

Evaluation and Monitoring of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030

Guidance document

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List of abbreviations used

EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
MRC	Marginalised Roma Community / Communities
SO SR	Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present document is to offer a framework for the evaluation and monitoring of the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 (Office of Plenipotentiary, 2021) and to define the basic standards through which the evaluation and monitoring process will be ensued.

The content of this document is to a large extent based on the experience gained during the implementation of the framework for evaluation and monitoring of the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020. Basic conditions necessary for the systematic performance of evaluation and monitoring, both in terms of institutional or financial support, were ensured back then.

The national framework for the evaluation and monitoring of the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020 was based on the commitments made both at European and the national level. These included the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions - Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, which later served as a source for other documents. At the national level, there were several government resolutions adopted that obliged relevant ministries to actively participate in the implementation as well as in the evaluation and monitoring of the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020.

In the context of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy), the basic framework for evaluation and monitoring is based on the European document called Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01).

The European Commission (hereinafter referred to as "EC") has recommended in the document that Member States follow a uniform structure for their national strategies, formulating them through five main chapters. These chapters cover:

- three horizontal objectives aimed at preventing and reducing discrimination by strengthening Roma equality, inclusion and participation;
- four sectoral objectives, which are (i) education, (ii) employment, (iii) health and social services, and (iv) housing and basic services;
- partnership and institutional capacity;
- funding;
- monitoring and reporting.

Adherence to an identical structure of national strategies adopted at the level of individual Member States is a way to facilitate the evaluation of progress and results of the European Union's ten-year plan for Roma integration. It can also strengthen synergies with other initiatives adopted by the European Union, individual Member States, as well as by supranational organizations and the civil sector, aiming for a better Roma integration with the

help of EU funding.

The EU obliges the Member States to establish a functional system for monitoring and evaluation of their national strategies. The progress in implementing the objectives of national strategies is to be monitored and evaluated through a common framework of indicators defined in cooperation between the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (hereinafter referred to as “FRA”), the EC Working Group on Roma Inclusion Indicators coordinated by the FRA, the national focal points (in the case of Slovakia, the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities), and the national statistical offices.

According to the Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021/C 93/01) of 12 March 2021, the EC calls for the Member States to report their progress towards achieving objectives of national strategies at two-year intervals. Years 2023, 2025, 2027, and 2029 were proposed. Compared to the previous period, when progress was reported annually, this is a significant simplification of the monitoring process by the EC. The EC also proposes to maintain the monitoring and evaluation model implemented at the European level, which will be carried out through regular monitoring reports submitted in 2022, 2024, 2026, and 2028; through reports prepared by civil society (the so-called Civil Monitor) and submitted in 2022, 2024, 2026, and 2028; through reports on the achievement of result indicators with the help of European financial resources submitted in 2024 and 2029. In the light of the above-mentioned proposal, it is also envisaged to carry out a detailed evaluation of the implementation of the national strategies and to carry out an ex-post evaluation of the strategies. The monitoring and evaluation process carried out at the European level will derive from the regular data collection carried out by FRA in 2020, 2024 and 2028 as well as from the national monitoring reports. It is therefore crucial that the national monitoring and evaluation process is compatible with the European monitoring and evaluation framework.

INSTITUTIONAL SECURITY

The National Contact Point for the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy is the **Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities** (hereinafter referred as “the Office of Plenipotentiary”). It has a coordinating role in relation to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy. Under the law 575/2001 Coll., however, the Office of Plenipotentiary is not responsible for the fulfilment of the objectives defined in the four thematic areas, which are i) education, ii) employment, iii) health and social services, and iv) housing and basic services. There is therefore a need to develop tools to ensure that the objectives of the Strategy are effectively implemented by the various ministries and relevant authorities.

To fulfill specific objectives, it is necessary to take both political and technical responsibility. In the context of political accountability, there is a necessity to ensure the implementation of the Strategy's objectives is included in the portfolio of responsibility of a specific head of any

Ministry (either the Minister or the Secretary of State). These will be responsible for securing conditions for Strategy's successful fulfilment. In the context of technical support, this mainly involves the **designation of a department/unit that will be responsible for the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives in the individual ministries** and will act as a ministerial focal and coordination point while ensuring regular reporting on the Strategy. It is necessary to secure that the designated department/unit has sufficient competences to coordinate activities of the specific ministry in relation to the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives.

Individual ministries can be bound to take political and technical responsibility through a resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic, which also commits the individual ministries to the fulfilment of the specific objectives of the Strategy.

In order to carry out a systematic evaluation and monitoring of the Strategy and the policies supporting the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives, it is the task of the Office of Plenipotentiary, which fulfils the position of a coordinator and a national contact point, to establish a stable analytical unit. Its activities will focus on the collection and analysis of data necessary for the implementation of public policies supporting Roma integration and the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy. Previously, the activities of such unit have been ensured through the national project funded by the European Social Fund (hereinafter referred to as "ESF").

External expertise essential to ensure independence in the process of evaluation and monitoring can be secured through the so-called **Panel of Experts**, which is made up of respected experts in each thematic area of the Strategy. They play a key role in the process of verifying the data presented in the monitoring reports as well as in the formulation of the objectives and methodology of specific evaluations. The Panel of Experts shall be composed of a minimum of five and a maximum of ten members, so that the content of each of the thematic and horizontal objectives of the Strategy is guaranteed by at least one member of the Panel of Experts. The members shall be appointed by a decree of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities for a three-year period. They also may be compensated for their work.

THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

Involving a wide range of actors in the evaluation and monitoring and respecting the principle of partnership helps to take into account a variety of aspects (regional, sectoral, social, economic, human rights, etc.) in the process of monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, thus achieving a higher quality of the whole process and the individual outputs of monitoring and evaluation.

Along with the engagement of the relevant central government departments and authorities, representatives of municipal and regional government, the non-governmental sector, academic sector, and Roma themselves are expected to be involved.

All above-mentioned stakeholder groups should have the opportunity to fully participate in

the design of the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, in setting the target values for the individual indicators, in data collection, in commenting and the adoption of monitoring and evaluation reports.

In order to ensure an independent view on the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives, it is appropriate that arrangements are made for regular monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy's progress by the civil society and the Roma themselves.

The participation of stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process is ensured through the so-called **Thematic Working Group of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030** (hereinafter referred to as “the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy”).

The activities of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy follow the activities of the Thematic Working Group of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020. The structure of the members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy respects the principle of parity of representation, where the number of members representing central government bodies should approximately correspond to the number of members representing local and regional authorities, NGOs, and academia. The Working Group shall oversee the accuracy and regularity in the process of monitoring and evaluation of the progress of implementation of the Strategy and the transparency in communication of identified findings.

The role of the Roma representatives themselves and their personal experience with the implementation of the Strategy's objectives is indispensable in the monitoring and evaluation process. It is therefore necessary to create the conditions through which their participation can be ensured. A suitable platform is the **involvement of Roma and pro-Roma organizations active at the local level** in the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy, as well as in other activities carried out in connection with the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. For their full involvement, it is necessary to focus on strengthening their capacities in the field of monitoring and evaluation of public policies. In addition to providing them with trainings, their participation in the monitoring and evaluation process should be financially compensated. Their involvement must respect the principles of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, and complementarity. There must be a transparent process for selection of the organizations involved, each representing the statement of a particular Roma group from a certain background and location.

DATA SOURCES

The ability to monitor and evaluate the impact of particular measures is largely dependent on the availability of qualitative and relevant data. A well-established data collection system is crucial for the implementation of qualitative evaluation and monitoring.

The right of Member States to choose their own methods and processes for collecting the data required for monitoring and evaluation is fully respected by the European Commission. However, the European Commission underlines the obligation of Member States to carry out data collection in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), and Guideline on improving the collection and use of equality data published in 2018 by the High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity.

The information obtained through the **Atlas of Roma Communities** is of irreplaceable importance in targeting inclusive policies. This is considered one of the key tools for planning policies on Roma inclusion and the use of EU funds. The Atlas of Roma Communities collects data using a sociographic territorial mapping method, focusing on describing the technical infrastructure of Roma settlements (geographical areas/concentrations of Roma), the extent of their spatial integration with the general population and describing the structural inequalities between Roma settlements and the parts of the municipality inhabited by the general population. The Atlas of Roma Communities does not focus on collecting information on individuals, but on Roma settlements. For the purposes of the updated version of the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, a Roma settlements/concentration has been defined as an integral part (e.g. a street, a cluster of houses, a neighbourhood or part of it) with a minimum of five Roma households or with more than (approximately) 30 people living there, while this geographical area is perceived by the general population as a Roma settlement/ Roma camp.

Three cycles of mapping have been carried out so far, in 2004, 2013, and 2019. The reiteration of the mapping offers the opportunity to track the data in time series and monitor the trends. It is therefore important to ensure that the Atlas of Roma Communities is regularly updated in the future period. Given the low level of dynamics of the indicators monitored, most of which are infrastructural, the recommended period between two updates of the Atlas of Roma Communities is 5-10 years.

Sample survey EU SILC_MRK have become an equally important source of data on the situation of people from the marginalized Roma communities (hereinafter referred to as "MRC"). The first two series of the EU SILC_MRK survey were carried out as part of the activities of the national project "Monitoring and Evaluation of Inclusive Policies and their Impact on Marginalised Roma Communities", implemented by the Office of Plenipotentiary and funded by the ESF. The first survey was carried out by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as "SO SR") in cooperation with the Office of Plenipotentiary in 2018 on a sample of approximately 1,000 households. The Atlas of Roma Communities from 2013 served as the basis for the selection of households. Households were selected to form a representative sample of marginalised Roma communities. A second survey was carried out in 2020. As part of this survey, the SO SR signed a cooperation agreement with the FRA, based

on which additional questions on discrimination against Roma were included in the questionnaires. The original sample of the EU SILC_MRK survey was expanded to include Roma households living integrated among the general population (at least 250 households), thus ensuring that the survey is representative of the Roma population in general in Slovakia, not just of the MRC.

The EU SILC_MRK survey focuses on income and living conditions in the MRC. One of the objectives of it is to make the data and results of the survey comparable with the standard EU-SILC survey, so that the extent of structural inequalities between the situation of people from the MRC and the general population can be monitored.

EU SILC_MRK provides indispensable information on the social situation of households from the MRC and together with the information obtained through the Atlas of Roma Communities it offers precise information on the situation in the MRC. The repetition of the survey offers a time series of the monitored indicators, which can be used to track trends and effectively adjust public policies. It is therefore more than important that the EU SILC_MRK becomes one of the standard surveys carried out at regular intervals. The recommended period between sample survey cycles is 3 years.

In order to enhance monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, it is also important to **strengthen cooperation with selected government bodies that collect data on specific topics under their respective competences**. These include data on education, social policy, employment, public insurance, state benefits, healthcare, and the use of basic infrastructure.

The existence of a wide spectrum of data collected by different governmental organisations under various types of mandatory sectoral reporting often remains inaccessible for the purposes of organisations other than those directly concerned (i.e. the organisations for whose purposes the data collection is carried out). The so-called data management or open-data (of course while maintaining all standards related to personal data protection and public data protection) has been still used rather rarely in the environment of the Slovak public administration.

It is therefore necessary to carry out a comprehensive audit of the type, scope and relevance of the data collected by government organisations and to assess the data collected across the spectrum of issues related to Roma integration. The existing reporting can then be adapted/updated in a way to also provide data applicable for monitoring and evaluation purposes in meeting the objectives of the Strategy.

In many cases, there is also no need to supplement the existing data collection system with new or modified questionnaires/questions. In many cases, it would be sufficient if existing data were made available at the necessary granularity, or based on spatial or other disaggregation. In the context of territorial breakdown, it would be desirable if the existing datasets were also made available at the municipal level or the so-called Local Administrative Units (referred to as 'LAU 2' in the statistical register of territorial units). A lower breakdown (e.g. the street level) is not needed and not appropriate with regard to data protection. Data

protection and privacy standards must be taken into account when making existing data available, therefore it is not desirable to make any data of a personal nature available or to make data available at a granularity that would make personal data identifiable. Making the data available at municipal level will allow it to be linked to the Atlas of Roma Communities, thus strengthening the quality of the data needed for systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress in meeting the objectives of the Strategy.

In designing a system in data collection, it is necessary to take into account the **need to monitor the possible intersectionality of disadvantage** of people from MRC. Several theories suggest that each additional disadvantage multiplies the marginalisation of the person concerned. In order to develop responsive public policies, it is therefore necessary to collect and publish data at least disaggregated by gender. Where possible, other types of disadvantages such as the presence of health disadvantage, low levels of education, or other should also be tracked.

Given the potential sensitivity of the collected data, it is necessary that issues related to data collection are approached with the utmost level of responsibility. In defining the principles of data collection, inspiration can be drawn from the recommendations of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights concerning the respect of human rights connected to data collection (OHCHR, 2012). These include the principle of free participation of respondents in data collection; the principle of self-identification of respondents, where the respondent is free to decide whether to reveal certain types of characteristics (data collection must not have a negative impact on the participant); the principle of necessary disaggregation of data, so that the data allows for comparison of the situation of selected groups; the principle of transparency, respect for privacy and accountability in the design, collection, and use of data, so that it cannot be misused.

SETTING INDICATORS

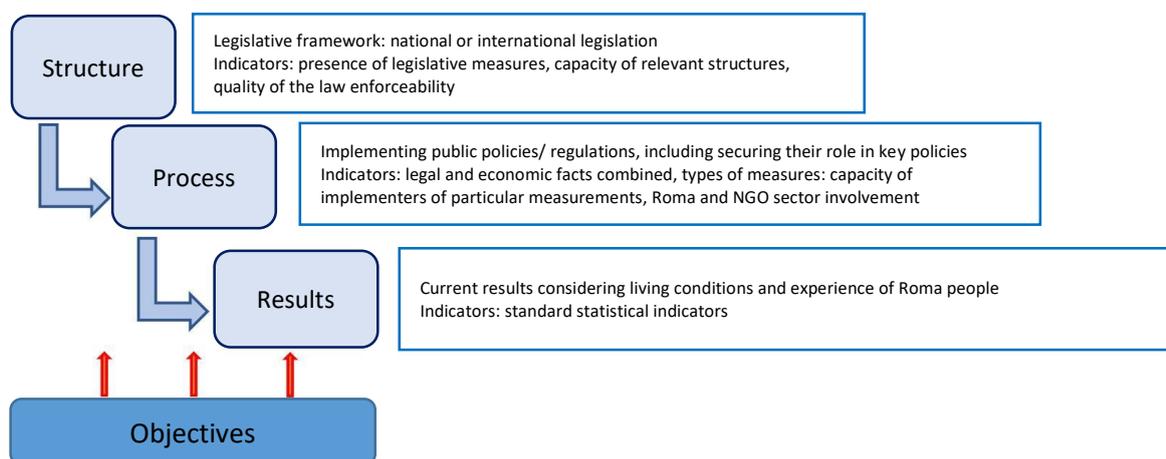
In its documents, the European Commission draws attention to the importance of setting the right indicators against which progress in meeting the objectives of the national strategy is assessed and monitored.

In order to develop a monitoring framework based on comparable, robust and relevant indicators, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), at the initiative of the European Commission, has developed a core framework of indicators on equality, inclusion and participation of Roma. Member States are invited to make priority use of a common framework of indicators on equality, inclusion and participation of Roma when developing the list of indicators through which they will measure progress in the implementation of national strategies. However, this does not prevent them from supplementing the list with indicators that reflect the specific situation of a particular country in relation to differences between Roma and non-Roma populations.

FRA's proposed indicator framework uses the human rights approach recommended by the

United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights in assessing compliance with human rights standards. The model focuses on assessing three fundamental and interrelated aspects of human rights fulfilment, which are:

- the presence of a legal and policy framework (structural indicators)
- the presence of specific measures (process indicators)
- the achievement of results, including the perspective of the persons concerned (outcome indicators)



Graph 1: Graphical representation of the FRA indicator framework, source: FRA (2020)

With the adoption of the European Framework and the National Strategies for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030, the first level of indicators (presence of a legal and policy framework) becomes automatically fulfilled. The common framework of indicators developed by the FRA therefore does not include the level of the so-called structural indicators. However, nothing precludes that if necessary, and of interest to a particular country, these remain monitored and their progress remain reported at national level.

The portfolio of common indicators developed by FRA includes two types of indicators. These are so-called process indicators and outcome indicators.

- Process indicators refer to specific measures and activities (programmes, projects, etc.) used to achieve the objectives of the national strategic framework for Roma integration. The process indicators are measured through data, mainly qualitative data, coming from various sources such as e.g. administrative sources; secondary research (desk research); qualitative research methods such as interviews with experts as well as Roma themselves; consultations with relevant parties such as NGOs, Roma platforms, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights; media monitoring, etc.
- Outcome indicators refer to the measurement of progress towards the achievement of targeted objectives, using mainly statistical and administrative data and/or data collected through surveys. The role of the basic source of the necessary data for determining the baseline and target values of the outcome indicators is currently fulfilled by the EU- MIDIS II carried out by the FRA published in 2017, the Fundamental

Rights Survey carried out by the FRA published in 2020, the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019 carried out by the Office of the Plenipotentiary and the EU SILC_MRK carried out by the Office of the Plenipotentiary in cooperation with the SO SR in 2018 and 2020. These are quantitative data.

When formulating indicators, it is crucial to take into account the availability and existence of relevant data through which progress can be measured. A key condition is that the data should be able to take into account ethnicity and provide sufficiently relevant and robust information on the situation of the Roma or people from the MRC. Given the absence of ethnic data in several areas of the Strategy, it is necessary to establish so-called "proxy" data, where instead of ethnic data, a whole area in which a higher occurrence of members of one of the Strategy's target groups is assumed, is used as a proxy for the indicator. This is usually represented by data of socio-economic character related to a specific territory characterised by a high number of people living in MRC. It is therefore highly likely that if progress is recorded in a particular area in that territory, this will also apply to people from MRC. Another type of proxy may be a particular group of people in a specific situation, e.g. children and students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, recipients of the benefits in material need, etc.

In the context of assessing and monitoring progress towards the Strategy's objectives, it is important to identify baselines and targets that should be met over the specified periods. Setting an indicator without establishing a baseline and target value is of little relevance to the monitoring and evaluation process. It also presents the risk of manipulation in the process of evaluation and monitoring of progress, as it offers the possibility of adapting the baseline and target values to the actual needs.

From this perspective, it is crucial to develop a manual in the form of a guidance document for setting the values of individual indicators of the Strategy and its action plans, including following set of data for each indicator: the unit of measurement; the baseline value; the data source; the definition and calculations methodology; the target values and milestones; as well as the body responsible for collecting the indicator data (Office of Plenipotentiary, 2022).

SUBJECT OF EVALUATION AND MONITORING

In developing an evaluation and monitoring strategy, it is important to know the subject of the evaluation and the basic questions that the evaluation and monitoring process is intended to answer.

The main objective of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030 and the Strategy itself is to promote real equality, effective socio-economic inclusion and a full participation of Roma. Following the recommendations of the European Commission as well as the outputs of the FRA (FRA, 2020), the main focus of the monitoring and evaluation process is to prioritize the measurement of progress towards strengthening equality, inclusion and participation of Roma in relation to four sectoral areas: (i) education, (ii) employment, (iii) health and social services, and (iv) housing and basic

services.

Progress in these areas is assessed and monitored through three horizontal and four sectoral objectives of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030, which are:

Horizontal objectives:

1. To prevent and combat the antigypsyism and discrimination
2. Reducing poverty and social exclusion
3. Promote participation through empowerment, cooperation and trust

Sectoral objectives:

1. Increase equal access to quality inclusive education in the mainstream education
2. Increase equal access to qualitative and long-term employment
3. Improve the health of Roma and increase an equal access to quality healthcare and social services
4. Increase a genuinely equal access to adequate and desegregated housing and basic infrastructure.

Progress towards the above-mentioned objectives will be measured through indicators derived from the common framework of indicators prepared by the FRA as well as through indicators that have been developed at national level and reflect the specificities of the situation in Slovakia.

Ensuring sufficient financial resources and appropriate institutional anchoring, it is essential to progress towards the above-mentioned objectives. Adequate funding and appropriate institutional arrangements are among the structural conditions enabling the successful implementation of the Strategy's objectives. Therefore, the monitoring and evaluation process should also take into account issues related to the amount of the financial allocation, its internal classification (European Structural and investment funds, national resources, municipal budgets, etc.), targeting of funds, capacity of the responsible institutions, and involvement of relevant partners.

In establishing the monitoring and evaluation framework, it is important to distinguish between the methods and purpose of *monitoring* and the methods and purpose of *evaluation*. For the purposes of this document, monitoring is seen as a continuous process, aimed at the regular compilation and publication of data through which a trend in the achievement of individual objectives can be demonstrated. Evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on the process of assessing the contribution of the implementation of the individual activities of the Strategy and their consistency with the stated objectives. Considering the difference between these activities, it is important to choose adequate methods to enable the activities to be achieved. Despite the differences between monitoring and evaluation, they are closely related activities, as the results of monitoring are usually used for the benefit of evaluation and the scope of monitoring is often also determined by the needs of evaluation.

MONITORING PROCESS

The monitoring framework is specifically designed to follow progress towards the achievement of the objectives set at the level of individual measures or activities. It is a continuous process, during which information is evaluated and published regularly. Monitoring focuses primarily on assessing progress in comparison to the outcome and output indicators, with the use of mostly quantitative data.

Monitoring outputs are an essential tool for controlling the achievement of results against the defined targets. An effective monitoring framework has the capacity to highlight shortages and delays in the achievement of defined targets, on the basis of which early corrective actions can be taken.

The national monitoring framework needs to be implemented in a way to ensure linkage with the monitoring framework implemented at European Union level. This is implemented in particular through the so-called common framework of indicators prepared by the FRA in order to monitor progress in the implementation of the national strategies.

A prerequisite for the implementation of an effective monitoring system is the availability of the necessary data and the establishment of standardised tools. The presence of standardised tools guarantees a uniform approach to reporting and interpreting the achievement of the set objectives across the whole implementation structure and throughout the entire monitoring period.

The main result of the unified monitoring structure is the existence of data on the basis of which it will be possible to carry out subsequent evaluations and provide information on the implementation of the Strategy's objectives to the public and relevant institutions both in Slovakia and abroad.

An effective monitoring system requires simplicity, clarity and comprehensibility. The purpose of the monitoring system is not to provide information on the complexity of the problem, the interconnectedness of the different programmes, the extent of structural barriers or the conditionality of the processes in achieving results. The purpose of the monitoring system is to provide unambiguous and up-to-date information of a primarily quantitative nature. Its presentation must be comprehensible even to an individual who is not an expert on the subject.

The source of the data used to illustrate the progress of the monitored measure/activity must also be clear and transparent.

The monitoring obligation emerges from the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (COM/2020/620), which obliges Member States to report on the implementation of the Strategy bi-annually.

Monitoring of the achievements related to the Strategy's objectives in the Slovak Republic

takes the following forms:

1. Annual report on the implementation of the Strategy's Action Plans

Despite the fact that the European Commission sets the periodicity of submission of national reports to a two-year period, in order to increase the involvement of the involved ministries, a progress report on the implementation of the Action Plans of the Strategy in the Slovak Republic is being implemented and will be submitted annually. The annual report is prepared for the needs of the national level, the increased periodicity is intended to benefit the timely provision of corrective measures in cases where the implementation of individual measures and targets is not executed in accordance with the planned timetable.

The annual report is submitted to the members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy as an informative document. The members of that Working Group shall not have the right to comment on its content. The withdrawal of the possibility to comment on the content of the document is conditioned by the need to preserve the authenticity of the information provided by the individual ministries and other partners responsible for meeting the objectives of the Strategy, and mainly to preserve the information provided by the members of the Panel of Expert panel involved in the preparation of the annual report.

The monitoring report is prepared in the form of a standardised monitoring table. The table is designed to provide information on the achievement of each of the five objectives of the Strategy (one horizontal objective and four thematic objectives) in the same structure and the extent. The format of the table is binding for all actors involved. The range of data provided in relation to the fulfilment of each objective includes:

- title of the measure, activity and measurable indicator(s) of the activity
- baseline value of the indicator at the beginning of the strategy/tracked period
- the target and achieved value of the indicator monitored in each year
- source of data through which progress is reported
- the relevance of the activity in the reporting period, i.e. the years in which the activity is reported
- designation of the entity responsible for the implementation of the activity
- description of the activities leading to fulfilment of the objectives
- if relevant, a list of other entities involved in the implementation of the activity under the review, how they are involved and the scope of their tasks
- indication of the reasons and corrective measures if the target value has not been met

- the amount of financial resources allocated
- estimated amount of financial resources invested during the period under the review, split between the European structural and investment funds (hereinafter refers to as “ESIF”), the state budget, and the budget of other entities
- verbal and scored evaluation of the implementation of the activity by the responsible body
- evaluation of implementation by the panel of experts.

The above mentioned information, in addition to the assessment provided by the Panel of Experts, is provided by the ministries responsible for the implementation of specific activities.

In the context of the annual monitoring report, the Office of Plenipotentiary, as the national contact point for the implementation of the Strategy, provides assistance to the individual ministries and other organisations responsible for the implementation of the activities and objectives of the Strategy and its Action Plans, related exclusively to the technical support necessary for the completion of the table. In any case, the Office of Plenipotentiary does not have any competence to intervene in the content and factual accuracy of the information provided by the individual ministries.

The accuracy of the content and relevance of the data is verified by the members of the Panel of Experts. Their task is to oversee the content and relevance of the data provided by the individual ministries and to assess the real impact of the reported programmes/activities on the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy. The reactions of the members of the Panel of Experts to the provided information focus mainly on the interpretation of the data on the implementation of individual activities by the responsible ministries and relevant authorities.

The Panel of Experts plays a key role in relation to the presence of a control mechanism and a mechanism for taking early corrective actions.

The involvement of the Panel of Experts is based on the experience from the past when it was not exceptional for individual ministries and relevant authorities to report activities and financial resources that did not have a real impact on the achievement of individual objectives. The role of the Panel of Experts is to assess, based on their expert opinion, the correctness of the interpretation of the reported measures, and to provide their opinion through a short commentary and the evaluation score of the implementation of the activities, especially when it comes to achieving the individual objectives. The evaluation made by the members of the expert panel will be sent to the bodies responsible for the implementation of the actions, so that they can comment on them or adopt necessary measures if needed. The options for corrective measures in case the activities are not being implemented will be discussed at the Steering Working Group of the Advisory Committee on the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and participation of Roma until 2030 (hereinafter referred to as “Steering

Working Group”).

The final monitoring report will include:

- evidence on the implementation of activities from responsible actors and partners
- external expert opinion
- The Steering Working Group's comments and suggestions for corrective measures

Subsequently, the monitoring report will be submitted to the Government of the Slovak Republic and its content will be presented at a selected committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In case of insufficient fulfilment of the defined objectives, the Government of the Slovak Republic has to oblige the individual ministries and relevant authorities to accelerate the process. After the discussions at the Government of the Slovak Republic, the monitoring report will be presented to the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy.

2. National report on the implementation of the Strategy submitted to the EC

Following the Communication from the Commission (COM/2020/620), the Slovak Republic is obliged to submit a monitoring report to the European Commission on the progress towards achieving the objectives of the Strategy at two-year intervals.

It can be assumed that the EC will provide the Member States with a guidance document on the preparation of the monitoring report well in advance. The document will also include guidance on the expected format and a scope of the monitoring report.

The submission of the monitoring report shall be the responsibility of the Office of Plenipotentiary. Individual ministries, relevant authorities and other partners involved in the implementation of the Strategy's objectives actively cooperate in the preparation of the report. The Annual Reports on the implementation of the Strategy Action Plans are an important source of information for the preparation of the National Reports on the implementation of the Strategy submitted to the EC.

The resultant report will be submitted to the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy for information.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The obligation to devote adequate attention and resources to both evaluation process and monitoring stems from Communication from the Commission (COM/2020/620).

The main objective of the evaluation activities is to assess the quality of the implemented programmes and activities through a thorough analysis and to assess their impact on the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy and, consequently, on the improvement of the

situation of the Roma in the society. An integral part of the evaluation reports is a set of recommendations which can make the management of the processes leading to the successful implementation of the Strategy more effective and can accelerate the realization of the Strategy's objectives. The evaluation process is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods. They serve to process and interpret a wide range of information that serve as the basis for the assessment process.

Following the standards for public policies evaluation, it is appropriate that the executed evaluations focus on assessing the fulfilment of the Strategy objectives taking into account these four main aspects: relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

The relevance aspect examines the relationship of the evaluated measures with the real needs of the target groups, the relationship of the evaluated measures with other policies and measures, or the relationship between the Strategy itself and other strategic documents.

The effectiveness aspect examines issues such as the scope of the measures implemented, the extent to which each objective is met, the appropriateness of the processes adopted to meet the objectives, or the presence and availability of the necessary resources.

The impact aspect examines especially the extent of change that has occurred as a result of the implementation of a particular measure/activity/Strategy. In relation to this aspect, it is appropriate to identify the values that can be considered as a minimum acceptable effect size (so-called MEAS) of change. If the subject of the evaluation is an area that is included in the Strategy with a list of indicators, the minimum threshold may also be determined by the value in relation to a specific indicator.

The sustainability aspect examines the impact of individual measures in the future, either when it comes to the target group or public policies. The availability of resources needed for the eventual continuation of the measure/activity is also examined.

An evaluation that takes into account these four aspects is ideally based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. If the nature of the evaluated intervention allows it (e.g. if the programme is not being implemented on a large scale), it is also appropriate to consider the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods with a control group being present, to better assess the impacts.

Given the political sensitivity of issues related to Roma equality, inclusion and participation, which are often subject of political battles, it is necessary to minimise the risk of 'pseudo-evaluation', i.e. evaluation that serves to achieve political power or political advertising. The evaluation process must not avoid unpopular issues and, if a failed implementation is detected, the results of the evaluation must not be interpreted in a way that the defined objectives have been met. It is therefore important to strive for as much objectivity and transparency as possible in the implemented evaluations.

The risk of a low-quality evaluation process can be minimised by the careful formulation of evaluation objectives and the allocation of sufficient resources (human, financial or time

resources). In order to ensure the most optimal conditions and the most objective evaluation results, each evaluation should be planned and carried out in seven basic steps, while steps 2 - 5 can run in parallel. A graphical representation of this approach is provided below, as well as a brief description of each step.

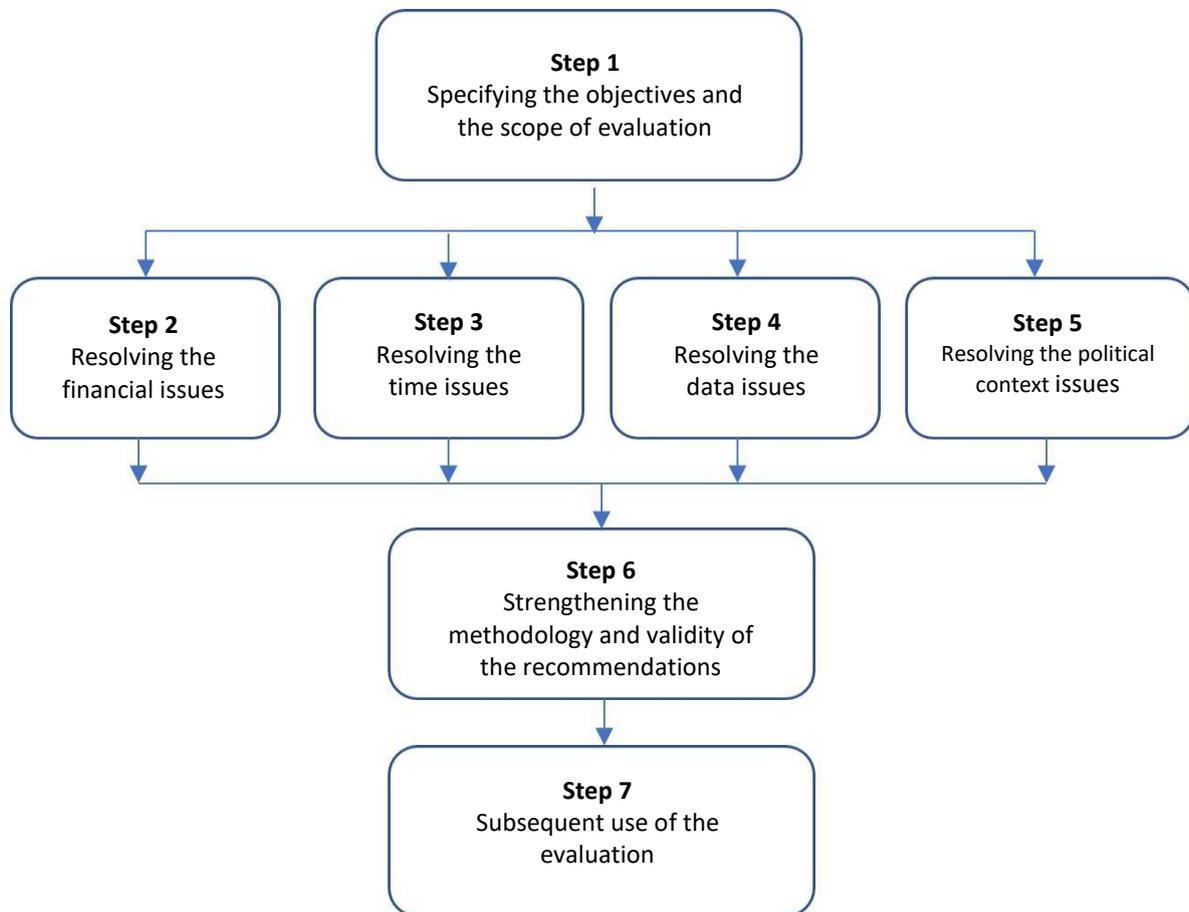


Figure 2: Graphical representation of the planning process for a specific evaluation. Source: Author, based on Bamberger et al. (2006)

1. Step 1: Specifying the objectives and the scope of evaluation

A clear definition of the assignment is a pre-requisite for the specific evaluation to be carried out. On the one hand, it is necessary that the commissioner of the evaluation, in this case the Office of Plenipotentiary, clearly states the main evaluation objectives and identifies the evaluation questions scope. It is also necessary to clearly communicate the determined time and financial framework to carry out the evaluation. On the other hand, the evaluator needs to understand the needs of the commissioning authority and the context of the subject of the evaluation (Strategy/thematic areas/measures, etc.) and to propose appropriate evaluation methods.

2. Steps 2 - 5: Resolving the financial, time and data issues and potential political interests

Lack of time, financial resources and data is a challenge commonly encountered in the

implementation of evaluations. It is therefore necessary to keep the expectations of the evaluation realistic. In the context of financial resources, it is important to choose the evaluation methods that reflect the finances allocated for the implementation of the evaluation. In many cases, the original methodology needs to be re-evaluated, the research sample needs to be reduced if experimental or quasi-experimental methods are used, or the evaluator needs to focus on the secondary or existing data. In the context of time constraints, additionally to the above-mentioned measures, the expansion of the evaluation team should be considered or, alternatively, the preparatory studies could be done by external contractors. Including impact indicators among the indicators whose progress is being tracked in the standard monitoring process can also provide major time savings.

A common challenge is the unavailability or a poor quality of the necessary data. This is particularly the case when the necessary data is not collected or is extremely difficult to collect. In case of data collection, there is a need to ensure that data is collected from relevant respondents and in an adequate manner that consistently applies all ethical standards. In case of the absence of the necessary data, the use of secondary or proxy data should be considered.

The context in which the evaluation is carried out must be considered when carrying out the evaluation. This includes in particular the political reality, the choice of respondents and the persons/institutions involved, so that the choice of respondents itself does not contribute to unbalanced evaluation results.

3. Step 6: Strengthening the methodology and validity of the recommendations

The validity of the recommendations resulting from the evaluation is largely defined by the evaluation methodology. The implementation of steps 2-5 provides a good basis for identifying the risks arising from the use of each method. When preparing an evaluation, it is important to be aware of the risks and to develop a plan to minimise them.

4. Step 7: Subsequent use of the evaluation results

The implementation of an evaluation is particularly meaningful if its results are used to improve other programmes/activities. It is therefore important to consider how the evaluation results and consequent recommendations will be communicated to the subjects concerned. It is also necessary to ensure that both the commissioning authority (most likely the Office of Plenipotentiary in this case) and the evaluator are identified with the formulation of the results. This can be ensured in particular by a continuous communication between the commissioning authority and the contractor, and by regular presentations of preliminary findings.

The evaluation framework adopted by the Slovak Republic should be compatible with the European Union evaluation framework. Analytical working document accompanying the

Communication from the Commission (SWD/2020/530) suggests implementing four basic types of evaluation, namely:

- A report on the EU funds use (to be implemented in 2024 and 2029)
- Shadow evaluation, so called "civil monitor", i.e. evaluation carried out by civil society organisations (a total number of four cycles is proposed to be carried out in 2022, 2024, 2026 and 2028)
- European Commission evaluation report (as in the "civil monitor", a total number of four cycles is proposed to be carried out in 2022, 2024, 2026 and 2028)
- Evaluation in the context of future actions (the implementation of two reports is proposed, the first one in 2024 and the second one in 2030, which should also serve as an ex-post evaluation report).

The evaluation of the Strategy's objectives in the Slovak Republic is therefore carried out in the following forms:

1. External evaluation of the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy

The evaluation of the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy is carried out externally, by independent experts. This approach builds on previous experience where the model of engaging external experts has proven to be a suitable approach to obtain information from a wide range of stakeholders and to offer a complete view of the progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

The evaluation questions mainly concern the progress in meeting the objectives of the Strategy. In addition to evaluating the achievement of the five core objectives of the Strategy (one horizontal objective and four thematic objectives), the external evaluation also assesses the institutional and financial security to achieve the objectives of the Strategy, the implementation of the partnership principle, and the functionality of the processes designed to ensure the achievement of the Strategy's objectives.

The external evaluation of the Strategy's objectives is carried out under the condition of respect for the basic principles, such as proportionality, independence, partnership, and transparency in evaluation.

The evaluation of individual measures/activities through which the objectives of the Strategy are met, are assessed in terms of relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability (see more information above).

The results of ongoing monitoring and other surveys carried out in the context of the monitoring process provide the basic source of data needed for the evaluation. These are triangulated through data collected via qualitative evaluation methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, observation, etc.

The external evaluation is carried out in three cycles – in 2025, 2028 and 2031. The last

of the evaluation series serves also as an ex-post evaluation of the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy.

The evaluation findings can be consulted with various experts during seminars organised for this purpose. The selection of the participants of the event is carried out in cooperation between the Office of Plenipotentiary, as the commissioning authority, and the evaluator.

After incorporating the comments from the experts present at the seminar, the evaluation report is submitted to the Government of the Slovak Republic as well as to the members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy. The results of the evaluation are also presented to a selected committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

In order to execute the external evaluation, it is important to provide adequate resources and conditions, where the evaluation can be carried out to high standards of independence and expertise.

2. Impact assessments in the thematic areas of the Strategy

The aim of impact assessments is to better understand the context of the execution of sectoral policies (preferably those that are mainstream) and their impact on the achievement of the Strategy's objectives.

The execution of the impact assessments is primarily based on quantitative evaluation methods, with an emphasis on the use of experimental and quasi- experimental methods. Qualitative methods are mainly used to triangulate and better interpret the findings.

Given that these assessments apply to certain thematic areas, it is also appropriate to illustrate the situations through case studies on the topic.

The subject of the impact assessments are specific, mainly mainstream measures/public policies in the given thematic areas of the Strategy. The assessment should therefore consider the intervention logic of the measure/public policy that is being evaluated.

In order to increase the validity of the findings and recommendations, they are consulted with the expert community during a dedicated event (seminar). The experts involved have the opportunity to comment on the individual findings and recommendations.

The process of conducting the impact assessments is shown in the chart below.

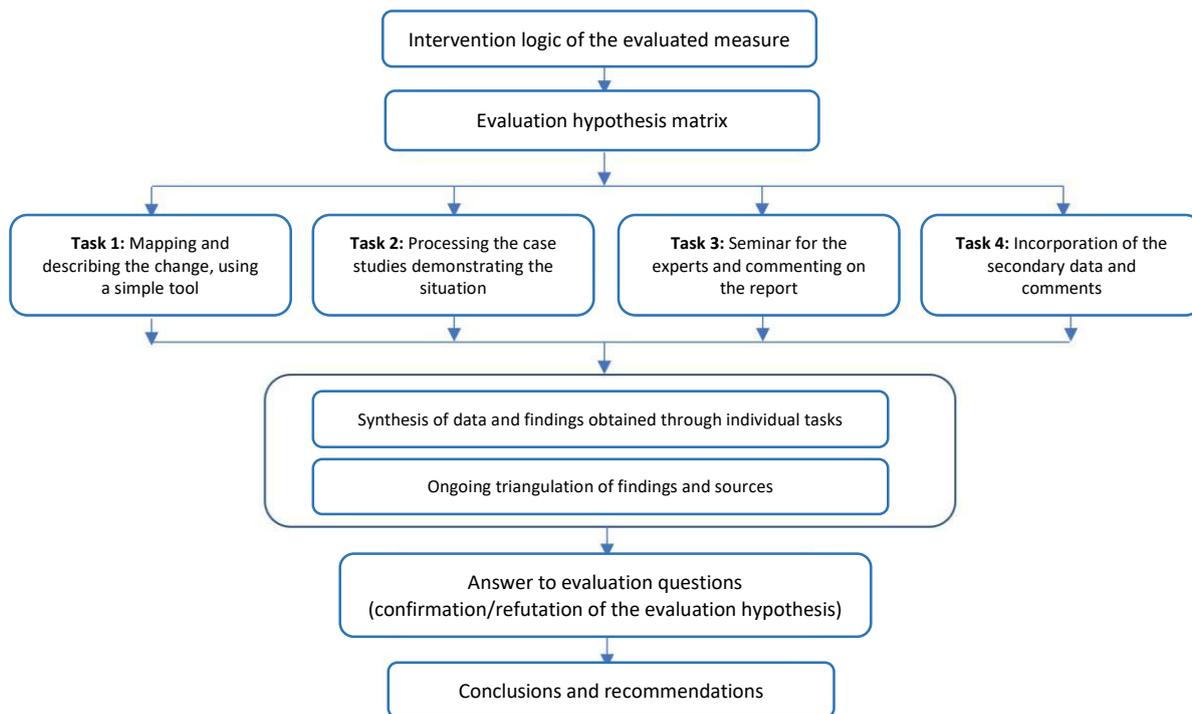


Figure 3: Graphical representation of the impact assessment process. Source: Author

The impact assessments are conducted by external evaluators experienced in performing both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods.

Given the possible use of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation methods, which are time-consuming to implement, it is necessary to start the implementation of individual evaluations early enough and to provide sufficient space and resources to carry out such evaluations.

By 2030, at least one impact assessment will have been carried out in each of the thematic priorities of the Strategy (5 in total) and at least two impact assessments will have been carried out to examine the complementarity of individual activities. All impact assessments need to take into account the impact of the horizontal priority of the Strategy.

The members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy will be informed about the implementation and results of the individual evaluations. The findings of each evaluation will serve as a source of arguments in favour of more inclusive public policy making.

3. Case studies on examples of good practice in selected topics

Sharing examples of good practice has the potential to effectively popularise the progress in meeting the Strategy's objectives among the experts and general public.

Presentation of the progress in meeting the objectives of the Strategy in a narrative way can also play an important educational and informative role and can become an

important source of information and inspiration for individual actors involved in the implementation of the Strategy, both at national, international, and local level.

In order to share the examples of good practice with the public to fulfil the above mentioned functions, it is necessary that the achieved change is described in detail and the sequence of individual steps, their interconnection, the role of the individual actors involved in the implementation of the activity, the resources needed to implement the activities and achieve the change, and activities related to the maintenance and enhancement of the achieved result are indicated.

Examples of good practice can be processed through a so-called critical ethnography approach (which focuses on the examination of structures and relationships in order to reveal and overcome inequalities and superiority) and hermeneutic interpretation (which focuses on understanding the context in human oration, taking into account the relationships between the actors involved).

Understanding the context of a given example is absolutely crucial for the elaboration of a case study on a good practice. In addition to the presence of appropriate public policies and the availability of resources, making progress in terms of the integration and participation of people from an MRC background is to a large extent conditioned by the local context, in which a particular group of people is located (this includes the historical context, relationships, size of the group, the socio-economic context, etc.). Experts with anthropological research experience should therefore be entrusted with the preparation of the case studies.

The minimum number of published case studies presenting a good practice is set at three in each of the thematic areas of the Strategy. In total, a minimum of 15 such case studies will be published from 2024 onwards, with an indicative number of 2-3 case studies per year.

In order to raise awareness about good practice, the production of short informational videos that would be used for communication and promotional purposes of the identified examples of a good practice could be considered.

In order to avoid processing examples of good practice that may be controversial or may become a demonstration of power, the selection of good practice examples must be made on the basis of the expert opinion of at least three members of the Panel of Experts (see above for more information on the Panel of Experts). Suggestions for examples of good practice can be collected in various ways, such as a public call for proposals, suggestions from the staff of the Office of the Plenipotentiary, relevant ministries and authorities, experts, or from the general public.

Members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy are informed about the selected examples of good practice.

4. Evaluation of the ESIF impact on the objectives of the Strategy

ESIF represent the main source of the funding needed to achieve the objectives of the Strategy. It is therefore necessary to measure their impact on the successful implementation of the Strategy.

In addition to assessing the results of the actual use of ESIF funds supporting the integration of the MRC and the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives, it is also necessary to assess the processes of ESIF use in the context of the implementation of individual programmes.

The outcome evaluation of the actual use of ESIF funds focuses on quantifying the amount of funding that has been allocated, contracted, and actually spent in favour of the integration of the MRC and the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy. The findings are based on ITMS¹ data triangulated through a review of projects supporting the fulfilment of objectives of the Strategy. The link between the implemented projects and the objectives of the Strategy will be verified through a field research carried out on a sample of selected projects, in addition to secondary research on all reported projects (through a summary of information on each of the implemented projects published in the ITMS).

The information obtained through the field research applying qualitative methods such as interviews and observation will also serve as the basis for the second part of the evaluation, which is the evaluation of the processes in the use of ESIF funds. The aim of the process evaluation is to identify the obstacles, which from the point of view of the beneficiaries of financial assistance slow down or completely prevent an efficient process of spending the funds.

The nature of evaluation requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative ones focus mainly on the analytical processing of secondary data, while the qualitative methods assess the situation in terms of the impact of resources on improving the situation and assessing the effectiveness of individual processes.

The evaluation of the impact of the ESIF on the objectives of the Strategy will be carried out twice. The first evaluation is scheduled for 2025 and the second for 2029. The evaluation carried out in 2025 is considered to be a "mid-term" evaluation of the programming period 2021-2027. The second evaluation, carried out in 2029, is considered to be an ex-post evaluation. The timing of the evaluations reflects the curve of the ESIF funds usage (the "mid-term" evaluation is therefore postponed from 2024 to 2025) as well as the N+3 principle in the use of ESIF funds which, despite the closure of the programming period in 2027 allows spending the funds until 2030. The timing

¹ ITMS is a central information system used to record, process, export and monitor data on programming, project and financial management of ESIF projects.

of the evaluations largely reflects the timing of the reports on the use of EU funds implemented at the European level, which are scheduled to be implemented in 2024 and 2029.

The evaluation is carried out by external experts with the expertise in the implementation of ESIF in relation to the integration of marginalised groups.

The results of the evaluation, as is the case of all other types of evaluation proposed, are subject to expert opinions, whose comments are taken into account in the final report.

Both reports are submitted to the members of the Working Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy. The reports are submitted to the Government of the Slovak Republic, which, if necessary, will oblige the individual ministries to take corrective measures. The content of the final reports is also presented to a selected committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

DISSEMINATION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION FINDINGS

In order to ensure the highest level of transparency in the implementation of the Strategy's objectives, all findings from the monitoring and evaluation process will be publicly available through the website of the Office of Plenipotentiary.

The individual outputs of the monitoring and evaluation processes will be reported to the Working Group for the Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation, whose members will either accept the individual outputs or only take note of them. Some of the outputs will also be submitted to the meeting of the Government of the Slovak Republic and/or to the meeting of the selected committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The specific procedure regarding the individual outputs is described in the previous parts of this document.

The individual outputs will be published on the website of the Office of Plenipotentiary (or via a separate web application linked to the website of the Office of Plenipotentiary). Ideally, the monitoring and evaluation outputs as well as the data related to ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy would be accessible in virtual space through a separate web application linked to the website of the Office of Plenipotentiary. The use of such solutions offers an opportunity to increase the transparency and accessibility of the monitoring and evaluation process, to better track progress in individual areas as well as to display progress in various interactive forms (displayed in tables and graphs, tracking of selected indicators, etc.). Publishing the information through web applications is becoming a standard in relation to the dissemination of information on the fulfilment of public policy objectives and fully reflects the principles of the so-called "open governance" and "open data", to which the Slovak Republic adheres.

In the context of gaining support for the implementation of the Strategy from the general public, especially in the area of the horizontal theme of the Strategy (Roma equality, inclusion

and participation), it is important to focus on disseminating the information also towards the general public. This can be achieved through a well-thought-out and systematically implemented communication plan, which includes cooperation with the media, organisation of educational and informational events for journalists, active presence on social networks and regular and comprehensible publication of information on examples of good practice through which the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy can be illustrated.

NECESSARY RESOURCES

For a quality and systematic evaluation and monitoring of the progress towards achieving the Strategy's objectives, the necessary financial and human resources need to be secured. Otherwise, monitoring and evaluation would not be possible; thus, the commitments towards the EC will be violated and the opportunity to improve the implementation of public policies in the areas of the thematic and horizontal priorities of the Strategy will remain untapped.

In terms of staff resources, there is a need to focus on building the internal professional capacities of the Office of Plenipotentiary and strengthening their analytical skills in the area of monitoring and evaluation of public policies. Conditions need to be created to minimise the turnover rate of the professional staff of the Office of Plenipotentiary, to build the institutional memory of the organisation and to make the Office of Plenipotentiary an attractive employer even for highly qualified individuals.

The support for the internal staff capacity of the Office of Plenipotentiary is closely linked to the availability of financial resources. Given the limited possibilities of the state budget, it is possible to repeat the model implemented in the past, when the financial resources needed to ensure the monitoring and evaluation process were provided through the so-called national project co-financed by the ESF through the Human Resources Operational Programme. It is a project called "Monitoring and Evaluation of Inclusive Policies and their Impact on Marginalised Roma Communities" implemented in 2016-2023 with a budget of 3.1 million EUR. The aim of the project was to ensure comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the living conditions of the MRC through the collection of statistical and other data and information.

In order to ensure the continuity of monitoring and evaluation processes, it is necessary to secure the implementation of the second generation of the above-mentioned national project also through its inclusion in the strategic documents related to the next programming period.

Given the time limits in the process of obtaining financial support co-funded by the ESIF funds, it is also necessary to start the preparation of the new national project immediately after the adoption and publication of the process of approval and financing for national projects co-financed by the ESIF.

The proposed process of monitoring and evaluation in the fulfilment of the objectives of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 envisages an expansion of the implemented activities compared to the previous period, therefore the budget of the

new national project needs to be increased in comparison with the previous one. The minimum scope of activities to be taken into account in the budget of the new national project includes the costs of:

- strengthening the internal staff capacity of the Office of Plenipotentiary in the field of monitoring and evaluation
- providing the external staff capacity of the Office of Plenipotentiary in the field of monitoring and evaluation
- updating the Atlas of Roma Communities
- three cycles of the EU SILC_MRK Living Conditions and Income Survey
- a continuous monitoring process and publication of annual monitoring reports
- strengthening cooperation with government authorities involved in data collection and auditing existing data in terms of meeting the objectives of the Strategy
- three cycles of external evaluation of the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives
- seven impact assessments in the context of implementing the thematic and horizontal objectives of the Strategy
- identification and compilation of at least 15 examples of good practice in the form of case studies
- two evaluation cycles of the ESIF impact on the Strategy's objectives
- creation and operation of a web application to monitor the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives
- implementation of a systematic communication with the general public on the progress towards the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives

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