

# Field Social Work in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Setting the scene

Existing research suggests that segregated Roma communities have poor access to welfare benefits and services in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia as well (Ringold et al., 2005). While all these countries have municipal social workers responsible for facilitating access to benefits among poor households, such services tend to lack capacities and expertise, just as the Slovak system was in 1998, before the introduction of the Field social work (*terenná sociálna práca*, hereinafter FSW). A detailed analysis of the evolution of the FSW as well as its current financing and monitoring will be likely to provide highly relevant lessons for the neighbouring countries on how to deal with non-take-up among Roma and how to strengthen social work in the context of relatively poorly developed and fragmented local government institutions. As none of the other cases focus specifically on an ethnic minority, it would also increase the variety of our selection in an important dimension.

## 2. Brief description of the benefit

Field social workers may facilitate access to various types of benefits, such as disability pension, parental allowance, etc., but the Benefit in Material Need (BMN) is the most relevant as this is the one that the large majority of poor Roma families (i.e. the clientele of the FSW) are eligible for and where a take-up problem has already been identified.

The BMN (*pomoc v hmotnej núdzi*) is a universal non-contributory tax-financed scheme. Its aim is to secure basic living conditions, which means one warm meal per day, necessary clothing and housing as defined by the Law on Help in Material Need (Act No. 417/2013 of Coll. - §2, clause 2) (Kusá, 2014). The BMN is organised centrally and provided in cash. Eligibility is determined at the household level and depends on family composition. The amount of BMN varies by household condition (from €61,60 for singles, to €216,10 for couples with 5+ children) after other claims to assistances, for example, to parental allowance have been exhausted.

Nationality is not part of eligibility criteria for BMN, and in general, all adults (age 18+) are eligible unless they are unmarried and share a household with their parents. After age 25, single adults are also considered separate households. The benefit is means-tested on some incomes, other benefits, and movable and immovable assets. Immovable assets cannot be required to be sold though, if the claimants use them as a permanent residence. Since July 2014, acceptance of public work offered by the municipality in at least 32 hours per month is a condition for receiving full benefit.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This country report is written within a contract with Eurofound, as input for Eurofound's Research Report on 'Access to benefits: reducing non-take-up', which will be available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ef-themes/social-policies>. Opinions expressed are those of the contractor only and do not represent Eurofound's official position.

<sup>2</sup> Law no. 417 / 2013 on Help in Material Need (*Zákon o pomoci v hmotnej núdzi...*) took effect on 01. January 2014, but allowed for a transitory period until 31. July 2014.

The BMN can be supplemented by various conditioned allowances including: protection allowance mostly for elderly or disabled not receiving pensions; housing allowance; activation allowance for registered job seekers carrying out small communal work (between 64 and 80 hours per month); child allowance for dependent child in the age of 6-16 after regular school attendance; and one-shot benefits which can be provided by the municipality for clothing, household equipment, or school supplies.

## 2.1. Existing research on the gap

According to a recent World Bank study, approximately 75% of the poor (bottom 20%) access one of the social assistance transfers. However this means that there is a gap in the coverage as 25% of the poor are not receiving any social assistance (World Bank, 2011a, p. 3)<sup>3</sup>. The same study found that only 41% of the extreme poor (bottom 5%) received the BMN, calculated from SILC 2009. This may be a lower bound estimate, as SILC may tend to under-represent poor and especially Roma households (World Bank, 2011b, p. 4). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, 4% of the poor receive no transfers at all, either from social assistance or from social insurance programmes. A companion study estimated that non-take-up of the BMN was around 79% in 2009 (World Bank, 2011b).<sup>4</sup>

Related to the launch of the FSW in 2002, the World Bank prepared a study on the poverty of Roma communities in Slovakia. This study identified a subgroup of the ‘absolutely poor’ among the Roma where take-up of welfare benefits and services was a problem: ‘Some receive social assistance benefits, however, in certain cases some have lost eligibility because of lack of documentation and unofficial residency status.’ (World Bank. & et al., 2002, p. 16). The same study noted that many Roma distrusted institutions (especially the local government and social assistance offices) and felt that these were hostile or indifferent to their problems. This may point to two potential causes of non-take-up: discrimination on the part of institutions<sup>5</sup> or non-claiming due to the anticipation of being turned down by the authorities. Lastly, the World Bank study pointed out that the existing service of municipality social workers was poorly equipped to work with Roma communities, being overburdened by administration and often lacking the necessary expertise as well (Duell & Kurekova, 2013, p. 24; World Bank. & et al., 2002, p. 44).

## 2.2. New qualitative analysis of the gap

Most interviewees doubted the existence of phenomenon that some people were eligible for social benefits but had no access to them. They claimed that the primary reason for non-take up (NTU) was that claimants did not fulfil some of the eligibility requirements.<sup>6</sup> When probing further to the underlying causes of NTU, only four interviewees - the Regional Coordinator (RC), and the three Main Coordinators of the Implementation Agency for Operation Programme of Employment and Social Inclusion (Implementačná agentúra pre Operačný program Zamestnanosť a sociálna

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<sup>3</sup> If „poor” are defined as individuals in households with income (after social transfers) below the poverty threshold used by EU-SILC, which is set at 60% of national median income, the figure for Slovakia is even higher: 81% (World Bank, 2011a, p. 21).

<sup>4</sup> Please note that eligibility for BMN is estimated using EU-SILC data.

<sup>5</sup> Several surveys conducted have found a high degree of social distance between the Roma and non-Roma populations in the country, including negative stereotypes and lack of trust (Vaševka, 2000, quoted in World Bank 2002).

<sup>6</sup> A typical example interviewees brought up was that some claimants had no valid ID cards or rental contracts which were necessary for housing allowance.

inklúzia) - were willing to consider other barriers than simply eligibility requirements. They identified the following causes of NTU:

- limited information about eligibility
- geographical distance and the lack of money to cover travel expenses
- administrative illiteracy
- fear in formal communication settings
- length of bureaucratic proceedings was demotivating
- lack of trust in institutions
- unwillingness to comply with rules, and a strong sense of freedom (especially in the case of homeless people)
- sense of inferiority because of skin colour, having a dialect or Roma name,
- fear or past experience of discrimination: when officials refused the claimant to provide information, treated them arrogantly, or in a condescending way
- lack of intercultural sensitisation trainings among bureaucrats
- vulnerability: “the basic attitude of bureaucrats is to find ways how they can do the least work, so when they try shortcuts to get rid of Roma clients, Roma cannot defend themselves” (IA ZASI)
- shortages of education system which did not teach practical things (e.g. how to send registered mail)

### **3. Assessment of the initiative to improve take-up**

#### **3.1. Brief description of the initiative**

Field social work is a social policy tool that helps marginalised communities integrate into the mainstream sociality. This service has been present in Slovakia since 1998 in the form of various pilot projects and programmes.<sup>7</sup> Between 1998 and 2001, FSW was realised in the framework of EU Accession, PHARE projects in three short stages (each in about ten localities) by the Office of the Government section for Human Rights and Minorities. The three stages had different names, but they all meant the same work: field social work, which was work with socially marginalised clients in their home environment.

In 2002, the Government endorsed and financed the Pilot programme of field social workers (uzn. 884/2002) which created workplaces for 58 field social workers (Fsw) and their assistants (Afsw) in 17 municipalities for 18 months. In 2004, the Government started the ‘Programme of support for developing community social work in municipalities’ which further expanded the number of participating subjects in FSW [198 municipalities, and 600 (A)Fsw]. At this stage the agency of Social Development Fund was established, took over the implementation of programme from the Office of the Government section for Human Rights and Minorities, and ensured a certain level of uniformity in FSW through supervision and monitoring.

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<sup>7</sup> The difference between projects and programmes being that the former are financed by the EU, the latter by the government of Slovak Republic.

Table 1: Timeline of FSW service in Slovakia

Time	Title of programme / project	Donor	Implementation	Participants	Fsw + Afsw	MC, RC
2002-2004	“Pilot program for field social work”	Various gov’t actors	Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of Slovakia for Roma Communities (the Plenipotentiary)	17 munic.	58	3 <sup>8</sup>
2005-2008	“Programme of support for developing community social work in municipalities”	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, MPSVR)	from 2006 fully by Fond sociálneho rozvoja (Social Development Fund, FSR) <sup>9</sup>	198 munic, 4 NGOs	600	2, 17 <sup>10</sup>
2008-2015	Demand-oriented projects (DOP) of FSW	European Social Fund (ESF), 5% co-financed by beneficiaries	FSR	228 munic.	770 <sup>11</sup>	4 MC? (until 30.6.2011) <sup>12</sup>
2012-2015	National Project (NP) of FSW	ESF, 5% co-financed by state.	FSR (that is, IA ZaSI) <sup>13</sup>	281 munic.	835	4, 15 (until 31.8.2014) <sup>14</sup>

Between 2008 and 2012, FSW (or sometimes called as ‘community social work’) was realised in demand-oriented (DOP) projects by ESF co-financing (95% EC, 5% municipalities). For a two years period 234 subjects joined into this phase, but since any local subject (that is, individual municipalities or NGOs) could apply for these calls, and meanwhile, the central coordinating FSR agency was underfunded, the realisation of programmes in this period had various shortages in

<sup>8</sup> (IA ZASI, n.d.-c)

<sup>9</sup> (FSR, n.d.)

<sup>10</sup> (Sociálna spoločnosť, 2014)

<sup>11</sup> (FSR, 2011)

<sup>12</sup> (IA ZASI, n.d.-c)

<sup>13</sup> On 01 April 2014, as part of administrative restructuring, the Slovak Government merged FSR into the Implementation Agency for Employment and Social Inclusion Operation Programme (Implementačná agentúra pre Operačný program Zamestnanosť a sociálna inklúzia, IA ZASI).

<sup>14</sup> Based on Ia ZaSI correspondence.

terms of supervision, and administrative burdens of individual beneficiaries. The National Project (2012-2015) was introduced to improve the quality of FSW by providing a uniform methodological guidance to field social workers and municipalities, and the project also took over much of the administrative tasks of municipalities.

### 3.2. The rationale behind the initiative

The task of field social workers is to help people in marginalised situations, among whom many are Roma, to find solutions to their problems directly in their own environments. The basic activities of Fsw include looking up clients – especially in the beginning of the project, monitoring the locality, and familiarise them with available social services to improve their life conditions.<sup>15</sup> According to one of the Main Coordinators (MC), initially, there is more emphasis on crisis prevention, but in localities where the service has been present for four-five years there is an expectation to focus more on individual and ‘deeper’ social work, that is, not only provide social services, but change client’s approach and involvement, for example, in education, or search for employment opportunities.

The long-term goal of FSW is to improve the situation of clients by helping them become independent, and ultimately, that they do not need the service anymore. The approach of field social workers to their clients is based on principles of partnership and voluntary cooperation. As the MC put it:

*‘The method, or that philosophy of work, is based on the idea of building trustful relationship with clients in segregated communities where all sorts of contacts have been interrupted in the past 20 years, and people are quite left alone. So FSW is kind of a bridge and bring those people motivation, information, some sort of inspiration, and examples how to cope with their situation.’*

The principle of partnership makes FSW fundamentally different from regular social workers who represent a coercive state institution which can sanction clients in case of non-compliance. FSW has merely an advisory role, and they have an independent agenda both from state agencies and municipalities.

#### *Field social work in practice*

Each locality participating in the national project has at least one field social worker (Fsw) and one assistant field social worker (Afsw). The exact number of field social workers can be increased depending on the needs of locality and in particular, the size of marginalised Roma community. There is a pair of Fsw and Afsw for 80 clients in average at each locality.

Field social workers are mainly responsible for the professional work with clients, such as mapping the settlements, providing advice to clients, and documenting the work. The role of assistants, on the other hand, is to help the day-to-day work of Fsw in establishing contacts with the community, translating to (possibly Roma, or Hungarian language), or helping clients fill out forms. During recruiting, it is preferred that Afsw be from the local, marginalised community, so they speak the local language and the Fsw can build on their knowledge of the local community. The minimum qualification for Afsw is completion (or working towards completion) of high school diploma. The minimum qualification for Fsw is the completion (or working towards completion) of a BA degree in social work. These official minimal qualification criteria of (A)Fsw are subject to change depending on the specific needs of locality and the social excluded communities living there (FSR, 2009). According to the regional coordinator, candidates with a degree in social work and experience in community work are strongly preferred during selection

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<sup>15</sup> Please note that we use „FSW” to refer to field social workers, while „FSW” to the project, respectively programme of Field social work.

of Fsw, but candidates with a general social science degree can also be considered for the position.

Fsw are expected to be on the terrain daily, about 90% of their time. This means that the community can get to know them in person as well as the type of services they can get help with. According to Fsw and the coordinators, the most common way Fsw get in touch with clients is that people come to them on the terrain or in the office when they need help. This approach seems to work according to all stakeholders, as people usually know very well why Fsw are present in the locality and whenever they need help they can turn to them. In the beginning of FSW, the social workers often needed to do information campaigns, for example, deliver leaflets to mailboxes about their activities, but now their presence tends to be well known in the localities, especially where FSW service has operated in previous project periods as well.

Another way how Fsw reach out to clients is that they are notified by public authorities if there is a problem in a family. This can be the local school teacher or social curatorship, in case of truancies, the doctor in case of compulsory health checks and vaccinations, or the social agency of municipality in case of maternity benefits. In these cases, Fsw inform potential clients about possible sanction they must face if do not cooperate with public authorities. They also offer clients assistance to fulfil the conditions, but since the service is based on partnership, it is up to clients if they cooperate or not.

There is no mechanism in the project that would ensure Fsw have to reach out to all members of the target group. This is due to the fact that monitoring is focused primarily on the number of interventions rather than individual clients, although separate files are kept for each client, but as the Plenipotentiary highlighted

*'[I]t is not a condition nor goal of the project to visit everyone; the point is that he [FSW] sorts out the problem. Even in a family, it might well be that not everyone has a serious problem.'*

### **3.3. Context of the initiative: where did the idea come from?**

Field social work realised in the framework of demand-oriented projects (DOP) had a number of shortcomings, which were identified in a qualitative research paper conducted by the Slovak Academy of Sciences (ÚEt SAV, 2009).

First, the communication between different actors was limited. The previously functioning system of local coordinators (2005-2008) had been dissolved and their functions moved to Bratislava, and field social workers did not have practical and professional help directly in their region anymore. Likewise, there was no longer formalised and regular communication between field social workers which would have enabled them to share good practices when they encountered new problems. In addition, trainings for field social workers which would have taught them how to communicate effectively with clients, or handle crises situation; or supervision which would have guarded them from burn out were completely missing from the project. Second, both field social workers and municipalities were significantly burdened by FSR to comply with administrative tasks: the former with regards to formal and often repetitive reporting tasks, the latter in the application phase. Moreover, processing refunds and the payment of municipalities was also slow and often belated. Third, although field social work had already had official standards since 2007, the enforcement of these operational standards depended to a great extent on the capacities and benevolence of individual municipalities. Since FSR had limited capacities to oversee the work of FSW at localities, municipalities could more easily mismanage field social workers and pressure them to work without adequate work equipment, or carry out municipality services with the target group, such as coordination of public work (ÚEt SAV, 2009).

In the same year and concurrent to the SAV research, the standards of FSW were updated in order to increase the quality of FSW. The 'Introduction to the Standards' booklet was prepared by an NGO called Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia in cooperation with a working group consisting of a wide range of stakeholders (FSR, 2009). These included public authorities (such as FSR, MPSVR, Plenipotentiary, representatives of municipalities), NGOs (Association of FSW and others) and academics (faculties of social work in Bratislava and Trnava). Reportedly, other actors, such as Fsw and representatives of public organs were also consulted in person or written form. The standards have four main parts:

- procedural standards of FSW: clarify the goal of FSW, method of work including scope and content
- personal standards of FSW: criterion of selection, scope of activities, training, supervision and monitoring
- operating standards (mostly for municipalities): creating favourable work environment for Fsw by providing work place, ensuring communication and logistic tools, and information about FSW in the locality.
- ethical standards: basic principles of professional work laid down for Fsw including dignity of clients, social justice, integrity, non-harm, and competency

### **3.4. The designing phase**

Based on the research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV) and the updated standards, the agency of FSR set up a working group to redesign FSW service within the framework of national project. The working group consisted of the management of FSR itself and informally, the prospective steering committee members in the project.<sup>16</sup>

The goal of national project was to change the financing of FSW, improve its quality and effectivity. This was done mainly by strengthening the role of central coordination agency (Proposal 2011, and Stanovenie štandardnej stupnice 2011). In particular:

- the state took over the 5% co-financing responsibility from municipalities,
- consequently, it eased the administrative burden of municipalities, who did not have to devote as much financial and human resources to implementation anymore,
- and decreased non-direct costs related to project management (vs actual work with clients) from 20% in DOP to an estimated 3% in NP.
- The centralised administration, and in particular, the re-introduction of regional coordinators to the system were expected to provide support, methodological guidance, and ensure conformity with FSW standards.
- Part of the project was also a complex system of professional training and supervision for field social workers, which in the system of DOP was missing because of insufficient financial resources of municipalities.
- Continuous realisation of projects were ensured in localities where field social work was already carried out in the framework of DOP,

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<sup>16</sup> The Steering committee in the NP of field social work currently includes a six members out of which two are representatives of the Plenipotentiary, and the rest come from the following organisations: MPSVR; The Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; The Association of Towns and Villages in Slovakia; and an NGO called Quo Vadis (IA ZASI, n.d.-e).

- the timespan of project implementation was doubled (from two to four years), and the intended number of beneficiaries were slightly increased.

### 3.5. Implementation process

Municipalities could apply to the national project in five rounds between January and September 2012. The calls were first open to municipalities where DOP was endorsed in 2010, but the realisation of FSW had not started yet. These municipalities could automatically start in the NP. Then calls were gradually opened up for other municipalities: the second one for those in which DOP 2010 was just about to finish; the third one for unsuccessful applicants in DOP 2010; the fourth one for participants in DOP 2009; and finally, NP calls were open to all municipalities with a significant presence of marginalised Roma communities (as defined by the Project of Atlas of Roma Communities in 2004) (IA ZASI, n.d.-b). This stepwise application phase was set up in order to ensure continuity of FSW, but also because of technical considerations. The Agency anticipated it would not have capacities to deal with all applications at once.

Table 2: Stages of application for the NP FSW

Round of NP calls	Which municipalities could apply?	Time period when municipalities submit application <sup>17</sup>
1	won in DOP 2010, but have not started project realization yet	17. Jan - 10 Feb, 2012
2	took part in DOP 2010	23 Feb – 23 March, 2012
3	were rejected in DOP 2010	23 Feb – 23 March, 2012
4	took part in DOP 2009	17 Apr – 9 May, 2012
5	calls open to all municipalities which had marginalized communities	24 Jul – 16 Sep, 2012

In the first four rounds municipalities were automatically accepted to NP if they fulfilled the requirements in the calls. In the fifth round, the Steering Committee for NP FSW assessed applicants according to the combination of following factors:<sup>18</sup>

- synergy effect with the ‘Comprehensive Approach to the Development of Roma Communities’ programme<sup>19</sup>
- realisation of DOP in the period of 2007-2012
- current undertaking of FSW from own or other resources

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.iazasi.gov.sk/sk/narodny-projekt-tsp-v-obciach/zakladne-informacie/ako-sa-zapojit?searched=FSR-NP+TSP-1%2F2012&advsearch=oneword&highlight=ajaxSearch\\_highlight+ajaxSearch\\_highlight1+ajaxSearch\\_highlight2](http://www.iazasi.gov.sk/sk/narodny-projekt-tsp-v-obciach/zakladne-informacie/ako-sa-zapojit?searched=FSR-NP+TSP-1%2F2012&advsearch=oneword&highlight=ajaxSearch_highlight+ajaxSearch_highlight1+ajaxSearch_highlight2)

<sup>18</sup> Information based on IA ZASI correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> This was an integrated territorial programme of social inclusion, using ESF that was to start in 2009, but remained largely unsuccessful. The list of municipalities with such strategies is available here: [http://www.minv.sk/?zoznam\\_LSKxP](http://www.minv.sk/?zoznam_LSKxP)



- regional disparities: ratio of unemployment in the district
  - number of persons in the target group / marginalised Roma community
  - ratio of target group in the total population of municipality
  - geographical segregation of the community
  - needs for FSW financing (based on NP regional coordinators' visit and assessment of complex situation in the locality)
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The realisation of national project was planned for 48 months between December 2012 and December 2015 and had five main elements. In the first one, municipalities were selected, contracts and methodological materials created. The second and third element of NP consisted of the actual work of regional coordinators and field social work on the terrain (the encountered problems of this phase see in sec. 3.13.). The fourth element included initial training, then education and supervision for regional coordinators and field social workers and their assistants during the course of the programme. These elements have not been realised because of difficulties with public procurement issues in the central coordination agency. Finally, the fifth element comprised of the update of *Introduction to the Standards of FSW* manual, professional support and advice for RC, Fsw, Afsw (i.e. monthly meetings), operation of web site, and evaluation of the impact of FSW in localities. The call for independent experts to carry out the evaluation has already been announced at the Agency's website and is expected to be published in June 2015(IA ZASI, n.d.-a).

*Table 3: Elements of NP activities*

Elements of NP activities	start date	end date
1. Preparation of project	12/2011	04/2012
2. Activities of regional coordinators	01/2012	12/2015
3. Performance of FSW in communities	01/2012	12/2015
4. Improving qualification, professionalism and HR development	03/2012	12/2015
5. Ensuring professional support	12/2011	12/2015

It is worth noting that some municipalities were rejected in the application process, either because of budget constraints, or they did not fulfil the requirements in the calls. Some other municipalities remained in the DOP projects after the start of NP, and there was also a new DOP call announced in 2012 which runs with 49 municipalities in a parallel system to the NP.

### **3.6. Target group and actual beneficiaries of the initiative**

The target group of project were defined, on one hand, as socially excluded groups or groups exposed to risks of social exclusion (altogether 86 872 persons intended), and on the other hand, public or non-governmental employees performing provisions in the area of social inclusion (in total 872 field social workers and assistants intended). The concept of socially excluded people is

defined by a long list of social groups which are one way or the other disadvantaged in mainstream society. Their common denominator is that they have little or no access to standard social care and employment provisions, or if they do, then these provisions have little or no effect on them because of their specific needs and situations, such as deprivation, isolation or high level of socio-pathology cases within their community. The list includes for example: long-term unemployed, illiterate people, geographically isolated groups, inhabitants of marginalised Roma communities, low-income families, women after maternity leave, disabled, homeless people, drug addicts, ex-prisoners and so forth [for the full list of enumerated groups see (FSR, 2011, sec. 2.1.1.)]. Although, people having no access to social benefits is not explicitly identified in the target group - only recipients of social benefit and care -, several sub-groups enlisted above include people among whom take up has traditionally been low.

In the project proposal, the composition of intended target groups was further broken down by categories of age, gender, education, employment, disability and minority status. There were 65 000 short and long-term unemployed altogether and some 70 000 minorities (meaning Roma) identified among intended target groups [for the exact breakdown see (FSR, 2011, sec. 2.1.2.)]

Table 4 shows the extent the number of beneficiaries increased in the project between June 2012 and June 2014. Please see Section 4.2 for an empirical analysis of the determinants of the selection on municipalities into the NP.

Table 4: Number of participating municipalities, (A)FSW and number of clients

Date	No. of municipalities	No. of Fsw	No. of Afsw	No. of clients
2012 June 1	43	58	66	8862
2013 June 1	238	347	380	50432
2014 June 1	272	389	431	72658

### 3.7. Costs of the initiative

Similarly to DOP, the NP was financed from non-refundable ESF sources (95%) and a smaller contribution (5%) by the respective municipality. But while in DOP projects the own contribution was financed by municipalities (or NGOs respectively) implementing the project, in NP, this has been taken over by the state. Municipalities pre-finance the costs of FSW service, but they get refunded on a monthly basis by the Agency.

The project's total budget was 30 million € out of which

- 29 million € (97%) was allocated for the realisation of main activities in the project, and out of these
- 25.9 million € was transferred to municipalities (Sociálna spoločnosť, 2014).
- during the 49 months project, the amount of non-refundable financial source for one client per year was planned to amount to 84.57 € (FSR, 2011, p. 32).

Due to simplified administration procedure (see sec. 3.4.), IA ZASI anticipates that in the national project the cost of FSW will be lower approximately by 8 million € compared to providing the service in the previous DOP system (IA ZASI, n.d.-b).

### 3.8. Who implemented the initiative?

The main implementation agency of the NP is called the Implementation Agency for the Operational Programme of Employment and Social Inclusion (IA ZaSI). It is an intermediary organ of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MPSVR) with a mission to decrease social exclusion of marginalised groups through the support of employment and development projects in poor regions of Slovakia. IA ZASI (back then FSR) was established in 2004, and is financed from the central budget, although its programmes are supported from EU funds (IA ZASI, n.d.-d). The Agency currently supports three other national projects besides FSW, namely, on deinstitutionalisation, community centres and care services. The MPSVR along with (two delegates of) the Government Plenipotentiary of Roma communities are represented on the Board of NP FSW (IA ZASI, n.d.-e).

The employer of field social workers is the municipality who had made the decision to apply to the NP. The application itself is managed by the Agency, the municipalities only submit a one page sheet which reflects their intent of participation and basic demographic data. Once the project is rolling on the locality, municipalities submit monthly checks to the Agency to reimburse the payment for the wages of FSW.

The administration pertaining to actual work tasks, such as writing field diaries, individual records about clients, monthly local reports, data gathering, are all carried out by the Agency (FSW, regional and main coordinators respectively). These spheres of competencies are clearly delineated and municipalities or other public institutions neither have additional responsibilities, nor rights to interfere, or dictate tasks for Fsw. Fsw cooperates with public institutions to the extent that based on the individual records, they can provide information about clients if a particular organ, such as social curatorship requests whether the children “go cleanly,” attend school, or have been vaccinated. But Fsw cannot carry out tasks that have been ordered by public organs and e.g. take away children from parents.

The competencies of FSW and public actors became first clarified in *the Introduction to the Standards of FSW* booklet issued in 2007, but could not be fully enforced before the start of NP in 2012. According to all interviewees, the role of Fsw was not fully understood by many municipalities and they often transferred their agenda to the Fsw that concerned the same target group they worked with. Because monitoring was limited in the DOP system, the coordinators rarely learned about such cases and often got involved only in emergency situations when the Fsw could already not handle the tasks. The RC interviewee highlighted that municipalities in the NP still do not tend to (or want to) understand their limited powers over the Fsw, but in such cases the Agency can much faster and effectively react, as it can withhold the monthly reimbursement of Fsw wage. In that case, the municipality is still obliged by law to pay the wage of Fsw, however, it will not get reimbursed for that month. After three months of warning and repeated misconduct, IA can cancel the contract with the municipality in question. According to the RC interviewee, in the vast majority of cases, the threat or actual withholding of reimbursement tends to work as an effective tool to settle cases with the municipality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Based on the data provided by IA ZASI on the NP FSW programme, in only four municipalities out of a total of 280 municipalities that won funding for the programme between 2012 February and 2014 August was the programme discontinued.

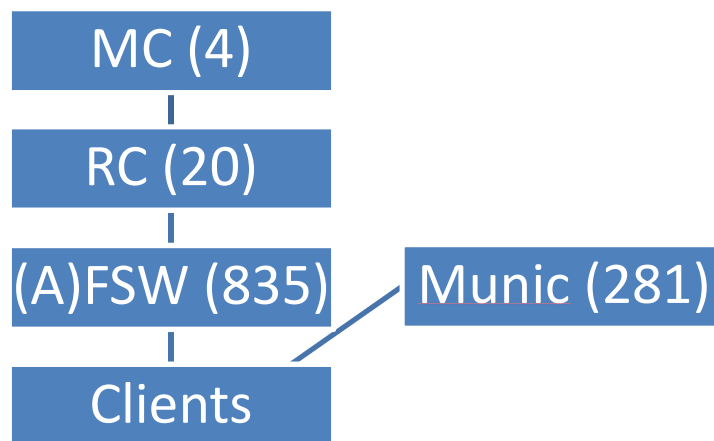
### 3.9. Monitoring

Field social work in the national programme relies on centralised monitoring structure. The main coordinators at the central IA ZASI office in Bratislava are responsible for monitoring and supervising regional coordinators who are located in different regions of Slovakia, usually in a district capital. Regional coordinators, each having between 13-15 municipalities, monitor the work of field social workers. The actual work with clients is carried out by field social workers and assistants.

Fsw keep field diaries where each day they describe the problems clients approached them with, and the intervention by which they tried to solve the problem. Some of the most frequent interventions include helping to fill out a form, mediating on phone with the bailiff, or accompanying the client to the doctor in the town nearby. Based on field diaries, Fsw keep separate files about each client. At the end of the month Fsw submit a monthly report about the locality in which they summarise their activities and highlight a few problematic cases.

RCs visit each settlement in their region once in a month and spend there a full day. During this time they read the field diaries, randomly check the individual files of clients, and evaluate the monthly reports. The RC makes sure that FSW keep the individual files updated within two-three days after interventions. This is particularly important because out of the three documents, it is the files that serve as an official document. So if something happens to the client and the Fsw have not updated their files, they do not have proof they have worked with the client. The field diaries are important because they report the day-to-day activities of Fsw, and enable the RC to check if the Fsw carry out tasks that are of his or her duty, and not e.g. that of the municipality.

*Chart 1: Relationship between different actors in NP FSW (number of employees and involved municipalities until 31 Aug 2014):*



According to the RC interviewed, the paperwork during monthly visits usually lasts about three hours. After that they go out together with the Fsw to the terrain and visit one, or at best two families. In case there was any conflict with the mayor, the RC also visits the municipality. Usually, about one or one and half an hour is spent on the terrain, and during this time the RC can observe the clients attitude to the Fsw (e.g. till what extent clients invite Fsw to their houses, or

whether they know them at all). After the RC visited the locality they also prepare a monthly report and field diary about the locality and submit them to the MC.

Besides reporting, quantitative data is collected from localities, from which the MC compile statistics in every quarter year. The statistics pertain to the number of clients (broken down to male / female, disabled), and (8) types of interventions on the locality. If the number of interventions at a particular locality is too low or too high, the MC ask the RC to explain the situation based on field diaries. If the number of clients exceeds what was intended at the locality, or if the locality is a particularly difficult one, it is the MC's responsibility to ensure sufficient amount of field social workers in the settlement.

Once in a month RC hold joint regional meetings with the Fsw they oversee in their district. At the meeting, participants discuss their problematic cases and can share good practices. In principle, Fsw can also contact RC for advice anytime in urgent cases, and then the RC are expected to be at disposal or provide advice. If the case requires technical expertise (e.g. legal issues with the bailiff) further advice can be requested by the involvement of MC. According to the interviewees these channels of communication are rarely used though. Only one FSW could recall a situation in her career when they contacted the RC in this manner.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.10. Impact assessment**

It is part of the national program to create an evaluation on the impact of field social work (expected in June 2015). The main goal of this evaluation is to assess the effective use of public resources for FSW since 2005, and to evaluate the performance of field social workers in the national project. IA ZASI intends to channel recommendations from the evaluation report into the planning of FSW in the next ESF financing phase (2015-2020), and thereby, improve the quality of service, make financing, coordination and methodological guidance more efficient (IA ZASI, n.d.-a).

### **3.11. Problems faced during or after implementation of the initiative and how these were solved.**

Making municipalities understand and accept the autonomous operation of FSW in their localities seems to be a recurring problem throughout the project, although much less than in the previous DOP system, where there were less coordinators to monitor FSW. The presence of more coordinators together with the liability that reimbursement can be withheld from municipalities, help ensure that local authorities mind the rules of NP, and do not abuse their powers.

The other shortages that all interviewees have highlighted were that there was no training provided for FSW before or after the launch of NP; and supervision – in a sense of a regular, professional support for FSW and RC which protects them from burn out – was missing from the project. Part of the reason of these shortages was that the Slovak government failed in 2012, and the incoming government came with new ideas and also changed the leadership of the Agency. During the last two years, the General Manager at the Agency was also replaced four times, which, the RC noted, caused problems with public procurement of training and supervision services. The IA ZASI leadership is now considering to hire a separate public procurement official, who in the future, would alone attend to the provision of these services.

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<sup>21</sup> The FSW recounted a case when she refused to give a lift to the children whom the social curatorship just resolved to take away from the family (and could not fit into the agency car); the FSW called the RC to confirm she proceeded correctly.

The Plenipotentiary noted that earlier there was a plan to introduce a software into administration to ease Fsw work. This software, which is used by social workers in the Czech Republic, enables to store and process the files of clients in a fast, point and click surface, which has the advantage that social workers can spend more time with actual work on terrain, rather than writing reports, and files. It also has good search functions and makes data available online for coordinators as well. The Plenipotentiary recalled that in 2009 and 2010, the Association of field social workers held a training on the use of this software for some 60 Fsw, but eventually, this programme has not been introduced either, because of problems with public procurement.

## 4. Quantitative analysis of the impact of Field Social Work on the take-up of the Benefit in Material Need

### 4.1. Data and sample

We rely on administrative data assembled from several sources for the period 2010-2014, and in all of these the unit of observation is the municipality. Here, we briefly describe each of these datasets.

*IA ZASI data on the NP FSW* This dataset contains quarterly data on all participant municipalities, it is a summary of the reports of the regional coordinators. The most important variables are the entry and end date of the programme, the number of (A)Fsw working in the municipality, the planned number of clients, the actual number of clients, and the number of interventions.

*IA ZASI data on the DOP FSW:* This dataset was assembled based on the information published on the webpage of IA ZASI on each of the DOP FSW calls, and it contains all project applicants, as well as the funding obtained and duration of the project for successful applicants.

*MPSVR data on BMN claims and registered unemployment:* This dataset contains monthly information at the municipality level on the number of persons receiving the BMN: the number of individuals claiming BMN (either only the basic allowance or the basic allowance and additional allowances), as well as the number of individuals claiming BMN who are not registered as unemployed. We also have information on the number of persons registered as unemployed, as well as the number of registered unemployed broken down by length of unemployment, gender, education level and age group.

*The Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia, 2004 and 2013.* The ATLAS contains estimates of the number of Roma living in each municipality, as well as data on the residential segregation (including the type and characteristics of dwellings) of the Roma population.

*Demographic composition of municipalities, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic*<sup>22</sup>. From the complete list of municipalities of the Slovak Republic, we selected a sample of municipalities all of which were potentially eligible to apply for FSW. We proceeded in the following steps. First, we removed all municipalities in the Bratislava region, since these were excluded from applying for FSW. Second, we excluded all municipalities that had no Roma population according to neither the ATLAS 2004, nor the ATLAS 2013. During the DOP FSW project period, one of the primary requirements for applicants was that there was a disadvantaged Roma community in the municipality (according to the ATLAS 2004), hence our discarding the municipalities with no Roma population.<sup>23</sup> Finally, we discarded the city of Kosice, which is a special, self-governing

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<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, we were unable to collect detailed data on the socio-economic composition of the population at the municipality level.

<sup>23</sup> There were a few exceptions to this rule, where the IA ZASI could include municipalities with no marginalised Roma communities, if the applicant presented data that the situation was different from that recorded in the

region, and is composed of 22 boroughs which are registered as separate administrative units. Due to this special administrative status (as well as having a sizeable Roma population), both the city of Kosice, as well as some of its boroughs individually were eligible for FSW, and won funding, which in this case there is a difficulty in separately analysing the city and borough-level programmes. Hence, we ended up with a sample of 1146 municipalities which could potentially participate in FSW programmes and for which we had data on our key variables of interest.

## 4.2. Selection into the National Programme

This section provides a brief empirical investigation of the determinants of the selection into the NP FSW. First, as outlined in Section 3.2, the phasing in of the NP was gradual. *Table 5* illustrates this point, where we display the number of municipalities that took part in the NP, and where we divided all potential eligible municipalities based on participation in previous DOP FSW programmes. We can see that close to one-third of all municipalities that won funding in the DOP 2010, but where the programme was due to start after 2011 December have already entered the NP within the first two months of its launch, and that there was no more entry into the programme after 2013 January from this category of municipalities. This Table also empirically demonstrates that in the second phase of the NP FSW, the majority of the DOP 2010 winners entered, and have started the FSW by July 2012. The rejected applicants of DOP 2010 entered the program with a slight delay, but more than 75% of this category were part of the NP by October 2012. Between June 2012 and January 2013 the overwhelming majority of DOP 2009 winners were channelled into the NP FSW. There was an important number of late entries into the NP FSW during 2013, when almost half of the new programme participants were from municipalities that never applied for a DOP before, but there were a number of entries from among applicants from the early (2007-2008) DOPs.

*Table 5: Entry into NP FSW by type of prior DOP participation (number of municipalities)*

Date	DOP start after 2011 Dec.	DOP 2010 won	DOP 2010 reject	DOP 2009 won	DOP 2007-2008 won	DOP 2007-2008 reject	No. DOP participation	All
2012 Apr. 1	9	10	14	0	0	0	2	35
2012 July 1	11	34	38	25	2	5	3	118
2012 Oct. 1	11	35	58	68	3	5	3	183
2013 Jan. 1	14	41	62	88	3	5	3	216
2013 July 1	14	41	65	95	10	8	20	253
2014 Jan. 1	14	42	67	96	13	8	28	268
Total number	28	59	77	108	54	45	775	

*Note:* Own calculations based on IA ZASI data. Column ‘All’ includes all municipalities that participated in the NP FSW programme on the given date. Row ‘Total number’ means the total number of municipalities (in our sample) which belonged to the category defined by previous DOP FSW participation.

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ATLAS 2004. This is why we included both the 2004 and the 2013 versions of the ATLAS. Nevertheless, we found a few municipalities that won funding despite having no recorded Roma population: 10 municipalities in the 2007-2010 (DOP FSW) period, and 3 municipalities during the 2012-2014 (NP FSW) period. For the sake of simplicity, we discarded these observations.

The formal selection criteria for the NP FSW programme were based on a combination of three types of information. First, the presence and success of previous DOP FSW programmes, as well as the existence other complex social inclusion programmes. Second, the municipalities’ general labour market and social situation, including the local unemployment rate and the size of the potential target group relative to the population. Third, the size and the geographical segregation of the Roma population in the municipality.

We estimated the impact of various socio-economic variables (based on data from 2011, the year before the start of the NP FSW) on participation in the NP FSW programme, ‘mimicking’ the formal selection criteria. We selected the following proxies of the selection criteria: the total number of inhabitants, the proportion of long-term unemployed (relative to the working-age population), the number of BMN beneficiaries (total and relative to the adult population), and the proportion of Roma in the population. Using this information along with a coding of the application and award of various DOP FSW programmes (along with region indicators) similar to the one used above, we estimated probit models of NP FSW participation. However, in our estimation procedure we could not simultaneously include all socio-economic variables, since these were highly correlated among each-other.<sup>24</sup> Hence, we show the results of two models where we include only a subset of socio-economic variables.

Table 6: Probability of NP FSW receipt (probit model, municipality-level analysis)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Coefficient	p-value	Marginal effect	Coefficient	p-value	Marginal effect
Number of BMN recipients/100	0,349	0,000	0,079	0,174	0,008	0,022
Proportion of Roma pop.	1,755	0,000	0,398	1,317	0,000	0,168
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0,257			0,572		

Note: both models include total number of inhabitants and region as controls. Model 2 additionally includes prior DOP participation dummies. The number of observations is 1146 municipalities.

The first model shows that if the number of BMN recipients increases by 10 persons, the probability of NP FSW receipt increases by 0.8 percentage points, whilst if the proportion of Roma population increases by one percentage point, the probability of NP FSW award increases by 0.4 percentage points.<sup>25</sup> This means that going from the median number of BMN recipients to the 75 percentile of the distribution increases the probability of NP FSW award by 4.4 percentage points and the same calculation for the proportion of Roma population yields an increase in winning probability of 6.2 percentage points (whilst the average award probability is roughly 24% in our sample). In our second model, we added indicators of previous DOP participation, and we saw that these indicators were important determinants of NP FSW award, and these variables substantially increased the explanatory power of our model. Controlling for previous DOP participation also dampens the effect of our key independent variables considerably,

<sup>24</sup> In particular, the proportion of Roma population was highly positively correlated (0.78) with the proportion of BMN recipients and long-term unemployed, while these two latter variables show an even higher positive correlation (0.92) with each other.

<sup>25</sup> Note that this model includes total population size and six region dummies as controls.



however both remain highly statistically significant.<sup>26</sup> Our results generally show that selection into the NP FSW programme was based on previous DOP participation, which was highly positively correlated with indicators of socio-economic deprivation.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.3. Quantifying the effect of NP FSW on BMN take-up

In this section, we estimate the impact of NP FSW (along with that of DOP FSW) on the take-up of the BMN relying on pooled cross-section and time-series municipality-level data for the period 2010 June 1<sup>st</sup> – 2014 May 31<sup>st</sup>. In the absence of a reliable estimate of the number of persons potentially eligible for BMN (as we do not have access to income distributions at the municipality level), our approach relies on directly quantifying the potential effect on the number of BMN recipients.

We need to note that in absence of data on BMN applications and receipt of the target group of the Fsw, we quantify the impact on *all* residents of the municipalities that participated in the Programme. Hence, we consider our estimates to be a lower bound of how the intervention affected the target group. Potential approaches might be to: (a) differentiate municipalities by the proportion of the potential target group eg. the Roma population; or (b) examine the impact in municipalities where a relatively large proportion of interventions by FSW were devoted to helping the target group with benefits applications (*vis-à-vis* ones where FSW made a smaller effort in this respect). However, due to lack of detailed data, we did not pursue these ideas further.

The dataset we use has been assembled based on the administrative data described in Section 4.1. We aggregated monthly data to the municipality and quarter level, and used the sample described above. Hence our sample includes 16 quarters for 1146 municipalities, a total of 18336 observations.

We examine the impact of FSW on BMN take-up in a regression model framework. The key independent variables we use are the existence of NP (and DOP) FSW programmes in the municipality, where we coded the entry into an FSW programme to the month following for the official entry date of the programme, in order to allow for delays in the start of actual work due to the initial setting-up process. The dependent variable is the (logarithm of) the number of BMN recipients.

Hence we first estimate the following model:

$$\ln(BMN)_{iq} = \alpha + \beta_1 DOP_{iq} + \beta_2 NP_{iq} + \delta X_i + \gamma R_{iq} + \varepsilon_{iq}$$

when X is a vector of control variables<sup>28</sup>, RQ is a set of region\*year\*quarter effects, the index *i* stands for municipalities, and the index *q* stands for quarters. In this initial specification, the impact of a NP FSW ( $\beta_2$ ) and that of a DOP FSW ( $\beta_1$ ) is estimated both from time-series variation

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<sup>26</sup> Note that we also estimated a third model, where we additionally included an indicator variable for planned participation in the ‘Comprehensive Approach to the Development of Roma Communities’ programme. We indeed found that the selection into that programme municipalities had significant positive impact on NPFSW participation, but the effect of other variables were largely unchanged. Results are not presented for the sake of brevity.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, estimating a probit model of DOP FSW award probability, we find coefficients on number of BMN recipients and proportion of Roma population that are virtually identical to the ones estimated in the model of NP FSW participation.

<sup>28</sup> These included the proportion of Roma population, the proportion of long-term unemployed (relative to the working-age population), and the total number of inhabitants. We also added indicators of the micro-region (*okres*).

within a municipality and cross-sectional differences across municipalities. Here, we ask the question whether the number of BMN recipients is higher in municipalities (and quarters) where there was a NP FSW (DOP FSW) programme relative to municipalities (and quarters) where there was no FSW, but were similar in other characteristics. We report these estimates only for the sake of comparison, since we saw in the previous section that BMN take-up (as an indicator of social deprivation) is a significant determinant of selection into the NP (DOP) FSW programme, hence we expect that the take-up of the benefits to be higher in municipalities that were selected for the programme even in the absence of FSW.

The second specification we estimate is a municipality-level fixed effect version of the above model:

$$\ln(BMN)_{iq} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 DOP_{iq} + \beta_2 NP_{iq} + \gamma R_{iq} + \varepsilon_{iq}$$

In this version of the regression model, we allow intercepts to be municipality-specific ( $\alpha_i$ ). Hence, we ask whether the presence of NP FSW in quarters following entry into the programme led to a change in BMN recipients relative to quarters when there was no programme. In essence, we wash out all those pre-existing differences across municipalities in determinants of BMN take-up that do not change with time.

The third specification we estimate is a municipality-level fixed effect and fixed trend version of the above model:

$$\ln(BMN)_{iq} = \alpha_i + \tau_i + \beta_1 DOP_{iq} + \beta_2 NP_{iq} + \gamma R_{iq} + \varepsilon_{iq}$$

This regression is carried out in order to test the robustness of our results, insofar as there can be differences in the time-trend of BMN take-up (independently of programme participation). Thus we estimate the impact of NP FSW on the (municipality-specific) rate of change of BMN take-up.

Table 7: Regression models of BMN receipt

Variable	Pooled cross-section time-series		Municipality fixed effects		Municipality fixed effects and time trends	
	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value
DOP FSW	0,640	0,000	0,002	0,819	0,003	0,149
NP FSW	0,658	0,000	0,009	0,305	0,001	0,545
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,514		0,991		0,032	

Note: both models include total number of inhabitants and region as controls. Model 2 additionally includes prior DOP participation dummies.

The estimates of these three regression specifications (which can be found in Table 7) reveal that BMN take-up is 93 (89) percent higher in municipalities with an NP (DOP) FSW. However, once we control for potential pre-existing differences in BMN take-up, we find no impact of NP (DOP) FSW.

Table 8: Regression models of BMN receipt with previous DOP participation

Variable	Pooled cross-section time-series		Municipality fixed effects		Municipality fixed effects and time trends	
	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value
DOP FSW	0,641	0,000	-0,001	0,928	0,003	0,257
NP FSW	0,401	0,000	0,040	0,008	0,010	0,009
NP *(DOP win)	0,276	0,030	-0,036	0,033	-0,010	0,020
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,516		0,992		0,032	

Note: both models include total number of inhabitants and region as controls. Model 2 additionally includes prior DOP participation dummies.

We also estimated a variant of the regression model above, where we allowed for the impact of NP FSW to vary across municipalities that ever won a DOP between 2007-2010 and those that did not win a DOP. The rationale for this is that even though we did not find DOP FSW to effectively increase BMN take-up (in the quarters where DOP FSW was present) it might have had a long-term effect by building up trust between authorities and marginalized persons. Insofar as the above effect is possible, the presence of NP FSW in municipalities with previous DOP FSW would only lead to higher take-up if the ‘quality’ of services in the NP is higher. However, in municipalities without pre-existing DOP FSW, we estimate the impact of the initial appearance of field social workers. The results displayed in Table 8, show that the BMN take-up increased by four percent after entry into the NP FSW in municipalities with no pre-existing DOPs, but there was no such increase in municipalities where field social workers were present before 2012. This result holds up to allowing of municipality fixed trends, hence we can see that the rate of change in BMN take-up increased by one percent following NP FSW with no previous DOP.

In summary, our quantitative investigation yielded mixed results. We saw that selection into the NP (and DOP) FSW was based on socio-economic disadvantage, and hence municipalities that had a high number of BMN participants were more likely to win funding for an FSW project. This in turn means that even though in municipalities where NP (and DOP) FSW was present the number of BMN recipients was much higher than in municipalities where there was no such programme, the FSW programme did not contribute to increasing BMN take-up in general. However, in municipalities where field social workers appeared for the first time in the NP (which was in 67 out of the total of 268 NP FSW recipient municipalities in our sample) BMN take-up increased by a small proportion.<sup>29</sup>

## 5. Assessment and conclusions

### 5.1. What helped/hindered the launch of the initiative and its successful implementation?

Mayors had signalled that there was a need for continued support of FSW, however both them and the state lacked capacity to fully finance it. There were several innovations introduced into the national project, which helped convince the EU about support. The joining of municipalities into the project has been simplified to a great extent. Previously, they had to go through several

<sup>29</sup> A back-of-the envelope calculation yields the result that roughly 1750 additional successful BMN applications were due to the implementation of the NP Fsw programme over the first two years of its existence.

phases in application, now there is only one round where they submit a one page sheet expressing their intent to participate and some basic data about the locality. Unit cost work has been introduced for the wages of field social workers, and a declaration of honour together with pay slips are sufficient from municipalities for reimbursement. There is no need for statements ('výkazy') on a monthly basis anymore. The reimbursement of payments is conditioned on conformity with standards of FSW, and the strengthened role of regional coordinators in monitoring and regular monthly visits help ensure a higher level of professionalism than it was possible in demand-oriented projects.

## 5.2. Lessons for Europe

Field social work is not a new method of work with marginalised groups in Europe. The Slovak service had been greatly inspired by the activities of People in Need NGO in the Czech Republic; elsewhere in the Balkan countries 'mediators' also have a somewhat similar role as they work with communities. The Slovak case is significant, however, because FSW here is not provided by an NGO but by the state itself. This service is a new element in the system of state administration because it is relatively autonomous. It is provided by the state (and should be financed by it) but represents the interests of clients. As one of the Agency's employees put it:

*'[A field social worker is someone who] understands the relationship to the state, but even more the attitude of that human, that he is in some situation and why is there, and tries, from inside, through that trust exert influence. Not from outside, that we will reduce your benefits if you don't do this or that'. (IA ZASI)*

This is a radically different approach of field social work from regular social work the state employs when interacting with people in marginalised situations. It is not a common practice elsewhere, and even in Slovakia exists typically in the most troubled, socio-economically excluded localities.

It should be noted though, that certain tasks, such as informing clients about eligibility for (cash or in kind) assistances, could be also performed by regular social workers acting on behalf of municipalities and MPSVR district agencies. If regular social workers acted more pro-actively towards clients, FSW could focus more on 'deep social work.' This would not only require a shift in the attitude of social workers and bureaucrats, but probably require a grand-scale reform of state administration so that officials are eased from overwhelming administration tasks and can focus more on work with clients. Until then, the provision of social work will prevail in a parallel system: it might be helpful, as marginalised people are provided much needed help, but not the most efficient, since Fsw perform some of the tasks regular social workers should be doing.

As for the national program, it is organised in a way that it has the ability to persist over time. The monitoring system enables continuous and gradual increase of service quality. *'While in DOP field social workers were like individual cells, all living their own life, in NP, they act like living organisms which have inbuilt capacity to improve themselves'* (IA ZASI). This is a significant difference in comparison to demand-oriented projects where regular feedback and monitoring was lacking.

The negotiation talks between Slovakia and the European Commission about the next ESF financing phase have already been concluded, and with one or two months of gap, FSW will probably continue in the 2015-2020 phase as well. The service will be implemented by a SORO agency (probably IA ZASI) together with the Plenipotentiary, who takes over the most impoverished and segregated Roma localities (as defined by the Atlas of Roma communities,

2013).<sup>30</sup> But this project will last again only for five years. Whether field social work will survive in Slovakia, ultimately depends what finances will be secured after the expiry of this programming period in 2020.

### 5.3. Main strengths and weaknesses

Overall, the increased duration of service in national projects (four years, compared two years in DOP), and the provision to ensure continuity in municipalities where FSW had already been present is a big strength of the project. Continuous realisation of projects is essential for carrying out social work in deeper level, that is, on a level which does not only intervene in crises situations, but tries to teach clients and make them more independent. Field social workers can develop an intricate partnership with their clients and the system of coordinators can protect this relationship from the pressure or potential abuses of municipalities.

The new system is quantifiable in terms of more efficient use of public resources since previous administrative costs have been reduced from 20% to 3% in the national project. In terms of effectiveness, our paper aimed at revealing the impact of NP on BMN take-up, however, we believe that due to data limitations, we are only able to provide a lower bound of the effect of the programme on the take-up among the target group. We observed a statistically significant, but arguably a low estimated impact (a 4% increase in the number of BMN recipients), and only in municipalities that did not participate in the previous DOP FSW. We believe that a possible reason for this low impact is that the analysis focused on one particular benefit, which is relatively easy to sort out in the sense that eligibility criteria are relatively simple and require moderate amount of paperwork. Hence, we might expect that the presence of field social workers to lead to a relatively quick learning process on the part of potential recipients, and hence the target population might have already been aware of how to successfully apply for a BMN in settlements which have been in DOP programmes earlier.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it needs to be noted that helping persons with benefit applications is not the focal point of the programme, as only around 2 percent of all formal interventions of FSW were recoded to have had this activity as its main purpose.

A few aspects have not changed since the outset of DOP system though. Firstly, supervision directed at the mental health of field social workers and regional coordinators is still missing from the project. This would be an essential provision for field workers on the terrain in order to ensure their long-term motivation, cater for their mental hygiene, and prevent professional burn-out.

Secondly, the training and education components of project have not been realised either and there is some indication that they would be needed as well, for example, in the form of legal training, as Fsw has noted that occasionally they themselves struggle to interpret legal regulations pertaining to the bailiff's procedures. In the context of this research, we think it is important to mention that Fsw did not recognise the phenomenon of NTU (despite claiming to have already helped clients sort out benefits). Sensitising Fsw about the general phenomena of NTU among poor and Roma, could be an important theme about the life conditions of target group. Developing Fsw's ability to establish *and* sustain contacts with clients, or work out individual

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<sup>30</sup> Form: personal interview with the representative of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities.

<sup>31</sup> Hence, future research will have to focus on the take-up of supplemental BMN allowances, with more complicated procedures (for example the housing allowance). In these cases the presence of field social workers might have a larger impact, through their beneficial effect on obtaining the required documentation.

plans (which are currently rarely used) would be another useful thematic focus of training programmes.

Thirdly, our impression during field work was that cultural sensitisation and decreasing racial prejudices among some social workers would potentially be also desirable among field social workers. It seems to us that there is a certain cognitive gap between professionals in terrain and in offices. While all interviewees on or above the level of regional coordinator were racially sensitive, the same could not be said about field social workers who made some rather derogatory statements about their clients during our meetings (especially before or after the formal interview).

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## 6. Appendix

### List of interviewees:

#### Officials of the agency that designed the initiative

- Zuzana Tordová, Main Coordinator, Methodologist at IA ZASI. 28 Nov 2014. 2 hours.
- Marek Hojsik, former Director of FSR (2010-2012). 5 Jan 2015. 1 hour.
- Adriana Datkova, Plenipotentiary of the Government of SR for Roma communities, Project Manager and Coordinator at the sec. of preparation of implementation of local strategies with complex approaches. As Plenipotentiary, delegate member of “Riadiacy vybor” of NP FSW at ZaSI. 9 Dec 2014. 1h 40mins.

#### Officials of the agency involved in implementing the initiative

- Pavol Jablonický, Main Coordinator, Manager for Publicity and Monitoring at IA ZASI. 28 Nov 2014. 2 hours.
- Pavol Makyš, Main Coordinator, Methodologist at IA ZASI. 28 Nov 2014. 2 hours.

#### Official of the agency administering the benefit

- Lydia Brichtova, Director of sec. of social services at MPSVR. 9 Dec 2014. 1h.

#### An organisation representing the interests of the beneficiaries

- Ludmila Stasakova, Coordinator of social and economic integration, ETP Slovensko. 1h.

#### Social worker who has field-work experience with eligible non-recipients.

- Jozef Vektor, Regional Coordinator in Levice. 10 Dec 2014. 1h 20mins.
- Nikoleta Machalkova, FSW in Cata. 10 Dec 2015. 1h 12mins.
- Eva Benyiova, FSW in Salov. 10 Dec 2015. 1h 12mins.
- Maria Doľova, AFSW in Hrabusice. 25 Nov 2014. 20mins.

#### An independent but well informed outsider who knows the initiative but did not participate in the implementation

- Peter Seman, NGO Direct, Prešov. 24 Nov 2014. 2h.
- Daniel Škobla, Institute for Labour and Family Research, Bratislava. 28 Nov 2014. 30mins.