

ROMA ETHNIC MINORITY AND THE LABOUR MARKET: MAPPING DEFICIENCIES AND CHALLENGING BARRIERS

“Roma do not, and will not work” is perhaps the most wide-spread stereotype expressed in personal interviews among people from different regions and different walks of life. What the very same people providing categorical statements often do not realise is, that there is wide spread discrimination on the labour market and prejudices in place. There is sometimes missing elementary bus connection to even get from the segregated settlement to a nearby city. What is abundant is raising alienation often leading to resignation. Nevertheless, there is also significant share of Roma people who are finding job opportunities and benefit from the concentrated efforts of various stakeholders challenging the barriers and opening the space for inclusion.

The barriers on the labour market may be **tangible** – i.e., overall economic and social development, labour market itself/lack of jobs, regional disparities, education demands on jobs available, shift from industry to service economy, diminishing welfare state and smaller number of public jobs and opportunities. In defining key challenges institutions and public services face in boosting Roma people's labour market activation we need to start with listing them and focusing on their terms of responsibilities, as well as performance.

More difficult for challenging and addressing are **intangible barriers** – i.e., differentiated treatment of Roma people at institutions and offices, ignorance or in worst cases bullying and tendencies to expel them from the system, and last but not least ‘soft’ discriminatory practise among employers and co-workers often leading to expulsion. Stereotypes and negative attitudes against marginalised groups are wide spread in the population. The most frequent grounds of discrimination are with 56% ethnic origin (Eurobarometer 2016).¹

Mapping the deficiencies and systematically address the barriers has been one of the key approaches when designing and launching activities of the *Interreg Danube Transnational Programme 2014 – 2020: Changing Discourses, Changing Practices: The Roma as Human Resource (RARE)*. The **Deficiency Map**, developed as part of the work, focused on key challenges institutions and public services face in boosting Roma people's labour market activation and to map procedural and institutional deficiencies.²

¹ Disability was 46%, sexual orientation 46% and gender identity ended up with 45%.

² The joint deficiency map confirming fields for interventions in the project partner countries, revealing service provider institutions' internal logic, missing cooperation links, lacking services, duplications and it set the stage for action. For more detail information on each of the project countries see country flowcharts available at www.interreg-danube.eu/rare).

Collected evidence and information on **key stakeholders'** performance and practice point out to different dimensions and multiply factors playing negative and/or positive role. As we illustrate on the Figure 1, the concrete situation of concrete people depends on many structural barriers and factors and is always embedded in local social practice. Results of the survey of public institutional system on Roma employment policies, actions, attitudes, discrimination and general set up point to many similarities among the Danube countries participating in the RARE project.

Any job seeker from a disadvantaged environment is coming into more or less close encounters and relations with various institutions and public services. They may have positive, neutral or negative influence on the person and his/her fate. The most important is general framework of the policies, projects and pressures from the state. Yet in social reality we see that many well-intentioned approaches fail because of lack of attitudes or even hostility among the key stakeholders on the local level.

The key stakeholders in this perspective are International/EU institutions, the state and labour market governance, municipalities, labour office, political parties, market/debt collectors, employers, international/national donors, non-state actors/NGOS and local associations. For each of the stakeholders we describe their role in supporting/preventing inclusion of Roma into the labour market (Key Challenges), while in the second part we outline what should be done or changed for a better performance and results (Fields for interventions).

Challenges and Fields for interventions

Undoubtedly, human rights and social rights, together with promotion of Active Labor Market Policies and Education Policies brings important framework. What is key challenge is its implementation. Cohesion and pre-accession policy of the EU is gradually stronger and more targeted on Roma. Better aiming of the interventions from the ESIF, and promotion of certain affirmative action regarding EU funds on behalf of Roma (e.g. Roma as so called horizontal priority) is a way.

In 2011, the European Commission adopted a Communication pushing for the development of national strategies for Roma integration detailing the concrete policies and measures to be taken (Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020).

Regionally, states declared their commitment to Roma employment and inclusion. The 2013 EC assessment report (Steps forward in implementing National Roma Integration Strategies) focused specifically on the structural preconditions needed in each country. Yet in reality we see only limited progress in coordinated social, economic and environmental policies aimed at job creation and social inclusion. Within the framework of the Europe 2020 dialogue, the European Commission stresses that further efforts must be made to achieve Roma inclusion within this coordinated framework.

Problem is, that these positive pressures are in the same time encompassed by transition of the labour market affiliated with automatization and IT technologies, resulting in rapidly diminishing demand especially for lower skills labour. There is also very different demand for new employees among the countries and even regions of the countries. The so called "Roma problem" cannot be addressed in isolation from broader social and economic development. Globally and locally we see rapid changes that need to address by evidence-based and tested approaches and policies.

Regional survey points out to the key role of municipalities, who are at the end implementing most parts of the general framework. They need more support and incentives. If the leadership of a town or village is pro-active, we may see rather progressive approaches. Yet it applies also other way round and there are documented cases where biased and/or passive attitude to development initiatives practically blocked local initiatives and prevents progress. The state, non-state actor, media and public need to support municipalities, share lessons learned and promote best practice.

Sometimes is social inclusion about more complicated infrastructure investments into transport or water. Sometimes it is problem of micro-management. In paradox, practice reveals that one of the biggest barriers to legal Roma employment is widespread indebtedness and Debt Collectors power and the only way out is to design cooperation with debt-collectors on behalf of indebted Roma.

Pro-Roma approaches are generally not popular among the majority population and prejudices/stereotypes are actively reinforced through traditional media and new social media. Even mainstream parties are riding on the populist approaches of "iron hand" expressed in calls for penalising and disciplining the poor, and Roma in particular. It is only through examples and best practice sharing where we may anticipate a change.

There are many other potential fields for interventions, going from supporting transition of disadvantaged jobseekers from the Labour Office register of jobseeker onto the labour market using active measures on the labour market, and projects and programs dedicated to supporting the increase in employment; supporting, creating and maintaining jobs in social enterprises founded by the municipality in accordance with the Act on Employment Services; support employment through specialized agencies (e.g. temporary employment agencies or mediation agencies) to supporting, creating and maintaining non-seasonal (permanent) jobs in agriculture or forestry.

The beginning should be in addressing the prejudices/stereotypes aimed at the Roma ethnic minority. These are widespread and naturally presented in schools, labour offices, municipalities to all other related spheres.

Addressing specifically employers, mediators between business and employees is a priority. Especially bigger employers, willing to open their jobs to Roma should support mediators from the side of non-state actors who would work with the Roma communities and individually and help to address barriers Roma face in practical life with taking a job.

It is often in low personal skills for job interviews, missing or weak formal CV (e.g., lacking education, verified official experience) which may prevent Roma from success in the competition for jobs. Many Roma people are in reality skilled and experienced, sometimes with work experience from abroad, but need to declare this in alternative ways.

What next?

In other words, what may/could be done in improving the situation? **Service provider institutions** usually possess some **internal logic**, which may have significant impact on the performance of the institutions as well as on their clients. In the same time, there are often key **institutional bottlenecks** leading to **malfunctions** and **service gaps**.

Key role in addressing problem of the Roma unemployment have institutions and public services. Here we focus especially on the **state**, the **municipality** and the **non-state actors**.

Diversity is a core value of the European Union. Municipalities, companies and organisations that recognise and value diversity as a development or business strategy by putting people first, regardless of their gender, race, age, religion, sexual preferences or physical disability, have a longer-term advantage. The discrimination of the vulnerable groups and specifically Roma, contribute to the deepening inequality and marginalization and multiply the problems instead of solving them.

Figure 1. Structural factors leading to the present situation and position of Roma on the labour market.

Deficiencies/Structural factors leading to the current situation .

