

Analysis of the coverage of the problems of Roma integration in integrated plans for urban regeneration and development 2014-2020

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“In accordance with the declaration adopted in Toledo on 22.06.2010 by the Ministers responsible for urban development, which states that an important condition for support of urban development policy is to apply an integrated approach to urban development as a prerequisite for receiving financial support from the instruments of the European Union, the Ministry of the Regional Development /MRD/, within the Operational Programme "Regional Development" 2007-2013, developed schedule BG161P0001/1.4-07/2010 “support for Integrated Plans for Urban Regeneration and Development /IPURD/”. The aim of this schedule is to assist certain municipalities to prepare their IPURD and become direct beneficiaries of Priority axis 1 “Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development” of Operational Programme “Regions in Growth 2014-2020” /OPRG/. In this regard, in August 2010 a call for submission of proposals for providing financial assistance for the development of IPURD to 36 municipalities identified in the National Spatial Development Concept (NSDC) as the main urban poles of growth and development of the first, second and third hierarchical levels was published. In February 2013 another 3 municipalities from the third hierarchical level received a call for this component, and other 28 municipalities of the fourth hierarchical level were called to develop projects under component 2.

According to the “Methodological guidelines for developing and implementing IPURD”, prepared by MRD, they must be developed by the local administrations on a very broad public basis with the direct participation and engagement of all the strata of civil society, the representatives of specific social groups and the population as a whole. The purpose of IPURD is to improve permanently the economic, social and environmental situation of a given urban area and to integrate policies and unite disparate stakeholders for their joint implementation, thus contributing to the realization of the vision and strategy for the development of the town, respectively the specific priorities of development, set out in the existing strategic documents.

One of the most important areas of integrated planning for sustainable urban development alongside the economic development and quality urban environment is the issue of social integration of disadvantaged groups. In this sense IPURD is expected to have an important role in the implementation of the integration policies set out in the National Strategy for Roma Integration and the Regional Strategies and Municipal Plans developed in accordance with it. On the other hand, the situation of the Roma neighbourhoods and the living standards of the people residing in them are such that they meet almost all the criteria for inclusion in the zones targeted by the measures in IPURD.

The purpose of this document is to examine whether the IPURD developed so far will really contribute to achieving the objectives of the strategies and plans for integration by seeing how the problems of Roma neighbourhoods are taken into account in IPURD and to what extent the measures and resources for their solving are foreseen. In particular, the document provides answers to the following questions:

1. Are Roma included in the preliminary planning phase
2. Are Roma problems identified in the analyses
3. Are Roma neighbourhoods included in the zones of impact
4. Is implementation of projects addressing Roma issues planned? Due to the large volume of documentation on IPURD, the plans of 11 of the finished so far plans in 39 municipalities have been examined in more detailed. All examined plans are of municipalities that applied under the first call. The process of development of IPURD in municipalities under the second call is still in its infancy, and it is uncertain whether they will ever have the opportunity to put into effect such plans - their inclusion in OPRG still has no approval by the European Commission. The selected municipalities are: Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Sliven, Shumen, Vratsa, Montana, Vidin, Petrich, Lom and Gotse Delchev. The choice of these municipalities is consistent with the fact that their district centres are characterized by a high percentage of Roma population and the existence of segregated and ghettoized neighbourhoods whose problems could not be delayed further.

Summary information about the findings from the addressed questions: 1. Inclusion of Roma in the planning phase of IPURD

- From the information available on the websites of the municipalities it is not clear whether the representatives of Roma and vulnerable minority groups were involved in the preliminary discussions for IPURD planning.
 - For two municipalities - Varna and Shumen – there are lists with the participants in public discussions available on the site. There are no Roma representatives in these lists.
 - According to information from the partner organizations of Integro Association from Sliven, Shumen¹, Gotse Delchev and Petrich one or two representatives of Roma organizations participated in the planning of their IPURD. For the remaining seven municipalities it could positively be said that the planning was carried out without Roma participants and the discussions were not made available to the Roma community.
2. Inclusion of areas inhabited by Roma in the analysis of IPURD
 - Ten of the examined municipalities (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Sliven, Shumen, Vratsa, Vidin, Petrich, Lom and Gotse Delchev) have included the problems of Roma communities within their territories in the analysis of the current situation.

¹ According to information from the President of "Iskra" foundation - Shumen, he was invited and participated in the consultation sessions for planning of IPGVR 2014-2020 of Shumen municipality, although his name does not appear in the list of persons involved in the discussions

- In some, the analysis focuses only on part of the neighbourhoods as in the case of Plovdiv and Sofia. Others have included all neighbourhoods with predominantly Roma population in the analysis.
- In two municipalities - Lom and Shumen, there is no reference to ethnic minorities in the analysis of the problems. The issues are addressed on a territorial principle, based on neighbourhoods. Before that, however, neighbourhoods with a large concentration of Roma inhabitants have been identified and thus conclusions can be made which of the described problems relate to the Roma community.
- The plan of only one of the municipalities - Montana has no analysis of the problems of the Roma communities in the town.

3. Inclusion of Roma neighbourhoods in zones of impact

- In nine of the examined municipalities (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Sliven, Shumen, Vidin, Petrich, Lom and Gotse Delchev) Roma neighbourhoods or parts of them have been included in the zones of impact - mainly in the zone with a predominantly social nature.
- In the IPURD of two municipalities - Montana and Vratsa – no information could be found about the inclusion of Roma neighbourhoods in the zones of impact, although after that projects were designed which can also apply to the representatives of the Roma community.
- In some towns - Gotse Delchev, Petrich, Sliven, Shumen - Roma neighbourhoods have been fully included in the zone with a predominantly social nature.
- In other towns one or two neighbourhoods have been selected in order to carry out more focused and comprehensive measures. Such are the plans in Sofia, Lom, Vidin and Plovdiv. In Lom one of the two neighbourhoods has been chosen since in the other one measures under another program / PHARE /were carried out. In Plovdiv the smallest of the three neighbourhoods with concentrated Roma population - Hadji Hassan Mahala with about 4,000 Roma has been selected, at the expense of Stolipinovo with about 40,000 inhabitants and Sheker mahala with about 10 000 inhabitants. However, there are numerous wide-ranging measures aimed at solving all identified problems. This is in line with the approach, taken by the authorities, of limited in scope but large in investment measures. In Plovdiv, only 5% of the town will apply IPURD, while in other towns the scope exceeds 50%, reaching 80% of the territory.
- The case of Varna is interesting. The analysis of the plan concluded that all three Roma neighbourhoods - Maksuda, Vladislavovo and Asparuhovo - fully meet the criteria for zones with a predominantly social nature. Ultimately, however, only Vladislavovo neighbourhood has been included in the zone and Maksuda neighbourhood was included in the zone of public functions with high public importance on the following grounds: “There are serious problems regarding the enforcement of regulations and the exercise of the right of ownership over a considerable part of the properties in the neighbourhood. There is

large-scale illegal construction and huge in dimension unregulated dumpsites which seriously impair the quality of the living environment not only in the Roma neighbourhood, but in the whole central part of the town and the water area of Varna lake. On the other hand, according to the provisions of the adopted General Urban Plan (GUP) of the town of Varna, these areas are envisaged to perform primarily public functions and to be the inbound and outbound site for a duplicate bridge to the amortised Asparuhov bridge, which will inevitably change the spatial configuration of the properties and their purpose. It is the severe problems with citywide importance and the projections based on the GUP for the future development of this part of the town which provide a sufficient basis for the inclusion of these areas in the zone of public functions. Only thus the necessary opportunities for tackling the major social issues of this part of the urbanized area can be created”.

- According to the data of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, as of December 2014 only 20 municipalities out of 39 ready IPURD, have included neighbourhoods and territories inhabited by Roma in the zones of impact.

4. Are projects addressing the problems of the Roma included

- A holistic integrated approach to the development of the urban areas is outlined in the plans of five of the examined municipalities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Shumen, Lom and Sliven, which includes streets inhabited by Roma. Investments in technical and social structure, combined with soft measures in the field of social services, education and stimulation of employment have been envisaged. Significant financing of the activities included in the integrated approach have been envisaged, but generally there is no way to know exactly what resources will be directed to solve the problems of the Roma community as the projects encapsulate larger areas, some of which are Roma neighbourhoods.
- Mostly soft measures are provided in two municipalities - Vidin and Montana, which include training and educational courses, motivational activities and provision of social services. Here too it is not clear what the specific resources are as the projects are generalized and target the entire population of the zone of impact.
- In four municipalities - Varna, Vratsa, Petrich and Gotse Delchev no projects aimed at Roma community can be identify in the information available on the municipalities websites.

Main conclusions:

- Overall, the neighbourhoods and territories inhabited by Roma are present in the analysis of the current state of the towns made for IPURD 2014-2020.
- Most municipalities have not included representatives of the Roma in the strategic planning process, which implies that the needs and

the expectations of the Roma are not taken into account and there is no definite opinion on the causes and the ways of resolving the problems.

- It is important to note that there is almost no information about how the Roma communities and their problems have been identified according to neighbourhoods.
- In general, estimates are made by experts who develop plans based on statistical data and personal observations².
- In the majority of cases, the problems enlisted sound generally and are described schematically - poor infrastructure, poor housing, low education, poor health. There are no detailed quantitative indicators to provide a baseline - data and in-depth analysis, taking into account the causes of deteriorating indicators; there is no concrete data and examples.
- A significant part of the Roma communities and neighbourhoods will not be able to benefit from funds under OPRG because they are either not included in the zones of impact or there are no planned concrete measures and projects in the IPURD to meet their specific needs and problems.
- Some municipalities have included in the zones of impact in the IPURD urban areas with existing illegal construction of buildings used as the only house of families from the Roma ethnic group, but according to the information of the representatives of NGOs and municipal officials they have difficulties in providing funds for detailed urban plans (DUP), which fact may obstruct the inclusion of those areas as the target of subsequent project proposals.
- A significant part of the concrete measures and projects aimed at the Roma community set in the IPURD do not meet the actual needs and expectations of the people. These measures and projects are tailored more to the interests of the local authorities to reach certain financial resources, and not to the interests of the people living in Roma neighbourhoods. Roma communities and neighbourhoods are mostly described as a problem which the local authorities should resolve, and the Roma themselves are subject to interventions which do not envisage their active participation in the implementation of these interventions. There are even cases when Roma communities and the neighbourhoods inhabited by them are considered as an obstacle to the normal development of the territory of the town and a factor leading to “serious deterioration of the living environment not only in the Roma neighbourhood, but throughout the central part of the town and the water area of Varna lake³”. This is especially true for neighbourhoods located on territories in which the municipality or the local businesses have certain economic interests and investment plans /Varna, Maksuda neighbourhood/.

In summary it can be said that in one way or another part of the local authorities are aware of the importance of the problems of Roma neighbourhoods and their influence

² It is not known whether representatives of the minorities and experts on minority and integration issues have been included among the experts

³ IPURD 2014-2020 of the town of Varna, „Potential zones of impact", p. 30

on the overall development of the towns and are taking or intend to take some action to resolve them. The lack of knowledge of the specifics of the community, mutual misunderstanding and poor communication between the local authorities and the community, however, in most of the cases leaves the Roma isolated from these processes. The undertaken actions are largely inadequate, they are misunderstood and unaccepted by the Roma community, and this is one of the reasons for their ineffectiveness. On the other hand, due to the lack of information and adequate presentation, this process remains misunderstood and unaccepted by the representatives of the majority thus deepening the mistrust and reinforcing the belief that these actions are to the advantage of the Roma people. As a result, the overall implementation process of the integration policies of municipalities is compromised and even good and meaningful actions are in danger of failing.

Recommendation: IPURD is a good chance for local authorities to obtain resources with which to meet their obligations and to implement the measures outlined in the National Strategy for Roma Integration and solve at least part of the problems. However, this cannot happen without the participation of Roma themselves. It is necessary to find the right channels to reach the community - socially active and interested Roma people, Roma with better education, informal leaders, representatives of the civil sectors, mediators and other people respected by the community and accepted by the majority. Their participation in the undertaken activities may provide the adequacy and the acceptance of all of these actions. Since the majority of IPURD have been approved, what is needed from now on is to make an effort to plan as precise and effective as possible projects for the Roma neighbourhoods. One option to ensure the participation of the Roma in the process is the creation of resourceful and active local groups in the community in which local activists, mediators, people with some expertise will participate. These groups can serve as a bridge of communication between the local authorities and the community, ensuring correct transmission of information in both directions and being a source of ideas and suggestions. This is a means that not only includes the community in the process of decision-making, but also provides its further participation through the assumption of responsibilities and makes possible the use of the potential of a significant part of the population which until now has been mostly neglected.

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