

ROMA AND THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN BULGARIA

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CENTER AMALIPE



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MORE ADMINISTRATION AND LESS CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HRD OP IN 2008

Significant increase of the schemes with direct allocation of financial resources at the expenses of the grant schemes is one of the tendencies in the implementation of HRD OP in 2008. This means that more and more financial resources will be allocated for direct management to certain institutions while the other participants in the process of implementation of the European funds (NGOs, social partners, municipalities, schools, and so on) will be restricted from participation in many of the financial schemes..

This tendency is alarming and can seriously affect the efficiency of the implementation of the HRD OP at least for three reasons:

First, the big number of schemes for direct financing will overload the administration with activities which are not (or at least should not be) its responsibilities. An example in this direction is the Ministry of Health. One can hardly say that the job of the Ministry of Health is to carry out information campaigns among vulnerable groups as envisaged in operation 5.3. It is a European and worldwide practice such campaigns to be realized by

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non-governmental organizations or other participants while the administration is usually assigned the role of monitoring and evaluation of the activities realized. There are obviously schemes that should be implemented by the institutions: when a scheme is designed to form and influence policies, for example. But when it comes to providing different social services, distribution of information, etc., the guiding role of the administration is ungrounded.

Second, the direct allocation of funds in most of the cases puts the real implementers of the activities in an unequal position. For instance, the measure “Educational services for students lagging behind with the school

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THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

The facts:

On March 14th the Ministry of education and science (MES) published a list with the approved projects within the grant scheme “Creating a favorable multicultural environment for practical implementation of intercultural education and upbringing” financed by the Human Resources Development Operational Program. 66 projects on the total amount of 6 000000 leva were approved. 42 out of them were submitted by organizations and schools, and 14 by municipalities. Among the selected projects are those by Center Amalipe, Roma Youth Organization – Slive, SHAM – Montana, Future – Rakitovo, and so on.

The results in the second call for proposals (“Let’s make the school attracting for young people”) were also published. The latter supported out-of-school activities including projects by Integro Association, Stolipinovo Union and so on. The implementation of the projects was supposed to start from January 2008 and finish by December 2009. It is expected the contracts to be signed by April 15th, 2008.

Comment:

The approval of projects within the two schemes mentioned above is definitely a step forward towards the educational integration of Roma children which

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MORE ADMINISTRATION AND LESS CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HRD OP IN 2008

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material and gifted students” includes most of all organizing additional lessons and work with these children. It is obvious that these lessons will be organized by the schools or out-of-school branches. The beneficiary however is the Ministry of Education. If this measure was opened as a grant scheme this would have provided the real implementers with the right for equal participation not only in the implementation but also in the planning of activities. Through the direct allocation of funds the role of the schools is diminished without a clear reason for this.

Third, providing community services and especially to marginalized and vulnerable groups is one of the weakest chains of Bulgarian administration today. We can point dozens of examples in this respect. Providers of social services, NGOs, community-based organizations, etc have higher mobility and efficiency in providing community services: this in fact is not only a Bulgarian but a world tendency. Most of the schemes for direct financial allocation approved by the

Monitoring Committee of HRD OP on April 24th, 2008 include exactly such types of activities which would be realized among vulnerable groups. It is hard to explain – in regard to efficiency – why these schemes were not announced as grant schemes.

The implementation of HRD OP would have been more efficient if it included broader range of participants. One of the most important things is to find the balance between administration and the structures of civil society, as well as to find the best possible role of each actor. The schemes for direct financial allocation might not be the best possible mechanism for finding the balance. Therefore, it will be good if they are limited to the cases when the role of the given institution should be imperatively leading. In all other cases it would be better to use grant schemes which are more efficient and would not overload the administration with activities which are not appropriate for it.

A ROMA OBSERVER IN THE MONITORING COMMITTEE OF NSRF

Only 3 NGOs were selected to take part in the election of observer from the civil society for the Monitoring Committee of the National Strategic Reference Framework on behalf of the so-called “social organizations” (a category that included “organizations working for minorities’s and migrants’ integration”). These were EKIP Foundation, International Society for Sustainable Development and Cooperation and Center “Amalipe”. They were selected by commission established by the Minister of Finance Plamen Oresharski.

In February the Ministry of Finance defined Rules for participation of NGOs in the sessions of the Monitoring Committee of the NSRF. The procedure included two stages: expression of interest by NGOs to participate in the election of observer and election of observers by NGOs that have been selected on the basis of the criteria envisaged in the Rules. These criteria included: effective and efficient work of the organization during the last 3 years, participation in developing, implementing and monitoring of strategies and policies,

experience in implementing projects financed by the European Community. The candidates had to define themselves in one of three categories: organizations working in science, education and culture; environment organizations and social organizations (including minority organizations). Every category of organizations had to elect own observer.

Although there was expression of interest by many capable organizations, the commission established by Ministry of Finance selected only the three organizations mentioned above as covering all requirements within the group of the social organizations. In 15 days they had to elect an observer.

Follow the decisions of the meeting of Roma NGOs from June 16, 2007 Center Amalipe suggested for this position Maria Metodieva (Director of Roma Program of Open Society Institute – Sofia). The three organizations agreed that the nominee of each organization would participate in the Monitoring Committee on rotation principle.

A PROCEDURE FOR THE ELECTION OF NGO REPRESENTATIVES IN THE MONITORING COMMITTEE OF HRD OP

On April 23 and 24, 2008 the Monitoring Committee of the Human Resources Development OP (HRD OP) held its working and second regular meeting, respectively. It approved the Annual report for the advance of the implementation of the HRD OP and the Communication Plan of the Program and authorized the Managing authority to make corrections in the two documents after receiving the comments from the European Commission. A report for the schemes already opened was presented as well as information for forthcoming operations.

The procedures for the election of NGO observers in the Monitoring committee were discussed and approved during the regular meeting of the Committee. The aim of the procedure is to guarantee an open and transparent mechanism for the participation of the civil society in the process of managing and monitoring the resources from the European Social Fund. The procedure is similar to the one already adopted by the Ministry of Finance regarding the National Strategic Reference Framework. It includes declaration of interest from the NGOs, selection of organizations after certain criteria, and election of a representative among the selected organizations. The procedures target organizations in six fields: protection against discrimination; education; Roma integration, health



care; science, and social issues. The procedure will be opened in the forthcoming weeks so that elected candidates could take part in the next meeting of the Monitoring Committee in November.

Center Amalipe was also invited and took active participation in the work of the Monitoring Committee. During the discussions Deyan Kolev proposed that each group of organizations should elect not only an observer but also a substitute to take part in the meetings of the Monitoring Committee. The idea was supported by the Deputy Minister Dimitar Dimitrov who was also a Chair of the Monitoring Committee. It was accepted with consensus by the members of the Monitoring Committee which provided the non-governmental organizations with twice as higher number as representatives. Deyan Kolev suggested also if two representatives of a group of NGOs receive the same number of votes during the election procedure both of them to be accepted in the MC and participate on rotation principle. This proposal was also accepted although the initial suggestion of the MC was the

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HEALTH CAMPAIGNS AMONG ROMA WITHIN HRD OP

Several activities within the intervention axis 5.3. "Employability through a better health" of HRD OP will start in 2008. Two of them (health information campaigns and a national campaign for early diagnostics of cancer) have special focus on Roma. The schemes will not be grant schemes but measures with direct financing. The beneficiary is the Ministry of Health with its regional branches.

The specifics of the work with the Roma community and the experience gathered so far however show that the results could be hardly achieved (especially when it comes to information campaigns) if the Roma community itself is not engaged in them together with its formal and informal leaders, and the community-based organizations. A very clear example is the screening campaign carried out by the Ministry of Health in December among people of minority origin without health insurances. The campaign was planned

and carried out without the participation of NGOs. The regional health centers however were about to fail so they had to look for the support of the local community-based organizations in order to realize successfully the campaign.

The problems would be repeated if the information campaigns planned within HRD OP directed to the Roma community are realized only by the Regional health centers. In this case they might face the reluctance of the community to answer the campaigns. No one could also guarantee that the community-based Roma organization will freely provide their efforts and resources if this cooperation is not regulated.

Since the beginning of 2008 Center Amalipe together with World without Borders association (Stara Zagora) has started an advocacy campaign for higher efficiency of the health operations directed to Roma. The

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THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

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would give a push to the whole integration process. At the same time we should not expect that this step would guarantee the successful implementation and speeding up of the process. The realization of the dozens of projects will give an impulse to the educational integration. First, finally resources for this process will be provided. During the last few years the educational integration relied only on administrative measures which did not require financial resources (e.g. elaborating of plans, strategies, lists and so on.) or used financing from foreign donors. The Phare resources could not however bring back to life the comatose process of educational integration and achieve something significant in it. Second, the starting of a huge number of projects realized by various actors (NGOs, schools, municipalities, etc.) will engage new people in the process and will involve “fresh” human resources in it. This is extremely important for the educational integration – even more important than the range of financial resources. For years the circle of people engaged with the educational integration of Roma children has been extremely tight: few NGOs and even fewer experts from different institutions. This resulted to a complete lack of innovative ideas (they had been exhausted years ago and since then they have been mechanically replicated without a perspective to turn into a national policy) and to a process with questionable quality. At the same time it is clear that for the successful realization of such a complex process the human resources are extremely important.

Unfortunately it would be hastily to expect that the two schemes would guarantee the educational integration process. First, the amount for a single project is rather low (50 000 Euro) to achieve full success of the educational integration in any municipality. This could be justified by the fact that it is a pilot scheme as well as by the lack of serious success of the previous Phare projects which budgets were rather high. But whatever the reasons are we could expect that if all projects are realized successfully they would only relief the harsh educational problems without completely solving them. Second, both calls have not a clear focus of activities to support. It just seems that the first call “Creating of favorable multicultural environment...” supports desegregation activities: the experts from the MES made a very interesting clarification during the application process that even a school with 1% Bulgarian students and 99% Roma kids is “integrated and ethnically mixed”; this makes senseless the whole

desegregation idea. Third, and the most important one, at present there is lack of active policy on behalf of the MES for educational integration of Roma children; no such measures are included in the activities of the MES for renewing the Bulgarian educational system. At the same time both calls insist that the project should implement the governmental educational policy in the given municipality. So the project should just apply the MES policy at the local level without any possibility for innovative models which in turn could be multiplied at the national level. On the other hand, the so-called “national policy” almost lacks at the moment or is rather amorphous. This vicious circle does not promise a significant change in the process of educational integration.

Apart from this several problems accompany the first calls for proposals. The announcement of the projects approved was delayed with several months regarding the fact that application deadline was the beginning of October 2007. Respectively the signing of the contracts was expected by the end of 2007. No body has answered so far what necessitated this delay and how this would be compensated.

More alarming is the fact that quite a huge number of projects of special schools have been approved. One of them will participate in three projects – these projects however do not plan to integrate the children from the special to the mainstream school. It is a public secret that the special schools still continue to enrol Roma children without disabilities. Now the parents of these children will have one more stimuli to send their kids to these schools: thanks to the projects they would become more attractive than the mainstream schools. In this way practically the European money will start to finance this vicious practice of sending children without any disabilities to the special schools.

Nevertheless the worries outlined above the start of the projects directed to educational integration within Human resources development OP is indisputably a positive fact: it provides chance for continuing and even fostering the process of educational integration of Roma children.

HEALTH CAMPAIGNS AMONG ROMA WITHIN HRD OP

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activities included a series of discussions with responsible persons within the Ministry of labor, the Agency for Social assistance and the Ministry of health. On February 28, 2008 Center Amalipe, World without borders Association, Integro Association and LARGO Association sent a letter to the Deputy Minister of Labor Mr. Dimitar Dimitrov appealing for his support the Roma organizations to be included as equal partners in all activities directed to Roma. In his answer Mr. Dimitrov guaranteed again that they would respect the

broad European principle of partnership, civil participation, and empowerment.

As a result the scheme sets as priorities joint activities of state institutions and non-governmental organizations regarding the activities directed to vulnerable groups, especially Roma. The detailed description of the operation however will still be developed so that it guaranteed the partnership of the community-based non-governmental organizations especially in the case when activities are directed to Roma. During the second regular meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP the responsible authorities again repeated the engagement that the civil society would be actively involved in this process.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ENCOURAGES ROMA PARTICIPATION

A letter concerning the participation of representatives of Roma NGOs in the Monitoring Committee of Human Resources Development Operational Program (HRD OP) in Bulgaria was sent by Mr. Filip Busz, Head of Unit for Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and the Netherlands in Directorate A within DG “Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities” of the European Commission to Center “Amalipe” on January 24, 2008. It is follow-up of the protest letter sent by 53 Roma NGOs to the Bulgarian Prime-minister Stanishev regarding the political pressure over the independent Roma organizations, their exclusion from the process of elaboration of the new Framework Program for Roma Integration, and the non-transparent process election of NGO representatives in the Monitoring Committees of different Operational Programs.

In his letter Mr. Busz outlines that: 1. The issue of Roma inclusion is an important area of the EC work; 2. The Commission supports a transparent, open and constructive dialogue between civil society organizations and public authorities which is illustrated by the principle of partnership within the framework of the European Social Fund.

Mr. Busz underlines the active and effective role of Center “Amalipe” and its partnering Roma organizations in the planning and programming of the Bulgarian HRD OP. He points out that in November 2007 the Monitoring Committee of the Bulgarian HRD OP has set up a working group to prepare criteria for selection of NGO representatives as observers in the Committee.

In this respects Mr Busz encourages Center “Amalipe” and its partnering Roma NGOs:

1. To continue assisting governments departments in the implementation of the HRD OP;

2. To liaise with the Managing authorities of HRD OP for preparing transparent criteria for selecting Roma NGO representatives in the Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP.

You can find the letter by Mr. Filip Busz attached

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Committee itself to decide which of the two persons to be included in the MC. This, according to Deyan Kolev would be interference from the side the side of the institutions in the independence of the civil society.

Two other suggestions were not accepted by the members of the MC. The first one was to include the donors as a separate group of organizations. The argument of Deyan Kolev was that the donors have been an important player in the field of social inclusion and the coordination with them would be an important factor for the success of the HRD OP. In addition, if they were not provided with a mechanism for participation they might try to influence the process of social inclusion by influencing the organizations themselves. According to Krassimir Popov (deputy-chair of the MC) however, the donors do not represent the interests of the target groups so they can not be part of the NGOs. They would have other mechanisms for participation in the work of the MC; according to Decree 182/2006 only representatives of non-governmental organizations might participate as observers in the MC.

The second suggestion that was rejected was for the creation of sub-committees in each of the field with NGO representatives. The sub-committees would involve all nominated organizations and would discuss statements to be presented at the meetings of the MC. Mr. Popov pointed that this was a good idea and it would be further regulated by a special decision of the MC. He stressed that such sub-committees would not be needed in all the fields but definitely the Roma integration sphere is a field where the broadest possible participation is needed.



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG
ESF, Monitoring of Corresponding National Policies I, Coordination
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Dear Mr Kolev,

Thank you very much for your letter dated 30 Novembre 2007 and sent to Mr Bender. I take this opportunity to inform you that I am the Head of Unit for Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and the Netherlands in Directorate A of this Directorate General. Let me also inform you that certain delay affects my answer to you which is due to the fact that my unit contacted the Managing Authority of OP-HRD to obtain additional background information concerning the selection of NGO(s) to sit on the OP Monitoring Committees in Bulgaria.

In your letter you present your views and position on the dialogue between the civil society organisations in Bulgaria working in the area of Roma inclusion and the public authorities. However, some of the issues raised in your letter are outside the scope of the Commission competence: under the provision of articles 63 and 64 of Regulation 1083/2006, the composition of the Monitoring Committee and the preparation of rules of procedure are responsibilities of the Member State.

As you know, the Commission supports a transparent, open and constructive dialogue between the representatives of the civil society and the public authorities respectful of the roles played by all parties concerned. Within the framework of the European Social Fund, this is illustrated by the principle of partnership. I know that your organisation was very effective in the planning and programming of the Bulgarian Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (OP-HRD) which led to the development of a specific chapter on policies for Roma inclusion.

I believe that the experience gained during the programming period could be used in the implementation of the OP-HRD in order to comply with the requirements of the ESF regulation and in particular with the provision of article 11 of Regulation 1083/2006. The issue of Roma inclusion is an important area for our services and for the Commission work. I will therefore encourage your organisation and its partners to continue assisting the governments departments in the implementation of the OP-HRD in the area of Roma inclusion.

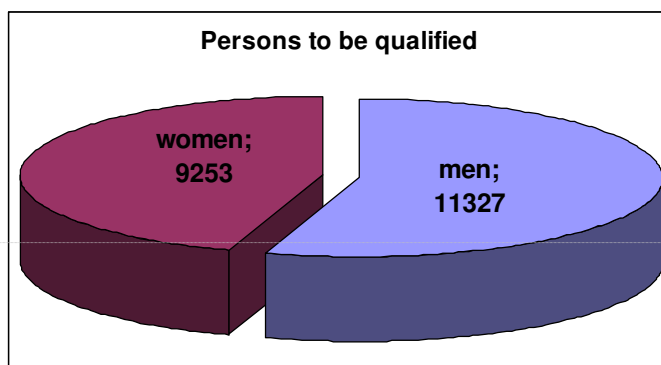
Regarding the participation of NGO(s) in the Monitoring Committee of OP-HRD (MC), let me inform you that during its November 2007 meeting, the MC decided to set up a working group to prepare a proposal for criteria for selection of representatives of the civil society to sit as observers in the MC. I understand that these criteria will be consistent with those being developed under the MC of the NSRF. At the meeting last November, the Commission advised that this working group meets with representatives of NGO(s) and maintains a dialogue with them during the process of elaboration of these criteria in order to respect the principle of partnership. I would encourage you to liaise with the Managing authority of OP-HRD in this respect.

Sincerely yours,

Filip Busz,
Head of Unit

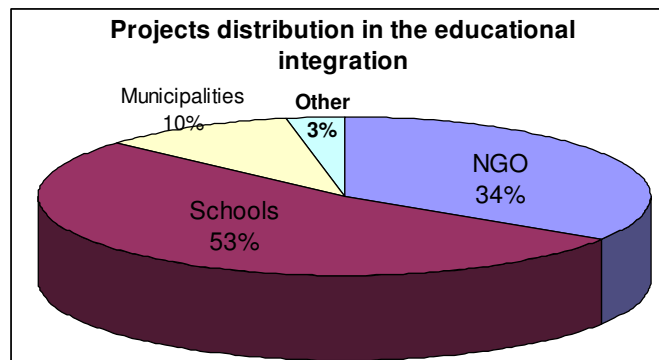
HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM: RESULTS ACHIEVED - ACTIVITIES FORTHCOMING

In 2007 the Employment Agency (EA) has started the grant scheme “Qualification services for employed people”. The second phase of the program is about to start now. Within the first one 650 project proposals were submitted. 194 out of them were approved on the total amount of 19 342 666 BGN. The biggest share of projects belongs to small-size enterprises (76), followed by big companies (67) and medium-size enterprises (51). There is however a gender discrepancy among the persons to be qualified: 11 327 men and 9 253 women.



In 2008 the EA will start several new financial schemes: the continuation of the one already started for qualification of employed people; a scheme for support of employment in the branches with shortage of labor force; raising the employability of young people through their inclusion on the labor market (where the focus is on language training and ICT); providing conditions for active labor for people above 50 and long-term unemployed people; fostering the starting of self-employment among long-term unemployed people. For providing more transparency the EA envisages to invite also external evaluator for the assessment of the projects submitted.

In 2007 the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) which is the implementing agency for the educational operations announced 4 grant schemes for the total amount of 23 176 586 BGN. 157 projects were submitted within grant scheme 4.1. “Creating a favorable multicultural environment.” 67 out of them have been selected although the contracts still have not been signed. The biggest share of projects belongs to NGOs (27) followed by 21 school projects, 15 municipal projects and 4 other. According to the projects around



17000 students will be involved in activities for overcoming segregation. Within the second grant scheme 4.2. “Let’s make the school attracting for young people” the interest has been higher: 689 project proposals were submitted and 256 out of them were approved: 83 NGO projects, 149 school projects, 18 municipal projects and 6 other; they should cover totally around 85 000 children and students in out-of-school activities.

Nevertheless the absolute success of the grant schemes however in 2008 the MES envisages sharply to limit their share in the total number of programs announced: only three out of nine operations will be opened as grant schemes with calls for project proposals; the rest will be for direct financing of institutions preliminary defined. The grant schemes that will be opened in 2008 will be: “Support of PhDs, post-doctoral students and young scholars”, “Developing school and university practices”, as well as the program for out-of-school activities but this time with twice as bigger budget (16 624 555 BGN). The program directed to desegregation however most probably will not be announced again by the end of the year. As mentioned above the rest of the schemes will be for direct financing without announcing calls for proposals. This measures will be directed to ICT in education, qualification and career development, support of the delegated school budgets (through training school principals and accountants); developing a system for evaluation of the quality of education and a rating system of the universities; educational services for gifted students and children who lag behind, as well as a scheme for student scholarship (the amount for the latter will be around 40 million BGN).

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