

**Programme for Return and Counselling Assistance to
Asylum Seekers from Czech Republic, Romania and
Slovakia, currently living in Belgium, Finland and The
Netherlands**

External Evaluation Report

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Introduction

The evaluation of the RCA programme was carried out during the month of January 2001. In co-ordination with IOM Brussels a plan of action for the evaluation was developed.

It was decided to conduct trips to Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia between January 10 and 20. Interviews of returnees were conducted in the presence and with the translation help of the IOM offices. A meeting with IOM The Hague was held in Brussels. Several meetings were held with IOM Brussels throughout the evaluation period.

The evaluation was carried out by Mr. Eckart von Malsen, German lawyer and independent Consultant, advising governments and international organisations on human rights and minority issues and the EU legislative process.

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Brussels, 31 January 2000

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1. Executive Summary

The programme Return and Counselling Assistance of Asylum Seekers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania currently living in Belgium, Finland and The Netherlands has been implemented by the International Organisation for Migration, IOM in seven countries. Its overall objective is to contribute to the provision of more durable voluntary return options available to potential returnees in host countries, while helping to stem the continuous outflow of migrating families in sending countries.

The programme can be qualified as very successful. For the first time, seven countries collaborated to tackle the issue of migration. With IOM, they found a very competent partner to implement this intergovernmental approach. With less than 1000 Euro per person repatriated, the costs were very low compared to other repatriation projects. Nonetheless, the quality of the work performed by IOM and its implementing partners is high.

The pre departure activities in the host countries have improved the existing counselling process for rejected asylum seekers.

Most of the returns took place to Slovakia, some to the Czech Republic and only few to Romania. In all countries of origin, successful capacity building measures have been implemented, that laid the foundation for higher number of returnees in the future.

At this stage, it is hard to judge, whether the return movements are durable. The conditions in the country of origin are only changing at slow pace and continue to be a push factor, where repetitive migration movements are seen as the only solution to improve the overall situation of many families.

Collaboration with NGOs in the countries of origin was good, they were involved as training partners and received training themselves.

Governments in the countries of origin generally appreciated the programme and its capacity building measures. A number of governmental orders have been triggered by the programme for the facilitation of the integration of returnees in the sectors of housing, employment and social security.

Synergies have been produced with other internationally financed programmes, the European Commission should generally intensify efforts to co-ordinate the PHARE programme with returnee programmes such as the RCA.

The following recommendations are made:

- Governments in the countries of origin, with the support of the EU Member States, have to more intensely tackle the root causes of migration by eliminating discrimination and supporting community development
- The RCA programme should be continued for another two to five years, the number of host countries and countries of origin participating should be increased
- “Portes paroles” should be identified amongst the returnees in the countries of origin with successful reintegration stories and present the programmes benefits in reception centres of the host countries
- A mapping of all development projects should be undertaken in the countries of origin, this information should be shared and updated regularly with the staff performing the pre-departure counselling, thus giving more incitements for return
- The development of Roma community houses should be supported financially, Hungary being a good example for their essential role of community life and potential one stop shop address for returnees
- Returnees should be offered financial training and small scale vocational training projects
- Follow up mechanisms could be more systematised, funds should be made available for legal assistance to individual cases in merit
- IOM should offer its good offices to seek additional funding for community development projects from the private sector
- A Microsoft Access database should be established enabling IOM to define needs and donors to plan future policies
- Governments in host countries should consider a higher number of bilateral labour agreements as the most effective measure to prevent illegal migration movements and abuse of the asylum procedure. *Close the back door and open the front door a little bit more*

2. Means and Costs

According to the second version of the IOM budget for the RCA programme, the overall budget was Euro 1 280 531. (The total expenditure was not available at the drafting of this evaluation report). The project was co funded by the European Commission under the European Refugee Fund and the EU co financing represents 61,9 % or 792 648 Euro. The governments of Belgium, The Netherlands and Finland have contributed 28,1%. Additionally, the Belgian government has financed the sub office in Kosice that was opened because of a high number of return movements to this area.

3. Organisation and Management

General Management

Central Co-ordination in Brussels

The programme was centrally managed in Brussels by a Programme Co-ordinator, supported by Administrative and Financial staff. The Co-ordinator undertook several missions to the countries of origin and was in permanent contact with the Technical Assistance Office for the European Refugee Fund, the Commission and the donor countries. She intervened with the authorities if necessary. This co-ordination was performed in a highly professional manner.

Regional Co-ordination

The capacity building measures were regionally co-ordinated. In the beginning, IOM Prague was tasked to do this, later, due to internal reasons, the co-ordination was shifted to IOM Budapest. There are valid internal reasons for such a regional co-ordination. The central Co-ordinator is relieved from administrative tasks e.g. the overlooking of meeting of deadlines. Additionally, with only half of the relatively low staff costs of IOM Budapest, this co-ordination delegation is cost efficient.

Co-ordination amongst IOM offices

The project was a pilot project, also for IOM with the involvement of seven IOM offices. Three co-ordination meetings took place, two in Brussels and one in Bratislava. As far as the returnee movements are concerned, there were slight initial difficulties, insufficient information was transferred from IOM in the host countries to the IOM offices in the countries of origin. After the development of a pre-departure questionnaire, this flux of information was significantly improved, while often some data from the questionnaires was regularly not provided, this was due essentially to the reluctance of the returnees to disclose information.

Staffing of the IOM missions

In host countries, the staff already involved in the « traditional » return programmes, such as REAB and REAN was implementing the programme. The staff's long-term expertise was useful to assure a smooth running. In the countries of origin, new staff was recruited for the programme. The staff recruited is of high level, with background from the academic or the NGO sector and with long term experience in Roma issues.

Thus, no particular training was necessary for IOM staff members, a cost saving factor.

Liaison with EC and Donor Countries

Donor Countries were represented in the national steering committees. The European Commission participated in the first and last meeting of the Belgian steering committee. Thus a constant exchange of information was assured to take place and fine-tuning of the programme implementation in accordance with the donors was possible.

4. Efficiency

The Capacity Building measures

The capacity building measures were implemented at a total cost of 145 614 Euro. If one looks at the outcome of these measures, this is a relatively small amount. In all countries of implementation there was a high consciousness for cost efficiency and a high degree of accountability supported by the transparent IOM accounting rules. The research studies were commissioned at an overall reasonable financial level. Many of the activities implemented were carried out under the goal of saving expenses, for example often contacts established were used for the free provision of training locations. The relatively low amount of money spent on capacity building measures was also possible with the still prevailing general low level of prices, especially in Romania and Slovakia.

The pre departure activities in the host countries

In the host countries, the Social workers from either the state or the NGO sector implemented the pre-departure counselling activities, often added to existing and long term experienced counselling work of rejected asylum seekers. No new mechanisms had to be established, a lot of synergies were produced.

The Returnee Movements

IOM is the expert to organise returnee movements. The IOM offices in the host countries were already implementing returnee movements for rejected asylum seekers on behalf of the governments (REAB, REAN). Access to preferential tariffs for air tickets as well as good relationships with airport and customs authorities were used for this programme. In the countries of origin, these relationships were established during the project. Fine-tuning was necessary for returns to the Kosice area with initial arrivals late in the evening, causing difficulties for families with children and additional overnights costs.

Thus, the returnee movements of 1235 persons in excess of the targeted 780 were performed at a highly efficient degree and in a very professional manner.

5. Effectiveness: Has the RCA programme reached its expected results?

Implementation, Analysis and Recommendations

Result No 1: Establishment of a comprehensive database of the profiles of potential returnees to be handed over to the project partners at the end of the project.

Implementation

IOM has collected information on each returnee during the pre departure counselling in the host country and through the filling of the pre departure questionnaire. This information was transmitted to the country of origin, where it was entered into Microsoft Excel worksheets. The countries of origin have constantly updated these worksheets after arrival of the returnees and after follow up activities and visits conducted.

Comprehensive databases were established in Slovakia and Czech Republic. In Romania, no database could be established as no or little information was transmitted by the host countries prior to return due to a reluctance of returnees to give the information. Out of the 63 persons who returned to Romania, only 16 were assisted after return with transport, all of these refused to have further follow up contact with IOM in the future.

The initial plan to establish a comprehensive database to be shared with project partners has met fierce opposition from Roma organisations. This caused IOM to change these plans and to replace the database by a Website about the programme containing general statistics on the returnees that will be accessible to everyone, while safeguarding the confidentiality of the individual information.

Analysis and Recommendation

Collecting information on returnees is generally a very sensitive issue and creates mistrust amongst the target population, traditionally opposed to any form of official registration. Nonetheless, coherent figures are essential for a programme as the RCA.

IOM's decision to establish a website that will not only be accessible to governments but also to returnees contributes to the transparency of the programme. Ideally the website should contain a Forum to enable stakeholders involved to share information and best practices examples.

The databases established in Slovakia and the Czech Republic are a solid basis for follow up work and contain a maximum of the information available. It will be essentially the task of the IOM missions in the host countries to improve information gathering on Romanian returnees.

In the long term, one should look at the establishment of a global database in the format of Microsoft Access. This would facilitate the analysis of activities conducted, identification of particular needs and help to define and plan future activities.

Result No. 2: An improved cross-national network established with project partners to ensure the timely exchange of information concerning return and reinstallation facilities.

Implementation

In each of the seven countries, a network has been established with project partners such as national ministries, local administrations, local NGOs and representatives of the target population. Thanks to modern information and communication facilities, information concerning return and reinstallation facilities was timely exchanged. This information was compiled in brochures, shared with the returnees.

Analysis and Recommendation

The national networks established can be qualified as comprehensive and sustainable. Apart from temporary misunderstandings with the government in the Czech Republic, IOM's relations with all governments were good. So was the selection of the partners in the NGO sector and the way of dealing with them.

IOM's handling of the often sensitive issues especially for government authorities in the countries of origin, currently under large public scrutiny for minority issues can be qualified as sensible and professional. It is absolutely essential that this good networking of IOM continues so that the common working basis established is strengthened and prepared to deal with higher numbers of returnees, meaning potentially more areas and cases of intervention.

Result No. 3: Mechanism established to ensure constant improvement of IOM counselling process in host countries with continuous gathering of information and incorporation of feedback

Implementation

The RCA programme can be seen as a layer put on the existing return schemes such as REAB and REAN by offering additional assistance after return. The component of returnee assistance after arrival definitely improved the counselling process in the host countries, as more could be "offered" and more people convinced to participate.

Essential tool for the improvement of the pre departure counselling were the leaflets and the questionnaire. There was some misunderstanding with the questionnaire's Part No 3 on housing. Returnees from The Netherlands to the Czech Republic claimed that they were promised housing upon return. As a reaction, IOM The Hague, advised their Social Workers to be very clear and concise in their messages and not to raise false expectations.

Analysis and recommendations

As far as the counselling process in host countries is concerned it is very important to bear in mind that the RCA programme does not and should not provide essential advantages to returnees as compared to the population that does not migrate. This would only further encourage migration movements and be counterproductive to any preventive efforts.

The counselling process is a very delicate one, on the one hand side it shall advertise the RCA programme and have the effect to increase the numbers of returnees and enable people to take informed migration decisions. On the other side the staff counselling has to bear in mind that no false expectations are raised. Returnees with less bona fide than others will continue to allege that they have been promised more, in order to justify their return at home.

It is recommended to improve the counselling process insofar that it should be provided everywhere in the language of the applicant, either directly or translated. Each applicant should be assisted in his native language when filling the pre departure questionnaire. Good example was the Slovak native that performed the pre-departure counselling in Gand, Belgium. Thus, complete data could be transmitted, essential for IOM in the receiving countries to plan reintegration.

Furthermore, IOM staff and partners in the host countries should be regularly kept updated on general community development projects in the countries of origin. IOM missions in these countries should send regular update sheets to their colleagues. It is then left upon the skilled counselling worker to brief the returnee candidate about projects in the area of planned return while avoiding the raising of false expectations.

Result No. 4: The return of 780 Czech, Romanian and Slovak asylum seekers currently living in Belgium, Finland and The Netherlands

Implementation

With a return figure of 1235 repatriated with the RCA programme the target of 780 was clearly met and exceeded by 60 %

Analysis and recommendation:

81 % of the return movements took place to one country, Slovakia. The existing repatriation schemes saw an increase of Slovak returnees in the year 2000 by 400 % in Belgium (REAB) and by 50 % in The Netherlands (REAN) as compared to 1999. Bearing in mind that a variety of factors determine these figures, one can certainly conclude that the RCA programme has encouraged returns to Slovakia.

As a precautionary measure, the Dutch government has conditioned the participation in the 2001 RCA programme (if approved by other donors) on an asylum application introduced before January 1, 2001.

Returns to the Czech Republic and Romania were relatively low. One of the factors for these figures is certainly the continuing existence of push factors in these countries and the slow improvement of the general conditions.

The capacity building measures as implemented by IOM Czech Republic and Romania have laid the ground to encourage higher numbers to participate in a future continued RCA programme.

Result No. 5: A minimum of 150 returnees with appropriate profiles matched with opportunities for assistance, i.e. professional training, social, educational and job orientation schemes and counselling

Implementation

No exact figures are available at this stage on how many returnees have received direct assistance. In Romania, out of the 16 persons met upon arrival, only one person wished to be further assisted. In the Czech Republic, an estimated 50 returnees were provided with support and advice beyond the mere travel assistance. In Slovakia, three meetings were organised for returnees with Social workers and representatives from Roma NGOs. 160 persons participated in these activities. Intensive follow-up work on individual cases was performed in Slovakia.

In all countries, an additional, not calculated number of persons has been provided with counselling, so that the target of 150 persons has been exceeded by far. In Romania, mechanisms for the counselling process have been put in place.

Analysis and Recommendation

Housing keeps being a major problem in the Czech Republic for the target group, as it is unemployment in Slovakia and the two together in Romania. IOM cannot and should not provide assistance other than assuring access to the general services that the state is providing to the population. This assistance still is very limited by financial constraints of the governments and by very tight labour markets, on which the target population continues to be vulnerable.

The current form of assistance should be continued, follow up activities could sometimes be more systematised. (see recommendations, page 24)

Furthermore, special vocational training for vulnerable groups such as women could be envisaged. Again, this training should target and be open for the whole population, a singling out of returnees would have disintegrative and pushing effects.

Result No. 6: A report per country defining the root causes for migration, and the most important needs for addressing the problem, existing structures for assisting returnees in place in each country, list of institutions that can play a positive role for reintegration of returnees

Implementation:

Four research studies have been commissioned by the IOM offices Budapest, Bucharest, Bratislava and Prague. A fifth small study providing synthesis and conclusions is still to be implemented. In the host countries, a study on the profile of the asylum seekers was produced. The studies were distributed during the capacity building event for journalists from CEEC that took place in Brussels on January 29-30.

Analysis and Recommendation

All studies are of satisfactory quality. They have been produced under time pressure and at low costs. They constitute a key tool for the programme both internally and externally. The national plans of action for the capacity building were drafted, taking into account the findings of the studies.

The studies also externally shaped the programme by enabling IOM to position itself as a key stakeholder in the discussion on the issues of minorities including Roma and their migration. All government officials met during the evaluation underlined the importance of the research for their work.

The Romanian research study was conducted in two phases, a quantitative part focusing on the migrations trends, destinations and reasons and a qualitative part focusing on the Roma Community. An originally scheduled third part of the research with individual interviews was cancelled due to the low number of returnees. The Romanian research does not contain the list of institutions, while this list is available at IOM Bucharest. The research was distributed to all project partners where it was very well received.

The Czech research is of good quality, it was decided not to distribute it via a press conference, while there were several requests for it from the local authorities.

The Slovak report can be qualified as outstandingly comprehensive; it has been presented during a press conference and was well received.

Likewise, in Hungary a press conference was organised to present the Hungarian research study that is of good quality. Additionally, a solid media research has been conducted in Hungary comprehensively analysing the issue of Roma in the Hungarian press during February and September 2000.

In light of the positive reactions of government officials and the media, a larger distribution, also during future press conferences could be envisaged.

Result No. 7: A strategy developed after the first 4 months period, including a plan of action for implementation of a reinforcement of the reception capacity and orientation services to be provided to returnees.

Implementation

In each of the countries of origin, national plans of action were developed, based on the findings of the researches and on the feedback from the contacts established during the first half of the year. These plans of action were tailored to the needs and areas identified and covered activities at national as well as local level. In the course of the implementation, these plans were fine-tuned, the implementation was sometimes delayed, as often training activities could only start in September after the summer break of the authorities involved.

Analysis

All national plans seem coherent and confirm the value of the research studies, helping to identify areas of necessary capacity building. They also reflect IOM's well-established contacts in the countries concerned, proven by a smooth implementation in full co-operation with the authorities concerned.

Result No. 8: The production of a minimum of 10 000 leaflets and brochures on counselling and orientation for returnees for wide distribution amongst authorities and returnees

Implementation

More than 10 000 brochures have been produced by the IOM missions in the countries of origin in co-operation with the national authorities. The brochures, written in the languages of the target population describe in an easily understandable way the first steps to be undertaken upon return in the field of social benefits, employment, housing, education and health care. The brochures have been distributed via the network of IOM partners in the countries of origin and in the host countries as main instrument of the pre-departure counselling. They have been well received by the target population.

Result No. 9: The organisation of a minimum of two training sessions for representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations in each country

Romania

Implementation:

The Romanian plan of action was planned and implemented together with the Ministries of Interior and Education, the National Agency for Employment and Training and selected NGOs. At each training activity, national or local media was represented, their feedback has been mapped. One of the main focuses of the training in Romania was the border police and

the county and local police, where training needs had been identified. In the education sector, county inspectorates, school principals and school staff have been trained. The county offices of the national employment agency were trained together with Roma NGO representatives. Finally, NGOs have received training, an essential tool for a future self-sufficiency of this sector.

Analysis and recommendations

All the Romanian training activities have been very well received. They can be seen as pioneer work, as no such activities have been carried out in Romania before. Unfortunately, the end of the programme coincided with the national elections that caused various changes in the administrative structures targeted. This is why it is very important that the activities can be continued, as often new contacts will have to be built. Further disadvantage of the Romanian programme is the low number of returnees. Only if this number increases in the future, one can properly assess the real impact that the training activities has for returnees, and whether commitments from the authorities are implemented at a satisfactory level.

Slovakia

Implementation

Partner organisations of IOM Slovakia were the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the District office in Kosice, and the NGOs Partners for Democratic Change, Foundation School Wide Open and the Association of Roma Citizens.

Training sessions were organised for the media, social workers from East Slovakia, teachers and school directors, local mayors and NGOs.

Analysis and recommendations

The Slovak capacity building measures are remarkable as they were implemented during intense return movements. Particularly successful was training for 60 mayors and for 20 social workers, both key figures for the returnees to Slovakia.

Furthermore, IOM Bratislava managed to establish very good relationships with the media and undertook a variety of promotional activities for the programme. A booklet was produced for journalists with Council of Europe guidelines how to write about minority issues.

It would be essential that funding for the sub office in Kosice continues, as the capacity building measures but also the returnee movements and their follow up have shown, that proximity to local authorities and returnees is crucial for a successful reintegration work. Should return movements intensify to other regions of the programme in the Czech Republic or Romania, the work of the sub office Kosice can serve as a role model.

In order to better handle operations and follow-up work, a car should be provided to IOM Bratislava/ Kosice.

Czech Republic

Implementation

In the Czech Republic, two main areas of intervention had been identified, housing and the lack of communication between the central government and the local administration as well as with the target population. A series of roundtables was organised in eight localities to establish links of communication between the different stakeholders. NGOs were trained separately.

Analysis and Recommendation

In the Czech Republic, the principle of a second follow up session within a month in the same location was followed very consequently and proved only partly efficient, participation from local authorities was often low at the second session. In the future, a larger time gap between the two sessions should be considered. A seminar organised for 28 mayors was particularly successful, facilitated through the good co-operation of IOM Prague with the Association of towns and villages.

Particular attention and care should be given to the future relationship with the Interministerial Commission as one of the key institutions of the government and in light of the likely transferral of the responsibility for the 73 Roma advisers in each District office, again key persons for the returnees. These Roma advisers were involved in the training and follow up activities of IOM Prague.

Hungary

Implementation

The Hungarian capacity building measures focused on the empowerment of the Roma population and the Roma community houses. Implemented by a partner NGO, a sophisticated website has been developed that is planned to be accessible in as many as possible of the 52 existing Roma community houses.

Analysis and Recommendation:

The situation of the target population in Hungary is much better compared to the neighbouring countries. Roma are politically organised and represented, an active community life takes place in the community houses. This makes the Hungarian capacity building measures appear as not coherent with the activities in the other countries. While the website is of excellent quality and certainly helpful for the promotion of the Roma case, it is rather serving a high-level community development with the only link to migration that it serves as prevention. Hungary faces a high level migration to Canada, people from neighbouring countries transit through Hungary.

If one looks at the aspect of best practice and experience sharing among the countries concerned, again the Roma community houses as they exist in Hungary might serve as a best practice example for other countries in the mid-term future.

6. Feedback from Governments in the countries of origin/ sector specific issues

The overall feedback from government officials met during the evaluation mission in the countries of origin (see attached agendas), was positive. The first time efforts by the international community to address the issue of migration from these countries and to conduct reintegration activities was welcome. The research studies were overall received as very positive and helpful for the work of the ministries and administrations. The wish that the programme be continued was expressed without exception.

The Educational Sector

Members of the different Ministries of Education, met during the evaluation, were satisfied with the training provided to teachers and school principals. Main problem in this area is the reintegration of returnee children into the national school system and the acknowledgement of the time spent at school abroad. Often, children that spend years abroad are put into the same grade from which they departed, a decision in the hands of school Directors. This is aggravated by often negative attitudes of the target population to public education. IOM Bratislava negotiated an agreement with the Ministry of Education for the recognition of school time spent abroad.

One of the most convincing solutions is the so-called zero classes implemented by the Czech and Slovak Ministries of Education and visited by the evaluator in Slovakia. A continuation of the RCA programme should contain funds to be allocated for these classes. While the establishment and running of these classes is performed by the national governments, small contributions, for example for free lunch packages for the children would be of large impact. School Directors continuously need to be addressed with training activities. The Romanian Ministry of Education should be encouraged to implement such 0 classes for Roma children.

The UNESCO recently established a regional Education co-ordination centre in Budapest; IOM Budapest should establish contact with this centre, share information about the programme and try to define common activities.

The Social and Labour sector

Unemployment is the prevailing issue for returnees in Slovakia, housing the issue in the Czech Republic. Social workers in both countries were instructed by the Ministries to ascertain access of returnees to the services.

The Czech Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs appreciated the RCA programme, yet stated that it took place in a time of major changes in the Czech administration; therefore the need to continue the capacity building activities. She admitted that the Czech

administration in general needs to be adapted to deal with the housing issue. A representative from the Slovak Ministry of Social Affairs found the training provided for her staff useful and expressed the wish that it would be continued. The Head of the Romanian Employment Department declared that the services of his department are open to the whole population without any discrimination of migrants. He advocated the conclusion of further bilateral labour migration agreements with governments in host countries.

Governments in the countries of origin have to increase their efforts to integrate the target population into the society, to eliminate discrimination and thus to contribute to a reduction of migration.

Minority Departments

Government representatives dealing with national minority issues shared generally positive reactions about the project and sometimes took a slightly reserved attitude towards it. The head of the Romanian office for Roma for example stated, that "no money should be spent on professionals, resources should rather be spent on vulnerable groups; those who are able to migrate are not vulnerable". This goes in line with the general criticism, that is raised about repatriation programmes in the EU Member States. Many people advocate solid community development programmes as much fairer and effective use of resources.

Furthermore he advocated also the conclusion of bilateral working migration agreements, as this would lead to a decrease of illegal migration activities.

7. NGO involvement-feedback and recommendations

A variety of NGOs was involved in the RCA as project partners. The NGOs were carefully selected, the experience of IOM staff with the NGO sector in each country was useful. Overall, there were no apparent problems during the work with the NGOs. Representatives of these NGOs acted as trainers during the capacity building and participated in Steering Committee meetings. This increased the level of trust both from the government and from the returnees and enabled IOM to position itself as neutral motor of dialogue and integration.

General problem in all countries in the direct work with the target population is the low degree of cohesion and the high number of little sub groups and NGOs existing, all with different agendas. A very challenging task for any continuation of the RCA programme will be to integrate as many subgroups as possible and thus to reach the highest degree possible of acceptance within the target population.

Some NGOs in the countries of origin raised criticism against the project. Their main argument is, that repatriation is not a solution of migration trends and advocate the general right of the Roma to migration as the only way to improve their living conditions. This is why they strongly favour bilateral working agreements enabling more people to migrate legally.

In the host countries, collaboration with representatives of the target group was very difficult as the programme is adversary to their agenda and raison d'être. In the future, this requires continuous efforts by the IOM offices, approaching them and convincing them of the improved return conditions. The following needs of the NGO sector were identified:

- **Funding**

Classic NGO issue, the provision of funding for NGOs continues to be crucial for all NGOs involved. Eastern Slovakia, for example only has a very weak network of NGOs. While it cannot be a direct purpose of the RCA programme, training on how to apply for it strengthens the NGO sector and renders the capacity building sustainable. It has been performed already by IOM and should be a fix component of the RCA programme in the future. As a result, should the RCA be discontinued in the future, the implementing partners would be capable of continuing IOM's reintegration task of returnees.

- **Association with internationally financed development programs**

A number of the project partners already collaborate with other long-term sustainable development projects, financed or implemented by other donors and Western European NGOs. One bright example is the Dutch based NGO SPOLU, conducting housing projects in all countries of origin.

At this stage, again it needs to be mentioned, that it is essential to avoid giving more advantages to returnees as to the general population. This leads only to an increase of migration movements and to increased disintegration not only of the returnees, but of the target population in general. On the other side, it is only the improvement of the general living conditions and the solution of essential questions such as housing and employment that will make return movements durable. As experience has shown, small-scale development projects implemented by reliable NGOs and targeting the general population can be very effective. Their "soft " promotion in the host countries during the pre-departure counselling has the capacity to incite more people to return, always bearing in mind to avoid raising false expectations.

8. Feedback from returnees/ recommendations

A number of returnees were visited during the evaluation mission, mainly in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. The programme was overall appreciated by returnees, as never before this kind of special attention to the particular needs of returnees has been given. Reactions quickly turned into the main general problems as there are housing and unemployment.

- **False expectations**

Already mentioned in a number of reports, the case of a Czech family was visited, that claims to have been promised housing upon return at the pre-departure counselling in The Netherlands.

Avoiding falling into stereotypes, this case is indicative for the motivations of migration and return, confirmed by the research studies. Migrants returning from abroad have to justify their return in the own community and avoid admitting that the conditions in the host country are also difficult and prompt return decisions.

Here again shows the crucial role of the pre departure counselling process. This has to be waterproof, clearly explaining the net benefits of the programme.

- **Vulnerable cases**

The programme did not contain activities particularly targeted at vulnerable cases. While it appears logical, that in the first phase of such a programme, efforts are directed towards the establishment of a functioning network between all stakeholders, a second phase has to take into account special needs of vulnerable cases such as women. Female returnees interviewed, not only face discrimination from authorities, but at the same time are bound to perform mainly traditional tasks by the very patriarchal structure of the society.

Future RCA activities should reserve resources to conduct vocational training for vulnerable cases, such as small-scale business training in general or sewing classes for women.

It is only through close collaboration with local NGOs, experienced in convincing targeted persons to participate and to help them to break the vicious cycle of marginalisation. Again, such programmes clearly have to be advertised as benefiting the global population without singling out returnees or Roma.

- **Financial training**

The target population has a very "low financial culture". A number of problems of returnees are caused by a lack of skills to handle their private finances. Returnees face various financial challenges in their country of origin. On the one hand side they often saved considerable amounts of money in the host countries and are often entitled to retroactive payments of social security benefits, as it is the case in the Czech Republic. On the other side, return means a number of costs ; payment of debts within the community made before departure, unpaid rent or other reintegration investments. These are costs that the IOM reinstallation is only partially meant to cover.

Such a financial training could already be part of pre departure counselling, even if there is likely reluctance to disclose any savings made in the host country. A skilled implementing partner though may be able to "sell" it as part of a return counselling package. In the countries of origin, one could envisage an implementing partner or social workers that address returnees individually in order to ascertain confidentiality. This is of course a very time consuming effort and alien to the culture of the target population, but definitely worth trying.

9. Overall quality of documents produced

The quality of the documents produced is generally good. The mid term evaluation report critically analysed shortcomings in a comprehensive way. Occasionally, the English of meeting's minutes is of poor quality such as in Hungary. Other minutes produced lack a certain sense of synthesis, both issues are neglectable as they were not part of the contractual obligations.

The questionnaire and the leaflets are of high quality, both have been appreciated by the returnees.

10. Feedback from Donors

- **European Commission**

Prime success factor for the Commission for a programme such as the RCA is the compliance with the contractual obligations. In addition, figures of returnees will be a measuring factor. All contractual obligations have been met and the target returnee figures have been exceeded by 60 %.

Furthermore, the Commission appreciates the professionalism IOM has shown conducting the project; its networking capacities in both the countries of origin and the host countries have contributed to the success.

The Commission is in favour of a continuation of the project, while under the new European Refugee Fund, implementation has been re-delegated to the Member States.

No feedback was available from the Technical Assistance Office of the ERF.

- **The Member States**

Representatives of the governments showed themselves satisfied with the programme, again the numbers of returnees exceeding the target is the most convincing argument.

11. Synergies with other programmes

Programmes in the host countries

Most evident synergies have been generated with the existing voluntary return schemes of the Belgian and Dutch governments. As those were in place since the early 1990's and operated by IOM since then, worthy experience in counselling could be used for the RCA. But also training and information of immigration and customs authorities was facilitated.

Governmental programmes in the countries of origin

One of the integrating side effect of the RCA and its capacity building component was that ministries in countries of origin identified the returnees as group deserving special attention. For example, "The second chance" programme, a project of the Romanian Ministry of National Education concerning the school reintegration of youth and adults. Through the common activities of IOM and the Ministry, the implementation of this programme was speeded up and attention to include returnees was raised within the Ministry.

Supported by increased international scrutiny, governments in the countries of origin are currently drafting and implementing a number of bills for the integration of the target group.

In the future it could be one of IOM's roles to ascertain the returnees' benefit from these improved legal frameworks and to watch their actual implementation. IOM should also offer its good offices to the governments in the continuous identification of returnee's needs, solution of problems and improvement of administrative structures.

Development programmes financed by international donors

- PHARE

The programme co-ordinator was in regular contact with the PHARE programme in Brussels and in the host countries members of the EC delegations involved in PHARE were participating in national steering committees. The research studies have been shared with the PHARE staff, and theoretically the implementation of the 2001 PHARE programme with a number of activities for the benefit of the Roma community, will take into account the special needs of returnees. Nevertheless, it is strongly felt that there is little co-ordination in general between EU funded migration projects and development projects, a view that is shared by Commission officials.

In the future, it will be the task of the IOM missions in the countries of origin and the staff in the EC delegations in charge of PHARE, to increase collaboration and to exceed the mere mutual sharing of documents and participation in meetings. This criticism is mainly directed against the PHARE programme, often perceived as inflexible.

- Soros Foundation

The George Soros Foundation is financing a number of Roma activities in the countries concerned, actually several project partners of the RCA were at the same time implementing Soros funded community development projects. In the future, contacts should be established on the central level to plan common activities systematically.

- OSCE

The programme co-ordinator presented the RCA during the OSCE conference on ethnic minorities that took place in Warsaw. The ODHIR adviser on Roma and Sinti issues was involved in the conception of the programme and regularly kept updated.

12. Overall Impact of the Programme

The overall impact of the RCA programme can be judged as highly satisfactory. In the host countries, the increased number of returnees and the excess of the targeted 780 persons by 60 % clearly speak for the high impact of the RCA.

In the countries of origin the impact can be measured in several ways. The general awareness on the problems of returnees has been raised amongst government officials, the media and consequently the public. But it is also the number of returnees and the often successful follow up work of IOM that show the impact of the programme in the countries.

In Romania, the level of Co-operation reached with the government is very high. Unfortunately, larger returnee movements to measure this and to test the commitments have not taken place. "A house has been built but it takes now people to move in," as one government official put it. Another significant effect for the impact of the RCA is the larger effect of the capacity building activities. IOM Bucharest was approached by a School inspector who had participated in a training session, asking whether he should assist a Roma child that returned from Italy.

In Slovakia, the numbers of returnees to the Kosice region speak clearly for the impact of the programme. But it is also IOM's proactive work with the Slovak media that has definitely had an impact on the reports about the issue and on the public opinion.

In the Czech Republic, the number of 150 returnees speak for an impact. The co-operation reached with the government, despite temporary misunderstandings, has reached satisfactory levels.

13. Sustainability

Sustainability is the big question mark for all returnee programmes. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, it is difficult to measure at this stage, whether the programme is sustainable, i.e. whether the returnee movements are definitive. Too many other factors are contributing to a decision to re-migrate, from allegations about new "high profit destinations", continued unemployment up to mere poverty as experienced in Romania.

It needs to be clearly born in mind, that only sustainable development in the countries of origin, with the effect of a general improvement of the living conditions leads to a decrease of re-departures and migration trends in general. This is why more governments of the host countries should follow the example of the Belgian government who decided to finance the office in Kosice, where the RCA programme has already contributed to community development. In the years to come IOM could there become the motor of community development projects to the benefits of the entire population. .

14. Recommendations

- ***Increased tackling of root causes for migration***

All stakeholders involved in the RCA programme have to bear in mind, that only a systematic tackling of the root causes for migration are a solution to the problems encountered.

Discrimination needs to be eliminated, integration efforts enhanced and local community development supported. This is essentially the task of the governments of the countries of origin, with the support of the EU Member States. The Belgian decision to fund the office in Kosice merits appraisal, as this office has been highly effective in its reintegration efforts; funding it means laying the basis for sustainability of the return movements to this area.

- ***Continuation***

It is recommended to continue the RCA programme for another 1 to 3 years.

More host countries should be tried to be attracted, the new proposal was submitted already to the Irish government. Experience shows that migration often takes place to countries holding the EU presidency. Therefore, the Spanish and Danish governments might already consider to be contacted for a participation in the year 2002. Increased migration to EU member states can be expected if Canada imposes further visa regulations to CEEC countries. This should help convincing EU donors to continue and extend the RCA.

During this continuation, the capacity building measures can be fine-tuned towards needs identified (see above, page 19, feedback from the returnees) and in the mid term run, slowly reduced. Mid and long term focus needs to be community development that needs to include small-scale development programs targeting vulnerable groups.

- ***Improved pre-departure counselling***

The questionnaire should exclusively be filled in the language of the applicant. Ideally, counselling is done in the language of the applicant as it has happened in Gand, Belgium; if necessary a translator should be present. Thus misunderstandings about the programme's content such as on housing issues will be avoided in the future. The mapping of development projects in the countries of origin and their regular sharing and updating with IOM colleagues in the host countries was mentioned above (page 10, result No. 3).

Furthermore, "portes paroles" of returnees could be identified in the countries of origin with successful reintegration stories. These persons could be brought to the reception centres and brief potential returnees on the benefits of the programme.

- ***Systematise follow up mechanisms***

The follow up activities sometimes appeared slightly unsystematic. While IOM Bratislava, thanks to its rich database, developed a solid system, it was felt that follow up in the Czech was slightly random, complicated by the dispersion of the returnee population. IOM missions should establish guidelines as to limit these time consuming activities to the minimum necessary, but also render them effective, in case of real merit. If existing, cases could be referred to national legal aid schemes. If non-existing or not efficient, the IOM mission should conduct a pre-screening. If during that, it turns out that there is an individual case of clear discrimination by the authorities or also by private bodies, such as house owners or employers, those cases could be handed over to a lawyer, budget should be reserved for this.

- ***Support of Roma community houses***

Wherever possible, the establishment of Roma community houses should be encouraged, be it by direct contributions or by collaboration with NGOs. As it can be seen in Hungary, these

houses serve primarily for community development of the Roma, with all sorts of cultural and social events. But they could in the future also serve as a one stop shop for returnees, where counselling is performed by the own community.

- ***Private sector involvement***

IOM could offer its good offices to approach the private sector for the financing of community development projects. The case of US Steel was discussed with IOM Bratislava, who recently bought a plant in the Kosice region, employing 13.000 people. The company certainly has a corporate responsibility policy. These projects of course should not single out returnees or Roma, as this would be counterproductive to integration efforts.

- ***Database***

The programme has shown the need to have exact figures in an area where little reliable data is available. The data collected by IOM is of high value for the countries of origin, showing the needs of the target population and enable the definition of future policy planning. The target population has a general mistrust towards any authority and is reluctant to reveal movement intentions or plans. Only an institution that has the full trust of the target population will be able to obtain decent figures and to tailor assistance to their needs. The programme in the year 2000 has laid the foundation for this trust.

Problematic with the data is their confidentiality. Roma organisations have criticised IOM for its plans to establish such a database, this is why at this stage a website will be realised. Further efforts should be made to convince these groups, that the use of the data is for the sole benefit of the target population as it helps to define their needs.

- ***Bilateral migratory agreements***

"Close the back door while opening the front door a little bit more"

This sentence, used during a Canadian migration conference reflects a migration philosophy, more and more adapted by governments. Through the conclusion of bilateral working agreements with selected countries, the issue of migration is taken out of clandestinity and streams of migrants are becoming controllable. The abuse of the asylum procedure is stopped at the same time and people in the countries of origin are able to take informed migration decisions by applying to such programs. All researchers and experts met during the evaluation mission are supportive of such agreements. It is strongly recommended to Donor countries of the RCA programme to conclude more of these migratory agreements, on the long term the most sustainable replacement of return programmes such as the RCA. The problems encountered are herewith solved at their roots instead of a late healing of symptoms.

ANNEX:

CV of the evaluator

The evaluation was performed by Mr. Eckart von Malsen, independent consultant advising companies, governments and international organisations.

Mr. von Malsen is a trained German lawyer and is specialised in EU and international law. He spent several years with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR and on duty stations in Geneva, Central America and Northern Africa he dealt with all aspects of small and large repatriation movements, including the evaluation of repatriation programmes. Since two years Mr. von Malsen is working on EU issues, advising private companies on the EU legislative process.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Under the supervision of the IOM Office in Brussels and within the framework of the IOM's project «Return and Counselling Assistance to Czech, Slovak and Romanian Asylum Seekers Currently Living in Belgium, Finland and The Netherlands» (RCA) funded by the Governments of Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands and the European Commission, the Expert-Evaluator will carry out the following evaluation activities :

1. To co-ordinate with the IOM office in Brussels the appropriate plan of action for an evaluation mission in the countries of return (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania) and in the host countries (Belgium, The Netherlands and Finland) involved in the Programme.
2. Your area of activities will be focused on the evaluation of the results achieved within the RCA programme in view of formulating recommendations for future activities for the successful reintegration of the returnees.
3. To undertake an evaluation mission in January 2000 in co-ordination with IOM, and more particularly :
 - to examine how the Project reached its overall goal and specific objectives;
 - to review and analyse the return and counselling process;
 - to review and analyse the capacity building activities undertaken in the framework of the RCA programme
 - to inspect and assess the potential capacity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of this Project to achieve the expected results;
 - to visit and interview selected returnees and national/local authorities in view of gathering information on how the Project assisted the returnees in better reintegrating into their region of origin;
 - To review the documentation (reports, research) produced in the framework of the programme
 - you will be requested to travel to the places of residence of selected returnees in January 2000 and to involved IOM Missions; your travel arrangements will have to be co-ordinated with the IOM office in Brussels;
4. To prepare in English, within 2 weeks following the end of your mission to host and return countries, an evaluation report (approximately 20 pages) containing recommendations for new actions, assessment of the conditions and means (viability) to attain the objectives defined in a new Project. This report of approximately 20 pages will have to be submitted to IOM Brussels, at the latest on 31st January 2001.

Agendas of the meetings during the evaluation mission

1. Romania

Visit by Eckart von Malsen, RCA Final External Evaluation, to Bucharest 11-12 January 2001

Thursday 11 January

- 9:00 The Ombudsman Office
Mr. Mircea Moldovan, Deputy Ombudsman, Secretary of State
- 10:30 Ministry of Interior
Mr. Vasile Dragoi, Head of the Romanian Refugee Office
- 12:00 Ministry of National Education
Ms Anca Butuca, Counselor to the Secretary of State, Ministry of National Education
- 13:00 Lunch
- 15:00 EU Delegation
Simona Botea, Expert, EU Delegation to Bucharest
- 16:00 Community Development Agency «Together» (Roma NGO)
Ms Maria Ionescu, Director
- 17:30 Romani CRISS (Roma NGO) Mr Costel Bercus, Executive Director
- 19:00 Dinner with representatives of donor States
Mr Herman Bovens – Consul, Embassy of the Netherlands
Mr Willem van Nieuwkerk – Task Manager, Justice and Home Affairs, EU Delegation to Bucharest

Friday 12 January

- 9:45 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Cristian Badescu, Director, Directorate for Human Rights and Council of Europe
- 11:00 Government of Romania, Department for Protection of National Minorities
Dr. Dan Oprescu, Head of National Office for Roma
- 12:30 National Agency for Employment and Training
Mr Mihai Dragan, Director, Employment Department
- 14:00 Lunch

2. Czech Republic

PROGRAMME FOR THE VISIT OF MR. ECKART VON MALSEN, EVALUATOR, TO IOM PRAGUE. Monday and Tuesday, 15.1. – 16.1.2001.

Monday, 15.1.2001:

- 8.00 – 8.30 a.m. meeting with the Deputy Minister, Dr. Bela Hejna, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- 9.30 – 11.30 a.m. meeting and working session at IOM Prague office
- 12.00 – 13.30 p.m. lunch with Dr. Jean-Claude Concolato, Head of UNHCR mission
- 14.30 – 15.30 p.m. meeting with local authority partners in Kladno (25 km out of Prague) Present will be our partners from capacity building round Table + Roma advisor.
- 16.00 p.m. return to Prague and Hotel Pyramida

Tuesday, 16.1.2001:

- 9.30 - 10.30 a.m. meeting with Mr. Victor Skeet (Inter.Ministerial Commission), and Mrs. Bozena Filova (Roma coordinator, Prague City Town Hall), At the Inter-Ministerial Commission
- 11.00 – 12.00 a.m. meeting with Ms. Tatjana Siskova and Helena Storova training partners FACIA at IOM Prague office Also present: Ms. Vera Peliskova Ministry for Regional Development CR)
- 12.00 – 12.30 p.m. lunch at IOM Prague office
- 14.30 - 16.00 p.m. visit to Rokycany and Karez to meet with RCA returned families
- 17.30 p.m. meeting with Mr. Howard Harding EC Delegation, Prague
- 18.30p.m. return to IOM office and Hotel Pyramida

3. Slovakia

Tuesday 16 January

23.05 - Mr.von Malsen will reach Kosice airport, flight OK 978.

Wednesday 17 January

9.00 – IOM Košice office – files, statistics, database, information about the activities of IOM Košice

12.00 – Working lunch at Restaurant Lamparéò with Mr. Tibor Železník, Advisor of the principal of the County Council in Košice for Roma issue, member of the Steering Committee, Mr. Marián Baèa, Advisor of the principal of the County Council in Prešov for Roma issue, member of the Steering Committee, Mr.Anton Koleno, Principal of the District Council of the city part Luník IX in Košice.

14.00 – Visits of the Basic school in Luník IX and Kindergarden in Luník IX, 3 Returnees visits

19.00 – Dinner

22.00 – The broadcast in Slovak Radio about IOM activities

Thursday 18 January

5.45 – 10.45 - train to Bratislava

11.00 – meeting with members of the Steering Committee - Ms. Katarína Muszková, Director of the social benefit department, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Ms. Jana Garajová, The Office of the Governmental plenipotentiary for solving of Roma issue and Ms. Katarína Ondrášová, The minority education department, Ministry of Education.

12.30 – Lunch with representative of the Roma NGO. Amália Pompová from the Association of the Roma Citizens and Lucia Baloghová from the Association of Roma Woman LUCIA.

14.00 – IOM Office Bratislava, files, capacity building, documentation, etc.

15.45 - meeting with the training partner Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia

17.03 – 19.42 Train to Budapest

4. Hungary

PROGRAMME for Mr. Eckart von Malsen Budapest, January 18 - 20, 2001

18th January 2001

19.42 h Arrival to Budapest

19th January 2001

9.00 h Meeting with Mr. Antal Heizer, vice-president of the Office
for National and Ethnic Minorities

11.00 h Meeting with Dr. Istvan Horvath, chief of Department for
Ethnic and Human Rights of the MFA and representative of the
Consular Department

12.30 h Meeting with Mrs Argentina Szabados, chief of IOM Mission
in Budapest and discussion with Mr. Andras Kovats, research
coordinator
IOM Office

14.00 h Meeting with Mrs Eva Orsos, director of the Mediator
Foundation and Mr. Ferenc Zsigo, responsible for RCH
program
IOM Office

15.30 h Meeting with the president of the Hungarian Roma Parliament,
Mr. Jenő Zsigo and Mr. György Kerenyi, editor in chief of the
AmaroDrom (Roma monthly revue)
Participation at the vernisage of Roma artists' exhibition

20th January 2001

14.40 h Departure for Brussels