

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

Justification and background:

The major funds that the European Commission allocates to support improving the situation of disadvantaged groups or regions, broadly convened as “instruments of solidarity” (including, for example, the Structural Funds and the PHARE funds), as well as the major action programs developed to directly combat discrimination, and promote social inclusion (such as the upcoming PROGRESS – Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, 2007-2013) have and will have a crucial impact on achieving the goals of the Decade for Roma Inclusion.

The strategic importance of EU funding for the overall implementation of the Decade emerges from at least two circumstances.

First, the Decade for Roma Inclusion does not have its own, special funding. As the programmatic description of the Decade informs: “Funding the Decade will presume the reallocation of existing resources in national budgets and aligning these plans with funding instruments of multinational, international, and bilateral donors.”¹ Furthermore, many government-sponsored programs for improving the situation of Roma have in the past been financed from EU funds. Therefore, it appears even more important that the EU financial instruments be monitored to ensure they offer the necessary tools for action to achieve the goals of the Decade.

Second, the European Commission has conducted a major revision of the EU funding instruments, in the context of the elaboration and adoption of the new Financial Perspective, 2007-2013. The new Financial Perspective, that was at the heart of much prolonged EU debates and about which an agreement on financing was reached only in the first week of April 2006, will cover most of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. Therefore, it is essential that advocacy efforts be made at early stages *vis-à-vis* national governmental authorities and other relevant parties to ensure that Roma women and men and Roma communities will benefit from the newly available financial support.

In this context, my project is premised on a more specific concern: Romani women are ‘missed out’ as beneficiaries of either Roma programs or gender equality programs developed with EU financial assistance. Romani women’s issues and priorities have not influenced the design, allocation and evaluation of EU funding. While “any measure to make EU funding more accessible to [Romani] grassroots organizations would be important”,² such resources will not automatically reach Romani women. Unless special attention is paid to the particular exclusionary mechanisms that keep Romani women out of current initiatives aimed either at greater social inclusion or gender equality, their issues and priorities will remain underrepresented and under- attended to.

¹ “What is the Decade?”, description available on the official site of the Decade for Roma Inclusion: www.romadecade.org, last accessed by the author on May 5, 2006.

² *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* (2004), p.50, report prepared by Focus Consultancy, the European Roma Rights Center and the European Roma Information Office, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf. Last accessed by author on May 5, 2006.

Aim and objectives:

The research project *aims* to show how the accountability of EU funding instruments to Romani women's issues and priorities can be made more effective, in view of the implementation of the goals of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. As a working definition, I suggest that a specific EU funding instrument or program is "accountable" to Romani women, if Romani women's issues and priorities have been included at all the following levels:

- (1) **Design:** Romani women's issues and priorities are accounted for (explicitly or implicitly) in the description of the instrument, and in the specific goals defined by the agencies that directly allocate the resources.
- (2) **Allocation:** Romani women's advocates (working for both governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations) and Romani women themselves have access to EU funding opportunities.
- (3) **Evaluation:** Evaluation reports and evaluation mechanisms include indicators that measure the number of Romani women beneficiaries, as well as other indicators that measure the impact of the fund/ program on increasing social and economic opportunities for Romani women, and provide an opportunity for revision if it appears that these targets are not reached.

The *objectives* of the research are:

1. to design a methodology for monitoring EU funding in the areas that have been identified as priorities of the Decade for Roma Inclusion (education, health, housing and employment) for its accountability to promoting the goals of social inclusion and gender equality particularly for Romani women
2. to apply and test the monitoring methodology by observing the use of EU funding for programs that aim to improve economic opportunities for Romani women (particularly employment)
3. to formulate preliminary conclusions about the accountability of the EU funds available under the new Financial Perspective 2007-2013 to Romani women's issues and priorities in the key area of employment, and
4. to make recommendations for achieving more inclusiveness and accessibility of EU funding instruments.

Research questions:

In line with the above-outlined definition of "accountability", I am raising the following research questions:

- (1) Have Romani women's issues and priorities been accounted for when establishing the areas and priorities of the 'solidarity' financial instruments (such as the European Social Fund), available under the new Financial Perspective? How do the new financial instruments potentially accommodate Romani women's issues and priorities: with targeted programs or mainstreaming strategies?
- (2) How accessible has the EU financial assistance been for Romani women's activists and advocates? How have 'intermediary agencies' influenced accessibility? How and how much has EU funding been used for improving economic opportunities for Romani women?
- (3) Do existing evaluation mechanisms for EU funds (both at the EU level and at the level of national managing authorities) contain indicators that measure the impact on Roma, and also specifically on Romani women? How have the evaluations been conducted and how are they used to inform current EU funding policies? How shall the new financial instruments be evaluated, and how could such evaluation be made more responsive to the needs of Romani women?

Methodology and plan for fulfillment:

The research will employ a multi-method, inter-disciplinary approach in order to monitor EU funding for the three key dimensions of “accountability” as defined above, in terms of the inclusion of Romani women’s issues and priorities at the level of (1) design, (2) allocation and (3) evaluation.

The countries that have signed the Decade for Roma Inclusion do not have the same status in relation to the European Union. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are already member states; Bulgaria and Romania are still accession countries, expected to join the EU in 2007; Croatia is a candidate country, which has not yet started accession negotiations and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro are considered potential candidate countries. As a result, each group of countries has access to different EU financial instruments; all of them providing nevertheless various funding opportunities for programs that seek to improve the situation of Roma.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the research, I suggest focusing on a small number of countries that have signed the Decade for Roma Inclusion and on only a few of the funding instruments that are relevant for the areas of the Decade. The design of the methodology for monitoring EU funding will occupy the early stages of the research, and will be based on extensive documentation and desk research.

In respect of monitoring for inclusiveness at the level of design of the funding instruments, the research will concentrate on the new Financial Perspective 2007-2013, and it will examine the Structural Funds, in particular the European Social Fund, and the PROGRESS program 2007-2013 - the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, which is designed to address “anti-discrimination” and “gender equality” as specific goals.

In respect of allocation, the project will necessarily explore the accessibility of financial instruments that have already been implemented. At this level, the research will be carried out for only a sample of countries from the eight that have signed the Decade for Roma Inclusion, and only for one area of the Decade – employment. The selection of the countries should provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant EU financial instruments for member states as well as accession, candidate and potential candidate countries. I have chosen Hungary, Slovakia and Romania as the focus countries of the research project.

The monitoring research - intended to apply and test the monitoring methodology in the three countries chosen - will be the most extensive part of the research. The first phase of the monitoring research will be to identify the relevant EU funding opportunities for programs seeking to achieve the employment goals of the Decade for Roma Inclusion in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, and the plans for making these opportunities available to the beneficiaries. For a period of two months, I am planning to carry out interviews with relevant management and coordinating personnel from the EC Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the EC Directorate General Enlargement and Regional Policy Directorate General, as well as the Cabinets of the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Commissioner for Enlargement and the Commissioner for Regional Policy. The purpose of the interviews is to gain a comprehensive view on where and how, from the perspective of the EU officials and personnel, the issues and priorities of Romani women can fit into broader EU funding instruments. A similar series of consultation will be

carried out with representatives of the national managing authorities and other relevant governmental bodies in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

The second phase of the monitoring research will explore the issue of accessibility and evaluation of EU funding instruments. I will design and distribute a questionnaire to governmental institutions and NGOs from Hungary, Slovakia and Romania that have used and are planning to use EU funding in order to increase economic/ employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma. The questionnaire will mainly ask about difficulties in accessing and managing EU funds, the process of defining goals and evaluation mechanisms (in the case of managing agencies), and invite suggestions for improvements. In addition to the questionnaire, I will carry out in-depth interviews at grassroots level with Romani women's activists from Hungary, Slovakia and Romania in order to elicit their views on the effectiveness of EU funding in providing support for Romani women who seek to further the employment goals of the Decade for Roma Inclusion.

As a result of the monitoring research, I will formulate conclusions about the areas and mechanisms that need improvement to ensure easier access for advocates and activists who seek to address the challenges of Romani women and advance Romani women's own priorities in view of the Financial Perspective 2007- 2013.

Expected outcomes:

- A short brochure outlining a methodology for monitoring EU funding for its accountability to Romani women's issues and priorities;
- A 20 pages Policy Paper and a longer Research Paper presenting the findings and recommendations;
- Increased awareness among EU management personnel and decision-makers within national governmental bodies about the relevance of thinking about Romani women's issues and priorities in their regular work.
- More specific lobby initiatives at the level of EC DG Enlargement, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and DG Regional Policy, as well as the Cabinets of respective Commissioners, and at the level of national managing agencies and governmental bodies in Romania, Hungary and Slovakia.

Applicability of project results (Advocacy plan):

The results of the research will be offered to the Roma Participation Program (RPP) of OSI Budapest. The research is intended to help their advocacy work at the European level (targeted at the European Commission and the European Parliament), and at the national level (targeted at Governments, the National Agencies for Roma and other relevant Roma offices in the countries that have signed the Decade for Roma Inclusion). Furthermore, the results of the research will be disseminated through the existing networks of Romani women's activists.

There is also an opportunity to coordinate the research with an initiative of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) – CEE, based in Bratislava, currently running a EU Gender Watch program. UNIFEM CEE is committed to ensuring the involvement of Romani women in all activities, under the programs supported by the agency. UNIFEM CEE also has a willingness to coordinate its activities with similar OSI initiatives, particularly regarding Romani women.