

EU-funded Roma programmes: Lessons from Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic

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Preface

This report was commissioned by MRG in partnership with four Roma NGOs: IQ Roma Servis, European Union Association for Roma Youth, Project Schola and the Wide Open School Foundation. We were aware that large amounts of funding had been allocated by the EU to projects targeting the Roma in accession states and at the same time we were aware that many Roma communities report little or no changes on the ground. Given that the accession process continues and that more funding will be allocated to Roma in the newly acceding states, we felt that it was important to independently research the impact of these programmes. Had positive impacts occurred but not reached all the Roma? Had changes begun but still needed more time to fully work through? Or were the funds, although seemingly large, still too small to really tackle the problem? Had the programmes failed? Or had they had temporary success but this was not sustained? We felt that lessons from this process could be used by Roma communities to lobby for new and different programmes in future. This report examines three Roma-oriented projects in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia funded by the European Union's Phare programme between 1999 and 2003. The study employed methods of participatory evaluation to identify the experience of Roma beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the projects, and makes recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of future EU-funded initiatives aimed at improving the lives of Roma people in the Central and Eastern European region. The lessons learnt are relevant to a new wave of accession states with significant Roma populations as well as to other poor and excluded groups in such countries.

The report is intended to be of use to the whole range of those involved in future initiatives to bring about the social inclusion of Roma communities, including politicians, policy makers, opinion formers, activists, NGOs, researchers at international, national and more local levels, particularly Roma themselves. In this spirit the evaluations were carried out in partnership with local Roma NGOs where the projects took place.

There is one facet of this report which we feel could have been more developed; that of gender and the particular difficulties faced by Roma women. One of the three country sections has more mention of this, but otherwise the report is largely silent on gender. This is partly as a result of the participatory nature of the exercise and the fact that we allowed comments to come out from the participants and we did not prompt for any particular subject areas in the interviews and group discussions. Gender was not raised as an issue by the participants and therefore did not feed into the report. It may also be because gender was not adequately mainstreamed in the Phare projects evaluated. We would therefore recommend the formulation of questions on gender even in the context of open participatory analysis otherwise the findings may not reflect the different situations and experiences of women and men. MRG remains committed to mainstreaming gender into all of our work and our publications.

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Summary

Roma¹ minorities constitute a significant and growing section of national populations in Central and Eastern Europe. However, Roma people have been among the main losers of post-Communist transition in this region. In all three countries covered in this report, unemployment and poverty are far higher for Roma than the national average and social and economic changes and discrimination have deepened segregation and social exclusion. At the same time, democracy and respect for the rule of law have led to unprecedented opportunities for Roma people to participate in public life, as well as the development of human rights and minority rights standards. Consequently, there is an acute need to ensure that the heightened public profile of Roma in the region is converted into tangible improvements in the living conditions and opportunities of Roma people.

The Phare programme aimed to help applicants to adapt to EU legislation by supporting improvements in institutional capacity and promoting social and economic cohesion. From 1990 all the countries covered in this report became recipients of Phare funding and the utilisation of this support was outlined in National Programmes agreed between the European Commission and national governments. The implementation of Phare-funded projects was overseen by the Directorate General (DG) for Enlargement in Brussels and EC country delegations in each state.

In 1997 the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia began formal accession negotiations with the EU. Entry conditions included establishing functioning democracies and viable market economies as well as guaranteeing human rights and respect for minorities. As candidate countries, the amount of Phare funding increased significantly and in May 2004 all three countries became full members of the European Union. As members states, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are now no longer entitled to Phare funds, however all are eligible to receive other resources from the EU, including structural and cohesion funds.

Support for projects specifically targeting Roma represented only a tiny proportion of total Phare funding in all three states. Furthermore, independent research indicates that the effectiveness of Roma projects was very limited and that the increased centralisation of larger initiatives marginalised the input of Roma people themselves. These conclusions are supported by the evaluations of the three separate projects carried out for this report.

The research was conceived as a pilot project to establish the viability of using participatory evaluation as a method for assessing the impact of EU-funded Roma projects. The study was conducted by a research team based in London and Roma partner NGOs in each of the three countries. The projects considered for evaluation had been completed prior to the research and were jointly selected on the basis

of agreed criteria so as to cover a variety of key issues, and be of suitable scale and relevance to partner NGOs.

One project was evaluated in each of the three countries covering important areas of particular concern:

- Hungary –Infrastructure and community development
- Slovakia – Pre-school provision
- Czech Republic – Housing

Background information was obtained from national and European sources and evaluation methodology agreed between MRG, the research team and the partner Roma NGOs. Each evaluation employed a combination of semi-structured interviews with representative stakeholders and focus group discussions with Roma who had participated in or were intended beneficiaries of a project. Fuller and more detailed reports on the evaluation in each country are available at www.minorityrights.org.

The study demonstrated the practicality and value of participatory methods for evaluating projects. In each case, there were no significant problems identifying Roma beneficiaries and securing their cooperation. The fact that this task was carried out by Roma NGOs with the assistance of local Roma representatives was an important factor in establishing confidence in the research and in the researchers themselves. At the same time, no problems arose in respect of cooperation from representatives of mainstream stakeholders either. As a result, the approach taken was able to identify a variety of different perspectives on each project.

The study also showed the feasibility of obtaining detailed qualitative data about Phare-funded programmes, which is largely absent from official evaluations. However, the method does require the verification of information, which can be inconsistent between participants or simply inaccurate. Inevitably, recollections deteriorate over time and it is best to conduct participatory evaluation as soon as possible after the completion of a project. At the same time, inaccurate reporting can also reflect limitations in the way information about the project was disseminated to Roma beneficiaries.

A revealing impression from the evaluations was the rather low expectations of most of those involved in the projects. This provides insight into a broader conclusion of the study regarding the relationship between accountability and effectiveness. It also identifies an important role for NGOs in supporting the empowerment of Roma communities in the course of participating in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects developed to assist them.

Overall, the findings of the research were disappointing. Though all three projects brought additional resources and benefits, these were inadequate for effectively addressing the problems of Roma communities, or even to achieve the

original aspirations of the projects themselves. In some instances, funds were wholly or partially wasted and all projects suffered from the lack of sustainability to continue the benefits that did accrue. Though Roma people were involved in various stages of each project, their influence over planning was very limited as the process did not sufficiently compensate for a lack of capacity or culture of inclusion within the rules and timescale imposed by the Phare programme. These conclusions confirm the findings of other research that Phare helps highlight problems, but is not well designed to address them effectively.

The report identifies a number of lessons that need to be learned to ensure future EU-funded Roma programmes are more successful. These include ensuring that the scale of resources is sufficient to address the depth and complexity of need in Roma communities, that more time and expertise is employed in planning projects, which should include significantly more consultation with Roma beneficiaries and their participation in planning, implementation and evaluation processes. The study also points to fundamental structural flaws in the operation of the Phare programme which was not well constructed to address the kinds of problems faced by Roma communities. At heart, there is a major problem of accountability at every level which prevents shortcomings being realised and acted on and thus undermines the effectiveness of funds.

The report also makes a number of recommendations aimed at public authorities and NGOs at European, national and local levels. While there is no simple solution to the problems identified, the fact remains that for many years to come the EU will continue to be an important source of funds for projects aimed at improving the lives of Roma people. Therefore, it is important to learn from the experience of the Phare programme, in particular that of Roma people, so that improvements can be made at every level to ensure Roma communities receive the assistance they require to overcome poverty and exclusion.

MRG's Roma Advocacy Programme

MRG has long been concerned about Roma communities throughout Europe, publishing a series of reports about their situation from 1973 onwards (Puxon 1973, Puxon 1987, Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995). This latest report is part of MRG's Roma Advocacy Programme that started in 2003 and looks at three EU-funded projects to improve the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. By working together on joint participatory evaluations with partner Roma NGOs, the aim is to draw lessons for both the EU and especially for Roma groups enabling these, as intended beneficiaries, to argue for more effective Roma programmes. To date, such programmes have been profoundly disappointing, leaving most Roma communities in disadvantaged conditions, which have remained essentially unchanged. In the view of MRG this unacceptable situation can only be altered with the full

involvement of Roma in such initiatives. For their participation to be meaningful, Roma need to play a full part at every stage of proposed projects – initiating, planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe

Roma communities in Europe are regarded as the continent's largest and most marginalized ethnic minority. Those living in the former Communist-ruled countries of CEE are estimated to form around three-quarters of this total population.² Unlike Roma groups in Western Europe that are often associated with a nomadic way of life, the vast majority of CEE Roma have long been settled. From 2000 onwards, a series of comparative surveys documented the extent and depth of Roma poverty and marginalization in the CEE region³ and the 2003 World Bank report identified loss of their former jobs in Communist command economies since 1989 as the principal cause of Roma impoverishment.⁴ The 2003 UNDP Roma Human Development Report found that 4–5 million [Roma] people in the [CEE] region endure living conditions close to those of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of illiteracy, infant mortality and malnutrition. For most Roma the most significant outcome of regime change was a reversal in their limited income, but increasing participation in wider society.⁵

Replacing this participatory trend were pressures to intensify segregation – occupational, residential and social – that relentlessly pushed Roma back towards their former enclaves and into new ghettos. On the whole, governments of the region appeared to lack either the political will or sufficient resources to take effective action to stem this decline. This is not to deny that state funding was allocated to initiatives to assist Roma but these schemes were small-scale and generally did not address some of the more serious problems afflicting Roma communities, such as employment and housing. They were typically grants to support cultural activities, promote tolerance of minorities, underpin NGOs and encourage education. However for CEE countries the prospect of EU membership gave a new urgency and impetus to policy formation for Roma communities.⁶

EU expansion and Phare programmes

The idea of expanding the EU eastwards to include CEE countries arose soon after the collapse of Communist rule in 1989. Although individual Europe agreements were concluded with applicants, establishing the legal framework for their gradual integration into the European Community from 1991 onwards, basic conditions to be fulfilled by applicant countries were formulated by the European Council in 1993 (in what are commonly known as the Copenhagen criteria) and reinforced by the European Council in Madrid in 1995. These criteria of accession required the establishment of a functioning market economy as well as 'stability of institutions

guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities' as a political condition for accession.⁷ In addition candidates were to adhere to the objectives of political, economic and monetary union, as well as adopt the *acquis communautaire*, the entire EU legislation.⁸

A rather different formulation, aimed explicitly at safeguarding national minorities, was the Council of Europe (CoE)'s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). This was even more explicit in its demand for 'full and effective equality' for minorities – not just in terms of respecting cultural aspects but also material conditions – requiring that:

*'[t]he parties undertake to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority.'*⁹
(CoE 1994, Article 4 §2)

However, as a CoE convention, this could only be recommended to present and future EU members and therefore, while applicants were strongly encouraged to sign and ratify this instrument, it could not be required as a condition of accession, particularly since France, Belgium and Greece ignored this convention maintaining that they had no national minorities to protect.

The pace of the enlargement process quickened with the publication in 1997 of the EC's Agenda 2000, which stated that the integration of minorities was generally satisfactory 'except for the situation of the Roma in a number of applicant ... [countries], which gives cause for concern'. The countries specifically identified were Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Starting in 1998, the EC began a series of Regular Reports on each candidate's progress towards accession, which repeatedly criticized the fact that little appeared to have changed. In 2000 the European Council adopted a Directive, as part of the *acquis*, requiring equal treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.¹⁰ In the same year an Enlargement Strategy Paper pointed out that although in most cases plans had been adopted aimed at improving the situation of Roma communities: 'The Roma continue to face widespread discrimination and difficulties in economic and social life'. The paper went on to demand that 'programmes ... [be] implemented in a sustained manner, in close co-operation with Roma representatives, and that appropriate budgetary support is made available in all countries'.¹¹

To support applicants' political, economic and institutional reforms in adapting to EU legislation, targeted financial and technical aid is provided in various ways. The Phare programme is the principal means of delivering such assistance through grants rather than loans, and in component programmes EU funding is frequently supplemented by co-financing from applicants or other

sources. Phare mainly involves *institution building*, particularly modernization of the administration and judiciary, by helping partner countries to develop structures, strategies, human resources and management skills by the transfer of 'know how' expertise, and investment measures chiefly designed to promote *economic and social cohesion*.¹² This second Phare priority seeks to promote the functioning of the market economy and help build 'capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU, which is key to fulfilling the obligations of membership'.¹³

Once the EC has made a favourable judgement on an applicant's suitability for EU membership, a complex pre-accession process is followed. National Programmes are agreed with applicants and account for most of the Phare budget, while Accession Partnerships (AP) and Regular Reports allow the EU to identify weaknesses and suggest what corrective action needs to be taken. Each candidate is then required to prepare a detailed National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis* (NPAA). CEE countries have been helped in their economic and political restructuring by Phare since 1989, but increasingly after 1997 this funding has been focused on the pre-accession priorities identified in APs and NPAA of individual candidates. For example, the Slovak programme considered in this MRG report is an explicit response to the AP and NPAA priorities of improving the situation of Roma, which themselves are directly linked to the political criterion for accession of respecting national minorities.

After EU approval, the NPAA becomes a National Development Programme (NDP), which is the basis for Phare programming. Implementation of programmes is supervised centrally through the EC's Enlargement Directorate General (DG) and locally by EC Delegations in candidate countries, with the aid of monitoring and evaluation reports at sector (e.g. Social Cohesion) as well as at programme level. These then form part of the input to the EC's Regular Reports on each candidate's progress towards accession. Finally a draft Accession Treaty is prepared, agreed and when ratified by all concerned, the candidate becomes a member state.¹⁴

This outline of the accession procedure gives the theory but in practice the Phare programme was not able to deliver all it promised for 'its aims were too ambitious and the time allowed to achieve them too short'.¹⁵ A review of all Phare programmes between 1999 and late 2003¹⁶ found a third of all programmes were rated unsatisfactory and results for Phare support for the Economic and Social sector (ESC) 'the most disappointing' of all. This poor performance was attributed to 'insufficient support ... provided to develop adequate strategies for economic and social development, and the instruments for delivering them'. As a result:

'pilot investments were generally not made on the basis of proper needs assessments but were instead executed more

*on the basis of ad hoc allocations of funding with limited impact.*¹⁷

The same report found that ‘capacity to coordinate and deliver pre-accession assistance ... is not yet sustainable’, emphasising the damaging effects of ‘understaffing, low salary levels and institutional instability’. Therefore it is evident that such shortcomings were not peculiar to Roma initiatives but characteristic of Phare programmes in general.

Phare Roma programmes

As the date of accession approached for the first group of applicants – including the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – Phare funding increased, rising from an average of €0.84 billion per year for the 1990-4 period, to €1.34 billion for 1995-9 and €1.5 billion for 2000-2006. In comparison with this overall expenditure Phare funding for Roma programmes was insignificant and in percentage terms almost invisible. Nevertheless, Phare Roma funding followed the same rising trend, reflecting continuing concern about this problematic issue, increasing from €11.7 million in 1999 to €13.65 million in 2000, and €31.35 million in 2001¹⁸ While most of these Phare-funded programmes explicitly identified the beneficiaries as Roma, some aimed at a broader constituency such as ‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘socially disadvantaged groups’. Phare was the main source of EU funding for Roma communities but it was not the only one for other programmes, particularly in the fields of education and anti-discrimination, which were supervised by other DGs. In addition, CEE governments also took their own initiatives directed at Roma, as did national and international NGOs.

While national authorities bore responsibility for identifying programmes within their overall Phare allocations in relation to current AP and NPAA priorities, in cooperation with the EC; they were encouraged to consult Roma representatives and organizations during programming and at other stages where possible. Before 1998 Phare funding for Roma communities was distributed through Civil Society Development Foundations (CSDF), largely to projects proposed by local groups including Roma NGOs. These were mostly in the fields of culture, education, human rights, law and media. Applicants were encouraged by media advertisements and through more informal networks, and offered assistance by CSDFs in drafting projects. These were inevitably small-scale initiatives but the advent of Accession Partnerships (APs) allowed for the introduction of much larger programmes, frequently coordinated and implemented by government agencies.¹⁹ These larger programmes had the potential for greater impact but, being more centrally planned, precluded broader participation at the programming stage and were less adaptable to the needs of beneficiaries.

In contrast, NGO projects do allow Roma to design and directly participate in schemes to benefit their communities but these are usually too limited in scale to have much more than a localised impact. Frequently, Roma NGOs’ lack of capacity has led to an insufficient take-up of the available funding.²⁰ Also the characteristic problems of many smaller NGOs in securing continued funding and retaining staff has tended to undermine the sustainability of such projects.²¹ On the other hand, larger programmes designed at governmental level tend to minimize the possibility of grassroots participation, replacing this by Roma representation on high-level advisory committees. For example, the Czech Republic’s Government Commission for Roma Community Affairs includes Roma members as does Bulgaria’s National Council for Co-operation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCCEDI),²² while Slovakia has a Roma in the post of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities who is closely involved in policy initiatives. However representation on committees does not necessarily ensure effective or adequate participation, and the EC conceded that a: ‘frequent problem ... is the identification of the relevant interlocutors for Roma communities.’²³

Research by the Open Society Institute’s EU Accession Monitoring Program (EUMAP) concluded in 2002 that:

‘unfortunately, ... policies [to protect Roma and other minority groups] are frequently more visible than effective. All too often, they have foundered due to insufficient political backing, low levels of public support, and even lower levels of funding.’²⁴

A more comprehensive 2004 review of Phare Roma programmes, prepared from 1998 to 2002 in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, emphasized their significance by stating that:

‘more than any other assistance programme, Phare is widely acknowledged as the lever of change that ... had the decisive effect of getting [CEE] governments to start to adopt an appropriate legislative framework and, in at least some cases, to set targets and provide resources “to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria in relation to Roma”’.²⁵

However the wider impact of such assistance was limited, in part due to the lack:

‘of a clear policy framework for social inclusion of Roma, [which meant] that many Phare programmes were considered to fall outside the mainstream functions of government ministries’.

However, this was also due to poor coordination at national level.²⁶ It was noted that although:

in all five countries some form of National Office for Roma Affairs was established, ... their status and capacity, in terms of experience and staff numbers is, in most cases, not adequate to influence effectively the policies of individual ministries.²⁷

In other words, initiatives to improve the situation of Roma communities remained peripheral to the more pressing concerns of CEE governments. Consequently, and especially when:

Phare tried to emulate complex socio-economic development schemes ... for various reasons [including] the short-term nature of Phare, inexperience or lack of preparedness in the sector, the final outcomes of many projects fell short of their high expectation.²⁸

In contrast to top-down Roma schemes:

'projects [which] promoted a "bottom-up" and participatory approach', were praised for adopting 'an approach based on good practice', 'although this proved difficult to achieve through Phare'.²⁹

The report particularly criticized the balance in the targeting of funds (totalling €96 million), which failed to correspond to the most pressing needs of Roma communities. It particularly emphasized the less than 10 per cent 'to address long-term unemployment that is endemic in Roma communities, and only 3% on health related initiatives', as opposed to the 27 per cent for infrastructure of which almost two-thirds was devoted to a single project in Slovakia.³⁰ The highest proportion of expenditure, a third, was spent in the education sector.³¹

Also highlighted was the variance in funding between countries, and the report suggested that these differences 'may be an indication of the level of political commitment'.³² Even allowing for its lower Roma population, it is striking that the Czech Republic had by far the smallest share of Phare Roma funding (8 per cent), particularly in comparison with the countries with the largest shares (Hungary 28 per cent and Slovakia 26 per cent). At the same time, it had about the same number of projects as the others but the average value of these (€1.3 million) was much less. Countries with the largest average project sizes were Hungary (€5.2 million) and Slovakia (€5.3 million). The Czech Republic also had a smaller share of co-financing (33 per cent) than Hungary (42 per cent) and Slovakia (37 per cent), although here the differences are not so marked. Another significant difference was that, as prior to 1998, Czech Phare programmes were mostly grant schemes for small NGO projects, administered by a separate Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF), 'to strengthen [the] capacity of Civil Society Organisations' and thus aimed at 'guaranteeing democracy'.³³

Phare evaluation and participatory evaluation

Phare evaluation

Individual countries are responsible for identifying suitable Phare Roma programmes but negotiations over design with EC Delegations before approval is granted can lead to protracted delays. Once approved as part of the National Plan, these programmes are subject to internal monitoring and periodic evaluations during planning and implementation stages. Some of the most important of these checks are Interim Evaluations, which are conducted by an external agency for the EC, and usually take place annually or sometimes more frequently at programme and sector level. Interim Evaluations are discussed at greater length because they offer the most detailed external scrutiny and reveal basic shortcomings in what might appear a thorough and systematic monitoring system. Later occasional thematic, summary evaluations, such as the 2004 review of Roma programmes in five CEE countries,³⁴ take a broader view of a range of programmes, and seek to present comparative findings and draw more general lessons using mainly Interim Evaluation reports as their 'base source of information'.³⁵ Although Phare programmes represent expenditure of public money, key evaluation documentation, with the exception of broader reports, is not publicly available as this information is regarded as confidential.³⁶

To gauge whether they achieve their ends all Phare programmes are evaluated on the basis of five key criteria – relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact (or outcome) and sustainability. Impact 'is the extent to which benefits received by the target beneficiaries had a wider overall effect on larger numbers of people', while sustainability 'relates to whether the positive outcomes of the project ... are likely to continue after the project ends'.³⁷ Outcomes are to be measured by 'objectively verifiable indicators'. Although the main emphasis is placed firmly on measurable, quantitative data, the evaluation process also involves interviews with stakeholders. In the case of Roma programmes, as well as close cooperation with the EC delegation, most of these interviews are with non-Roma ministerial and other governmental officials with responsibility for implementation, etc., although a limited number are with Roma – most commonly representatives of Roma NGOs. Very limited time is available for field visits to check on implementation on site and to talk with Roma beneficiaries about their views on programmes targeted at them.

As in the Strategy Enlargement Paper, explicit calls for Roma participation beyond the level of basic consultation have continued to be voiced periodically in EC Regular Reports, reports on compliance with the Framework Convention, NGO shadow reports and those of the Granada Conference (2003) and World Bank Conference (2003). This last report underpinned the Decade of Roma Inclusion which proclaims Roma participation at every

stage to be a 'core value of the Decade', including 'regular oversight and monitoring of the process over the next ten years'. Despite such recommendations, Roma involvement in Phare evaluations is generally extremely limited.

While it might be expected that any basic flaws in design would be picked up at the planning stage, it should be appreciated that EC delegations are often dealing with national officials with responsibility for implementing current programmes in understaffed government offices, while planning the next round, and face problems in influencing relevant ministries. Lack of capacity is not helped by low pay (see above), deterring recruitment of well-qualified personnel who can earn far more in the private sector.³⁸ Criticizing the persistence of previous institutional culture, a Slovak Governance Institute (SGI) researcher recently argued that:

*'it is quite exceptional for state bodies to carry out systematic monitoring and evaluation of their policy measures and publish their findings. Furthermore, the policy process often does not start with defining the problem and setting out clear objectives, which means there are no indicators to monitor and benchmarks to evaluate against.'*³⁹

Given these kinds of problems it is hardly surprising that Interim Evaluation reports, at the implementation stage, sometimes find that objective indicators, by which the success of component projects of programmes are to be assessed, are impossible to measure, or that relevant statistics are simply not provided or available. Having said this, much of the evaluation process is a matter of ticking boxes such as whether the allocated money was spent on the agreed activities within the allotted timeframe or whether the planned number of Roma went on the training courses indicated, etc. Taking the last case as an example, an attempt would be made to assess whether completing a training course would increase their likelihood of being employed but real outcomes – i.e. whether trainees actually found jobs as a result of the training – would typically remain unknown.

Participatory evaluation

Participatory evaluation, as defined in this MRG report, is an attempt to remedy some of the deficiencies of the Phare evaluation by directly involving Roma at two levels in assessing the outcomes of projects aimed at improving their situation. First, MRG evaluators worked with Roma partner NGOs at the local level to agree a way of discovering whether such projects were successful in the longer term. However, as well as cooperating with Roma NGOs, any meaningful participatory evaluation must involve dialogue with the beneficiaries to seek their views.⁴⁰

Combined in-depth interviews, focus groups and survey methods were originally proposed but in view of the limited resources our partners thought Roma would prefer

the former, rather than questionnaires from which they often felt they derived little.⁴¹ Therefore, the investigation adopted a qualitative approach⁴² so noticeably absent from both Phare methodology and recent large-scale surveys of Roma populations. In the same spirit, it was agreed that opinions should be recorded and transcribed rather than 'interpreted' in researchers' notes. This grassroots approach also differs from asking the views of Roma representatives on national councils.

Nevertheless, a full research approach would combine qualitative with quantitative methods, providing a more reliable basis. The focus would also look 'upwards' at the process of programme design and coordination to avoid the mistaken impression that NGOs, with their inherent structural limitations,⁴³ are largely accountable for outcomes, whereas higher bodies bear the main responsibility.

This was the methodological basis for this pilot exercise in participatory evaluation and in each country a Phare project was jointly selected and interview questions agreed. Target groups were informed of the purpose of the research and volunteers recruited. These were told once more about the project, assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and after the interview offered payment for their time.⁴⁴ Subsequently transcripts were jointly discussed and analysed with partners and feedback on findings should be given to participating communities.⁴⁵

In all three case studies this focused, though limited, evaluation procedure revealed that the Phare projects were incapable of addressing needs adequately. This was largely due to a profound gap between programme aims, formulated at higher levels, and translation of these into realistic, sustainable measures at the local level involving municipalities and other key stakeholders.⁴⁶ However this profound structural limitation was compounded by the fact that, to different degrees, the projects had design flaws that undermined their effectiveness. While this method of evaluation gave a very clear picture at ground level of project shortcomings and also their successes, difficulties encountered exemplified the general problems already discussed and in some cases these had already been identified earlier in Phare evaluations, though to little remedial effect.

In Hungary, the targeted villages fail to meet the eligibility criteria and rather than innovate, Phare was simply used to implement existing plans. In Slovakia, one example shows a Phare project sustaining practices that directly oppose its aims, while the other more promising case only partially meets people's needs. In the Czech Republic the difficulties and complexities of sustained intervention are underestimated, and the essential integration with mainstream services is inadequate.

Partner and project selection

Finding suitable partners posed problems, since any viable partner needed both capacity and expertise to carry out the joint research with a minimum of training. Time constraints ruled out a process of competitive selection, so advice was sought from relevant NGOs and experts in target countries. Roma NGOs with experience of research and evaluation were approached, and agreed to participate in the exercise.⁴⁷ Indicative of their standing is that three partner NGOs are now recipients of EU structural funds.

Selecting projects to be evaluated was mainly the choice of MRG's Roma partner organizations. However some initial criteria were suggested by MRG with the aim of reporting on a balanced range of projects. These were that ideally projects should be: significant – addressing a serious area of concern for Roma communities; relevant – representing an issue of importance to Roma partner NGOs; representative – reflecting a main focus of a country's Phare Roma projects; well-established – allowing longer-term project impact to be assessed; manageable – enabling adequate pilot evaluation with limited resources; and diverse – permitting comparison of a varied spread of projects across countries

Long lists were prepared of all main Phare projects targeted at Roma communities and implemented from 2000 until the end of 2003 in the three countries under review, and a shortlist of possible projects also suggested. In addition, a comparative table of Phare expenditure was supplied to partners to aid discussion about what appeared to be each country's priorities for the Roma. After joint consultation two projects were selected from the shortlists but the third, in the Czech Republic, had not even featured on the long list.

In all cases NGOs chose to evaluate projects with which at least some team members had links and knew well, giving rise to initial worries over whether such close involvement might lead to suspicions of partiality. Any such doubts were dispelled when evaluations were carried out and assessed in a spirit of reflexive self-examination, fully acknowledging shortcomings and difficulties encountered.

The eventual choice of projects related directly to main areas of Roma concern: Hungary – Infrastructure and community development; Slovakia – Pre-school provision; and Czech Republic – Housing.

Country projects

Hungary

MRG partner: European Union Association for Roma Youth (EURIFE)

The programme: Roma Social Integration (Phare 2000)

Hungary's Phare 2000 programme, Roma Social Integration Programme (HU-0002-01) was selected for evaluation together with our Roma partner EURIFE (Európai Unió Roma Ifjúságért Egyesület). This was an ambitious initiative aiming to strengthen social cohesion, and improve communication and cooperation between Roma and non-Roma. The programme was considered experimental, with good practice to be shared and scaled up, and was intended to serve as a model for the intensive cooperation between Roma and non-Roma, service providers, state institutions and the non-profit sector. Preparatory work started as early as 1998 but the EC Delegation only agreed the final programme in December 2001. The expiry date for the programme was September 2003.

The programme was divided into three parts: welfare innovation, anti-discrimination capacity building and training, and an information service. The welfare innovation element combined investment in infrastructure and community development in four disadvantaged micro-regions. The anti-discrimination initiative provided equipment to legal advice offices, and included training for staff in anti-discrimination law and conflict management skills. The information service element supported the development of a central information database to provide comprehensive and up-to-date information useful to Roma people and those working with them, particularly Roma minority self-governments and NGOs. The website (www.romaweb.hu) was launched in May 2003.

The total budget for the programme was €3.35 million, of which 75 per cent came from the Phare programme (€2.5 million) with the remainder contributed by the Hungarian government. The welfare innovation component of the project accounted for over 60 per cent of the total budget, with the remainder shared between the anti-discrimination and information service elements.⁴⁸

The project: welfare innovation

This evaluation examines the welfare innovation project in one of the three micro-regions, selected on size of Roma population, scale of slum-like settlements and whether villages were disadvantaged even by the standards of their deprived region. A further criterion was meant to be the existence of inter-ethnic tensions to be reduced.

In this bleak context the project aims were to improve prospects for village residents by upgrading basic infrastructure and launching community development initiatives. Apart from employing local people on

constructing new infrastructure and refurbishments to buildings, Roma homes in the settlement were to be renovated and repaired. In addition, job training was to be offered to unemployed Roma. In theory, the projects to be undertaken were to be decided following public consultation.

Participatory evaluation

The selected micro-region is located within Hungary's eastern region and consists of three adjacent villages lying on the eastern bank of the Tisza river in south-east Hungary. The villages are characterized by small, impoverished councils, with fewer than 10 per cent of Roma inhabitants in work. While each village has a distinct Roma settlement, Roma also live among non-Roma. Overall, Roma form half of the population but locally their proportion varies from 28 to 67 per cent.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in each of the three villages by the MRG partner, Andras Teleki of EURIFE, assisted by Erika Lencses, former head of Phare Office of the Secretariat for Roma Affairs. Interviews were conducted with one mayor, two village council clerks and two officers of the Gypsy Minority Self-Government (GMS-G),⁴⁹ representing views from all three villages. Partners also sought the cooperation of local Roma representatives to identify and invite participants to a focus group in each village. These included people who had directly participated in the project, as well as beneficiaries. Altogether 24 took part, half of whom were women, and half the participants were parents of at least one child of school age. All interviews and focus groups were carried out in November 2005.

Evaluation findings

Phare and other evaluations

Interim evaluations were carried out in 2002 and 2003. While the latter report rated the whole programme as 'satisfactory',⁵⁰ serious problems were identified at an early stage. It was noted that 'although the main Immediate Objective was to reduce conflict, relations at two of the four micro-regions are harmonious' and therefore these failed to meet a key selection criterion.⁵¹ Design changes, poor management and subsequent delays were cited. These hindered the original intention of allowing local people to cooperate in joint implementation, with the infrastructure investment being separate from community development.⁵²

Further, claims about the innovative character of the project were challenged,⁵³ as was its sustainability, since 'no provision is made for the institutionalisation of successful pilots'.⁵⁴ Also the hope of finding jobs for Roma, with 'Roma employment indicators improving at the same rates or faster than national averages', was seen as unrealistic, given the prevailing high unemployment and lack of plausible ideas.

Participatory evaluation

On the positive side, the project did result in new infrastructure, mainly in the form of improvements to the approach roads, and renovation of public buildings, including nurseries. In addition, some Roma were given short-term employment, either in the form of public work schemes or paid to carry out improvements to their homes. However, these benefits were limited by the shortcomings of the scheme and events bore out the earlier scepticism of Phare evaluators.

Project planning and consultation

The planned consultation with the supposed beneficiaries – Roma residents, particularly those living in slum settlements – was very limited. In part, this can be explained by the relatively short period available for planning. However, it also demonstrates that despite the small size of these communities, and the fact that each has its own local GMS-G, there is no culture of wider consultation with, support for, or capacity of, Roma populations to become involved in decision-making. Consequently, the infrastructure investments (which accounted for three-quarters of the total budget) were based on existing local government development strategies, rather than specifically addressing the needs and wishes of the most disadvantaged Roma residents.

Infrastructure development

The infrastructure improvements proved very limited in scope and offered little direct benefit to the most disadvantaged Roma. In two villages none of the roads asphalted led to the Roma settlements and many dirt roads remained. Despite requests that local people be given construction work, only one subcontractor employed three or four local Roma men for a day or two.⁵⁵ While some public buildings were refurbished, one proved too expensive to run and two were subsequently converted for other purposes. Nursery enlargements were insufficient to meet local needs in one case, while in the other, further expenditure was needed; although focus group participants were very pleased with the improvements.

The infrastructure improvements were appreciated as beneficial to the villages, especially the road building and nursery enlargements. However, the later conversion of renovated buildings illustrated not only a lack of planning, but also that the project was unable to address the profound economic problems in the most deprived communities. In effect, Phare contributed primarily to helping the local authorities make progress on their pre-existing development plans. It also showed how infrastructure investment can create additional municipal costs, which can ultimately lead to investment being wasted.

Community development

Whereas the infrastructure works were carried out by a contractor and administered centrally, community development initiatives had to be channelled through local NGOs. The Phare programme also required these NGOs to make a small financial contribution (20 per cent) to the cost of the initiatives. Since the NGOs had little money, in each village the municipality paid this contribution, thus reducing the finances available for local services or development.

In all, 30 long-term unemployed Roma were employed for a year to carry out work on public buildings, to tidy up the villages, and to repair and improve homes of Roma in one settlement. Many of those involved came from the settlement and residents were also encouraged to take the opportunity to refurbish their own homes.

Those who had been involved in these activities evaluated them very positively, both for providing work and an income, as well as for their pleasure in being able to improve the village, and especially people's homes. However, there was widespread regret that the scheme had ended while no participants had been able to use the experience to move into regular work. One mayor noted that within a short period of time, 80 per cent of the homes in the settlement on which work had been done had deteriorated to their original poor condition due to the lack of money and motivation of the residents.

In addition to the limited effectiveness of the programme, such subsidised employment is not innovative, but is, in effect, another form of (and source of funding for) public work programmes, which are the main active employment tool used throughout Hungary for the long-term unemployed. Public work schemes generally employ people for a few months on improvements to public buildings and parks, etc. and pay the minimum wage, as in this and other Phare programmes. They do not usually provide sufficient skills or experience to enable participants to find work in the labour market. A more positive step was training for the unemployed where Roma and non-Roma took part in a basic computer skills course, preceded by employment skills training. This was conducted in one village by the local labour office. Both trainers and participants rated the experience very positively, although only one man said it had helped him into work. Nevertheless, the initiative led to an ongoing relationship with the local labour office.

Although social cohesion was the focus of the programme, in none of the villages were there any significant pre-existing tensions between Roma and non-Roma, confirming the earlier view of the Phare evaluators. In each village comments from interviews and focus groups showed the programme had made no difference to inter-ethnic relations, and in one there was little awareness that the programme had anything to do with Roma.

Overall, the programme demonstrated that an injection of resources is welcome and can achieve a certain amount.

However, the lack of consultation and effective planning, the small scale of investment, and the lack of sustainability meant the project did not make any significant or long-lasting improvement in conditions in the micro-region, particularly for the most disadvantaged Roma residents. In the words of one GMS-G President:

'You can organize cultural programmes, a bit of singing, a bit of dancing, but democracy is not about that. If we carry on like this the Gypsy question will never be solved.'

Slovakia

MRG partners: Wide Open School Foundation (WOSF) and Project Schola (PS)

The programme: Improvement of the Situation of the Roma in the Slovak Republic (Phare 2000)

Slovakia's 2000 Phare programme Improvement of the Situation of the Roma in the Slovak Republic (SK0002) was largely an attempt to develop the 1998 pilot initiative Improving the Situation of Roma in the Spišská Nová Ves Region (SR9813.04), which 'mostly focused on education and community development', by broadening its activities and application within Slovakia. Like its predecessor, this programme adopted an integrated approach, addressing a range of interrelated areas that included inter-ethnic relations, community development, social work, vocational training and counselling, as well as various educational aspects. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, Minorities and Human Rights was responsible for the overall coordination and implementation. The cost of the programme was €4.1 million of which the Phare funding amounted to €3.8 million and national co-financing €0.3 million. The focus on education highlighted the short- and medium-term priorities of the 1999 AP, which cited 'increased access to education'. To assist the programme, including the transfer of good practice, a twinning covenant was concluded with France.

The project: Pre-school education initiative

MRG's Slovak partners were two educational NGOs with extensive experience of Roma initiatives, the Wide Open School Foundation (WOSF) (Nadácia Škola dokorán) and Project Schola (PS) (Projekt Schola). Together it was decided to evaluate a crucial part of the programme's education plan (sub-programme 3), implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE). This aimed:

'to reinforce a comprehensive pre-school education system for Roma children including a child-centred approach and mothers' involvement into the education process supported by trained Roma assistants.'

The scheme was put into practice in 50 kindergartens in three regions, targeted at children between the ages of 3–6 years.⁵⁶ The staff were backed up by EU and local experts at a cost of €230,000, while equipment costs amounted to €200,000. Also a Roma mother was appointed ‘for mediation between the kindergarten and the community’. Other mothers were encouraged to help in class or after-school activities, to join discussion groups on family and health issues, including drug abuse, and to attend sewing classes.

The activity continued from October 2002 until November 2003 but similar provision was made in a subsequent 2001 Phare programme Support to the Roma Minority in the Educational Field (SR0103.01), where 50 kindergartens were refurbished in various locations throughout Slovakia.

Participatory evaluation

Two kindergartens were chosen for comparison in similar size villages (approaching 2,500) near Košice and Prešov, the largest towns in eastern Slovakia. While one kindergarten was small with only one teacher apart from the headteacher for 20 children; the other was three times the size with a headteacher and four teachers for 60 children. In both, slightly less than half of their children were Roma and both had one Roma assistant teacher at the time of the project. The smaller kindergarten had two classes, both integrated, while the larger had two non-Roma classes plus one with only Roma children.

According to the 2001 census Roma form over 60 per cent of the inhabitants of the village with the smaller, integrated kindergarten. In 2003 sociographic mapping⁵⁷ recorded the Roma population as being 80 per cent of inhabitants, with almost 20 per cent of Roma living within the village and the remainder in a settlement on the perimeter. Corresponding figures for the other village are 23 per cent and 40 per cent, with only 5 per cent of Roma within the village.

It was agreed to use a mixture of interviews and focus groups to gather information on the experience of the project in each kindergarten from Roma mothers, a Roma teaching assistant, teacher and headteacher (all female). MRG partners agreed the main questions, focusing on the impact of the main activities two years after the project had ended. Since the project specifically targeted mothers it was decided that this pilot evaluation would focus on them, although a fuller investigation would also seek the views of Roma fathers and of non-Roma parents. During February 2006, some 24 Roma mothers gave their opinions on their experience.

Evaluation findings

Phare and other evaluations

The main method of monitoring appeared to be crude comparisons of overall statistics rather than more precise

tracking of performance.⁵⁸ The MoE was responsible for producing these statistics but a December 2003 Phare evaluation noted that:

‘indicators of achievement (IAs) have proved very difficult to measure since keeping statistics on Roma pupils seems to be difficult due to compliance with the [currently] valid anti-discriminatory legislation in Slovakia.’⁵⁹ Similarly the final twinning report complained of ‘the absence of reliable data on the situation of Roma children.’⁶⁰

Interim evaluations of the whole programme, together with other programmes in the relevant sector, were carried out on four separate occasions from 2001 to 2003. The main concerns were delays associated with the lack of capacity in the main coordinating body and the poor functioning of the twinning arrangement. As regards the education component, from the first report onwards, strong recommendations were made for ‘the educational integration of the Roma minority’ and for ‘free kindergarten places in all locations with Roma children’, with an adequate support system including properly trained and pedagogically recognized ‘Roma assistant teachers’.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the programme as a whole was judged to be ‘satisfactory’ in 2003.⁶²

Participatory evaluation

The choice of the two kindergartens proved fruitful as very different pictures emerged of how the project had operated and of parental satisfaction.

Integration and segregation

In the smaller kindergarten Roma children were recruited at the start of the Phare project,⁶³ when it was decided that two classes should be completely integrated. Both teaching staff and Roma parents saw this as essential. Initially there had been some resistance from non-Roma parents but this was not repeated the following year and Roma parents reported good relations with non-Roma. Roma parents were overwhelmingly positive about the project, participating eagerly in activities and feeling welcome in classrooms, and their children reciprocated this feeling. A 2002 UNDP report stated: ‘Roma children attending integrated preschools have incomparably higher chances to continue their educations than those attending segregated institutions. Preschools should be where integration begins.’⁶⁴ In contrast, the larger kindergarten placed all Roma children in a Roma-only class, the headteacher justifying this on the grounds that Roma came when they were aged five and were therefore less acclimatized to the regime than ‘white’ children, who often started from three. While the teacher felt that Roma children were not isolated, their parents complained bitterly how ‘everything is divided’ and especially how the Roma-only class had been suddenly introduced. As children they had attended

integrated kindergartens, so they felt that conditions had deteriorated despite Phare. Relations with non-Roma parents were poor and their children's progress in primary school was patchy, with some unwilling to attend school. Some parents reluctantly suggested that all-Roma classes might avoid bullying and primary teachers' favouring non-Roma children. This is very different from the other parents' account, where all children 'had got used to each other' and formed friendships in kindergarten.

Nevertheless, all Roma children had progressed to the first grade of primary school from both kindergartens and none were sent to special schools for those with learning disabilities. A child-centred approach is still used in both locations and parents continue to use the parents' room and kindergarten facilities.

Roma assistant teachers

In the view of both kindergartens, apart from being a general helper, the assistant teacher's main function was to assist Roma children unable to speak Slovak. Indeed, all the Roma parents insisted on the need for their children to learn Slovak. Good results were reported on the introduction of Roma assistants, not only in relation to 'the removal of the initial language barrier ... [but also] to the acceleration of learning success, and ... [an] improved ... social climate'.⁶⁵ Both teachers praised the work of Roma assistant teachers but their situation was fraught with ambiguities. The assistant teachers spoke of their warm reception by staff in the kindergarten but neither was working when interviewed. They saw little prospect of future employment as assistant teachers, due to the financial constraints of the municipalities.⁶⁶ Despite the current national policy, the smaller kindergarten still does not employ an assistant teacher, although the larger one does.

One argument offered to justify Roma assistants had been that they could serve as role models for children and parents. While these assistant teachers had enjoyed their work, they – like the Roma parents – saw this as low-level, teaching children basic skills like holding pencils and scissors correctly. As such, they appeared to have little self-confidence. These issues have been recognized in Slovakia and other CEE countries and steps have been taken to improve assistants' qualifications and position.⁶⁷

Kindergarten provision

A major theme to emerge was the limited effectiveness and impact even of successful practice. In both kindergartens, Roma children were almost all admitted at five for a single year, despite many parents wanting their children to start at three and teachers saying this produced much better results. A rationing system for the restricted places available was based largely on whether mothers worked, rather than on children's needs and consequently favoured non-Roma. As such it was discriminatory against children with greater needs. While both the Phare project specified Roma

children from 'the age of 3 to 6',⁶⁸ the practice here was for a single year.

Also troubling was the number of children unable to attend kindergarten. In 2003 Roma children were just over 40 per cent of the kindergarten total, although in the same year Roma formed 80 per cent of the village population, and given the demographic imbalance an even larger proportion of village children.⁶⁹

During the Communist period attendance at kindergarten had been mandatory for all children in their last year before primary school. With the regime change many nurseries closed, especially in poorer areas where most Roma lived, including one in the village with the smaller kindergarten. A 2001 report quantified this change in stark terms, calculating that:

'between 1988 and 1995 ... the total number of Roma ... in kindergartens [in Slovakia] dropped from 166,852 to just 1,181 ... [and] in 1999, just 1,120 Roma children were attending kindergarten'.⁷⁰

Educational research from the UK and elsewhere has shown that while all children benefit from pre-school education, those from deprived backgrounds gain the most, and correspondingly suffer more from its absence.⁷¹ Despite the advice in Phare evaluations⁷² and the final twinning report⁷³ that pre-school education should be mandatory in Slovakia, as it is in Hungary, this has yet to be realised.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, all parents receiving social support have almost all of their kindergarten costs provided including lunches.⁷⁵

As well as wanting pre-school education for their children,⁷⁶ Roma interviewees wanted this to be integrated. However, there was no mention in the fiches of either of the projects evaluated or in its successor in the following year (SR0103.01) of 'integrated education' as a goal.⁷⁷ An important point is that, following the AP priorities, this project did not require this but instead aimed at 'increasing the access to education which is the basic condition for employment, creating in this way better conditions for the integration of this national minority.'⁷⁸ This evaluation shows that in some cases Phare funding was evidently supporting segregated education and this undermined the eventual goal of integration.⁷⁹ In July 2002 decentralization transferred responsibility for educational establishments to municipalities where competing demands for resources pose 'a real risk of ... a two-track educational system: one for the majority population and one for the Roma'.⁸⁰

Czech Republic

MRG partner: IQ Roma Servis (IQRS)

The programme: Improvement of long-term opportunities for Roma (Phare 2003–4)

The Brno-based Roma NGO IQ Roma Servis, together with MRG, chose to examine a component project of the Czech Republic's Phare 2003–4 programme, Improvement of long-term opportunities for Roma (CZ 2003/004–338.01.01). This was a Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF) grant scheme inviting small-scale projects in the fields of employment, education and housing. The scheme was targeted at experienced civil associations with an established network of fieldworkers, with the idea that in the future they could manage larger grants from EU Structural Funds. This was thought to be sufficient assurance of sustainability. In fact the expectation about Structural Funds was not fulfilled for most participants. IQRS was an exception in later applying successfully for an EQUAL scheme to promote equal opportunities in accessing the labour market. The overall budget anticipated around 22 projects of between €30,000 to €50,000 each.⁸¹ For housing, the 'desired results' were 'improved local public spaces by community initiatives and attractive "safe places" created within Roma neighbourhoods to de-stigmatise/de-ghettoise Roma housing'.

The project: Reviving Community Life

The Reviving Community Life project ran from 1 February 2004 to 31 January 2005 as part of the above-mentioned Phare 2003–4 programme. It was inspired by the integrated strategy for social inclusion and justice adopted by the London Borough of Greenwich, which had particularly impressed an IQRS community development worker on a study trip to England. The main municipality concerned had already commissioned a local social policy department to adapt the Greenwich model, resulting in a Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma.⁸² However IQRS stressed that for project sustainability 'this partnership [with municipalities] needs to be mutually encouraged and developed further in the future'.⁸³ As a pilot scheme the IQRS project aimed to improve relations between the mainly Roma residents of five inner-city, tenement blocks, through regular tenants' meetings which would hopefully lead to a system of self-governance. This would provide a basis for formulating tenants' demands and for better links with public institutions, including the police. A main activity in all the buildings concerned was to involve tenants in clearing away huge amounts of rubbish in communal yards and then to maintain this situation. Another aim was to achieve essential repairs to some of the buildings through the assistance of the municipality. Also seen as crucial was the involvement of property management companies in lesser repairs, resolving problems of rent arrears and preventing

new debts from arising. IQRS social fieldworkers were to intervene to alleviate these and other problems of individual families, and act as advocates on their behalf.⁸⁴

IQRS workers did succeed in organizing initial rubbish clearance from yards, while the main municipality made substantial renovations to two adjacent houses. Regular tenants' meetings were held, sometimes attended by municipal officials. In addition, 'the post of caretaker was established in two of the buildings and was being discussed in the remaining three'.⁸⁵ Also tenants appreciated the work of the IQRS fieldworkers, who were credited with mediating successfully on behalf of individual families.

Participatory evaluation

For the evaluation the views of all the main stakeholders were sought by IQRS fieldworkers, through a mixture of interviews and focus groups a year after the project had ended. Interviewees were mainly tenants as those principally involved, but also social fieldworkers, who carried out the project, as well as a municipal official and a representative of an estate management company. Opinions were expressed by 23 tenants, mostly women, and including a few non-Roma, from all five houses during November and December 2005.

Evaluation findings

Phare and other evaluations

Although a final report was produced for this project, no interim or other Phare evaluation is available. However in reports on multiple grant schemes only a limited selection of projects is discussed and in this case the complete absence of an indicator by which to measure the project's success would have made evaluation difficult to say the least.⁸⁶

Participatory evaluation

Despite the undeniable, positive achievements resulting from the project, such as the successful initial rubbish clearance from yards and substantial renovations to two adjacent houses, the overall results were disappointing.

Reviewing the impact of the project as a whole, there was little evidence that the hope of community empowerment by establishing a system of self-governance in the houses was likely to be realised. From the vantage point of a year later, the planning appears weak and over-optimistic, both in underestimating the difficulties of reaching and influencing all tenants, and then transforming them into a viable community. The most recalcitrant residents did not attend tenants' meetings and so were influenced neither by IQRS, nor by their neighbours.⁸⁷ The refuse in most yards was mounting again, attempts to appoint and retain caretakers had failed and, more significantly, all tenant and fieldworker interviewees shared the view that relations between neighbours had not improved or changed in any significant way. Further, the

anticipated cooperation with municipalities and property management companies was not working satisfactorily.

While some IQRS fieldworkers felt ill-prepared and overwhelmed by the intractable problems they encountered, the evaluator felt that the NGO was powerless to offer sufficient incentive to tenants in terms of benefits such as employment and training, and therefore that a more integrated and long-term scheme was required. Here, sustainability had also been underestimated but this stemmed from the short-term nature of such Phare projects, particularly of the type supported by the CSDF in the Czech Republic.⁸⁸ The project had a one-year timespan but the expectation in the fiche was that community workers would be available 'after the project life', possibly for an unlimited period, even though no funding for such demanding work was guaranteed.

The other problem was the NGO's inability to exert effective pressure on public institutions on behalf of its clients. The officials misunderstood the role of IQRS. The officials were not proactive. They reportedly excused their inaction by claiming a lack of resources, or stating that it was 'pointless' to carry out expensive repairs, claiming these would be vandalised again. Even in the case of the major repairs undertaken, these were only partial and both IQRS and tenants suspected the ulterior motive was to improve the exterior appearance of buildings in the vicinity of Brno's massive new shopping mall.

In itself, the project attempted to address serious, structural problems with extremely limited resources. Without adequate support from municipalities and institutional agencies, the odds against a positive outcome were overwhelming, yet the omens were not promising. The social inclusion strategy report had sharply criticized all three previous policy documents of the main municipality as 'declaratory in nature ... [which] did not lead to fulfilment [of the policies] in practice'.⁸⁹ The report also stated that while NGOs had better contacts with Roma, only the administration and official agencies had the power and means to solve the problems, and concluded that 'the main reason for the lack of communication and co-operation [between them] at this level is ... unwillingness and mistrust on the part of state institutions'.⁹⁰ In such situations, Phare is unable to compel public institutions to take effective action and projects are forced to rely on their good will. Indeed the entire network for coordinating and implementing Roma policy nationwide effectively disintegrated in December 2002 as a consequence of decentralization.⁹¹

While the main Brno municipality has a good reputation for its pro-Roma stance, particularly as regards housing, the Czech Republic as a whole does not.⁹² A leading Czech sociologist recently gave a warning from ongoing research that many Roma localities are potentially threatened with social exclusion, and criticized 'a certain tendency of city halls to pressure [Roma] ... into doing something with themselves or leaving'.⁹³ This echoed the

2004 report by the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs which, drawing on municipal sources of authorized information, indicated that of 80,059 Roma for whom data was available, nearly a quarter (23 per cent) lived in 'socially excluded communities (ghettos)'.⁹⁴ The report concluded: 'Social exclusion and material poverty and the consequent degradation of human dignity are the most severe problems for the majority of Roma. In this context the IQRS project was a tiny initiative and while other housing projects were undertaken elsewhere, even taken together these were hardly likely to reverse such negative trends. Here it is relevant that 'housing is considerably less developed as an area of European Union policy than other fields of relevance to social exclusion'.⁹⁵

Conclusion

All three projects undoubtedly brought certain benefits to the communities involved and participation in activities was viewed positively by most Roma interviewees. However, project weaknesses were largely attributable to those of the Phare Roma programme as a whole, namely: limited institutional commitment, a restricted approach to multi-faceted structural problems, short-term duration of projects, and hurried planning undermining effectiveness. In principle, the EU's Roma Phare programme was a welcome offer of assistance, however, evidence to date indicates that none of the serious problems afflicting most Roma communities are nearing a solution.

The lessons to be learned from this exercise in participatory evaluation are twofold. One clear message is that direct involvement of intended beneficiaries at grassroots level in every stage of future initiatives – planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating – would offer better hopes of such projects delivering more meaningful and sustainable outcomes. The other is that without committed and active participation of mainstream institutions, extending to governmental level, little is likely to be achieved.

Lessons learnt

- The projects all sought to address genuine needs of impoverished and excluded Roma, including improving relationships between Roma and public authorities and non-Roma neighbours. However, none of the projects was able to tackle or meet these needs effectively.
- The fundamental problem was that this size of project, in terms of budget, time and expertise, was too limited for the scale of the problems being addressed by them.
- The level of funding was too low, or too widely spread, to be effective.

- Projects were not funded for a long enough period to take root, or to find alternative sources of financing by which the initiatives could be sustained.
- Insufficient time and resources were available to ensure the quality of planning required for a full consideration of the multiple factors which needed to be taken into account if projects were to be implemented successfully.
- Inadequate preparation reflected the failure of the Phare programme to allow for the limited capacity of local authorities and Roma communities; and to permit the relationship between the two to develop, in order to plan and implement effective projects of benefit to Roma.
- Better monitoring and evaluation, including greater access to information and more involvement of Roma, including beneficiaries, would still have been frustrated by poor initial planning.
- The ultimate responsibility for these limitations lies with the Phare programme, which was not well constructed to address the kinds of problems which the projects sought to tackle. In particular, there was a lack of expertise and commitment at the highest level to evaluate proposals properly to ensure the effective allocation of resources.
- The Phare programme contained a fundamental structural problem of a lack of accountability at every level, including local communities, local and national authorities, and also the EU. Lack of accountability severely reduced the incentive of decision-makers to ensure money was allocated and used efficiently and effectively.
- Higher standards and greater expertise is required to assess proposals from national governments for the use of EU funds to ensure they will lead to genuine improvement in the lives of Roma communities
- European politicians should more effectively seek to hold the European Commission to account over the use of EU funds targeted at Roma minorities
- International NGOs need to increase awareness among EU politicians and administrators of the needs of Roma minorities, and demonstrate how addressing the needs of Roma should have a high priority if EU funding is to achieve its policy goals
- International NGOs need to raise awareness of the limitations of previous EU funding in respect of Roma and lobby for far greater quality in planning, monitoring and evaluation, along with greater access to information and clear lines of accountability

At the national level:

- Governments should maximize opportunities to use EU funds to support Roma projects in National Development Plans, which should be coordinated with national Roma policy frameworks
- Governments should provide sufficient information, resources and support to Roma NGOs, representatives and communities to enable them to participate fully in the development, implementation and monitoring of Roma-oriented initiatives
- Governments should improve the standards by which proposals for Roma projects are evaluated to ensure they are practicable and can be objectively measurable, and they should demonstrate the meaningful involvement of local Roma representatives and communities
- Governments should ensure that local authorities, agencies and communities have the capacity to effectively use EU funds to improve the living conditions and opportunities of Roma people
- NGOs and media organizations should work together to ensure greater accountability of national politicians and administrators so that EU funding allocated for improving the lives and opportunities of Roma people is targeted appropriately and used efficiently

At the local level:

- Local authorities should use EU funds to bring new resources to their communities that will directly improve

Recommendations

For the foreseeable future, EU funding will have a crucial role in supporting initiatives addressing the deprivation and exclusion of Roma minorities in CEE. However, the primary responsibility for inclusion and respect for the rights of Roma citizens lies with national governments, and local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that targeted funding is used effectively. In addition, NGOs can make an important contribution to supporting Roma people and encouraging greater accountability at every level.

At the European level:

- The European Commission should ensure that Roma communities receive an appropriate share of EU funds for social inclusion, economic development and infrastructure improvements

the lives of Roma and should fully utilize financial and technical support provided by central government

- Local authorities should use the opportunity provided by EU funding to develop constructive relationships with local Roma representatives and communities
- EU-funded Roma-oriented projects should be coordinated with, but not subordinated to, local development plans
- There should be greater public awareness of EU-funded Roma projects in order to demonstrate the contribution Roma can make to the wider community
- NGOs can also encourage capacity building in Roma communities by facilitating training, workshops and other opportunities by which Roma people can acquire skills and experience to build a stronger collective voice
- NGOs should work with Roma communities to monitor the implementation of projects and to evaluate outcomes and to demand greater accountability of national and local agencies and officials

Notes

- 1 In this report the term 'Roma' is used to refer to the very diverse communities generally perceived by others as 'Gypsies' and including those identifying themselves as Roma, Gypsies or by other names. The term 'Roma' is used as a singular and collective noun as well as an adjective in accordance with current widespread usage, although some prefer 'Romani' as an adjective.
- 2 See Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995, p. 7. Census figures for Roma populations are widely accepted to be severe undercounts as many Roma do not choose to identify themselves as Roma to census takers for a variety of reasons (Marushiaková and Popov 2001, pp. 34–5). Instead a range of different estimates are preferred for social policy purposes. In Slovakia, a count of Roma, known as sociographic mapping and carried out in 2003 on behalf of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (Slovak Government 2005), reported a total of around 320,000 Roma or 6.9 per cent of the total population (Slovak Statistical Office 2003), as opposed to the 2001 Census figure of 89,920 (1.7 per cent) (Census 2001). In Hungary, a national Roma survey carried out by the sociologist Istvan Kemény, most recently in 2003, estimated the Roma population at between 550,000 and 650,000 or 5.4–6.4 per cent of the population (Kemény *et al.* 2004) in comparison with the 2001 census figure of 190,046 (1.9 per cent) (Census 2001). In contrast, the Czech government has not sanctioned any similar survey on data protection grounds but in 1999 it accepted an estimate of the Roma population at around 200,000 or 2 per cent of the population (Czech government 1999, p. 33, endnote 9) as opposed to the 2001 census figure of 11,716 (0.1 per cent) (Census 2001). A sociographic mapping approach, as in Slovakia, is now being considered (Swanson 2005).
- 3 Ringold 2000, World Bank *et al.* 2002, UNDP 2003 and 2005, Ringold *et al.* 2003.
- 4 Ringold *et al.* 2003, p. 1. Throughout the CEE region Roma employment had increased significantly and in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary the rate for men reached that for the general labour force (Guy 2001, p. 293, Kovats 2001, p. 338). A 1967 study of social stratification in Czechoslovakia showed the average monthly income of employed Roma to be higher than that of Slovaks (Machonin *a kol.* 1969, p. 537, Table 16.7).
- 5 The Communist period generally had overtly assimilationist policies, accompanied by certain abuses of human rights; these included sterilization of Roma women in Czechoslovakia (Helsinki Watch 1992), the placement of Roma children in special schools

- 6 for 'people with learning disabilities' (ERRC 1999) and the refusal by Czech local authorities to register Roma as residents (Guy 1975). Such abuses did not necessarily cease with regime change.
- 7 These included national policy documents such as longer-term plans for Roma populations, which were adopted at various times and are considered in individual country reports.
- 8 European Commission 1999a, p. 3).
- 9 Europa 2006.
- 10 Article 4 of the FCNM affirms commitment to equalizing action in paragraph 2, while paragraph 3 declares that any such action is not itself discriminatory.
- 11 Existing member states were required to implement this Directive by 19 July 2003, while candidate countries had until the date of EU accession (European Commission 2002, p. 7).
- 12 European Commission 2002, pp. 5–7.
- 13 European Commission 1999b.
- 14 Europa 2006.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Bailey and De Propris 2002.
- 17 Allocated in 1999–2002 and implemented until November 2003.
- 18 EMS 2004a, p. 1.
- 19 European Commission 2002, pp. 7–8.
- 20 European Commission 1999a, p. 6.
- 21 EMS 2004b, p. II.
- 22 See Trehan (2001) for discussion of the difficult environment for Roma and pro-Roma NGOs, and Šiklová (1999) for an account of the chaotic situation in the Czech Republic in 1997.
- 23 Formerly NCEDI.
- 24 European Commission 2002, p. 8.
- 25 Guglielmo 2002
- 26 EMS 2004b, p. 9.
- 27 EMS 2004b, pp. II, III.
- 28 EMS 2004b, p. 9.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 EMS 2004b, p. II.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 17.
- 32 EMS 2004b, pp. 12, 13.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 4, footnote table 1.
- 34 Since its establishment in 1993 the CSDF (NROS) has administered a continuing, EU-funded grant scheme, the Civil Society Development Programme. Between 1993 and 2002 almost 2,700 projects were supported in the Czech Republic with grants totalling more than CZK 700 million. These were claimed to be 'above all of a long-term character' within the three main priority areas of developing civil society and the non-profit sector, human rights and the integration of the Roma community and programmes for children and young people (CSDF 2003).
- 35 EMS 2004b.
- 36 EMS 2004a, p. 1. The evaluation team normally consists of agency workers resident in the country concerned who review all the applicant's Phare programmes when required by the EC, plus an external expert as Short-term Technical Specialist (STTS) on particular topic areas. One of the authors has been involved as STTS in Interim Evaluations of Phare Roma programmes in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria as well as in the 2004 comparative review across five CEE countries (EMS 2004b). In the process he evaluated two of the three projects examined in this MRG report.
- 37 Project fiches, describing the programmes, are presented on Europa's Phare website but not necessarily with subsequent changes, while other documentation, such as Terms of Reference (ToR), monitoring and quarterly reports relating to the Consultant and Steering Committee minutes, is usually available from the Programme Implementation Unit (PIU). Interim Evaluations are confidential. While Phare Guidelines declare: 'Evaluation reports will be systematically published and made available to all concerned', this appears to refer only to broader ex-post evaluations (European Commission 1999, p. 11).
- 38 EC *Interim Evaluation Guide*, annex 1, pt 3, pp 4, 5.
- 39 At least three, and probably more, Interim Evaluation reports have urged governments to increase salaries as a solution to understaffing but this would have implications for civil service pay structures.
- 40 Kubánová 2005.
- 41 The NGO partner in the Czech Republic had already received training in participatory evaluation and is now offering this to Roma and non-Roma organizations.
- 42 This is by no means to assert that survey methods are inappropriate for research among Roma, particularly when field interviewers are trained Roma.
- 43 In practice, discussions in focus groups were found to be a more acceptable and effective way of gathering opinions from Roma

- participants than individual interviews.
- 43 These include detachment from mainstream institutions, financial instability and personnel change.
- 44 Paying respondents used to be regarded as suspect for possibly introducing bias by influencing answers but this practice is now widespread and regarded as fully justifiable (Thompson 1996).
- 45 In two evaluations some anxiety was expressed about personal views disclosed and so these locations have been made an anonymous as possible, but in Hungary the villages involved are easily identifiable and concealment was not required.
- 46 Prospects of effective intervention are extremely low without the close involvement of local stakeholders as the main partners, particularly municipalities with their devolved powers
- 47 The NGO partner in the Czech Republic had already received training in participatory evaluation and is now offering this to Roma and non-Roma organizations.
- 48 Miniszterelnöki Hivatal Roma 2004, pp. 9–10.
- 49 The 1993 Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities established the basis for Minority Self-Governments. Each of the country's 13 recognized minority communities can elect its own local Minority Self-Government in any of Hungary's 3,200 local government jurisdictions. At the last elections in 2002, 1,999 Gypsy Self-Governments were set up. The word Gypsy (cigány) is used in both the law and in the title of self-governments.
- 50 EMS 2003a, p. IV
- 51 EMS 2002, p. 19
- 52 EMS 2002, pp. II, III; EMS 2003, abstract.
- 53 EMS 2002, p. 11.
- 54 EMS 2002, p. III.
- 55 The infrastructure work was won by a non-local firm in a public tender. The villages of the micro-region were not party to the selection procedure and did not have a contract directly with the firm.
- 56 The project drew not only on the experience of the Spiš pilot but also that of various MoE and other NGO projects, including those of WOSF, which had been cooperating with the MoE since 1995 and was particularly involved in pre-school education.
- 57 See earlier references and Plenipotentiary (2005).
- 58 While 'sources of verification' for this activity were the 'project report[,] statistical figures [and] education surveys', the stated indicators of achievement were an 'increased number of Roma children attending pre-school institutions (kindergartens) (by 15% in 2003 compared to 2001)' and a 'decreased number of Roma children attending elementary schools for handicapped [sic] children (by 10% in 2003 compared to 2001)' (Project fiche, p. 20).
- 59 EMS 2003b, §18.
- 60 Bavoux 2003, p. 46.
- 61 EMS 2001b, p. IV.
- 62 EMS 2003b, p. IV.
- 63 Prior to the project only two Roma children had attended the kindergarten.
- 64 UNDP 2002, p. 6.
- 65 Rigová *et al.* 2002, p. 431.
- 66 Although assistant teachers are seen as integral to the Slovak National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, their provision remains uncertain and a recent report is highly critical that the largest Roma kindergarten in Slovakia has no assistant teachers. *'In an environment where there is such a strong language barrier, where 100 percent of the children are Roma, there is no excuse why there aren't any assistants. This is unacceptable.'* (Roma Press Agency, Košice, 28 March 2006).
- 67 Kocze and Tankersley 2004, pp. 316–8. The assistant teachers interviewed had received training with certificates from accredited institutions but since 2002 the position of assistant teachers has been strengthened in Slovakia, as elsewhere, and bachelor-level university training is available.
- 68 Project fiche, p. 10.
- 69 A survey in 2000 found that whereas 11.12 per cent of children attending the first grade of primary school in Slovakia were Roma, they formed only 5.35 per cent of those who had previously attended kindergarten (Rigová *et al.* 2003, p. 418).
- 70 Save the Children 2001, p. 181.
- 71 Taggart 2003 .
- 72 EMS 2001a ,§6.2.2.
- 73 Bavoux 2003, p. 47.
- 74 Slovak 'Ministry of Education officials ... said there were no such plans and believed there would be significant opposition to such proposals' (World Bank 2004, p. 31).
- 75 Kindergarten costs vary but here parents paid 50 crowns monthly plus 20–25 crowns per lunch, the main expense. It is indicative of the positive atmosphere in the smaller kindergarten that Roma and non-Roma parents, whether or not they receive social support, voluntarily contribute 150 crowns (c 4) monthly to cover costs of toys and other materials.
- 76 While previous Slovak research has shown that demand is variable, the conclusion was that 'other factors ... have a much greater impact [on Roma attitudes to education] ... above all their poverty and social exclusion' (Krieglerová and Kušnieriková 2003, pp. 447–8).
- 77 The emphasis throughout was on 'increased access to education' although the Terms of Reference (ToR) listed as an aim: 'to support the contacts between Roma and non-Roma children' (ToR SK0002.01 §4.2.1). However, in 2003 the Slovak government's long-term (2003–10) policy document, gave as its first educational priority for 2003: 'to draft and adopt a policy of Romany children and youth integrated education including a proposal of temporary affirmative action' (Slovak Government 2003, section A). Eventually a Government Resolution of May 2004 approved the concept of integrated education (Slovak Government 2005, p. 1).
- 78 Project fiche §3.1.
- 79 An ERRC report includes information on segregated schooling in Slovakia gathered in the school year 2002–3 (ERRC 2004).
- 80 Bavoux 2003, p. 47.
- 81 Project fiche §3.4.
- 82 Navrátil and Šimíková 2003. Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic with a total population of 368,169 (Brno Labour Office 2004, p. 3). In the 2001 Census only 374 people declared a Roma ethnicity but the Roma community is estimated at 10,000–20,000, forming 3–4 per cent of all inhabitants (Navrátil and Šimíková 2003, p. 14). Most are concentrated in inner-city areas.
- 83 IQRS 2004, pp. 4–5.
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 *Ibid.*, European Dialogue 2005, p. 33.
- 86 The nearest was the following: *'4 Community centres supported in regions with a high minority concentration; each community centre ensured at least two Roma and non-Roma community and/or field social workers as intermediaries between relevant authorities (e.g. housing, employment, education) and minority community; field community workers available for both sides during and after the project life'* (Project fiche, Annex 1). While the role of fieldworkers as mediators is described, this has more to do with capacity building of NGO community centres rather than evaluating the success of any particular activity undertaken, such as creating 'safe places'.
- 87 Tenants meetings for the two largest houses were attended by a mere handful of residents.
- 88 Sirovátka *et al.* 2002, p. 73.
- 89 Navrátil and Šimíková 2003, p. 25.
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 91 Czech Government Council 2005, p. 11.
- 92 Bařšová (2003) has charted the rapid erosion of protection for poorer families since 1991 following state withdrawal from the housing sector.
- 93 Asiedu 2006. The impetus to renovate city centres has put municipalities under growing pressure if they seek to protect their weaker citizens, since economic rationality 'dictates ... get[ting] rid of apartments and buildings with high indebtedness, including their high-risk residents' (Víšek 2003: 39-40). Even where Roma tenants cause no problems whatsoever, their mere presence lowers the value of buildings and their associated apartments (Frištenská 2000: 29).
- 94 Czech Government Council 2004, p. 16.
- 95 Focus *et al* 2004, p. 25.

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