

INTERNATIONAL POLICY FELLOWSHIPS

CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES

(affiliated with the Open Society Institute and the Central European University)

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The Accountability of EU Funding to Romani Women's Issues and Priorities

Interim Activity Report

October 2006

A. General overview of project progress:

The five months that have passed since I began implementing my research project have been mostly dedicated to:

- background research on EU Funds and the use of EU Funds for projects that benefit Roma communities
- defining methodological tools
- building research instruments (questionnaire for managing authorities and potential beneficiaries)
- establishing contacts and conducting consultative meetings in view of the elaboration and distribution of the questionnaire, as well as in view of the selection of case studies to be explored through in-depth interviews with Romani women activists and advocates
- building my own research capacity

As I advanced in the implementation of the project, it became clear that it was more relevant to conduct initial consultations at the national levels, in Slovakia, Romania and Hungary, rather than at the level of the European Commission. The national managing authorities for the Structural Funds have drafted operational programs, in anticipation of the new funds due to become available from 2007. The European Commission is only now reviewing the operational programs that have been drafted by Member States. Hence, from a research, as well as an advocacy point of view, the months of October to December are a better time to conduct the research trips to Brussels that were planned for the months of June and July.

B. Completed activities in the period May – September 2006

1. Background research:

Through in-depth Internet and library research I have identified the relevant EU funding opportunities (2007-2013) for projects benefiting Roma communities that could additionally contribute to the realization of the employment priority area of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. The initial background research led to a further narrowing of the project to look more specifically at the European Social Fund and the up-coming community action programme PROGRESS. (The community action programme PROGRESS will also include funding for gender equality programmes.)

2. Defining methodological tools

I am building on the existing literature on “gender responsive budgets” to try to define an approach that could be called “monitoring for gender and ethnicity responsive budgeting”. I am applying this methodological tool to the study of EU Funds in order to monitor for their accountability of Romani women’s issues and priorities at the level of design, allocation and monitoring/ evaluation.

3. Building research instruments

I have drafted a questionnaire for managing authorities and potential beneficiaries that will evaluate their preparedness and expectations for the new funding opportunities (2007 – 2013). I have decided at this point to use the questionnaire only as an instrument of assessing the preparedness and expectations for the new funding opportunities, and not for monitoring the existing funds. The background research revealed there was already a satisfactory number of monitoring reports on the use of EU funds for Roma projects. Therefore, for a broad overview on the use of EU funds for Roma projects, I am relying on existing (independent) monitoring reports that were either commissioned by the European Commission itself, or conducted by NGOs. For an in-depth perspective, I am currently in the process of selecting and visiting three projects that have been implemented (or are currently being implemented) with EU funding - one in each of the countries of the study: Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

4. Establishing contacts and conducting consultative meetings

June:

- I have participated in the Minority Rights Group Conference “The European Union and the Roma”, 6-7 June, Budapest, Hungary.
- In a meeting with a colleague from the Institute for Public Policy, Bucharest, I was briefed me on the results of the conference “Mechanisms for co-financing for projects under the Structural Funds – a European perspective”, organized by the Institute for Public Policy, Bucharest and the Association of Towns in Romania, 22-23 June, 2006. IPP has also generously shared with me the conference materials for consultation.

July:

- I met with the UNDP Liaison officer for Hungary, who shared with me the UNDP experience of funding a micro-credit scheme opened to Roma communities and administered by the AUTONOMIA Foundation, Hungary.
- I have completed a four-day research trip to Bucharest, Romania for initial consultations with Romanian authorities and NGO experts. During the research trip, I met with:
 - the Managing Authority for Sectorial Operational Programme, Human Resources Development
 - the National Agency for Equal Opportunities (the national machinery for gender equality)
 - the National Agency for Roma
 - Experts from the Institute for Public Policy, Bucharest

- Experts from the Center for Legal Resources, Bucharest

August – September:

I have completed two short research trips to Bratislava, one for two days and one for one day. During the research trips,

- I have met with the UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) expert on EU programmes
- I have attended a UNDP presentation on New EU Financing Instruments
- I have touched-base with one of the co-authors of the report “Gender audit of EU Pre-Accession Funds, 1999-2004”, Bratislava, 2005. She generously shared with me her experience of distributing a questionnaire to Slovak authorities.
- I have met with a representative of the Social Development Fund in Slovakia, who generously shared with me information on the projects that have already been implemented in Slovakia, with co-financing from the European Social Fund.

5. Building my own research capacity

I have purchased most of the research equipment and I have designed my personal website. I have also purchased relevant research material (books).

C. On-going/ up-coming activities:

- On October 4 and 6, I am attending the two days training on EU Funding of the Information Diffusion Europe Association. (www.idseurope.org)
- I will be attending the LGI/ OSI training “Ethnic Diversity and Public Service Delivery”, 5-9 November, 2006.
- My objective is also to update my website with all the new material available and to update it more regularly than has been the case until now.

D. Steps forward and difficulties:

The EU financial instruments as a whole and more particularly the ones that are of specific interest for my project – the European Social Fund and the community action programme PROGRESS are currently under specific negotiations between the European Commission and Member States. The months of October-December 2006 represent a very good advocacy time for any “last minute” lobby for the inclusion of Romani women’s issues and priorities in the objectives of the operational programs for the European Social Fund. At the same time, the delayed negotiations also constitute a difficulty for my project, because they are prolonging the time limit for a final agreement on specific objectives, as well as on the timeline for the implementation of funds, which makes assessment rather difficult.