

Contents

Executive summary	1
1. Introduction	2
2. The research process	4
Step 1 - The desk research	4
Step 2 - The fieldwork	4
Step 3 - The questionnaire	5
3. The European youth employment policy framework	6
4. Research Findings – Hungary	9
4.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies	9
4.2. Secondary students part of the Roma Police Fellowship Program	11
4.3. Integrom Programme – The way to employment for higher education graduates	16
4.4. Pro Ratatouille Garden Project for less educated Roma from rural Hungary	22
5. Research Findings – Bulgaria	27
5.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies	27
5.2. Young university students from the town of Sliven	29
5.3. Pre-secondary, secondary and university students from Vazovo village	34
6. Research Findings – Romania	38
6.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies	38
6.2. Early school leavers from a marginalised, remote community in Resita	41
6.3. Less-educated rural Roma from Prahova County	45
7. Research Findings – the Czech Republic	49
7.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies	49
7.2. Young educated Roma from northwestern Czech Republic working in Prague	50
8. Research Findings - Slovakia	54
8.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies	54
8.2. Secondary students from an urban area in Skalica	56
9. Conclusions	62
Appendix 1	65
Appendix 2	66

Executive summary

The aim of this research is to find out what works for young Roma in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia across different regional and educational contexts and levels when it comes to finding employment. The report summarizes the existing European and national youth employment policy frameworks and the situation in each country with a specific focus on Roma youth. The aim is to assess to what extent Roma youth and others interviewed refer to these frameworks and whether they are being implemented. The research involved a fact-finding and “reality check” investigation, followed by a further exploration of the different profiles of Roma youth for whom no best practice has yet been identified when it comes to accessing the labour market.

The research first presents three examples of practice related to different target groups from Hungary: secondary students coming from different geographical locations, Roma university graduates from big cities, and less-educated Roma from rural areas. The next case discussed is from Bulgaria (the Nadejda case), focusing on college students from a segregated urban area, while the case after that focuses on rural secondary students. Romania’s first case looks at early school dropout from a marginalized urban community, while the second case looks at less-educated rural youngsters. In the capital of the Czech Republic we look at Roma university students and graduates, whereas in Slovakia we look at secondary students from a medium-sized urban area.

Generally speaking, this research has shown that the more educated young Roma are and the better their geographical conditions (i.e., living in big urban areas), then the higher their chances are of being employed. There are big discrepancies between Roma college or university graduates and Roma youth who are marginalized (from rural, segregated areas) and uneducated (especially women) when it comes to their employment needs. College graduates need jobs that match their level of qualification, whereas less-educated Roma need programmes that can support them to either stay in their current school or to continue their education.

There is a need, therefore, for investment into Roma youth education, on the one hand, and into desegregating Romani housing and creating acceptable living conditions on the other hand. Governments should invest in education, more specifically, into education that provides professional development and qualification. Both civil society and Government need to address early school drop-out at different levels so Roma youngsters increase their chances of getting fair jobs. Lastly, Government should invest in different programmes enabling Roma youth employment that would provide sufficient compensation for youth labour so they are not forced to migrate at an early stage of their working lives.

Investing in our future: What work(s) for young Roma?

1. Introduction

According to the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017) only one in four Roma aged 16 years or older reports being ‘employed’ or ‘self-employed’ as their main activity. Roma women report much lower employment rates than Roma men (16% compared to 34%), whereas 72% of young Roma women belong to the ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’ (NEET) category compared to 55% of young Roma men. The paid work rate for Roma aged 20-64 is 30%, which is well below the EU average of 70% for that age category in 2015. The situation of young people is substantially worse: 63% of Roma aged 16-24 were NEET at the time of the survey, compared to the 12% EU average on the NEET rate for the same age group.¹

In order to understand the underlying causes of low Roma youth employment and to inspire practitioners and policy makers to invest in employment opportunities for Roma youth, ERGO Network, in cooperation with its member and partner organisations, has engaged in fact-finding research in five EU countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The research was conducted with the help of these ERGO Network members:

- A. Slovo21, Prague, Czech Republic (www.slovo21.cz)
- B. Roma Advocacy and Research Centre, Skalica, Slovakia (www.romadata.org)
- C. Pro Cserehát Association, Budapest, Hungary (www.bffd.hu)
- D. Autonomia Foundation, Budapest, Hungary (www.autonomia.hu)
- E. Nevo Parudimos, Romania - Reșița, Romania (www.nevoparudimos.ro)
- F. Asociatia CRIS, Prahova, Romania (www.asociatiacris.ro)
- G. Integro Association, Razgrad, Bulgaria (www.integrobgbg.org)

Considering the most likely characteristics of youth who secure jobs, such as educational attainment and geographical location, it was agreed to focus on different profiles, ranging from disadvantaged youth living in remote rural areas to highly-educated Roma youth in capital cities. In the first phase, the specific country context of employment for Roma, as well as good or promising practices in youth employment measures, were defined through desk research. In addition, field research was conducted and an online questionnaire was developed to triangulate the fieldwork and reach out to as many Roma youth as possible for their input.

This report presents the results of the research as a whole (with a focus on interview and focus group findings), while the questionnaire findings and the desk research results have been presented in ERGO’s publications *Investing in our future: What work(s) for young Roma? Results from an online questionnaire* and *Investing in our future: What work(s) for young Roma? Top 10 Best Practices of Roma Youth Employment*, respectively. The aim of this research is to provide a full picture of the profiles explored through the different stages of the

¹ Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) Roma – Selected findings, available at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings/fra-opinions>

research process, as well as to ‘reality-check’, both with youth and with professionals at the grassroots level, whether the identified measures are indeed best practices.

This research is an important component of a campaign that ERGO Network has prepared to mobilise support for investing in employment opportunities for Roma youth. The campaign was launched in November 2017 at an ERGO Network public event, where partial results of this research were presented for the first time, as well as at the EU Roma Platform 2017 through specific campaign activities centered on the views and messages of Roma youth themselves that were developed and explored during the ERGO Summer Academy. That Academy took place in August 2017 and assembled a group of 20 Roma youth who spent six days training and debating in order to explore one of the most challenging issues they face, namely, access to the labour market by Roma youth.

First, this report describes the methods used – desk research, interviews and focus groups, and the online survey – followed by a short overview of the main European Union initiatives on youth employment. It then explores some of the profiles in the countries where the research has been conducted. Here we explain the country contexts, the best practices explored, and most importantly we reflect on beneficiaries’ and other stakeholders’ views about the experiences of Roma youth and their opportunities for employment.

The first part of the analysis reflects on how the best practices are understood by their beneficiaries and by an array of other actors, whether directly involved or not involved at all (see the Hungary section). In the rest of the analysis, in cases where no best practice has been identified, an analysis of the profile has been conducted based on our understanding of the potential beneficiaries of such best practices and the interested actors.

As far as Roma youth themselves are concerned, we would expect that the higher the level of their education and the more favorable the region where they live, the greater their access would be to the labour market. Based on previous research, we would expect Roma youth living in disadvantaged areas (mainly rural ones) to be less likely to get jobs compared Roma living in urban areas.² Generally speaking, we would expect to find different policy approaches across these different profiles, with most approaches presenting a high probability of being able to work across countries. The intention of this research is to provide an overview and a cross-country comparison of these different profiles of Roma youth according to their levels of education and geographical locations.

²See: Szalai, J, and C. Schiff. (2014). *Migrants, Roma, and Post-Colonial Youth in Education Across Europe. Being Visibly Different*. Palgrave Macmillan,

2. The research process

Step 1 - The desk research

The aim of the desk research was to collect information about different employment measures/projects/programmes/initiatives (hereinafter, “measures”) that can be considered best or promising practices for which Roma youth are eligible (see Appendix 1). Desk research guidelines were developed and distributed at the end of April 2017 among the ERGO Network members involved in this research. The guidelines were based on a number of profiles, varying from disadvantaged youngsters living in remote rural areas to highly-educated Roma youth in capital cities, as follows:

- a. Primary education or lower, rural area
- b. Primary education or lower, segregated, urban
- c. Primary education, urban
- d. Secondary education, semi-rural
- e. University, rural
- f. University, urban

The guidelines provided to the partner organisations centered around a common set of questions focusing on aspects such as: the institution/organisation responsible for implementing the measure; who supports the measure financially and who are the partners; which profile of youth the measure covers; which type of employment the measure aims to enhance; whom the measure targets (e.g., age, female/male ratio, geographical location, etc.); and the eligibility criteria. A second set of questions focused around the aims of the measure, its intended outcomes, what it consists of (e.g., job shadowing, job application writing), its components or phases, and its duration. Most importantly, we focused on the extent to which the agreed indicators/targets have been achieved and on the beneficiaries’/users’ perception of the measure.

Step 2 - The fieldwork

For each profile, after the desk research, the selected good practice examples were ‘reality-checked’ with youth and professionals at the grassroots level through focus groups and interviews. In this second stage we checked how and to what extent the selected measures have achieved their goals, i.e., whether they were sustainable and created sustainable opportunities for Roma youth.

Based on the desk research, the participating organisations were asked to select one or two measures that fit under one of the profiles they would further explore in the field. Once they selected the measures, they were asked to identify people they would like to interview or include in the focus groups, including beneficiaries of these measures (and other youth with the same profile who could be or could have been beneficiaries) and the implementers (the people in charge of the project, including those who wrote it, managed it, contributed to the decision-making stages of the measures, lobbied for the measures, were in charge of

recruitment and outreach for the measures, trainers, employment officers, employment mediators, etc.).

The field work used two research instruments. For each measure the organisations had to conduct a certain number of focus groups with Roma youth as well as interviews with employers, employment offices, professionals and other actors. Besides the main aim of the research project, the idea of the focus groups was to make the Roma youth voice heard at the EU level and to promote a participatory approach. The questions (see Appendix 2) referred to the youngsters' socio-economic contexts and their knowledge about youth employment initiatives at the EU or national level, or of any initiatives targeting personal development for youth, their involvement in decision-making processes related to youth, as well as their recommendations for EU decision-makers in terms of Roma youth employment.

The aim of the semi-structured interviews with employers was to learn more about their businesses, their familiarity with regulations/legislation in their country regarding the employment of youth or other particular groups, employment outreach, vacancies, how the employers target Roma, whether they provide on-the-job training or any type of assistance, as well as their needs and the assistance provided by the Government or other deciding factors. The aim of engaging in conversations with other professionals (employment offices, consultancy firms, professionals in the same locality as the focus group) was to understand how they perceive barriers to employment for Roma youth, as well as what the available opportunities and measures are, what these professionals perceive as good practice examples, etc. We also wanted to know how other actors, such as municipalities, community centers and schools, can support the employability of Roma youth and whether they have been involved directly or indirectly in developing and implementing such measures.

Step 3 - The questionnaire

In addition to the desk research and the field research, an online questionnaire was developed to triangulate the fieldwork (more specifically, the qualitative research done through the focus groups), as well as to reach out to other Roma youngsters who, due to logistical practicalities (time, resources, etc.), could not be interviewed personally and engaged directly in the research.

The questionnaire was designed in English (EN) and, with the help of the ERGO members, was translated into local languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Czech and Slovak). The questionnaires were open during the period August-September 2017. They were distributed via e-mail to different Roma and pro-Roma youth NGOs and to well-established, renowned international Roma NGOs. ERGO members also facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire in their national language through social media, especially through Roma-related social media groups.

ERGO Network was interested to find out the employment status of Roma youth (age 16-30) given their levels of education and geographical locations and to understand how their education level impacts their ambitions for further careers, including self-employment. The

research targeted 100 young Roma from the countries involved. Besides establishing the age limit and requiring a declared ethnicity, there was nothing further to the sampling procedure. We received 156 responses to the questionnaire; if respondents did not declare themselves as Roma, or if they were the wrong age, their responses were not considered in the final data analysis.

The respondents come from the initially-targeted countries, with most respondents coming from Romania (40%), Bulgaria (24%), Hungary (19%), Slovakia (12%) and the Czech Republic (5%). In terms of gender, 63% of respondents identified themselves as female and 37% as male.

As far as the profile of the respondents is concerned, there was an almost equal representation of employees and students (RO 16% employed and 19% students, BG 6% employed and 16% students, CZ 3% employed, SK 7% students and 4% employed, and HU 7% students and 11% employed), followed by about 10% unemployed, approximately 5% self-employed, and one person living with disabilities. The main findings from the questionnaire, *Investing in Roma youth: What work(s) for Roma? Results from an online questionnaire*, can be found on ERGO's website.³

3. The European youth employment policy framework

In order to show that there is a foundation for youth employment in Europe, in the following section we will provide a short overview of the main, more recent European Union initiatives on youth employment. In the profiles analysis we will refer to the national or local frameworks or strategies for targeting youth employment, especially Roma and disadvantaged youth.

Considering the multilevel governance approach in the European Union, on the one hand there are European youth employment initiatives (e.g., Youth Guarantee) that are not binding on the Member States; however, the Member States have expressed their explicit commitment to enhancing youth employment. On the other hand, at the national level, either because of these EU initiatives or because of other national priorities, problems or goals, the Member States have their own national strategies and measures for youth employment (e.g., the National Employment Strategy 2014-2020). In theory, Roma youth should be eligible to benefit from these youth employment measures in their countries of residence, whether they explicitly target Roma youth or not.

One of the most well-known European mainstream strategies is Europe 2020.⁴ This strategy talks about inclusive growth by fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion. Europe 2020 sets a target of employment, youth included, of

³ See more at: <http://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Questionnaire-report.pdf>

⁴ See more at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

75% in 2020, compared to 69% in 2010. In line with these objectives, three main tools have been developed: the New Skills Agenda for Europe⁵ (formerly known as the Skills Guarantee), the European Platform Against Poverty,⁶ and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs.⁷

The New Skills Agenda aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or to acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or the equivalent. It targets adults with a low level of skills, e.g., those without upper secondary education who are not eligible for Youth Guarantee support. They may be in employment, unemployed, or economically inactive with a need to strengthen basic skills.

The European Platform Against Poverty aims to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable, in particular by providing innovative education, training, and employment opportunities for deprived communities, to fight discrimination (e.g., against persons living with disabilities), and to develop a new agenda for migrant integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential. Last but not least, the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs aims to strengthen the capacity of social partners and make full use of the problem-solving potential of social dialogue at all levels (EU, national/regional, sectoral, corporate), and to promote strengthened cooperation among labour market institutions including the public employment services of the Member States.

As far as youth-specific EU strategies are concerned, the EU Youth Strategy⁸ represents one of the cornerstones for the current EU youth employment policies in the Member States. We will mention just some of its many instruments. Youth on the Move, for example, promotes young people's entry into the labour market through apprenticeships, internships or other work experience, including a scheme ('Your first EURES job') aimed at increasing job opportunities for young people by favoring mobility across the EU. The European Solidarity Corps is another instrument giving 18 to 30-year olds the opportunity to do volunteer or paid work helping the community and the general society while at the same time gaining invaluable life experience and job skills. The Youth Employment Initiative emphasizes support for NEET young people in regions with a youth unemployment rate above 25%. From a rather different perspective, the Youth Employment Package focuses on ways to smooth the transition between school and work through youth guarantee schemes, ensuring that traineeships offer a high-quality work experience under safe conditions. The package also aims to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships and to give youth more opportunities to work and train abroad. Last but not least, the Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship.

⁵ See more at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en> (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

⁶ See more at: <http://cor.europa.eu/en/policies/growth-and-jobs/pages/eu-platform-against-poverty.aspx> (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

⁷ See more at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:776df18f-542f-48b8-9627-88aac6d3ede0.0003.03/DOC_1&format=PDF (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

⁸ See more at: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

Recently there have been serious efforts from the side of EU institutions to increase youth employment in general and to include different youth categories in these frameworks. There is still a need to conduct an in-depth narrative analysis exploring what exactly these categories are and how they are referred to in which contexts. In 2015, ERGO Network and the Foundation Secretariat Gitano in Spain did a fact-finding exercise on the impact of the Youth Guarantee on young Roma by carrying out a small-scale research into the Youth Guarantee in six EU countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The aim was to investigate whether the Youth Guarantee is successful in reaching out to and creating meaningful opportunities for young Roma. Our findings clearly show that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee is patchy and has yet to make a systematic difference for Roma youth.⁹ It is up to the Member States and the relevant stakeholders, therefore, to ensure that such measures deliver in reality for all young citizens of their countries.

⁹For more about ERGO's research, the results and recommendations, read <http://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Youth-Guarantee-%E2%80%93-Synthesis-note-ERGO-Network.pdf>

4. Research Findings – Hungary

4.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies

Unlike in the other Central and Eastern European Member States we researched, where policies and programmes are based on an integrated concept of ‘explicit but not exclusive targeting’, Hungary’s strategies do not target Roma youth specifically. According to the Hungarian Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, the Government promotes the entry onto the labour market of disadvantaged people “by means of comprehensive, personalized and tailor-made individual programmes comprising labour market services, subsidies and training”.¹⁰ These include general and vocational training, wage subsidies, support for self-employment, mobility support, housing allowances, and provision of labour market services such as information, advice, job search assistance, etc. A similar approach has been promoted for job-seeking youth, in particular the low-skilled and long-term unemployed or those just beginning a career.¹¹

The Hungarian National Youth Strategy 2009-2024 aims to enhance the employment and self-sufficiency of youth, women in particular. Among many others, the Government aims to strengthen the relationship between training providers and the labour market, to improve the efficiency of vocational training, to encourage employers to employ youth with no work experience, to encourage students to acquire work experience and employment competences during their studies, and to facilitate the operation and maintenance of enterprises started by young people.¹²

The Hungarian version of the National Strategy for Roma Integration - the National Social Inclusion Strategy 2011-2020 - emphasizes public employment, a variety of active labour market policies, employment-related subsidies, self-employment, and access to microcredit. As the available data shows, the labour market situation of Roma in Hungary is much worse than that of their non-Roma compatriots. The table below shows the discrepancies between the activity rates of Roma and non-Roma. The employment rate of non-Roma is higher at 67.4% compared to 44.5% of Roma (Source: KSH, Eurostat 2017).

¹⁰ European Commission, Youth Guarantee country by country: Hungary, 2017, p. 7.

¹¹ National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan- Hungary. (2015). Available at: <http://ngmszakmaiterulek.kormany.hu/download/9/4c/c0000/Youth%20Guarantee%20Implementation%20Plan.pdf>

¹² National Youth Strategy 2009-2024- Hungary. (2009). Available at: http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Hungary_2009_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf

Changes in the activity rates of the Roma and non-Roma population aged 15-64, 2016

Even bigger discrepancies than this are visible in the unemployment rate, with Roma five times more likely to be unemployed than non-Roma. Most importantly, the highest differences between these two groups are their NEET rates and

Activity rate	Roma	non-Roma
Employment rate	44.5	67.4
Employment rate of men	53	73.3
Employment rate of women	36.6	61.6
Unemployment rate	20.3	4.7
Inactivity rate	44.1	29.3
NEET rate (15-24-year-olds)	37.6	9.5
Early school-leavers (18-24-year-olds)	61.8	9.6

their rates of early school leavers, where Roma are around five times more likely to be NEET and almost seven times more likely to leave school early. The level of education of the Roma population is far lower than that of non-Roma people, with 1% of Roma graduating from college or university. As the table below shows, the higher the education level, the lower the unemployment rate.

The employment rate of 15 to 64-year-olds by level of educational attainment

Level of education	2014	2015	2016
Elementary school	25	27.3	30
Secondary school without GCSE	57.9	59.3	61.6
Secondary school with GCSE	63.2	63.9	64.9
Higher education	72.9	74.5	76.1

Educational attainment also depends on several factors including family background, place of residence, ambitions of individuals and their parents, the integrating-segregating nature of the school system, the role of teachers, parents, role models, etc. The

Hungarian data show that the dropout rate in secondary education is incredibly high in the case of Roma students: nearly two-thirds of them do not finish the schooling they have started (Source: KSH, Eurostat 2017).

In 2011, Hungary changes it compulsory from age three to 16. The compulsory starting age used to be five, which had negative effects on the learning performance of the students. Primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1, 2)¹³ is organised as a single-structure system and corresponds to 8-grade basic schools (*általános iskola*). According to the EU MIDIS report, Roma participation in early childhood education and care is 91%, close to the

¹³ ISCED is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields - International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). ISCED levels: 0 - Early childhood education, 1 - Primary education, 2 - Lower secondary education, 3 - Upper secondary education, 4 - Post-secondary non-tertiary education, 5 - Short-cycle tertiary education, 6 - Bachelor's or equivalent level, 7 - Master's or equivalent level, respectively 8 - Doctoral or equivalent level.

national average and the highest in the region.¹⁴ Upper secondary education (ISCED 3) is provided by general secondary schools (*gimnázium*), vocational secondary schools (vocational grammar schools, known as *szakgimnázium*) or vocational schools (for less academically inclined students, known as *szakközépiskola*), or vocational schools for special education (*szakiskola*).¹⁵ All general secondary schools in Hungary prepare for the secondary school leaving examination and for post-secondary vocational programs (ISCED 4, 5) or higher education (ISCED 6). It is worth noting here that since the lowering of the compulsory school-leaving age from 18 to 16 in 2012, disadvantaged young people are increasingly likely to leave school to take jobs that require no qualifications.¹⁶

Higher education programmes are offered by both public or private universities (*egyetem*) and colleges or non-university higher education institutions (*főiskola*). In accordance with the Bologna degree structure, there are Bachelor degree programmes, which can be followed by Master degree programmes and later by doctoral studies (ISCED 8).

In the following section we will explore how some of the practices enhancing Roma youth employment in Hungary work. The first part looks at secondary students pursuing further studies to become police officers. The second part looks at college-educated Roma (either pursuing university degrees or already graduates) studying in urban areas.

4.2. Secondary students part of the Roma Police Fellowship Program

The Roma Police Fellowship Program (RFPF) aims to support Roma youth in secondary education to become police officers. This initiative began more than 20 years ago in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (B-A-Z) county, located in the underdeveloped northeastern region of Hungary.

The area is characterized by long-term stagnation and an economy that has recently slowly revived, but there is little industry, a high level of long-term unemployment, and an aging, shrinking population. According to the Hungarian partner organization conducting the field research, the proportion of Roma here is the highest nationwide, 8.7% compared to an average Roma population of 3.2%. In this area, characterised by small villages, local industry is not significant and the biggest employer is the public sector. Small companies here are mainly micro-enterprises, established primarily as a possible option for self-employment purposes. Most of the large agricultural plans fell apart after the democratic changes; currently there are only a few large agricultural ventures, while the majority of producers in this sector are family farmers.

¹⁴ Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) Roma – Selected findings, available at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/eumidis-ii-roma-selected-findings/fra-opinions> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

¹⁵ See more at: Hungary- System of education. Available online at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Hungary:Overview> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

¹⁶ European Commission. (2017). “Education and Training Monitor 2017 Hungary”. Available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017-hu_en.pdf (last accessed 15 January 2018).

The regional labour market has been deeply depressed for some time, with an unemployment rate more than twice the national average. The better-educated residents, especially youth, tend to migrate away from the region, partly due to the structural shortage of proper job opportunities, and partly due to the ‘pull’ factor of higher wages in the western part of Hungary or abroad.

Less-educated Roma, unemployed persons, and their families are in the worst situation. Often both parents are unemployed; their family income depends on social benefits alone, on the availability of somewhat better-paid public work, and on some casual labour opportunities. The Roma unemployment rate is very high, and in some deeply deprived settlements it is close to 100%, only decreased to a certain degree by a dead-end public work scheme in which labour is underpaid.¹⁷

At the county employment office, the Head of Office and the Administrator of Youth Unemployment provided our researchers with a general picture about the regional labour market situation with special regard to Roma youth. According to data provided by the local community representatives, unemployment has been slowly declining in this area from around 20% in 2000 and 23% in 2010 to the recent unemployment rate of 12.9%. This is still double the national average of 6% in mid-2017. More than half of the unemployed are less educated (having completed primary school at the most) and one-third of them are long-term unemployed. The ratio of unemployed youth (below 25) is close to 20%.

Most eligible unemployed youth (having the required level of education) are involved in the Youth Guarantee (YG) Scheme, and 12% are Roma. Nearly 80% of the Roma on the YG scheme have been given training, and 60% of them completed it successfully. Roma youth are most frequently offered training related to the construction industry and materials handling. They are also trained to be shop assistants and welders. All other Roma youth, 20% of whom were on the YG Scheme, have been involved in subsidized employment

All in all, the Employment Office considered that the training offered to Roma youth was the most useful measure in spite of its relatively low effectiveness.

The Roma Police Fellowship Program¹⁸ (RFPF), aiming to promote new Roma secondary school graduates to become police officers, was initiated by Borsod County Police Headquarters. In the past 20 years the RFPF has become a nationwide program, and the originator, Borsod County, still shows the best results, concluding some scholarship support contracts every year.

¹⁷ Public work schemes have been the most frequently-used active labour market programme in Hungary since 2011. The schemes involve hundreds of thousands of long-term unemployed persons for different periods of time – some for just months, some for one year, - in different kinds of locally- organized work for wages far below the minimum wage. See: “*EC criticizes Hungary's rudderless public works scheme*”. (2015). Available online at: <https://budapestbeacon.com/ec-criticizes-hungarys-rudderless-public-works-scheme/> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

¹⁸ See: “*Police Scholarship for Roma Students*”. (2014). Available online at: <http://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/szervezeti-hirek/jovokep-rendor-osztondij-roma-tanuloknak> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

As a result of different targeted support measures, hundreds of Roma persons are estimated to be among the Police ranks. In Borsod County their ratio is estimated at around 9-10%, equivalent to their estimated representation in the population.

Roma applicants to this programme come from different secondary schools around the region. They find the role played by schools to be the most determinative of who applies for these scholarships. “An eager teacher can help a lot, not only in terms of information, but in obtaining and filling in the related documents too,” the Roma youngsters explained to our researchers.

4.2.1 Implementers’ perspective

The Education Director and Education Administrator of the Police Vocational Education School of Miskolc explained in their interviews that their school is the biggest of the four in the country and, by receiving about 500 students annually, they train about half of the country’s graduating police officers. The training itself is adult education and lasts one and a half to two years depending on the students’ qualifications. Those who complete secondary education with an exit examination are eligible to apply. Most students come right after their graduation, but the school also has some students aged 30 or older.

The Roma scholarship as such represents an advantage during the entrance examination, adding five points to an applicant’s score (130 points are needed total). Scholarship students receive additional attention from their teachers in order to assist their possible need to catch up and be able to meet the requirements. This sort of additional mentoring can be asked for by any student, “but they do not ask for it very much since they don’t want to be different. They don’t want to receive additional attention even if it would help them to improve their results,” the Education Director explained.

4.2.2 Beneficiaries’ perspective

A focus group meeting was held with 11 Roma students aged 18-21 on the campus of the school. Only one participant was a woman. Nine students were on the RPFP scholarship scheme, while two received some different type of scholarship. Four were second-year students and could also be asked questions related to their employment due to their already having acquired a practical, traineeship type of experience. Most participating students come from Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, with three of them coming from neighbouring counties (from quite a distance). Roughly half of them came from cities of various sizes, while the other half came from small villages. Their families are typically medium-sized with three or four other members besides them. Only one student came from a multi-generational family, while all the others live just with their parents and siblings. The vast majority of their family members are working; only one student said his mother was unemployed. Many of the parents are reportedly public workers, while others work in different factories, such as assembly-line companies, meat factories, shoe factories, sewing factories, etc., with one or two exceptions mainly in semi-skilled or unskilled positions.

Most participants heard about the scholarship at their school, from a teacher. Some were told about it by a well-informed family member or relative, while two heard about it quite accidentally, from a radio programme. Around one-third had some previous motivation to become police officers: one student had liked the police uniform since kindergarten, while the only woman participant was inspired by her grandfather, who served in the army, and said she had wanted to become a police officer since the age of 10, while two other young men said they were following the example of some of their relatives working as police.

All respondents said their families had been behind them when they applied for the scholarship. As one student explained: “My parents make a living through public work. They hoped police work would be much better for me, so they fully supported my choice.”

When asked about their further plans and where they see themselves, the group had different opinions on whether they would like to go back to their own communities, but most seemed to want to go back to the same area where their family lives. One student, however, strongly opposed this idea, saying that “it would be awkward to handle a familiar person as a policeman”.

When asked what could help Roma youth find good jobs, one respondent argued the following:

What I can see is that Roma young people of my age are hugely uncertain and uninformed about their possible future. They have no idea what would be good for them to study, what sort of occupation could last for them for their entire lifetime. They enter into training courses without knowing anything about that profession or about themselves, whether it fits them or not... In this respect it feels good to me that this is already decided in my case. Those who are here already here know what can be expected in their future.

One student said that of his 28 classmates, 25 are on public work by now. The only woman participant commented that she was the only member of her primary school class who went on to secondary education. Another student referred to the case of his village where, from a class of 29 pupils, only two went to secondary school.

Individual, personal will, along with good role models to follow, was found to be very important in breaking away from a deprived environment. The students listed persons, mainly from their families, and sometimes from their schools, who made them “sit down to study every day”. As a continuation of this sort of role they referred to themselves and how they tried to influence the youngsters in their home settlements. Speaking about the rarity of good role models, the focus group discovered the importance of having other Roma in their school. “Good to see many young Roma here, it is a sign that others have succeeded too,” they agreed. The respondents said they did not feel that the teachers discriminated against them, but they may have experienced prejudice from their fellow non-Roma students: “As Roma you have to perform two or three times better, but you still can be called ‘stupid Gypsy’ at any unexpected moment,” one respondent said.

All the participants considered education very important. A good teacher played an outstanding role in most of their lives, compared to the apparently increasing fatigue presented by the rest of their school environment. Although they noted that the quality of the schools can be different, they agreed about the determining role of education, which should be reinforced from an early age among Roma pupils. In this context the importance of community-building and mentoring were also outlined.

Beyond the very important role models of their working parents, the motivating force and contribution of their families to their daily learning as children seems to have been decisive. These police officers-to-be remembered, remarkably similarly, how they had been required to sit down and study and how they were checked daily by their parents or grandparents. As one student concluded, “Without my mother, who forced me to study, I would have been nowhere near here.” Another student added that “I don’t find it shameful if my parents advise me at the age of 18, on the contrary, I am pleased by that because they want the best for me. I wouldn’t be here without them.”

4.2.3 Conclusions

In Hungary the Roma youth-related strategies (e.g., the National Social Inclusion Strategy 2011-2020) emphasize employment by public administrations. This type of scholarship programme reflects this goal of enhancing Roma youth employment in the Hungarian public administration. The Roma Police Fellowship Programme works remarkably well for those already on the scheme, but it could do better, since it is not able to attract as many applicants as possible. However, as in most cases, the implementers tend to over-praise the programmes even though they include a relatively small number of young Roma.

Most Roma youngsters in the RFPF come from families where one or both parents have a stable job. This is reflected by the fact that their children have the chance to remain in school and, later on, this positively impacts the career prospects of these youngsters. The school environment and the geographical location seem to play crucial roles: it was through school that most of the youngsters got to know about the programme, whereas, as one of the respondents mentioned, of his 29 fellow pupils from a rural area, just two made it to secondary education, reflecting rural-urban disparities.

The scholarship and its related, highly-subsidized adult training both offer “safe employment in an honored profession” in the interpretation of the participants in the programme. Furthermore, police work must have a symbolic, emancipating value; for Roma people it sends a clear message of their being on the side of law enforcement, countering some of the prejudices about Romani people as involved in criminal activity. Such measures have a direct, positive impact on Roma youth employment, and as was described above, it requires strong determination from the national Government to invest in jobs in the public sector for Roma youth.

4.3. Integrom Programme – The way to employment for higher education graduates

This programme was initiated by the Boston Consulting Group in cooperation with the Autonomia Foundation and several large companies in Hungary. It is funded by the Open Society Foundation, Hungarian Telekom, and Boston Consulting Group and currently runs in several large towns in Hungary where the partner firms are located: Budapest, Székesfehérvár, Nyíregyháza, and Békéscsaba. The project is largely implemented through the coordinated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of various actors – large firms as employers, training and assessment companies, consultancy companies and NGOs.

The programme aims to develop a new model to facilitate Roma employment by promoting their employment in the mainstream business sector. The main idea of the programme is to facilitate access by Roma to job opportunities not involving manual labour at market-leading companies that represent higher-level employment opportunities. The programme targets educated, unemployed Roma youth aged 18-35 with secondary or higher educations or Roma youngsters who are overqualified in their current jobs.

The project assists the recruitment and employment process by:

- Identifying relevant positions at the participating companies
- Adjusting various company procedures to make open positions accessible by Roma (sensitive recruitment, affirmative action, etc.)
- Recruiting and screening potential Roma employees
- Preparing Roma candidates for the recruitment process
- Assisting employers with creating an inclusive environment, helping new Roma employees integrate into the company environment and minimize drop-out
- Facilitating networking among the partner organizations

4.3.1 Beneficiaries' perspective

ERGO Network wanted to explore how young Roma who are part of Integrom and those who would be eligible for it perceive this programme and its impact. Moreover, by discussing their needs on the labour market, ERGO wanted to explore how educated Roma perceive the existing barriers to their employment, the available opportunities and measures that could fit their interests, and the support they would need to benefit from such measures. We aimed to discover these aspects through a focus group with **current and former Roma students** at the University of Pécs, four men and two women. The focus group discussion took place in the office of the Khetanipe Association in Pécs. What participants also had in common is that, with one exception, they are all scholarship holders of the Wlislöcki Henrik Special College and all had taken part in projects of the Khetanipe Association and the Uccu Roma Foundation for Informal Education. Those NGOs are primarily engaged in support for Roma youth as either project implementers or beneficiaries. Since September 2017 five of the six participants had been working as trainees in the priority EU programmes of the Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection.

All of the focus group participants hold **multiple jobs** and are continuously looking for various scholarship and employment opportunities. None can rely on any financial assistance from their families; therefore, they all have to earn money while studying, regardless of whether they are doing a full-time or a correspondence course. The group is in a unique situation in that their partnership with the Khetanipe Association determines their income-earning chances. Many reported that they had been compelled to do all kinds of occasional jobs beside their studies and that they have worked for very low salaries via student unions several times. Now they have almost continuous employment opportunities in the various programmes of the Khetanipe Association with the help of its network of relationships. Only one has full-time employment, while the others mostly have fixed-term part-time jobs in the non-profit sector.

One participant described her current situation as follows: “My parents have always taught me that work is never dirty,” said 26-year-old Alexandra, who has been self-sufficient since she was 18, as her parents cannot help her financially. She even applied for a student loan to finance her studies. She took four years to complete a two-year university course because she had to work simultaneously. She never has just one job but always tries to do several things at the same time. It was only for a short period that she could earn a living doing a single job. It has always been difficult for her to find appropriate jobs, but that changed last year, and now the jobs find her. Currently she is the editor of a journal at the University of Pécs and works as the local coordinator of the UCCU Foundation.

The situation of the respondents is “privileged”. Because there are not many Roma university students, they did not have to compete with many others for admission to the Roma special college or traineeship jobs. All who applied were admitted. The college in Pécs has 33 students, but not all are Roma. However, there were not enough jobs available for them all. It is not typical that high-prestige jobs are filled by Roma. There are a lot of unqualified and overqualified people, with no category in between, and this is true of both Roma and non-Roma workers.

One participant was of the opinion that these students’ Roma origin makes it impossible for them to be competitive on the labour market: “We have a minus, namely, that we are Roma. If we were not working on Roma issues, none of us would have a job. The only reason we could find a job is that we are employed by a Roma organization. It is impossible to work as locksmiths, cooks, or stonemasons because of our ethnic background.”

There was consensus among the participants that even despite the shortage of labour it was much more difficult to find a job as Roma applicants, but they did not agree on its being impossible. The majority said they had some family members who had already been rejected on account of their ethnic background (although that reason for the rejection was not expressed directly). Participants argued that if one is persistent enough, one can find a job: “The way I see it, you must keep trying a lot (as a Roma).” Many mentioned the example that, with a family name like Orsós (a typical Romani surname in Hungary), an applicant’s fate is decided already during the very first telephone conversation.

When asked whether they had heard of **programmes specifically aimed at improving the employment situation of youth**, most referred to EU programmes targeting those living in segregated settlements. Many had heard of and even participated in the Autonomia organization's HRom programme, where Roma youth are given assistance with job-seeking. One participant mentioned the ROMASTER program, where young university students are supported and mentored and are also employed after graduation. However, that opportunity is available only to higher education students studying technology, and then only to those who achieve above a certain grade average. Another participant mentioned the "Start" work programme aimed at helping youth under 25, including young career-starters, but no one had any personal experience with it. None had heard of the Youth Guarantee Programme.

Two participants had some recent experience with the state **Employment Centre**. Both had to be registered as job-seekers because they started working in a programme where that status was among the eligibility criteria. Another participant had heard of an opportunity whereby employers were entitled to a full wage subsidy for several months if they agreed to continue to employ youth under 25 for a fixed period. He was able to make use of the subsidy since he found a job at a civil society organisation. Another participant had planned to apply for financial aid from the Employment Centre to help him become an entrepreneur, but his attempt was in vain. The Centre did not aid him but did inform him that the form of support he had applied for was no longer available. It was the general opinion that the willingness to help at the Employment Centres greatly depended on the individuals working there. The centre in Pécs was reportedly much more positive than those in the surrounding smaller settlements.

Many participants have thought about **starting a business**, but only one of them would work as an entrepreneur in the field he is currently specialising in through his university, and even so, he said he would start his business only after gaining five to 10 years of work experience. Some of the participants are considering starting their own civil society organisations (one of them has already established one). In their view, setting up an organisation is like starting a business. In their interpretation (and vocabulary use) the operation of a civil society organisation is the same as running a business, with the only difference being that in the former case the income is the amount of funding available through grant applications:

Fortunately, I've always had some resources through the Association, but I think it is also due to my personality and the fact that I was in the right place at the right time. Of course, without your parents' support you are always forced to work, which is rather hard. But, as far as I can see, others (who have no relations with civil society organisations) do even more difficult work or work for which they are overqualified. I would not say it is easy to find a job; it is just that we have joined the right organisations, and these organisations are always able to come up with something through their projects. But there have been times when there were no projects and we had no work for half a year.

In the course of the discussion it became clear that no one had actually practically dealt with the possibility of becoming entrepreneurs and that it was only a desire. They agreed that the

most essential requirement for launching a business is to have a sufficient amount of start-up capital.

When asked if they would leave their current place of residence for the sake of a job, the group had rather different views. Everyone emphasized that they love Pécs a lot and if they were to move it would not be easy for them. It also turned out, however, that all participants had close family members who had already been working abroad. Three of the participants of the focus group definitely envisage their life abroad after they complete their university studies. None of them would like to leave Hungary once and for all, but all three of them are planning to take long-term jobs abroad. One of the participants would move anywhere in Hungary if offered an irresistible job, but would prefer not to go abroad, whereas two insist on staying in Pécs and would not move away under any circumstances.

When asked about the role of their current jobs or studies in their future careers, the majority were of the opinion that graduating from university provided no guarantee for finding an appropriate job later. For most of the students it was not possible to build a good network of relationships during university studies; personality is a key factor, the participants said. “I think each job helps the next”, one participant said, pointing out that although everybody works now, almost none of them are in the area of specialisation they studied at university. Everyone said they think the work experience acquired at civil society organisations is important. It is the specific goal of three participants to work in the civil sector after they graduate and another three are considering this option. Some of them emphasised that besides making a living, their current job was of great help in building relationships they could later rely on.

The focus group participants were then asked to come up with different suggestions about **what kind of support is needed and from whose side**. One of **the structural aspects** that needs improvement is the cost of commuting and housing. In many cases, the obstacle to taking a well-paying job in another settlement is the difficulty in finding housing and paying for these costs, considering the average wage. Therefore, several participants mentioned that it would be important for the Government to provide more substantial support for accommodation and commuting costs, as most employers cannot afford or do not want to reimburse their employees for the cost of their commute.

As far as the role of training institutions is concerned, there was also consensus concerning the need for teaching foreign languages at an adequate level. At university the number of **language courses** is limited, and those provided at the special college are of a low standard in the participants' view. All of the participants would like to attend language courses and believe it would increase their chances of employment later.

It was also suggested that in the case of EU programmes aimed at economic development it should be compulsory for the supported undertakings to **employ Roma workers based on a quota system**.

Last but not least, it was the almost unanimous opinion of the participants that it is difficult to improve the relationship between Roma people and the majority society through projects or measures and in most cases the labour market chances of Roma applicants depend on how

inclusive the social environment is. According to their experience, the sensitization of Roma and non-Roma people is essential, considering the potential of such programmes to help in the long run.

4.3.2 The voice of Roma educators

Romaversitas Foundation (hereinafter Romver) was established 20 years ago with the aim of providing support and services to Roma youth accessing higher education so they can complete university courses and do not drop out of the system for financial or social reasons. Romver is a comprehensive educational programme supported by the Roma Education Fund to help Roma university students complete their studies, find proper employment, and build community among themselves. Romver provides Roma university students with mentors, tutors, soft skills and a like-minded community of Roma university students. The ERGO partners in this research interviewed the director of Romver in the hope of learning more about the employment prospects of Roma youth, as well as in the hope of indicating what needs to be in place for programmes like Integrom to function for other educated Roma youngsters.

According to the director, in the early 2000s, Roma young people's employment chances were entirely dependent upon (and still do depend) on their personal relationships. Experience shows that almost everyone participating in Romver has been able to find a job, but only subject to a lot of compromise. They would have preferred much better jobs, and many students would have deserved far better workplaces based on their studies and achievements, but they often had to accept jobs just to earn a living. Initially there were opportunities for Roma youth to find jobs in public institutions or in ministry programmes, but later the number of such opportunities decreased, and even those who had a relevant qualification were not able to find jobs, not even in their area of specialisation. The situation has become increasingly diverse: those Roma youth who started certain courses in humanities or social sciences, which have been popular among Romver beneficiaries, have ended up working in absolutely different sectors than their fields of study.

When asked whether obtaining a higher education degree as a Romani youth would increase one's employment chances, the director claimed that having a degree definitely improves employment chances to a significant extent, and some achievements in this area are also attributable to the network of people managing Romver. As such, Romver training courses have been specifically aimed at increasing the employment chances of Roma youth (e.g. CV writing, job-seeking techniques). There are similar courses currently taking place for Romver students/alumni, such as a LinkedIn course, organized together with another NGO, and a professional Excel training is being launched.

In recent years, Romver started to collect data to find out who was employed in their field of studies one year after graduating from university. The response rate was quite high (more than 95%). At present, Romver has as many as 290 alumni. Most typically, Romver alumni/students do not work in the private sector after graduation; most youth are absorbed by various areas of the public and administrative sectors. It is only a recent trend that more and

more Roma youth are taking on jobs at multinational companies, as they are less exposed to prejudices and discrimination in such workplaces. The main requirement of such employers is to have the necessary skills; it does not matter who you are, provided you are good at your job. Many multinationals also pay special attention to their corporate social responsibility related activities. During the interview, it was also mentioned that an increase in educational attainment changes prejudiced attitudes as well. While these will never entirely disappear, there is a difference between an employer just having negative thoughts about Roma and an employer not hiring somebody because of his or her origin.

It became clear that Romver takes a similar approach to Integrom, in the sense that they have come up with the idea of setting up a student cooperative or recruitment cooperative that could link Roma youth with multinationals. The challenge here is a lack of financial resources to put together a variety of employers in addition to corporations. A difference in their approaches is the fact that, in the case of Romver, multinational companies that have supported Romver students provided aid on a single occasion but did not want to stand up for the cause by offering long-term assistance or cooperation. Now it is mainly the small and medium-sized enterprises that support Romver “for the sole reason that it touches their hearts because they find the ultimate goal and the cause itself important”, says the director.

4.3.3 Conclusions

During the Integrom programme’s piloting phase, the Autonomia Foundation succeeded in bolstering cooperation among 10-15 various organizations (employers and training, recruitment and consultancy firms, NGOs and Roma colleges) which all work together to enhance Roma youth employment. Probably one of the biggest achievements was that five-established market-leading companies enrolled in the programme as partnering employers. Moreover, new CSR strategies have been developed or strengthened and have had a tangible impact on Roma integration.

In 2014 the programme trained 60 participants, of which 15-20 were subsequently employed at the partner firms. The programme has contributed to providing Roma youth with stable, long-term, quality employment. The methodology and model of Roma integration through promoting employment in the mainstream business sector has now been attempted and distilled.

Such measures, in order to be effective, need a strong partnership between Roma and pro-Roma civil society organizations, educational institutions and, most importantly, the private sector. Enhancing decent jobs for Roma that correspond to their qualifications and skills is not just the right thing to do, but is something that should happen naturally. The conclusion here is that Government, through legislation, should encourage the private sector to engage in enhancing the employment prospects of groups such as the Roma.

4.4. Pro Ratatouille Garden Project for less educated Roma from rural Hungary

Hejőszalonta, Bükkaranyos and Hejőkeresztúr, located in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (B-A-Z) county, are the three villages where the implementation of the Pro Ratatouille Garden Project (PRGP) is taking place. This project is a good example of employment promotion for Roma youth because this county is part of the economically underdeveloped northeastern region of Hungary, which suffers from multiple disadvantages. The area has been characterised for a long time by a stagnating economy that has recently been slowly reviving, by very little industry, by double the average unemployment rate, and by an aging, shrinking population. The proportion of the Roma population here is the highest in the country, 8.7% compared to an average of 3.2%.

The area is a traditional district center with a steadily declining population of less than 10 000 inhabitants, 8% of them Roma. Agricultural and mining industry activity traditionally characterized it in the past. It has still not recovered from the shock of closing down the coalmine and the liquidation of the agricultural cooperative in 1995. With those changes, about 2 000 jobs were terminated and have yet to be replaced. Despite all the efforts of the local government, only two companies have been established since then with more than 40 employees, while a further two enterprises have between 20 and 40 employees. All the other companies are mainly microenterprises, primarily self-employment. With the exception of these examples, the biggest employer is, therefore, the public sector. Overall it can be said that the situation of Roma people in this region is very similar to that of Roma in general in Hungary's rural areas, although the settlements here are in better physical condition than many other similar settlements. There are three Roma settlements in the town and most local Roma live in segregated housing.

The Pro Ratatouille Garden Programme (PRGP) is designed and implemented by the Pro Cserehát Association. This is a community-based organic agricultural programme for disadvantaged people, non-Roma and Roma, which aims to disseminate sustainable developmental models among small settlements. The programme also contributes to fighting prejudices towards the Roma minority by enabling Roma and non-Roma community members to work together towards a common goal.

The two main methods used in the programme are informal adult education and empowerment work. These methods serve the following goals:

- Acquisition of skills required for regular work
- Creating a sense of teamwork and cooperation
- Learning the basics of community-based development
- Creating a sense of personal responsibility
- Establishing a basis for taking initiative and making life plans
- Development of self-confidence
- Creating the ability to acknowledge positive life changes

During the field research individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five main actors relevant to the issue of Roma youth employment locally. These actors were the

Mayor and the Notary representing the municipality and local management, two employers managing small local companies, and the director of a local school providing primary and secondary vocational education.

4.4.1 Decision-makers' view

There are only four companies in the town employing more than 10 persons. In the public work scheme about 300-400 people are employed and 80% of them are Roma. The problem now is that the scheme will be cut back nationwide, and locally it will decrease to about 150-200 people. "Looking at the generations (people above 50, between 30-50, and 16-25), you can state that the younger people are the most problematic. The situation is catastrophic," we were told. "Most of them just do nothing, and have also no idea what to do." In this context, an initiative such as the Pro Ratatouille Garden Programme is appreciated highly by these actors as a way to involve youth in meaningful work activity that contributes to their work socialisation and self-esteem.

The schools here are administered by the central Government, not the municipality, and consequently the local government has no authority over, e.g., whom to hire as principal or about the curriculum. Two local primary schools are mainly attended by Roma. One generally produces good results and has contributed to making the youth pursue secondary school. The other school is based at a nearby settlement and run by a church organisation.

4.4.2 Entrepreneurs' view

The managers of two local small enterprises employing Roma youth were interviewed. Both companies work in the construction business, their sizes are similar, and they both employ 20-25 employees. However, their experiences are quite different regarding the employment of local Roma youth. Company 1 was founded almost 30 years ago as a small enterprise working in the construction business in northeastern Hungary, employing roughly 20 employees permanently, about one-third of them Roma. Company 1 does not wish to expand but to maintain its present size for a while. At the same time, Company 1 is almost always looking for additional labour, both for permanent employment and temporary work.

The interviewed manager listed several examples of how newly-recruited Roma youth, after a certain period of employment and on-the-job training, have left Company 1, either for work abroad, for a subsidised training course offered by the local employment office, or for a temporary casual job. Company 1 tried the traineeship program offered by the local employment office, but would not do it again. "More than 10 young Roma came, they enjoyed themselves here in the courtyard, made a big mess, and after some days they disappeared and didn't come anymore. They obviously were not accustomed to work all day from 7 o'clock in the morning. The most enthusiastic two left for the Netherlands after a week." Company 1 said they have been trying to cooperate with vocational training schools to receive their pupils for practical training, but this didn't work well either: "They didn't

appreciate that we were dealing with them, all in all it was a lost effort,” the manager summarised the experience, adding:

The main problem is the free-of-charge principle they are used to. Any change has to be started with the family and has to include work. In this respect, the mining work of the past was very good because it required collaboration. The public work is not a very bad beginning, but it should use performance criteria and it should be paid properly. Otherwise, they just take their time when performing the public work. The schools are good in this area, they should utilize that much more.

The manager has heard about the local Pro Ratatouille garden and found it very useful in terms of its educational, work-cultural and socialisation impact. This example indicates that it is not impossible to receive good feedback at the local level on Roma issues in Hungary.

Company 2 was founded seven years ago. It works also in the construction business, implementing projects in the northeastern part of Hungary. Company 2 has 25 employees on a permanent basis; about half of whom are Roma, mainly in auxiliary worker positions for which they were trained on the job. Most of the employees are local residents, but Company 2 provides transportation to some of their workers commuting from neighbouring areas.

Company 2 has good relations with the local employment office and takes advantage of the wage subsidies scheme whenever possible, given the seasonal character of their activity. Company 2 seems to have an exceptionally stable, harmonious relationship with their Roma workers. The key to their secret must be that they rely on family relationships and employ only newcomers from among the Roma who already have a family member working at Company 2, and that employee apparently takes responsibility for the newcomer. “In this way, when they come from the family, there is not any problem with them,” concluded the HR administrator of Company 2.

4.4.3 Schools’ view

One local school is established by the Baptist Church and deals with about 600 pupils, more than 90% of whom are Roma. The school has been there for 23 years and their pupils come from all over the region. The school is unique because it is financed by the Baptist Church, and as a religious school it can receive additional financing from the state and can follow a different curriculum. As a result, the school covers a big age range, from kindergarten to primary school to vocational training, and also provides remedial adult education to those who want to complete their primary education. The main mission of the school is to serve and educate pupils in disadvantaged situations. For this reason, they provide pupils school materials free of charge, and in case of need, they provide dormitory accommodation for pupils coming from deep poverty and unstable families.

As the principal of this school explained, their pupils rarely go as far as general secondary education: “They – i.e., Roma pupils – cannot really be integrated into general secondary education. In most cases they don’t feel like being there, they drop out, they do not come back

once they have tried it.” The principal had a very bad opinion of the abundant adult training courses promising the acquisition of new skills in a short period of three to six months. As he argued, “It is impossible to learn a new profession in such a short period of time and without proper professional practice”. All in all, what such programmes attempt to achieve is to keep pupils in education for as long as possible, since allegedly there is no other way to help them. Besides this negative view about short-term training, the principal did not have a high opinion of start-up assistance for Roma youth either: “It does not make any sense in this circle, since it requires capital or credit, which makes it impossible. Who would give them that, and for what?” The principal was also very skeptical about wage-supported employment programs. The school has tried to place their pupils in local enterprises, with little success: “The entrepreneurs were not eager at all, it was problematic to them. It is part of the arrangement that after the supported period they have to employ them further from their own resources. In that case they prefer to select employees from other circles that are not supported.”

The principal said the school has a good relationship of trust with the parents of its pupils, most of whom attended the school themselves. The principal said he highly appreciates the efforts of parents who “try to grab at every straw that can help them to survive and keep going.”

The principal said he would welcome financial assistance that would have few restrictions on its use instead of EU or non-EU programmes “formulated by people who don’t know the reality at all. However, no such money is coming here from any source,” he concluded.

4.4.4 Beneficiaries’ perspective

An equal ratio of men and women participated in the focus group, 12 Roma youth in total. All were 20-35 years old, with eight of them having worked for years in the Pro Ratatouille Project. Speaking about their employment chances, the focus group said they do not have job opportunities, except for those who have opportunities to go abroad. However, for that one needs financing for travel and one’s initial stay. Most participants have had bad experiences with this: some of them tried to work abroad but were never paid and all their savings were spent on the trip.

In their local area the situation is not bright. One could not find a job as a hairdresser, while another has three young children at home, lives in a rented house, and has no possibility to study. A female participant said she has finished a flower production course,¹⁹ but as she has six children and cannot find a job, that option won’t work either. It is also a problem that without practical experience, the focus group members cannot find employment, and the level of the trainings on offer is often quite low: “You are needed for their statistics, and thus you get your certificate.”

The focus group agreed that the Roma are quite behind locally. Public work is a real option for most of them because casual manual labour opportunities do not pay much more. They

¹⁹ Flower production courses are often provided by the employment office and the general opinion is that they are highly useless.

prefer public work schemes. “You can get home early and you do not have to commute. There is also a problem here - it is quite difficult to get into the public work scheme, you have to fight for it”, they said.

Another female participant who is a public worker at the local government states that you can only break away if you study, “but it costs a lot”. She is determined that she will educate her daughter for sure at whatever cost. “I have already planned it,” she said, but she was not speaking about continuing her education herself, although she is only about 30 years old.

The people who work in the Pro Ratatouille Garden said “We have developed a lot, we have learned how to talk, to communicate” (besides being able to cultivate a garden). They say it would be very good to have the Pro Ratatouille programme running long-term. The Pro Ratatouille Garden could be a profitable (or self-sustaining) enterprise, they think, for seedling production and sales, or for the sale of crops according to a business plan.

Some focus group participants said they were thinking about or had experienced attempts at self-employment. One mentioned that he once speculated about becoming a gas-tank seller, but that opportunity needed a lot of investment and a business plan.

When asked what they think might help Roma youth in their area get employed, they said it would be useful to have a programme leading to a profession and foreign language skills training. They also discussed the idea of forming a group to go abroad together to trade in agriculture (similar to the Pro Ratatouille Garden).

4.4.5 Conclusions

Opportunities for Roma youth in this location are very limited. For many, the only solution seems to be going abroad, although people eventually return. Many do not have the means even for the initial investment into such an adventure. Although different stakeholders blame Roma youth for not working in general, and for not participating in the public work scheme in particular (while also acknowledging its extremely low wages), Roma youth themselves see this scheme as a good opportunity. If the competition for getting a place in the scheme is high now, we can assume that Roma people will be under greater risk of unemployment the moment the Government reduces the number of public work employees.

Regarding the private sector, it can be concluded that the openness of management and the additional support provided to Roma youth, such as covering their travel expenses, are factors affecting the greater trust and satisfaction experienced by the companies’ staff members interviewed, besides having an opportunity to take advantage of the wage subsidies scheme and establishing what might be a problematic but specific criterion for the recruitment process (recruiting family members of already-employed persons). However, there are very few companies and projects such as the Pro Ratatouille Garden that have a good impact, could last a longer time, and could ensure sustainability.

5. Research Findings – Bulgaria

5.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies

A rough map of the employment policy framework in Bulgaria consists of national legislation, national strategies and plans, and the relevant EU legislation, guidelines and strategies. Starting with national legislation, the most basic, important documents regulating and referring to employment are:

- The Constitution of Bulgaria
- The Labour Code
- The Anti-Discrimination Law
- The Employment Promotion Act
- The Law on Safety and Health at Work
- The Vocational Education and Training Act
- The Investment Promotion Act
- The National Strategy for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises 2014-2020

The Constitution of Bulgaria secures the right to work for all citizens in articles 49 to 52, including protection of employees and their right to form labour unions, to a safe work environment, and to social security and health insurance.²⁰

As far as specific youth strategies are concerned, first it is worth mentioning the National Youth Strategy 2010-2020. This strategy aims at improving the quality of secondary and higher education and informal learning and encourages lifelong learning in accordance with the needs of the labour market. It further aims at increasing the effectiveness of links between educational and training institutions and businesses to facilitate the transition from education to employment. Moreover, the strategy mentions the goal of expanding access to guidance services, thereby providing support for young people to solve problems related to career choice and professional development with regard to their individual qualities and the relationship between skills and employment opportunities. Last but not least, the strategy refers to steps that contribute to enhancing the career development of young people in public administration, as well as to the need to encourage the participation of employers who support the professional integration of young people and increase their productivity and adaptability.

Another framework worth mentioning is the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee 2014-2020 in Bulgaria and the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020. The latter refers to a set of activities targeted at developing a system of ongoing upskilling and improving the motivation of people to work, **supporting the employment of parents**, training, and work-life balance. Some of the priorities mentioned here refer to opportunities for employment and increased labour income through active labour market inclusion: general and specialized **training to improve one's professional skills**; opportunities for **validation of competencies** acquired through informal learning and training; **employment of members of vulnerable groups**, employment services

²⁰ See more at: <http://www.fnf-southeasteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Employment-and-Social-Entrepreneurship-Support-Policies.pdf> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

(intermediary services); promoting an **entrepreneurship culture** among vulnerable groups; or implementing employment and training inclusion measures, coupled with **social support services** for vulnerable groups on the labour market.

The National Roma Integration Strategy of The Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) refers to several aspects including:

- Ensuring Roma **access to the labour market and to various self-employment** instruments and initiatives.
- **Qualification and pre-qualification** of employed and unemployed Roma to meet the demand for specific professions on the labour market.
- Promoting employment by **educating unemployed persons in key competences**.
- Promoting **entrepreneurship**, the launching and managing of one's own business.
- Applying concrete mechanisms ensuring the **sustainable employment of Roma of working age** together with representatives of employers, trade unions, local governments and Roma organisations.
- Encouraging civil and social dialogue to assist the employment chances of Roma.
- Introducing economic and legislative mechanisms as **incentives for employers to hire persons of Roma origin**, including through the mechanisms of corporate social responsibility, subsidized employment, etc.
- Activating persons experiencing long-term unemployment and economically inactive persons through the work of **employment mediators**.
- Encouraging **green employment by subsidizing the creation of jobs** in environmental activities with a view to creating quality employment and environmental protections.

In Bulgaria, education is compulsory from ages seven to 16. Children complete their compulsory education in upper secondary schools. Basic education comprises primary school (grades 1-4 or *natchalen etap* ISCED 1) and pre-secondary school (grades 5-8 or *progimnazialen etap*- *прогимназиален етап*, ISCED 2)²¹. Secondary education normally encompasses grades 8 through 12, with the upper secondary level lasting for either 4 or 5 years, and is provided in three types of schools: comprehensive (general) secondary schools usually called *gymnasia* (high school), profile-oriented schools (e.g. music), and vocational-technical schools. Secondary general education covers pupils from years 9 to 12 (13). Secondary vocational education (*sredno profesionalno obrazovanie*) is provided in vocational training schools and/or technical schools, i.e. *technikum* or *vocational gymnasia*, covering grades 8/9 to 12. Higher education is provided through higher education institutions such as: universities (*universitet*), specialized higher education institutions (*spetzializirano visshе uchilishte*) (academies and institutes) and colleges (*kolej*).²² At universities, undergraduate

²¹ Kostova, D. (2008). „The Bulgarian educational system and evaluation of the ISCED-97 implementation”, in S. Schneider (ed), The International Standard Classification of Education: An Evaluation of Content and Criterion Validity for 15 European Countries, Mannheim: MZES, pp. 162–75 Available online at: http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/publications/misc/isc97/kost08_the_bulgarian_educational_system_and_evaluation_of.pdf (last accessed 15 January 2018)

²² See more at: <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-bulgaria.pdf> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

programs take –three to four years to complete, and may then be complemented by Masters degrees and Doctorates.

We will next explore how Roma youth in Bulgaria perceive their employment opportunities and prospects. As such, the first section here looks at university graduates in the town of Sliven, whereas the second part looks at secondary students and graduates from the rural area of Vazovo village - Isperih municipality, Razgrad region.

5.2. Young university students from the town of Sliven

The Nadejda settlement is one of the largest ghettos in Bulgaria. According to data provided by the local community, there are between 15 000 and 20 000 people living there. Nobody knows the exact number of inhabitants, as buildings are erected without permits and many have no address registration certificates or identification numbers. The ghetto is separated into two parts. In the “rich area”, the houses are massive and well-furnished, while in the “poor area”, the picture is typical of a ghetto environment, with temporary buildings, lack of running water, no paved streets, and many irregular garbage collection places.

Early childbirth and early marriage are typical of the Nadejda settlement. These are the main reasons for early school dropout, especially for women. According to the focus group participants, around 40 % of youth are unemployed there, but few register with the Labor Bureau even though it has established a branch in the settlement. According to the participants, the main reasons for not registering with the Labor Bureau are residents’ frequent migration abroad, lack of motivation to actively seek employment opportunities, lack of trust in the system for work placement, lack of personal identification, etc.

The focus group participants live in Nadejda settlement in Sliven. There were four participants, three women and one man. All of the women are university students, whereas the man holds a high school diploma. The man was the youngest (20 years old) and the women were 23, 24, and 25 years old. One woman is currently employed in a day care center for street children as a social worker, another went through a programme for temporary employment in 2015, and the man is employed as a labourer in an auto production factory in the neighboring town of Yambol.

One woman shared that in 2015 she enrolled in a programme for temporary employment for six months that aimed to tackle unemployment among young people. In the meantime, she was hired as an assistant in a foundation working in Nadejda settlement. Her assessment of the programme was that it contributed to tackling unemployment among young people only temporarily and did not secure their stability or build skills that could aid youth with realizing their goals in the real economy.

Generally speaking, the participants shared that while there are some opportunities for employment, they require certain levels of education or qualification. Another Roma woman in nursing college said she has been working as a social worker in a day center for street children for a year now. She found the job advertised on the Sliven municipality web page. Before this job she was not very active in seeking employment opportunities. She used to

work as a seasonal worker in seacoast resorts without an official labour contract. A year ago, she decided to start looking for permanent employment in Sliven, as she had married and decided to settle in Sliven permanently.

The male participant said he had been working for six months. He started to work shortly after graduating high school in a school for electricians. The factory where he works is in the neighboring town of Yambol, 20 kilometers away. Transport is provided for the employees. His salary is slightly over 300 euro per month, which currently satisfies him given the working conditions. He shared that he found the job after a short time of seeking, as his mother works in the same factory and he got the information that the factory was seeking workers. It seems there are many Roma, both qualified and non-qualified, working in the factory, and that it constantly seeks new workers from the region, as there are free places available. This opportunity, however, is not attractive for other young people, both non-Roma and Roma, who prefer seeking employment outside Bulgaria.

The participants discussed the issue that young people in Sliven do not want to work for the living they can make in Sliven and prefer leaving for the larger cities or going abroad. They alleged that there is also a significantly large group of marginalised youth who never attended any kind of school, have never mastered any employment habits, do not know the relevant employment institutions and do not trust them. These people reportedly make their living through informal self-employment by collecting materials for recycling from the garbage containers. The participants shared that they believe it is very difficult to get these young people motivated to find formal employment. Reportedly many lack basic housing conditions that would enable them to be able to bathe regularly, for example. Reportedly these young people also do not succeed in keeping their registrations with the Labor Bureau active, as they fail to sign in every month, and thus their registrations are annulled. The focus group respondents expressed said that such youth expect the Labour Bureau to propose them work instantly, and if they do not see the immediate effect they switch their interest and lose their trust in the help of institutions. The participants of the focus group also were of the opinion that this group of marginalized young Roma are reluctant to accept certain jobs if the wages are too low or they are not confident enough they will be able to cope with job requirements. None of the participants in the focus group identified themselves with the youth whom they described in such terms.

Regarding self-employment among Roma youth, the focus group participants shared that there are many people in the settlement who are engaged in self-employment, mostly commerce activities. However, most of them work in the “grey economy”, with the buildings where they run their businesses were illegally built. The participants also shared the example of a young woman who wanted to open a facility to produce decorative candles but did not have any information regarding eventual financing sources or the documents necessary for the starting of the business.

The participants also discussed the possible participation of Roma youth in local and national civil society initiatives. There was only one participant who shared that she had been engaged in initiatives at the national level, namely, the Integro Association’s programme opposing hate speech against Roma in the media. Apart from that she had also participated in the initiative

called *So keres, Europa*, a big awareness-raising campaign with many Roma youth participants realized in Varna when it was the European Youth capital for 2017.

Last but not least, the participants concluded that the Government should invest in education, concretely, in an education that would provide development in a profession and qualification. They also referred to the need to address early school drop-out at different levels so Roma young people will increase their chances of getting fair jobs. Lastly, it was agreed that the Government should invest into increasing the salaries of young people.

5.2.1 Roma employment mediator's view

Todor Stefanov is the Roma mediator in the Labour Bureau in Sliven. When asked what the main obstacles preventing Roma youth from becoming employed are, he claimed that there are many obstacles:

We have the highest Roma youth unemployment rate. However, we should underline that we are speaking about unofficial unemployment. The biggest problem, in my opinion, is that the young people do not want to get registered with the Labor Bureau. Even if they do register, they soon terminate their registration. Most expect to find employment right after getting registered, but the system does not work like this. Sometimes it takes time. We do not have many employers in the municipality and there are not many free places available. There are positions available, however, for people with certain qualifications – truck drivers, people with good command of the English language or IT skills. Our young people [Romani youth] are mostly eighth- grade graduates, or have even less education than that. The other problem concerns the process of becoming qualified. In order to get enrolled in a qualification course, one has to have completed sixth grade. If this is not the case, the person should go through an evening school. This takes time, and even those people who start evening school soon quit. Serious community work is needed to motivate the young people to get educated and trained. They should learn to invest in themselves; otherwise, their self-realisation will always be questionable.

Currently there are two Labour Bureau programmes available for Roma young people –Youth Employment and Training and Youth Employment. However, the number of Roma youth from Nadejda settlement engaged within these programmes is very low. The process starts with employers advertising positions; the advertisement should be approved, and after that the young people should apply. However, there are very few employers and very few young people looking for employment opportunities. Generally, if the candidates are serious and patient, the Labour Bureau succeeds at finding employment for them, but in most cases the job is temporary.

The Labour Bureau representative said there should be programmes involving terms longer than the current six months. Payment is also a problem. Young people do not want to work for minimum wage. When asked about good employment practices that could be used for Roma youth, the labour mediator gave some examples. He mentioned one practice under which the compensation for unemployment was disbursed as a gross amount if the person presented a business plan to start a private business. That could work among Roma youth entitled to unemployment compensation.

“If we can establish connections between employers and youth, this might work well. Thus, for example Yazaki (a firm from Yambol) is constantly looking for workers. There are many people from the neighbourhood who work there. The firm secures their transportation to work, but many of our young people just do not apply. If there is direct contact with the firm, that could help,” says the labour mediator.

Nadejda is a ghetto; however, there are young people there who have high school diplomas or higher educations. For them it is easy to find work compared to those who have less education. The latter need more support, just as the most marginalised part of the settlement needs more support. They should be assisted to get qualifications through motivation programmes, mentorship, and secured opportunities for temporary employment such as cleaning the streets and garbage collection, jobs where qualifications are not needed.

The ghetto residents are living in misery; some cannot read and write and some are starving. They need employment in order to generate some income, provide basic needs for their families and children, and gradually to make a better living.

5.2.2 Roma civil society's view

The head of the Health of Roma NGO was also interviewed. When asked whether he has ever participated in implementing measures that target Roma youth unemployment, the director referred to the fact that they are the only NGO working in the Nadejda settlement:

We have established a health–social center. It is located in the settlement and targets primarily health issues such as HIV prevention, tuberculosis and other illnesses. However, all our activities are connected with unemployment issues. In 2014 we had two girls recruited under a programme for temporary employment for six months. The program targeted persons under 29. They were recruited for positions matching their education and qualifications. These two girls were high school graduates and we employed them as assistants. Their salaries and social security contributions were paid by the programme and our NGO had no financial involvement.

As regards NGOs' role, the director is of the opinion that NGOs could be useful in the process of motivating youth to complete their educations, to stay in school, and to postpone marriage:

Our settlement is well-known for early marriages and early childbirths. We are trying to motivate the young people to continue their educations. Thus, for example, this year we have seven or eight girls who were enrolled as first-year university students. They study midwifery and nursing. We are trying to provide young people with information about universities, preparatory courses for the entrance exams, scholarships. Our aim is to have educated young people who can also motivate others. It is difficult to get things done in such an environment. We have different kinds of people living here, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. Some people do well because they work abroad, but there is one very marginalized part of the community that is difficult to work with. Those people barely survive and are not interested in anything.

When asked whether he can provide some examples of successful or unsuccessful employment policies targeting Roma youth, the director said there have been many unsuccessful practices. He believes most employment measures targeting youth in general are unsuccessful because they offer young people qualifications that do not match the

requirements of the labour market. Very frequently people are trained in landscaping gardens or parks but then cannot find any work through the programmes for temporary employment. Once applicants enter the system, they just wait for the next programme to be announced and do not even think about going to the private sector for work. Another aspect is that the programmes are usually limited to between three and six months. Longer-term programmes are needed so people can get used to the thinking that they should work and look for employment opportunities once a programme is over.

Last but not least, it is believed that there is a lack of social services incentives stimulating unemployed persons to go on to the labour market and take personal initiative. There are some psychologists and case-managers appointed to the Labor Bureau, but their work is so formalised that they are in fact nothing but administrators. In a nutshell, there is a lack of real supportive work with job-seekers who are Roma youth.

5.2.3 Conclusions

Big discrepancies could be observed between the educated, employed youth who look continuously for better opportunities and the marginalized, poor people from the same Roma community. In such a segregated settlement one can find early marriages, school dropout, and unemployment; all of which go hand-in-hand in most cases. In such communities one can find few exceptions, and they are quite dramatic exceptions of youth with higher education degrees who work for state institutions (women especially).

The most important aspect here is that of the marginalized Roma young people who are not educated, who have not mastered any employment habits, and who neither know nor trust the relevant labour institutions. These people are unofficially self-employed and make their living by collecting materials for recycling from the garbage containers. It is very difficult to get these young people motivated to seek formal employment, as many are homeless. If they do register with the Labour Bureau, they do not succeed in keeping their registration active, as they usually allow their registration to lapse by not renewing it on a monthly basis as required. Reportedly such persons expect the Labor Bureau to propose them “good” jobs immediately, and if this does not happen, they lose interest in being registered.

Attractive salaries abroad cause such Roma young people to emigrate despite the existence of official employment assistance. The level of qualifications required for certain local projects or opportunities is the main obstacle to getting Roma youth on board (besides financially-stimulating, highly-attractive, long-term work abroad). Longer-term programmes that are properly paid are needed so Roma youth can get used to thinking they should engage in formal employment and look for such employment opportunities once a programme is over.

The role of the Government in such cases is to invest into education that provides professional development and qualification. The Government should also address early school dropout at different levels of education so that Roma young people increase their chances of getting fair jobs. Lastly, the Government should invest in increasing the salaries of young people so the society at large can benefit from their employment.

5.3. Pre-secondary, secondary and university students from Vazovo village

Vazovo village is located in northeast Bulgaria about 10 kilometers from the municipal centre of Ispirih. The unemployment rate is 20-22 %. In the past, people were generally engaged in agricultural and farming activities, with the industrial sector being less developed. In recent years the only source of income generally has come from working abroad.

The five participants in this focus group were all men. The youngest was 16 and the oldest was 25. In terms of education they had quite diverse backgrounds. Two had graduated from some form of pre-secondary education, 6th and 8th grade, respectively, two were enrolled in the 10th and 12th grade respectively, and one was a first-year law student. The 8th grade student had been unemployed for about a year. He went through a programme for temporary employment for four months. The 6th-grade graduate had been unemployed for about two years. He also went through a programme for temporary employment. The 10th grade student did not plan on continuing his education after graduating. He shared that he still did not have concrete plans but did not think he would stay in Bulgaria. He said he will probably leave for Germany, where some of his relatives live, and that he will be able to easily find work and adapt to the life there. Emigration is one reason for the low number of young people who are high school diploma holders in this particular community. Usually, upon graduating from 8th grade, young people do not continue their educations but leave the country with their parents. Roma girls are normally not allowed to continue their educations because of the community's patriarchal arrangements.

Two of the focus group respondents are married. One has one child, the other two children. In 2013 they were in a vocational training programme and were employed in the local NGO. Presently they are waiting to be employed for another six months in the local municipality as cleaning staff.

The general problem identified by the participants is that while it is possible to find work in the village, the salaries are too low, usually minimum wage (230 euro per month). After paying taxes and social security contributions, as well as the costs of commuting, net income is 170 euro per month. The general income source is employment abroad, mostly in Germany and Belgium. The participants shared that most people work abroad for six or seven months, then come back to Bulgaria and live on their savings. Over time the number of people who spend time working abroad grows, and they plan to permanently settle in the countries where they have been working.

When discussing possible ways to solve these problems, the youth said they think the rates of salaries should be increased. However, they do not believe that salaries can grow enough so as to reach West European levels. The general opinion of the group was that there is no hope that the young people who work abroad would ever come back to Bulgaria; on the contrary, the number of young people leaving the country will grow.

On the question of why they had been unemployed for so long, two participants shared that in fact they were working, but in the “grey economy” - collecting herbs for unofficial resale, working unofficially in agriculture and other services, etc. They said they did not want to start work away from the village because of the cost of commuting. In fact, they did see the programmes for temporary employment as additional work opportunities they can combine with their informal income generation.

When discussing Labour Bureau services, the participants shared that they are satisfied with the level of the services and the attitude of the officers working there. They shared that they always received enough information but that there are not enough opportunities, as jobs in the region are generally limited. The participants shared that the Labour Bureau has nothing else to propose to them – not suitable courses, not temporary employment, and not local employers seeking labour, as everything is centrally organised. The centralised programmes were described as unsuitable because they offer low salaries and meaningless qualification courses that do not lead to real employment opportunities.

On the question of whether they were working while studying, two participants answered that they work during the summer so they can have money of their own. They shared that they are not obliged to work in order to afford their educations, as their parents take care of this, but they prefer to get work during vacation.

When asked what the situation of non-Roma young people is with regard to employment, the participants answered that only a few non-Roma are not officially employed. Most non-Roma youth who look for employment opportunities succeed. When asked whether they feel discriminated against because of their Roma origin, most participants said the problem is not connected with discrimination, but is rather a problem inside the Roma community. According to the participants, Roma youth are not used to working for low pay, and this is also the situation among the Roma adults. It was generally agreed that they have other opportunities and make more money through working abroad or in the grey economy – according to the participants, Roma youth earn their livings informally and are unemployed only in the official sense. The participants shared that very few Roma in the village are engaged in doing business. The main reasons are that generally they do not own their own land, real estate, or other assets. Another reason discussed was the inconvenient business environment in the region, especially the high number of closed businesses. The participants shared that there had been an attempt to provide no-interest loans to Roma community members in the past, but the initiative failed.

The main conclusions indicate that Roma youth are not organised to become officially employed locally and no longer participate in local employment initiatives as they did some years ago. The main reason for the low employment rate in Bulgaria in general is the low rate of salaries on offer. If one has the chance to earn more (no matter whether within the grey economy or abroad), then this is what one does. There is also reportedly one small group in every Roma community of the most marginalized people, and this is the group which needs the most the different kinds of measures for securing employment and/or qualifications.

5.3.1 Roma civil society's view

The head of the Roma Vazovo NGO was interviewed. When asked how this organisation can assist with overcoming the problem of unemployment among Roma youth, the head of the NGO claimed to primarily assist by providing information to the young people in their village. This is needed, as the Roma in this area are a Turkish-speaking community, do not have sufficient command of Bulgarian, and often experience difficulties with understanding and speaking Bulgarian. Bulgarian TV programmes are not very popular locally, and the community prefers to watch Turkish TV programmes. This leads to the fact that the community is much better informed about the situation in Turkey than they are about the situation in Bulgaria. Keeping this in mind, the head of the NGO believes it is important for community members to be informed about existing opportunities and to be assisted with the process of communicating with institutions. If community members are not well prepared, they cannot understand the information provided, which creates conflicts. This is, for example, the main reason the community believes the Labour Bureau does not pay attention to the problems of community members - in fact, this is a result of difficulties in communication between the people working in that institution and the community members.

The head of the NGO said that last year they temporarily hired two youths for a four-month programme, after which they employed two more girls for four months:

That was useful for our organisation, as we had four people paid under the programme. Our budget is limited and we only have one person working full-time on an open-ended contract. When we have additional persons employed, we have the opportunity to develop more activities. However, we had many administrative problems while employing additional staff members under the programme mentioned. We had to pay their salaries as well as their health insurance and social security contributions, and we were to be reimbursed by the programme within a month, but we only started to receive the reimbursements three months later while continuing to pay the staff members. This forced me, as the chairperson of the organization, to get a loan in order to pay salaries. I got my money back within a few months, but it cost me a lot of time plus interest.

A few years ago, several campaigns to form groups for Bulgarian literacy courses for persons over 18 who had completed 4th grade were launched. The Labour Bureau addressed the NGO for support in the process of recruiting course participants. Unfortunately, the NGO was not able to form such a group. Not enough people wanted to join, even though there are many people there who are illiterate in Bulgarian and need this skill. The course was supposed to continue for six months and the attendees were offered a stipend of two euros per day, but there was still not enough interest. The NGO also assisted the Roma employment mediator with motivating Roma youth to register as unemployed. In the end they enrolled a few persons, but without success:

Nobody wants to stay in Bulgaria and almost all young people have emigrated abroad. However, in the smaller villages there are still some young people who need employment. The municipality has applied for such a project. We are awaiting the decision on the application and we will assist the municipality to reach the target group if the application is successful. We have never been addressed for such assistance by private firms, but if the project mentioned is successful, they will

probably address us for assistance, as this programme requires cooperation between the municipality and the employers.

5.3.2 Decision-makers' view

The vice-mayor of Ispirih municipality was also interviewed. According to him, one responsibility of Bulgarian municipalities is to work on the issue of unemployment. However, he claimed they do not have many instruments at their disposal. One of the main activities every municipality is doing is to try to create a suitable environment for the development of local businesses and the attraction of investors. The main approaches used are minimizing taxes for businesses, providing them land at a lower cost, etc. The other possible instruments are implementing the national employment programmes offered by the Labour Bureau or applying for financing under EU-funded programmes. "I have to stress, however, that all these activities target people in need of employment regardless of their ethnic origin. We try to secure equal access to services by the Roma in order to avoid conflicts between people from different ethnic groups or the separation of different ethnic groups," said the vice-mayor.

For the last two and a half years the vice-mayor reported there had been little to deal with in terms of youth employment. The main reasons were the fact that the municipality does not have sufficient experience to deal with unemployment issues among youth, as well as the fact that there were no suitable programmes available for doing so.

When asked whether the municipality had any measures envisaged in their plans and strategic documents to target Roma youth unemployment, the vice-mayor revealed that such measures are included within the municipal programme for Roma integration. They had even applied, using the municipality's concept, to secure funding for the implementation of the municipal programme. One special integrative procedure was opened under two operational programmes – Human Resources Development and Science and Education for Intelligent Growth. Within their local concept the municipality included 15 young people from ethnic minorities to be recruited for a six-month internship with an employer who would promise to secure permanent employment for at least six youths after the internship was over. "We planned this because many employers shared that they cannot identify qualified workers; through the internship the young people will have six months for training and the employer will be able to evaluate their work," the vice-mayor said.

When asked about the attitude of employers towards Roma youth and whether they hire them, the vice-mayor claimed that he does not believe a serious employer would be interested in the ethnic origin of any worker. What employers share is that they look for serious people with the necessary qualifications. Unfortunately, there are few Roma with suitable qualifications and very few express a willingness to get qualified, the vice-mayor alleged:

Young people do nothing – they do not study, and they do not work, because their parents work abroad and make a good enough living. This problem concerns not only Roma, but all young people. Overcoming this problem should be among the priorities of the national policies. We, as a municipality, cannot target it. We have problems

with the education system, because young people graduate even though they are still illiterate, and this is because they are not motivated to develop themselves. They are not motivated because even if they are educated and employed, they will still receive low salaries. We have to work on raising incomes. There is no other solution to this situation.

5.3.3 Conclusions

The situation of Roma youth employment in rural areas is a rather delicate subject. Rural youngsters work more in the grey economy, mainly in day labour of a manual nature such as agricultural work, construction work, etc., and their ambitions are to go abroad because the salaries in Bulgaria are very low. Self-employment is one way out, but it is limited to small-scale commercial activities. As for the decision-makers, it seems the unemployment situation is something they do strive to deal with. As a strategy, the municipality, for example, focuses more on attracting investors and supporting the development of businesses at the local level in the hope that young people would benefit as employees. However, while the municipal representative highlighted the investment into enabling conditions for small businesses, the beneficiaries question the meaningfulness of this effort, since in general small businesses are closing down.

It seems there is a shared understanding across a certain category of Roma who do not trust state institutions and the short-term offers provided by them. There is especially a lack of communication between the Turkish-speaking communities and the Labour Bureau, which results in Roma youth who speak Turkish lacking information. Furthermore, Roma youth have either lost their faith in the work of civil society or have had bad experiences with getting involved in different projects and are reluctant to get involved in community-related projects. From the civil society perspective, one can conclude that opportunities to engage Roma youth in NGO work are not sustainable.

A positive aspect of this case study was that Roma students report that they work during their summer holidays and sometimes also during their studies. This proves Roma youth want to work and are willing to do so regardless of their circumstances.

6. Research Findings – Romania

6.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies

Romania has a series of strategies aiming to tackle youth employment. For example, the *National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction* up to 2015 included specific objectives and lines of action aimed at improving youth participation in the labour market – empowering youth to develop and capitalize on their professional potential, building youth capacity to search for and find jobs suitable to their professional training and skills, supporting youth in starting and expanding their own businesses, helping youth with starting their families, and providing them with an environment that enables them to enjoy a work-life balance fostering their broader participation in social, cultural, civic and political life at national and European level. By doing so, the Strategy pays special attention to young people

who, for various reasons, may have fewer opportunities, and defines lines of action for youth at high risk of becoming economically inactive or victims of chronic poverty: the long-term unemployed and the NEETs.

Besides this, the *National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015-2020* aims, *inter alia*, to increase funding for employment policies and provide tailored employment services to inactive, unemployed people. This strategy also targets vulnerable youth through EU-wide programmes such as the Youth Guarantee. It also addresses issues that are specific to the Romanian labour market, such as massive informal employment, informal self-employment, low productivity subsistence entrepreneurs, job insecurity, income poverty, limited access to continuing training on the labour market, and other forms of occupational exclusion.

The *Education and Professional Training Strategy in Romania 2016-2020* aims to facilitate access to training programmes for hard-to-reach youth with an emphasis on those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds as well as the Roma population. It also aims to implement measures to increase access to vocational training programmes for Roma, including Roma students, such as the allocation of special places for Roma pupils, providing school transportation, and scholarships for students in vocational education. Last but not least, it also aims to provide financial support for the housing and food needs of youth from disadvantaged and/or rural environments and of Roma, including people living with disabilities or deficiencies who are enrolled in vocational and technical education establishments. The strategy promotes equal opportunities and non-discrimination in the labour market for vulnerable groups and aims to create a system for collecting data about the situation of vulnerable groups in the fields of education, economic activity, employment and professions. An important aspect is that this strategy aims to implement the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination in the organisational cultures of educational institutions, of employers, including private employers, and of public institutions.

The *National Employment Strategy 2014-2020*, one of the most powerful background documents on this issue, refers to a set of integrated measures aimed at increasing the employment of members of vulnerable groups in order to reduce the risk of their poverty and social exclusion while stimulating their participation in personalised education and training programmes. It also mentions the provision of support services for inactive Roma people on the labour market, which can be achieved through the concerted efforts of all institutions involved in the field while ensuring access to social assistance services according to the specific needs of the individual, especially in marginalised communities, including those in rural areas.

Last but not least the *Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority for the Period 2012 – 2020* identifies the following priorities:

- Adapting to labour market needs the training courses offered by the training centres within the National Agency of Employment;

- Providing professional counselling services to persons in difficulty, including members of the Roma minority, in view of their social reintegration; identifying financing sources for initiating independent activities; offering assistance with drawing up a CV and with preparing for an interview, and with finding a job; facilitating access to social, public, or private housing units, etc.

More specifically, the directions for action include activities such as:

- Promoting entrepreneurship among communities with a large percentage of Roma as a solution for activating local partnerships and for resolving the complex problems of local communities, including those inhabited by Roma; promoting citizens' participation in the labour market and, in particular, the social integration of the Roma minority;
- Identifying job opportunities based on flexicurity for vulnerable groups, especially Roma women (flexibly scheduled jobs where social security contributions are paid), income-generating activities and small family businesses, apprenticeship and tutoring programs, along with ensuring support for access to education and health care systems, nursery schools, kindergartens, and "afterschool" programmes;
- Identifying ways to recognize the professional skills of Roma that have been acquired outside of the official education system in order to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market;
- Providing different types of facilities for entrepreneurs and other economic agents who employ Roma;
- Stimulating agricultural activities for Roma communities in line with the Common Agricultural Policy and the national agricultural policy;
- Promoting programmes designed to raise employers' awareness of the discrimination phenomenon in the workplace, of equal opportunities, of psychological harassment and social dialogue;
- Developing a separate financial mechanism, in the framework of the 2014 – 2020 financial programming, to support the professional inclusion of Roma;
- Organising courses teaching Roma how to create a business plan and launch a business - business management trainings, project management trainings, etc.
- Diversifying the jobs on offer for vulnerable groups to respond to their qualifications;
- Stimulating the issuing of authorizations for certain activities (crafts and handicrafts, etc.), supporting associations of craftspeople where Roma can practice their trades.

According to the information collected by Eurydice on different national education systems²³ in Romania compulsory education has 11 grades, including the first two years of upper secondary education. Lower secondary education includes grades 5 to 8. Access to upper secondary education is achieved through a national evaluation examination. Upper secondary education has two forms: high school education, which includes grades 9-12/13 and can include academic, vocational and technological paths; and three-year

²³ See more at: Romania- System of education. Available online at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Romania:Overview> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

professional education (technical, professional). All students holding a high school diploma can enroll in higher education. Higher education can be provided by universities, academies, institutes or schools of higher studies and is organized according to the Bologna Process's three-degree structure of Bachelor, Master and PhD.

The case studies below aim to assess to what extent such frameworks and strategies have reached a) early school leavers from a marginalised, remote community in Resita, b) less-educated Roma youth (attaining just primary or lower secondary grades) from rural areas of Prahova County; and c) how Roma youth and other stakeholders perceive the existing opportunities as well as those that are lacking.

6.2. Early school leavers from a marginalised, remote community in Resita

In Resita, Caras-Severin county, the focus group participants came from a marginalised, remote area of the town that is often targeted by measures and projects for Roma. The aim was to obtain more detailed information in an open setting about individual cases of employment and school dropout and the factors that facilitate or prevent the employment of youth as perceived by Roma young people.

In Resita two focus groups with Roma youth took place. In the first focus group there were six participants, four women and two men between 15 and 19 years old. All had completed some form of primary or lower secondary education, more specifically between 3rd and 6th grades, and most did not finish their studies. In terms of family status, one girl was married and another was pregnant.

In the second focus group there were seven participants, two of whom were men. They were all between 15 and 20 years old. In terms of education almost all had completed 4th or 5th grade, with one having graduated from 10th grade. Currently he is a mechanic and is married with two children. As far as the family status of the other participants, it is noticeable that the older participants had between one and three children and that two women said they were pregnant at the time of the focus group.

One of the main findings is that an almost total lack of interaction between Roma parents and their children's teachers was mentioned by both focus groups. This had a significant impact on their own educational experiences as children and on their retention of what was taught at school. In just one case did a participant mention that his father had regularly attended the parents' meetings at his school. He said: "I had eight brothers, but my father wanted me to have education. (...) Now I am a log truck driver, I work here because I earn much more money."

When asked why they had dropped out of school, 80% of participants said the main reason had been their family's **poverty**. The women participants mentioned their specific duties within their family's household such as cooking, taking care of younger siblings, and taking care of elderly family members. In such circumstances, children attending school is considered a luxury and they do so only until the child achieves a basic education (writing, reading, and counting). The second reason for dropout was that the participants had their own

children (i.e., the women gave birth). Lack of educational support provided by the school and the state was the third reason mentioned for dropout.

When asked whether they saw a connection between education and employment, the participants reported a visible connection between employment (or better employment) and education. They said there are no “good jobs” for them because they do not have any training. They have had to work in the grey economy as day labourers (mainly the male participants), or live on the social assistance allowance. There were only a few who had gone to work abroad, mainly in agriculture. Even those with a degree or training were setting off to work in Germany. “I want to go to Germany to work, earn money, and come back to buy a house”, one participant said. Learning a foreign language (German, especially) was one of the most-mentioned reasons for continuing their studies or enrolling in a “second chance” school programme.

When asked about the involvement of the employment office, a female participant referred to the professional training provided by the local employment office in cosmetics. She had wanted to apply for it but did not qualify as she did not know how to read and write.

None of the focus group participants had ever enjoyed proper housing conditions for learning and still do not. Their families all had more than two children and rooms in their households were shared by all. Their low socio-economic status (below the poverty level) was another reason they left school and attempted to find decent jobs. Most participants have between two and eight siblings or an ill parent, if not their own children. Having a child was not the reason the participants were unemployed, but it is correlated with their low levels of education (sex education is an optional subject in primary and secondary schools and less than 1% of the schools embraced it, for example) and with their poverty. Those participants who were parents did not describe parenthood as frustrating their achievement of a professional career. The mothers said they perceived child-bearing as a common process, not a break in their careers.

Through the focus group it came out that **segregation** is one of the main causes for institutional dropout and rejection on the labour market. Educators committing violence against Roma youth in the schools, or a principal rejecting Roma children on the basis of their skin colour were just some of the mentioned phenomena. As such, many Roma youngsters in the focus group reported being denied access to basic education, and their civil rights to education and to work were not protected. In such cases we found that discrimination against children on the basis of their economic status was more prevalent as a cause of Roma children leaving school. This is a deeply-rooted process that has immeasurable consequences, especially for a city like Resita, which is already confronted with high rates of poverty and unemployment. The partner organisation conducting the field research affirmed that discrimination and segregation are profound processes that directly affect dozens of Roma youth, and it is believed, therefore, that the issue of low self-esteem and silent discrimination exists for Roma youth from their early childhoods here.

The partner organisation conducting the field research noticed a high level of open **desire among Roma youth to reintegrate themselves into the education system** in order to access

better jobs. In this context, a “second chance” programme is still active, and there are youngsters that have graduated from university. However, there is a lack of active, proper support from the local authorities (educators, former teachers, psychological support, social assistance) correlated with a lack of information. There is insufficient support and a lack of school facilitators to provide Roma youth with the necessary instruments to continue their studies (there are some small after school programmes, but they are dependent on Government funding).

Education was highly valued among the focus group participants and there was a general opinion in favor of education and its impact on bettering one’s life. The participants considered themselves less fortunate because they did not have the opportunity to complete their schooling. They believe their own better futures will be connected to education and employment. The participants also underlined the connection between educational attainment and better employment. At the same time, they said proper training programmes are those that are correlated with labour market demand. Most affirmed that they learned their trades through on-the-job processes (e.g., from others working in construction). If there would be jobs available locally, they would like to do them. Usually they access jobs by getting recommendations from friends and relatives, not by accessing the Employment Agency or other formal channels.

6.2.1 Civil society’s view

Two civil society organisations were interviewed: Fundatia Humanitas Pro Deo and the Provitam Association. The first organisation focuses on financially sustaining people living in deprived conditions, children and their families specifically, through social programmes. The second organisation has a reputation for working on Roma employment. Both are quite familiar with the situation in the Roma community from where we drew the Roma youth participants in the focus groups.

When asked how they perceive the existing barriers to employment for Roma youth as well as the available measures and opportunities, Fundatia Humanitas Pro Deo said they do not see any barriers or blockages and that, on the contrary, when they ask employers to hire, the employers do not refuse. This organisation reported that Roma candidates did not show up to the job interviews arranged, though. For its part, the Provitam Association claims that there are no opportunities for Roma youth - the same conditions apply for everybody, and the barrier is the lack of interest among Roma youth themselves.

When asked whether they can recall any best practices on Roma youth employment, neither could, although one association said some projects targeting vulnerable groups included some extra incentives (food aid packages) to motivate attendance at qualification trainings.

6.2.2 Employers' view

Three employers who have employed Roma adults or youth at certain times were interviewed. They work in the carpentry, construction, and tourism sectors. When asked why they would employ Roma, almost all responded that what matters to them is the professional skills and qualifications of their employees, with one business stating that they were more inclined towards hiring men, but none mentioning barriers related to ethnicity. When it comes to recruiting, all agreed that they find their employees through their own family members and friends, and sometimes through their current employees. None of the employers had ever received financial or other institutional support for hiring Roma and did not know where to find proper information on this subject.

When it comes to their familiarity with employment legislation related to youth, or to best practices in employing Roma youth, the employers said they are not familiar with such topics, and only two affirmed that they provide professional training to their employees. To employ more Roma youth, the employers said they would need training courses to prepare the Roma workers as well as financial assistance in order to offer competitive salaries.

6.2.3 Public authorities' view

During the fieldwork several interviews took place with different public authorities' representatives, as follows: the Social Work Department, the Caras County School Inspectorate, and the Ocna de Fier Gymnasium (grades 1-8).

More Roma used to work in the Social Work Department, with most employed through open competition, but none of those staffers had been youth. The interviewed social worker has been working in the area with children (e.g., with the Save the Children organisation) as well as with Roma expectant mothers and mothers who are young. Talking more about the situation in the marginalized Roma community of Resita, the social worker was of the opinion that one of the most important aspects in getting Roma youth employed is education. "It would be good if there would be work with the parents to make the children attend school. Many children do not have even enrolled or completed the first-grade" said the social worker. Besides this, the social worker acknowledged that in general, more jobs should be created for youngsters, especially for disadvantaged Roma youth.

The Caras County School Inspectorate implemented several projects focusing on Roma in 2005 (e.g., PHARE²⁴), either projects for people from disadvantaged areas (e.g., "second chance" or "new chance") or different partnerships with other institutions aiming to support Roma. Most of these projects aimed to increase the level of education of Roma youth and to form them professionally – to create a human resources pool – as well as to develop inclusive education policies, reduce school drop-out, and re-educate people who left school early.

²⁴Originally called: "Poland Hungary Aid for the Reconstruction of the Economy"
Later called: "Economic aid to certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe". See more at:
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/phare_en (Last accessed 2 February 2018)

According to the inspectorate, the interested actors should stimulate different measures – including financial incentives – to employ Roma youth. As a prerequisite, Roma youngsters should have access to education and get the proper qualifications needed for employment. “I believe that implementing projects that would form the Roma from a professional point of view would be a good measure, providing that these projects are in line with Roma history and traditions. If some of the traditional occupations²⁵ would be revitalized (formally registered) this would be an extra opportunity. There should also be some projects that deal with increasing Roma self-esteem,” the county school inspectorate representative added.

Last but not least, the school director of the Ocna de Fier Gymnasium would like schools to be more involved in Roma-related projects as such. He believes financially supporting schools to have after-school programmes, counseling services and orientations for parents and students, as well as many other services, would significantly contribute to reducing Roma youth unemployment.

6.2.4 Conclusions

In this disadvantaged community where a high number of Roma live, almost all the interested actors said they were actively involved in supporting the employability of Roma youth but were encountering certain limitations, with early school-leaving rates being the most relevant problem.

As was mentioned by the employers’ interviews, the state should stimulate employers by providing more financial support for hiring Roma youth. As far as the initiatives and measures to be implemented to support Roma youth are concerned, first and foremost there is a need to provide educational support to both adults and children, including professional training. Measures that are sustainable and can properly support Roma youngsters to access better jobs are those that target the process of education, either in school (from primary to high school/university) or through professional trainings (developing and using competencies and skills). In both cases, the main supporter is or should be the state through educational, financial and legislative policies targeting both employers and Roma youth.

6.3. Less-educated rural Roma from Prahova County

In Prahova County we looked at the profiles of Roma youngsters coming from rural areas with relatively low levels of education (mainly primary education only, with some completing some secondary or professional education. In total, 16 Roma youth had the opportunity to voice their concerns as follows: five from the Mimiui community in Ploiesti, six from the Mogador community in Campina, and five from Marginenii de Jos. Of the 16 young people, only one is employed abroad by her husband's firm; he is not Roma.

²⁵ For example: tinsmiths and coppersmiths, blacksmiths, basket-makers, woodworkers, etc.

Ploiesti is one of the largest cities in Romania, with 209,945 inhabitants, of whom 5,048 are Roma according to the 2011 census.²⁶ According to the Roma NGOs, Ploiesti has a very strong industrial sector, but Roma there do not enjoy a lot of attention from employers. This is mainly due to racism against Roma and their lack of formal education. Campina is the second-largest city in Prahova County, with 32,935 inhabitants, of whom 639 declared themselves to be Roma in the 2011 census. In reality the number of Roma inhabitants is around 2,000, according to Roma NGOs. The Marginenii de Jos village has 3,187 inhabitants, and the number of Roma there is 1,227, according to the 2011 census. Currently, of the 3,187 inhabitants, 2,500-2,600 are said to be Roma.

6.3.1 Public authorities' view

The Prahova County Employment Agency (PCEA) said they do not know the actual exact number of Roma youth from Mimi, Margineni, Campina or other communities who are employed or who have been looking for a job during the last 12 months. Based on our interview with the PCEA representatives, it became clear that the Agency does not carry out any surveys to identify Roma young people looking for jobs. According to the PCEA, of about 10,000 people looking for a job, only 181 declared they are of Roma origin: 13 are from Ploiesti (two from the Catun community and none from Mimi), 20 from Campina, and four from Mărginenii de Jos. The deputy director confessed that during the last year, most of the data on Roma job-seekers was collected from files submitted by Roma residents to their local mayors for obtaining the minimum income benefits guaranteed to them by law (Law No. 416/2001).

The PCEA representatives, who are not Roma, admitted they have reservations about going into Roma communities themselves, but they have shown an openness to go along with representatives of Roma NGOs recognised by the Roma communities in order to obtain accurate data about Roma who are unemployed, not in education, or who have left school early. Once these groups are identified, where appropriate, the PCEA says it will support them with getting access to the “second chance” programmes in order to complete the compulsory minimum level of education, after which they may become beneficiaries of vocational training courses in the professions required on the labour market²⁷.

According to the PCEA representatives, the fact that most Roma do not declare their ethnicity when applying is a barrier to their becoming beneficiaries of Roma programmes. So far, Roma have been beneficiaries of free training projects. Many just enrolled for the allowance they received if they attended the course. The certificates earned proved useful to less than 1% of these graduates.

²⁶ National Institute of Statistics Romania (2011). “*Final results of the 2011 households and population census*”. Available online at: http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf (last accessed 15 January 2018)

²⁷ Recently, PCEA has begun a partnership-building campaign with municipalities to initiate second-chance courses to complete 8 grade education and training for all beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum income, including Roma, and those who meet the conditions attend the training courses but refuse, will lose the minimum income guaranteed by Law 416/2001.

6.3.2 Entrepreneurs' view

During the fieldwork, the partner organisation identified three types of local private employers:

- employers who would hire Roma if they had no alternative
- employers who want to hire unskilled Roma or Roma who have completed their compulsory eighth-grade education and know how to write
- employers who would hire Roma who are physically strong but unskilled, irrespective of their educational attainment, for unqualified manual labour in agriculture, construction, digging, etc.

As a rule, this last category of private employers works relatively near the places where Roma live. For example, two business producing thermo-panels near the Mimiú and Cătuñ neighborhoods fall into this category.

A good experience of employers with their Roma employees so far is a strong motivation for Roma young people to seek jobs with an employer. Two employers in this area said they needed two to three Roma youth who, if employed, would undergo a probationary week and then, if hired, would be paid more than the minimum wage.

6.3.3 Decision-makers' view

At the declarative level, all three mayors from the areas researched said they were willing to hire Roma college or high school graduates who are young, but the Roma young people who were part of the focus groups stated that this was not the case, since it is highly competitive to get a job in the local administration and no preferential treatment would be given to applicants from vulnerable groups.

Moreover, in Prahova County there are many local councilors and mayors who, despite the current legal framework regulating the employment of community health nurses and health mediators of Roma ethnicity,²⁸ have refused to comply with requests for Roma staff coming from the Prahova Public Health Directorate. The main reason for their refusing to employ medical staff of Roma origin was the allegedly low number of Roma inhabitants in their municipalities.

6.3.4 Conclusions

In this specific rural region of Romania, involvement with and outreach to the Roma communities from the side of the employment office would be one of the preliminary steps for less-educated Roma youth to get to know about different opportunities, including training.

²⁸ See: Ministerial order 619/2002 article 3 which states that localities can employ Roma health mediators

For Roma living in rural areas there are few employment opportunities available for youth. The only available jobs involve hard labour, and most are provided by foreign investors. Despite the existence of frameworks that could increase Roma participation and representation in public institutions, local authorities seem to be discriminatory when it comes to Roma youth and reluctant to see them participate.

7. Research Findings – the Czech Republic

7.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies

In the Czech Republic, the “National Youth Strategy 2014-2020” especially reinforces informal education that affords equal opportunities for young people to learn skills that can be used in employment or society in general. Activities during which young people are guided by professional youth workers aim to enable young people to especially develop so-called “soft skills”. Emphasis is also placed on the recognition of the results of informal education during work with children and youth, in particular by employers, representatives of state and local authorities, formal education institutions and organisations working with youth. Two strategic goals of the strategy refer to the creation of favourable, sustainable conditions for the participation of children and youth in informal, leisure-based education in order to enhance cooperation between educators and employers as well as among educators themselves regarding the recognition of the results of informal education, as well as improving the conditions for employability of youth and their employment by:

- facilitating the transition between school and the work environment for young people and creating conditions for their gradual involvement in the work process;
- promoting greater cooperation between schools, educational facilities and their founders (usually municipalities), other educators, employers, professional and sectoral associations and labour offices to improve opportunities for young people on the labour market; and
- improving access to services in education, employment, health and social care for children and youth with fewer opportunities.

The Czech Republic’s Social Inclusion Strategy (2014-2020) aims to create conditions for socially excluded persons or persons at risk of social exclusion to enter and remain on the labour market. It also aims to ensure adequate income and prevent loss of income for people who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion. The strategy also aims to support equal access to social services for persons who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.

According to the information collected by Eurydice²⁹ on different national education systems, in the Czech Republic compulsory schooling starts at six years of age (including one year of compulsory preschool education) and lasts nine years. Primary and lower secondary education is organised within a single-structure system in nine-year basic schools (*základní školy*). Lower secondary education can be provided also by multi-year general secondary schools (*víceletá gymnázia*) and eight-year conservatoires (*osmileté konzervatoře*).

Upper secondary education is provided by upper secondary schools (*střední školy*), and vocational schools. The age of their students is usually 15 to 18 years. School leavers acquire one of three levels of secondary education: a) with a school-leaving examination (*střední*

²⁹ See more at: Czech Republic - System of education. Available online at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Czech-Republic:Overview> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

vzdělání s maturitní zkouškou), b) with an apprenticeship certificate (*střední vzdělání s výučním listem*), c) secondary education (*střední vzdělání*). Upper secondary schools also provide follow-up study (*nástavbové studium*) enabling holders of the apprenticeship certificate to acquire a secondary education with a school-leaving examination, and shortened study (*zkrácené studium*) in which school leavers with a school-leaving examination or an apprenticeship certificate gain qualifications in a different field.

Tertiary education is carried out by tertiary professional schools (*vyšší odborné školy*) and higher education institutions (*vysoké školy*). Tertiary professional education is usually attained in three-year programmes. Higher education is provided for Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes.

Of particular concern in the Czech Republic is the 12.7% of Roma pupils who attend elementary schools with learning programmes for children with mild mental disability,³⁰ as well as the estimated 72% of Roma children who leave school early, which has a significant impact on their future labour market and social inclusion prospects.³¹

In the following section we will explore how Roma youth in the Czech Republic perceive their employment opportunities and prospects. We look at educated Roma youth who already have experiences with the labour market.

7.2. Young educated Roma from northwestern Czech Republic working in Prague

The focus group in the Czech Republic was conducted with three Roma youngsters, one male and two females, all of whom have completed high school and two of whom are enrolled in higher education studies.

The only male participant graduated from high school in Jarov, Prague 10, and currently is unemployed. He lives in Černý Most, a socially excluded locality in Prague mainly inhabited by Roma. “In my area, there are many Roma who work. They work in the field of construction, in customer service, or they are entrepreneurs. I think my education will help me to get a job,” he stated.

The labour market in the region is generally quite good for youth, according to the male participant:

I worked during my studies as a painter and the job was very well paid. Currently I am not looking for a full-time job, just short-term offers. People offer me a job between three and five times a month. However, sometimes I have a month when I do not get any job offers. I usually get offers from painting or varnishing companies.

³⁰ Prague Monitor. (2018). “Over tenth of Czech Roma at schools for kids with mental disorder” Available online at: <http://praguemonitor.com/2018/01/08/over-tenth-czech-roma-schools-kids-mental-disorder> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

³¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), Roma survey — Data in Focus: Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States, http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014_roma-survey_education_tk0113748enc.pdf (last accessed 15 January 2018)

Generally speaking, the main problem Roma youth face is discrimination and lack of work experience. “I think in the Czech Republic there is racism and people discriminate. If we can change their attitude towards Roma, we will have equal opportunities and thus better job offers and possibilities,” this participant said.

In Prague 14, the area where the participant lives, there is a possibility to become a police assistant. Most of his friends were such assistants and now have applied for police school and want to become police officers. When it comes to his future plans, he wants to get a “trade certificate” in order to become self-employed and get offers from painting companies, or to work for some time in a painting company and then set up his own business.

Last but not least, the participant said he would like jobless Roma youth to receive bigger support from various actors, mainly to create courses and trainings that would allow Roma youth to become specialised in a particular area.

The women participants in the focus group are both employed. One has graduated from the Cevro Institut, where she majored in public administration. She lives in Chomutov but moved to the capital for her studies and work. The other woman respondent is also currently working. In the Ústí Region, where she comes from, there is a lack of job opportunities and wages there are low. However, because now she lives in the capital city, her situation is better. There are more job opportunities there than in the other cities or regions:

My education helped me to find a job and also the fact that I am a Roma – the projects for Roma students helped me, as did my CV. I worked during my studies. I used to work in McDonald’s, Tchibo, in the Municipality of Prague 1, and many other places. Currently I work at the ING Bank and at the ROMEA NGO. All of my jobs have been paid. I work for salary. I do not want to be self-employed because I think it is too risky.

When asked what the main obstacles are for Roma youth in getting employed, work experience was the first one mentioned. “Most employers require experience and most graduates do not have any. Also, a lot of companies attract graduates by promising them high salaries they will ultimately never receive,” this participant said. “I would like to work in the private sector. I want to buy a flat and financially support my parents. I also want to help the Roma community and mainstream society.” This participant found her jobs through friends and school, but what helped her the most were the internships and educational courses she has attended. “I think the best way to support employment for youth is internships, courses, advice, and workshops for writing CVs,” she said.

7.2.1 Employers’ view

The purpose of this interview was to better understand what kind of measures the Social Entrepreneurship section of the Prague 14 Municipal Department offers to young Roma. This section provides services to clients, including Roma youth, through three pillars:

- 1) Technical services – greenery management, cleaning, etc.
- 2) Community housing management – housing maintenance, etc.

3) Community centre – services for children whose parents are employed.

“We are employing disadvantaged people: Roma, including youth, persons with impaired orientation and mobility, people released from prison, and persons at risk of addictive behavior,” said the representative. The main objective of the project is to support comprehensive work in the socially excluded localities of the municipality of Prague 14 by creating a platform for the supported employment of around 20 people (the period of supported employment is up to nine months):

We provide young workers with opportunities to work not only in our social entrepreneurship project but also by reaching out to other offers from the private sector and other services. These positions are mainly in the service sector as cleaners, shop assistants, etc. Another part of our work is providing training courses that increase the capabilities and skills of our clients on the labour market.

The representative concluded that there are a lot of opportunities for Roma, including Roma youth, but that they are not very well implemented:

What we lack is technical assistance from Roma civil society to get involved in the implementation of EU-funded programmes and projects. I think nobody has focused on gathering data about the needs of Roma youth since the Czech Republic joined the EU. We know how Roma youth are struggling and are affected by discrimination when it comes to employment, and this discrimination is not based only on their ethnic background, but also on the level of education they obtain. There are no concrete measures led by the Labour Office to help these people specifically at all, as the Labour Office focuses on the administrative work connected to paying social benefits rather than on the employment measures and strategies themselves.

7.2.2 The national-level Labour Office's view

The representative of the Labour Office claimed that most Roma youth, after completing primary school, attend vocational school and register with the Labour Office. However, the Labour Office does not record the ethnicity of its clients, so it is hard for them to estimate the number of Roma youth involved.

According to the representative, Roma youth face two main challenges: their ethnicity, and their lack of work experience. The representative stated that retraining courses are good measures for activating Roma youth who have not graduated from secondary education of any kind, not even vocational school. Besides that, the Labour Office implements 11 regional projects entitled ‘Guarantees for young people in the region’ in selected regions through their regional offices and Roma youth are eligible for these. Such programmes can be implemented through Operational Programme Employment,³² which covers 85% of the project costs, with the remaining 15% covered by the Czech state budget. The Labour Office has a total of 933 million CZK to work with (more than 36 million euros) and has already provided employers

³² The Czech Operational Programme "Employment" was founded for the implementation of the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in the period 2014-2020. The Programme defines the priorities for promoting employment, social inclusion and an efficient public administration

with subsidized wages for employed youth of over 376 million CZK (almost 15 million euros).

The representative claimed that the chance for a new job is given to young people who have been registered with the Labour Office for at least three months and have worked for a maximum of three years since completing their studies. The largest number of concluded employment agreements for graduates (459) has been reported by the Brno Regional Labour Office. Graduates of primary schools, graduates of secondary schools providing a school-leaving examination, graduates of vocational schools, and college graduates are among the participants in such projects.

When it comes to the challenges of working with Roma youth, the representative claimed that there is a missing element in the system, one that would allow the NGO sector to be more involved with the mechanism of the Labour Offices related to the employment of Roma youth, as NGOs generally know how to employ and work with youth, but when it comes to Roma youth, there are gaps and obstacles that officials do not know how to handle or to solve.

7.2.3 Conclusions

Big cities attract young people for different jobs. For educated Roma youth who have been involved in Roma-related activities and projects, getting a job in a related field in the Czech capital is achievable. Like many other young people, for Roma the most-encountered obstacle to accessing mainstream jobs is a lack of work experience.

Discrimination was another aspect mentioned by both the Roma young people and by the Labour Office. It seems that despite their levels of education and professional experience acquired, employers' attitudes towards Roma are not changing. This directly affects the equal opportunities Roma youth enjoy, whether in education, employment, or any other sector.

8. Research Findings - Slovakia

8.1. National youth employment policy frameworks and strategies

The *National Employment Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2020* puts forward a set of possible actions and measures on Roma and on youth as follows:

- An important measure of active labour market policies for promotion of youth employment is the implementation of projects from the resources of the European Social Funds, focusing on the promotion of job creation in the private and public sectors for the unemployed up to 29 years of age.
- Within the initiative for promoting youth employment, the strategy recommends supporting job creation in all sectors of the national economy and ensuring the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, especially those who are not employed or are not in education or professional training, including young people at risk of social exclusion. For this purpose, the state should ensure the implementation of measures supporting young people in acquiring sustainable employment or self-employment. Particular attention should be paid to continued support for a young person's first regularly-paid employment.
- The strategy calls for promotion of the employment of Roma with a focus on people from marginalised Roma communities.
- Successful municipalities have followed the best practices known from other countries, from development planning to other specific activities and their monitoring, evaluation and review. It is important to adapt good practices to local conditions; development plans must reflect the specific conditions of the locality and its people.
- In partnership with the FOSFOR fund, the strategy calls for supporting infrastructure to support the creation and implementation of business plans and plans emphasizing the use of microfinancial and microgranting programs to support micro-enterprises that meet the criteria of social enterprises. Particular attention shall be paid to business plans with prospects of employing disadvantaged jobseekers, including people from marginalised Roma communities and people in unfavourable social situations (homeless people).
- In order to effectively address long-term unemployment, the strategy calls for the implementation of activities under the Operational Programme Human Resources for the programming period 2014 - 2020, particularly in the context of its Specific Objective. This means increasing employability and employment and reducing unemployment with a special emphasis on the long-term unemployed, on low-skilled people, older people, and people living with disabilities, within the Specific Objective. This also means increasing the employability and employment of marginalized communities, especially the Roma, and improving their financial literacy.

- The strategy recommends considering strengthening analytical capacity in terms of the current and future positions of Roma in the labour market and those who are in unfavourable social situations and building a working group to increase their integration (e.g., in the form of working group across various departments). It calls for assessing the possibility of introducing legislative solutions for eliminating the barriers that prevent such persons from being employed, for example, the fact that current legislation protects social welfare income from collections and that collection enforcement proceedings commence the moment a debtor officially has income from formal work (the assessment should be carried out in particular in terms of affirmative action in favour of some groups of the population).

The National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan of Slovakia introduces subsidies for a graduate's or a student's first regularly-paid job to enhance job creation for young people, whereas the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Youth 2014-2020 focuses on introducing systematic careers, thus increasing young people's orientation on the labour market. It also aims to reflect upon young people's specific needs with a view to improving the provision of public employment services, responding to the labour market's current needs (with a focus on vocational education as one of the main preconditions for young people's successful application on the labour market), supporting employers in creating jobs (with a view to increasing the number of jobs available for young people), and supporting education for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education in accordance with European policy focused on supporting skills for young people's employability, etc.

The Operational Programme Human Resources for the Programming Period of 2014-2020 emphasises sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those in NEET, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities. Moreover, it focuses on facilitating access to employment for inactive people and job-seekers, including long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market, through local employment initiatives and support for labour mobility.

As far as the national Roma strategies are concerned, the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Slovak Republic (2012-2020) aims to improve Roma access to work opportunities with a special emphasis on non-discriminatory access to the labour market, as well as active policies and programmes targeting the labour market, education, and the training of adults to engage in self-employment. It also aims to reduce the gap between the employment of non-Roma and Roma and to reduce the percentage of Roma unemployment by 50% (bearing in mind the UNDP survey in 2010 which found the unemployment rate among Roma men was 72% and among women 75%).³³ It also puts forward the idea of increasing the employability of Roma community members and improving relations between Roma community members, Labour Offices, and other institutions.

³³ United Nations Development Program, the World Bank & European Commission. (2011). *"The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States - Survey results at a glance"*. Available online at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/situation-roma-11-eu-member-states-survey-results-glance> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

According to the information collected by Eurydice on different national education systems³⁴, in Slovakia compulsory school attendance lasts ten years (between the age of six and 16) and pupils complete it by the age of 16, finishing therefore the first year of upper secondary education. Primary education lasts four years and lower secondary education lasts five years, organised as a nine-year-long single-structure system. Upper secondary education (starting age is 15) is organized as general, or vocational (two to five years) and art education (provided by conservatories). General upper secondary education is provided by four, five or eight-year gymnasia³⁵ (for age 11-18). In addition to upper secondary vocational education, secondary vocational schools also provide educational programmes of post-secondary education and tertiary professional education. Higher education is provided at three levels: Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes, whereas adult education provides the opportunity to supplement, extend and enhance one's education, to re-qualify, or to satisfy one's interests.

8.2. Secondary students from an urban area in Skalica

The partner organisation in this research from Slovakia chose to conduct the focus group in a part of the country where the job market is good and the employment rate is quite high. The barriers and challenges in eastern Slovakia are known through many studies conducted by other organisations (e.g., UNDP). Therefore, the partner organisation in this research wanted to learn the views of Roma youth living in a different part of Slovakia. In this northwestern region the unemployment rate is 4.75% (compared to Rimavska Sobota, where the unemployment rate is 25%). The housing conditions are much better and there are no slums or very badly segregated communities. The Roma Advocacy Research Centre representative argues:

We wanted to take a look at Roma youth employment possibilities from this region because the premise exists that everyone can get a job there. Therefore, we were conducting the research in this region, because we assumed that if Roma youth cannot get a job even when they are educated, it can mean they are really facing discrimination.

The Roma living in Skalica and in the larger region are working in companies and services in the town. There is one big company providing jobs to more than 4,700 people, Roma included. Many Roma are also working in the hospital in different positions. Roma youth study at the grammar school in Skalica³⁶, in the Business Academy and also in the secondary school for nurses. There are another two big secondary schools, also with Roma youth enrolled. There are no segregated schools or "special schools" for Roma children.

³⁴ See more at: Slovakia - System of education. Available online at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovakia:Overview> (last accessed 15 January 2018)

³⁵ Gymnázia (grammar schools) prepare students for university or college studies. They may last 4 (only upper secondary level), 6 or 8 years.

³⁶ A grammar school is the equivalent of a gymnasium, or high school (it lasts 4 or 8 years), and prepares students for higher education.

In Skalica there are 15,000 inhabitants and Roma are around 1% of the population. Skalica and Holíč are two towns in the western part of Slovakia on the border with the Czech Republic. This region has good employability and a low unemployment rate. The focus group in Skalica took place with six Roma youth, three women and three men, five who are enrolled in or have completed some form of secondary education, and one of whom (a woman) has graduated from university. They were between 17 and 25 years old. Three were working – two men and one woman. Five live in the Skalica city center and one man lives in Holíč. Almost all of the parents of the participants are working (in an engineering company, as a construction worker, in a food company, and two parents are self-employed), except for one mother, and all participants have one or two siblings, except for one who has five.

Most of the youngsters agreed that it is important to have a good education for finding a better job, but one also needs to know the right people. “You have to have some good connections and then you will get a well-paid job. I work with my father because he has a good relationship with the director of the company and he is giving us very good working conditions,” said one of the men.

Being Roma is a negative for some employers. “I finished secondary education with very good results, but when I was trying to find job, it was very hard because I am Roma”, said one of the girls. “I think that if we will have good educations then we will have more chances to find good jobs. For Roma it is very important to be much better than non-Roma are, because the trust in Roma work is very low”, the participants added.

When it comes to the labour market opportunities in their region, most participants said that it took them a relatively short time to find a job. “I found a job three months after graduation. It was great luck, because my aunt knows the director of social services”, said one of the young women. “When I finished secondary school, I could not find work for almost six months. My father appealed to his boss to give me a job”, added one of the young men, while another said that he started to work with his father two months after graduation: “I finished as a cook, but I could not find a job in my area. Even though there are many job opportunities for cooks, nobody wanted to accept me. They said they did not want beginners but I knew they did not want Roma.” One young woman said she wants to continue her education after graduating from secondary school and to attend university: “I want to have better chances to get a job. I think the job market in our region is good, but for Roma it is hard to find a job. Many employers used to say they do not want to give jobs to beginners without experience, but, how can young people get experience if they do not get the opportunity to work?”

When it comes to the role of the state, the youngsters said the state should take responsibility for the youth employment situation. “The state should give conditions to the companies so they are able to give jobs to young people”, one participant said. Another referred to the participatory approach of youth in youth-related policies: “I think that if the state is designing measures for young people they should speak with youngsters first. The state is speaking about measures for young people, but they do not understand that some of them are impossible to implement. The state should give young people a financial contribution to relocate if they find a job in another town. Otherwise I cannot imagine living alone, 100 km away from my mother.” Another participant referred to the retirement age and the place of

young people in the labour market: “I think it is also important to think about seniors, because they are working so long – some are working when they are 63 years old, so there are not so many places for young people”. Last but not least, one female participant referred to the Labour Office services: “The people working there do not know anything about state contributions and benefits for young people. When I was registered there I never got any information that could help me find a job”.

When asked where they hear information about study or job opportunities, some referred to family and friends and some to their school. “We are getting information in the school. There is an educational guidance counselor and he is giving us advice about what to study at university, what would be the best for us,” it was said.

When asked about their international experiences, almost all participants referred to language barriers and family-related factors. “I would like to [go abroad] in the future, but my mother says I am too much young to do anything international. She does not allow me even to go to summer camp in another town. She says when I will be 18 years old I can do some other activities”, said one of the young men.

8.2.1 Employer's view

The business owner interviewed is a woman. Her business has been working for more than 15 years. It is a family business founded by her and her husband. They started with the small-scale production of rolls:

It was very good, because we built up a strong network of our business partners and we were delivering our rolls more than 60 km away from our production facility. We had over 100 employees at the beginning. Then the season of TESCO and LIDL began in the small towns. Our production started to lose money, because people started to buy cheaper, pre-frozen rolls from Lidl, Tesco and Billa, and our business partners could not sell rolls from us at all. We closed our production facility two years ago and left open just our small food shops, we have three shops in Skalica. I can say it is much better now because we are not so stressed as before. We do not produce anything, we just sell goods.

She is in charge of the selection of new employees in their business:

For me it is important how well a person can communicate, if he is nice to the customers, and if he can also work fast. The person should look clean, you know what I mean. We sell food; therefore, our shop assistants have to be clean and also quite good-looking. I do not differentiate among potential workers in terms of age, but I prefer to have someone younger in the shops. The reason is that if you are younger you can better react to situations during selling, you do not have problems moving heavy goods or staying longer, if necessary. So, the ideal age is between 24 and 45. Too many young people are not flexible about work. They do not want to work more than four hours daily, and they would like to earn about 1,000 Eur per month net.

When asked about the level of education of her potential employees, the owner prefers workers with a minimum of a secondary education “because we are working with the electronic cash system and it is necessary to have some skills in math and IT.”

Currently the business has three shops and two shop assistants in each shop. Two of her shop assistants are Romani women:

They are working very well. I am very satisfied with their work. When we did roll production we also employed Romani people. They were good workers, quick and flexible. I do not have problems to give jobs to Roma if I have good references for them. I used to ask my Romani friends how this or that person is, if they know them and if they are good workers. In my shop the Roma are visible. They face the customers and sell directly to them, and it is not strange, because people know them. We have many other cases of Roma working in companies that mostly produce parts for cars, but you know, they are not visible to the customers, so, there is not so much discussion here about Roma and why they are doing this or that. However, services are an area where Roma are visible, and in our town, it is not a problem that they are visible, because people know them.

When asked whether there are enough employment opportunities for youngsters, especially for Roma youth, the owner added that reportedly only a small percentage of young people wants to work:

They are depending on their families and they do not need to work full-time. For them it is good to have part-time jobs. I think the Government should make the EU funds much more accessible to small businesses like we are. There are so many administrative barriers that we are not able to ask for EU funds to employ young people or anyone.

She is also of the opinion that schools should be cooperating more with employers so that young people would be better employed after they finish secondary school.

8.2.2 Career advisor's view

The career advisor is a psychologist by vocation. According to her, there are many factors that can affect the possibilities for Roma youth to get a job.

First, we have to think about the regional unemployment rate, and also education levels. This is very important. If there are no job opportunities for the majority, it will be doubly hard to find jobs for the minority. The implementation of youth employment programmes such as the Youth Guarantee is not very successful. My colleagues are not able to give the right information to people, because they do not know exactly what kind of options are written into the measure. The stereotype about Roma is that they will not work, so employers do not offer job opportunities to Roma because they think it's a waste of time.

When asked what the main problems faced by Roma unemployed youth are, she said she believes there is regional disparity and segregation in secondary education that affects the different life paths of Roma:

Our school system is not providing too much care or attention to the career advisor centres, and therefore many young people are choosing their profession wrongly, and they are not able to either continue the studies they choose or the jobs they really wanted to get into. We have in our region many secondary schools where a lot of Roma youth are studying and I am sure they could make it to the grammar schools or business academies, because they got good grades in primary school. However, if there is no qualified support for career advice, then these students are losing their chances to get better educations and be successful. I think many Roma are facing discrimination and this discrimination is bigger in the regions where there are not enough jobs for everyone. In such cases Roma are really excluded from everything and they cannot contribute to society. Roma want to work, but there is a lack of opportunity for them. They do not get the chance to show that they can work well and that they can be responsible for any task. I also believe it would be good to speak more with youngsters about financial things, like salaries, etc., because they do not know what kind of salaries they can earn.

8.2.3 Social worker's view

The social worker interviewed is also the director of the Office for Social Affairs and Health in Skalica. He is responsible for social affairs locally, for work with disadvantaged families, for social housing and for health. Before holding this job, the social worker has been working for 15 years at the regional social office of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic, where he was responsible for matters related to disadvantaged families, especially when they were not working at all, or were working for little money.

When asked about the barriers for Roma youth to access employment, the social worker stated that from his experience and during his work with unemployed people he has discovered that Roma face latent discrimination. Another aspect is that Roma in general are so disappointed about this situation that many have given up and stay at home without working:

This has happened usually with less-educated youngsters. First, they have problems to find well-paid work, and second, they do not have the proper qualifications for it. Third, they stigmatise themselves. They give up on going to the interview when they are at the workplace before it has even happened. If they go there with such negative attitudes, what can one expect?

According to the social worker, the state should not just change its approach when it comes to youth employment, but companies (the private sector) and society in general should change as well:

If they [the private sector] will not hire Roma, who else will do it? I know that many young Roma do not have the qualifications to get better-paid jobs. They do not finish secondary school and they do not have a proper secondary education certificate. This is the minimum if you want to get jobs paying more than minimum wage, but youngsters do not hear about such things during their schooling. They just think they will finish nine grades or so of education and they will become millionaires. I can see how many live in such dreams and do not accept reality.

What would be helpful, in his opinion, would be to strengthen the education system and the dialogue between the state and private sectors. Very importantly, the private sector should be more flexible about hiring people from diverse backgrounds.

8.2.4 Conclusions

Besides the low unemployment rate in the region and the existence of proper labour market opportunities, this case study has shown that when it comes to youth employment, ethnicity matters! Moreover, it has also shown that as the level of education decreases, so do employment opportunities: out of the total number of participants in the focus group, just half of them had a job. Importantly, this case shows to a certain extent that when parents have a rather stable job, they are more likely to attend and complete their education. Last but not least, the case of the shop owner demonstrates that there are entrepreneurs open to hiring Roma even in jobs where the employees are the “face” of the business.

9. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to find out what works for Roma youth across Europe and across different regional contexts and educational levels. The report began by describing existing European and national youth employment policy frameworks and strategies and the situation with a specific focus on Roma youth, assessing to what extent Roma youth and others interviewed ever referred to these frameworks. As has been demonstrated throughout the research, there is little knowledge among Roma civil society or Roma youth about EU-level initiatives, although a bit more is known about the national ones. This fact confirms, once again, that such initiatives are only known to those who already have strong social capital and the capacity to access them.

The fact-finding phase of the research aimed to ‘reality check’ what actually works in practice. We focused here on three different groups from Hungary: Roma secondary students coming from different geographical locations, Roma university graduates from big cities, and less educated Roma from rural areas.

In the case of the Roma secondary students, we saw the importance of linking education with employment directly. The Roma students placed in police-related education can become, upon graduation, public servants working for the state as police officers. This opportunity is a reflection of national strategies emphasizing the employment of Roma and of youth in public schemes. This is also a best practice when it comes to the role of the state in providing the necessary support for enhancing Roma youth employment.

The case of Roma university graduates from big cities shows that despite this level of education, Roma youth still encounter difficulties when seeking employment. This is also a case where education level might not necessarily lead to better employment opportunities, as most Roma youngsters here were sometimes working in jobs for which they were overqualified, or in jobs outside the mainstream. Here the role of non-Roma and Roma civil society in linking the private sector with potential Roma employees should be noticed.

The last Hungarian case shows that even Roma youngsters living in a rather marginalised rural area with low levels of educational attainment (just a few grades) can succeed in becoming self-sustaining through job opportunities supported by civil society.

These practices demonstrate that if enough investment is undertaken to make financial and human resources available through programmes and projects, successful results can be achieved. Despite the fact that the overall data shows low employment among Roma, there are employment measures that do work for Roma youth. As such, there is a need for different actors to come together and ensure that the right to a decent job becomes a reality for Roma. Some of these practices prove to the EU Member States that it is worth investing in good examples of employment measures targeting Roma.

The next section of the research analyzed different contexts in which good practices could work given similar levels of education and geographical location. The first case from Bulgaria (Nadejda) could be easily compared to the case of educated young Roma in Hungary, but the geographical circumstances are different: Nadejda is a ghetto. Despite this, Roma young

people there have earned high school diplomas or graduated from higher education. The environment in the area has a direct impact on youngsters' aspirations: they want to get married early, go abroad for short-term periods, work there to get money, and then come back to Bulgaria. For those who are educated it is easy to find work compared to those who are less educated. The latter need more support, just as the most marginalized part of the settlement needs more support. They should be assisted with getting qualifications – through motivation, mentorship and secured opportunities for temporary employment such as cleaning the streets, garbage collection, and other jobs where qualification is not needed. The people most in need are living in misery; they cannot read and write and some are starving. They need employment in order to generate income, provide for their families and children, and gradually make better livings.

The second case from Bulgaria showed the situation of Roma from rural secondary schools. Again, as an analogy to the Hungarian case of the Roma Police Program, this Bulgarian case clearly shows what happens if there is no intervention from civil society or the state. In Bulgaria the Roma youngsters do not see any way out except going abroad. This has direct effects on their education (e.g., their retention of material) and their career prospects (e.g., their ability to negotiate stable incomes and jobs).

Both of the cases from Romania are difficult to accept. These examples involve multiple disadvantage: The Roma youth are both uneducated and living in a marginalised rural area. In addition, their Roma origin becomes an obstacle once there is a minimal opportunity to get a job. Their lack of proper education due to obstacles from their own families and schools means they lack the prerequisites for employment or skills development. The situation in these cases is very similar to the ones in Bulgaria where Roma youngsters are bound to their communities without having the possibility to move ahead (except for going abroad with their community). Again, the most disadvantaged Roma youth here are the most in need of any type of employment measure that can contribute to their betterment.

In the capital of the Czech Republic, educated Roma youth are attractive for different job opportunities in their fields of interest. For educated Roma youngsters who have been involved in Roma-related activities and projects, getting a job in a related field in the capital is achievable. Like many other youngsters, most Roma encounter obstacles in accessing mainstream (i.e., not Roma-related) jobs due to lack of work experience, but they also face discrimination. As in the case of higher-educated Roma from Hungary, it seems that despite their levels of education acquired and their professional experience, employers' attitudes towards Roma are not changing in the Czech Republic. This directly affects the equal opportunities Roma youngsters enjoy in education, in employment, or in any other sector.

Last but not least, in Slovakia, the experiences of Roma secondary students from a medium-sized urban area demonstrate that while on the one hand education levels might be an important component to getting a job, discrimination might be another factor. It is up to employers whom they want to hire and under what circumstances.

Generally speaking, this research has shown that the more educated Roma youth are and the better their geographical conditions (residence in big urban areas), then the higher their

chances of employment are. There are big discrepancies between educated Roma youth (those with university degrees) and marginalised (from rural, segregated areas), uneducated youth (especially young women) when it comes to their employment needs. College graduates need jobs that match their level of qualification, whereas uneducated youth need programmes that can support them to stay in school or continue their educations. There is a need, therefore, for investment on the one hand into the education of Roma youth, while on the other hand investment into desegregating education and housing and creating acceptable living conditions for Roma youth.

When it comes to employing Roma youth specifically, this research has shown that there is a need to give Roma youth the chance to show they want to work and have the necessary skills, to make employers more open to including youth as employees, especially Roma youth, and for the state to facilitate these processes.

Moreover, the role of labour offices should be revisited, in the sense that such elements should encourage and stimulate young people to use their services. The level of qualifications required for certain opportunities is the main obstacle to bringing Roma youth on board in Bulgaria (besides the fact that financially stimulating, highly attractive, long-term work is available abroad). As such, longer-term labour office programmes promoting Roma youth employment, properly paid, are needed.

Last but not least, Government should further invest in education, more specifically, in education that provides professional development and qualifications. Civil society and Government need to address early school drop-out at different levels so that Roma youngsters increase their chances of getting fair jobs. Lastly, Government should invest into increasing the salaries of young people so they are not constrained to migrate for work at an early stage of their careers without having completed a certain level of education.

Appendix 1

Best Practices Collection (Name of the practice, responsible organization, country)

1. **Startup** - Esély, Budapest, Hungary
2. **Roma Police Fellowship Program** – Public Employment Service, National Labour Office, Hungary
3. **Civic Transit Protection** - Hungarian Roma Association of Szomolya, Hungary
4. **Way Out- Social Self -Employment and Microcredit Program** - Nyírség Youth Association, Budapest, Hungary
5. **Pro Ratatouille** - Butterfly Complex Development Pro Cserehát Association, Budapest, Hungary
6. **Integrom (2014-2016), HRom (2016- present)** - Autonómia Foundation, Budapest, Hungary
7. **Romaversitas** - Romaversitas Foundation, Budapest, Hungary
8. **Equal Access to the Labour Market** - Provitam Association Resita, Romania
9. **Intensive Educational Support** - Roma Education Fund, Bucharest. Romania
10. **Mozaic** – Pestalozzi Foundation, Bucharest, Romania
11. **S.E.S. – Start in Social Economy** - HERMES Association, Bucharest. Romania
12. **Youth Guarantee** - Prahova County Office for Employment, Ploiești, Romania
13. **Equality of opportunity** - U.S. Steel Košice, Slovakia
14. **From Benefits to Paid Work** - Mesto Banská Bystrica, Slovakia
15. **Second Chance** - The Association of Young Roma, Banská Bystrica, Trieda SNP 27 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia
16. **Social Business in Prague** - SP Černý Most, Czech Republic
17. **Support of Roma Employment** - Prague Czech Republic
18. **New Chance** - Community Center Bratstvo 1869, Kyustendil, Bulgaria
19. **Take Part in your Life – Plan your Future** - Association Amala, Bulgaria
20. **New Opportunity for Youth Employment** - Employment Agency, Bulgaria
21. **Education and Employment for the Youth** - Employment Agency, Bulgaria
22. **A Bridge toward Business** - Open Society Institute, Bulgaria

Appendix 2

Focus groups with young Roma

The main themes touched on in the focus groups were divided as follows:

Personal details: Level of education, employment status? How far is your community, roughly, from your nearest major population centre (in km)? Who works in your household, in what sector? Do you feel the education/training you received is useful in getting a job?

General questions: Can you refer to an employment measure that is successful from your point of view when it comes to Roma youth? What do you know from your family and friends, is there something you have heard of? How does the labour market in your region respond to your needs? What do you think are the main problems within the functioning of the labour market for youth? Who should solve those problems? How they can be addressed?

If students: What do you plan to do after completing your current studies? Are you working or have you worked during your studies? If yes, where did you work? Was it paid work? Have you already started looking for a job?

If not employed: What has been the main obstacle to finding a good job? Have you received any advice/assistance from the employment services? Would you consider moving to find work? What kind of support do you think would be most helpful in finding a job (e.g., an apprenticeship with an employer)? How are you looking for a job (e.g., job fairs, newspaper advertisements)?

If employed: Do you work for a salary, or are you self-employed? What helped you find a good job? Have you received any advice/assistance from the employment services? Did you have to move to find work? What kind of support do you think would be most helpful in finding a job (e.g., an apprenticeship with an employer)? How did you find the job (e.g., job fairs, newspaper advertisements)?

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ERGO Network

The European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO) is a network of Roma and pro-Roma NGOs across Europe and advocates for better policies for Roma in Europe, combats antigypsyism and empowers Roma activists.

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