrated housing programme (“Complex Programme for the Settlements”) was launched in **Hungary** (2011), targeting segregated settlements financed from ESF (*Human Resources Development*) and as a second step, in 2013, an ERDF 7.2 article housing intervention opened for those settlements where they have already started the individual and community level development.

Although Regulations for the **upcoming programming period** provide an adequate framework for integrated and multidimensional actions addressing Roma exclusion, including through a combination of EU funds, Member States have many uncertainties about the design, management and implementation of the integrated approach.

Indeed, for the **2014-2020 programming period**, most countries are considering the use of an integrated approach as a key priority but also as 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. 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 address at least two of the four defined areas of intervention (Improving the access to employment, ensuring access to social and health services, development of the capacity of the local communities and overcoming of the negative stereotypes, improving the access to education for the marginalised groups). For example, **Hungary** plans to scale-up the housing interventions based on article 7.2. foreseen in the *Human Resources Development Operational Programme*.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the way that integrated approach is considered in the design, management and implementation of interventions. Since Member States do not have yet much experience in this regard, a more proactive role of the European Commission would be recommendable in offering practical guidance during the programming period to push the integrated approach to be a reality in next programming period.

An integrated approach is of particular relevance in areas with relatively widespread situations of geographical segregation and marginalisation or where Roma are overrepresented. But it is important to go further and apply an integrated and multidimensional approach in all interventions targeting Roma, emphasising the linkages between the different fields.



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It is possible to develop integrated Operational Programmes or integrated interventions combining different areas of action and/or funds. An example worth mentioning is the *Integrated Operational Programme* in the **Czech Republic**. In particular, under the area of intervention *Improving the environment in problematic housing estates* it allows for the implementation of actions related to different areas through an integrated approach, and has allowed the launch of pilot projects combining activities related to social and community care and connect ERDF investments (hard investments, housing, etc.) and ESF investment (soft projects).

The possibility to combine more systematically different funds, notably ESF and ERDF programmes for social inclusion, opens up interesting possibilities for integrated actions, for example in disadvantaged micro-regions, settlements or neighbourhoods, and for the simplification of the planning, programming and coordination of Roma inclusion projects. In fact the new Regulations open opportunities for multi-fund programmes, for the allocation of up to 10% of eligible costs from one fund to another and for synergies between funds. However, the implementation of these options remains a challenge for most countries.

The physical and economic regeneration activities supported by the ERDF should go hand in hand with ESF actions aimed at promoting the social inclusion of marginalised groups as presented in the Common Strategic Framework.

Key actions from the ESF: Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma	Key actions from the ERDF:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated pathways to the labour market, including individualised support, counselling, guidance and access to general and vocational education and training. • Access to services, in particular social care, social assistance services and healthcare (including preventive healthcare, health education and patient safety). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the physical and economic regeneration of deprived urban and rural communities including the Roma, which reduces the spatial concentration of poverty, including the promotion of integrated plans where social housing is accompanied notably by interventions in education, health including sport facilities for local residents, and employment.



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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elimination of segregation in education, promoting early-childhood education, fighting early school-leaving and ensuring successful transitions from school to employment.• Measures to overcome prejudices and discrimination against Roma.	
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Some countries have combined different funds in the current programming period (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Czech Republic** and **Hungary**). Others are already planning or considering implementing this model in the next programming period (e.g. **Slovak Republic**). In general, all countries seem to be exploring possibilities to combine funds as a way to implement the integrated approach. The **Slovak Republic** suggests the establishment of a multi-fund Operational Programme using ESF and ERDF funds, which would finance programmes focused on inclusive infrastructural development and public services as well as specific labour inclusion and educational programmes. In **Bulgaria**, the Integrated Plans for Urban Restoration and Development combine measures under the *Regional Development OP* (hard) and *Human Resources Development OP* (soft).

It is also worth mentioning that in **Greece**, in the next programming period, regional programmes will combine ESF and ERDF funds. In **Italy**, although there has not been much awareness of the opportunities offered by Art. 7 of the ERDF (neither from the regional administrations nor from the national administrations), there has been some experimentation of programmes at local level with a comprehensive perspective, that could be considered to be testing the integrated approach. Although during the current programming period there is no scale up mechanisms once the initiatives are finished and have proven to be good, it is envisaged to happen in future programming period. In **Romania**, during the current programming period there have been changes in the implementation of ERDF by using social/soft measures for few deprived communities. For the future period discussions are still undergoing and it seems they will follow a territorial approach, mainly funded with ERDF focusing on an integrated territorial investment in deprived communities at urban level.

The new Regulations propose new forms of implementation and strengthen some of the existing ones, in order to facilitate the integrated territorial approach and to support local actions. These mechanisms of implementation can be very useful when addressing Roma needs from a micro-territorial perspective.



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Community-led local development (CLLD)
<p>Community-led local development (CLLD) is a tool for engaging local communities and support local partnerships, of public, private and civil society actors in developing responses to the social, environmental and economic challenges we face today, through the design and implementation of local integration strategies. It allows for the implementation of an integrated approach and for connected and integrated use of the Funds to deliver local development strategies. Further guidance is available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/pdf/preparation/clld_guidance_2013_04_29.pdf</p>
Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)
<p>An ITI is a territorial development tool that enables the implementation of a territorial strategy in an integrated manner while drawing funds from several priority axes in the same or different operational programmes and funds. It can deliver actions in urban areas, in detached geographical units within a region as well as in cross-border areas in the context of European territorial cooperation.</p> <p>For further information, please check http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_iti.pdf</p>
Joint Action Plans
<p>Group of projects (ERDF, ESF and CF), not consisting in the provision of infrastructures, carried out under the responsibility of the beneficiary, as part of one Operational Programme or various. They must provide information on the geographic coverage and target groups, as well as an analysis of the effects of the Joint Action Plan on the promotion of equality between men and women and the prevention of discrimination.</p> <p>Joint Action Plans represent a leap towards results-based management, built on an extension of simplified costs principles to all types of operations. Opting to implement at least pilot operations in the form of Joint Action Plans may therefore be helpful in the long term.</p> <p>Further information is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/strategic_framework/csf_part1_en.pdf</p>
INTEGRATED OPERATIONS
<p>Can receive the support from Funds and other EU Instruments.</p>



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↪ Global grants

A valuable instrument foreseen to bring Structural and Investment Funds to groups and communities experiencing poverty and opening up the opportunities of these funds is the global grants. Through this instrument, foreseen both in the Regulations of the current and the upcoming programming period, Member States or Managing Authorities may designate and entrust the management and implementation of a part of an Operational Programme to one or more Intermediate Bodies, which could be public or private bodies. In turn, these Intermediate Bodies, which have a better understanding due to their experience and specialisation, can be ideally placed to deliver Structural and Investment Funds, often in the form of small grants, with 100% financing, and make a real impact.

It is widely acknowledged that some key stakeholders for Roma inclusion, for instance, municipalities or NGOs, have difficulties in accessing the Structural Funds mainly due to lack of capacity. However, an instrument such as the global grants, which is foreseen to overcome these difficulties and could open up opportunities for more beneficiaries, has been remarkably underused in the **2007-2013 programming period** despite their potential and their proven track record when used in the previous period. Member States have been extraordinarily cautious in using the 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 they lack further guidance on how to use it correctly in practice. Except for the **Slovak Republic**, no country plans to use global grants.

Indeed, not using this instrument could be considered as a missed opportunity. For Member States to take full advantage of the existing instruments, further guidance from the European Commission would be needed. In addition, looking at examples of how global grants have been used in the past could be useful.

↪ Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance is another relevant tool with a potentially important role in the quality use of Structural and Investment Funds. It supports the smooth running and management of ESI Funds' operations by supporting, on the one hand, actions for preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication, networking, complaint resolution, and control and



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audit, and on the other hand, actions to reinforce the capacity of Member State authorities and beneficiaries to administer and use those Funds. ESI Funds may also be used by the Member States to support actions for the reduction of the administrative burden on beneficiaries, including electronic data exchange systems.

Specifically, it may support studies linked to the drawing up of the strategic guidelines; evaluations, expert reports, statistics and studies; measures aimed at the partners, the beneficiaries of assistance from the Funds and the general public including information awareness; measures to disseminate information, networking, raise awareness, promote cooperation and exchange experiences throughout the Union; installation, operation and interconnection of computerised systems for management, monitoring, inspection and evaluation; and improvements in evaluation methods and exchange of information on practices.

Despite all these opportunities offered by Structural and Investment Funds Technical Assistance, the use of this instrument needs to be improved, both in terms of the type of activities funded and the beneficiaries. In fact only the NRIS of two of the countries (**Bulgaria** and **Spain**) explicitly mention the use of Technical Assistance.

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 only certain activities. In fact, countries tend to absorb this financial allocation for the use of public authorities managing EU funds (Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies) for internal management, monitoring and evaluation purposes (e.g. costs of monitoring committee meetings, publication of materials, etc.). Only a few countries have spent a part of it on studies (e.g. **Greece**, **Czech Republic**). On the other hand, while 2007-2013 Structural Funds Regulations allowed 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 **Spain** for example, the Managing Authority responsible for the Structural Funds provides technical assistance for the creation of networks at the national and international level as in the case of the EURoma Network.

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. **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.



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There are different options that could be explored for the next programming period using ESIF Funds Technical Assistance to, on the one hand, improve the management, monitoring and evaluation of the Structural and Investment Funds as regards Roma inclusion and, on the other hand, contribute to the involvement of other stakeholders, conceiving technical assistance for the benefit of all relevant actors, including Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, but also beneficiaries, specially focusing on the capacity of all of them.

↪ Transnational cooperation

Both in the **current and upcoming programming periods**, cross-border and transnational cooperation are considered essential elements to use the full potential of Structural and Investment Funds for Roma inclusion in all Member States.

In the current period, ESF Regulation stipulates that transnational cooperation is an integrated feature of the ESF 2007-2013 and therefore Member States and regions must assume the main responsibility for learning from one another through exchange of good practices and knowledge, and working together. However, despite initiatives like the EURoma Network, transnational cooperation seems to be underused in the current programming period. In some cases it is due to a lack of will or interest on the part of the those managing funds; in others, due to the fact that regional or local entities had difficulties in actually finding transnational potential partners and programmes. Some countries mention the transnational cooperation as regards Roma inclusion in their OPs (**Spain, Czech Republic**), some others (**Italy**) despite of mentioning it or not, plan to carry out transnational cooperation for the transfer of good practices in social inclusion of Roma.

The potential of the transnational cooperation for Roma inclusion should be further explored in the **upcoming programming period**. The Structural and Investment Funds Regulations pay particular attention to cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and encourages Member States and regions to make use of the possibility offered by cooperation activities, notably under the ERDF and the ESF.



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4. 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 and Investment 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. This chapter reviews to which extent there is an adequate synergy between the NRIS and the Structural and Investment Funds, a prerequisite to ensure that financial instruments contribute to the implementation of policies.

➤ **Aligning Funds with Europe 2020 targets: going beyond the promotion of social inclusion and poverty**

Three out of the five Europe 2020 headline targets are of relevance for Roma (employment, education and poverty reduction) as a high percentage of them are concerned by the challenges raised/pointed out in these three areas. However, only in some countries Roma are mentioned in the National Reform Programmes. Indeed, it could be even considered contradictory that while all countries agree that in order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets Roma are to be included as a target group, they are not explicitly mentioned in many National Reform Programmes. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that these three objectives are also covered by the thematic objectives of the Structural Funds, notably under ESF priorities, complemented by ERDF and EAFRD. As a result, although the Europe 2020 Strategy was launched in 2010, at a moment where Structural Funds interventions of the 2007-2013 programming period were already planned and already ongoing, there is a direct link between the Europe 2020 targets and the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion.

There is a clear progress as regards the alignment between the Structural and Investment Funds and the Europe 2020 targets 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 the Europe 2020 targets. In the country-by-country meetings, stakeholders in all countries referred to the Europe 2020 Strategy as a guide for the planning process of the Structural and Investment Funds.

Most countries focus on Thematic Objective 9, and specifically on the investment priority



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“Integration of marginalised communities such as Roma” when planning the use of the Structural and Investment Funds to achieve the **Europe 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.

➤ **Aligning Funds with National Roma Integration Strategies: a great potential for achieving social change**

It seems that in the **current programming period** there is little connection 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 did not lead to any revision of the Operational Programmes or at least to major changes. As in other cases, this is arguably related to the fact that the Strategies were adopted in the middle of the Structural Funds programming period. It should however be acknowledged that in some countries, such as **Hungary** or **Italy**, even if the NRIS did not imply a revision of the OPs, they did guide deeply the content, priorities and budget of the most recent call for proposals. And this is what actually matters.

In the **upcoming programming period**, countries affirm that the National Roma Integration Strategies, which are now in place in all countries, 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 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.



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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 Points (NRCs). However, the assumption of this responsibility is not always possible taking into account that in some countries the role of the NRCs is very weak, or merely formal, or because they lack the political leadership and administrative capacity to fulfil the tasks assigned.

In fact, it is now, when the Structural and Investment Funds for the next programming period are being designed, that Roma national policies can be connected with EU Funds. But for making it possible, close cooperation between relevant actors from both sides is required, i.e. the National Contact Points and the Managing Authorities with the participation of the regional and local level as well as the units/teams with responsibilities in social policies together with the civil society and Roma organisations.

➤ **How to ensure that there is an alignment between Structural and Investment Funds, the NRIS and the Europe 2020 Strategy?**

Some proposals to ensure that there is a better alignment between the Structural and Investment Funds, the National Roma Integration Strategies and the Europe 2020 Strategy are as follows:

- Review the references to the Structural Funds in the Europe 2020 Strategy and the NRIS.
- Ensure that the lines of action, objectives and targets included in the Europe 2020 and the NRIS are fully taken into account when planning the Structural and Investment Funds programming period so that they contribute to their achievements.
- Make sure that funds are not focused exclusively on employment or social inclusion, but have a wider scope and tackle the four areas which are considered necessary to achieve Roma inclusion –employment, housing, education and healthcare- combined with the cross-cutting issues of non-discrimination and gender equality.
- Involve the National Roma Contact Points in the preparation of the OPs which could have an impact on Roma, going beyond the OPs on social inclusion and employment.
- Ensure that other relevant stakeholders (public authorities at all levels, civil society organisations, etc.) are also involved in the preparatory phase of the OPs.



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5. 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 and Investment Funds. Aware of the need to improve the connection between Roma issues and Structural and Investment Funds, efforts have been made to develop systems, whether informal or formal, which could contribute to this process. Some countries have opted for addressing Structural Funds for Roma inclusion in the context of existing structures relevant for Roma-related issues; in others, specific 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.

➔ Coordination at horizontal level

According to the information gathered, in the **current programming period** mechanisms for horizontal cooperation both between bodies in charge of the management of Structural Funds and those in charge of the coordination of the relevant programmes for Roma vary from country to country. In a few countries, coordination is limited to informal contacts and cooperation, whenever considered necessary by the parties involved, without a formal mechanism for cooperation. However, in most of the countries analysed, formal structures or mechanisms for cooperation have been established both in the context of the existing ones or through the creation of new ones to address specifically the use of Structural Funds for Roma inclusion.



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Specific mechanisms on Roma issues and Structural Funds used by Member States

Information on the initiatives adopted by some Member States is as follows:

- **Hungary** has established a model which involves both the political and the technical level. At political level, the *Interministerial Committee for Roma Affairs*, where the National Roma Contact Point is included, oversees the execution and convergence of the National Roma Integration Strategy and the Structural Funds Action Plan and can establish professional working groups on monitoring. At technical level, the *Roma Coordination Council* brings together representatives from different areas of the public life with the aim of supervising and coordinating the convergence between the National Roma Integration Strategy and the Action Plan through consultation. However, according to stakeholders, further efforts on coordination and synergy between both structures are required.
- **The Slovak Republic** has different mechanisms for coordination which are worth mentioning. First of all, it counts on a unique figure: *the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities*. The Plenipotentiary is in charge of the coordination of the Roma-related aspects of the six operational programmes involved in the complex approach, which means, among other issues, that it cooperates with the Managing Authorities in the process of preparation of calls for projects submission, applying the comprehensive approach; it publishes calls for submission of local comprehensive approach strategies; it sets up a selection committee for the comprehensive approach and coordinates its activity, with the aim of approving local strategies; it cooperates with Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies/Managing Authorities in the selection, evaluation and monitoring of projects submitted under the comprehensive approach; it coordinates the work of the monitoring group for comprehensive approach application, whose task is to monitor the implementation of projects on the spot and address the identified problems in implementation (if any), directly communicating and cooperating with the Managing Authorities of the relevant operational programmes.

Moreover, the *Office of the Plenipotentiary* is also responsible for the implementation of the *horizontal priority 'Marginalised Roma Communities'*.

In addition, the conclusion of an agreement between the Managing Authority of the most relevant OP as regards Roma integration (*Employment and Social Inclusion OP*) and the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities should be pointed out. Signed in April 2008, in the "Agreement on Mutual Cooperation and Coordination in Fulfilling the Horizontal Priority Marginalised Roma Communities" both parties agreed on



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procedures for the implementation of the Horizontal Priority ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’ as regards the use of EU funds in the 2007–2013 programming period.

The role assigned to the Plenipotentiary during this programming period had the aim of increasing Roma participation in the process of design and implementation of the Structural Funds. However, the imbalances between the responsibilities assigned and the competencies given to this body are identified as a shortcoming that requires some reflection. The Slovak Government is considering different options to address these imbalances so as to better coordinate the so-called ‘complex approach’ and implement the horizontal priority ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’.

- In the **Czech Republic** a working group on Roma communities (*Working Group for Roma Community Affairs*) was set up in 2005 with the aim of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of projects for Roma Inclusion under the European Social Fund. It was created as a formal group of the *Human Resources and Employment OP Monitoring Committee* with a clear status and rules of procedure and has been consolidated over time, currently constituting a platform for information and consultation of relevant stakeholders. This group has contributed to improving the coordination and exchange of ideas between the different bodies in charge of Structural Funds and Roma policies and other stakeholders, including civil society organisations. It is a formal group, involving 20 members who meet four times a year, but flexible enough to adapt to circumstances and allow the participation of additional actors when considered appropriate (for example the beneficiaries of the Area of Support 3.2.- *Support of Social Integration of Members of Romani Localities*). The leadership of this group is held by the ESF Managing Authority due to the particular role of the National Roma Contact Point in the Czech Republic, which is formally held by the European Policies Coordination Department and lacks institutional capacity to mobilise different stakeholders. In the upcoming programming period, it is foreseen to reinforce and consolidate this structure already in place.
- In **Spain**, as stated in the NRIS, plans are in place for the creation of an *Interfunds Committee*, comprising representatives of the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD, with the aim of coordinating the programming, follow-up and review of activities focused on the Roma. The Committee has already held its first meeting, but the process has just started and requires further definition, which seems to be a commitment for the coming programming period.



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Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies as part of wider structures on Roma

- In **Bulgaria** Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies are part of a wider structure on Roma. An *Interinstitutional Working Group* related to the Council of Ministers was created with the aim of coordinating all stakeholders regarding the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy. This body, whose Secretariat is held by the National Roma Contact Point (the National Council for cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues), meets at least twice a year.
- In **Italy**, following the approval of the National Roma Integration Strategy, a structured mechanism for coordination of Roma issues was created, including the representatives of the Structural Funds Managing Authorities. This unique structure combines the political and technical level, as well as the horizontal and vertical coordination (different line Ministries together with representatives from regions and municipalities). It also gathers civil society representatives.

Participation of specialised Roma-related bodies in the management bodies of the Operational Programmes

- In **Romania**, the Government *National Agency for Roma* is part of both the monitoring committee and the evaluation steering committee of the most relevant OP for Roma.
- In the **Czech Republic**, the *Office of the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs* is represented also at various management commissions of EU Operational programmes, which directly or indirectly target Roma.

Informal mechanisms for cooperation

- In the case of **Greece**, since the role of the National Roma Contact Point was temporarily assumed by the ESF Coordination Unit, coordination between ESF actions and Roma policies was an easy task. However, since September 2013 the responsibility of the National Roma Contact Point is held by a different body (National Centre of Social Solidarity), a public organisation within the Ministry of Labour; therefore, even if there is a close cooperation, for the moment it is based on informal relations and no formal structure has been established. It remains to be seen how it will be organised in future.



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Aware of the importance of improving coordination, in the *next programming period*, a general trend towards a reinforced and more formal cooperation is observed. Countries do not foresee major changes, but to continue with the process of further developing and consolidating the mechanisms created during the current programming period.

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 Managing Authorities 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.

➔ Vertical cooperation: the missing link

In the majority of cases, it seems that significant challenges remain with regard to vertical cooperation between key bodies at central level, including the Managing Authorities, and regional and local authorities responsible for the implementation of actions for Roma inclusion. In some cases cooperation with the regional and local level takes place through the cooperation with the Managing Authorities of the OPs at regional level, if any, or through the cooperation and involvement of the representative organisations for regions and municipalities.

However, it is widely recognised that improvements need to take place to facilitate this cooperation and specially to reach the regional and local level in order to promote their ownership of the actions, as they will be the ones in charge of the implementation. Notably in the countries with a high degree of decentralisation, regions are in the best position to create a link between the national and the local level by ensuring that the information reaches them and encouraging their involvement.



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Specific mechanisms on Roma issues and Structural Funds used by Member States

Some countries have already launched initiatives to promote or strengthen the involvement of local and regional authorities in the use of the Structural Funds for Roma inclusion.

- This is the case of the *Agency for Social Inclusion* in **Czech Republic**. This agency acts at the local level by providing assistance in the preparation and implementation of projects which target socially excluded Roma communities, and by providing services. This Agency is connected to the Structural Funds since one of its tasks is to assist in the project identification and implementation of the EU funds for the benefit of socially excluded Roma at the local level. It helps to overcome the difficulties of institutional capacity of local authorities when trying to access and use Structural Funds for Roma inclusion. The establishment of the Agency is widely recognised as a step forward; however, its impact is limited to a number of municipalities that on a voluntary basis address to the Agency and are willing to improve the living conditions of the Roma families.
- In the **Slovak Republic**, a platform where regional government bodies are represented has been established by the *Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities*. At the same time these regional bodies are also members of the Monitoring Committee of the *Employment and Social Inclusion* OP. In addition, local bodies are linked to the Managing Authority of this OP mainly as beneficiaries, allowing the latter to have an overview of proposals for demand-driven projects and to obtain feedback at the local level through on-the-spot checks. Moreover, the Office of the Plenipotentiary has six regional offices, which aim to reinforce the link with regional and local authorities.

Other countries have tried to reinforce the link between the Structural Funds and the local/ regional level without being specifically focused on Roma, but through initiatives that are potentially open to Roma inclusion.

- In **Romania**, the Managing Authority relates with regions and municipalities by means of the so-called *Regional Pacts and Local Partnerships on Employment and Social Inclusion*, constituted by representatives of public institutions, unions and NGOs. Each Regional Pact is supported by a Permanent Technical Secretariat, providing counseling to the Pact's members and financed in accordance with the Action Plan for increasing the Structural and Cohesion Funds absorption rate. It is envisaged that these actions are supported by the European Social Fund through the *Human Resources Development* OP.



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For the upcoming programming period, there are plans to train community level consultants for awareness activities, like preparatory sessions with local authorities, informal leaders and members of the communities. Discussion is also taking place on the idea of creating a database of experts in order to support local level.

- In **Hungary**, the Managing Authority coordinates actions vertically through the Intermediate Bodies and an *Expert Network of Micro Regions*. Local beneficiaries receive technical guidance on the implementation from mentors in the field during the full cycle of the project. The Intermediate Bodies, regional development agencies and final beneficiaries at local level are required to use the guidelines on horizontal equal opportunities issued by the Managing Authority.

In other cases, there is already some kind of structures or mechanisms for the coordination of Roma issues at vertical level, and the Structural Funds are or may be one of the areas covered by these structures/mechanisms.

- In **Spain**, the *Roma Technical Cooperation Group* includes representatives of the central, regional and local administrations. It promotes mutual information concerning Roma-related policies implemented at the three administrative levels and the operative rollout and follow up of measures that require involvement from all three levels. This structure is already ongoing, but further efforts are needed to regularly incorporate the Structural Funds on the agenda of the group.
- In **Italy**, which is also characterised by a decentralised structure, national and regional *Coordination Tables* have been set up to follow up the implementation of the NRIS, focused mainly on themes such as education and employment. As mentioned before, the use of the Structural Funds is included in a wider structure around the National Roma Integration Strategy.
- **Bulgaria** has recently set up a *Network of Mayors* to improve the impact of actions at local level on Roma. Around 70 municipalities are participating in this initiative which is quite active in terms of exchanging experiences and practices, including the implementation of Structural Funds programmes. And under the investment priority *Integration of marginalised communities*, such as Roma, it foresees for the upcoming programming period the launching of *Municipal Roma Integration Plans*.
- **Greece** is considering the setting up of information offices at local level.



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Although there are evident efforts to connect more effectively Structural Funds implementation structures and the Roma policies through the different levels of the public administrations, further efforts are needed. In terms of progress for the *upcoming programming period*, most of the countries foresee to reinforce the structures already in place or to create new ones. As already mentioned, while having the adequate structures is a precondition for a proper coordination, countries should also reflect on the quality and content of this work.

Especially as regards the coordination of different levels of public administrations, neither mechanisms for coordination nor even communication channels are in place in many countries, which makes really difficult an effective implementation of Roma Structural Funds programmes at the local level. When available, these channels reach the regional level, but not always the local one.

As concerns the role assigned to the **National Roma Contact Points**, it is important that they are endowed with the adequate human and financial resources as well as the competences necessary to fulfil the tasks assigned to them at coordination and political level. In general terms, **there seems to be an imbalance between the responsibilities assigned and the capacity to fulfil them**. The capacity to mobilise actors and to align Structural Funds and Roma policies is particularly relevant.

In general terms, there is a need to **foster institutional capacity** of those bodies dealing with Roma issues and those dealing with the management of Structural Funds to ensure that Funds are invested in a more effective way. Funds available as part of the technical assistance could improve the institutional capacity of these actors.



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6. 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 and Investment Funds) pay particular attention to the involvement of relevant stakeholders in all the process.

The **European Code of Conduct on Partnership**¹⁶, recently proposed by the European Commission, identifies as relevant partners public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society and insists on the need for their active involvement in the whole Structural and Investment Funds cycle. The Code proposes a set of standards to improve consultation, participation and dialogue with partners during the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds). It stresses the need to pay particular attention to *“including groups who may be affected by programmes but who find it difficult to influence them, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, which are at highest risk of discrimination or social exclusion, in particular persons with disabilities, migrants and Roma people”*. The Code also points out to the strengthening of the institutional capacity of partners as an essential element to facilitate partnership and to help them to effectively participate in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. To this end, it proposes the use of EU Technical Assistance in the form of, inter alia, dedicated workshops, training sessions, coordination and networking structures or contributions to the cost of participating in meetings on the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a programme.

In particular, as regards Roma and Structural 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.

➔ Different levels of participation

During the **current programming period** there has been improvement as regards stakeholders' participation, moving towards a more structured and coordinated involvement. The following elements could be highlighted:

¹⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=8248>



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- The involvement of stakeholders, notably some of them (i.e. civil society organisations) mainly takes place in certain phases of the project -notably implementation- and not so much in other key phases such as overall planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- There are big differences regarding the degree and quality of the participation of stakeholders.
- The extent to which Roma individuals or organisations, as well as organisations working with Roma, are involved differs from country to country. We see a general acknowledgement of the importance of their involvement, however how it is done in practice remains in many cases unclear as there is no systematic monitoring and evaluation of involvement of stakeholders.
- Participation takes place in different ways and to different extents in each of the countries, ranging from formal and restricted mechanisms of cooperation to more informal mechanisms involving a large number of stakeholders (e.g. in **Romania** in the 2007-2013 programming period the institutional mechanism for partnership included approximate 1,000 institutions, which makes the process really complex). Roma civil society was mainly consulted in the programming stage, but not in the monitoring phase.
- The participation of Roma organisations takes different forms but it is mainly as final beneficiaries of the projects. In some cases, they are entrusted with other roles, for example consultation in the project design or participation in the monitoring committees (e.g. **Bulgaria**), although the participation in these cases tends to be confined to a status of observers lacking formal voting rights.
- The creation of *ad hoc* committees is observable in some cases; in others, manuals and guides for Roma participation have been developed (**Hungary, Italy** and **Spain**).

Based on the information gathered, it is expected that this trend continues and is further developed in the **next programming period**. All countries recognise the need to fully involve stakeholders, although in many cases it remains unclear how this will be done; in some cases, several stakeholders, including different ministries or representatives of the civil society, are involved in the preparation of the next programming period. The **European Code of Conduct on Partnership** elaborated by the European Commission with the aim of helping national authorities to ensure a high quality involvement of partners could be a useful instrument. As previously mentioned, the Code provides guidelines and recommendations, as well as examples of good practices, on elements such as the



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partners to be selected and their involvement in the different phases, from the planning and implementation to the monitoring and evaluation. It is important to stress out that the Code mentions specifically the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, including Roma.

The participation in the preparation of the **next programming period** could be seen as an example of the different mechanisms at the disposal of Member States:

- Some countries have used **informal mechanisms of consultation**, such as bilateral contacts and face-to-face meetings with interested parties (e.g. **Romania**), consultation processes using the electronic tools (publication of the information on the website and/or sharing of the drafts with relevant stakeholders by email), organisation of events (e.g. **Greece**), etc.
- Others have set up **specific structures for preparation of the documents and consultation** with stakeholders.
- In other cases, countries have expressed their willingness to involve partners in **specifying the implementation arrangements and in developing the key documents**, such as the applicant guidance, eligibility rules, etc (e.g. **Romania**).

During the **current programming period** there has been some improvement as regards stakeholders' participation, moving towards a more structured and coordinated involvement. However, there is still room for improvement. Countries analysed are aware of how to make progress for **the next programming period**, which should include extending the participation to all the project cycle (from planning, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation), advancing towards a 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 capacity of potential partners (using, for example, available instruments, such as global grants and ESI Funds Technical Assistance).



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7. 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 and Investment Funds are meeting the expected goals as regards the integration of Roma. This section addresses key aspects raised in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of Structural and Investment Funds interventions, focusing particularly on the main challenges, and presents possible approaches to be adopted based on the current experiences.

This process is directly linked to the collection of data (notably ethnic data) and the need of measurable indicators. In particular, according to the new Structural and Investment Funds Regulations, especially as regards the ESF and the ERDF and in relation to the target groups and strategic areas of intervention, effective monitoring is expected on the basis of clear and measurable indicators.

In the country-by-country meetings most participants were aware of the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of Roma-related initiatives and their impact on the situation of the Roma community. However, this is identified as one of the most challenging areas in which there is room for improvement.

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 what are their impacts on the Roma population taking into account their particular environments. 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.

7.1 Monitoring of implementation of programmes and projects

➤ Setting indicators for data collection

In many programmes and projects there is a lack of relevant and reliable data (probably as a result of the existing concerns about the difficulties to obtain them), which prevents from monitoring performance and measuring the impact of both policies targeting Roma and mainstream programmes.



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Indicators which allow collecting this information and verifying whether the activities of the Operational Programmes are actually implemented in accordance with the original plan and what are the actual results and outcomes as well as, where necessary, redesigning approaches, resetting priorities and reallocating resources are also missing.

In general, it has been stressed that there is a need to collect better data on:

- Roma-targeted interventions contained in Operational Programmes where the Roma are explicitly defined as a target group and as the intended final beneficiaries.
- Interventions where Roma are targeted among other target groups.
- Mainstream initiatives which, although not directly targeting Roma, could have an impact on the situation of this group (e.g. education, health, infrastructure and urban regeneration, etc).

Stakeholders involved in the reflection process expressed their doubts about the types of indicators to be included, mainly as regards the mainstream actions. While the difficulty to obtain data in these cases is generally acknowledged, some indicators are proposed to gather at least approximate information when it is not possible to know the exact number of Roma beneficiaries. They include calculating an approximate percentage of Roma beneficiaries and identifying the entities benefiting from the funds working with the Roma.

The **2014-2020 European Social Fund Regulation**¹⁷ proposes a common set of output and result indicators for monitoring and evaluation which should contribute to ensuring that monitoring produces robust and reliable data that can easily be aggregated at EU level. The evaluation focuses on assessing the effectiveness and impact of ESF support.

ESF Regulation sets four categories of indicators, referring to the participants in projects, to the entities involved and to the immediate and long-term results:

- **On participants in projects.** One of the “common output indicators on participants” refers to “migrants, people with a foreign background, minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)”.
- **On entities** (implementing the projects or benefiting from them), including:

¹⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1304>



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- the number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organisations,
 - the number of projects dedicated at sustainable participation and progress of women in employment,
 - the number of projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level,
 - the number of supported micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy).
- **On immediate result indicators on participants**, including the following indicators:
 - inactive participants engaged in job searching upon leaving,
 - participants in education/training upon leaving,
 - participants gaining a qualification upon leaving,
 - participants in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving,
 - disadvantaged participants engaged in job searching, education/ training, gaining a qualification, in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving.
 - **On longer-term result indicators on participants**
 - participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving,
 - participants with an improved labour market situation six months after leaving,
 - participants above 54 years of age in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving,
 - disadvantaged participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving.

Some countries are already including indicators on Roma participation in the **current programming period**, mainly focused on those programmes where Roma are expected to be beneficiaries.

- This is the case of **Romania**, which, within the *Human Resources Development* OP, includes indicators on Roma persons (as an output and result indicator) and the number of ESF participants.
- In **Bulgaria**, the participation of vulnerable groups, including the Roma minority, is monitored at project level under the *Human Resources Development* OP and there is a specific set of indicators targeted at the social inclusion of Roma. Participants in the projects of this Operational Programme are invited to fill in a form where they can identify themselves as a member of the Roma (or any other) minority (self-identification).



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- The **Slovak Republic** also has a list of indicators relevant for ‘Marginalised Roma Communities’. Some of them are compulsory, others optional.
- In **Spain** extensive information about Roma participation is gathered in the context of the *Fight against Discrimination Operational Programme* but not in other programmes.

Other 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.

By way of example, in **Hungary**, the public institute Kurr Itsvan, within the Ministry of Human Resources, in charge of gathering all information at project level concerning ESF and ERDF interventions, is expected to conclude a system for obtaining disaggregated information, including by ethnic origin, based on self-identification.

➤ Collecting data on ethnic origin

Gathering data on Roma is directly related to the collection of data on ethnic origin. Many countries point out to difficulty of gathering this type of data in their countries due to national legal constraints, which according to their understanding render ethnic data gathering difficult, and in some cases to the fact that Roma are not recognised as a specific group but rather are included in the ‘vulnerable or excluded groups’ category.

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.

The EU Directive on the protection of individuals with regards to the processing of personal data has been narrowly interpreted. For instance, this Directive includes a number of exceptions to the prohibition, notably: 1) there must be an explicit consent of the subject to the processing of data; 2) there must be adequate safeguards; 3) reasons of public interest are a basis for deciding to collect sensitive data. While there are differences between Member States practices, and in all countries legal provisions restrict the processing of this sensitive data, it is important to clarify that national legislation does not generally prohibit their collection, but rather makes it conditional on the respect of certain safeguards. For instance with some minor differences all countries include exceptions to



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the prohibition of ethnic data processing in line with the provisions of the Directive, and all countries have bodies safeguarding personal data protection.

In the **current programming period**, countries have explored different methodological approaches to overcome this challenge, including some that have demonstrated important limitations, notably the self-identification by the beneficiary. Approaches include:

- **Self-identification by the beneficiary.** Experience has shown that the self-identification as done in some countries does not work as it is in most cases voluntary (e.g. **Bulgaria, Romania**) and Roma generally do not identify themselves as such. For example in Bulgaria jobseekers visiting the employment agency are invited to fill in declaration form including their ethnic origin, however it is voluntary/optional.
- **Using a name and address list**, which has proven its value to have an indication of the Roma beneficiaries in the projects.
- **Using information provided from intermediaries** (persons working with Roma, community leaders, school teachers...) on the ethnic origin of beneficiaries.
- **Lists of non-ethnic categories which might contain an important representation of Roma.**

7.2 Evaluations and assessments of needs and impact

➤ Evaluations

Countries acknowledge the importance of evaluations of results (impact assessments, external evaluations...), which should be based on measurable indicators. Mid-term evaluations are considered of particular relevance in order to have information for, whenever necessary, redesigning approaches, resetting priorities and reallocating resources. In this sense stakeholders consulted regret that the mid-term evaluations were optional in the current programming period.

During the **current programming period**, some countries have limited the evaluations to the compulsory ones; others have decided to undertake specific evaluations on Roma-related measures. For example **Romania** is carrying out a specific evaluation on the obstacles and shortcomings encountered as regards the implementation of the measures for Roma inclusion under the relevant OP, which will be available in the first trimester of 2014. The **Slovak Republic** has undertaken an external evaluation on the horizontal priority 'Marginalised Roma Communities', and its results will



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feed in the drafting of the new OPs for the 2014-2020 programming period. **Spain** has carried on an external evaluation of the *Fight against Discrimination* OP, assessing the impact of interventions developed by the four private organisations (NGOs) involved in the Operational Programme, which includes the specific actions for Roma inclusion. The **Hungarian** Managing Authority (National Development Agency) commissioned in 2011 an evaluation of EU funded developments for Roma integration in Hungary with a view to preparing the upcoming programming period. The evaluation addressed actions at three levels (policy level, measure level and project level) and elaborated a number of recommendations for each of them.

For the **next programming period**, countries are considering different options as regards the evaluations ranging from the idea of **Romania** of increasing the frequency of evaluations to the creation of an Evaluation Working Group in the **Czech Republic**. The **Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy –Extreme Poverty, Child Poverty, the Roma-** (2011-2020) establishes a detailed monitoring system, including clear indicators, which should be used also in the upcoming programming period.

➤ Analysis of context and impact on the ground

In the **current programming period**, some countries have based their Operational Programmes and initiatives on analysis, studies and maps which allowed assessing the state-of-play and situation on the ground or the implementation of the measures for Roma inclusion undertaken in the context of the Operational Programmes. Some of them have led to changes in the current period. 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. Some of these initiatives have been funded with Structural Funds Technical Assistance.

For the **upcoming programming period**, many countries are planning to design their programmes and interventions building upon the outcomes of the analysis, studies and maps that they have undertaken in the current programming period or that they are planning to undertake. For example, **Hungary** is concluding a poverty map. In **Romania**, several projects and studies are currently being implemented with the World Bank with the aim of improving the working procedures for verification and simplification of procedures; there is also a diagnostic study developed on the needs of the Roma community in the country as a baseline-map analysis, in order to establish priorities. In the **Czech Republic**, the “Analysis of socially excluded Roma localities” undertaken in 2006, will be repeated in 2014-2015 using Technical Assistance. The **Slovak Republic** has recently released (September 2013) the “Atlas of Roma communities”, which mapped marginalised communities and it is foreseen to guide the territorial approach for the next programming period.