



Civil society monitoring report
on implementation
of the national Roma integration strategy
in Austria

*Identifying blind spots
in Roma inclusion policy*

Prepared by:
Mirjam Karoly
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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
INTRODUCTION	9
EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA WOMEN AND GIRLS	11
Definition of the problem	11
Background and cause of the problem	11
Policy answer to the problem.....	13
EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES	15
Definition of the problem	15
Background and cause of the problem	15
Policy answer to the problem.....	18
RECOMMENDATIONS	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESF	European Social Fund
EUFW	EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before the adoption of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (EUFW), which triggered a new dynamic in Austria's policy towards Roma, government policies targeting Roma were merely fulfilling the objectives of the Ethnic Group Act (1976), policy regulating the protection and promotion of ethnic minorities in Austria.

In particular, the autochthonous Roma benefitted from this law and funding for initiatives aimed at promotion of culture and language. Further, several organisations receive annual funding for running non-profit organisations representing the interests of their members and offering services, in particular social counselling and educational support for Roma. Moreover, they act as a hub for information, awareness raising about history, language and culture of Roma in Austria.

The rather conservative definition and approach of Austria's minority policy (applicable only for those proven to reside over three generations within a specific autochthonous territory and own mother tongue) does not, per definition, extend protection to Roma with a migrant background, even if they reside or are born in Austria and have already required Austrian citizenship.

In this regard, the adoption of the Austrian *National strategy targeting the inclusion of Roma 2011* (NRIS) was a positive step forward as it targeted a number of relevant policy fields, which are not covered under the traditional minority rights scheme and focused on improving the situation of Roma in education, employment, fight against antigypsyism, empowerment of women, girls and youth, empowerment of Roma civil society and enhancing participation. By doing so, it did not limit its scope on autochthonous Roma but aimed to address all Roma residing in Austria.

Its implementation mostly draws on the existing initiatives and work of civil society organisations and, only to a limited extent, expanded Roma inclusion efforts into mainstream policy areas. But it also brought new opportunities with an important impact by increasing efforts for Roma inclusion in the area of employment through ESF funded projects coordinated by the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs.

Gender mainstreaming in Roma policies

Although Austria has a general commitment to promoting gender equality and the NRIS has a particular focus on the empowerment of Roma women and youth, gender mainstreaming is not comprehensively implemented in Roma targeted policies, while the Roma women targeted projects and programmes are limited. There is also limited capacity among Roma civil society to implement gender mainstreaming in their operational work, while mainstream organisations, working on promoting gender equality, are often not sensitive to the interests and needs of Roma women or do not recognise the multiple forms of discrimination Roma women face.

The strategic goal of gendered targeted Roma policies, empowering Roma women and girls, has not yet been transformed into policy implementation. There is a lack of gender disaggregated data or comprehensive analysis of the situation of Roma women and girls, and there is a lack of resources for Roma women and girls to meet in confident safe spaces and in discussions. In general, there is little awareness and capacity for integrating a gender mainstreaming approach within Roma targeted policies and programmes while initiatives targeting the empowering of Roma women and girls are limited. Also, guidance from national and local administration through their funding tools remains limited.

There is a need for producing more evidence-based knowledge data and stimulating stronger gender mainstreaming approaches in Roma targeted programmes, but also for women targeted initiatives. Here, national and local authorities can play a crucial role in

stronger integration of gender mainstreaming approaches within their funding tools. Further, there is a need to increase capacity of Roma civil society but also to sensitise mainstream institutions, promoting equality of women, to the needs and interests of Roma women.

Evaluation of programmes and policies

Independent evaluation following standard evaluation criteria is key for ensuring good investments and needs-based policies but also to take stock and guide future policies, programmes and funding cycles. The [second RCM report on Austria](#) identified the area of promoting inclusion in employment as the field which has seen most impact within the framework of implementing the NRIS, due to a number of projects and programmes enabled through ESF funding. However, this analysis reflects the increase of activities aimed at improving labour market integration rather than giving a qualitative assessment about the results. In general, projects and programmes aimed at Roma inclusion are not evaluated, neither by authorities managing funds or by stakeholders, including Roma civil society implementing the funds. In many cases, projects aimed at Roma inclusion were run by the civil society who have to apply for funding on an annual basis. The NRIS set for the first time a longer strategic policy goal for Roma inclusion trying to align the different projects to this end, including the multi-annual programmes funded by ESF and administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs promoting Roma inclusion in the labour market.

Yet, these investments and programmes have not been evaluated nor has a broader discussion taken place in order to take stock of lessons learned, opportunities and challenges and guide future policy making or further programmes and funding cycles. There are also particular challenges to enable sound evaluations, such as the lack of data or analysis, lack of institutional framework and financial resources, both within the authorities and civil society to build in between funding/programme cycles.

The ending of the current NRIS and the finalisation of the first ESF programme cycle give a unique opportunity to initiate evaluations and discuss the results within a broader strategic discussion, including Roma civil society, other stakeholders and authorities, to inform the post-2020 NRIS and future Roma related policies. Moreover, in the interest of improving and enhancing effectiveness, the future NRIS should plan mid-term and final external independent and participatory evaluations following the standard criteria of relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of its projects and programmes and overall performance.

INTRODUCTION

The Austrian Ethnic Group Act adopted in 1976,¹ provided for a legal framework for the protection and promotion of the officially recognised national minorities (ethnic groups) like Carinthian Slovenes, Burgenland Croats, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks (previously Czechoslovakians). The Austrian Roma groups² with a long-standing history in Austria were at that time not considered as fulfilling the criteria of a national minority and consequently their interests were not reflected in the law.

In 1993, Roma succeeded with their struggle for official recognition as an ethnic group. In addition, the government financed initiatives for the protection and promotion of Roma language and culture³ and supported the set-up of a Roma advisory council to represent the interests of autochthonous Roma communities. However, due to long standing history of exclusion, persecution under the Nazi rule and continued discrimination in 2nd Republic of Austria, the minority rights framework fell short in addressing the vulnerable socio-economic position and discrimination against Roma.

Further, there were little efforts to mainstream their needs and interests within general policies (social policies, employment policies, gender equality policies, and others). Also, as per definition, the Ethnic Group Act focuses on autochthonous Roma communities, a bigger part of Roma with migrant background (some with Austrian citizenship and some without), was not seen as beneficiaries of the legal provisions.

The "Strategy for the Continuation of the Inclusion of Roma in Austria" (NRIS)⁴ brought new dynamics and added value to Austria's existing Roma policies by addressing both autochthonous Roma groups as well as Roma with a migrant background irrespective of whether they hold Austrian citizenship or not. Additionally, the strategy addressed two of the four identified key areas for social inclusion, namely education and employment and, instead of health and housing, focused on addressing antigypsyism, the empowerment of Roma women and girls, strengthening the organised Roma civil society and the empowerment of Roma youth and participation. In the absence of data and a broader needs analysis on the situation of Roma, the focus areas of the NRIS were designed in consultation with the Roma and non-Roma civil society and drawing on already existing initiatives and projects.

The first two [RCM reports on Austria](#) reflect on the existing legal and policy framework for Roma inclusions⁵ and on the outcomes and limitations of its implementation in the key

¹ Full text of the Ethnic Group Act (*Bundesgesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Volksgruppen in Österreich*) and its amendments is available at: <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000602>

² In Austria the Burgenland-Roma, Sinti and Lovara are considered to be autochthonous communities while others who migrated to Austria in more recent decades are defined as new minorities. See also Roma Civil Monitor (2018) *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Austria: Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*, p.7 ff, available at <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-austria-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

³ In general minorities must fulfil the criteria to have an own language (not German), own culture and reside in parts of the country over several generations (three generations). For details see: *Bundesgesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Volksgruppen in Österreich*, <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000602>

⁴ See: *Strategie zur Fortführung der Inklusion der Roma in Österreich*, available at: <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/themen/volksgruppen/roma-strategie.html>

⁵ See Roma Civil Monitor (2018) *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Austria: Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*, available at

policy areas of education, employment, health and housing as well as on how anti-discrimination and antigypsyism are addressed.⁶ In line with the given policy implementation and practice but also due to lack of data, the analysis does not give particular insight on how policy implementation affects men and women differently or how the interests of Roma women and girls are met. Further, the second monitoring report finds that the NRIS process brought the most significant change in the area of employment due to a Roma-targeted ESF programme, which enabled also Roma civil society to implement projects targeting labour market integration from 2015 to 2019.⁷

This third monitoring cycle will draw attention on some of the blind spots to inform policy makers and practitioners in their discussions about improving future policy cycles, in particular post-2020 approaches as well as future funding cycles both at national and EU level.

In doing so the report will reflect on how the empowerment of Roma women and girls have featured in the implementation of Roma policies and programmes, in particular within the process of the NRIS's implementation.

In addition, the report will critically discuss the lack of evaluations carried out for project and programmes implemented within the framework of the NRIS drawing from the experience of the work of the Vienna based Roma organisation *Romano Centro* which implemented the ESF co-funded programme "*Romano Zuralipe*" from November 2015 to April 2019 and a number of other smaller scale projects supporting the implementation of NRIS.

The analysis focuses in particular on the situation of Roma in Vienna as the capital is believed to have the highest number of Roma and also constitutes the main destination and residence area of Roma with migrant background.

The conclusions are drawn from desk research and experience of the staff working at *Romano Centro*. *Romano Centro*, founded in 1991, is one of the bigger Roma organisations which represents both, the interests of autochthonous Roma and Roma with migrant background. *Romano Centro* has also been awarded a three-year ESF-funded project "*Romano Zuralipe*" within the framework of the NRIS implementation.

This report was prepared by Ms. Mirjam Karoly, who is board member of *Romano Centro* and vice-deputy of the Austrian ethnic board for Roma. The first two RCM reports were prepared by *Romano Centro*. Due to staff turnover and finalisation of "*Romano Zuralipe*" by April 2019, the limited resources of the organisation did not allow for pursuing the third cycle report as planned.

<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-austria-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

⁶ See Roma Civil Monitor (2019) *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Austria: Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*, available at:

<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-austria-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA WOMEN AND GIRLS

Definition of the problem

In response to consultation with civil society and the discussion at the 17 Dialogue Platform hosted by the National Contact Point on the topic "violence within the family, domestic violence and forced marriage,"⁸ the Austrian NRIS included empowerment of Roma women and girls as one of its focus areas.⁹

Many Roma women and girls face multiple forms of discrimination and challenges because of their ethnicity, gender and socio-economic and/or social status. In addition, Roma women with migrant background who arrived recently to Austria might also face specific challenges to enter the labour market due to language barriers and restrictions. These barriers cause unequal chances and impede the full realisation of their fundamental rights. Talking about Roma women's issues still remains a taboo both within Roma communities and outside; there are only rare opportunities for Roma women or girls to meet in a confident environment to exchange experiences and create a bigger support network.

Background and cause of the problem

Major challenges with regard to addressing the situation of Roma women and girls within mainstream policies and ensuring gender mainstreaming of programmes/projects and policies targeting Roma, in particular within the NRIS are: lack of data and poor assessment; little and insufficient capacity (including little knowledge on gender mainstreaming and awareness on promoting equal rights and opportunities for Roma women and girls) and organisational resources; lack of guidance and stimulation through funding tools; and lack of reporting and evaluation.

Lack of data and poor assessment

In general, there is little data on the current situation of Roma in Austria available, particularly concerning the situation of Roma in Vienna, where the majority resides.¹⁰ Moreover, there is also no gender-disaggregated data or a comprehensive policy analysis available on the situation of Roma women and girls in Austria or a comprehensive policy analysis. General reports on the situation of women usually do not reflect on the situation of Roma women and girls; in some cases, with regard to analysis about Vienna, these issues might be subsumed under the category 'women with migrant background'.¹¹ Knowledge rely solely on the experiences of the civil society, in particular those delivering social services and educational programmes.

Little and insufficient capacity and organisational resources

There is also little and insufficient capacity and resources at NGO level on implementing gender mainstreaming approach in project work and programmes. There is also limited awareness on the need to promote equal rights and opportunities for Roma women and

⁸ 17. Roma Dialogplattform vom 22. Juni 2016 zum Thema „Gewalt in der Familie, häusliche Gewalt, Zwangsheirat. [The 17. Dialogueplattform on 22. June 2016 focused on: Violence within the family, domestic violence and forced marriage.]

⁹ See Strategy for the Continuation of the Inclusion of Roma in Austria/Strategie zur Fortführung der Inklusion der Roma in Österreich, p. 17, available at, <https://www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/themen/volksgruppen/roma-strategie.html>

¹⁰ Only in the field of education a study gives an insight into the general situation of Roma. See: Mikael Luciak, 2014: ROMBAS: Zur Bildungssituation von Roma und Sinti in Österreich, Wien: Initiative Minderheiten.

¹¹ See: Susi Schmatz and Petra Wetzels, MigrantInnen in Wien. 2015: Zur Beschäftigungs- und Lebenssituation von Roma/Romnja und Kurden/KurdInnen mit Migrationshintergrund, AK Wien, Wien.

girls. In Vienna, the association VIVARO¹² aims at creating a space and the possibility for networking for Roma women. At the initiative of three Roma women, low-profile outreach at local level is pursued in order to create trust and encourage Roma women to join and discuss in a confident atmosphere. However, the organisation is run mostly on volunteer basis with very little funding for smaller activities. In addition, *Romano Centro* has in recent years started to involve stronger in promoting empowerment of young Roma girls and women to engage in prevention, awareness raising and empowerment in addition to offering social counselling for Roma women and young girls.

However, empowerment projects have received very irregular and small funding from programmes administered by the city of Vienna or donations by church or were partly supported through available ESF resources. Moreover, gender mainstreaming or a gender targeted approach is not yet incorporated within the overall Roma civil society organisational work, also due to lack of knowledge and capacity; other mainstream women's organisations are not aware about the specific situation of Roma women.

Field experience:

"Roma women and girls, who seek assistance, usually find themselves in complex situations of dependency and in many cases face violence. However, many women are under so much pressure, that they are sometimes not aware about the violence they face or do not report at first about it. Often, they come to seek assistance for issues related to their children or problems with regard to access to the labour market and only later in the process it is revealed that they also suffer from psychological or physical violence at home," witnesses a social worker from NGO *Romano Centro*.¹³

The experience of *Romano Centro* also shows that the problems women face can be cantered around certain topics, e.g. situation of children/education, poverty, health related issues, difficulties in resolving administrative issues with different authorities, language barriers, issues related with residence or work permit, unemployment and access to the labour market, debts, health and reproductive rights, domestic or gender-based violence. Further, in many cases, women fear that their children will be taken away if they report about gender-based or domestic violence or other problems within the family. In this regard, the Roma women-cantered service provided by a Roma woman social worker is an added value, as Roma women and girls feel safe, trusted and understood and can express themselves in their mother tongue.¹⁴

Lack of guidance and stimulation through funding tools

Available national funding tools, especially those provided under the Ethnic Group Act do not condition funding to gender mainstreaming or gender-targeted programming; this is also reflected in the selection procedure of programmes and projects awarded for funding.¹⁵ Moreover, from a procedural point of few view, no gender balance is envisioned in the advisory council of the Roma, which among others, discusses and recommends that projects be funded under the Ethnic Group Act. For example, currently, there are two Roma women among the eight members of the council (only one Roma women holds a seat for representing Roma civil society, as the second Roma women holds the seat of the church).¹⁶ Gender-specific funding is available under national funds promoting gender

¹² See: www.vivaro.at

¹³ Interview on 25 March 2020 with Danijela Cicvaric, Social Worker at *Romano Centro*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Application forms and guidance for applying for funds under the Ethnic Group Act are available online under: <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/themen/volksgruppen/volksgruppen-forderung.html>

¹⁶ According to the law the advisory council should reflect the political interests and diversity of the Roma Ethnic Group. The Roma advisory council has eight seats, four to be nominated by the Roma civil society and

equality. However, Roma women issues are hardly covered by the general services or detailed information is missing. Therefore, to address this gap, *Romano Centro* has started to offer specific social counselling for Roma women and girls in September 2013. The position of the social worker is partly funded by national structures in charge of women's issues/gender equality.

Lack of reporting and evaluation

As a result of the few limited number of available gender-targeted programmes run for Roma women and girls in Vienna, there is also lack of reporting, analysis and evaluation giving deeper insight into the situation of needs and interests of Roma women and girls. If at all, the available reports were written within the framework of project finalisation processes and thus these are also fragmented with regard to the scope and thematic area. Moreover, project reports on the use of funds granted through the provision of the Ethnic Group Act do not require gender-sensitivity reporting. An exception in this regard was the requirements for ESF funded projects to include documentation of end-beneficiaries disaggregated by gender.

Policy answer to the problem

The NRIS identified the empowerment of Roma women and girls as one of its key areas to be addressed until 2020,¹⁷ recognising that Roma women and girls face multiple forms of discrimination in society due to their gender and ethnicity and partly also due to traditional patriarchal gender roles and expectations. The defined objectives are:

- (i) to ensure that Roma women and girls are empowered to participate in all spheres of life on equal basis,
- (ii) Roma women and girls are informed about how to enforce their rights,
- (iii) Roma women and girls have access to mainstream institutions,
- (iv) Roma in general are informed on issues of equality and equal rights and opportunities.¹⁸

These objectives were expected to be reached in particular by preventive work with Roma women and men; individual health and social counselling (from Roma women to Roma women); networking of women's counselling services with Roma civil society.¹⁹

The set objectives and measures would be a great step forward if implemented effectively. However, as demonstrated in the previous sections, the services available for preventive counselling and networking regarding Roma women and girls are financially and institutionally under-resourced. The few activities carried out in Vienna are important but too marginal to gain greater impact and to reach the objective. Progress in this area would require adequate resources, including a regular women's space and greater synergies and exchange of experiences between Roma organisations and mainstream organisations promoting women's rights (this would also enhance inclusiveness towards the needs of Roma women and a diverse representation of women's needs in general).

Additionally, providing funds for stimulating more knowledge, baseline data and analysis would enhance effectiveness of projects and help define targeted measures. So far, most evidence is only created by those involved in social work and counselling, which gives

four representing the stronger political parties and the church (Roman-Catholic). In the case of the Roma advisory board, the political representatives are non-Roma, the civil society representatives are Roma engaged within the different Roma NGOs and the church has sent a Roma women employee.

¹⁷ See chapter II.4 *Ermächtigung von Roma-Frauen und Mädchen (Romnja)*, in: *Strategie zur Fortführung der Inklusion der Roma in Österreich*, p. 17, available at: <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/themen/volksgruppen/roma-strategie.html>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18

limited insight of the Roma women's situation (and particularly on the situation of those actively seeking help).

Further empowerment of Roma women and girls is required throughout all areas of life. According to the experiences of the Roma mediators and social workers, the full enjoyment of equal opportunities and rights by Roma women is in many cases strongly linked to economic security, good quality education and training and economic opportunities.

It is important to stress that the empowerment and rights of Roma women and girls should not be limited to health and reproductive rights, to the prevention of violence of against women, or the elimination of harmful traditional practices.

In this respect, a great potential would also be to generally advance the gender mainstreaming approach in Roma targeted and mainstream policies and stimulate or condition funding opportunities to projects which deliver gender sensitive results or are inclusive to Roma women targeted activities. Moreover, broader outreach to Roma women by mainstream institutions has also great potential for enhancing awareness raising and the understanding of gender equality and women's rights among Roma women and girls.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

Definition of the problem

Evaluating policies and programmes on how they meet intended goals and impact the situation of their beneficiaries is key for good policy making. It allows, in addition, to measure whether set goals and objectives are relevant, effective and meaningful, while lessons learned and experiences in implementing policies and programmes can help to change and redirect policies to better meet existing needs of the community. Yet, there is no practice of evaluating the impact on policies and programmes aimed at Roma inclusion; similarly, there is no broader discussion on experiences taking stock of lessons learned of programmes and projects implementing the NRIS or an evaluation of the NRIS.

Background and cause of the problem

Until the NRIS fell into place, the interests and needs of Roma were mainly addressed through the minority rights approach and the legal framework for minority protection, as laid down in the Ethnic Group Act. Additionally, for work which would not fall under the competence of the Ethnic Group Act, the civil society had to find support of various local national or other funding sources. Usually, financial support is given on an annual basis, which has also an impact on any strategic planning and implementation processes. Donors request, in principle, that civil society or other institutions implementing programmes and projects report about the implementation under their financial and narrative reporting scheme. Overall, there is a very flexible and also meaningful approach given that the funding process is very responsive to a variety of different interests in specific local contexts. So far, there has not been a broader discussion among civil society about the need to evaluate projects beyond the usual narrative reporting or to evaluate state policies aimed at Roma.

The adoption of the NRIS was a new approach, under which a strategic policy goal was reached by 2020. Additionally, for the first time, there was an effort to make use of some of the national funding opportunities to facilitate, at least to a certain extent, the set goals formulated in the strategy. In this regard, in particular the ESF call from 29 April 2015 on "Roma Empowerment" enabled Roma civil society to apply for ESF funds for multi-annual projects for promoting labour market integration of Roma. It was closely co-ordinated between the Ministry of Social Affairs in charge of administering the ESF calls and the Federal Chancellery in charge of overseeing the implementation of the NRIS. This, in particular, helped to stimulate a broad spectrum of programmes and projects generating positive practices to promote access to the labour market for Roma women and men, including youth.

Looking at the implementation of the NRIS, the RCM's second monitoring cycle finds that: *"In employment, the NRIS process brought the most significant change. A Roma targeted ESF programme enabled civil society to conduct ten projects on empowerment of Roma in employment from 2015 to 2019, compared to one project before 2015."*²⁰

However, this assessment builds on the increase of activities conducted in this area by Roma civil society stimulated by the opportunity of ESF funding. In order to analyse the outcomes of the NRIS, the achieved results against its objectives and track benefits and

²⁰ See Roma Civil Monitor (2019): *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Austria: Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy*, p. 7.

The ESF call from 29. April 2015 on "Roma Empowerment" with a total amount of 4 million EUR aimed at activating and stabilisation the situation of Roma women and men at the labour market. For a full list of awarded projects see *ibid.*, p.12, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-2-austria-2018-eprint-fin.pdf>

lessons learned of the NRIS and its implementing programmes and projects, an independent participatory evaluation would be essential. So far, the authorities dealing with the overall NRIS or managing authorities/ministries managing bigger funds (e.g. the Ministry of Social Affairs in charge of ESF funds or others) have not conducted an evaluation of the impact. Also, within the specific programmes implemented by the NGOs, no external evaluation is commissioned or built into project/programme frame nor is there time set between the programmes/funding cycles to allow for evaluation and deeper analysis or stock-taking of lessons learned.

While there is no in-built project evaluation under ESF grants and NRIS related projects for Roma, evaluating projects, programmes and policies targeting the inclusion of Roma is challenged by: a general lack of data on Roma, lack of evaluation mechanisms and a lack of financial and time resources.

Lack of data and analysis

In general, there is lack of data and analysis of the situation of Roma in Austria, particularly of Roma who came to Austria since the 1960s and reside mostly in Vienna or other bigger towns in Austria. There is also little data or analysis available on specific aspects and areas the NRIS is focusing on, such as the level of integration of Roma children and youth in education, access of Roma to the labour market, health services and housing.

The collected information is based mostly on the experiences and outreach of the Roma NGOs and thus reflect important information about those who can be reached or pro-actively get in touch with the organisations to seek support or engage. In addition, it does not allow to set clear indicators and measurable goals and also does not allow for longer term impact assessment. So far, reporting including under the NRIS relates to descriptions of conducted activities, or the numbers of persons who participated or benefitted from an intervention. In this sense, reporting or stock-taking remains on activity level rather than on outcome (results) level or change achieved (impact).

Lack of evaluation mechanisms

In general, there is no institutional framework or mechanism to assess the results achieved within programmes or projects or for more strategic discussion about experiences of medium and larger scale programmes and lessons learned such as, for example, the ESF-funded programmes focusing on fostering inclusion of Roma in the labour market.

In addition, the absence of guidelines about project evaluation, particularly independent, participatory evaluation, both civil society and public administration lack the capacity to fully understand all the aspects of project management cycle. As a result, managing authorities have failed to include requirements for evaluation of programmes or projects or allow for budget allocations for evaluation in programmes and projects.

Discussions about the outcomes of programmes or narrative reporting do not reflect on the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency or coherence of a programme or project. There are also no platforms or mechanisms to assess the successes, failures, challenges and lessons learned in order to inform future programming or project cycles. This seems to stem also from the fear of not receiving further funding (in the case of civil society) or the fear of not having managed the funds well (in the case of public administrations). Deeper understanding of opportunities and challenges as well as reflecting about lessons learned has nonetheless a great potential for improving impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes.

Case study: *Romano Zuralipe*, ESF-funded project implemented by *Romano Centro*²¹

Among other initiatives, the Vienna-based NGO *Romano Centro* with long-standing experience in the area of promoting education for Roma children, including through its Roma school mediators programme, fighting discrimination, and providing information and awareness raising workshop for administration as well as social work for Roma and counselling for Roma women, successfully implemented an ESF-funded project "*Romano Zuralipe*" aimed at empowering Roma men and women at the labour market. Within four specific measures, the project meant to provide for a holistic approach, making use of the experience of the organisation and engaging in particular in the area of transition from school to training and employment. The project offered counselling to overcome obstacles for labour market integration, in particular counselling for Roma youth, job orientation with youth and parents through Roma school mediators, empowerment of Roma youth as multipliers/youth leaders and project work of with Roma youth, and train-the-trainer programmes to conduct workshops on raising awareness, combating antigypsyism and on history and culture of Roma in Austria.

The project, supported with over 400,000 EUR, was successfully implemented from November 2015 to April 2019 by eight staff members, building on the strengths and experiences of the organisation. However, the cumbersome and complex finance structure of the programme and its financial reporting requirements as well as the extremely high administrative amount of work and challenging goals of the project demanded extraordinary commitment from the employees. Moreover, the great successes of the work of the Roma mediators and their increased outreach to schools with substantial numbers of Roma children could not be kept after the end of the project as there was no interest of the Vienna education directorate neither to invest in the model of Roma school mediators nor to build on their experiences or systematise them as Roma language teachers. Further, the increased social work focusing on overcoming obstacles, which was well received by the end-beneficiaries, and demonstrated valuable change of the situation was not matched with additional national funds after the ending of the project and had to be thus reduced. In addition, the complex financial structure negatively impacted on the financial liquidity of the organisation, which created high risk, forcing to slim down the overall plan of activities and operations and putting the further existence of the organisation at high risk.

There are a number of positive but also challenging lessons learned with regard to relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence which can be drawn from this programme cycle. Given that the follow-up grants' call awarded already a number of organisations before the ending of the project, no broader consultation was held to discuss the experiences, strengths and limitations and no evaluation was done in order to build on the lessons learned in the follow-up ESF programme cycle 2019-2021.

Lack of financial and time resources

Many of the programmes created under the framework of the NRIS are implemented by NGOs, funded by public administration (local and national). The organisations often do not implement the whole programme but only part of it. Usually, funding is given on an annual basis without the security of continuation. These cumbersome funding structures can be a challenge for the evaluation, which is generally not requested nor supported by the public or private donors.

Similarly, the larger scale multi-annual programmes do not have yet built-in finance tools or evaluation. In fact, there is no coverage of costs after the project ended; thus, a post-project evaluation is impossible. Moreover, the programme and funding cycles sometimes have complex and administrative challenging procedures leaving little to no space for

²¹ http://www.romano-centro.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=174%3ARomano-zuralipe&catid=12%3Aprojekte&Itemid=4&lang=de

reflection, stock-taking of lessons learned or sharing experiences so as to inform a strategic direction or redirection or for changing procedures in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Policy answer to the problem

In particular, with the NRIS ending in December 2020, and given that so far little investment has been done in conducting evaluations, a strategic discussion could be initiated to discuss about institutional shortcomings and ways to improve project evaluation mechanisms and processes related to Roma.

A primary challenge remains the lack of data and analysis in key policy fields. Here policy and programme implementors might consider investing in gathering baseline data on the situation of Roma in Vienna, in particular, in the respective policy fields of the NRIS.

Furthermore, the positive development under the framework of the NRIS, e.g. the coordination approach to provide ESF funds for improving access to the labour market for Roma within multi-annual programmes implemented over three years, could be seen as a good starting point to invest in evaluating the outcomes and having a strategic discussion within the wider evaluation of the NRIS to inform future policy design in this area.

Raising knowledge and capacity among civil society but also public and private donors on the benefits of independent evaluations will support a broader debate on the results of mid- and longer-term policy implementation. Further, introducing evaluation criteria and guidelines, funding and mechanisms for project evaluation will enhance relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and coherence of programmes and bigger projects.

Tacking stock of lessons learned and evaluating impact is crucial to inform the direction of future policy design, in particular with regard to the post-2020 policies targeting Roma.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Empowerment of Roma women and girls

1. National and local authorities to provide adequate financial and staff resources and a safe space for Roma women and girls to meet and discuss experiences and create networking opportunities and awareness. This could also serve to strengthen stronger preventive approaches targeting young Roma women and girls in vulnerable situation.
2. National authorities and local authorities of the city of Vienna to ensure more evidence-based data and analysis on the situation of Roma women and girls, e.g. by facilitating qualitative research and anonymous survey data.
3. Promote equal rights and opportunities for Roma women and girls through targeted projects and programmes aimed at promoting education and training for Roma women and girls and this way ensure greater increased economic independence and security.
4. National and local authorities to stimulate increased gender mainstreaming efforts in Roma targeted programmes and projects by conditioning financing to ensure gender mainstreaming or gender targeted project design, implementation and reporting.
5. National and local authorities to stimulate greater mainstreaming of Roma women's issues in general services targeting women and victims of violence.
6. National authorities to ensure that gender mainstreaming as well as Roma women targeted interventions are integrated both as a crosscutting and separate objective in the future Roma strategy in Austria, with clear benchmarks, monitoring and impact assessment.

Evaluation of programmes and policies

7. Build the capacity of national and local authorities but also civil society to address existing project evaluation shortcomings and improve future funding cycles.
8. National and local authorities should invest in developing guidelines and mechanisms providing for independent evaluations of projects and programmes aimed at Roma inclusion in order to increase impact and sustainability of interventions and inform future policy design, programmes and funding cycles. The evaluation should be done in a participatory way and meet the standard criteria assessing relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of projects, programmes and policies.
9. In order to increase relevance and needs-based policy design and enable meaningful measuring of results, national and local authorities but also private donors should secure resources (time and financial resources) for data collection and analysis for building needs-based interventions.
10. National and local authorities and donors should design evaluation criteria by ensuring that the project results build over time and allocate financial resources for independent evaluations into the project budget. Public and private donors should also ensure future programmes and follow-up projects take account of project evaluation.
11. National authorities to evaluate the implementation of the NRSI and start a broader discussion with stakeholders, including Roma civil society about lessons learned and take stock of opportunities and challenges so as to inform post-2020 Roma policies and NRIS, including by ensuring constant evaluation (mid-term and final).

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