

Guidelines

Swedish Assistance to the Roma Population in the Western Balkans



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Summary

In the Swedish Government's decision of 2004-12-22, Sida was given the task to present "Guidelines for Swedish Assistance to the Roma population in the Western Balkans". These guidelines are intended to provide guidance for Swedish assistance that targets the Roma population in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. The guidelines should be used as guidance to future country cooperation strategies and as a complement to the Swedish country strategies in the region. After approximately three years Sida should decide if the guidelines need to be updated or revised.

The main point of departure is the Swedish Policy for Global Development (PGD) and its overall poverty objective, in which human rights – one of its central component elements – are specifically emphasized. A PGD priority is also the promotion of closer links with European Union structures and values and, in this connection, the fulfilment of the EU conditions, the Copenhagen Political Criteria is emphasized. These criteria emphasize minority rights.

Although large groups in the Western Balkans suffer from poverty, the Roma populations are often poorer than the generally poor groups. They suffer from both material poverty and social exclusion, due to discrimination and neglect. Women and children are particularly affected. Most Roma people live under appalling conditions and do not have access to basic social and economic services provided by society, such as education, basic health care, social welfare, employment and housing. They are in general also excluded from exerting an influence on political or administrative decisions and neglected with regard to their specific cultural and political rights as a minority. One main obstacle to their integration in society is the difficulties they encounter in registering as residents or acquiring citizenship. Refugees, returnees and internally displaced are among the most vulnerable.

The guidelines describe some experience of assistance and the role of the main actors. They further propose four focus areas for Swedish assistance: empowerment and participation of the Roma; development and implementation of national Roma strategies; poverty reduction; and respect for human and minority rights. Education is emphasized as being particularly important for the Roma population to escape from poverty. Seven guiding principles for implementing programmes of assistance are also presented, with suggested approaches. It is further recommended that Roma issues should be an integral part of Swedish development

cooperation in the Western Balkan countries and be supportive of national Roma strategies and plans.

To be noted:

This document uses the designation “Roma” to include all the groups known as Romani, Ashkali, Egyptians, Sinti and Travellers. This is done for the purpose of simplification, but with full respect to their cultural and ethnic differences.

1 Introduction

1.1 Points of Departure

The purpose of these guidelines is to clarify how Sweden can assist the national governments to improve the overall conditions of the Roma minority in the Western Balkans. These guidelines are intended to provide guidance for Swedish assistance that specifically targets the Roma population, as a regional complement to the Swedish country strategies.

The countries in the Western Balkans have an EU membership perspective. Efforts which lead to improved conditions for the Roma minority are also important in the broader context of fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria, which all countries must meet in order to become EU members. One of the three Copenhagen Criteria for membership is the political criterion, which, as part of its conditions, includes respect for and protection of minorities.

The need to pay particular attention to the Roma population is further emphasised by the fact that the Roma suffer from substantial discrimination and socio-economic exclusion throughout the Western Balkans. As an effect of persecution, discrimination and deterioration in their living conditions, there has been considerable Roma migration to Western Europe, including Sweden.

The points of departure have been to analyse the general characteristics of the living conditions of the Roma population in the Western Balkans, to assess the strategies, plans, experience and ambitions of governments and international actors to improve the situation, and to outline general objectives, general focus areas and principles of work for Swedish assistance.

The analysis has been carried out through a review of literature, reports, national and international Roma strategies, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), as well as field visits and consultations with Swedish embassies and field offices, international organisations such as UNDP/UNICEF/UNHCR/EU/Council of Europe/OSCE, Roma representatives, NGOs and government officials. Consultations have also been held with the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and with staff at Sida with special expertise on minorities, education, gender and policy/methodology. Data used in this document are mostly taken from the UNDP report “Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope” (2005) and the regional Roma needs survey made for Sida by an international NGO, ECMI. These analyses and consultations have resulted in the guidelines presented in this document.

1.2 Poverty and Rights Perspective

The overall goal for Swedish development cooperation, as stated in the Swedish Policy for Global Development (PGD) is “to contribute to an environment supportive of poor people’s own efforts to improve their quality of life”. This goal includes two pillars: a rights-based and a poverty perspective. The PGD further specifies that the overall goal should be promoted through, and be characterized by, improvements with regard to respect for human rights, democracy and good governance, gender equality, the sustainable use of natural resources and protection of environment, economic growth, social development, social security and through special efforts related to conflict prevention and management and to global public goods.

Of these central component elements, respect for Human Rights is specifically emphasised here, as a national governmental responsibility in relation to the rights of the Roma as individuals and as members of a minority.

The PGD further specifies that development cooperation with the countries in Central and Eastern Europe should, as an important element in the struggle against poverty, focus on measures to promote closer links with European cooperation structures and common values. As the countries in the Western Balkans have an EU membership perspective, improved conditions for the Roma minority is important for fulfilling the conditions for EU membership, the Copenhagen Criteria. Respect for and protection of minorities is part of the Political Copenhagen Criterion which countries must fulfil in order to attain candidate country status and to open accession negotiations with the EU.

Most of the Western Balkans countries have large groups that suffer from poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, due to wars, economic reforms and social restructuring. It has, however, been established in poverty assessments and strategies that the Roma populations are often poorer than the generally poor groups.

In addition to material poverty, the Roma suffer from social exclusion, segregation and discrimination, which deprive them of their fundamental rights as citizens or residents, and they are excluded in different ways from education, social services, health care and housing. The Roma are often treated with contempt and discrimination by authorities and by people at large, which is a further cause for the deterioration in their possibilities to make a living and escape poverty. They are also, in general, excluded from exerting an influence on political or administrative decisions and neglected with regard to their specific political and cultural rights as members of a minority. A halt to the discrimination is necessary, as well as improvements to the living conditions of the Roma.

2 Regional Problem Analysis

2.1 Roma Facts

There are various internal divisions among the Roma population in the Western Balkans – both regionally and within the countries. There are different groups: Romani, Ashkali, Egyptians (a. k. a RAE) , Sinti, and Travellers, which are often referred to as Roma. Even though most Roma speak Romany and the language is an important uniting factor, it is important to recognize that the Roma is a heterogeneous group of people with diversity in several areas such as dialectal and language differences, different religions and their importance, different ways of living, and income diversity. In some cases there is a distinct separation between Roma and Egyptians. In Albania, for example, the government only recognizes the Roma as a minority and that is on linguistic grounds. As the Egyptians, the larger group, speak Albanian, they are not recognized as a minority and are not included in the National Roma Strategy, although they suffer from similar social and economic exclusion as the Roma.

In the various ethnic conflicts that have dominated the region in the past and in recent history, the Roma have been particularly exposed. The most tragic example of this is the Second World War when hundred of thousands Roma were killed in the holocaust. Another example is the wars following the disintegration of Yugoslavia in which many Roma were killed as well, even though there are no official figures on the number of casualties.

The Roma have a reputation for being migrants but, with exception of the forced displacements during the wars and conflicts in the Western Balkans, seasonal migration workers – especially from Albania, and some smaller groups of travellers, most Roma populations have been sedentary for at least a century. Some Roma settlements can be 50–100 years old.

The size of the Roma population in the Western Balkans is difficult to estimate due to lack of proper information. This has therefore led to underestimates in official figures, which, in turn, have been complemented with overestimations. Experience shows that the true number often is closer to the estimates than the official figures. In 2004, the number of Roma in the Western Balkans was estimated between 293,000 and 956,000. Serbia is the country with the largest Roma population in the region with an interval of 100,000–420,000, followed by Macedonia 50,000–136,000, Kosovo 42,000–150,000, Albania 30,000–120,000 and

Bosnia and Herzegovina 60,000–70,000. Croatia and Montenegro have the smallest Roma population in the region with 9,000–40,000 and 2,800–20,000 respectively.

2.2 Political Aspects of the Roma Situation

Due to the widespread discrimination and stigma associated with the Roma ethnicity, many Roma, for their own protection, often identify with other population groups. It is common that the Roma side up with other population groups, often the majority group in their neighbourhood, whose language they may speak. In Macedonia, the government has tried to overcome this phenomenon by giving various privileges of political or cultural character to the Roma to identify themselves as Roma and not as Albanians.

The Roma have also encountered difficulties and persecution for having sided with a certain ethnic group. In Kosovo, many had sided with the Serbs, and the majority of the Roma were therefore forced to leave the country during the conflict in 1999, and also as a result of the riots in March 2004. The Roma who fled from Kosovo to Serbia were often left without necessary support. Many of them therefore moved to Western Europe, where they are actually in the process of being sent back to Serbia again. In pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the majority of the Roma lived in the Republica Sprska (R.S). After the war their return has been obstructed and they are therefore living as internally displaced persons in the Federation part of BiH, discriminated against for being Roma and from R.S. Many of them therefore fled to Western Europe, but have been forced to return.

For the many Roma who live in settlements, one major problem is that most of these settlements have not been legally established. Therefore, many Roma have no address for registration purposes and cannot therefore obtain the documents required to obtain access to basic social services. Many are deprived of their basic social and economic rights.

The Roma displaced by war face the same problems regarding access to social services, but are also excluded in the reconstruction efforts after the war. While the Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina see houses being reconstructed for other citizens, the Roma have been neglected during ten years of peace and are still living in the abandoned ruins of other people's properties or in makeshift homes, mainly due to their difficulties to prove ownership of their pre-war possessions, a requirement for reconstruction, by international and national rules imposed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Even though there is considerable variation in the degree of Roma integration in the various countries in the Western Balkans – where some have recognised the Roma as a national minority, some have political representation at the national level, and some live in good material circumstances – the overall situation suggests that the Roma invariably constitute the most disadvantaged ethnic group throughout the region.

2.3 Living Conditions and Statistics

The lack of proper statistics on the Roma is a major constraint when trying to analyse the Roma situation. No complete surveys have been made of the situation of the Roma and, when governments set up their millennium goals or poverty reduction strategies, they seldom make distinctions with the aid of statistics on socially excluded groups such as the Roma. UNDP, however, made an effort to overcome this situation in 2004 by making a survey in the Western Balkans with the aid of data

samples of living conditions, comparing the Roma with neighbouring majority population groups. This effort is a part of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” initiative and these statistics are the most comprehensive and relevant statistics to date. These comparisons clearly show how socially-economically underprivileged the Roma are.

Table 1 Roma Statistics

	ALB	BiH	CRO	MAC	SER	MON	KOS
ROMA POPULATION	30'-120'	60'-70'	9'-40'	50'-136'	100'-420'	3'-20'	42'-150'
POVERTY	72% (15)	29% (4)	13% (5)	52% (14)	61% (10)	40% (6)	79% (42)
UNEMPLOYMENT							
Total	36% (19)	49% (26)	18% (16)	61% (46)	40% (21)	56% (25)	83% (74)
15-24	53% (45)	67% (46)	42% (40)	79% (78)	68% (36)	67% (53)	89% (79)
EDUCATION							
Enrolment 7-15	48% (98)	50% (98)	89% (100)	77% (99)	73% (92)	39% (85)	62% (97)
Illiteracy Total	32% (2)	28% (0)	17% (1)	16% (1)	13% (2)	42% (1)	34% (8)
Illiteracy 15-24	35% (0)	24% (2)	9% (2)	10% (0)	10% (3)	27% (1)	35% (2)
HOUSING AND LIVING CONDITIONS (Lack of)							
Essential drugs	41% (12)	71% (29)	50% (13)	79% (42)	60% (22)	64% (9)	86% (47)
Secure housing	7% (0)	36% (5)	10% (2)	36% (5)	50% (5)	11% (2)	n.a.
Improved sanitation	72% (4)	50% (4)	60% (4)	59% (12)	50% (6)	68% (2)	72% (45)
Improved water source	28% (0)	17% (0)	29% (1)	1% (0)	8% (1)	18% (0)	n.a.

UNDP (2005). The figures in parenthesis are the percentage of the neighbouring majority population and not national aggregates.

As can be seen from table 1, the socio-economic situation of the Roma is precarious throughout the region. Some common regional characteristics can be seen:

- Widespread poverty – the Roma are over-represented among the people living below the poverty line
- Low levels of education – lower primary school enrolment and higher illiteracy prevalence for the Roma
- Unemployment – higher unemployment rates for the Roma
- Insufficient health care and poor living conditions – the Roma often lack essential drugs, secure housing, sanitation and water facilities

According to the UNDP survey, Roma poverty is worst in Kosovo and Albania, whereas the highest unemployment rates can be found in Kosovo and Macedonia. The lowest school enrolment rates can be found in Albania and Montenegro, whereas illiteracy is most common in Montenegro and Kosovo. Lack of essential drugs is generally serious, and is worst in Kosovo, followed by Macedonia. Lack of secure housing is most common in Serbia followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Lack of improved sanitation is a general problem in all countries even though the situation is worst in Albania and Kosovo. Lack of clean water is worst in Albania and Croatia.

The general living conditions of the Roma are very similar in the whole region. Most Roma live together, segregated from the majority populations, often in rather large groups, in villages or city neighbourhoods. Most of the Roma settlements have not been legalised as they have not been intended for this purpose or have not been included in any

plan. They therefore lack most of the essential facilities such as sewage, sanitation, garbage collection, clean water and roads, and their dwellings are of temporary character, insecure and unsuitable for the climate. Some settlements are not at all suitable for human habitation and are direct life-threatening environments. Some Roma live in houses of better condition that were constructed during pre-war times when they had employment.

One general and very common problem of the Roma is their difficulties in obtaining proper documents, due to the lack of a legal permanent address, their movements due to the wars, and the lack of different certificates. It seems that a large number of Roma are not registered as citizens. The movements during wars and the disintegration of the former Yugoslavian Republic have exacerbated this situation. In the creation of new nations, the laws on citizenship have also become restrictive. Without proper documentation and registration they are excluded from essential services of society such as health, social services, schools and employment.

A large proportion of the Roma are not enrolled in schools and, when they manage to enter the school system, they often drop out after a few years. There are several explanations for this. One major obstacle to enrolment is the Roma difficulties in obtaining proper documents. Another is that Roma who do not speak the official language cannot pass the school entrance examination and are sometimes put in so-called special schools for backward children. The language problem and the lack of a home environment for studies make it hard for the Roma to succeed in school and teachers do not pay attention to these particular problems. Another obstacle is poverty-related and concerns the lack of income to buy schoolbooks and clothes and the children are often treated with contempt by schoolmates and their parents, as well as by teachers. It is also common that Roma children have to contribute to the survival of the family and therefore working is a higher priority than attending school.

The health situation of the Roma is bad in general, due to the unhealthy environment in which most are living. The Roma often also lack access to the most basic health care and pregnant women can at times be forced to give birth at home after being rejected at the doors of the clinics due to lack of proper documents or health insurance. New health reforms have excluded, in an unfortunate way, large groups of poor people from access to basic health care, due to exclusionist insurance systems. According to some reports, child and maternal mortality tends to be generally high, the latter due to young pregnancies and multiple births.

Aggregated gender statistics on the Roma in the Western Balkans are rare. There are, however, some statistics on education, which show that enrolment is lower, dropouts are more common and illiteracy higher among girls and women. There are also some statistical indications that the unemployment rate is higher for Roma women. Poverty and the cultural traditions of the Roma are the major reasons for Roma women marrying young and giving birth to many children. There is also a high prevalence of Roma women and girls among the victims of trafficking for sexual purposes in the region.

Children are particularly affected by poverty and there are indications that child mortality rates are high and that many children suffer from malnutrition. Due to the poverty of the families, children often have to contribute to household income through begging and hard labour. They are also victims of trafficking to other countries for sexual

purposes and for labour and begging. Few children attain minimum primary education and are often treated badly by the authorities and the police.

Roma unemployment is very high and their income is usually derived from low-skilled and low-status jobs, usually in the informal sector. Common occupations are metal scrap collection, street cleaning, begging, seasonal agricultural work, and street sales, often of second-hand clothes. Many Roma live on social welfare, but not all have access to these systems due to lack of documentation. Some Roma have managed better in life, through incomes from work abroad or through commercial activities of different kinds. These are indeed exceptional cases. Some Roma are involved in criminal activities, mostly petty offences, as a way of making a living.

Discrimination expressed in violent forms is generally connected with abuse by the police. Discrimination in terms of exclusion is mostly carried out by institutions and authorities, such as health or school institutions. General intolerance against the Roma does exist, but violent civil expressions of hatred are rare, with the exceptions of the recent persecutions in Kosovo and the killings during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

3 Experience and Principal Actors

3.1 Experience of Forms of Assistance

As governments hitherto have done little to assist Roma communities, experience gained in the Western Balkans is mainly from initiatives carried out by national or international NGOs. It is important that this experience is not lost and that the governments learn from the best examples and get in contact with the best implementers.

Hitherto, most experience has been gained from education projects and attempts to enrol children in school. Positive results have been achieved through pre-school preparations and different forms of study assistance.

Experience gained in connection with housing and the improvement of conditions in settlements is often connected with very complex situations concerning legalization of settlements and ownership of houses. Social housing, i.e. subsidized housing, was abolished in most countries, which has affected poor people. For Roma people, who have insufficient incomes or no incomes at all, a low cost house or a proper house is a necessary survival strategy.

Some experience has been gained of assistance to social support and health and employment projects. They are all carried out through specific outreach methods and try to solve the lack of access of the Roma to these services and opportunities on an ad hoc basis.

Many legal assistance projects through NGOs deal with documents and registration issues for the Roma. UNICEF and UNHCR are involved in this area, often in connection with other ongoing activities or projects, but these problems have to be solved in a national and all-embracing way.

As regards returnees/deportees from Western Europe, very little is being done and the Roma returnees are essentially left to their own fate. UNHCR is not involved in returnee cases, but does however assist a few thousand refugees (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia), some of whom are being cared for in collective camps, but many are also living on their own. IDPs, mainly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia-Montenegro, are the responsibility of the governments and they are provided with the minimum of support – but only if they have documents. Many Roma IDPs do not have proper documents to receive support.

Experience of the elaboration of national Roma strategies differs. In most cases OSCE, sometimes together with UN organisations, has been the catalyst or facilitator in the work of the governments, and OSCE has often supported the process of establishing Roma Councils and acted for the involvement of Roma representatives in decisions on their own future. The Council of Europe monitors the situation as regards the rights of the Roma.

Work in Roma communities requires capable intermediaries and communicators with roots in, or knowledge of, specific communities. It is not possible to introduce changes with drastic methods. The Roma communities are, due to past experience, often suspicious of outside interventions and have a strong sense of independence. Due to their poverty situation, they are also sensitive to changes, which could interfere negatively with their survival strategies. Some Roma communities suffer from internal divergences and can therefore be more difficult to approach. It is sometimes difficult to find true representatives or spokespersons in a community. It is mostly elderly men who are given this responsibility, sometimes to the detriment of the interests of women, youth and children. Although National Roma Councils or other representatives usually exist and are generally respected, the Roma communities seldom speak with one voice. To understand the interests of a whole Roma population group, methods of an outreach character are necessary.

In the neighbouring countries outside the Western Balkans region, there is experience of different forms of work, as well as some research capacity and experienced expertise, which could be of interest to actors in the Western Balkans. In Sweden, there are some research resources as well as a Roma NGO community.

3.2 National, European and International Actors

Despite some efforts to improve the Roma situation in the region, progress has been slow and uneven. Past years have shown some positive developments and Roma issues have received increased attention due to efforts carried out by national actors (governments and NGOs), European organisations (EU, CoE, OSCE) and international organisations (UN and the World Bank).

National governmental initiatives on Roma issues are slowly taking form in National Roma Strategies and Action Plans across the region. National Roma Strategies have been developed in Serbia (2002), Croatia (2003), Albania (2003) and Macedonia (2005). Bosnia and Herzegovina is presently preparing a National Roma Strategy. The strategies do, in general, identify the real problems of the Roma and also propose well-considered actions. The listed priorities and the pedagogy of the reports can, however, vary in quality, but they are in general useful tools for identifying priorities and for interpreting the thinking and political intentions of the governments.

Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro are taking part in the regional initiative (launched by the World Bank and Soros Foundation) “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015” and have presented ten-year Action Plans for the four Roma Decade priority areas: Education, Housing, Employment and Health. The action plans presented for the Roma Decade vary in quality and level of detail. However, some reflect profound thinking and analysis. There is a risk that the budgets of the action plans have not been realistically calculated and integrated in state finances, at least for the first year – 2005.

Many national and international NGOs have been actively involved in Roma projects in the region. One positive aspect of this is that the Roma participate directly and are involved in the planning and implementation of activities.

In order to become candidates for EU membership, the countries will need to fulfil the political conditions expressed in the Copenhagen Criteria. Membership applications will be judged according to the criteria, and candidate status will be given to countries that meet the conditions. Furthermore, throughout the process of accession, the EU will monitor developments in the various areas of the Copenhagen Criteria, in order to judge whether conditions are being met and continue to be fulfilled.

The OSCE has been involved in conflict prevention in the area for over a decade, and has developed an “Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area” (2003). All of the countries in the Western Balkans are OSCE members, and the Action Plan is a legally non-binding set of recommendations for national policies and implementation strategies. OSCE has played the main role in supporting the governments in elaborating strategic plans and in establishing Roma Councils and executive offices for Roma issues.

Sida initiated assistance to Roma projects in 2003 and formulated, for this purpose, a specific decision with guidelines in 2002. In the Western Balkans Sida’s support has primarily been given to initiatives in Macedonia, and to some regional programmes through Swedish organisations (KtK, OPIC, SHC) and international organisations (ECMI, PER, IOM). Sweden has experience from its assistance for the elaboration of a national Roma strategy in Macedonia and for the empowerment of Roma experts included in strategy work. The Swedish regional programmes have mainly been involved in providing support for Roma women empowerment, training of youth, and anti-discrimination projects. Through IOM and Terre des Hommes, some assistance for trafficked Roma women and children has also been included.

There are several international and bilateral actors that have been involved in Roma issues or projects of assistance. In the education sector the Soros Foundation has been particularly involved. It is, however, withdrawing its direct support and joining in the World Bank – Soros initiative for a Roma Education Fund. This fund is a major new initiative covering the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Western Balkan countries, which have joined the Roma Decade and presented action plans for education. Different bilateral donors have also been involved in different projects of support for the Roma, for example USAID, the Swiss Development Cooperation, The Netherlands, the Nordic countries, Germany etc.

The initiative of the World Bank in respect of the Decade of Roma Inclusion puts the Bank in the forefront in the work for improving the living conditions of the Roma. The World Bank has furthermore demonstrated its concrete support, as a coordinator together with the Soros Foundation, by setting up the Roma Education Fund. The Bank has a central role in eradicating poverty through its involvement in the PRSP process in most countries in the region.

UNDP and UNICEF have been involved in some projects in the region. Since it is in the forefront of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN needs to pay attention to socially excluded and poor groups such as the Roma. Attempts are being made, for instance by UNICEF, to improve government statistics on the Roma and socially excluded

groups, and a regional report on Roma children is planned. In 2005, UNDP is preparing a Regional Western Balkans report on the Roma, similar to their report on the Roma in Eastern and Central Europe: “Avoiding the Dependency Trap”. UNHCR’s mandate is primarily refugees, but is also concerned with the situation of internally displaced persons.

4 Guidelines

4.1 General Objectives

The general objectives of Swedish assistance to the Roma population in the Western Balkans should be:

- to create conditions for women, men and children of the Roma minority in the Western Balkans to improve their lives by acquiring access to general development opportunities.
- to contribute to respect for the human rights of women, men and children of the Roma minority, with regard to their specific rights as a minority and with regard to their general rights as individuals to be socially, economically and politically included on equal terms as other groups and the majority population in society.
- to foster the aspirations of the countries in the Western Balkans for integration in the European Community, through the promotion of poverty reduction and respect for human rights with regard to the Roma minority.

4.2 General Focus Areas

A group of four priority focus areas is presented below. These priorities are intended as general guidance for the future establishment of country-specific priorities. The priorities should be set in accordance with the specific situation and priorities in each country and should follow the recommendations of the Swedish country strategies in order to assist the countries to improve the living conditions of the Roma populations and to fulfil conditions for EU membership.

Assistance should concentrate on a few areas of activities and should not consist of small and scattered projects. Although education is not included in the present Swedish country strategies for the Western Balkans, it is recommended that attention be paid to this area, as education is of highest priority for the development of the Roma communities.

Focus areas:

To strengthen and empower Roma women and men to exert an influence on and participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies to improve their social, economic and political situation.

Through different civil society programmes, Sida has already gained some experience of this kind of support and it could be further developed. For instance, Roma experts can be trained for purposes of elabo-

rating or monitoring national plans, or for being included at the national or local administrative level as Roma advisors. The Roma NGOs could be strengthened in their work and through networking. Valuable experience gained hitherto by these NGOs, should be analyzed and utilized by the governments.

To strengthen and assist governments and authorities in formulating, implementing and monitoring plans, in consultation with Roma representatives, to improve the social, economic and political situation of the Roma.

Sida has experience of assistance to one government in the elaboration of a National Roma Strategy. This area could further be supported, for instance through assistance to executive units for elaboration and implementation of Roma strategies and plans, to special units in sector ministries or in local authorities. There will be a need for sector studies, surveys and statistics for carrying out national programmes, which could be done and selected in accordance with the Swedish country strategies.

To contribute to poverty reduction for Roma women and men through support to areas of direct importance for the improvement of their living conditions.

In national strategies and plans and other needs assessments, some key areas have been selected as priorities for the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma. These key areas are the same in the entire Western Balkans region.

Access to education, vocational training,

Education has been chosen by the Roma Decade to be of top priority for support to the Roma and this area is of central importance for the integration of the Roma and for the improvement of their living conditions. Education could be supported through regional organizations such as the recently established Roma Education Fund. The priorities here should be to support pre-school and primary education and the desegregation of the Roma in education. NGOs have been successful in this area and some national action plans are well elaborated.

Access to sanitation, clean water and secure housing

Sanitation and clean water in Roma communities could be included in Sida's programmes for sustainable environment. Land registration of Roma settlements could be included in cadastre programmes. In Kosovo some house reconstruction for Roma is ongoing and this could continue. If possible, reconstruction of houses could also be included before the end of 2007 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Housing, however, is otherwise an area from which Sida is withdrawing in the Western Balkans.

Employment

Most Swedish country strategies include programmes for economic development and employment, in which the Roma could also be included. This could be, for instance, support for the development of employment agencies or for small credit schemes.

Access to health care

Sida's involvement in the health sector is mainly limited to the problems of HIV/AIDS, which is an area that could be carefully included in projects targeting the Roma. Considering the precarious health situation of the Roma and their limited access to health services, this issue could be approached by Sida through support to advocacy for Roma rights to health care.

Access to social services

The Roma should be included as one socially excluded group amongst others in Sida's planned programmes for support to reforms of the social sector. If possible, special outreach programmes could also be included.

IDPs, returnees and refugees

The specific migratory and political aspects of these groups of Roma, and their particularly difficult situation, could motivate support to general living conditions and assistance to their integration on a temporary or permanent basis in society.

To contribute to increasing respect for the human and minority rights of Roma women and men through support to areas of importance for the elimination of discrimination and segregation, and through support for political and social-economic integration

Some specific areas for the improvement of the rights of the Roma have been selected or pointed out in national Roma strategies and other assessments in the Western Balkans region.

Citizenship and registration, legal assistance, discrimination, segregation and exclusion by society, trafficking in women and children, and women and child rights

One crucial issue with regard to the human rights of the Roma is the particular problems of attaining citizenship, registering and obtaining the documents needed to become an integrated member of the society, and thereby enjoying all social and economic rights. In this field there are possibilities to work through, for instance, the UN organizations involved in similar work. Within Sida's programmes for human rights, support to the legal sector and anti-trafficking programmes, there is already some experience and this assistance could include and specifically target the Roma.

4.3 Guiding Principles for the Implementation of the Assistance

In carrying out programmes of development assistance for the above-mentioned objectives and in guidelines for establishing priorities for the future, Swedish development cooperation assistance should, in addition to following the recommendations of the Swedish country strategies and the EU Copenhagen Political Criteria for integration, pay attention to the following aspects:

Dialogue

In its dialogue with Governments and in the selection of areas of cooperation, Sida should underline the importance of the EU Copenhagen Political Criteria and targets to be fulfilled for attaining EU membership. It should also be made clear that the responsibility for the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma lies with the national governments.

Harmonization

Sida should emphasise the importance of harmonization, coordination and cooperation between different national and international actors and the target groups. Sida should also try to stimulate the international donor community to increase their efforts in respect of support for the Roma.

National Roma strategies and plans

When it is considered that the National Roma Strategies and specific plans are sufficiently well elaborated and Roma representatives have been appropriately consulted, these documents should be used as guiding tools. If deemed necessary, Sida could support improvements to these documents. Sida should pay particular attention to the implementation process of the National Strategies and plans and not merely be content with the preparation of the strategies themselves. The efforts should be monitored. In countries where there is no strategy at present but intentions exist to elaborate one, Sida could offer its assistance, for instance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In countries where a Roma strategy is dormant, for example Albania, Sida should try, together with other donors, to assist and advise the government to implement the plans. In Kosovo, where there will probably not be a special Roma strategy, support could be given to set up different targeted plans.

Roma participation

Sida should emphasise the importance of Roma participation and ownership in all efforts in order to facilitate implementation and to guarantee the quality and sustainability of the projects. Support to Roma communities should include consultations with the local population, and give special attention to surviving strategies and cultural traditions. Therefore, governments will need the assistance of Roma NGOs, Roma representatives, and experts, for any direct interventions in Roma communities.

Migratory and political situations

Special attention should be paid to the political environment and to situations which already have, or could have in the future, undesired effects on the life of the Roma. All kinds of threats of violence or direct violence, inflammatory speeches or armed conflicts cause, by their very nature, movement of population groups. In these situations the Roma are often the least respected group, even if they are not always the prime victim or target. The lack of respect shown by authorities, for example in the form of forced removals, or beatings by the police, can cause undesired conflicts or the dislocation or migration of people. Special attention should also be paid to the large number of internally displaced Roma and to the forced return of the Roma who have taken refuge in Western Europe. Their situation is particularly difficult as they are normally not welcomed by the governments of their countries of residence and they have great difficulties in obtaining access to minimum support and little possibility to integrate into society.

Target groups

Assistance shall be observe, and respect, social, economic and cultural traditions of the specific Roma community groups, whilst not neglecting the specific positions of women, children and different age groups and professional or occupational groups. Assistance should strive to involve women in consultative or participatory forums. Assistance to children should strive to include listening to the opinions and experience of the child target group. In the Roma societies, where traditions are so strong and poverty-coping strategies are needed, it can be difficult to reach women with information on contraceptives or the importance of children's education. There are, however, many examples of approaches which have been successful.

Gender equality

All assistance should have a gender equality perspective and particular efforts should be made to include and empower women to participate in the development efforts initiated. When developing Roma statistics in the future, it is important that they are gender disaggregated. This should also be enhanced in projects and in surveys and reports produced.

4.4 Programme Planning and Follow-Up

In planning Swedish assistance to the Roma population, the first step should always be to analyse whether Sida should support the government of the country to elaborate, implement, improve, develop or monitor a national Roma strategy. It should also be analysed whether and how support is needed for consultations and the inclusion of Roma representatives and experts in this work.

One general point of departure should be to make Roma issues an integral part of development cooperation in the countries of the Western Balkans. Sida should analyse whether and how the Roma could be integrated as a target group in different ongoing and planned programmes and how these programmes could support the national Roma strategies and action plans.

Sida should identify possible partners among those working directly with the governments at the national level, for example the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, OSCE, and the EC, or government partners with which Sida has established or intends to establish relations. In international organisations with programmes of strategic importance for Roma, for instance education or strategic planning, Sida could second experts. Among other international or Swedish organisations Sida should choose actors that have relevant competence and that have experience from working with the Roma or with minority questions. Direct support to national NGOs should only be given in exceptional cases and to well-established and well-reputed NGOs.

Roma assistance shall be included in Sida's annual country plans and in the half-yearly and annual reports from Swedish embassies/Sida offices in each country.

General national trends in respect of development and improvements to the living conditions and the rights of the Roma should be monitored through available international or national reports.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues
EU	European Union
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KtK	Kvinna till Kvinna
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OPIC	Olof Palme International Centre
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PER	Project on Ethnic Relations
PGD	Policy for Global Development
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RAE	Romani, Ashkali and Egyptians
R.S.	Republica Srpska
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SHC	Swedish Helsinki Committee
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
Soros	Soros Foundation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
Western Balkans	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro

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Useful Links

Council of Europe (CoE)	www.coe.int
European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)	www.ecmi.de , www.ecmirom.org
European Commission (EC)	europa.eu.int/comm
European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)	www.errc.org
Minority Rights Group International (MRG)	www.mrgi.org
Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	www.osce.org , www.osce.org/odihr
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	www.undp.org , www.roma.undp.sk
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	www.ohchr.org/english
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	www.unhcr.ch
World Bank	www.worldbank.org/roma , www.romadecade.org
Other links:	www.rroma.org , www.erionet.org

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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