

The long road of national Roma Integration Strategies

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During Hungary's EU Presidency the goal of the country was to renew and reinforce the role of the European Union as well as the cooperation between the EU and its Member States, on the field of Roma inclusion. It was declared that promotion of social inclusion of the Roma shall be common interest of all EU Member States.

Based on the Commission's communication issued this April, Hungary prepared her Council Conclusions, successfully adopted by the social ministers (EPSCO Council) on the 19th May 2011. The Council Conclusions cordially invites the Member States to work out and present by the end of this year national strategies or sets of policy interventions for the improvement of the situation of Roma people. These strategies are cut out to meet EU goals along four key fields, education, employment, healthcare, and housing, respectively. The Conclusion emphasise the necessity to consider aspects of Roma inclusion within the National Reform Program in order to achieve the Europe 2020 headline targets on the four crucial fields.

The handling of disadvantaged social groups brought no significant results in the recent past; that is why a new social inclusion policy with comprehensive approach and complex intervention has become necessary. *The National Social Inclusion and Roma strategies endeavour to pave the way for the achievement of concrete goals:*

- Reducing the rate of those living in poverty and social exclusion;
- Reducing backward social status of underprivileged children, weakening the "vicious circle" of poverty;
- Closing the social gap between Roma and non-Roma people.

In order to reach these goals, some priorities must be taken into consideration:

- Improving the employment chances of active citizens;
- Reducing child poverty;
- Reducing socio-cultural disadvantages;
- Empowering Roma women;
- Reducing territorial backwardness.

The National Social Inclusion and Roma Strategies wishes to handle all these factors mentioned above, along a complex and integrated path consistent with other relevant strategies related to social inclusion.

Hereby two ongoing programs previously accepted by parliamentary decisions must be mentioned: the National Strategy of "Let it be better for the Children" and the *Program of Decade of Roma Inclusion (RIÉP)*.

Analysing the situation of the target groups (that of Roma, children, and inhabitants of backward regions) shall assist to the identification of major problems concerning the four key fields mentioned above.

The main social features of poverty are the following:

- Roma origin;
- Number of children of families, and child poverty;
- Rural inhabitancy

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The situation of Roma

It is a fact that Roma people are immensely stricken by the phenomenon of child poverty, moreover the majority of them live in the most disadvantaged regions. Programs targeting the economic improvement of these regions can better the situation of the Roma population living there.

The disadvantaged situation of the Roma stems from several closely linked social and economic problems. Only complex and multidisciplinary programs can lead to positive outcomes. Roma women comprise a multiple discriminated group; their empowerment is indispensable for the general success of the social inclusion program. A robust and adequate monitoring system is also needed to track the implementation of the policies. Setting up a monitoring system must be based on regular ethnic data collection and thorough researches. Effective measures against discrimination and awareness raising programs are also recommended for the smooth implementation.

The situation of Children

It is obvious that the continuous decrease of the general birth rate endangers the sustainability of the society. Unfortunately, the number of endangered children, removed from families shows no sign of decrease. Deficiencies of the child welfare and social welfare provision system, its territorial inequalities and the lack of intersectional cooperation also hinders the adequate problem solving. Meal provision (daytime, summer, weekend) of children living in deep poverty requires also significant management. Daytime care and early childhood development are hardly accessible for the underprivileged, so targeted and complex interventions are also welcome in this field.

Regional disadvantages

Multidisciplinary programs with comprehensive approaches are needed with and these must be better tailored to the local needs and more actively involving the local community.

Access to Education

Roma people face significant educational and vocational disadvantages, despite the general increase of education level. Inclusion in the education for Roma must be increased and accelerated. In underdeveloped region early childhood development and kindergarten facilities, capacities must be improved. Access to education not only shows territorial inequalities but sharp quality differences are also present. School dropouts increasingly concern the Roma population. Vocational training plays a significant role to prepare the young ones with low education level to access more easily the labour market.

Access to Employment

Increase of low employment rate is one of the key elements of social inclusion. Therefore, obtaining adequate, useful skills must be facilitated by targeted, complex programs. In programs related to the improvement of employment proportions the so-called phenomenon of creaming must be avoided and the most disadvantaged social groups (with special attention to the Roma) have to be reached by harmonized and complex regional development programs. This is immensely necessary in Roma inhabited rural crisis zones.

Access to Healthcare

Basic healthcare services are hardly inaccessible in the most disadvantaged regions, where healthcare is characterized by significant territorial inequalities. Children's health condition is closely linked with parent's social status: Targeted programs for health improvement and health preservation for disadvantaged children are necessary. Disadvantaged ones are particularly stricken by the problems related to abortion, early pregnancy, premature birth, miscarriage, and health of the foetus and the infant. Negative indices are characteristic of the health of the Roma population.

Access to Housing

Concrete measures and interventions are needed for securing housing and avoiding ultimate impairment for those in need. As a solution, commission housing could be feasible but their lack may hinder the development of complex programs of social inclusion. Slums and settlement segregates are well researched and documented in Hungary; however, programs aimed to better their conditions have not been entirely successful. A novel, well grounded set of programs are needed containing a clearly planned assessment methodology for decisions concerning settlement rehabilitation versus settlement closing down.

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The principles of social integration policies

The principle of governmental priority of social inclusion: All the tasks issued either from the state or from local governments must clearly contain aspects regarding those living in deep poverty and member of Roma communities. Straightforward, quantitative measures must be taken towards those living in deep poverty.

Development policy with social inclusion principle: This policy must link governmental and EU funds and resources to the social inclusion strategy.

Principle of integration: Solutions aimed to back inclusion and integration; equal chances must be well thought and well tailored to the local needs.

Complexity and concentration: Strong governmental and local coordination is a must to sustain long term interventions.

Sure start, sure future: Since early childhood is a crucial phase in everybody's life, early childhood services (particularly for Roma children) must be encouraged.

Comprehensive approach: Harmonization of branch programs is indispensable in order to launch complex development programs.

Personal participation and responsibility: Pro-activity of stakeholders is very important with the reinforcement of the personal responsibility. This will help the stakeholders to access labour market more easily.

Common participation and responsibility: Inclusion of Roma experts and their employment is indispensable for a positive outcome.

Well-grounded planning and regular measuring of efficacy: Ethnic and anonymous data collection must be better developed to give an integrated picture about the Roma and those living in poverty.

The social inclusion strategy is a Roma strategy but not only for Roma people: Explicit but not exclusive measures must be taken.

System of objectives

The strategy of social inclusion is a frame strategy planning measures for the next 10 years. During the time interval its comprehensive goals would be to reduce poverty in Hungary from 28.3% to 23% which would concern almost half million people, and significantly narrow the huge social, economical and territorial gaps between Roma and non-Roma people. This would be done along a concrete system of goals:

System of goals

- Facilitation of Roma people and those living in poverty to integrate into labor market, increasing the rate of their employment;
- Raising the education level of Roma people, and those active-aged living in deep poverty;
- Economy and enterprise development in order to increase the employment rate of disadvantaged people with low education level (labor intensive industrial branches, social economy, atypical forms of employment on the primary labor market);
- Development of accessibility, effectively and quality of provisions, services supporting integration into labor market;
- Developing, widening the system of common employment, support of atypical employment forms;
- Forming a benefit system which encourages activity and employment;
- Harmonization of work and family;
- Developing administrative, statistical, and informational databases and systems aiming to monitor and assess all the measures against child poverty, deep poverty and disadvantages of Roma people.

Tools are also provided to achieve the objectives. The following list deploys all the instruments which will provide help to develop the areas of intervention.

Tools

For child well-being: By spatial development and encouragement of parents, it must be achieved that children with multiple disadvantages, especially Roma children, enroll to kindergarten from the age of three. Obstacles (lack of material things like clothes, travel

expenses) must be eliminated. Training of kindergarten teachers must be sensitized to special treatment with disadvantaged and Roma children.

Welcoming school environment and reduction of dropouts must be secured, by complex pedagogical programs (extracurricular activities, learning rooms, day-boarders etc.). Schools in underdeveloped regions must be better equipped and infrastructured, and last but not least dialogue between school and parents must be reinforced. Facilitating disadvantaged young Roma people to arrive and remain in secondary and tertiary education is also of key importance.

For employment: Economic- and enterprise development is necessary in order to raise the rate of employment of disadvantaged people with low education level. This can be supported with the use of combined financial instruments (microcredit). Local market and production must be protected by old and new subventions. These subventions must reach communities with multiple disadvantages. Since Roma women bear the lowest employment rate, to their integration into labor market special attention must be paid. Atypical and flexible employment forms are encouraged, which will contribute to the harmonization between work and family duties. Family friendly services are needed to be worked out parallel with the conditions of their functioning. By adequate remuneration, work will be attractive again for those who dropped out from the labor market.

For healthcare: For campaigns on development and health protection are very important to raise awareness. Here Roma women are particularly under focus since their group is one of the less involved to public healthcare. Accessibility to healthcare in general must be made more equal and more provided. For those living in slums and isolated settlements specifically targeted and designed plans must be worked out. Healthcare policies must target the Roma as a specific group and encourage their involving into public healthcare. Health visitor system must be improved and worked out for individual needs. Psychiatric help system for the disadvantaged must be built up.

For housing: House maintenance must be supported including debt management counseling. Settlement programs, urban rehabilitation, and social access to commission houses must be facilitated.

For inclusion, awareness-raising, fighting discrimination: All these factors can be encouraged by actively involving The Roma and the disadvantaged ones to designing the action plans. Roma civil society has a significant role here. The Roma must be involved to all the arenas of public life, community life and their role must be enhanced in representative bodies.

Binary awareness-raising is also very important, but without tokenistic tendencies. A continuous dialogue between institutes and Roma citizens is a key to a rightful cooperation.

Institutional and organizational background of the social inclusion policy and its financial environment

Equal Treatment Authority: The Equal Treatment Authority conducts proceedings if the principle of equal treatment might have been violated, either at the request of the injured party or upon its own motion (ex officio) in cases set forth by law in order to establish whether any discrimination occurred.

Interdepartmental Committee of Roma Affairs and Social Inclusion: The Committee set its goals to help the inclusion of disadvantaged social groups, and to facilitate the cooperation

of various departments and the best usage of the central funds. It endeavors to grant to equal access to public goods.

Local Governments of Roma Minority: Constitutes the primary information source for the Roma population. Their development must be accelerated for the interest of effective dissemination of information.

Türr István Development and Research Institute – Regional Centers: An effective network for tackling the problems of isolated territories, and those living there in disadvantaged circumstances. The institute is a budgetary body which coordinates the overlapping interventions countrywide.

Roma Coordination Council: The Council is a consultative body.

Wekerle Sándor Fund Management: Its most important task is to control and manage the functioning of an effective project system which grants the realization of the finest projects, and the rightful usage of the national budgetary sources.
