

Council of Europe Secretariat
Directorate of Internal Oversight



Evaluation (2012)8

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**REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP
AGREEMENT AND CO-OPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN
ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM**

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -

Background

1. The review is intended to assist the CoE and its member states in three ways:
 - a) Assessing implementation of the *Partnership Agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Roma and Travellers Forum* (ERTF);
 - b) Examining ways of ensuring as needed that the aims of the ERTF are met as defined in the *Guidelines for the Establishment of the European Roma and Travellers Forum*; and
 - c) Providing suggestions designed to attain gradually the financial self-sufficiency of the ERTF.
2. Conducted by two external evaluators, the review was organised around three principal themes: representation/governance, sustainability and contribution to the work of the CoE.

Conclusions and key issues

General

3. Unclear role of Forum. There are different understandings within the Forum and within the Council of Europe about the role the Forum should and could fulfil, with possibilities mentioned by stakeholders including lobbying and advocacy; acting as a project implementing agency; developing national NGO networks; raising awareness of CoE legal instruments; conducting primary research; serving as a clearinghouse on Roma and providing technical assistance.
4. Unsatisfactory cooperation and results of the Forum. There seems to be a broad consensus that the Forum in its present composition and mode of working as well as results achieved so far is unsatisfactory.
5. Lack of information about the Forum's activities. Documentation of activities undertaken under the auspices of the Forum is generally insufficient, and the Forum lacks a strategy which could serve as a basis for fundraising as well as for planning concrete activities.
6. Low levels of trust. Whereas some stakeholders within the CoE question the legitimacy of the Forum as constituted to date, this lack of trust prevents the two organisations from cooperating effectively.
7. Importance of a Forum for Roma at European level. The very existence of the Forum is viewed as a success by many CoE and external stakeholders, as are the Forum's achievements to date in bringing together different fractions of Roma communities.

Governance and representation

8. Ineffective governance structures. The governance structures of the ERTF are in need of improvement in order to make the Forum more responsive to its constituents.
9. Underrepresentation of women and youth. The ERTF Statute's calls for gender and generation balance have not been implemented so far.
10. Creation and role of umbrella organisations. Overall, the creation and functioning of national umbrella organisations have not taken place as foreseen at the establishment of the Forum.

11. Relations between the ERTF and umbrella organisations. The lack of clarity in relation to the overall role of the Forum is reflected in a lack of clarity concerning relations between the Forum and the umbrella organisations beyond election and representation at the Plenary Assembly.
12. Elections to the Plenary Assembly. The formation of some umbrella organisations and the processes resulting in the election of some of the delegates have lacked transparency and raised questions about the Forum's representativeness.
13. Overly complex rules of procedures. Although clearly designed to ensure the representativeness of the ERTF, the Rules of Procedure provide little guidance on working relationships among the Forum's various entities.

Sustainability

14. Absence of an overview of funding sources. Data on financial and in-kind contributions are not readily available but must be collected from different sources.
15. Lack of funding strategy. The ERTF does not have a coherent funding strategy, and there is a lack of common understanding between the CoE and the ERTF with respect to the nature of the CoE's financial contribution to the Forum.
16. Creation of an enabling environment by the CoE. The stipulation of the Partnership Agreement that "the Council of Europe shall not provide meeting rooms, interpretation, translation or mailing facilities for activities of the Forum unrelated to its relations with the Council of Europe" makes the search for potential fundraising and cooperation initiatives unnecessarily difficult.
17. Pursuing synergies with umbrella organisations. In many countries minority organisations in general and Roma organisations in particular rarely benefit from larger funding streams because of the large amounts of funding involved relative to the absorption capacity of the NGOs. The Forum and national umbrella organisations could complement each other in this respect.

ERTF contribution to Council of Europe work

18. Unclear working relations. The lack of clarity on the Forum's status relative to the CoE as a whole complicates day-to-day relations between the Forum and bodies of the CoE, between the Forum and stakeholders outside the CoE and among individual staff members working for the Forum and the CoE.
19. Disagreements on the Forum's contribution to the CoE. Doubts on the part of many stakeholders outside the Forum about the added value provided by the Forum to the work of the CoE appear to be based on the Forum's communication style and the relatively small number of publicly available written outputs produced by the Forum.
20. Staffing the ERTF Secretariat. Chronic understaffing of the Forum Secretariat goes far in explaining the discontent expressed by some stakeholders within the CoE about the participation of the Forum in the work of CoE bodies, also grounding complaints from within the Forum that the CoE has not followed through on its commitments to the Forum.

Recommendations

To the Council of Europe

21. Stabilise the presence of the ERTF in Strasbourg by providing the Forum Secretariat with all staff foreseen in the Partnership Agreement, as well as with access to CoE facilities for development and implementation of the Forum's funding strategy.
22. Ensure regular consultation between the CoE and the ERTF by requiring relevant CoE bodies to consult the Forum on issues affecting Roma in CoE member states.

To the European Roma and Travellers Forum

23. Develop an accountability framework appropriate to the Forum's non-governmental status, possibly drawing and building on existing international civil society initiatives such as the Global Accountability Project.
24. Ensure that women are equitably represented in the Forum by applying existing provisions of the State and Rules of Procedure, assessing available pathways to balanced gender representation, and developing and implementing an action plan for this purpose.
25. Bring a new generation of young Roma into the Forum by assessing available pathways to a generation balance and developing and implementing an action plan to this end.
26. Rework the Rules of Procedure to reflect the Forum's status as an international non-governmental organisation, giving consideration to reducing the size of and redesigning the election process for the Plenary Assembly.
27. Increase the Forum's visibility within and outside the CoE by drafting a strategy for broad dissemination, generating quarterly work plans based on the strategy and regularly disseminating reports on Forum activities.
28. Develop a realistic funding strategy aiming for a diverse portfolio of donors and income streams as an integral part of a broader organisational strategy.
29. Develop cooperation with selected umbrella organisations, drawing explicitly on the expertise of Forum members in pursuing joint initiatives including but not limited to seeking relevant funding opportunities.
30. Rethink the role of the Advisory Committee, forming instead thematic or project-based working groups comprised of Forum members with relevant expertise.

To the Council of Europe and the European Roma and Travellers Forum

31. Promote the Forum's continued growth into fulfilling its role of providing a voice for Roma at European level, taking into account ERTF's Accord of Intention of 3 August 2012.
32. Clarify the role of the ERTF relative to the CoE and in general through a collaborative process between the two organisations.

33. Build trust through routine cooperation by generating a set of fundamental rules for the day-to-day operations of the Forum, scheduling regular meetings between the ERTF and relevant CoE bodies and reporting on a quarterly basis on implementation of the recommendations of this review.

To the Member States of the Council of Europe

34. Support follow-up on the review process by making available needed material and human resources.