



## The Missing Link: Monitoring and Evaluation of Roma-related Policies in Slovakia

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Policy initiatives and instruments aimed at Roma in Slovakia are rarely subject to adequate formal or informal monitoring or evaluation by policy-making institutions. Consequently, past experience is not used sufficiently to adjust and improve new policies. A number of reasons can be identified, especially when it comes to the role of state institutions. Identifying them will help suggest proposals to remedy this deficit, which could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of future initiatives.

### Monitoring and Evaluation: Stepchild of Policy-making?

A primary cause of the flawed monitoring and evaluation of government policy in Slovakia is that policy-making culture is still very much evolving, only gradually moving away from the heritage of socialism and adopting best practices from abroad. There are many civil servants who still do not perform (or are not capable of performing) a systematic evaluation of their own proposals.

Moreover, the incentives required to trigger a change in practice are missing. Rules of the policy-making process<sup>2</sup> do not require civil servants to carry out in-depth evaluation and monitoring, and training for civil servants do not focus on these skills. Although ministries do order research and background analyses from subordinated state agencies, such research usually plays a minor role in policy-making. According to research by Katarína Staroňová, civil servants admit that "a greater degree of competition (through allocating grants earmarked for dealing with selected themes, instead of the permanent flow of funds to subordinated institutions) might improve the quality and quantity of produced outputs". She also argues that "another significant cause of the lack of evidence-based analysis is the shortage of information about analytical techniques, and poor analytical skills in both social and economic analysis (evaluation, forecasting, modelling)."<sup>3</sup>

Reflection by state bodies on their policies is most often understood by them as a simple check whether all the laws and government resolutions were complied with, which is a tradition inherited from the socialist regime. It is quite exceptional for state bodies to carry out systematic monitoring and evaluation of their policy measures and publish their findings. Furthermore, the policy process often does not start with defining the problem and setting out clear objectives, which means there are no indicators to monitor and benchmarks to evaluate against. A rare exception in the field of education is the *Report on the higher education reform in Slovakia and its impacts on students*, prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2004<sup>4</sup>. This document was prepared upon the request of Parliament and clearly describes the state of affairs before the higher education reform, the goals and objectives of the reform and the resultant state after the reform.

A second set of reasons for insufficient monitoring and evaluation of policies revolves around the problem that it is quite common for there to be just a few key policy makers at the ministries. Those people are often so overburdened by the fast introduction of policy measures that they tend to skip these important phases of policy feedback. The time pressure of the political cycle - a four-year term of government - also encourages policy makers to spend their time mostly on drafting, adopting and implementing policy measures. Since new governments usually arrive with new priorities or alternative proposals, little time is left for *ex ante* impact assessment or subsequent evaluation and adjustment of policies. This pressure is intensified further when the

government intends to pass a large-scale reform during its election term, in which case the huge scope of work prevents these few key persons from implementing an in-depth analysis and sufficient consultation and evaluation as part of the public policy cycle. Instead, they focus exclusively on simply launching the reform project<sup>5</sup>. These risks are all the greater because Slovakia is a transition country, undertaking large-scale reforms in different areas, and there is little continuity in the top civil service positions. There is no tradition of senior civil service as it is known in Western countries.

A strong drive to change these practices of policy-making in Slovakia is missing – and this has its impact on Roma policies as well. Monitoring and evaluation has not been high on the agenda of Roma policies, and in turn, Roma policies themselves have not been high on the agenda of key state bodies. The lack of monitoring and evaluation, resulting as it does in a lack of efficiency and progress, moreover reinforces the low profile of Roma policies. It follows that the initial steps to improve this state of affairs should be putting the Roma issues higher on the agenda of state bodies and changing the institutional setting involved in this task. Yet, this may not be as simple to carry out as it sounds because of lacking public support and a politically weak Roma minority.

In conclusion here, it is clear that there are steps that can be taken by politicians and top policy makers that could improve public policy in general, but that considerable constraints result from the state institutions' insufficient capacities to effectively implement their own monitoring and evaluation. That conclusion pertains to Roma policies as strongly as to any other policy field. Here the involvement of other actors, such as policy analysts, NGOs and the media could improve the situation. So could tailored training targeted at civil servants.

### **The resulting waste of public funds – and government strategies to combat it**

The amount of funds spent on Roma-targeted policies remains large and the absence of sound monitoring and evaluation prevents us from determining the best choice for allocating these funds in future. The following examples on the impact of the lack of monitoring of government spending illustrate this point and suggest possible measures to address the problems described.

The best illustration of this point from general government policy practice is the example of one small state agency, under authority of the Slovak Ministry of Finance, which collected specific outstanding debts for decades - until the amount recovered was smaller than the operational costs of the agency itself<sup>6</sup>. Had proper evaluation been in place, the agency would have been closed down much earlier or restructured to carry out other activities.

A similar situation is common in the field of education. Many state projects and experiments (usually small-scale ones) are still running but neither fully applied nor abolished. According to Andrej Salner, the Roma teaching assistants for example were experimentally tested for more than ten years<sup>7</sup>. But despite good test results and positive foreign precedents, the teaching assistants only started to be used in schools on a broader basis in the past two years – and even then only thanks to the involvement of several NGOs. Similarly, the preparatory classes and zero grades at primary schools were tested in the early 1990s, but legislation allowing their implementation was passed only in 2002 and these classes are still not opened in all the areas of the country where they would seem to be potentially useful.

The effort of the Ministry of Finance to introduce target-oriented budgeting is the key tool to address this issue on a governmental level<sup>8</sup>. This measure is part of a broader reform of public finance. Its core element is to structure the budgets of state institutions on the basis of their main activities, and to link these with clear goals and objectives. However, the pace of implementing the new system is rather slow in some areas. If we look at the budget of the education ministry and its programmes that cover primary and secondary education (which are crucial for Roma children), the targets that are set are vague, mostly defined either as input targets or simple output targets, rather than focusing on the desired outcomes of the education process<sup>9</sup>.

Certainly, civil servants need some time to familiarise themselves with the new philosophy of budgeting. However, their motivation to act risk-aversely prevails unless there is strong leadership from the top: after all, it is safer for civil servants to choose unambitious or vague and immeasurable targets when their jobs and funds of the ministry are at stake. To hold the education ministry accountable for its target-oriented budget, a strong involvement of the analysts at the finance ministry as well as external stakeholders (such as the media, watchdog NGOs and associations of teachers and parents) is needed.

### **Civil society in the role of external evaluator**

External stakeholders should also play a crucial role in increasing the efficiency of Roma-related policies. Those striving to improve Roma policies and place them higher on the political agenda are, after all, first of all faced with the common dilemma of how to effectively address the broad and pressing issues concerning the situation of the Roma, when dealing with them mostly does not increase the popularity of the political representatives in charge. The majority population at large does not consider the disadvantages that Roma face a significant social problem that requires urgent government action, while the Roma minority itself has too little political power to advocate for the solution of their problems effectively.

This means the Roma are often not on the top of the agenda for key state bodies, which either avoid dealing with the issue or delegate it to specialised units with little capacity or political backing. The two main interdepartmental posts – the Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities and the Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, subordinated to him – are too weak to achieve co-operation of the many actors involved in the public policy process, because of their limited size and capacity and competing priorities on the agenda of the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

Monitoring and evaluation here is thus also a primary challenge to watchdog NGOs, the media and active citizens. It is also up to them to apply the necessary additional pressure to move things along. Furthermore, they have new opportunities to do so. In the past few years, several important tools were created that make the public policy process more transparent for the general public. A Freedom of Information Act has been in force since 2001<sup>10</sup>. Documents submitted to government sessions are now published on the Internet in advance, where citizens can comment on them. The main state bodies are obliged to publish annual reports on their activities, and target-oriented budgeting is being implemented. The media, NGOs and concerned citizens can use these new opportunities to play a useful role as independent evaluators, providing feedback from the different regions.

### **Conclusion**

In addition to human rights concerns, it should be a strong interest of the society to improve the effectiveness of policies aimed at ameliorating the socio-economic status of the Roma due to their relatively high birth rates and consequent potential contribution to future economic growth.

However, lacking or failing mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation result in a significant waste of public funds, complicate the establishment of long-term, effectual policies, and reinforce the tendency to assign Roma issues a low priority.

Therefore, it is necessary, above all, to communicate the importance and benefits of evaluation and monitoring to the government and top policy makers. Here, it is vital to create public pressure for the use of evaluation and monitoring as a tool to increase the efficiency of public spending. Real demand for sound evaluation and monitoring from the top positions, such as ministers, state secretaries and heads of section as well as parliamentary leaders, is the prerequisite for better value-for-money in public sector.

To realise these conditions, the following activities should be undertaken and supported:

- organising training sessions for civil servants to help them realise the importance of evaluation and monitoring, and empower them to carry it out effectively
- simplifying monitoring and evaluation by easy-to-use guidelines, or even through outsourcing the process
- involving local people in watchdog projects and activities to evaluate public policy and provide feedback to policy makers

Political will and public concern, however, remain paramount. Individual solutions and improvements can be sketched, but without a strong determination to solve the disadvantages Roma face on the part of top policy makers and the society as a whole, their application and impact are likely to remain rather limited.

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the process of reviewing government draft documents by ministries and the public and directives on the submission of documents for the Government session.

<sup>3</sup> Staroňová, K., *Public policy-making in Slovakia (discussion paper)*, Slovak Governance Institute, Bratislava, 2004, Policy Brief 02/2004.

<sup>4</sup> The Slovak version of the document is available at the Ministry of Education official site: [http://www.minedu.sk/igrsvs/igr\\_doc\\_20040421\\_1\\_sprava\\_o\\_reforme\\_VVS\\_NRSR.doc](http://www.minedu.sk/igrsvs/igr_doc_20040421_1_sprava_o_reforme_VVS_NRSR.doc)

<sup>5</sup> Katarína Staroňová quotes a civil servant commenting upon the large scale reform projects: „A senior civil servant stressed that if he could start again from scratch, what he would do first of all would be dividing large reforms into several smaller parts and implement them in smaller steps. He emphasised that civil servants and experts in the given area do not have sufficient capacity to prepare reforms so immense in scope. He also noted that if there were so big problems to be faced even in the preparatory stage, he could not image what would happen in the implementation stage as nobody was interested in this at the time of preparing the reform.”

<sup>6</sup> This example is taken from the document *Audit of financing and activities of central authorities of state administration and organisations under their domain* approved by the Government on August 30, 2000 (Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 694/2000).

<sup>7</sup> Salner, A. (ed.), *Roma Children in the Slovak Education System*, Bratislava, SGI, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Resources related to this issue are available at the Ministry of Finance official site in the section *Public Finance Management Reform* (in Slovak or English) at <http://www.finance.gov.sk/mfsr/mfsr.nsf/0/89582662911AA8E6C12570150021846F?OpenDocument&ID=PAR352623336265&TYPE=S&LANGUAGE=E&LENGTH=S>

<sup>9</sup> See the State Budget Act No. 740/2004 Coll., expenditures of the budgetary section on programmes.

<sup>10</sup> The Freedom of Information Act No. 211/2000 as of May 17, 2000. More resources related to this issue in Slovak can be found at <http://www.infozakon.sk>