Economic Exclusion of Ethnic Minorities:

Indicators and Measurement Considerations

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Introduction

This issue brief discusses how social exclusion can be measured from two different approaches – the economic growth approach of the European Union (EU) and the sustainable development approach of the UNDP. This study, the UNDPs Regional Human Development Report on the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe proposes the inclusion of a number of other qualitative indicators not considered by the EU approach[1].

It is asked here whether the common indicators used to quantify the more general concept of social exclusion will "travel well" when applied to its narrower dimension of economic exclusion, especially in empirical research related to disadvantaged groups such as historical ethnic minorities.[2]

The EU approach towards social exclusion is chosen here as one of the entry points because of the recent European shift away from traditional understandings and notions of income poverty and material well-being, towards a new paradigm of an inclusive European society on the basis of equality, minority empowerment and human rights as forcefully promoted in the Lisbon Strategy. [3] The use of indicators and measures of social exclusion have evolved in a EU context.

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[1] UNDP, "The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap", Regional Human Development Report, UNDP, Bratislava, 2002). Available at: http://europeandcis.undp.org/home/show/62BBCD48-F203-1EE9-BC5BD7359460A968. Access date: 07.07.2008.

[2] For a discussion about the concept and growing importance of the economic dimension of social exclusion applied to historical ethnic minorities, see Tim Dertwinkel, "Economic Exclusion of Ethnic Minorities: On the Importance of Concept Specification", European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI Issue Brief #19, November 2008, Available at: http://www.ecmi.de/download/brief_19.pdf. Access date: 07.07.2008.

[3] In the United States for example, this shift has not taken place yet. The US still frames poverty and personal well-being as a deficiency of income for basic needs. In contrast, the European Union has continually revised its thinking about social deprivation, adopting a view of poverty relative to rising average living standards, and, more recently, a framework for thinking about non-monetary aspects of deprivation (see, e.g., T. Atkinson, B. Cantillon, E. Marlier, et al, *Social Indicators: The EU and Social Inclusion* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002).

The aims set in the Lisbon Strategy to expand the European labour market and to become the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion among its groups, has created an even greater demand for valid, reliable and comparable indicators across countries and standardized measures that can help monitor and evaluate these developments.

Especially in the new member states of the EU there is rising pressure on governments to create better living conditions and greater participation opportunities for members of ethnic minorities, broadly defined. For example, under the Social Inclusion Programme of the EU, member states are required to adopt National Action Plans (NAPs) addressing different dimensions of social exclusion, among them economic exclusion, at *all* levels of society. It is thus obvious that indicators of social and economic exclusion are coming to play an increasingly important role for the EU, national governments, NGOs and researchers working in the field of minority rights in monitoring and comparing national progress towards the ambitious goals set.

I am proceeding as follows: first, the usefulness of a common set of indicators and quantitative measures for further data-driven investigation on the topic of socio-economic exclusion is stressed. Second, I examine what kind of social exclusion-related indicators have been proposed and applied at the EU level so far. Third, special emphasis is given to the question how to measure and quantify the most salient dimension of social exclusion, economic exclusion. I have outlined elsewhere that the very meaning of social exclusion has always been an economic and less a political or cultural one[4]. It will be investigated to what degree the measurement of economic exclusion at the EU level is taken into account and in what ways it differs from classical measurements of income poverty.

Finally, when applying the measurement of economic exclusion to certain disadvantaged groups, (such as ethnic minorities[5]), what are the implications for the use of quantitative indicators and data collection?

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[4] See Tim Dertwinkel, "Economic Exclusion …", as in footnote 2.
[5] See Jonathan Wheatley, "The Economic Status of National Minorities in Europe: A Four-Case Study", 6 *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* (2007), 1-35, Available at: http://ecmi.de/jemie/download/1-2007_Wheatley.pdf, Access date: 07.05.2008 ; see also Jonathan Wheatley, "The Economic Dimension of Minority Participation in Europe", European Centre for Minority Issues, Issue Brief #15, February 2007, Available at: http://www.ecmi.de/download/brief_15.pdf, Access date: 07.05.2008

What are socio-economic indicators, and what are good socio-economic indicators?

Socio-economic indicators aim to provide empirical, valid and reliable measurements of different dimensions of human well-being. They draw their authority from the level of consensus and sense of legitimacy they attain in particular cultural contexts. Socio-economic indicators can either be constructed to measure a real, current situation, e.g., being unemployed at a certain point in time, or can give information about the extent a situation is changing over a period of time, e.g. slipping in and out of unemployment. For the latter purpose, the same indicator or measure is used on the same individual/group, but at different points in time, resulting in a longitudinal or panel study design.

Indicators can be objective or subjective in nature. Objective indicators often come in the form of official statistics such as employment/unemployment rates or percentage of people living below the poverty line. They are often constructed by making use of secondary data - data that already was collected by someone else, e.g. through national statistical offices.

Subjective indicators instead try to operationalize and make use of more qualitative information such as personal feeling of well-being, individual job satisfaction or feelings of belonging to a particular community. Such indicators are less standardized in their measurement than objective ones, and are often obtained through open questions in an interview, in-depth field work, focus group interviews and the like. However, this does not mean that they are less important or less reliable than objective indicators. Quite the contrary, in the growing field of social and economic exclusion research in the EU, the importance of subjective indicators is increasingly recognized as a useful complement to more "standard" measures.

The decision on what kind of indicators to rely depends very much on research purposes, audiences and available financial resources – a standardized set of questions in a survey on socio-economic exclusion e.g. will be much cheaper and faster to realize, but might not capture the very concept of social exclusion well, as in the case of EU social indicators proposed so far (see below for details). In other words, such indicators do not measure what they are supposed to measure, and their usage is driven by context and policy considerations rather than by theory.

A successful use of indicators builds on a match between the collected data and the intention of the indicator "what to measure". Unfortunately, quite often the construction and use of certain

indicators is predetermined by data availability and not by the research question or the theoretical background of the research as such. This might result in problems of content validity of the measurement instrument, especially if only certain dimensions of a concept are measured and others left out of the picture.

In sum, good indicators of social exclusion are those that are able to:

- summarize otherwise complicated information into one aggregated number, graph or figure
- measure what they intend to measure and are closely related to the dimensions of the theoretical concept (content validity)
- quantify and/or qualify the degree of exclusion of specific groups across countries
- monitor developments and trends over time and evaluate progress
- identify gaps and aid effective targeting of resources for policy makers and practitioners

Common indicators of social inclusion at the EU level

Since the 2000 Lisbon meeting, the European Social Model explicitly aims to eradicate poverty, fight social exclusion, and enhance social cohesion. These aims are best achieved by means of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Key elements of the Open Method of Coordination are the definition of commonly agreed objectives for the European Union (EU) as a whole, the development of appropriate national action plans (NAPs) to meet these objectives, and the periodic reporting and monitoring of progress made. Similar approaches were subsequently adopted in many other areas, including economic policy, employment, education, sustainable development, social inclusion, social protection, etc.

In October 2001, the Commission and the Council adopted the Joint Inclusion Report, based upon the first 2001 National Action Plans of Social Inclusion. The document specified four objectives:

1. facilitating participation in employment and access to resources and rights, goods and services for all citizens (e.g., social protection, housing, health care, education, justice, culture);

2. preventing the risks of exclusion by preserving family solidarity, preventing over-indebtedness and homelessness, and promoting "inclusion";

3. helping the most vulnerable, for example, the persistently poor, children, residents of areas marked by exclusion;

4. mobilizing all relevant bodies by promoting participation and self-expression of the excluded and partnerships and mainstreaming their concerns.

In December 2001 at the Laeken Summit, a revised list of social indicators was adopted. Most of these pertained to income, labor market status, access to public services, health, and education[6].

Building on prior work of Eurostat and academic research[7], it is within the reporting and monitoring context of the Open Method of Coordination that the European Council in 2001 and the Social Protection Committee in 2006 endorsed some best practice criteria for indicator design and selection, which are in line with the considerations of what good indicators should ideally cover from the previous section above. According to these best practices,

- an indicator should capture the essence of the problem and have a clear and accepted normative interpretation
- an indicator should be robust and statistically validated
- an indicator should be responsive to policy interventions but not subject to manipulation
- an indicator should be measurable in a sufficiently comparable way across Member States, and comparable as far as practicable with the standards applied internationally by the UN and the OECD
- an indicator should be timely and susceptible to revision
- the portfolio of indicators{ XE "Indicators:portfolio" } should be balanced across different dimensions
- the indicators should be mutually consistent and the weight of single indicators in the portfolio should be proportionate

Yet, the general indicators proposed and used by the EU so far to measure social exclusion suffer from a serious problem of low content validity and are little more than extended measures of classical income poverty, the dimension of social exclusion that is easiest to quantify. Only in a second step were extended poverty and unemployment indicators developed[8], and accompanied with already existing education and health attainment measures.

Finally, recognising that a large number of common indicators (currently 18){ XE "Indicators" } are needed to properly assess the multidimensional nature of socio-economic exclusion, the Social Protection Committee recommended that they be presented in three tiers. These tiers include especially:

- 10 *primary indicators*{ XE "Indicators:primary" } consisting of a restricted number of lead indicators which cover the broad fields considered to be the most important in leading to social exclusion:

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[6] T. Atkinson, B. Cantillon, E. Marlier et al, *Social Indicators*, as in footnote 3.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

Table 1: **Primary Indicators of social exclusion used in the EU, (based on Atkinson et al. (2002))**
{ XE "Indicators:primary" }

	Indicator	Definition
1	Low income{ XE "Income:low income" } rate after transfers	Percentage of individuals living in households where the total household income is below 60 per cent national median income with disaggregation by age and gender, most frequent activity status, household type, tenure status
2	Distribution of income	Ratio between the national income of the top 20 per cent of the income distribution to the bottom 20 per cent
3	Persistence{ XE "Income:persistence of low income" } of low income	Persons living in households where the total household income was below 60 per cent median national income in year n and (at least) two years of years n-1, n-2, n-3 with disaggregation by gender
4	Relative median low income gap	Difference between the median income of persons below the low income threshold and the low income threshold, expressed as a percentage of the low income threshold with disaggregation by gender
5	Regional cohesion	Coefficient of variation of employment rates at NUTS 2 level
6	Long term unemployment rate	Total long-term unemployed population ($\geq$12 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total active population with disaggregation by gender
7	Persons living in jobless households	Persons aged 0-65 living in households where none is working out of the persons living in eligible households
8	Early school leavers not in education or training	Share of total population of 18-24-year olds having achieved ISCED level 2 or less and not attending education or training with disaggregation by gender
9	Life expectancy at birth	Number of years a person may be expected to live, starting at age 0 with disaggregation by gender
10	Self defined health{ XE "Health" } status by income level	Ratio of the proportions in the bottom and top quintile groups of the population aged 16 and over who classify themselves as in a bad or very bad state of health with disaggregation by gender

- 8 *secondary indicator{* XE "Indicators:secondary" *}s* supporting these lead indicators and describing other dimensions of the problem. Both these levels would be commonly agreed and defined indicators, used by Member States in their National Action Plans{ XE "National Action Plans" } on Social Inclusion and by the Commission and Member States in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion. The 8 secondary indicators are shown below in Table 2:

Table 2: Secondary Indicators of social exclusion used in the EU, based on Atkinson et al. (2002)

	Indicator	Definition
11	Dispersion around the low income{ XE "Income:low income" } threshold	Persons living in households where the total household income was below 40, 50 and 70 per cent median national income
12	Low income rate anchored at a moment	Base year 1995 1. Relative low income rate in 1997

	in time	2. Relative low income rate in 1995 multiplied by the inflation factor of 1994/96
13	Low income rate before transfers	Relative low income rate where income is calculated as follows: 1. Income excluding all social transfers 2. Income including retirement pensions and survivors pensions. 3. Income after all social transfers, disaggregation by gender
14	Gini coefficient	The relationship of cumulative shares of the population arranged according to the level of income, to the cumulative share of the total amount received by them
15	Persistence { XE "Income:persistence of low income" }of low income (below 50 per cent of median income)	Persons living in households where the total household income was below 50 per cent median national income in year n and (at least) two years of years n-1, n-2, n-3, disaggregation by gender
16	Long term unemployment share	Total long-term unemployed population (≥12 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total unemployed population, disaggregation by gender
17	Very long term unemployment rate	Total very long-term unemployed population (≥24 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total active population, disaggregation by gender
18	Persons with low educational attainment	Educational attainment rate of ISCED level 2 or less for adult education by age groups (25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64), disaggregation by gender

In addition to those two levels, Member States themselves can then include a *third level of indicators* in their National Action Plans{ XE "National Action Plans" } on Social Inclusion, to highlight specificities in particular areas, and to help interpret the primary and secondary indicators; these are not to be harmonised at EU level.

At the European Union level, the data for these indicators comes from mainly two household surveys:

- the Household Budget Surveys (HBSs)
- EU-SILC (Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions)

Household Budget Surveys (HBSs) are national surveys mainly focusing on consumption expenditure. They are conducted in all EU Member States. They were launched at the beginning of the 1960's and Eurostat has been collating and publishing these survey data every five years since 1988. The two last collection rounds were 1999 and 2005. Although there have been continuous efforts towards harmonization, differences remain. The surveys vary between countries in terms of frequency, timing, content or structure. Currently data are collected for all 27 EU Member States as well as for Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Norway and Switzerland.

Usefulness of common EU indicators for the measurement of social and economic exclusion

EU-SILC is the main source for the compilation of comparable indicators on social cohesion used for policy monitoring at EU level in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination. It is collecting on an annual basis timely and comparable multidimensional micro-data on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions, as shown in detail in Table 1 and 2 above. Every year, both cross-sectional data (pertaining to a given time or a certain time period) and longitudinal data (pertaining to individual-level changes over time, observed periodically over, typically, a four year period) are collected.

The EU-SILC was launched with six EU-15 countries plus Norway in 2003 and re-launched under a Regulation with twelve EU-15 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Finland and Sweden) and in Estonia, Norway and Iceland in 2004. In 2005 the rest of the EU-25 countries joined the EU-SILC. Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Switzerland have launched SILC in 2006.

EU-SILC and the proposed common indicators attempt to capture social exclusion's multidimensionality and time dimension, but, aside from low income and unemployment, they do not agree upon which dimensions are salient or even causally related to social exclusion as such. The resulting list set of indicators are little more than extended and varied measures of material or income poverty. For example, 9 out of 18 indicators are advanced measures of income, which are the most obvious and widely used measures of poverty, not exclusion. However, the EU *interprets* these measures as indicators of people who are "at risk of being poor", and not as measures of poverty as such. At least this reflects a growing awareness that low material income may not be a reliable indicator for social exclusion at all.

In addition, 5 EU level indicators are related to long-term (a year or more) unemployment. Long-term unemployment is a key cause and classical measure for poverty, but theories of social exclusion stress that unemployment is rather the consequence than cause of social exclusion. This reflects an important lack of theoretical and conceptual guidance for the collection of such data, resulting in possible problems of content validity and reliability for the current measurement of social exclusion in the EU.

Elsewhere, I have pointed out that a working definition of social exclusion would be non-participation or denial of access to key activities of a society[9]. Social exclusion normally means

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[9] See Tim Dertwinkel, "Economic Exclusion …", as in footnote 2.

that an individual is not participating in society for reasons beyond his/her control, but he or she would like to participate. Social exclusion is generally agreed to be a relative concept – relative to time, place/location and society. Political/civic engagement, cultural interaction and economic participation are the most obvious dimensions of the concept of social exclusion.

In terms of available data and measurements for social exclusion, the good news is that the common indicators used at the EU level today are really indicators of only *one dimension* of social exclusion, the economic one. The economic dimension was identified by the EU as most salient and easiest to realize empirically. The official indicator list stresses very much the need to focus on production (participation in economic activities through access to labour market and non-discrimination) and consumption (capacity to purchase goods and services, capacity to generate an income and savings) of individuals, households and certain disadvantaged groups such as women or elderly.

However, as e.g. income poverty is still understood mostly in terms of vertical redistribution of wealth between individuals, economic exclusion is a relational, group-level phenomenon. For example, income poverty can lead to economic exclusion, as well as the reverse, but excluded members of societies do not necessarily have to be poor. Thus, economic exclusion is never strictly a question of insufficient material resources almost by definition. Currently, work is under way to measure the social and political dimensions of exclusion more explicitly, which will lead to more disaggregated data related to the question of the salience of the three main dimensions of social   exclusion.

Other aspects to keep in mind relate to regional or geographical disparities unrelated to income or unemployment but related to exclusion, including ethnic settlement segregation and the emergence of ethnic neighborhoods, exposure to crime and probably worse environmental and health conditions. What is an even greater concern is that there are no commonly agreed indicators at the EU level that are disaggregated according to ethnicity, although steps have been taken to disaggregate income and unemployment data by gender and age (see Table 1 and 2) and by geographic region (such as the measure of social cohesion at NUTS 2 level).

Towards meaningful indicators of economic exclusion of ethnic minorities: the example of UNDP's work on Roma

As pointed out above, commonly agreed upon disaggregated indicators for the measurement of social exclusion of different *ethnic* groups in societies in Europe do not exist. At best, the current indicators used in the EU are advanced poverty measures that *might* be interpreted as measures of one manifestation of social exclusion, economic exclusion. These can be applied to different disadvantaged groups in society such as women, children and the elderly, and to some sub-national administrative regions beyond the state level.

Thus, any further empirical study that is interested in causes and consequences of exclusion of ethnic minorities will face the problem that it has to collect primary data on the topic in a meaningful way. The general inclusion indicators set at EU level should be taken as guidance for data collection and own indicator construction, and should not be used in an uncritical way. I have argued that at best the proposed EU indicators should be interpreted as measures of the narrower dimension of economic exclusion instead of social exclusion in general, and that there are other aspects, political and cultural dimensions of social exclusion, left out of the picture so far.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) most likely faced the same problems as described here when comparative research was launched on the social situation of the Roma minority in five Central and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and the Slovak Republic) in 2001.

UNDP has been at the forefront to apply the European concept of social exclusion to countries of the developing world and to countries in transition from state to market economies. In detailed and micro-level case studies on the socio-economic situation of Roma, social exclusion is framed as limited or blocked access to the social system. Findings supported the view proposed in this issue brief that socio-economic exclusion is associated mainly with long-term unemployment rates and causally linked back to group characteristics such as ethnic affiliation rather than caused by low income alone[10].

UNDP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) claim to have undertaken the first comprehensive quantitative survey of the socio-economic situation Roma minorities face. The study seeks to provide national and international policy makers, academics and representatives of civil society with valid, reliable, and cross-country comparative statistical data and indicators.

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[10] UNDP, "The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe …", as in footnote 1.

The problems Roma face were identified by asking Roma representatives and samples of individuals directly about their personal well-being and social situation, and how they would rank these problems themselves.

Data was collected with the help of a representative survey based on 5,034 individual face-to face-interviews in each of the countries under study. The results from each country are comparable because they are based on a common (standardized) questionnaire where certain sets of questions are designed in such a way to measure e.g. unemployment or education access. The questionnaire used is transparent and freely available, which makes it a valuable source for further studies on different ethnic minorities. An identical sampling design was used for the interviews, using random quota sampling (quotas for regions or municipalities for adult Roma), based on the last formal census in a country.

Three major indicators of the *salience* of social exclusion were identified by the study in the following priority order[11]:

- Availability of employment opportunities and access to employment
- Equal access to education
- Participation in government, especially at the local level

I have outlined before that for economic exclusion of ethnic minorities to be present, it is sufficient if one of the second-level dimensions of economic exclusion (lack of participation measured as blocked access to labour market / education *or* discrimination measured as underpaid job) becomes true. It is interesting to note that the second possibility to measure economic exclusion, discrimination, does not seem to play an important role for the Roma – their concern seems more fundamental about blocked entry access to jobs and to schooling. The most important reasons for not finding a job were described by survey respondents as "my ethnic affiliation" followed by "overall economic depression in the country" and "inadequate skills." This suggests that labour market discrimination is certainly present, but is not the only reason why Roma have difficulty finding employment.

Contrary to expectations by UNDP, Roma attention is less focused on having Roma political participation realized, stressing again the importance to focus on the economic dimension of social exclusion first. However, unemployment figures among Roma averaged 40 % and were

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[11] Ibid.

found to be lower than what is commonly believed. These figures contradict frequently reported estimates of nearly 100 percent unemployment rate and clearly show the need for quantitative indicators and empirical research strategies in the field of minority empowerment. The informal sector was found to provide important income generation opportunities as well.

Data also shows that poverty is more severe in rural areas than in urban centres, which means that the Roma in rural areas are "double losers": in addition to lack of access to the social safety nets available in urban areas, rural Roma also lack access to productive resources. Another implication of these results is that legal frameworks for minority rights protection are a necessary but insufficient precondition for social inclusion. The survey revealed that the Roma understand "human rights" as being inseparably linked with access to jobs and education. Further studies should build on this somewhat surprising result and try to test this hypothesis against other ethnic minorities in different settings in Europe.

Conclusion

The complexity and relativity of social exclusion, its sensitivity to context, social group, time, geographic location and its variation across salient dimensions have made it extremely difficult to define and quantify social exclusion. Driven by EU policy mandates and the Lisbon Strategy, efforts to operationalize the concept separately from poverty have outpaced theoretical work by far. As a consequence, most measurement efforts draw upon available data on income and still measure poverty instead of exclusion.

The EU has so far claimed to measure social exclusion more explicitly, focusing on advanced income indicators in combination with indicators on unemployment, education, life expectancy and health status. A sense of caution is needed here, and at this point in time the EU is promoting the narrower focus on economic exclusion rather than social exclusion as such. This paves the road further for researchers and practitioners that call for disaggregated studies of social exclusion, applied to ethnic minorities or immigrants more specifically.

The detailed micro-data has still to be collected on a "case by case" basis, which will be cost- and labour intensive. How further collection of data and construction of indicators related to questions of economic exclusion of ethnic minorities should be carried out has already been demonstrated in the UNDP research on Roma issues. I conclude that further studies on the topic of socio-economic exclusion should take this study as a benchmark for own data collection on ethnic minority groups in general and follow the methodology proposed .

For future work in this field, it would indeed be worthwhile to test some of the implications of this study in different settings and on different ethnic groups.

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