

***Roma grassroots perspectives on poverty alleviation:
Impact of access to quality education and employment as well as antigypsyism
on Roma people's economic situation***

Introduction

Aims and objectives

ERGO Network members from Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have conducted seven comprehensive local case studies that contribute to a better understanding of the impact of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRISs) and relevant mainstream measures on local Roma communities. The topic of the case studies was how access to quality **education** and **employment** as well as **antigypsyism affect Roma people's economic situation**.

This synthesis report can serve as **evidence concerning implementation of the EU Roma Framework and mainstream social policies on the grassroots level**, which can support the EU institutions' work on making the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality.

The main objective is to fill the gap and **bring more perceptions of Roma into Roma-related discourses. Therefore ERGO members** explored Roma people's perspectives on the causes of poverty that can potentially say more about barriers to poverty reduction efforts and implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and social policies (if any). Fostering participation of Roma in voicing their needs and positions about what causes their economic situation is crucial for our work.

Methodology

Our partners conducted one case study each. They merged the three examined topics – access to education, access to employment and antigypsyism into one case study and reflected on an integrated approach - links between the policy fields. In addition, they ensured that questions regarding gender, Roma participation and empowerment were answered.

The case studies included evidence from the ground by **collecting stories of people's personal experiences through focus groups (three focus groups each) and/or in-depth semi-structured**

interviews. Our partners were supported by ERGO Network and were provided with guidelines and guiding questions for each policy field. The members were encouraged to conduct interviews in addition to focus groups in case that there is not enough information collected, in case it would be good to ask more or clarifying questions or if someone was particularly silent or uncomfortable during the focus groups. One researcher had to conduct interviews in addition to the focus groups because the participants in one of the Romanian Roma communities did not feel comfortable to talk about their experiences of antigypsyism.

Altogether, there were about 100 conversational partners of Roma origin, of different gender, age, educational background and employment status, from five countries and seven localities. A big majority of them was between 16 and 60 years old.

Contexts/Localities

Criteria for choosing the localities were the following (while not all the criteria have been used by all the partners):

- 1) Already established trust relationships with inhabitants;
- 2) settlements/villages are segregated and/or located in underdeveloped regions;
- 3) there was or there is ongoing implementation of the European Union (EU) or national and local initiatives;
- 4) inhabitants were involved as implementers (exceptionally one case study in Hungary) or beneficiaries of EU and national initiatives;
- 5) communities are strongly affected by antigypsyism, high unemployment rates, poverty and/or exclusion from basic services;
- 6) there is a high number of educated Roma (exceptionally the case study conducted in Bulgaria).

Hungary

Focus group by Pro Cserehát Association: Settlement “Á” is in the economically underdeveloped Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (B-A-Z) county in North-East Hungary. There is no traffic passing through the settlement. There are 1200 inhabitants, 23% of them Roma according to the 2011 census and 1580 inhabitants, 60% of them Roma according to the focus group participants. (Nation-wide, the highest percentage of Roma is 8.7% in B-A-Z County.

Before 1989 most people were working in a local agricultural co-operative. Today people are mostly involved in public work schemes.

Focus group by *Autonomia Foundation*: Villages of Cserehát are located in the Edelény micro-region, the 14th most underdeveloped micro-region of Hungary in the north-eastern part: Unemployment rates are significantly above the national average. In the past inhabitants commuted to close-by mines or worked in cities; now they are mostly employed in public work. Based on the 2011 census data, the number of Roma among the inhabitants is as follows: Szakácsi - 118 out of 146; Lakon - 355 out of 569; Tomor - 36 out of 229, Halmaj - 284 out of 1 646; Pere - 80 out of 308.

Romania

Focus group of *Center of Resources for Social Inclusion CRIS*: Segregated Roma community Mimiú in Ploiești is located in Prahova County, 56 km north of Bucharest, with approximately 1 300 Roma. Most of them are not employed and the level of poverty is high: Almost 90% live in extreme poverty with low standard of living. Houses lack basic amenities, such as electricity, heating or tap water and are in a very bad condition Starting this year, Mimiú is part of the Local Action Group's Development Strategy of urban marginalized communities of Ploiesti City in the framework of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and changes started to occur, i.e. a sewage system is being put in place and garbage is collected. More work is planned.

Focus group of *Nevo Parudimos*: Mociur in Resita is an isolated neighbourhood, part of a marginalized urban area (according to 2011 census population of Resita counts 73 282, of Mociur 910). Mociur is a former settlement of workers located within a now abandoned industrial site. It is an isolated area with limited access to services, disconnected by the Barzava River and the railway line from the rest of the city. There are four blocks of social housing for low-income people owned by the Resita City Hall.

Bulgaria

Focus group of *Integro Association*: Byala Slatina is in the rural Vratsa Region in north-western Bulgaria (24 500 inhabitants, 3000 of them Roma). This region is known as the poorest region of Europe. The municipality includes the town of Byala Slatina and 14 villages. The town has two Roma settlements: The residentially segregated Latinka with a lack of infrastructure and undeclared housing; and the one known as "Roma Mahala", with better infrastructure and houses. The municipality is known for its openness to implement integration policies and the "Roma mahala" in Byala Slatina is known for its high number of Roma university students and graduates. Nevertheless, the employment rates are quite low.

Czech Republic

Focus group of Slovo 21: Přívoz, part of the city district Moravská Ostrava Přívoz is segregated from other residential areas by an industrial area around. The apartment houses were built during the 60s for the employees of the Czech Railways and have not been renovated since. Residential buildings are dilapidated, without any maintenance. There are 1 200 people living in Přívoz and 98% of them are Roma, most of them with low income and high debts.

Slovakia

Focus group of Roma Advocacy and Research Centre: Rakúsy is in Kežmarok, one of the least developed districts of Slovakia (3051 inhabitants, 80% of them Roma). A Roma settlement is situated in the northern part of the cadastral area, 1.2 km away from the village. .. The biggest problem in the region is unemployment.

Analysis

Education

School segregation – School segregation in primary/elementary and vocational education was reported as the biggest obstacle to quality education for Roma children in the visited localities in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Even in the settlements where not only Roma live, like in the Hungarian village “A”, schools are almost 100 % attended by Roma children because non-Roma parents send their children to schools outside the village. Segregation is on the rise in the north-eastern region of Hungary because of policy changes. Before the 1990s, children were obliged to go to geographically/locally assigned elementary schools. Now parents can choose the school freely. In the whole region segregation is also on the rise due to demographic changes and increased financial support to church-schools who do not enrol Roma children. Schools in small settlements face segregation. This is reflected not only in the composition of the children, but also in the absence of educators or lack of professional competence.

In Romania, our partners have analysed the situation of segregated localities, which consequently also have segregated primary schools.

In Bulgaria, it is interesting that all the women who talked to our Bulgarian partner (some of them university graduates) finished the same secondary school with the profile tailor. The participants explained that there was no pressure but that they were encouraged to go to that school because many Roma were studying there. Even though the school is not segregated, there is a practice to form ‘Roma-only’ classes. After Roma children finish the 4th grade in a

segregated primary school, they are enrolled in a mainstream school, but separated into Roma-only classes.

The segregated Rakusi village in Slovakia has a primary school and a kindergarten. In addition, there is a branch of a secondary vocational school in the municipality, which Roma do not find useful because it contributes to segregation.

All the focus groups' results showed that the quality of education in segregated schools is extremely low:

A. and I. said that in recent years functional illiteracy is at a very high level. They gave examples of their own children. A's daughter is in grade 6 and I's son in grade 9. It is common for Roma students to complete primary and secondary education without real knowledge. As a reason for this, they pointed out that teachers did not make enough efforts to overcome this problem.

(Quote from the Bulgarian case study)

Motivation to study – Roma children are generally not motivated to study, even if their parents are encouraging them. In Hungary, Roma children see their parents struggling in public work schemes, which pay very little (about 150 euros a month). Also in Slovakia the lack of job opportunities does not motivate young people to achieve better education. Roma parents motivate their children to go to school in all the communities concerned (except for the localities in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria where the participants admitted that they lacked parental encouragement), but they cannot help much with skills and content due to their own lack of education. For Roma single mothers it is much more difficult to commit to motivating their children. In Bulgaria, interviewed Roma women admitted not being motivated by their parents, but rather enrolling for further studies not to be seen as exceptions.

Some of the participants from the Czech Republic continued their studies to avoid feeling ashamed and being poor:

"The environment around me motivated me. I could not imagine going to the labour office and telling them that I have only primary education. It is a shame. I do not want to be poor. My aim is to work and live without any limitations. I do not want to count how much money I have."

(Quote from the Czech case study)

Gender – Gender-related information was provided by the Bulgarian partner: up to 1990 there were fewer graduates of secondary education who were and predominantly men. Between 1990 and 2000 more girls started to study. In the same period, the number of boys who graduate from high school became lower because of social changes and the financial crisis: the boys left school in search for work in bigger cities, or left the country with their parents. Since 2000 the number of boys and girls who graduate from secondary school is equal.

Drop-out – Roma children often drop-out of primary and secondary education. In Hungary a new regulation was introduced five years ago by which the age limit of compulsory education was reduced to 16, leading students to leave school without any certificate. In Mimiú (Romania) students drop out because of poverty. Early marriage of boys and girls is mentioned as another reason in Romania and Bulgaria. This is however not Roma specific: as our Romanian partners explain it is a phenomenon that affects other people in the poor counties, too.

In Mimiú, drop-out occurs early, even in elementary school, while in Mociur Roma children usually finish primary school and drop-out later. Here drop-out rates are lower, as well as the rates of absenteeism and grade repetition. Roma children still drop-out from secondary education because of poverty and lack of support from school and the state, and early marriages. In the Roma Mahala in Bulgaria drop-out is almost not occurring at all. Byala Slatina, where the Roma community is located, is famous for the high number of Roma university students and graduates.

Education initiatives – In the opinion of the Hungarian Roma who talked to Autonomia Foundation, additional educational programmes are implemented because institutions are motivated by the extra incomes, not by Roma children being integrated. Sometimes the project owners are motivated by their personal interest. Local level partnerships between NGOs and other stakeholders are non-existent. NGOs implement programmes, but are not strong enough to tackle structural issues, and basically do the job of the schools. They are still important, i.e. after-school programmes motivate children in segregated schools to improve basic skills. Small programmes of local NGOs are more useful than EU programmes. Small programmes are struggling with financing, but at least they reach marginalized children, while the implementers of EU programmes are good administrators, but not interested in local contexts. Small Roma NGOs do not have much administrative capacity and rarely benefit from EU grants. The “Sure Start” house, which provides day-care for 0-3 year olds, is mentioned as a promising practice by our other Hungarian partner. The programme runs since 2010 and the mothers to whom Pro Cserehát Association talked have good experience with the service. It helps children to develop relations with peers, and also with social skills.

In Mimiú, the urban CLLD programme of the EU helps to improve school and community infrastructure. The members of the community have never heard of the National Roma Integration Strategy. They benefited from several short-term initiatives implemented by NGOs related to education and employment (provision of food and clothes to children, private lessons in educational centres once per month or professional qualification course for the parents accompanied by some financial motivation). The parents however were not even present at the courses; they just signed the participation lists and received the money. In Mociur (Romania) more than 93% of interviewed people stated that supportive programmes to fight school dropout are useful. School mediators seem to have an important role. They help people to obtain concrete things such as a driving license or enrolling them into 'School after School' program.

In Bulgaria, one woman recalled a project under one of the Operational Programmes concerning educational integration. In the framework of this project two educational mediators have been appointed, but she did not find their work effective. The rest of the participants did not know about it, even though both mediators are from the Roma mahala where the participants come from.

A very important initiative in Rakúsy (Slovakia) is the Community centre (supported by the EU and the Municipality), which started its activity in 2007/2008. The idea was to offer after-school activities for children. The activities are diverse and adapted to the interests and learning needs of children. Twice a month a medical doctor provides services for mothers with children. Occasionally, the building is used for social gatherings organised by the municipality or other institutions, and some rooms can be rented by residents of the settlement for private celebrations. The respondents pointed out the importance of the CC; thanks to the CC children and can do their homework there, and attend are various activities and events such as celebration of the Children's Day.

All respondents in the Czech Republic are aware of some local Roma organisations. They mostly mentioned organisations focusing on extracurricular activities and tutoring for Roma children or scholarships for Roma students. All of them believe it is important to help Roma from an early age on and motivate them to study. They mentioned NGOs and institutions such as Living Together, Romea (that coordinates Roma Education Fund scholarships in the Czech Republic), Slovo 21 and the Ostrava Municipality. Only one participant out of 6 was involved in the activities – tutoring children. University students are beneficiaries of the Roma Education Fund scholarships.

Employment

Occupations – The employment situation of Roma in Hungary is closely linked to the public work scheme. For most Roma this is not a good solution because the wages are low, but some people argue that it is still very important. In the visited region there are fewer public work opportunities than in other regions, except for village “A”, where thanks to local political will more opportunities exist. Out of 1500 people, 280 people are employed under the public work in this village and they are happy to have this opportunity. They usually combine it with undeclared work. The conversational partners of Autonomia Foundation argue that the reduction of places in the public work scheme led to more people being employed in the primary labour market where wages are higher. Younger mobile Hungarian Roma also work in big production companies and as concrete installers, where they can earn four times more than by doing the public work. They however sometimes have to walk long distances because some settlements are badly connected to other locations. Many Roma in Hungary are working in the construction industry or agriculture for private entrepreneurs (person who arranges the work informally), but they exploit people. One of the participants even called this phenomenon *trafficking*. People in village “A” are frequently involved in seasonal jobs of picking apples, while others go to the capital during the yearly clearance, when everyone can put bulk trash out on the street. People then select useful things (metal, tools, furniture, clothes, etc.), sometimes repair it and sell it.

In all the other communities Roma are mostly unemployed or involved in some kind of informal work. Some of the interviewed Bulgarian Roma run small family businesses. These are not registered: “G. produces and sells breakfasts. She works at home and has no permissions or licenses. E. is selling clothes on the village markets. She has no registered firm for this either”. Most of the economically active inhabitants of Rakúsy in Slovakia work in the areas of industrial production, construction, public administration, wholesale, retail and healthcare.

Migration for work - Hungarian participants for example explained that there is a demand for construction workers outside of Hungary, but one of the participants said that it is difficult to find people. Another case study argues that this is because the families break and people do not want to be apart. Roma people from Romania are more frequently leaving their country for work compared to Hungarian Roma. They are going to Italy, Spain, Germany and the UK where they either do construction work or beg. Even those who possess a degree or qualifications went to work abroad. The respondents argued that this is easier for young people because they can more easily travel abroad. The Bulgarian participants that educated people travel abroad, too. Half of the educated Roma from Bulgarian Roma mahala left for the bigger cities, mainly for Sofia, and almost none of them works in their profession. Other educated people work in

Italy and are engaged in low qualified work. All of the Bulgarian Roma conversation partners presently have at least one family member who works abroad and provides for the family. Before 1989 all Roma of the community worked in a military factory, which does not exist anymore. Between 1990 and 2000 mass unemployment started, as all factories in the city have been closed. Men then went to the big cities to work in construction or in factories and the women engaged in seasonal work in agriculture with no labour contracts. In 2000 the Roma started to immigrate in high numbers to Greece where they worked until the economic crisis started there. After that the main immigration destination became Italy, where most of work until now.

Challenges - Challenges observed in all the localities are the following:

- lack of employment opportunities;
- low wages;
- poor public transport connections;
- people do not have skills to search for jobs, for example, to write a CV or perform well in interviews;
- lack of qualifications;
- poor service and support from employment offices antigypsyism in recruitment and to a lesser extent at the workplace.

Only in Hungary the employment situation is reported as better compared to the previous years: almost all people can find jobs, mostly in nearby Miskolc, while the mentioned obstacles are still in place there, too. The situation seems to be much worse in Romania and Bulgaria. Many people in Mimiú are on social benefits, unemployed because of a lack of qualifications and antigypsyism in recruitment processes and at the work place (at work place less frequently). In Bulgaria, the biggest problem is the extremely low level of wages (even for people with university diplomas) and lack of employment opportunities. Families of Pŕivoz in the Czech Republic are either unemployed or do undeclared work. Indebtedness and seizures are major issues there, too. Moreover, job opportunities are very limited due to low qualifications (90% of residents have only primary education). The unemployment rate in – Rakúsy (Slovakia) - amounts to 37.16% for 2014. In comparison, the unemployment rate in the surrounding districts of Keŕmarok, Poprad and Stará Ľubovňa is between 14% - 28.44%.

Gender inequality is also a challenge; men for example sometimes do not allow their wives to participate in training programmes. In village “A” in Hungary, it happened that out of 15 women, only 2 finished a training programme. Roma women in the Slovak, Czech and Romanian communities are mostly performing unpaid domestic work. Women in the Bulgarian mahala are not allowed to go to work before they get married. Only after they give birth and their children start going to school, women start engaging in employment. The cause is probably the Muslim background of the community, where patriarchal relationships are stronger and young women stay at home. It is not accepted and even seen as shameful for young girls and women to work. In the Czech Republic men are mostly involved in undeclared work, while women are working ‘legally’.

Party political affiliation – A., M. and I., the women interviewed by our Bulgarian partner shared that they are members of a political party, which was an advantage when they were looking for work. They think that the chance to find work in a small municipality without being politically affiliated is minor. It concerns Roma more than other people, as they lack social networks and contacts available for the majority society. The rest of the participants shared that they did not receive political support; however everyone is engaged in labour activity because they have been recommended by someone. A. shared that she has been appointed for a position with the support of a political party in the past; however, after the political power in the municipality changed, 50% of the old administration got fired. In the last such case she was one of the dismissed. The other women working in the municipal administration shared concerns that it can happen to them, too.

Employment initiatives – Most of the Bulgarian Roma conversation partners knew that there are opportunities for micro-credits for small businesses and grants under the EU-funded schemes; however none of them has ever tried to apply for them. They believe that they will not be successful because of being Roma.

There have been no employment initiatives in Mimiú, Ploesti. Some Roma in Resita attended EU-funded trainings (measures to help them to obtain a “certificate”). This was perceived as a way of self-accomplishment, socially and economically, but sometimes these certificates or the certificates provided through the Local Employment Offices are not useful.

The municipality of Rakúsy has been involved in a ‘Local Citizens' Service Activity’, which will last until November 2020. 8 Roma have been employed in the project. Engaging in these projects is intended to improve the situation of excluded Roma in the area, but more sustainable efforts need to be made, especially in the area of employment and education.

Roma participants in Hungary argued that *training programmes* do not provide knowledge, only diploma; they offer unjustified training sessions, which for many people are a loss of time and money. Training companies sometimes only care about the number of people signing participation lists. *EU programmes* tend to be only a temporary solution. Often, compliance with the call for proposals seems more important than the true development goal.

Young people under 25 are not allowed to be put into the public work scheme. The rationale behind this measure is that young people should not get used to public work and instead look for jobs in the business sector, with the assistance of active labour market measures, such as the Youth Guarantee programme. This measure however did not reach its aim: the young people are still out of education and employment.

Local labour offices - In the Czech Republic, none of the conversation partners mentioned the labour office or any social service that would help Roma to find a job. In other localities, labour offices are not helpful either. In Hungary, there are so-called Roma referrals working in the office, but they are sometimes not of Roma origin and not committed. Most Roma in the Romanian community Mimiú did not hear about the Office for employment and are not registered at the County Office for Employment as persons looking for a job. The office is about 5-6 km away. As mentioned, certificates provided through the Local Employment Offices in Resita are sometimes not useful. One of the respondents mentioned a professional training in cosmetics provided by the Local Employment Office. But she did not qualify as she did not know how to read and write.

In Bulgaria, the participants shared that there is a labour mediator of Roma origin who works in the Labour Bureau. However they do not think that this position is useful and effective. The people registered with the Labour Bureau hardly receive any employment offers, and in most cases the offers available are not suitable. In most cases they provide for low income, or are outside of the municipality. Many people can participate in programmes for temporary employment, which are implemented by more and more municipalities in Bulgaria. However, because of migration and very low salaries in these programmes there are not enough people who are interested to take part in them. The Roma labour mediator position remains formal. They are not doing any field work and even if they would, it would mean to register more unemployed people, which is against the national policy to keep the official unemployment rate low. The people registered with the Labour Bureau only get opportunities in.

Employment in the public sector - It is telling that the topic of employment of Roma in public institutions was rarely discussed in the focus groups. In Bulgaria there are only four people from the community Roma Mahala who work in the institutions and three of them are employed as mediators and not recruited for expert positions. The municipality of Byala Slatina has a deputy

mayor of Roma origin However, the local Roma shared that he is completely isolated from the rest of the local authorities and his appointment is rather a formality and a result of an agreement between political parties. Some Roma in Rakúsy, Slovakia work in public administration or health care. Roma rarely get support from local authorities in this regard. A Hungarian mayor though employs two Roma girls in administrative jobs.

Antigypsyism

Manifestations of antigypsyism in education – Discrimination is experienced to some extent in segregated schools, but it is much more severe in secondary education in mixed school environments. This was emphasized in the study conducted in Mociur, Romania. Discriminative behaviour is coming from teachers, other school staff, children and parents. Other participants also mentioned teachers' violence, discrimination by school employees and hate-speech in school as major problems. Many of the participants shared that they experienced a reserved attitude from the teachers.

Manifestations of antigypsyism in employment – In Hungary, discrimination in recruitment as well as at the workplace was mentioned. Some respondents were wrongly accused of stealing fuel and publicly shamed for that. Some female respondents were denied jobs in the local government with no justification. One Roma woman working as a social caretaker applied (within the same institution) for a more qualified job for which she had the required qualifications, but her supervisor told her that people would not like to be served by a Roma. Other respondents agreed that only a few Roma find their way in the social sector. The Hungarian Roma participants also recall a story of a few years ago, when a Roma woman opened the local pub, but after a while she had to close it down, as Hungarians did not want to go there. The Hungarians did not want to “make a Roma rich”.

In Romania, antigypsyism manifests itself rather in recruitment processes than at the work place. The markers are skin colour and the fact they live in a segregated Roma community. A Romanian Roma participant from Mociur, Resita explains: “My husband is being refused now for 2 years when they see that he is from Mociur, when he is asked for his identity card”.

Inter-ethnic relations – The focus group participants who talked to Autonomia Foundation in Hungary feel the consequences of the 2010 protests against Roma. The participants revealed that even their non-Roma friends turned against them and that now the police is doing more ‘stop and search’ and gives fines for traffic offences mostly to Roma. The respondents in village ‘A’ find that Roma and non-Roma people in the village are good neighbours.

Protests against noisy weddings of Roma in Byala Slatina in Bulgaria resulted in a social media campaign of non-Roma who collect signatures against the lack of response of the municipal administration regarding the issue. One of the demands in the petition is the resignation of the deputy mayor of Roma origin. One of the interviewed women said that she is afraid because she is involved in the discussions going on in social media. There are very few cases of friendly relations and almost no marriages and friendships between Roma and non-Roma families in Byala Slatina. Many of the other partners concluded that since the participants live in segregated localities, they do not face ethnic conflicts. Despite the fact that the Roma constitute a majority in Rakusi (Slovakia), there are situations where the Roma are exposed to conflict because of their ethnicity. M. confirmed to us:

“It happens occasionally that the boys from Nazi groups come to the village because they think we are afraid of them. The opposite is true, we are not afraid of them. We are only afraid that they do something bad to our children. We had such a case that Nazis travelled in the school bus with our children. They thought they were causing a conflict, but they did not. And if they also wanted to provoke a conflict, it would turn out well, we could have beaten them.”

Other manifestations of antigypsyism –The participants from Hungary shared that they were followed in the shops and that Roma youth is often not allowed in the local clubs and bars. Some Roma participants from the Czech Republic also shared that they were not allowed in a club. All respondents confirmed that the media talk about Roma in a negative way. Politicians also publicly speak out against Roma.

Institutional antigypsyism –The area of social services is seen as the most problematic, because of the behaviour of employees. Bulgarian respondents for example emphasized insufficient understanding and hostility of the social services. The participants shared dissatisfaction with social workers who usually blame the clients for their situation rather than providing support. Doctors, other medical staff and police also discriminate against Roma. The Czech participants stated that state employees do not know how to behave with Roma.

In Mimiú, housing is also mentioned in relation to institutional antigypsyism. The owners of the dwellings neither have property papers nor construction permits. Since the land is abandoned, it could have been given to Roma through an assignment contract for 50 years, but because of negative attitudes of authorities towards Roma in Mimiú, the authorities rejected this option.

Structural antigypsyism – For the people of Mimiú the employment agency, hospitals and medical centres are up to 8 km away from the community. For other communities, access to services is not a problem. School segregation, as explained earlier, is a big problem and affects Roma in a very negative way. The fact that the Roma children are placed in separate classes and schools is enough to conclude that there is no good attitude towards the communities. In the

Slovakian village Rakúsy, Roma even have their own church and cemetery. The Romanian partners argued that Roma people are discriminated because they are poor and because they are Roma.

Impact of antigypsyism – The impact of antigypsyism in schools is severe. A participant from the Czech Republic testifies:

“Roma children refuse to go to school or kindergarten if they are bullied. The school attendance is low, grades are not good and Roma end up with only primary education, which limits them to have quality employment.”

Institutionalized antigypsyism also materializes in a lack of infrastructure: Our partner Center of Resources for Social Inclusion CRIS in Romania reports a lack of asphalt, sewage, lack of pharmacies, parks and sports grounds in the community, as well as the poor condition of the school. Their respondents said that their experience of antigypsyism affects their self-esteem. In Resita, Roma subsequently suppress their identity and do not admit their ethnicity. For example, a girl passed the bacalaureate exam and wanted to register for the Police Academy, but refused to fill the spot that is reserved for Roma. The health mediator who was interviewed thinks that the girl wanted to prove that she can succeed on her own without the support of affirmative action for Roma. Also the Czech respondents said that experiences of antigypsyism affect Roma people to suppress their identity.

In Slovak supermarkets, for example, non-Roma people look at Roma in a “very nasty way”; often Roma get into arguments because salespersons are offensive. Therefore most Roma go shopping only once a month and are happy they do not have to go to town more often.

Measures to combat antigypsyism – Only once antigypsyism is mentioned as policy priority by one of the Hungarian partners. In the framework of the NRIS the government planned three programmes focusing on discrimination in the labour market, especially on women who experienced discrimination. However, the implementation of all three programmes is delayed. In Romania, our partners who visited Mimiú in Ploesti are hoping that EU projects will address antigypsyism since the NRIS is not helpful in this regard. The future NRIS might contribute if combating antigypsyism is to be taken seriously, they added.

Concluding remarks

It can be concluded that the National Roma Integration Strategies are being implemented in the education and employment fields. However, the implementation is partial; it does not bring any structural changes and very little results. The quality of education is extremely low and drop-out rates are high. School segregation is ongoing, in Hungary even on the rise. When it comes to employment, none of the challenges mentioned in the chapter on employment such as access to transport, lack of qualifications or antigypsyism in recruitment process are tackled through the NRIS. In general, people are either on social benefits or they engage in informal work, mostly in construction or agriculture. In Hungary, even though the unemployment rates are still high in the visited region, the situation is better compared to other countries. Regardless of the criticism towards public work schemes, they are still 'better than nothing' and people often combine public work with informal work to earn a living. Roma from all the communities migrate, especially those from Bulgaria and Romania, because of a lack of employment opportunities.

For young people, the situation is a little bit better in general because they are more mobile and more easily go to other cities or abroad in search of better opportunities. In Hungary however, it seems that young Roma are more often unemployed compared to their parents. The EU's Youth Guarantee programme does not show any results. Gender inequality in education is not mentioned as an issue, compared to the inequality in employment. Roma women are rarely employed; they are mostly engaged in unpaid domestic work. There are two interesting findings concerning gender: One is coming from the Czech case study where the participants argued that women, if they are employed, are much less engaged in undeclared work. Another finding comes from Mimiú in Romania where our partners concluded that Roma women experience antigypsyism much more frequently compared to Roma men because they are more often in public spaces such as pharmacies and medical centres.

Corruption is a big problem (the fact that initiatives are sometimes faked, i.e. signing participation lists, but not attending trainings). Some places, like Mimiú, benefit from EU funds; in this case, from the Urban Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme. Importantly, Roma are involved in the CLLD processes there. The activities are mostly related to the community and school infrastructure and Roma usually only implement small-scale projects. The way EU funds are used is mostly problematic: Projects are implemented by 'good administrators' who are not very interested in improving the situation in Roma communities. Our informants generally do not see any results of EU-funded projects. In addition, Roma people are seldom involved in them. Sometimes there are very specific justifications for Roma participation. For example, many measures implemented in the framework of projects in

Slovakia are bound by the condition of desegregation. It is however very hard to desegregate a locality in which Roma are the majority. Therefore involving Roma in discussions about EU grant schemes would help the discussion about the condition of desegregation in the projects and would open the door to better development of the locality.

Respondents neither see the results of state measures, especially not of current employment measures. In Bulgaria they are seen as meaningless because the wages are so low that people have to engage in informal work or go abroad. Neither employment offices nor their initiatives are considered effective. Many unemployed Roma from Mimiua in Romania and Roma Mahala in Bulgaria are not even registered as unemployed. Only some smaller initiatives are mentioned as good practices, like reducing the drop-out rates in Resita, Romania or activities for children in the 'school-after-school' initiatives. The conclusion is that small-scale projects bring some results because they reach people. An exceptional promising practice might be the practice of the municipality of Rakúsy in Slovakia that is involved in the Local Citizens' Service Activity, which will last until November 2020 and employs 8 Roma. Yet, more sustainable efforts are needed, as argued by our Slovakian partner.

The respondents are aware of the connection between access to education and employment, on the one hand, and their economic situation, on the other. For most of them it is clear that education plays an important role in getting a (better) job. The only exception is Bulgaria, where employment opportunities with the possibility to earn decent wages are non-existent. Even highly educated Roma go abroad and do jobs for which they do not need their diplomas. Although there are many highly educated Roma in Byala Slatina, this does not directly affect their economic situation. Typical for Bulgaria is that there are many "working poor", including in the majority population. Young highly educated Roma from Resita, Romania sometimes also go abroad. Therefore, although there could be a general conclusion that better qualifications and employment positively affects Roma people's economic situation, this should not be taken for granted, especially not in Bulgaria.

The lack of Roma experts in the administration results in persistence of the problem of equal access to services for Roma.

From the discussions we can conclude that it is easy to make a direct link between antigypsyism and communities' poverty. Roma children naturally do not enjoy going to school if they face violence there. They lose their motivation and self-esteem. They frequently drop-out of schools in the visited communities and generally have no or low qualification. This further leads to more difficulties to access the labour market. Moreover, antigypsyism in recruitment processes directly and visibly denies Roma their right to work and to escape poverty.

In addition, our Bulgarian partners argued that existing prejudices and attitudes indirectly influence the implementation of the NRIS. The general negative discourse very often influences personal opinion of people working with Roma in institutions. At the same time, these people are required to implement local and national policies for Roma integration. In general, this leads to a lack of good results: the ineffective implementation of NRIS does not help in any way to overcome poverty.

Recommendations

Education:

Long-term additional assistance in schools is needed, i.e. well-trained school mediators. Long-term mentorship programmes to prevent drop-out should be implemented. It is also important to implement second chance programmes or other initiatives for re-integration into education and obtaining (better) qualifications.

In the future, it would be useful to **better support the work of NGOs** in developing and implementing programmes complementing formal education, side by side with the states making tangible steps in providing systematic solutions.

It is necessary to **address school and class segregation** at all levels of education and to demand and achieve high quality of education for the Roma.

Relevant **policies have to be implemented**, but also in some cases **revisited and changed**. For example, in Hungary it would be advisable to restore the previous age limit of compulsory education (18 years old).

Employment:

Training **programmes should be specifically tailored to the needs** of the local labour market. For this to happen, a coherent and realistic **analysis** of the need for training and the existing job offers through longitudinal analysis is required.

There is a need for longer training courses where participants could learn to master a profession and be financially supported during the courses are necessary.

There is a need for **programmes targeting specifically Roma women's employment**. A good support mechanism is needed to be established for young mothers.

Additional support should be provided to people who face challenges such as lack of transport to the work place

There is an urgent need for **programmes specifically targeting Roma youth belonging to the NEET category**. Existing programmes such as the Youth Guarantee have to work for Roma, too. Employment agencies and other authorities need to put more efforts so Roma benefit from such measures.

Creating **additional incentive mechanisms for employers** as temporary compensatory measures are needed.

Opportunities for **Roma to become self-employed** would be one of the good solutions because many of them wish to have small family businesses.

Antigypsyism:

There is a need **to work on teachers' attitudes** in mainstream schools and combatting manifestations of antigypsyism in education and employment in general. Regarding employment, a special emphasis should be put on **combating antigypsyism in recruitment processes**.

Roma need to get a share of the power that is in hands of authorities through being **employed in the public sector** as well as being empowered to **take part in party politics**. Roma leadership and **participation in the programmes** targeting them should have happened a long time ago.

More skilled **Roma** have to start **representing local interests** in the use of EU funds, otherwise consultation companies will secure the grants without considering the interests of the communities

There is a need to **raise self-esteem of Roma children** from marginalized areas through various activities (e.g. sports, arts, culture) to help them discover their potential.

In order to secure adequate reactions to antigypsyist hate speech and crime, the communities should know the relevant mechanisms – **using lawful methods**, such as complaints to the responsible institutions, collection of signatures etc.

Law enforcement needs to be strengthened as a key to improving the status of Roma in society. The most important is to condemn and **punish citizens, public figures, media, other institutions and politicians who are racist** and spread or allow antigypsyism.

It is important to talk about the manifestations of antigypsyism in the public spaces in general and especially in media, and to **support campaigns and other initiatives against antigypsyism**, including those focussing on positive narratives about Roma.

The EU should develop a new EU Roma Framework that would include a comprehensive approach to combating antigypsyism and support the Member States to instead of denying its existence, implement concrete measures to prevent and remedy acts of antigypsyism.