



TO BE OR NOT TO BE ... ROMA DECADE AFTER 2015?

Policy options paper on the future of the Decade after 2015 for consideration by the 24th International Steering Committee

Introduction

On 2nd February 2005 Prime Ministers of nine Central and Eastern European countries pledged that their governments will work toward eliminating discrimination and closing the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society, as identified in Decade Action Plans. They declared the years 2005–2015 to be the Decade of Roma Inclusion¹ and committed to support the full participation and involvement of national Roma communities in achieving the Decade's objectives and to demonstrate progress by measuring outcomes and reviewing experiences in the implementation of the Decade Action Plans. They decided on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing, mainstreaming non-discrimination, poverty reduction and gender equality.²

Today the Decade is a unique initiative focusing on Roma inclusion and promoting dialogue among Roma, governments and international actors. It moved forward the inclusion of Roma practically from zero by encouraging and assisting participating governments to develop Action Plans, and by inspiring the European Union Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.³ The Decade established useful structures and practices, and achieved results primarily in the area of education. It is the leading initiative in engaging Roma in the public policy debates affecting them. It also laid down basic standards of cooperation on Roma issues, at the same time remaining flexible and open to interested governments and international partners. From its initial coverage in 2005, participation was enlarged with three more countries, two observing countries and a number of international organizations.

Approaching the end of the Roma Decade term, the Croatian Presidency of the Decade initiated a process to assess the state of the Decade and its possible future after 2015. Initial discussion took place at the 23rd International Steering Committee meeting. In November 2012, a working group on the Decade future was established and methodology for consultation and developing recommendations was elaborated. During the next five months, the working group had consultative meetings with the Decade partners and conducted a survey to assess the viewpoints of as many relevant actors as possible.⁴

The present document is a result of the analysis of the opinions gathered during the consultation process. It lists the achievements and shortcomings of the Roma Decade as background information and elaborates the possible options for the Decade future after 2015.

Roma Decade achievements

- **The Decade motivated national and European Union commitment.** It raised the profile of the Roma inclusion issue and encouraged the development of public policy spelt out in the Action Plans in the participating countries and the EU Framework at the EU level.
- **The Decade set a relevant and valid mission:** tackling discrimination and poverty of Roma. Moreover, it is unique in its exclusive commitment to Roma inclusion.
- **The Decade raised the overall awareness of Roma exclusion.** The situation of Roma is far better documented and understood and the obstacles to inclusion have mainly been identified.
- **The Decade pioneered participation of Roma in policy discussions affecting them.** An important Decade goal has been to ensure that Roma are meaningfully engaged in dialogue with governments and international partners, including in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. This feature of the Decade has also benefited decision makers by providing for better understanding of the situation and thus contributing to more informed decisions. Roma participation is an exceptional, recognized and highly appreciated feature of the Decade. It continues to be developed, particularly with the Decade Focal Points and the Civil Society Monitoring Reports. Participation of Roma goes beyond the Decade by facilitating Roma participation on national and European Union level. Through the efforts to support Roma participation the Decade also contributed to the development of Romani civil society organizations and activists.

¹ The official name of the initiative is *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015*. "Decade" or "Roma Decade" are used interchangeably in this document.

² More information on the content, structure, process and other aspects of the Decade can be found on its official web-portal: www.romadecade.org.

³ Also called "EU Framework" in this document.

⁴ The working group on the Decade future conducted the following semi-structured focus-group meetings: with Roma civil society (13/12/2012), with international partners (16/01/2013), and separate meetings with the government officials and civil society from Montenegro (26/02/2013), Macedonia (13/03/2013), Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/03/2013), Croatia (15/03/2013), Czech Republic (19/03/2013), Serbia (19/03/2013), Albania (25/03/2013), Romania (25/03/2013), Spain (31/03/2013), and Hungary (25/04/2013). Meetings were not organized in Bulgaria and Slovakia. The Slovakian government responded to the questionnaire, while Roma civil society of both countries were represented at the Roma civil society meeting. The Working group received 93 responses to the questionnaire.

- **The Decade spurred the creation of specialized facilities and the mobilization of new resources for Roma inclusion.** The Decade Trust Fund was established with government contributions to promote learning among the participating governments, while the Roma Education Fund was established as a grantmaking, policy development and implementation facility in the area of education. Making the Most of the EU Funds for the Roma was established as an instrument to connect the Decade of Roma Inclusion objectives to EU financial resources and thus support European, national, and local governments in realizing the targets of the Roma Decade.
- **The Decade initiated, documented and disseminated good practices in the priority areas.** It promoted inclusion of Roma in preschool education, scholarships for Roma students in secondary and tertiary education, Roma health mediators, social housing for Roma, to name but a few examples.
- **The Decade is recognized for its convening power and as a learning and developing platform.** The Decade is unique in bringing together relevant representatives of governments, Roma civil society and international actors to discuss the most relevant issues of Roma inclusion. Besides assessment of the situation and exchange of experiences and practices, the Decade has facilitated identifying solutions.
- **The Decade is also unique in its flexibility.** It established very basic rules, principles, structures and processes for the work on Roma inclusion but remains flexible in its membership requirements and adjustable to the country context. For example, it offers possibility for observer status, allowing participation of countries without any specific requirements. It is not limited in its geographical coverage.

Roma Decade shortcomings

To date, the Decade has failed to make an impact on the daily lives of the majority of Roma. The reasons for this include the following:

- **Ambitious mission and general priorities.** The Decade set valid and aspirational goals, but too ambitious and general a mission for a very limited timeframe. Priority and cross-cutting themes were set appropriately to achieve the mission, but were not clearly specified. In design and practice, the focus has been on the poverty dimension, while non-discrimination (equality) dimension has been comparatively neglected.
- **Disproportional resourcing.** Having such complex, longstanding and large-scale problem of Roma exclusion requires similarly longstanding and large-scale commitment of time, money and enforcement mechanisms. While respondents agree that the time was too short to bring about significant change, the adequacy of funding is disputed by decade partners. Some believe funding remains insufficient, particularly from governments; others believe funding is sufficient in theory but note the lack of absorption capacities or various barriers to using that money effectively. Decade implementation faced a shortage in human resources, both on national and international level. To this end, many Roma complain that capable Roma are out there, but are not engaged by governments to address Decade priorities.
- **Lack of enforcement mechanism.** The Decade is missing enforcement mechanisms to ensure governments adhere to the commitments they undertake – at least the fundamental ones: to adopt and implement Action Plans, monitor and report on progress and meaningfully engage Roma. The only enforcement power rests in peer pressure from other governments and public monitoring by civil society. Incentives are sometimes provided, mainly by the international partners, in the form of technical assistance or funding.
- **Structural discrimination.** While negligence towards non-discrimination as a cross-cutting theme has been mentioned, widespread structural discrimination was highlighted by respondents as a particular obstacle to the success of the Decade. While equality is provided by the state de jure the actual impact of legislation and practice often leads to further inequalities. Related to this is the resistance to apply affirmative measures (some may call these positive discrimination) to redress existing inequalities.
- **Sporadic monitoring, evaluation and reporting.** Although it is one of the fundamental principles of the Decade, monitoring and reporting on progress of Roma inclusion have been sporadic and inconsistent, mainly consisting of poor annual reporting, research supported by international organizations, and civil society monitoring reports. For the most part, participating states do not collect, analyze or disseminate data disaggregated by ethnicity which is critical for creating and implementing effective policy.
- **Shortcomings in the structure.** All of the structures created to implement the Decade have been criticized for lack of power (mandate) and qualified staff. The International Steering Committee decision making capacity is criticized both because government representatives often lack decision making power and because Roma representatives' role in the decision making is unclear and insufficient. The Decade Secretariat is recognized as the most efficient body, but still in need of improved capacity to ensure implementation of all the aspects of the Decade. The Presidency and the national structures set to implement the Decade are criticized for all of the above.

- **Parallel initiatives.** The Decade exists in parallel with numerous other initiatives and structures dealing directly or indirectly with Roma inclusion and providing wide range of resources for this purpose. There are views that the Decade duplicates efforts and lacks coordination.

Options for the future of the Roma Decade

Basically there are four possible decisions that can be made on the future of the Decade after 2015:

1. Ending the Decade without any further commitments;
2. Transferring the legacy of the Decade to other initiatives and ending it;
3. Continuing the Decade for a certain period of time without any change;
4. Changing the Decade according to the lessons learnt and the new context and continuing for a certain period of time.

There is general consensus among Decade partners that the Decade should continue after 2015. Government representatives consulted agree that there is a need for the Decade besides other existing initiatives dealing with Roma inclusion, because of its unique features. There is a difference between government representatives from non-EU and EU countries. While the first group unreservedly supports continuation of the Decade, the second group conditions it on ensuring greater compatibility with the EU Framework: eliminating duplication of effort in policy development, monitoring and reporting, and offering added value to the EU Framework, such as technical assistance for the use of available regional funds or providing a platform for dialogue with Roma. The European Union itself also supports continuation of the Decade with the same conditions as mentioned and with a recommendation to focus on non-EU countries. Similar are the viewpoints of other international Decade partners that support continuation of the Decade at the same time demanding better cooperation and coordination. Representatives of civil society, with a very few exceptions, go beyond proposing continuation of the Decade by advocating its strengthening and widening and often support this viewpoint by saying that “The Decade is the best thing ever that happened to Roma and it just has to go on”.

At the same time Decade partners, even those not necessarily supporting continuation, strongly argue that if the Decade is to continue, it has to change. Such change does not refer only to the conditions mentioned above, but also taking account of lessons learnt and the changed context in which the Decade exists.

Another very legitimate option is to end the Decade in line with the original commitment in 2015. Moreover, Decade participating countries have committed to Roma inclusion as part of the EU Framework or the EU enlargement process, and committed to other national and international laws and policies to address Roma inclusion without time limit. Provided that those unique features of the Decade that are found useful and supported for continuing by the partners are advocated and taken up by other initiatives, the legacy of the Decade could be appropriately transferred with no need to continue the Decade. The legacy of the Decade refers to: a) Roma (civil society) participation; b) specialized facilities; c) good practices in the priority areas with a prospect of their institutionalization; d) convening power (coordination, learning platform).

The two simple options, namely continuing the Decade without change by simply allocating more time and ending the Decade without transferring its legacy to other initiatives, are self-explanatory and need no further elaboration. Ending the Decade while transferring its legacy to other initiatives is an option that requires further elaboration within those initiatives that would inherit the Decade’s legacy. The EU Framework would be the most appropriate initiative to take over the Decade’s legacy, provided it effectively covered enlargement countries along with the Member States. However, the European Commission has indicated that it prefers the Decade to be the locus of efforts for non-EU countries.

The option to continue the Decade adjusted to the lessons learnt and changed context (the option that has most support among Decade partners), needs further elaboration. While details on the changes of the Decade have to be agreed through a consensus building process by those participating governments that commit to the Decade beyond 2015, a non-exhaustive list of ideas and proposals made during the consultation process are provided below.

Possible changes to the Decade if continued after 2015

- **Mission:** the core dual mission for Roma inclusion through poverty reduction and non-discrimination should remain. Rewording might be considered to retain the basic idea, but make it more specific and realistic.
- **Approach:** summarizing various proposals of respondents and formulating with theoretical terminology, the main approach in achieving the mission needs to change from pilot projects to human rights based and individualized integral approach.⁵ Scaling up and institutionalization of good practices is another strongly supported proposal.
- **Time:** two options are proposed for continuing the Decade a) for another set of ten years, thus by 2025, to allow for meaningful change; or b) for five years to complement the EU Framework which has an endpoint of 2020.

⁵ The human rights based approach has been established by the UN and is widely known, but in summary, it means that all actions taken must be guided by applicable human rights standards and must further realization of human rights, develop the capacities of the state to protect and promote human rights and the capacity of individuals to claim rights. Individualized integral approach means that the approach of ‘one solution fits all’ must be abandoned in every sense. Instead, basic objectives (strongly related to basic human rights) should be set, and the path of achievement should be worked out, followed and adjusted as needed for each individual (or family) and their circumstance, until the objective is sustainably reached.

- **Priority themes:** respondents made variety of proposals for priority themes, that can be summarized as follows (any of the proposals below can be considered separately or in a combination):
 - Retain the same priority themes, but set more specific objectives that complement other initiatives; focus on dissemination and institutionalization of established good practices (move forward from simple solutions and pilot projects); create additional specialized institutions to pursue the objectives (similar to the Roma Education Fund); apply human rights based and individualized integral approach; work on trust-building and empowerment of Roma community; tackle neglected sub-themes;
 - Focus on fight against all types of discrimination or violence against Roma, with special attention to structural discrimination; introduce measures targeting both Roma and non-Roma, and media;
 - Introduce new priorities or cross-cutting topics: suggestions include empowerment of Roma; access to and ensuring justice; civil registration and issues related to movement; Roma identity; children's rights and early childhood development; participation of Roma; the most deprived (street children, beggars, (potential) victims of trafficking, etc.).
- **Roma participation:** increase and strengthen Roma participation and combine it with empowerment of Roma, at national and local level.
- **Decade process:**
 - **Action plans:** harmonize requirements and structures with EU Framework to eliminate redundancy and provide for guidance and support in policy development;
 - **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting:** propose and implement feasible system of monitoring, evaluation and reporting that is comprehensive and comparable, takes into account existing data collection methods and proposes adjustments, harmonizes with EU Framework monitoring, supports civil society engagement, results in policy recommendations and ensures follow-up.
 - **Policy coordination and guidance:** increase pragmatic and grassroots oriented discussions; increase relevance of topics and people involved; ensure subsidiarity and bottom-up approach; ensure follow-up; engage opposing elements; ensure both horizontal and vertical coordination; focus on institutionalization of proven practices, not abandoning proactive approach in seeking and piloting innovative solutions; consider mainstreaming and explicit but not exclusive targeting in the policy development.
 - **Exchange of experience and information sharing:** increase efforts and structure these processes better.
 - **Create enforcement mechanisms** or use existing ones by ensuring institutional cooperation.
 - **Ensure funding:** identify correlation between funding and change on the ground; guide budgeting and fundraising; provide technical support and coordination; work on building absorption and management capacities in government and civil society and tackle funding barriers; introduce regional planning and management facility.
- **Membership:** maintain broad membership with flexible requirements; fully focus on non-EU countries and offer complementary elements to EU countries; expand with new countries; engage observing countries more meaningfully; coordinate better and involve other relevant international partners; ensure more meaningful participation of Roma.
- **Administration and management:**
 - **International Steering Committee:** clarify procedures and ensure efficiency (particularly in case of insufficiently active members); encourage participation of decision-makers; ensure enforcement of decisions and follow-up; bring in more expertise to inform decisions; ensure wide consultations including at local and national level.
 - **Presidency:** clarify role and procedures and ensure efficiency; engage other countries; increase visibility, dissemination and representation efforts; replace the presidency system with thematic hosting country system (annual plan is developed and countries volunteer to host on specific items).
 - **Secretariat:** increase the mandate and power including role in visibility and representation of the Decade; ensure diversified and sustainable funding; ensure national and local outreach; increase capacities for all the aspects of the Decade process; including potentially new elements, as well as capacities on ensuring Roma participation and empowerment.
 - **Specialized facilities:** ensure continuity and sustainability; create new facilities according to new objectives.
 - **National level structures:** ensure National Coordinators actively participate, coordinate on national and local level and have appropriate decision making and executive powers; back-up with appropriate in-country structures; increase Roma engagement.