

Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Greek Roma¹

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Introduction

This paper discusses the programme for the social inclusion of Greek Roma in the light of certain admitted limitations which have prompted a reassessment of the original programme. At the same time the paper links aspects of Greek experience to initiatives elsewhere,² as well as locating the discussion within the wider context of European social inclusion policy. There is a specific focus on problems of accommodation, including settlements and encampments, not only since solution of these issues presents a fundamental challenge to the programme under review but also because homelessness and housing exclusion is a prioritised thematic area for 2009 for the Social OMC.³ The aim of the paper, as of the review, is to assist the development and implementation of a successful social inclusion programme for Greek Roma by drawing on the experience of other Member States, while in return offering positive suggestions for practice that might be transferred to comparable yet different situations in partner countries.

The Lisbon Strategy, Social Inclusion and Roma populations

Policy framework for social inclusion

In 2000, with the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council decided to launch an initiative 'to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010' (European Commission 2006a). This aim was to be achieved principally by means of realising more fully the economic potential of the Community – especially through more skilled employment, which can be regarded as the main goal of the Lisbon Strategy – but was to be accompanied by a reduction in social inequalities. Consequently this initiative also focused on the key policy issue of poverty and later on other areas where social exclusion was prevalent, such as education, housing, pensions and health. Particular attention was to be paid to the most vulnerable groups and those suffering multiple deprivation with especially high risk of exclusion, such the disabled, children and young people, women, ethnic minorities and immigrants, the homeless and the institutionalised. Roma populations contain some of the most vulnerable and multiply deprived people on many, if not all, of these counts. This was recognised by several countries in specified measures for Roma in their National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPSI).⁴

¹ This article adopts the usage of the European Commission's July 2008 report, using 'Roma' as an umbrella term for the wide range groups referred to by this or related names (European Commission 2008a: 3, footnote 3).

² Mainly to previous Roma-related Peer Reviews in the Czech Republic and Spain. In a short paper like this it is inevitably necessary for Peer Review partners to recognise which aspects discussed resemble their own situation.

³ See Social Protection Committee (SPC 2009: 3, §3.1).

⁴ Countries mentioning Roma included Greece and Spain as well as Central and East European (CEE) countries, such as Hungary (FOCUS *et al.* 2004: 39-40).

A flexible approach to cooperation between the Commission and Member States was adopted to take account of the varied administrative and legal structures of individual countries. This Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is 'a mutual process of planning, monitoring, examination and comparison ... on the basis of common objectives' where sharing experience and good practice is encouraged by peer review exercises (Atkinson *et al.* 2005: 33, 36-38; European Commission 2006b). In addition, a network of independent non-governmental experts makes regular reports to assist the Commission in its task of reviewing the implementation of the social inclusion process (European Commission 2008c). The importance of social inclusion was reiterated at the March 2005 meeting of the European Council and a pragmatic approach to policy assessment was advocated, placing even greater emphasis on 'effective monitoring and evaluation provisions' such as more efficient use of 'targets, benchmarks and indicators, [and] better links with economic and employment policies' (EPSCO 2005, European Commission 2005).⁵

In spite of this well-established policy framework a 2007 overview of reports by national experts on social inclusion found poor linkage in many cases between Lisbon economic strategies and those for social protection and inclusion and concluded that '[e]ven where they are reasonably integrated, it tends to be in selected areas only, ... whereas social inclusion as such is often absent. ... A cause for concern is the relative lack of attention to whether economic policies ... are contributing ... to raising the incomes of those at risk of poverty and social exclusion' (Begg and Marlier 2007: 4-5).

The strongest criticism of the apparent neglect of social inclusion was voiced by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), which stated that 'poverty has become almost invisible in the Lisbon process', pointing to the difference 'between the strong commitment to ensure a link between Structural Funds and [economic] Lisbon, compared to the weak link with the social Lisbon goals through the OMC Social Protection and Social Inclusion and specifically the priorities of the Social Inclusion National Action Plan' (EAPN 2007: 1.5).⁶ The Greek report by the social inclusion expert was equally critical, arguing that the government's Lisbon strategy only 'pays attention to the objective of achieving high economic growth', although 'no links are evident between economic growth and social inclusion'. While 'the guiding principle' appears to be the 'spill-over effect', where 'gains from economic growth ... spread out to the whole population', in Greece the 'high rate of working poor' 'suggests ... "permanent inability" of the vulnerable social groups to benefit from the gains from economic growth' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 3.6).⁷

Roma populations and social inclusion

In many Central and East European (CEE) countries, sporadic efforts had already been made since the early 1990s to integrate their substantial yet marginalised Roma populations. Such initiatives intensified in candidate countries after 1997 when negotiations for accession to the EU gathered pace. A political criterion for these applicants was 'respect for minorities' and the excluded situation of their Roma citizens was a source of repeated criticism in regular reports by

⁵ From January 2006 increased effectiveness was to be aided by simplification of reporting mechanisms and streamlining of separate strands 'into one integrated OMC for Social Protection and Social Inclusion' (Social OMC) (European Commission 2008b).

⁶ The EAPN Hungarian report, emphasised that the 'highest possible percentage of cohesion policy and structural funds would be focused on the Lisbon objectives' (i.e. growth and jobs) (EAPN 2007: 5).

⁷ 'In 2001, the working poor rate was 13 percent in Greece and 7 percent in EU-15'. 'Greece continues to exhibit a high level of income inequality, measured either by Gini coefficient or by the ratio S20/80, remaining one of the most unequal income distribution[s] among the EU-15 Member-States' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 6).

the Commission. Meanwhile EU-funded projects assisted candidates to fulfil this requirement and ‘under the Phare programme, more than €100 million ha[d] been spent [in the decade] since 1998, targeting primarily education, infrastructure and other fundamental challenges for Roma communities’ (European Commission 2008a: 49 §10.3).

Reviewing this aid, a comparative report on Roma-targeted Phare programmes in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania identified not only the ‘absence, in any of the five countries, of a clear policy framework for social inclusion of Roma’ (EMS 2004 II) but also disproportionate and poorly directed use of PHARE support. While a World Bank study recognised that the widespread impoverishment of Roma in the CEE region was almost entirely due to the loss of their former jobs in the Communist economy (Ringold *et al.* 2003: 1), it was found that less than 10 percent of PHARE funding had been devoted to projects ‘to address long-term unemployment that is endemic in Roma communities’ (EMS 2004: 6). Likewise, when Roma life expectancy is at least ten years less than the general population, ‘only 3% [of PHARE expenditure had been] on health related initiatives’ (*ibid.*).⁸

While the PHARE programme was the main conduit for EU financial aid to CEE countries and provided the bulk of all support for Roma inclusion initiatives, numerous NGOs and other national and international donors, including governments, also sponsored Roma projects. The most significant of these other agencies remains the Open Society Institute (OSI), which still runs a variety of programmes in many ex-Communist countries. In 2003 the OSI and the World Bank jointly announced an ambitious new initiative, the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015), at a Budapest conference timed to coincide with the release of the most comprehensive study to date on levels of Roma impoverishment and exclusion in CEE and South-East European (SEE) countries.⁹

At the launch of the Roma decade in February 2005, participation was pledged by eight governments,¹⁰ while support was offered by many institutions including the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UNDP. A new comparative survey provided an important new database on the situation of CEE and SEE Roma populations (UNDP 2005). The Decade targets key issues of housing, education, employment and health and has important similarities to the Lisbon process and in many ways can be regarded as a parallel, complementary programme. However important differences are that with the exception of the Roma Education Fund (REF) the Decade has no funding of its own and, until February 2009 when Spain joined, applies solely to Roma in ex-Communist countries.

The concern of the Commission for excluded Roma populations was given added impetus when, in 2004 and 2007, a total of ten former Communist-ruled countries became EU members. This meant that the enlarged Community gained up to 5 million Roma – larger than the population of some new entrants (Ringold *et al.* 2003: 12). Roma, like other fellow-citizens, had already been migrating in limited numbers to existing Member States ever since the fall of Communist regimes after 1989. They came mainly as illegal workers or more controversially as asylum seekers, claiming endemic discrimination and sporadic racist attacks threatened their safety.

⁸ As indicated in the 2008 report (European Commission 2008a: 49), the greatest part of Phare funding, a third, was devoted to education projects, while over a quarter (27 percent) was spent on infrastructure (EMS 2004: 6).

⁹ The report included chapters on Hungary, Slovakia and Romania but also on Spain (Ringold *et al.* 2003).

¹⁰ Signatories to the Decade were Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovakia. See home webpage for Decade <<http://www.romadecade.org/>>.

However, after easing of visa restrictions in anticipation of the accession of Romania in January 2007, an estimated half a million Romanian Roma had migrated legally to Italy. There they joined indigenous Italian Roma, Roma refugees from former Yugoslavia and Albania and illegal immigrants in the long-established shantytowns on the outskirts of Italian towns and cities. Heated press campaigns, attributing rising levels of crime to Romanian Roma, grew to a crescendo in late 2007 following a brutal murder and resulted in vigilante attacks on Roma, the demolition of a shantytown in Rome and the burning of another in Naples and the passing of an emergency decree to expel those seen as a threat to security. In this way the consequences of both EU enlargement and continuing Roma exclusion in CEE countries combined to threaten not only the relationship between two Member States but also the fundamental right to freedom of movement within the EU (Hooper 2007, Popham 2008).

These disturbing events coincided with renewed pressure on the Commission to review and improve its initiatives for Roma populations throughout the EU. In late 2007, for the first time, the European Council addressed 'the very specific situation faced by the Roma across the Union' and calling on Member States 'to use all means to improve their inclusion', requested a progress report from the Commission (European Council 2008a). In early 2008 the European Parliament, followed by a coalition of leading NGOs concerned with Roma issues, passed a resolution that the Commission adopt a more proactive role on the basis of a new 'European framework strategy for Roma inclusion' (European Parliament 2008: §6). This demand was supported by several CEE governments including Hungary, then chair of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The Commission duly published its progress report in July and then convened the first-ever Roma Summit in September 2008. In its response, the Council strengthened the earlier call for old and new Member States to take more concrete action and make better use of the Structural Funds. Among other requirements, the Commission was asked 'to organise, initially, an exchange of good practice and experience between the Member States'¹¹ and to 'stimulate cooperation between all parties ... in the context of an integrated European platform' (European Council 2008b).¹²

Demands for a new Roma strategy focused attention on the long awaited restatement of the social agenda, updating the already modified Lisbon Strategy. Announced on 2 July 2008, this new package comprised legislative proposals, studies and recommendations and included the Commission's progress report on Roma. It also coincided with a Eurobarometer poll in which a large majority of EU citizens expected social inequalities to increase in the coming years and this was before the scale of the world-wide recession had become apparent. Accompanying the debate on the Commission's future role were disturbing reports of physical attacks on Roma including murders, reminiscent of the upsurge of anti-Roma violence in CEE/SEE regions during the turbulent economic conditions of the early 1990s. Apart from Italy, these incidents are now growing in frequency in new Member States, particularly Hungary, and often involve populist extremist parties which appeal to local concerns about concentrations of excluded Roma, often described as ghettos (ERIO 2009). Housing is only one aspect of Roma exclusion but this acute focus of popular unrest makes this current Peer Review, with its emphasis on housing and settlements, particularly timely and relevant to all Member States with Roma populations.

¹¹ This Greek Peer Review represents an important contribution to this exchange of experience. In addition a Europe-wide, comparative report of examples of good practice in Roma inclusion has been commissioned. This report will be based on individual country reports from eighteen Member States and is being carried out by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and Roma Education Fund (REF). Publication is due in mid-2010.

¹² Consultation over the structure and role of such a Roma 'platform' is currently taking place under the auspices of the Czech Presidency (in Prague, 26-27 February and 24 April 2009).

Relevance of earlier Peer Reviews

Greece has an extremely diverse Roma population, as explained later, and the original Greek programme addressed a wide range of types of dwelling from travellers' camps and peripheral settlements to urban housing. These accommodation patterns reflect differing degrees of integration of Greek Roma groups and the aims and experience of this initiative should be relevant to Peer Review countries with Roma populations and their own specific living conditions. Furthermore the Greek programme demonstrated early recognition that the complex issues associated with Roma marginalisation require integrated and multi-faceted treatment – an approach now seen as essential for offering the best chance of promoting inclusion. However adoption of this kind of comprehensive policy poses challenging questions about an appropriate institutional structure, coordination of implementation, effective delivery and adequate funding, all of which will be of concern to participants attending this review.

Two earlier Peer Reviews are closely related to this current exercise since both projects, although targeted at improving the situation of Roma in specific excluded locations, were also linked to wider national strategies of Roma inclusion. The Spanish example is particularly relevant since, like the Greek programme, it adopted a broader integrated approach in recognising that far more than better living conditions were required for effective inclusion.

The 2006 review, the *Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Avilés*, sought to rehouse marginalised Roma groups from dilapidated settlements to improved accommodation. This initiative had already been put forward in Spain's 2005 National Plan for Social Inclusion as an example of 'best practice promoting social inclusion and was subsequently selected as one of the principal case studies in the discussion on *Integrated policies and actions to promote the social inclusion of Roma in urban environments and disadvantaged neighbourhoods*' (Fresno 2006: 1).

While the project's title might suggest it only had limited local significance, it took place within the context of a national plan. Even though Spain introduced a highly devolved system of regional autonomy, the institutional structure of this initiative involved municipal cooperation with regional and national government bodies, which also contributed to the funding. Among the principal features was the integrated nature of the project design, which addressed multi-dimensionality in social inclusion by combining provision of vocational training and work experience with associated initiatives for education, health and community development. Close cooperation at governmental level was matched by the effective implementation by a combined team of key public and private actors and the involvement of national and local Roma NGOs as well as of Roma beneficiaries at grass-roots level (see Annex 3 for details).

The other Peer Review, significant for the Greek case, is the Czech Republic's 2005 *Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion*. This was the first Peer Review to be held in a new Member State and examined a project providing advice and help to impoverished families, overwhelmingly Roma, living in excluded urban localities. Advice was given by a prominent NGO, with a long record of involvement with Roma issues, on critical social problems afflicting its clients, such as housing problems, unemployment, debt, access to health care, education, drug addiction and unregistered citizenship. An integral feature of the project was negotiation of contracts between social workers and clients, so that those receiving advice were empowered by taking decisions and responsibility for their actions.

While the NGO recognised the multiple and interrelated aspects of exclusion in offering counselling on a wide range of concerns, it was not in a position to require municipalities to take effective action. The same was true of government in spite of a national strategy in place since the year 2000 and specific mention of Roma in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (Czech Government 2000, Minev 2005a: 5). On the other hand the project was funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and had been adopted by it in collaboration with other municipalities, demonstrating its transferability. Nevertheless Peer Review participants concluded that: '[g]iven the gravity of the problems and the limited resources available ... [the project] can perform no more than "harm reduction", ensuring that the clients' situations do not deteriorate further, rather than achieving full social inclusion' (Minev 2005b: 7) (see Annex 4 for further details and discussion).

The aim of the present Peer Review is to draw on the experience of other participant countries to improve the previous policy for the social protection and inclusion of Greek Roma. The two previous Peer Reviews concerning Roma, described above, have important lessons for the current exercise, which should help to consolidate knowledge already gained. This is aided by the presence of Hungary, Spain and Greece, as partners in earlier reviews. While the two previous examples focused on localised projects, they both share with the Greek programme an integrated approach to the complex aspects of exclusion, although to differing degrees. Also, although small-scale initiatives, they are linked to national programmes and crucially provide useful models for cooperation - both between different levels of government, a vital factor in increasingly devolved systems of governance, and between municipalities and other social actors. In addition the Czech and Spanish examples emphasise the importance of active Roma involvement rather than treating beneficiaries as passive recipients of welfare. Particularly appropriate in today's climate is the positive lesson from the Spanish project in Avilés, which was conceived during a period of economic decline.

The Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Greek Roma

Background

Greece has a special significance in the centuries-long history of Roma in Europe and the Greek-speaking realm of Byzantium has been regarded as the crucible of Roma European identity and the base area from which they later spread throughout Europe (Marushiakova and Popov 2001a & b). The presence in most Romani dialects of more loan words from Greek than from any other language, such as basic terms like 'road' (*drom* – Romani, *dromos* – Greek), attests to a long residence in and around what is now modern Greece (Fraser 1992: 55-56).¹³ Also most scholars argue, albeit speculatively, that the two most common sets of names used by others to denote Roma have Greek origins.¹⁴

¹³ In the absence of reliable historical records, linguistic evidence has been used to infer the possible date of the departure of Roma people from India, the routes of their subsequent journeys westward and the duration of their stay in particular areas (Hancock 2002: 7, Fraser 1992: 10-32). Interestingly 'almost all the words having to do with metalwork are from Greek' (Hancock 2002: 10).

¹⁴ The English name 'Gypsy' (*Gitane* - French, *Gitano* - Spanish) is thought to derive from the port of Modon (now Methoni) on the western coast of the Peloponnese, which had a Roma settlement known in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as 'Little Egypt'. The Hungarian name '*Cigán*' (*Cikán* – Czech, *Cigán* – Slovak, *Tsigan* – Romanian, *Tsigane* – French, *Zigeuner* – German, etc.) is thought to have been applied to Roma in Byzantine times after a heretical sect known as the *Atsinganoi* (Fraser 1992: 52-55).

While isolated claims of possible early Roma arrivals are unreliable, '[t]he first [firm] evidence we have ... of Gypsies in Europe is on the territory of the Byzantine Empire' and certainly 'during the fourteenth century', 'Gypsies were well established in the Peloponnese and a number of Greek islands' (Marushiakova and Popov 2001b: 35, Fraser 1992: 49). It is not implausible that their extended presence on Greek territory is an important factor in explaining the extreme diversity of the present-day Greek Roma population, ranging from those who are highly educated and well integrated yet affirm Roma identity, through marginalised shantytown inhabitants on the fringes of Greek towns and cities, to tent-dwelling, travelling groups pursuing a nomadic life.

Greece is a Balkan country and its Roma have similarities with those of Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia and Albania but unlike its nearest neighbours (Turkey excepted), it was never ruled by a Communist regime. Consequently Greek Roma did not experience state initiatives to draw them into the mainstream labour force that were widespread throughout Communist countries. Instead, as in Spain, the majority remained on the periphery of the labour market and the decline of traditional occupations led to growing urbanisation with Roma increasingly moving into dilapidated houses and overcrowded settlements. Here most are trapped 'in an informal "grey market" without financially viable prospects', often 'dependent on the seasonal employment of one family member and on welfare benefits' (MESP 2009b: 4-5).¹⁵

Wider social inclusion framework, policy objectives and target groups

This complex situation presented a considerable challenge to the Greek government which viewed 'the situation of the Roma in Greece ... [as] unsatisfactory and indeed unacceptable' and was 'determined to do everything in its power to remedy the situation' (Greek Government 1999). In 1996, it announced a National Policy Framework for Greek Gypsies, having decided that the only way to counter the deteriorating situation of the majority of Greek Roma was 'by well organised long term inclusion policies and within an integrated approach' (MESP 2009a).¹⁶ Nevertheless the great differences among the Roma population posed serious difficulties for the design of a comprehensive policy and the Programme was eventually introduced five years later in 2001.¹⁷ Delays were attributed to the need to consult with 'smaller [Roma] groups, scattered around the country' to build consensus and the 'sluggishness of bureaucracy in its every endeavour' but also to 'widespread ... prejudice', including that 'displayed by police officers or by elected officials at the local administration level' (Greek Government 1999).

The Integrated Action Plan (2001-2006) was developed 'within the framework of the national policy concerning Roma'¹⁸ and its main objective was 'the smooth integration of Roma in ... Greek society while maintaining their particular ethnic and cultural characteristics' (MESP 2005,

¹⁵ Certain occupations, 'such as recycling work, itinerant trad[ing] and junk [collecting], are practiced almost exclusively by the Roma' (MESP 2009b: 5). In rural areas Roma 'occasionally earn a living by seasonal agricultural work', while 'in urban settlements around Greece, the main occupation is selling scrap-metal and other wares in markets' (Abdikeeva 2005: 7).

¹⁶ This announcement followed criticism of a major police raid on a Roma settlement (ERRC/GHM 2003: 184).

¹⁷ 'According to the government's own Implementation Review for the Years 1996-1999, the only part of the initial project that had been completed by 2000 was a survey on Roma housing conditions' (Abdikeeva 2005: 7). Five settlements were to have been relocated 'immediately' but by the end of 1999 none had yet been moved (ERRC/GHM 2003: 10). The first relocation, of a settlement not in the original plan, eventually took place in 2000 as a result of NGO pressure and only after the intervention of the Greek Ombudsman (Alexandridis 2001).

¹⁸ Somewhat confusingly documents refer to two periods for the Integrated Action Plan :2001-2006, probably to include this within the corresponding NAPS I period, and 2002-2008.

Annex 1: 38-39). More broadly it aimed to prevent the risk of exclusion (Objective 2) and also formed part of the specific 'comprehensive interventions' to support 'particularly vulnerable population groups (persons with disabilities, Roma, the elderly, the uninsured, repatriates and immigrants' (Objective 3). As such, it was included in the Greek National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (ibid: 10, 23, MESP 2008a: 1).

The principal target of the Plan was the immediate problem of inadequate living conditions. Almost half of Roma families lived in dilapidated housing in run-down urban neighbourhoods, which 'are exclusively or mainly populated by Roma', while a further quarter lived in mixed settlements consisting of an approximately equal mixture of houses and shacks. Gravitation towards towns meant that 60 percent of 'seasonal families' also lived for part of the year in urban neighbourhoods, while 28 percent of these families lived in settlements.¹⁹ Accordingly the first segment, or axis, was to address infrastructure issues, which involved the improvement of existing accommodation and the construction of new settlements, including the provision of organised camp sites for Roma who travelled. An integrated approach meant recognition that improvement of accommodation on its own would be insufficient to increase inclusion, since serious concerns such as poverty would be unaffected. Consequently a second axis addressed problems of education, employment and vocational training, health and welfare, as well as cultural issues including sporting activities (MESP 2009a).

The Plan 'gathers all the interventions proposed and implemented by various agencies, organises them and classifies them along [the] two axes'. Responsibility for these activities is borne by an Inter-Ministerial Committee, which includes representatives drawn from central and local government and from Roma organisations, as well as Roma experts (MESP 2008a: 6).²⁰ The Committee is coordinated by the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, while at local level 'measures ... are largely being implemented via decentralised, administrative structures and municipal administration' (MESP 2005: 29, 23; Annex 1: 38 & 2008a: 1).²¹ Proposals are submitted to the Ministry by local authorities and assessed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee, which is 'primarily concerned with the matter of coordination and cooperation between co-responsible agencies for the implementation of separate actions' (MESP 2005, Annex 1: 26).

The broader National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSI) acknowledged the difficulties of coordinating different institutional levels and to encourage the participation of different actors, Objective 4 was set as 'Mobilising all Institutions and Agencies'. In this context the importance of effective supervision and assessment of on-going activities was emphasised: 'The success of policies also directly depends on appropriate monitoring and evaluation. Decentralised service structures contribute to this as an opportunity is offered for an immediate recording of the results and of needs at the local level' (ibid, Annex 1: 31). Meanwhile central government intended to review national policy in order 'to re-examine the soundness of the specific objectives, to explore

¹⁹ See MESP (2009b: 1-3). Although these figures are from 2009, the proportions are likely to be similar. A 2005 NGO report stated that 'an estimated half of the Roma population live in shacks, without access to electricity, sanitation or piped water ... [and] often under the threat of eviction' (Abdikeeva 2005: 1).

²⁰ As well as national representation, 'local authorities – upon their [own] initiative have established an inter-municipal Rom network ... [which] cooperates on a regular basis with central administration' (MESP 2008a: 11).

²¹ According to Law 3463/2006, 'any proposal or project aiming at the housing rehabilitation of citizens in need falls within the primary responsibility of the competent Local Government Organisations (MESP 2008a: 6).

the degree to which they will contribute to combating poverty and social exclusion, and to re-determine them, if necessary' (ibid: 10).²²

Legal framework and related issues

The anti-discrimination legal framework underpinning the National Policy Framework for Greek Gypsies includes article 5.2 of the Greek Constitution which states: 'All persons living within Greek territory shall enjoy full protection of their life, honour and liberty irrespective of nationality, race or language and of religious or political beliefs' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 14).²³ This general guarantee was strengthened in 2005 by the delayed incorporation into Greek law²⁴ of two European Council Directives from 2000. One, commonly known as the Race Directive, requires equal treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.²⁵ However the Greek Ombudsman highlighted problems in interpreting this law (ibid: 16) and doubts have been raised about its enforcement (Abdikeeva 2005: 6).²⁶ Also, although citizens, Greek Roma often lacked essential documents such as identity cards (ibid: 6, Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 15) but the housing loans scheme proved a strong incentive for Roma to obtain these (MESP 2008a: 3).

Most Greek Roma were only granted citizenship in the mid-1970s and had previously been seen as 'aliens of Gypsy descent' (Roughieri 2000: endnote 2). Nowadays, the 2008 updated report on the Action Plan emphasises that 'Gypsies in Greece [represent] ... an integral part of the Greek population; they have unequivocally expressed the wish to be considered and treated as Greek citizens, and not only as persons of Roma origin'. Consequently, since Roma 'are not registered separately from other Greek citizens, either during the national census, or in the municipal rolls²⁷ ... there is not a precise number of the Roma population as such' (MESP 2008a: 1).²⁸ The most recent Ministry 'rough estimate' is a total number of 65,000.²⁹ However the 2001 Integrated Action Plan had given a much higher figure of 250,000 - 300,000 (EETAA 2001: 5). This large discrepancy in official estimates serves to highlight the unreliability of existing Roma population statistics and the need for more trustworthy data. In this context it should be noted that, as in many other Member States, the indigenous Roma population has been augmented by recent

²² While this referred to 10 National Social Objectives to be achieved by 2010, it also states a general principle. However this did not appear to have been applied in a related 2006 Implementation Report on the National Reform Programme (2006-2008), which the Greek independent non-governmental experts sharply criticised for being a mere 'technical exercise' as simply 'a repetition of the main initiatives taken or intended to be taken in certain social policy areas crucial to social cohesion' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 4).

²³ Other legal instruments are international Covenants and the European Convention on Human Rights (ERRC/GHM 2003: 178-9).

²⁴ Law 3304/2005 was passed following 'intense international criticism and legal proceedings by the European Commission' (Abdikeeva 2006: 6).

²⁵ The Commission's abbreviated name is the [Racial Equality Directive](#) (European Council 2000a). The other directive combating discrimination was the Employment Framework Directive (European Council 2000b).

²⁶ The earlier Action Plan had been criticised on the grounds that it 'lacks a rights-based approach, which would target discrimination as a key cause of Roma exclusion and poverty, and completely omits gender issues' (Abdikeeva 2005: 8).

²⁷ 'The overwhelming majority (97%)' have now registered, also with municipalities (MESP 2009b: 4).

²⁸ 'Unofficial estimates for Roma refer to a number of 250,000 persons' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 14). But other estimates range from 70,000 to 300,000 (Abdikeeva 2005: 6). The 2008 report casts doubt on 'any precise number ... [as it] is not based on ... credible procedures and criteria' (MESP 2008a: 1).

²⁹ This represented an 8-10% increase from a 1998 estimate of 60,000 (MESP 2009b: 1).

Roma immigrants, in the case of Greece mainly from Albania.³⁰ However, the Action Plan applies only to Greek Roma (Abdikeeva 2005: 6).

The Action Plan had previously referred to their 'ethnic and cultural characteristics', although '[o]fficially ... there are not any ethnic minorities in Greece' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 13). Some integrated Roma 'reject the very notion of an ethnic minority',³¹ although some poorer tent-dwellers are said to disagree (Abdikeeva 2005: 6). Nevertheless, in view of their inadequate living conditions and poverty, Roma were classified in the Action Plan as a 'socially vulnerable group' and this term is repeated in the 2008 report (MESP 2005: 29, 2008a: 1).

Financial provision for policy components³²

The Integrated Action Plan 'does not have a budget of its own but ... relies on funds from the CSF [Community Structural Funds] and other sources (national funds ... [and] other financial sources)' (MESP 2009a). 81 percent of the budget for infrastructure was covered by national funds and the remaining 19 percent by the ERDF [European Regional Development Fund] (MESP 2009b: 16). However, in the general NAFSI, most 'comprehensive interventions' to benefit 'specific, particularly vulnerable population groups', including Greek Roma, were mainly funded by the CSF. However '[p]roblems in the planning and implementation of the programmes, in combination with their sometimes fragmentary character, led to low rates of absorption' (MESP 2005: 10). Structural problems, particularly economic decentralisation procedures, were blamed for preventing 'speedier and more effective implementation of ... policies at the regional and local level' (ibid: 23). Delay or even failure in making use of allocated funds was especially pronounced in actions intended 'to prevent the risk of exclusion' (ibid: 10). These general difficulties should be borne in mind when assessing progress of programmes for Roma.

The initial budget for the Action Plan for Roma was €308.6 million, of which 57 percent (ca €176 million) was devoted to infrastructure and 42.85 percent (ca €132 million) to services (EETAA 2001: 37, 115). According to the 2008 report in the infrastructure segment since 2002 until 1 June 2008 a total of €65.54 million has been allocated from the national budget for **infrastructure works** carried out by local authorities of which €39.13 million has been spent (MESP 2008a: 6).³³ Also, since 2002, the Ministry of the Interior has approved **land purchases** for 17 municipalities at a total cost of €5.16 million in order to relocate existing settlements or build new ones. In addition 9,000 **housing loans** of €60,000 each have been allocated for Greek Roma living in sub-standard accommodation (mainly tents or shacks), i.e. a total budget of €540 million. These loans, too, are funded and by the state budget, which also guarantees the loans and interest payments to participating banks. Beneficiaries are subsidised for 80 percent of interest payments

³⁰ The Greek independent experts point out that since the early 1990s 'Greece, once a traditional emigration country, has become ... a destination country for a large number of immigrants. ... Among the countries of origin, Albania dominates the picture, as 57.5% of ... legal immigrants living in Greece were Albanian nationals in 2001'. They add: 'To date the Greek State has not yet accepted the fact that Greece has become a "de facto multiracial" and multicultural society' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 11-14). Among these Albanian nationals 'there is a sizeable community of 'immigrant Roma from Albania, who have been legally living in Greece for over a decade, although few have obtained citizenship' (Abdikeeva 2005: 6). Also see the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in its *Second Report on Greece* on the Greek government's reluctance to acknowledge multiculturalism in Greece (Council of Europe 2000b: 25, appendix).

³¹ 'In Serres, Roma residents reportedly signed a petition against all [Gypsy/Roma] designations, insisting they were Greeks' (Abdikeeva 2005: 13).

³² Annex 2 gives a table with breakdown of budgetary costs.

³³ Funding by year (2003, 2004, 2005) for infrastructure expenditure is also given. See MESP (2005, Annex 1: 40).

and can pay off the loan over a 22-year period (ibid: 1-2). The Infrastructure budget also includes the construction of **socio-medical centres** and provision of **mobile units** as well as the establishment of **educational and cultural premises** (ibid: 5-6).

Yet, while some initiatives, particularly infrastructure projects and housing loans, were targeted specifically at the Roma population, others in the second axis of services, such as education and employment programmes, were broader in scope and disaggregation of funding is not always possible.³⁴ In **education**, the Induction of Gypsy Children to School initiative³⁵ was incorporated with others for repatriated Greeks, from around the Black Sea (Pontic Greeks) and Albania, and for Muslim children with a total budget for all three for the 2000-2004 period of €29.3 million and expenditure of €20.6 million. Of these, the Roma programme had a much lower absorption rate than the others (MESP 2005: 21) and enrolment and drop-out rates were seen as problematic, particularly for girls.³⁶ Education for Greek Roma Students, following on in the 2005-2007 period, had a budget of €5.3 million (MESP 2008a: 7). In **employment**, Roma were also among the beneficiaries of the EU initiative EQUAL to combat employment discrimination and assist vulnerable population groups to enter the labour market. The total budget was €141.25 million over the 2001-2006 programming period. Also within the context of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Employment and Vocational Training, Roma were among those to benefit from projects to learn the Greek language, create New Jobs and New Entrepreneurs (MESP 2008a: 9 & 2005, Annex 1: 40). In **health**, 'a total of 27 [socio-medical] centres have been established' in areas where there are organised Roma encampments, each with annual running costs of €100,000, while travelling Roma are served by 3 mobile units. Between July 2003 and March 2004 expenditure on these mobile units was €176,000 (MESP 2008a: 8 & 2005, Annex 1:39). Within the framework of mass programmes of sporting activities for 'population groups at risk of social marginalisation', **sports** projects have been organised in Roma encampments and also **culture** programmes have been developed in areas with a high concentration of Roma (MESP 2008a: 8, 11-12 & 2005, Annex 1:40).

Policy reviewing and reassessment

The Integrated Action Plan had been reviewed on a regular basis since its inception in 2002 to improve its relevance and efficiency, as well as having being amended to ensure compliance with binding international documents.³⁷ However in 2008, towards the end of the second phase of implementation, a decision was made to undertake an assessment study in order to review and evaluate progress made up to and during the third CSF planning period.³⁸ This review would involve **investigation of any remaining implementation activities, assessment of the effectiveness of measures undertaken and identification of examples of good practice.**

The specific aims of the study were listed as:

³⁴ For example, Second Chance educational projects included Roma, repatriates, Muslims, immigrants and prisoners, while employment-related EQUAL projects reached a wide range of vulnerable groups (MESP 2005, Annex 1: 21, 33).

³⁵ A 2009 document gave a total budget of €12.258 million for this in the period 1997-2007 (MESP 2009b: 13).

³⁶ These were also seen as problematic for older Muslim girls in spite of the high absorption rate (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 20, MESP 2005, Annex 1: 20)

³⁷ For example, a 2006 legal amendment to comply with the statement on forced evictions by the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the UN's covenant (ICESCR) and the Council of Europe's (2000a) recommendations on improving housing conditions for Roma and Travellers, etc. (MESP 2008a: 2).

³⁸ This section is a slightly adapted version of a box in the 2008 updated report (MESP 2008a: 10).

- a) **Evaluate** all actions related to the National Integrated Programme for the Gypsy Population, as well as other projects undertaken to benefit this population group;
- b) **Investigate** and **update** any available data regarding the existing conditions and problems;
- c) **Draft a long-term, integrated Action Plan**³⁹ to be adopted within the framework of the fourth CSF planning period and afterwards.

The results so far

Policy results and evaluation

In view of the desired outcomes from the Peer Review on the part of the Greek hosts, particular attention is paid in this section to the continuing problem of **accommodation**, which lies at the heart of the social protection and inclusion of Greek Roma, as well as to issues of overall programme design, institutional forms and coordination.

As described above, 57% of the Integrated Action Plan's budget was allocated to the first axis of **Infrastructure** works, covering land purchases, settlement construction, temporary housing and basic infrastructure, as well as housing loans to individual Roma families. Since 2002 the Ministry of the Interior has approved **land purchases** for 17 municipalities and **permanent settlements** have already been established at several municipalities while other work is still in progress.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, since 1997 there has been on-going construction of a total of 1,763 **prefabricated houses** in temporary settlements to deal with urgent housing needs.⁴¹ **Infrastructure works** associated with existing and new settlements have been undertaken, such as sewage and road construction, water and electricity supply, playground provision, etc., and an average of 30 municipalities have been financed each year. Also 27 **socio-medical centres**,⁴² 3 **mobile medical units** and 13 **educational and cultural centres** have already been established (MESP 2008a: 5-6).

A major element of the housing initiative is the provision of **housing loans** 'to Greek Gypsies living in shacks, tents or any other construction that do not meet minimum requirements on permanent habitation'. Funding for 9,000 loans was initially agreed and following assessment of the data on applications, a revised figure of 8,785 was accepted by the Ministry of the Interior. 2008 data shows that 6,984 applications were approved and of these 5,689 loans (almost 82%) have already been granted by participating banks. However earlier data from 2005 indicates a total of 15,665 applications of which 5,747 (36.7%) were approved. Of these applications, 6,117 (39%) were from women, whose share of successful applications was similar (37%) with 2,114 approved. The relatively high proportion of women both applying and gaining approval for loans was attributed to the effect of policies to strengthen the position of women in society, such as introducing a single-parent family criterion (ibid: 1-3).

³⁹ The actual term in the original is 'long-term multi-filed Action Plan' (ibid.)

⁴⁰ As examples four named municipalities are listed with a total of 187 permanent residences (MESP 2008a: 5). These appear to have been built before 2005 as the same total is given for the period 1997-2004 by Ziomas *et al.* (2006: 26).

⁴¹ Figures for the period 1997-2007 (MESP 2009b: 8). However Ziomas *et al.* (2006: 26) give a figure of 1,674 for the period 1997-2004.

⁴² However a higher figure of 32 planned centres is given in the 2008 assessment (MESP 2008b: 9).

Housing loans are highlighted since this initiative is regarded by the Greek authorities as an 'innovative and ambitious' example of good practice by offering Roma participants the chance to adapt rapidly to very different and admittedly challenging new housing conditions. This transition is helped by adopting an individualised approach in settling beneficiaries in accordance with their desire to live near kinsfolk and their requirements for making a living. However it is acknowledged that positive discrimination in the form of state-backed loans might carry a risk of inducing a mentality of benefit dependency (ibid: 4).

Another significant risk is that although the isolated location of many present-day Roma settlements in Greece reflects the marginalisation of their inhabitants, the construction of new state-sponsored all-Roma urban developments might result in segregated, social excluded ghettos as they have elsewhere, especially in some CEE countries. In view of this very real danger, a pilot project in Crete offers a positive alternative where 131 families in a remote Roma community, without basic infrastructure and amenities, are offered loans to relocate to houses in 'a place of their choice' (ibid.). Assuming this move is of their own free will and provided the necessary support is given in their new homes, this resembles the approach of the Avilés project, where families were offered housing among the non-Roma community. Following the Cretan model, housing policy for Greek Roma is expected to evolve in future from a programme of building new settlements, unless this is unavoidable, into a strategy of integrating individual families within local communities.⁴³

Even though the Integrated Action Plan had been regularly reviewed from the start, the overall assessment in 2008 revealed a wide range of deficiencies.

As regards the infrastructure axis, systemic problems had been encountered in the planning and coordination of Roma housing initiatives, particularly in operational design, organisation and implementation, where these were often treated separately instead of being mainstreamed into more comprehensive local programmes.⁴⁴ Many difficulties stemmed from inadequate preparation of projects, involving poor awareness of existing housing conditions, inability to anticipate problems and the absence of prior needs assessments. No doubt the failure to involve Roma families in the decision making process played a significant part in these omissions. Clear criteria were missing for the approval of projects and also for their coordination, monitoring and evaluation. Funding problems included vague financial criteria, failure to secure requisite public funding for projects and inadequate use of relevant Social Fund (ESF) resources, although this last shortcoming had been characteristic of wider NAPSİ initiatives for other particularly vulnerable population groups. Newly built accommodation for Roma also presented problems, since the houses could be of poor structural quality, inadequate in size⁴⁵ for the intended occupants and expensive, which proved a deterrent hindering the development of an integrated housing policy (MESP 2008b: 3-4).

A major element of the services axis of the Action Plan is the provision of **education** to Greek Roma, where over half of adults had never attended school (MESP 2009b: 7). While the main

⁴³ The actual wording is: 'it is almost evident that that the Greek Gypsies' National Integration Policy is smoothly transforming into project and policies of individual rehabilitation within the local communities' (MESP 2008a: 4).

⁴⁴ The importance of mainstreaming housing policies for Roma as well as adopting an integrated approach is emphasised in the Council of Europe's Memorandum on Roma housing problems (Council of Europe 2000a: I).

⁴⁵ A minimum size of 85 sq. m. per house had been established in 2004 (Ibid: 5). In 2001 the ROM network had complained: 'The low specifications .. and their small size render them completely unsuitable' (MESP 2009b: 9).

programme, now in its second phase as Education for Greek Roma Students (2005-2007), is specifically targeted at this group, this initiative forms part of a broader attempt to meet the educational needs of a growing numbers from 'social groups with a particular social, cultural or religious identity'.⁴⁶ In 1996 the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs 'adopted "cross-cultural education" – a new form of education in Greece' and by 2006 a total of 26 cross-cultural schools were in operation where 'at least 45% of pupils are Roma, repatriated and/or foreign students' (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 17).

In the 2005-2007 Roma programme 'the aim is to integrate Gypsy children in the existing educational system (without establishing separate classes)'.⁴⁷ To increase school attendance and reduce drop-outs, a network of 170 'intervention schools' and 150 'monitoring schools' provide extra tuition and support by mediators, cultural and recreational workshops, teacher and staff training, and new educational materials. Greater access to education is encouraged by reducing enrolment requirements and by providing record cards for itinerants and also allowances for students. At the same time schools seek to raise awareness by working with local non-Roma communities and by organising 'parent schools' for Roma. Further assistance is offered through the establishment of Educational Support Centres (MESP 2008a: 7 & 2008b: 7).

In general the 2008 assessment reported an overall improvement with increased enrolment numbers, higher attendance and better academic performance of Roma students. In the 2006-2007 academic year, intervention schools enrolled 8,065 students compared with a total of 9,000 over the longer earlier period. The decrease in drop-out rates from 25 percent to 15 percent over the two implementation phases was partly attributed to the financial inducement of allowances. Relatively weaker results from rural areas were explained by the facts that in such localities Roma groups were more mobile and had worse living conditions. Apart from this the report noted 'insufficient implementation of supplementary teaching classes ... [and] exploitation of educational material' (MESP 2008a: 8).⁴⁸

Employment is a key factor in promoting social inclusion yet one of the hardest areas in which to make significant progress for severely marginalised groups such as Roma. Apart from the earlier EQUAL programme, the main means of improving Roma access to the labour market is by participating with others in the Sectoral Operational Programme for Employment and Vocational Training at both national and regional level. In 2008 it was reported that to date 1,338 Roma had benefited from 67 programmes offering training, counselling, Greek language classes and other support. Of these, 12 percent had joined labour activation schemes and 2 percent had obtained more permanent employment. In addition 1,402 proposals had been submitted to a Roma entrepreneurship programme of which 580 (41%) had been approved, while 34 Roma had established their own enterprises (MESP 2008a: 9 & b: 5).⁴⁹

As with infrastructure, the 2008 assessment found problems of operational design, project organisation and implementation. The lack of preliminary needs assessments resulted in actions which sometimes neither met requirements of the local labour market nor those of Roma

⁴⁶ The total number of foreign pupils increased from 44,000 in 1996 to 119,000 in 2003 (Ziomas *et al.* 2006: 17).

⁴⁷ The 2008 Updated Report mainly refers to 'Gypsies' but the term 'Roma' also appears (MESP 2008a: 6).

⁴⁸ Similar deficiencies in the earlier phase were blamed on the prioritising of necessary 'preliminary actions: [such as a] census of Roma children and [their initial admission in school]' (MESP 2005, Annex 1: 20).

⁴⁹ The NAPS document reported that between 2001 and 2003 a total of 1,183 Roma had participated in the Operational Programme for Employment and Vocational Training, while in the period 2002-2004 subsidised programmes to create new jobs and to assist entrepreneurs had benefited 160 and 51 Roma respectively (MESP 2005, Annex 1: 40).

participants. Standard programmes were inflexible and unable to adapt to take account of the special characteristics of their Roma clients, particularly their potential, skills, needs and expectations. Other design problems were gaps in the continuity of initiatives, and failure to integrate them with other measures to boost employment. Organisational and implementation difficulties included poor coordination and management of partners, lack of effective time-planning and delays in starting and implementing projects. A significant shortcoming, found elsewhere and also a feature of the Czech Peer Review, was that counselling 'focused mainly on psycho-social support without addressing employability enhancement and labour market entry issues' (MESP 2008b: 6).

Health benefits should follow immediately from initiatives that improve living conditions (accommodation and infrastructure). The Integrated Action Plan also includes the provision of 27 socio-medical centres near organised encampments and 3 mobile medical units serving travelling Roma, as well as vaccination, preventative and health education programmes. Many vaccinations have been carried out and Roma knowledge and attitudes to health issues are reportedly improved. The centres have the advantages that they are relatively small and flexible, accessible and user-friendly to their Roma clients and aware of local communities and the living conditions of Roma.⁵⁰ An important aspect of the centres is that they benefit not only Roma but also non-Roma communities in the vicinity, which helps in the difficult task of making local people aware of the situation of Roma groups and more sympathetic to their inclusion.

Although reported outcomes of this element of the services axis are mainly positive, design, organisational and implementation difficulties were encountered once more. While Roma health was known to be markedly worse than for the majority population, no prior systematic research underpinned the health interventions. Another fundamental problem was that health initiatives were not supported by national funding but were dependent on EU support and this lack of mainstreaming was also reflected in poor links with the hospital network at regional and local level and difficulties experienced by Roma in trying to access official health institutions. At the same time there were delays in the provision of both infrastructure and pharmaceutical supplies (ibid: 10).

In spite of health education efforts and increased vaccinations (50% of adults and 75% of children), basic health indicators 'remain unchanged' and 10 percent of adults 'face serious health problems'. Women's health was of particular concern for although health awareness had grown, this had limited effects on practice. Of the 40% aware of the Pap test for cervical cancer almost all had taken it only once, while of the 50% who knew about mammograms, only one in four had taken it only once. 80% of women did not use any method of contraception and 10% said that at least one child had died, mostly before the age of ten months (MESP 2009b: 5-6).

Obstacles and constraints

The 1996 decision by the Greek government to adopt a National Policy Framework for Greek Gypsies marks a watershed in the approach to the indigenous and long-established Roma population in Greece. Having been categorised previously as 'aliens' and mostly granted citizenship only two decades earlier, Roma were acknowledged thereafter as an integral part of the Greek population and the generally precarious and insanitary living conditions of the majority of Roma were frankly condemned as 'unacceptable'. However, there has been no provision as

⁵⁰ Over half (55.4%) of Roma households in the vicinity made use of the centres (MESP 2008b: 6).

regards measures targeting the "indigenous" Greeks despite the acknowledged extensive and deep-rooted prejudice of the latter vis-à-vis the Roma.

Nevertheless poor progress in initial measures to relocate settlements and delays in introducing the Integrated Action Plan have already been noted, as have suggested underlying reasons of 'bureaucratic sluggishness' and 'prejudice' within police forces and local authorities. However the wider National Action Plan drew attention to and fundamental structural problems, particularly those linked to the process of decentralisation, which impeded efficient coordination and 'effective implementation of policies at the regional and local level'.

Consequently it is not unexpected that the Integrated Action Plan for Greek Roma suffered corresponding failures of coordination between central, regional and local authorities. Not least of the problems was that operational projects were sometimes presented and approved before the Action Plan had been completed, leading to difficulties in incorporating and funding these initiatives within the overall programme. Indeed the absence of guarantees of secure and timely funding was seen as a general problem (MESP 2008b: 11-12 & 2009a).

Although the Inter-Ministerial Committee was entrusted with scrutinising and approving project proposals for local authority projects and coordinating the agencies involved in their implementation, the 2008 assessment study identified the '[a]bsence of a Central unified centre for the overall coordination of the Action Plan' as a principal problem in the overall design. Linked to this institutional gap were deficiencies in the 'lack of an integrated approach in regard to the design and implementation' of projects, 'lack of homogeneity of interventions' and 'insufficient promotion of regional and local partnerships' (MESP 2008b: 11-12).

Further shortcomings, involving both the Committee and local implementing partners, concerned failure to anticipate potential setbacks and poor preliminary assessment of 'the most important problems and needs'. In some cases this led to projects 'insufficient[ly] addressing ... [the] real needs' of Roma, partly due to poor knowledge of Roma characteristics and requirements. Monitoring and evaluation of interventions was another shared responsibility that was reported as inadequate. Charged with the main responsibility for implementing local projects, municipalities and their local partners sometimes had insufficient organisational and technical skills to fulfil their roles adequately. Nor did they always involve 'Roma households in the decision making and implementation process' (ibid.). And, on occasions, municipalities simply tried to resist the initiatives.⁵¹ Commenting on problems of delivering the Action Plan at local level, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that despite the positive political will of the national government, discrimination was still openly practised by many local authorities (Council of Europe 2004: 21, §70).

All these factors strongly suggest that the Inter-Ministerial Committee lacked sufficient capacity to carry out the massive tasks of designing and coordinating a complex Integrated Action Plan, adequately scrutinising local authority proposals, monitoring progress of approved schemes and then recording and evaluating results. Furthermore, in an organisational situation of devolved powers, where 'any proposal or project aiming at the housing rehabilitation of citizens in need falls within the primary responsibility of the competent Local Government Organisations', the Committee most probably possessed inadequate authority to perform the coordinating role with which it was entrusted (ibid: 6). Faced with this situation, and looking to the future, consideration

⁵¹ See Ziomas *et al.* (2006: 26).

of the two previous Peer Reviews concerning Roma and also of their institutional context could be helpful.

Potential lessons from previous Roma-related Peer Reviews

The Czech Republic had launched its national policy for Roma integration in 2000 and in 1997 had established an Inter-Ministerial Committee, renamed after 2004 the Government Council. Although the role of this body was mainly advisory, it nevertheless also had some coordinating functions. However, following devolution of many former centralised responsibilities, particularly for housing, the Council had found itself virtually powerless to influence regional and local authorities. These sometimes even went as far as diverting the work of Committee appointees at regional level from the Roma-related coordinating duties, for which they had been recruited, to these authorities' own totally unconnected tasks (Czech Government Council 2005: 11).

Spain's National Programme for the Development of Roma was introduced in 1988, two years after accession to the European Community. As in Greece at later date, and also in some CEE countries, a central administrative body was established, in this case supported by three coordinating commissions. A substantial national budget was provided, supplemented by matching funding from regional and local authorities and by a voluntary income tax levy. While the existence of a national programme and a coordinating unit encourages policy coherence and continuity as well as dissemination of experience, the commitment of regions and local bodies in Spain's highly devolved system of governance is encouraged by the requirement for them to contribute at least 40 percent of project funding.

A striking difference between the Peer Review cases of Spain and the Czech Republic is that whereas the project in Avilés was initiated and led by the municipality but fully supported at regional and national level, the Czech project is an NGO-led initiative which, although supported by the relevant ministry and in harmony with national policy, has limited integration with local policies of municipalities where it operates. Indeed it has been convincingly argued that it is precisely certain local authority policies that have been largely instrumental in creating the desperate situation which the NGO is seeking to alleviate (Baršová 2003: 19-20).

While the wide diversity of Greek Roma and their consequent housing situations are more varied than their counterparts in Spain, there are nevertheless important resemblances between the two countries, such as the long-established presence of indigenous Roma and, if often limited, a certain level of popular acceptance of Roma as part of wider national society. Not least of these similar features is the willingness of the central government to pursue a national policy aimed at the social inclusion of Roma within the structural context of a devolved administrative system. Therefore it is likely that, with appropriate modification, certain elements of the Spanish model may well be transferable to the situation of Greece in the reformulation of its Integrated Action Plan, while the example of the Czech Republic – in spite of the endeavours of the NGO and the Government Council – may offer some warnings.

Concluding thoughts

Finally, in considering future policy it is important not to view the options in isolation but to bear in mind the wider political and economic context in which these initiatives will be located. Largely because of extensive and deep-rooted prejudice, it is regrettably always a problem to gain popular support for marginalised Roma populations. At the present time a crucial aspect of public dissatisfaction is the widespread perception, shared by many experts on Roma issues, that despite considerable financial outlay by the EU, national governments and donors on numerous initiatives for Roma inclusion, these funds are producing negligible progress and therefore are, to all intents and purposes, wasted.⁵² This is a Europe-wide phenomenon and in the current climate where ordinary citizens are suffering the effects of recession, represents a critical situation where time is rapidly running out. Consequently any future Roma policies must be seen at last to deliver tangible and demonstrable results.

Key Issues for debate at the Peer Review meeting

Greece, as Peer Review host, has already identified in the Abstract document the **purpose** of the Review and also indicated the main **outcomes** it would wish to emerge from the process. These mainly concern the **institutional form and managerial mechanisms** and **improved design of policies in relevant sectors** for a more successful future Integrated Programme.

Therefore key issues for debate could include the following topics:

- **Organisational structures** – government structures, planning procedures, review mechanisms, administrative decentralisation, national and local cooperation, importance of local commitment.
- **Implementation, monitoring and evaluating** – central and local accountability, management systems, working with partners, self assessment and external scrutiny, corrective measures.
- **Research** – continuing requirement for basic empirical information and critical analysis, data collection issues, (e.g. disaggregated data), regular exchange and dissemination of findings.
- **Funding sources** – including EU support (ESF, ERDF), national and regional funding, importance of local financial involvement, other donors, Roma contributions.
- **Increased mainstreaming** – criticised as deficient in the 2008 Assessment, particularly in the policy areas of housing, employment and health.
- **Anti-discrimination measures** – utilising EU and national instruments in key areas such as equal opportunities for women and men, housing, education, employment, health, evictions.
- **Necessity of community work and local community benefits** from pro-Roma projects – as means of building popular support and political consensus, (e.g. socio-medical centres).

⁵² For example, see MfD (2009).

- **Awareness raising activities** targeting the "indigenous" Greeks as a means to tackle the widespread and deep rooted prejudices vis-à-vis the Roma.
- **Housing** – construction of new settlements and/or family integration to local communities, (e.g. Cretan pilot scheme); client-centred services and individualised approach.
- **Education** – provision of pre-school education and family support, parental involvement (esp. mothers); risks of segregated schools, girls dropping out, lack of parental role models.
- **Employment** – realistic integration into labour market as opposed to activation schemes, vocational training, entrepreneurs, poverty trap, 'grey economy' issues, social economy.
- **Health** – registration and vaccination campaigns, health education (esp. mothers), pregnancy and contraception, access to mainstream services, poverty and health, substance abuse.
- **Multiply-deprived vulnerable Roma** (e.g. girls and women, children, pensioners, single-parent families, disabled, institutionalised, homeless, undocumented people, immigrants).
- **Roma participation** – involvement at all levels: planning, employment possibilities (e.g. infrastructure), monitoring implementation and evaluating; inter-group cooperation.

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Annex 2

CONCISE FINANCIAL DATA OF THE OPD (extract from MESP 2009b: 16-17)

Under AXIS 1

Measures of Axis 1		Estimated cost in M €	National Funds	Community Funds (ERDF)	Particip- -ation of National Funds (%)
New Hamlets		139.40	119.59	19.81	86%
	Land Acquisition	17.61	17.61	0.00	100%
	Studies	7.34	5.14	2.20	70%
	Infrastructure networks & landscaping	23.48	9.17	14.31	39%
	Reception services infrastructure	7.34	4.04	3.30	55%
	Construction of new residences	83.64	83.64	0.00	100%
Improvement of existing residences		10.27	10.27	0.00	100%
Improvement of existing hamlets		11.74	5.14	6.60	44%
	Land Acquisition	1.47	1.47	0.00	100%
	Studies	4.40	1.10	3.30	25%
	Infrastructure networks & landscaping	2.93	0.73	2.20	25%
	Reception services infrastructure	1.47	0.37	1.10	25%
	Additional residences	1.47	1.47	0.00	100%
Reception facilities for people passing through		14.67	8.07	6.60	55%
	Land Acquisition	5.87	5.87	0.00	100%
	Infrastructure networks & landscaping	5.87	1.47	4.40	25%
	Establishment of communal facilities	2.93	0.73	2.20	25%
TOTAL AXIS 1		176.08	143.07	33.02	81%

Under AXIS 2

MEASURE	FUNDING FORESEEN*	FUNDING APPROVED**	%
MEASURE 1: EMPLOYMENT	66,030 m Euro	13,107 m Euro	20%
MEASURE 2: EDUCATION	29,347 m Euro	12,257 m Euro	42%
MEASURE 3: HEALTH& WELFARE SERVICES	13,206 m Euro	8,014 m Euro	60%
MEASURE 4 : CULTURE SERVICES	16,140 m Euro	685,000.00 Euro	4%
MEASURE 5 : SPORTS SERVICES	2,934 m Euro	757,738.00 Euro	25%

Annex 3 Spanish Peer Review (2006): Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Avilés (Principality of Asturias)

The Municipal Programme of Shanty Towns Eradication in Avilés is a remarkable case of good practice on many counts. One way to demonstrate this is to recount how the project developed, avoiding repetition of previous information, and then follow this narrative with a formal list of transversal issues, identified as critical success factors, which the programme exemplified.

Political concern over the growth of shantytowns in Avilés had intensified during the economic crisis of the late 1980s. Faced with the enforced closure of the vast steel complex that had been the city's main employer, the municipal administration reacted in a remarkably way. Reflecting on a post-industrial future, it decided that the town should not contain shantytowns. But instead of razing these to the ground and driving out their mainly Roma inhabitants, as has been done recently in Italy, the administration set out to integrate them. This 1989 local plan was linked with the 1988 National Programme for the Development of Roma (NPDR).

The initial plan was that, as an intermediate step, social workers would 'resocialise' these people in a separate, purpose-built development on the outskirts of town. After a few years it was recognised that to make improvements in housing conditions, while continuing to maintain residential segregation, was failing to make progress towards social inclusion. So, in spite of the considerable expense of having constructed new accommodation, this was declared redundant and progressively demolished while a programme to match individual families to suitable normal housing was implemented. In this way, to their great satisfaction, Roma families were gradually resettled among other city-dwellers. Unsurprisingly there were some objections from future, non-Roma neighbours but officials patiently explained that the Roma were citizens too and had the same rights and added that, on the basis of personal experience, they were actually nice families. 'Try it for a few months and see!' they suggested and resistance soon ceased. This firmness in the face of difficulties exemplified the resolute political will that characterised the whole project throughout its various phases.

The main strengths of this project were that the project team recognised that factors preventing social inclusion were interrelated and in response they designed an integrated and sustainable approach. As well as providing desegregated housing, they also addressed unemployment concerns – mainly through vocational training schemes, education issues – by providing desegregated kindergarten and school places with support for pupils and they also registered Roma families at health centres and initiated inoculation programmes.

The organisational structures were no less impressive for every level of government – national, regional and municipal – played an active part alongside civil partner NGOs and Roma organisations. The national Roma NGO, the *Fundación Secretariado General Gitano* (FSGG), played a prominent part, particularly through its acclaimed and ESF-supported employment programme *Acceder*. Central government provided assistance and guidance while the regional government supplied much of the funding. This was particularly important in the most decentralised country in the EU with seventeen administrative areas with varying levels of autonomy. A crucial element in the success of the project was that agreement between political parties was negotiated in advance. This prevented the scheme ever becoming a vote-catching

issue or a political football in the local media. By no means least, the team worked closely with the Roma beneficiaries who were active participants in the scheme.

The problem is therefore to discover what conceptual and institutional structures will produce the best results in fostering schemes that, whatever their scope, must ultimately be local in their application. This is for the obvious reason that all Roma communities are sited in specific locations. To be successful such schemes must gain local non-Roma support – or at least tolerance, which is one of the most important lessons from many examples of good practice. Without such support, local authorities – the elected representatives – are likely to resist or sabotage instructions from central authorities. Indeed this has been the experience of all past large-scale attempts to integrate (or sometimes assimilate) Roma populations, ranging from the endeavours of Maria Theresa in the Habsburg Empire, those of Communist regimes and more recently, some policies of post-Communist CEE/SEE governments with EU financial assistance. The necessary counterpart to non-Roma support is local Roma involvement at every stage of initiatives. This has been a stated aim of various policy transformations over the years but largely remains an unfulfilled intention.

Elements of the Avilés programme most relevant to Greece :

- Recognition that improved accommodation, even linked to social work, can fail to promote integration (re: new settlements with prefabricated accommodation)
- Willingness to reconsider plans if not solving most important problems
- Adoption of successful integrated approach (also with significant Roma participation)
- Establishment of viable regional and local partnerships
- Ability to access Social Fund (ESF) funding (e.g. via the *Acceder* programme)

For further information, see: Fresno (2006), Guy (2006), Guy and Fresno (2006) and Peer Review

<<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2006/social-integration-of-roma-people-municipal-programme-of-shanty-towns-eradication-in-aviles>>

Transversal issues (Extract from *Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion: Executive Summary* (European Commission 2004))

Several transversal issues can be identified to develop into a list of critical **success factors** for use in the design of future programmes:

- *Political consensus*: political support and strong government commitment have a positive effect;
- *National framework and local implementation*: a combined bottom-up and top-down approach may be seen as a factor contributing to the success of all good practices;
- *Institutional framework*: creation of partnerships at multiple levels and with multiple partners benefited most good practices;

- Co-operation at governmental and service provision levels, leading to *integrated services* which provide adequate solutions to the problem of social inclusion which is multi-dimensional;
- *Client-centred services* and *issue-oriented co-operation* lead to more efficient support for the beneficiaries;
- *Pathway approaches* based on the assessment of the individual capabilities of clients and accommodating to their needs and potential pay attention to the long-term social inclusion process;
- Attention to the development of appropriate *professional competences* of all actors involved is generally needed.

Annex 4 Czech Peer Review (2005): Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion

The Field Social Work Programme in the Czech Republic is operated by NGO People in Need.¹ This is one of the largest organisations of its kind in post-Communist Europe, providing relief aid and assistance through projects in over thirty seven countries since 1994. Together with its partner, Czech Public Service Television, it has a creditable track-record of defending the rights of the Roma populations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

People in Need began its Field Social Work Programme in 1999, which largely -although not exclusively - targets very poor Roma families living in dilapidated tenement blocks in urban settings. Typically these people suffer from problems of long-term unemployment, benefit dependency, debt, poor living conditions and health and are often at risk of eviction.

The programme is funded mainly by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs but municipalities and private foundations also contribute and so this programme represents is a good example of private/public partnerships (NIZW 2005). However, although the localities chosen for intervention follow invitations from municipalities, it was reported that 'collaboration with local authorities and civil society is limited'. Furthermore, the potential for solving accommodation problems is restricted by the fact that '[v]ery few municipalities now provide social housing and central government lacks the power to influence them'. Even more serious is the suggestion that 'municipal workers may have private economic interests that conflict with care for Roma families (e.g. property ownership)' (Minev 2005b: 22, 16-17). In other words officials can be part of the process by which the localities at risk of exclusion are actively created by real estate companies moving Roma from former state-owned apartments in desirable locations to desolate areas where Roma are already concentrated.

The aim of the programme is 'to support and develop clients' social competencies and thus their social mobility, and to prevent harm following from their social situation'. In 2004 it focused on sixteen localised neighbourhoods, employing a team of twenty-five streetworkers. Having undergone rigorous training, these adopt an individualised approach to their clients' needs and negotiate explicit contracts with them to encourage active participation in suggesting solutions to their own predicament. In addition to counselling and giving advice on problems, the streetworkers act as mediators with doctors, teachers, police, officials, etc., on their clients' behalf, since usually these families 'have very limited access to assistance from government institutions, which often deal with them repressively' (NIZW 2005).

The Peer Review Discussion Paper and Synthesis Report emphasised the dedication and professionalism of the NGO and explained how this approach both empowers clients and exemplifies the evolution of social work from the 'production of social services to "production" of citizenship and political participation' (Minev 2005a: 10). However, although praising the flexibility of the programme in adapting to the specificity of Roma clients, Peer Review partners commented on 'the restricted impact of the programme on the general [marginalised] situation of the clients' and were sceptical about whether it could achieve more than 'harm reduction' (Minev 2005b: 7). To some extent this view has similarities with the critical evaluation of the Greek programme that counselling for Roma 'focused mainly on psycho-social support without addressing employability enhancement and labour market entry issues' (MESP 2008b: 6).

When reviewing specific pro-Roma projects it is always important to consider the national policy and institutional context and in the very same year that the Czech Peer Review was held, a bleak report revealed deep problems in the organisational structure. This report was issued by the national advisory body for Roma policy, the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs. In the Czech Republic the institutional arrangements to realise the goals of the national policy towards Roma were, at national level, the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs, the broader Government Council for National Minorities, seven employees 'who [we]re at least partly responsible for Roma affairs' and whose 'task ... [wa]s to support "mainstreaming" of policies of equal opportunities for the Roma'. In addition, there were experts attached to ministries, while at local level there were coordinators at regional authorities and advisors and assistants at district authorities (Czech Government Council 2005: 8).

While this might appear to be an adequate administrative network to support the implementation of pro-Roma initiatives, this was evidently not the case. Although the Council was 'the sole central interdepartmental authority whose aim is to unify activities of individual ministries', its capacity and remit were limited for its role was always advisory and it did not possess any executive powers of its own. As was also stated in the Peer Review Synthesis Report, the Council was unable to 'supervise the performance of tasks entrusted to regional authorities and to municipal authorities with extended competencies, or draw any conclusions from their failure to fulfil such tasks'. It had been proposed to remedy this lack of an effective coordinating body by setting up a special unit, either attached to the Government Office or to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, but 'no consensus was reached in this respect, particularly due to one of the government's priorities, which is the prevention of further growth of the state apparatus' (ibid: 8)

At local level the network of advisors simply disintegrated. Some municipalities failed to appoint anyone to fulfil this role and 'due to the fact that the establishment of a post of Roma advisor and assistant is not prescribed by the law, it cannot be imposed upon local authorities to employ such workers'. Meanwhile, as has already been noted, some authorities simply used their advisors for other tasks. As a result 'a significant part of consistent network of Roma advisors, which covered the whole territory of the country, has been scattered'. This state of affairs was not helped by the indifferent attitude of many municipalities, where 'representatives and employees of local authorities have little information about the content of the government Concept [i.e. plan] and most of them are not too interested in it' (ibid.: 8, 12).

Inevitably these structural problems had implications for funded programmes designed to encourage Roma integration. The existence of such fundamental weaknesses and the necessity for remedial measures is highlighted in the following frank extract from the report.

[A] problem of the distribution of government funds ... for the purpose of social inclusion of Roma communities is the lack of coordination among ministries, which results in scattering of these funds. At the same time, there is *de facto* no authority that would effectively coordinate the policy of the ministries and create priorities of the subsidy policies applied by the government in this sphere for every calendar year. *To increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the Roma Integration Policy Concept, it is necessary to re-assess the current financial support system and to propose such framework that will permit the implementation of long-term measures proposed in the Concept at the local level and in cooperation with all relevant partners.*

(Czech Government Council 2005: 9, emphasis in original)

In the meantime the Government had recognised an apparent growth in the number of the type of locations targeted by the People in Need programme and the absence of basic research. The result was an in-depth survey (Gabal 2006), which for the first time revealed their extent and the depth of exclusion of their inhabitants.

For further information, see: Minev (2005a & b), People in Need (2008) and Peer Review <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2005/field-social-work-programmes-in-neighbourhoods-threatened-by-social-exclusion>