

WP19 - Task 3 Report.

Slovakia

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May 20th, 2013.

Final Draft – Anonymized version.

Table of Contents

<i>I. Introduction</i>	3
<i>II. Description of the field</i>	3
Economic and social conditions	4
Roma community	8
Experiences of Roma with job opportunities	9
<i>III. Methodology</i>	10
Field selection, methodology	10
Selection of interviewees: stakeholders and employers	11
Recruitment and organization of focus group discussions	12
<i>IV. Findings</i>	13
Small municipal works and other employment creation measures	14
Municipal enterprise	17
Entrepreneurship and start up incentives	18
Local Strategies of Comprehensive Approach	18
Labour office assistance	20
Illegality and social benefits	20
Employers' perceptions	21
The role of NGO sector	22
Discrimination	22
Opportunities for education and training	23
<i>V. Summary</i>	24
Recommendations	26
<i>References</i>	27

I. Introduction

This report summarizes field work research conducted in March 2013 in a district located in the southern part of Banská Bystrica region (Banskobystrický kraj), selecting three sites: the district main city and two smaller villages. For anonymity purposes, which we guaranteed to interviewed individuals, we will use codes for the municipalities, referring to the **district in general as P**, to **the district main city as C1** and to the **two villages as V1 and V2**.

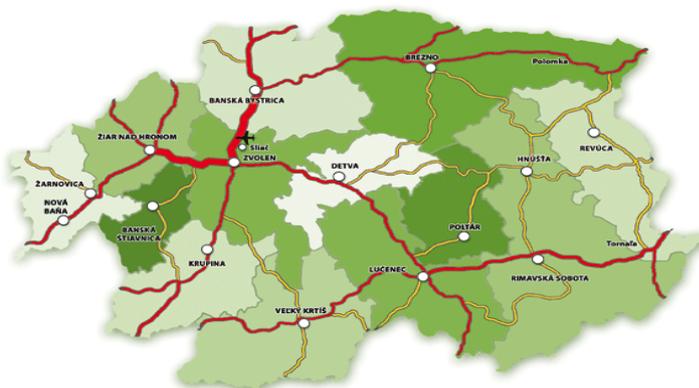
The main aim of our research, conducted in the framework of NEUJOBS FP7 project (WP19), was to learn about practices, experiences and perceptions of employment policies and their targeting on Roma in Slovakia. The field work was constructed in a way to gain opinions and experiences of a varied range of actors and included meetings and interviews with the local labour office, mayors, local employers and Roma participating in different measures. The research aimed to understand how employment policies and other measures or programmes targeting Roma in a more complex way are implemented in a given economic and social context and attempted to highlight positive and negative practices in implementation.

Section 2 describes characteristics of the field, including living conditions and employment opportunities of Roma. Section 3 presents case selection procedure and methodology. Section 4 documents findings about implementation of different types of policies and highlights views and experiences from different perspectives. The last section summarizes the findings, synthesizes the evidence and offers a set of recommendations which stem from the field research.

II. Description of the field

The field research was conducted in district P, and specifically in the C1 and two villages within the district: V1 and V2. P is located in the middle of Banská Bystrica region and consists of 22 municipalities: 21 villages and the city of C1 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of districts in Banská Bystrica region with main infrastructural connections

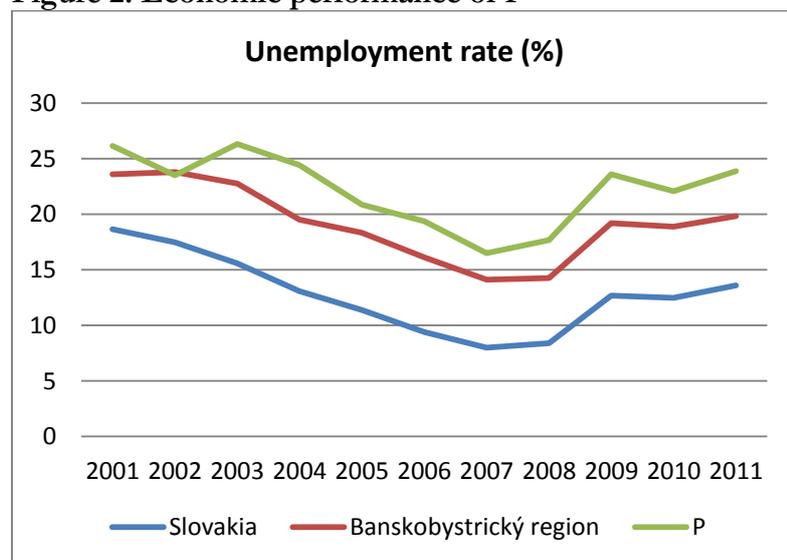


P is one of the smallest districts in Slovakia in terms of population size with about 25 000 inhabitants. According to the 2004 Atlas of Roma Communities¹, 11 of its municipalities have Roma population residing in them. The district is surrounded by and economically interacts with two larger districts in which a significant share of Hungarian-speaking minority resides. From this perspective, P has been exposed to multi-ethnic and multi-lingual environment.

Economic and social conditions

High unemployment is the key problem of P today. The unemployment rate has in the past decade followed general trends in the Slovak economy and in Banská Bystrica region (Figure 2), but at a much higher level. In January 2013, the unemployment rate of P stood at 28.6% and was the third highest in the region. Large variation exists in economic conditions in the Banská Bystrica region with better economic performance in the northern district and worse outcomes in districts located closer to the Hungarian border. Poor infrastructure in the south contributes to these differences as highway connects the northern towns and seems to contribute to better prosperity. Unemployment is more spread among people with low education levels, youth and people above the age of 50. High unemployment rate is projected into poverty and dependence on benefit in material need. According to the interviews, it is not only Roma who receive income support, but also a share of majority population.

Figure 2: Economic performance of P



Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and COLSAF.

¹ The 2004 Atlas of Roma Communities is the most comprehensive source about conditions of living and density of Roma population across Slovakia. Data was collected in 2004 and is recognized as a reliable source of information for research purposes. An updated version is under preparation, but not yet available. For more details see: http://www.minv.sk/?regiony_atlas

The share of persons receiving benefit in material need is higher in the two villages than in C1. In V1 and V2V2, nearly each tenth inhabitant is a recipient of income support (Table 2). The numbers rose quite markedly between January 2012 and December 2012 from 57 to 93 in V1, from 219 to 270 in V2 and from 264 to 385 in C1. This could be the outcome of the closure of a strategic employer in glass processing sector towards the end of 2011 and of several other smaller employers in the region. According to OLSAF data we received during the field work, 707 activation allowances were given in P in February 2013, out of which 37 were paid to long-term unemployed who began working.² Out of this number, for 152 activated persons was the contract based/funded by the labour office, the remaining were organized on the basis of municipality contract. Protection allowance – typically paid to long-term sick or to persons on sick-leave – was given to 335 people in the district. This together compares to about 4% of district's population.

C1 and the surrounding villages have a strong tradition of mining and industrial production, especially in the field of glass processing and glass production. A glass production factory with a long history and several branches in the surrounding smaller villages – used to be a key employer in the region. In late 2011, it has been closed down, laying off about 400 workers, and currently is out of operation. In the past its workforce consisted of persons with all levels of education, including low education levels, as skill needs of this sector are quite specific and require on-the-job training and manual skills. The firm was late in paying wages to its employees, which has contributed to the growth of indebtedness problem. This has had implications on the solvency of citizens and until today is felt by a relatively high number of executions in the city and surrounding villages.

Public sector is the main district and city employer (schools, public administration). Business environment is not prospering and the number of people employed in private sector has declined. The remaining work opportunities are spread across a range of sectors which offer opportunities to skilled and unskilled labour. A few small businesses operate in service sector (hairdressers, cosmeticians, retail). In addition to this, there are agricultural cooperatives and several wood processing companies, all characterized by seasonal peaks in demand in labour. A number of the glass production factory former employees started self-employment licences in glass processing or glass decorating. The most successful developed into medium-sized company specialized in hand-made glass decoration for export which currently employs around 100 people, including several Roma. Due to the availability of land and forestry, region is considered agricultural, but our interviews revealed that the agri-business has been struggling quite considerably and has also shed much labour over the past few years. Northern villages of the district (e.g. V2) have developed tourism sector.

Both commuting and migration for work have been widely spread in P and represent a key survival strategy. Unemployed non-Roma females migrate be-weekly mainly to Austria, while males migrate mainly to the Czech Republic to work in construction sector or perform other manual tasks. This was confirmed to be the case also for Roma men who participated in the focus group. Illegal work takes place as well, and has different forms. OLSAF director mentioned

² Activation allowance is 63.07 euro per month. Most people receive it for participating in small municipal works (activation works) as a top-up to benefit in material need which is the main income support scheme. For more details see Kurekova and Konstekova 2013 and World Bank 2012.

cases when people who are registered with the labour office would go and work abroad and return once a month to fulfil former registration criterion. The other form of semi-legality is employment through ‘work agreement’ (Dohoda o vykonání práce) whereby on a paper a certain number of work hours and payment is agreed, but higher amount is paid unofficially (and is then untaxed).³ Opportunities to earn on the ‘side’ were confirmed also by Roma whom we interviewed. Legislative changes effective since January 2013, which have led to less favourable conditions of employment on the basis of ‘work agreements’, have created uncertainty in the Roma community. The expectation is that this is likely to result in higher shares of illegal work.

We found a relatively vivid social fabric of civic sector organizations with many varied initiatives in the town and surrounding villages, and good and productive cooperation between the mayors in the region. We found peaceful inter-ethnic relations and references to good interactions between majority population and Roma population. Especially in C1 Roma were referred to as ‘good’ Roma who had worked hard in the past, and there were no references to petty crime by Roma in the town. The (assistant) field social workers in C1 were ethnic Roma women, and their office was co-located with other municipal offices in the town hall building. In V1 three Roma were elected into the municipal council. We nevertheless encountered complaints that the municipality has been unwilling to support Roma focused projects, and the relations appeared tenuous. The third municipality which we visited – V2 – was very successful in getting EU structural funds and had surplus municipal budget. The positive impact on the living conditions of Roma minority however was less evident. The village is characterized by the presence of a strong Roma cultural and political leader respected also beyond the village and serving as an intermediary and a community role-model.

³ Work agreement – dohoda a vykonani prace – is a form of employment where employer asks employee for task-based work for a specific and limited amount of time per month/year. The number of hours per year is regulated, and there are no social security contributions paid on this income up to a certain level of income per month. This income was until the end of 2012 disregarded in the calculation of eligibility for benefit in material need.

Table 1: District of P: Basic living infrastructure of majority population and Roma households in selected municipalities

		Infrastructure of Majority				Households in Roma settlements						Inhabitants of Roma settlements		
		Accessibility of utilities				Total number of settlements	Share of legal settlements	Share of households connected				Number		Share on total inhabitants
Name	town/village	Water supply	Sewage system	Electricity	Gas			Water supply	Sewage system	Gas	Electricity	In settlement	Per one house	
V1	village	yes	no	yes	yes	20	100,0	100,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	193	10,0	20,8 ⁴
V2	village	yes	partly	yes	yes	97	100,0	100,0	10,3	40,2	100,0	461	4,8	14,8 ⁵
C1	town	yes	partly	yes	yes	130	100,0	100,0	96,2	60,8	100,0	600	4,6	9,8 ⁶

Source: Atlas of Roma Communities, 2004.

Table 2: Description of localities

	Number of inhabitants (12/2011)	Number of BMN recipients (12/2012) *	Number of activation workers	Anti-flood measures (2011)	Local Strategy of Comprehensive Approach	Political representation of Roma in local governance structures	Municipal enterprise	Field social workers	Community centre	Active Roma NGOs
V1	983	93 (9.4%)	TBC.	20 (More than 50% Roma)	Yes	Yes	No	None currently	No	Yes
V2	3026	270 (8.9%)	106 4 coordinators, none is Roma	10	Yes	No, but local Roma Council as an advisory body	Yes	Yes, but working as mayor's secretary	No	Yes
C1	5794	385 (6.6%)	98 (70% are Roma)	10 Six Roma, 4 non-Roma	No	No, but the mayor pledged to have links and cooperation with local Roma leader	Yes	Yes, also Roma Out of five, two are Roma	No	Yes

Source: Authors, based on field work. Notes: (*) - share on total population in parentheses

⁴ The mayor estimated the current share of Roma to be one third of the inhabitants, Local Strategy of Comprehensive Approach mentions 273 Roma/28%.

⁵ This number is similar to estimation given by the mayor during the interview.

⁶ The mayor estimate is that 620 inhabitants of the town are Roma, which is about 12% of town's population.

Roma community

The localities have significant number of Roma residing in them (Table 2). Approximately every fifth person in V1, every sixth in V2⁷ and every tenth in C1 is Roma. In all three localities, Roma households were not segregated but integrated into the village/town, although Roma housing was typically concentrated in few areas in the given municipality (Table 1). In C1, Roma lived mainly in the buildings of block of apartments, in the villages they typically resided in houses. The housing situation in V1 was the most difficult as houses were overpopulated. This has led the local Roma community to demand construction of municipal housing, but the municipality council was unwilling to support the cause, which was the key issue of contentions in the village.

Most Roma have only primary education, though we met few Roma who had vocational license or took part in courses organized by the labour office in the past. Some Roma women were also currently enrolled in a degree study for leaving certificate (*maturita*) and a university degree, motivated by educational conditions required in order to work as field social workers or Roma assistants. None of the Roma we met at the time of the focus group organization had a formal employment (with the exception of Roma field social workers in C1), but in the past they had different employment experiences. Many Roma have been involved in small municipal works or other forms of public employment programs. Before the employment situation degraded to the current state, Roma travelled or migrated for work. Females typically commuted to nearby towns or cities to do mainly low-skilled or unskilled work, men had worked abroad, mainly in the Czech Republic but also in Germany or Italy, also doing low-skilled work (see Table 4 for more details). Their jobs were mainly low-skilled and manual. Work was often found and organized through temporary work agencies, much fewer opportunities seem to have been provided by labour office staff. Short-term contracts through ‘work agreements’ combined with illegal work have been frequent, especially in forestry work. During periods of no employment, especially in the winter, Roma rely mainly on income support, and combine this with participation in activation works. When possible, they take up seasonal opportunities for work, mostly by having ‘work agreements’.

Job fluctuation is high, caused both by unstable contracts, but also low salaries. Poor wages in many cases do not provide incentives to commute due to high transportation costs and poor infrastructure connections which make commuting costly and difficult. Similar behavioural patterns were identified to exist also among non-Roma who faced long-term unemployment. Roma who started employment often stopped after few weeks as net income difference between benefits and low-wage employment is not motivating. In spite of this, most Roma we talked to during the focus groups took different employment opportunities in the past, doing mundane, and physically demanding, low-paid and unstable jobs. In many cases they accepted work far away from their families, if it brought at least some promise of improvement of their economic and social situation. Self-employment efforts were limited due to the lack of capital or fear of financial implications in case of failure to fulfil conditions when receiving self-employment contributions from public funds.

⁷ According to the mayor in V2, about a fourth of Roma were immigrants from other cities north of the village who came in the past decade due to lower property prices in the village and good cultural environment.

Experiences of Roma with job opportunities

C1 area and its surrounding villages have a strong tradition of employing Roma. Many Roma in the past were employed in industry - glass processing factories or brickworks factories - as well as in agriculture. Several employers continue to employ Roma until today. Several references were made during focus groups, but also when talking to other stakeholders, that Roma used to be employed during socialist regime and their situation worsened significantly with the regime change. The existing opportunities are very limited, especially in the winter, and situation has worsened significantly during the crisis.

Roma gained information about labour market opportunities through channels outside labour office. They found out about opportunities through informal channels or advertisements of employment agencies. Labour office was not identified as an institution that would support Roma, but rather as a formal body to which they are once a month obliged to provide evidence of a job search activity. The visits are formal, while Roma are not being actively advised.⁸ Instead of labour office staff, Roma were advised on various aspects of job search by field social workers. These who would assist them in writing or updating CVs, filling out job applications and communicating with potential employers via email, if necessary. Only seldom were Roma invited to labour office organized recruitment. Several Roma had gone through a training course organized by the labour office (flower design, basket making, etc.). They did not find these courses very useful for improving their chances on the labour market. In the cases of gaining employment through employment agency, cases of maltreatment were quite widely spread; examples included lower wages than agreed, worse working conditions or a lack of payment for the work carried out.

Opportunities for illegal work existed mainly in local forestry sector. Until recent reform in effect since January 2013, the availability of legal employment on the basis of 'work agreement' provided a legal way for earning additional income aside the receipt of social assistance, without incurring costs on the employer and high social security contributions on the employee.

Roma themselves referred to widely spread discrimination in the labour market based on the ethnicity. Employers would tell applicants that they do not hire Roma openly. Some Roma felt that they faced less discrimination on the basis of ethnicity abroad (e.g. Czech Republic). Even more educated Roma having vocational license or secondary school had difficulties finding jobs, which sometime dis-incentivized younger Roma (or their parents) to invest into education. We also identified elements of short-termism among younger male Roma who due to the fact that situation was relatively good at the time when they were about to finish their compulsory education and were therefore able to find job and earn income, they preferred to exit education as soon as possible.⁹

Work of NGOs was generally viewed positively, but their scope seen as quite limited. Scope for bigger impact exists if more extensive funding combined with capacity building would be

⁸ This has been found to be the case generally for any type of unemployed, as labour office staff is overburdened and does not have capacity for placement and counselling work (World Bank 2012)

⁹ Schooling is compulsory up to 16 years of age in Slovakia. Roma males which we met at this age achieved different levels of education, but most of them only lower primary (i.e. elementary school) due to repeated school years.

available. Some more experienced NGOs were able to provide short-term employment for local Roma in different types of projects. Female focused civic associations which we found in the field did not have a direct employment focus. Their positive impact rather materialized by providing a sense of community, motivation to study and support to local women as well as means of access to information and experience. The most positive direct impact we identified was through the work of field social workers, especially those who were also Roma, who assisted Roma in various job-search related tasks and also provided knowledge, information and assistance in various aspects of everyday life issues.

III. Methodology

Field selection, methodology

C1 and the two surrounding villages was selected following selection criteria defined in the project to choose localities with an above average share of Roma, not the most deprived in the country economically, and with a mixed economic basis (industry, agriculture). We relied on the 2004 Atlas of Roma communities which maps residence density and conditions of Roma in Slovakia and is nationally and internationally used and recognized as a source of information about Roma in Slovakia. Given that instructions insisted on selecting a town and a village within the same district, this implied limitations on the possibilities of selection, as Roma in Slovakia are mostly rural residents. C1 was one of the few towns where we identified an above average share of Roma.

We considered a range of additional factors which we found important from the point of view of practical implementation of field work and in view of gathering data that can describe general conditions, interactions and implementation practices. Therefore, additional key criterion which entered into selection was to choose location which can be considered 'average' and where not much previous media coverage (positive or negative) has been directed. The next criterion was to select localities where a range of instruments are being applied to be able to evaluate implementation of different measures and tools. The fourth key element was to choose localities where we could identify active civic basis which we hoped to use in approaching Roma for focus group participation. C1 satisfied all the selection criteria. Originally we selected only V1 as field work village, but our initial investigation suggested that we might not find much activity there. This was not confirmed in the field, but we nevertheless also interviewed a smaller group of stakeholders in V2 and conducted a focus group there.

During internal team discussions we debated Banská Bystrica, Brezno and Moldava nad Bodvou (and Turňa nad Bodvou), as possible localities for the field research. We were not able to find suitable villages nearby Banská Bystrica where also the share of Roma is unclear in the city itself. Brezno is a home-town of one of the researchers and we decided to exclude this location to avoid possible biases. Moldava n. Bodvou and Turňa nad Bodvou are located at the Hungarian border and already in Košický kraj, which has had considerable research attention already, while our preference was to target less exposed parts of the country, not least to generate additional evidence to the existing knowledge.

Selection of interviewees: stakeholders and employers

The field work entailed meetings and discussion with a wide range of stakeholders, employers and four focus groups (Table 3). We approached our interviewees in advance by email or by phone. We found generally open attitudes and flexibility to our requests for the meeting and we did not encounter any major problems. The interviews were conducted during the week of 4-8 of March 2013 by both researchers present at all interviews. The availability of own car enabled to move flexibly between the localities and to conduct interviews efficiently. In our view, the interviews with stakeholders and employers covered all major issues, including questions such as discrimination, illegal work or inter-ethnic relations. The majority of interviews were recorded. Prior to going out to the field, we conducted interviews with public officials in Bratislava.

We were unsuccessful at agreeing on a meeting with the forestry sector employer in C1 whom we in the preparatory phase identified as employing Roma. During the focus group this information was confirmed; we also found out that the hiring had aspects of illegal work and underpayment, which we suspect was the reason why the employer avoided meeting with us directly (he said he was busy or not anymore in the company when we called). We were also unsuccessful in meeting local Roma leader in V2. After few attempts we decided not to push this meeting as information about the NGO's work was available through other means.

Table 3: Interviewed stakeholders and employers

	C1	V1	V2
Stakeholders	Mayor	Mayor	Mayor
	Municipal enterprise director	Field social worker	Municipal enterprise director
	Field social worker and organizer of activation works	NGO representative and community coordinator	
	(Assistant) Field social workers and female NGO leaders	Roma NGO representative and member of the municipal parliament	
	NGO representative: Partnership for social inclusion – director		
	Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - director		
	Secondary vocational school – director and vice-director		
Employers	Glass processing factory – former human resources manager	Agricultural cooperative in nearby village - director	
	Agricultural cooperative - director		
	Sonne Crystal – medium sized employer in glass processing and decoration		
	Billa – assistant manager		
	TESCO - manager		
Focus groups	Female focus group	Male focus group	Mixed focus group
	Male focus group		
Unsuccessful interviews	Forestry sector entrepreneur		Local NGO leader and musician

Recruitment and organization of focus group discussions

Four focus groups were organized in total in three different localities (Table 4). Focus groups in C1 and in V2 were organized with the assistance of field social workers, who were also present. In V1 we asked Roma municipal parliament member to organize the meeting for us, where he was also present and actively participated. We decided to organize focus groups of a smaller size which we expected to be more conducive to open and balanced discussion. Gender aspect was also considered and we requested one focus group to be only females (C1).

Table 4: Description of focus group participants

<p>Focus Group 1: male participants</p> <p><u>V1</u> Organized through a member of municipal parliament and vice-chair of Roma civic association active in the village</p> <p><u>Participant description:</u> 5 Roma men participated, varied age groups, both single and married, with previous experiences of employment spell in labour market in the vicinity of the village and abroad, currently all unemployed, some currently participate in active labour market programs</p> <p><i>Previous employment:</i> Yura (cable assembly Rimavská Sobota), Ipeľské Tehelne (C1), cable works (Prievidza), Agency DELETE (that employed on behalf of the cable works in Prievidza), activation works, anti-flood measures</p> <p>Duration: app. 1,5 hours</p>	<p>Focus Group 3: male participants</p> <p><u>C1</u> Organized with the help of Roma terrain social workers, who participated in the discussion and helped to facilitate it</p> <p><u>Participant description:</u> 4 Roma men, in late 20s-early 30s, all single, with primary education, with previous work experience in local labour market and abroad, all currently unemployed</p> <p><i>Previous employment:</i> Yura/KIA (cable assembly, Hnúšť'a), Mladá Boleslav (car industry), glass industry, Czech Republic, Lučenec, bakery in C1; activation works, anti-flood measures</p> <p>Duration: app.1 hour</p>
<p>Focus Group 2: female participants</p> <p><u>C1</u> Organized with the help of Roma terrain social workers, who also participated in the focus group discussions, one non-Roma social worker was also present</p> <p><u>Participant description:</u> 6 Roma women, 3 field social workers (2 Roma, 1 non-Roma), different age groups, mostly married with children, all with previous employment experiences, some currently in formal education, currently all unemployed</p> <p><i>Previous employment:</i> glass production factory, municipality (field social workers), schools (teacher's assistant), gastronomy (bartender), supermarket (branch manager), nurse/educator in Málíneč in social care, textile industry worker, activation works (manual but also tutoring of children).</p> <p>Duration: app. 1,5 hours</p>	<p>Focus group 4: mixed participants</p> <p><u>V2</u> Organized with the help of local Roma terrain social worker originally from V2 but working in C1 as field social worker.</p> <p><u>Participant description:</u> 7 participants; this was a varied group in terms of age and gender. 4 Roma women, 1 Non-Roma woman and 2 Roma men participated; terrain social worker was also present at the focus group (although she was working in another community in C1). Participants varied in age and experience. Older generation had varied working experiences, including self-employment (older Roma man), the younger generation had no or little experience with previous employment, with the exception of doing activation works in the municipality. A Roma woman with six children considered migrating for work to Austria to work in the home care sector.</p> <p><i>Previous employment:</i> Yura/KIA (Hnúšť'a), Utekáč, Czech Republic (manual work at a factories, not part of the core staff), NGO, sawmill, employment agency in Lučenec.</p> <p>Duration: app.1 hour</p>

Discussions in all focus groups were very open, and the flow of conversation was good, with quite balanced input from nearly all members. All major topics were covered in our view satisfactorily, including the issues such as grey labour market or opinions on aspects of local inter-institutional cooperation. In the Roma women focus group we centred the discussion intentionally more on the issues of access to education, schooling and relatively less on the implementation and experiences of active labour market programs (due to time constraints). Women knew each other through the activities of civic organization aimed at gathering Roma mothers and preparing activities for them and their children, several of them actively engaged in child-oriented activities in local pre-school and primary school.

We evaluate focus groups as rich in generating information due to their smaller size, previous contacts between the focus group participants and the presence of local mediators (NGO leader/member of municipal parliament, field social workers) whom the participants knew and considered trustworthy. The presence of the Roma field social workers was beneficial for gaining deeper insight, as they were often able to clarify different aspects during the interview. We also provided small refreshments to create a more relaxed atmosphere open to discussion and non-hierarchical context. All focus groups with the exception of the one in V2 were recorded. We did not remunerate the participants in any material manner. On this aspect we sought the advice of field social workers who did not see it necessary or adequate. We decided to offer some refreshments during the meetings, which contributed a more relaxed atmosphere.

IV. Findings

The localities we visited have been using a wide range of ALMP tools and other programs available for working with marginalized Roma communities. Their overview is provided in Table 2. According to OLSAF in C1, small municipal works are the most widely used ALMP measure, followed by anti-flood works and graduate practice. Indeed, the key measure targeting unemployed and people in material deprivation are small municipal works, which are implemented in all three localities with quite a high number of ‘activated’ workers. In the past all three localities also employed people on the basis of “anti-flood” measures, in which also Roma participated. Because only few Roma finish secondary education with a license, graduate practice is not widely used by them.

The villages developed Local Strategy of Comprehensive Approach (LSCA), which entail also projects with environmental aspects.¹⁰ Municipal enterprises function in C1 and in V2. While these are not an ALMP tool, we investigated them to see opportunities for employment in the public sphere not provided through ALMP measures. We encountered work of field social workers which we will also discuss to explain their role in assisting Roma in labour market matters. An important initiative which has been functioning in P is the Partnership for Social Inclusion, which has been active since mid-2000s. It first began as an informal forum for meeting of different stakeholders in 2004 and since 2005 has been formally registered as civic organization and a most part of its existence received public funding for its activities. Partnerships as a tool for

¹⁰ C1 had also prepared Local Strategy, but it was not in the end submitted for evaluation. The reason we were given was that the process was quite demanding with the conditions changing throughout; this led some municipalities to give up on the way).

social inclusion were supported across Slovakia as an instrument for bringing different stakeholders together in improving social cohesion in different parts of the country. Unlike in many other parts of Slovakia, where they seized to fulfil their initial functions, the Partnership has been active in P and has served as an important tool for networking, information sharing and expertise generating venue. Until recently, it held positions of ‘community consultants’ whose role was to provide advice and activation of local partners. Its seat is co-located with the seat of ‘centre for first contact for investors’ in P. All stakeholders we approached valued the work of Partnership and saw it as an important forum which helped them to gain information and – if needed – expertise and advice in preparing project applications for funding. The access of Roma NGOs to the Partnership and its benefits was clearly quite limited. We discuss each of these measures and tools in greater detail below.

Small municipal works and other employment creation measures

Activation works are the most widely used measure in C1 and the villages nearby. It is tied to the receipt of benefit in material need (BMN) and implemented by municipalities. It can be organized on the basis of the contract with labour office or on the basis of municipality contract where the relationship is established directly between the municipality and the activated person. Under both types of contracts, the participant receives top-up benefit of 63.07 EUR in addition to the benefit. According to the statistics of the labour office, activation works are now mostly organized on the basis of the municipality contract, the conditions of which were made stricter by reform in 2012. In practice, municipalities alternate people who are involved in activation works at any point in time on the two different contracts due to eligibility limitations defined by the law. Labour office director confirmed that demand for activation among BMN recipients is high and that there is fight among jobseekers as there are generally more interested persons than the available places (cf. (World Bank 2012)). The participation in activation works was widely spread among Roma who participated in the focus groups, which revealed a diversity of activated people (varied age, gender, previous work experiences, included women receiving child benefits).

The activities done by activated people were generally unskilled and mundane with little upgrading element and involved mainly street cleaning and maintenance, up-keep of green areas and lawn-mowing. More sophisticated activities were not done widely, but existed. First, in C1 we found that activation workers were organized in cooperation with the municipal enterprise and participated in tasks done by their employees, which would be more sophisticated. For example, municipal enterprise produced bricks for very cheap prize, which were then laid on the streets in the town with the help of activation workers. This provided for more meaningful use of workforce and beneficial activity for the community. This activity is not done anymore, because funds were needed to produce additional bricks, which have not been available. Second, in C1 we found a more productive use of activation works stimulated by the presence of Roma female and child oriented NGO. The NGO leaders (who are also (assistant) field social workers) suggested to place Roma women participating in the activation works to tutoring activities in the local school. While there was a concern about the appropriateness of tutors’ qualifications, NGO representatives with the support of the coordinator of activation works convinced the school that

this support is nevertheless useful as many children do not receive any support at home.¹¹ A similar placement of Roma women was conducted to the supportive activities in the local kindergarten and the retirement home. This suggests that already prior to the legal change implemented in January 2013 which broadened organizations which can organize activation works, in some places activation workers have already been used in institutions funded by the municipality (e.g. primary school, menza, retirement home, etc.).

The municipalities have raised implementation problems related to the organization of activation works which related to the lack of funding to buy tools needed for conducting the activities but also to pay for the costs of activation works organizers. In V2, the workforce stability was ensured by alternating the labor office contract and municipality contract.¹² Such system has been functioning for 6 years, offering more stable opportunity to the activated people. The municipality has on this principle been employing also coordinators of activation works, all of whom have been non-Roma. In C1 implementation problems are not tackled; while the city had 7 coordinators earlier for 120 activated, now there was only one person. The problem arose also due to the fact that a coordinator cannot be employed more than twice, and over the years they exhausted the pool of eligible persons.¹³ At the same time, in C1 a motivation system for activation workers was in place whereby they first offer a month-long contract to the person, and if the person performs well, s/he is kept for the whole duration (6 months).

In all three municipalities we found elements of institutional discrimination by the means of selection of non-Roma into 'cleaner' or more interesting activities (work in schools) and Roma into more mundane activities (snow shovelling). In C1 the situation improved after the work of Roma field social workers began. These came up with explicit propositions for Roma women placement in the local school or kindergarten, and also argued for fair distribution of places in anti-flood measures between Roma and non-Roma.

The evaluation of activation works by stakeholders has been generally positive. The labour office director saw the system as mutually beneficial: *"I think it helps the municipality and also to the citizens."* She considered activation works as a way in which the municipality can help people often in poor conditions to get some extra income and to retain working habits.

"As the loss of employment of those who were working for [glass production factory] for 30 years is reflected also in their health condition. Maybe they had already some work related illnesses in the past, but now there is evidence of more sickness... So the municipality is helping them with this little contribution, to maintain working habits – well, it is not possible in their profession – but so that they feel useful generally and for themselves." (Labour office director, C1)

Indeed, we found similar views confirmed by the mayors.

¹¹ It however faced opposition from the parents, suggesting that the importance of education and school is not recognized in the whole Roma community in C1.

¹² Small municipal works can be organized on the basis of labor office contract or on the basis of municipality contract. The first type brings to municipalities additional funding for tools and for covering costs of organizers of activation works, the second type has no contribution for municipalities. For more see Task 2 report (Kurekova and Konstekova 2013).

¹³ The law allows employing one coordinator for 25 people if taken via labour office, with regards to the activation workers contracted via municipality it is not possible to have resources for a coordinator.

“A hundred of people have income that is indispensable for them. Two hundred could be possible, but it wouldn't be effective, and the motivational effect would diminish... This institute helps me to help these people.” (Mayor, V2)

The mayor in V2 suggested that a combination of activation works and public works would be a better system which would incorporate motivational element through the possibility to reward good workers by offering them more stable employment outlook. When prompted to comment on the possible crowding out effect of activation workers, he confirmed that the number of employees in municipal enterprise which has been naturally lowered (retirement reasons), will not be increased as he can replace them by activation workers.

“So they [activation workers] help me to save finances”. (Mayor, V2)

At the same time, the mayor acknowledges that a majority of the people could be employed. *“Maybe from those 106 that I have, I can say that some 30 are only able to hold this broom, but the rest of them are fairly employable. If I had a firm, I could maybe pay them a higher amount than these 60-70 EUR.”* (Mayor, V2)

Given the very limited working opportunities and harsh living conditions, the opinions of Roma about the possibility to do activation works were generally positive. They treasured this opportunity to gain additional source of income, which was helpful especially for Roma women who due to child rearing were less mobile.

“It helps; I cannot be involved as I am a member of the municipal council. My wife is working, and 63 EUR is also something, for us it is good. Mostly women work here on activation works.” (Focus Group, V1)

“The municipality employs many people locally. They are not complaining, there is at least something.” (Focus Group, V1)

The general population also viewed activation works positively: *“At least the city has been cleaned”, also the snow will be removed. ... Roma have the chance to demonstrate that, yes, they want, they try.”* (Manager, retail sector)

However, some Roma also saw the fact that given the amount of time they spend in activation works, they could also get employed: *“Well they could also employ me, as I work for them 4 days a week, 4 hours daily.”* (Focus group, V2)

Another negative feature which was identified related to the fact that general public started to rely on activation workers to the extent that they have stopped doing activities which they should, such as cleaning the premises near their homes or shovelling the snow. *“They are waiting for the activation workers.”* Assistant field social worker, C1

At the same time, the stakeholders as well as Roma found that ‘publicly beneficial works’ which existed prior to activation works were a better form, because they were based on an employment contract with the attached benefits.

“Maybe the form could be different; I had the chance to know and experience the public works and it was a better form. As it was on work contract, those people had even better feeling about that. Even if it was not a big amount of money what they received. But also for the fact that the incomes from this employment were counted towards their

pensions. Now they don't have anything from this. Yes, I am at work – because they call it like this – I have an employer, I receive money for that and also I am needed. There are hundreds of people... (Labour office director)

“We were at least ordinarily employed... this meant employment for 8 hours and a solid income.” (Focus group, V1)

In response to the economic crisis and the heavy floods which hit Slovakia around similar time (2009-2010), government introduced “anti-flood measures” as a new ALMP tool. Similarly to activation works, it is implemented by municipalities, but the participants are given 6 months-long employment contract establishing full-time employment. Anti-flood works were positively evaluated by all stakeholders as well as Roma, who valued additional benefits such as meal vouchers. The activities have more added value (cleaning fishpond, assisting in road construction, regulating river bank, etc.), which has been recognized by everyone involved.

“If there would be jobs like this, it would be suitable.” (Focus group, V1)

Perhaps the most direct critique of activation works was given by the representative of Roma Plenipotentiary Office: *“So the activation works are there to give the people some extra money for an activity that doesn't have any sense and value at all.”* Based on the Plenipotentiary Office's experience, municipalities are not able to use activation works meaningfully. They usually give Roma brooms and request them to tidy up, while mayors do not recognize that the range of activities could be much enhanced (e.g. civil patrols, afternoon/morning activities in schools).¹⁴ We however found C1 relatively progressive in this respect.

Municipal enterprise

During the field work, we in particular concentrated on the interaction between activation works and municipal enterprises, also called „technical services” (technické služby). Municipalities in the past employed people with different skills to take care of municipal grounds and offered services, such as upkeep of public greeneries, waste collection, provision of municipal lighting, maintenance of publicly-owned housing, etc. Many of these activities are now being done by activation workers, indicating a possibility of replacement of employment through the possibility to have labour 'for free' on the basis of small municipal works. Municipal enterprises currently exist in C1 and in V2.

In V2 the number of employees in municipal enterprise declined from the peak of 50 employees – being one of the largest employers in the village in the past - to its current 17 employees. The current employees are on average older people who would be unable to find work elsewhere due to their age. In the past, municipal enterprise employed low-qualified workforce in waste collection, and many of those were Roma. None of the current employees are Roma, but one has recently retired. In the 1990s, the director of municipal enterprise cooperated with labour office when hiring low-qualified workers, but this stopped when the small municipal works were introduced. Now there is a close cooperation between the municipal enterprise and activation

¹⁴ This suggestion is of course controversial, as while on the one hand more meaningful activities would be organized, even greater danger of replacement of job opportunities exists if more varied activities with no attached possibilities to shift to more stable/meaningful job is provided.

work activities. The activation works coordinator comes to the municipal enterprise and the director of municipal enterprise requests a certain number of workers who are needed, on average 15 people daily. The municipal enterprise owns vehicles, machines, and finances gasoline, while activation workers supply the labour. The activities which prevail relate to sweeping the pavements, cleaning the cemetery, mowing grass, digging, few women work in the local laundry, do some cleaning or tidying. Activation workers often assist more qualified employees from the municipal enterprise (for example to a tractor driver). In effect, the activation workers *supplement* workers in the municipal enterprise, and therefore no additional hiring is done. Field social worker during the focus groups noted that there are localities where municipal enterprises/“technical services” were closed down altogether and the activities are now fully done by activation workers.

Entrepreneurship and start up incentives

Contribution towards establishing small business (self-entrepreneurship) has been allocated a significant amount of resources of ALMP budget. The profile of recipients who are given the support, who are typically better educated (World Bank 2012), suggests that not many Roma are targeted by this measure. Focus groups revealed that Roma are aware of the existence of this measure, and one older Roma even had self-entrepreneurship license in the past. He did not take the contribution being aware that it would require him to pay social security contributions for two years, but his income was not stable enough to ensure that. The fear of not being able to pay social security contributions attached as a condition to the measure disincentivised the younger Roma from taking this opportunity. On the other hand, they lack own capital to start the licences without the government support. The field social workers shared their experiences that labour office staff typically discourages Roma from this measure. In addition, no capacity building to increase self-entrepreneurship skills is provided by labour office. In the civic sector, the Partnership for Social Inclusion organized such training, into which one Roma woman was also involved.

Local Strategies of Comprehensive Approach

Local Strategies of Comprehensive Approach are a key tool of complex approach targeting localities with a large share of marginalized Roma communities, and have been approved in 152 localities across the country (for details see Task 2 report, Kurekova and Konteskova 2013). When selecting the sites, we intentionally included villages where Local Strategy has been prepared and during the interviews enquired about the process of the preparation, its aims and implementation.

Local Strategies were written with the assistance of Partnership for Social Inclusion and consulted with the regional Roma Plenipotentiary Office. The interviewed stakeholders highlighted the competition aspect inherent to the selection procedure of Local Strategies. Initially the municipalities in the micro-region under the organizational leadership of the Partnership for Social Inclusion organized several meetings where they sought to design meta-strategy for the micro-region. This turned out not to be possible as Local Strategies were to be funded at the level of municipalities and not micro-regions, setting the municipalities into competition with each other. The municipalities therefore met to discuss content of the

individual strategies in order to maximize their chances to have the Local Strategy selected in the national competition. The municipalities negotiated the types of projects to be included in each strategy with the aim to draw on different operational programmes and priorities and so to minimize that they compete against each other. Many stakeholders we interviewed considered an approach that would enable synergies better than competition. However, local interactions also highlight that funds allocated to marginalized Roma communities are often viewed in a rather opportunistic manner as a tool to gain access to additional resources. This came through in the discussions with the municipalities whereby the content of strategies was designed to maximize village benefit, at time without clear connection to what appeared most urgent needs of Roma community (for example, failure to include housing infrastructure project in the Local Strategy in one of the villages in spite of demands and needs of local Roma community).

In V1, Local Strategy suggested three projects: educational, environmental and infrastructural project, and was written by the previous mayor. The environmental project initially suggested building a composting place where 3 jobs were planned. This project idea was transformed by the new mayor and municipal government into creation of waste collecting yard. The key reason given was the fact that the municipality is unable to finance three workplaces and the new project only requires to create part time employment for one person for the duration of 5 years. The municipality is waiting for a call to be able to start implementing the project. Educational project was targeted specifically on Roma and aimed to motivate Roma youth to education by innovative teaching methods. The infrastructural project, which was not approved in the Local Strategy, had planned to improve living environment in the vicinity of Roma households.

The preparation of Local Strategy in V2 was done in cooperation between a local Roma NGO and the mayor's office. The NGO was in charge of preparing and – if successful – of implementing 'soft' projects, while the mayor planned to steer mainly the infrastructural project aimed at reconstruction of the local policlinic. The attached employment goal was to create employment for locals during the reconstruction of the facility.

None of the envisaged projects are being implemented and we generally confirmed the initial findings of Task 2 review that Local Strategies have failed in their implementation stage due to time delays which shifted implementation to a point in time when finances are not available. Our interview at the Plenipotentiary Office confirmed that implementation is currently stalled as various operational programmes are nearing its end and resources have already been tied to other projects. This has implications on incentives on the ground. For example, many local strategies included infrastructure projects (i.e. hard projects) in connection to 'soft' projects, such as education and training. Due to the fact that funds have dried in OPs able to fund infrastructure focused projects (such as Regional Operational Programme), municipalities lack incentives to implement soft projects alone. Roma are more direct beneficiaries of these and local opposition from majority population might exist to the co-financing of projects which benefit primarily Roma. An additional obstacle which we identified in some localities is a lack of funds for co-financing which is an outcome of a smaller municipal income due to the economic crisis. In none of the villages, therefore, Local Strategy has been implemented and the interviewed mayors could not identify any major benefit of the comprehensive approach to date.

The key envisaged benefit of this complex approach has been hampered by the lack of coordination among the operational program with respect to the Marginalized Roma Communities framework. An additional key element to make the tool successful is the need to transform Local Strategies into a systemic tool. The Roma Plenipotentiary Officer highlighted that continued source of financing and implementation procedures need to be put in place in order to make a good use of Local Strategies and the complex approach. This has been lacking in many other good projects whose positive impact was clearly demonstrated but there was a lack of political will or power to secure stable funding (e.g. Roma health assistants).

Labour office assistance

Experiences of Roma with the labour office were neutral, but it was not an institution which they considered helpful in their job search. They have described encounters with the labour office staff as very formal. Jobseekers have to visit the labour office on a monthly basis to present evidence of job search activity. This is perceived as useless: *“It has no meaning to go there, they only give you a stamp, and so what? And if you don’t go one day, they cancel you from the registry.”* (Focus group, V1)

The labour office staff is not working with the clients actively. Job offers are available in a printed form on a notice board or a table. None of the Roma we met has been asked to participate in a recruitment process organized by the labour office. A few were in the past offered training courses, which however often lacked genuine content relevant for the local labour market, and other supporting infrastructure (e.g. finances to start business). An administrative obstacle to participation in training and education courses is often the fact that initial secondary-level qualification is required in order to participate in the available courses or training.

“With regards to job search there wasn’t any help. Once they offered me a course of a basket-maker, so I had to make it, otherwise they would have cancelled me from the registry of jobseekers. It had no meaning. I would have needed to set up a business, but it was not feasible to sell these products.” (Focus group, V1)

Jobseekers therefore rely on other means to find out about existing vacancies, such as online portals, advertisements or private recruitment agencies. Networks of friends who had migrated for work were also used in the past to learn about employment opportunities abroad.

Illegality and social benefits

Roma and different stakeholders have confirmed existence of semi-legal or illegal employment, but it is difficult to quantify the scope and conditions. An opinion was spread that the level of social benefits provides disincentives for taking work. Wages in P are very low due to oversupply of labour. For example, even in the retail chain which employed only people with secondary education the wages stood at roughly 400 euro gross (minimum wage is 337,70 euro). Compared to the amount of social assistance and additional benefits attached to it (free meals for children at school, subsidy to cover travel expenses of children to go to school, etc.), taking on low-paid employment, even if it was available, would be difficult on low-income families.

A combined effect of low wages and social assistance support providing disincentives for working was confirmed by the experiences of Roma. This situation was more the case among Roma with more children and was clearly linked to very low wage levels and additional costs

attached to commuting to work. For this reason, many Roma preferred to get social assistance and earn activation benefits or combine social assistance with 'work agreement' work. If income was irregular or below certain threshold, this income was fully or partially disregarded in the calculation of eligibility for benefits. This condition has been changed from January 2013 and work agreement income will be counted towards family's income in full, which is likely to enhance informal employment in the most deprived communities. We also found indications that selection into some types of ALMP measures was guided by the implications it would have on total family's income. For this reason, anti-flood works were staffed typically by single men with no family obligations whose net income was not lowered by taking on half-year employment for the municipality in the measure.

Employers' perceptions

Experience of Roma employment has been common in C1 in the past. This recollection came up in most of the interviews with employers and other stakeholders. During socialism, Roma were employed across different sectors, mostly in manual but also more skilled work, for example in glass production sector. While most sectors shed Roma workforce among the first during the restructuring phase in the 1990s (e.g. agriculture, brick production, etc.), a few Roma remain to be employed in the businesses in glass production sector which have remained. Employers' experiences with employing Roma in the past or currently have been very good and they praised them for willingness to work hard. At its employment peak, as much as half of low-skilled workforce in the glass production factory were Roma, doing the most difficult or tedious work. The most successful exporter of glass today continues to employ Roma, who represent about one/sixth of its workforce. No Roma are employed in agriculture sector, which has become more technological, and has experienced a major decline in labour. We did not find indications of illegal work in this sector. None of the retail chains hired Roma. The reasons could be mixed, ranging from secondary level qualification requirement to internal unofficial policies of not hiring Roma. Roma were not among temporary staff which the chains would use during the peak periods.

Employers we interviewed were reluctant to participating in most ALMP measures. Many of the existing employment support measures require that after an initial period of government subsidy, the workplace is sustained at the expense of the employer. Due to cash flow or uncertainty of future demand, employers considered this risky and preferred not to get government support. The most widely used measure has been 'graduate practice', with which the employers had mixed experiences. Some had difficulties to find interested graduates willing to undertake the practice, even if the remuneration was considered relatively high in local wage standards. Others could not find suitable graduates as the recent changes to the implementation of this measure require that the graduate undertakes practice relevant to his/her field of study, which in the case of glass processing industry is not anymore possible due to the closure of this specialization in secondary school. Administrative burden was also mentioned often as a reason preventing especially smaller employers to participate in ALMP measures.

The role of NGO sector

P is characterized by a vibrant NGO sector activity and grass-root Roma activism. The key organization that has become an important interaction forum is the Partnership for Social Inclusions which was established in early 2000s as part of governmental initiative to create micro-regional partnerships. The Partnership has become an important platform where different types of stakeholders meet on a regular basis (typically twice a year) to share information and expertise. The Partnership played an important role in the process of preparation of Local Strategies by providing personnel who assisted in writing the strategies, and has been assisting municipalities or some local NGOs in other fundraising activities. It has contributed to establishing of good working relations at the local level and has generated a cross-sectoral know-how. While the assistance to creation and sustenance of civic sector has been among the Partnership activities, the involvement of Roma NGOs in the Partnership formal structure has been limited, due to difficulties to pay annual membership fees.

A set of other NGOs exists in the localities we have visited, and some of them are Roma led. In V1, there is currently inactive association of Roma, in C1 and V2 we found more active organizations with different aims and activities. Roma female focused organizations have been organizing activities for Roma children and mothers on a lower scale and with limited resources. They have been influential in providing encouragement and support to Roma women to continue in gaining formal education.

An established NGO in V2 was run by a local Roma leader, musician and political activist. In the past it was successful at gaining funds from different projects, some of them aimed also at (temporary) employment of local Roma. For example, local Roma women were funded to work as assistants in school/kinder garden based on a project earned through the NGO. NGOs however face limitation on getting employees in the framework of some ALMPs (e.g. NGO sector cannot have workers through activation works). On the other hand, we found NGOs which used workforce through 'voluntary works' framework or graduate practice. We also were told about activities organized independently from public support frameworks. For example, Roma NGOs self-organized soft skills and other types of trainings without any public funding.

Discrimination

Discrimination in the labour market entry is widely spread. Discriminatory decisions are openly expressed by employers, but no Roma that we spoke to have tried to formally deal with the instances of discrimination. When calling up to apply for vacancies, applicants are openly asked about their ethnicity and told that Roma are not accepted. Applicants with Roma sounding surnames are not invited for the interview or told that position is taken when potential employer in a direct contact recognized that the jobseeker is Roma.

We also found indications of in-work discrimination such as lower pay given to Roma workers. Institutional discrimination – though perhaps more latent – appears also widely spread. Roma face it in their interactions with labour offices or mayors. Examples include instances when activation work activities are allocated based on ethnicity, as the next quote reveals:

“I am trying – for instance for the laundry – to select a decent person, so that she is not the kind of a dirty gypsy woman, I tell you that openly. I rather take a whiter one. I am satisfied with decent gypsies. Here the Gypsies are not like those in East-Slovakia. The old settlers are good people, but their children and the new-comers are a problem. I was told that earlier the Gypsies had to go on Saturdays and had to sweep the streets for free. Now, nobody wants to do anything.” (Municipal enterprise in V2, director)

Discrimination challenge has been affecting them in their daily interactions. *“The feeling is such an anxiety then, there is a lot of fears, blocks.”* (Focus group, V2)

Roma subjectively perceived their status as more equal when working abroad.

“Abroad they treat you in a different way. There is no discrimination. The agreements are kept.” (Focus group, V1)

“I also worked in Czech republic, they didn't make difference based on the colour of your skin. You wouldn't receive there an inferior job. If you are interested and clever, they see that you can get trained and work for them.” (Female focus group, C1)

The work of field social workers has been important in mediating some of the upfront disadvantages. At times they accompany Roma to public institutions to assist them in interactions with public officials, including labour office.

“These people are often not respected. Therefore we go with them, and then they take them completely differently. Be it the labour office, be it the court.” (Assistant of the field social worker, C1)

None of the NGOs we met or the field social workers were directly involved or intended to deal formally with the instances of discrimination. Labour Office staff generally do not acknowledge existence of discrimination of Roma, and highlighted more the existence of age discrimination. Labour Office is not formally tasked and does not have capacity to deal with discriminatory practices.

Opportunities for education and training

An important theme which came up during the interviews was the opportunity for further education and training. Labour Office recognized this as a general need of workforce in P, and pointed out limited opportunities to offer re-certification courses to skilled people. For example, in the region there are people who had worked as welders, glass processing workers, etc., whose licenses have expired and they cannot afford to renew them. Labour Office could assist in this process, as there is some potential to place these people abroad where these skills are needed. More emphasis on practical education and training, and also recognition of qualifications/skills based on previous work experience could improve chances of Roma and other long-term unemployed. Vocational secondary school in C1 has actively been involved in providing more practical courses to Roma youth who faced difficulties in finishing compulsory education. The school director however identified obstacles in social assistance conditions which were to be taken away if an adult Roma enrolled in day-time /full-time education.

We identified demand for education on the part of Roma women especially. Some of them are undergoing formal education courses at the vocational secondary school with the aim to earn school leaving certificates that would qualify them for the openings which might be available to Roma in public sector.

“I realized that without education I cannot find a job. (...) Sometimes you just aren’t in the mood for that, I have 5 children, I am divorced and often I am really not in the mood to get back to the school. As I have worries and sorrows at home. But like this as we have the chance to talk [referring to the Roma women NGO gatherings], we really share all our problems, thus one has really a bigger strength and willingness to start from the beginning.”
(Female focus group, C1)

V. Summary

The existing ALMPs often represent the sole option for Roma residing in these localities and their importance might have risen with the worsened economic situation over the past months. The existing tools were generally seen as useful, but the implementing actors often lacked critical perspective which would evaluate net impact of the measure and possibilities for labour market inclusion into open labour market. We nevertheless discovered examples of local innovations to how labour market policy was implemented, such as linking activation workers to municipal enterprise to carry out more meaningful activities. Another example is the motivational and evaluation element introduced into ‘hiring’ of activation workers which helps to simulate more closely open labour market context.

Municipalities are large beneficiaries of the existing ALMP framework. Activation works in particular help municipalities to cater to a range of local upkeep needs which they otherwise would need to pay for or which possibly would not be done. However, beyond the existing framework, we did not find a genuine intention or a sufficient capacity to prepare projects that would seek to integrate Roma in a more systematic manner. One of the reasons could be the local opposition from the majority population which might exist against projects that benefit Roma to a greater degree. The opportunities to draw on funds allocated to marginalized Roma communities are typically viewed in a rather opportunistic manner as a tool to gain access to additional resources. Possibly due to prevailing opinions that the current situation of Roma unemployment and poverty cannot be (easily) solved, we found a lack of activity towards a more fundamental change that would benefit Roma, even if material conditions might have existed in some municipalities.

A more strategic vision and targeted thinking is missing completely on the side of labour offices. The most direct assistance to Roma on the ground appears to be provided by field social workers who supplement labour offices in important aspects of job search assistance, legal advice, sending of applications, and advocacy and mediation with various institutions (lobbying for educational courses, sending applicants to entrepreneurship course, searching for teachers’ assistants, writing CVs, etc.). Field social workers who were ethnic Roma enjoyed respect and appreciation among the Roma community which they assist; their niche lied in better understanding of cultural and language specificities of Roma communities. The NGOs we met – Roma and non-Roma - have

been doing important work, but function in a tight budget environment and in a restricted policy framework.

We found evidence that activation works have pushed out low-skilled employment in the public sphere, but precisely for this reason are valued by mayors who save expenses on upkeep of local environment. Activation workers are also used in educational/social care institutions and in some cases to do more value added activities.

Roma seemed generally well informed about the most common measures which are available in the context of employment policies. Roma appreciated what was available to them in the form of ALMP measures and typically evaluated the approach and cooperation with municipalities positively. While activation works are viewed positively by Roma as often the only available source of legal additional income, they prefer forms of engagement closer to or providing actual employment (former public works, anti-flood works). At the same time, we identified disincentives to work especially among breadwinners with more children. The contributions provided to children when commuting to school or other children-related benefits represent important “in-kind” benefits that parents would lose when taking on formal legal employment. Commuting to work further away is a major obstacle for many low-skilled due to transport expenses and poor transport connections. Some Roma therefore refuse jobs to which they would need to commute because net income would be very low. Migration for work abroad, seasonal employment and illegal employment (construction, forestry) are nevertheless important survival strategies for many Roma.

In the pre-crisis period nearly all Roma we interviewed had spells of employment, some of longer duration, others short and interrupted. This might suggest that when general employment context is better, preferences of many Roma shift towards employment as wages are on average higher, but also that employers might be more willing to employ Roma under the situation of more tight local labour markets. The older generation of Roma has a tradition of employment in local glass production and decoration factory as well as in agriculture; some employers continue to employ both skilled (glass production) and unskilled Roma (forestry work). In public sector, employment opportunities for Roma exist in the positions of field social workers and teacher’s assistants; due to formal education criteria but also crony practices, these are not always filled by Roma. While education requirements are a barrier for Roma who are typically less educated, we also found that it has generated incentives for Roma women to gain education in view of getting these employment positions once they qualify.

From the available ALMP measures employers used on a larger scale only graduate practice. High administrative burden and risks attached to the commitment to keep workplace after the period of support made employers not to participate more extensively in the schemes.

Local Strategies which were based on a complex approach have not been successful due to implementation hurdles. A more direct positive impact was therefore delivered by mainstream employment policy framework. Local Strategies nevertheless entailed the most explicit elements of ecological sustainability by including projects aimed at municipal waste collection and recycling.

Discrimination in the labour market entry and also on-the-job is widely spread. Public institutions also sometimes make decisions reflecting ethnic sorting. While facing discrimination frequently and implicitly even in the interactions with public bodies, Roma never initiate formal complaints.

The field work generated a series of recommendations, some of which were directly offered by our interviewees. We list them in no particular order below.

Recommendations

- Public works have been highlighted as a preferred model to activation works; they resulted in formal employment contract and entailed more meaningful jobs and higher pay; one of the suggestions included a system which would combine activation works and public works whereby public works would represent a “graduated” options;
- Anti-flood measures are viewed positively by all stakeholders as a more meaningful alternative to activation works. The participants several times mentioned and praised the possibility to receive meal vouchers;
- The current design of Local Strategies of Comprehensive Approach does not enable cross-municipal cooperation and the system in essence makes localities compete against each other; this precludes more systemic and comprehensive micro-regional approach that would enable strategic planning going beyond the village (“synergy rather than competition”);
- The partnership approach is very useful as a networking and information-sharing platform; Roma NGOs are poorly integrated in the Partnership for Social Inclusion, also due to difficulties to cover annual fees; allowing participation in the Partnership free of charge to institutions with their budget below a certain threshold would enable and support involvement of Roma NGOs;
- It is important to motivate and enable second-chance education as an alternative to subsidized employment without losing access to benefits/income (the current system does not allow day-time/full-time study and enrolment in education leads to a loss of benefits);
- Better education outcomes of Roma/socially deprived families could be supported by granting child-related benefits also for children in secondary education; child-related benefits are only available for primary school children and in villages where children need to commute this disincentivizes families to send children to secondary schools because they cannot afford it;
- Co-locating the offices of field social workers with other municipal offices is a good practice which gives visibility and credit to their work;
- Labour offices currently fail to provide any assistance to marginalized communities and serve mainly as administrators rather than mediators, job brokers, advisers, or consultants; a presence of Roma in labour offices could facilitate provision of more targeted services taking into account specificities of Roma communities;
- Long-term unemployed need more direct support in their transition to employment, a position of social tutor or social supervisor could be established, possibly located in labour offices and tasked with helping employees to overcome short-term difficulties which might otherwise lead to absenteeism (administrative duties, family issues, etc.);

- Projects whose benefits and effectiveness are demonstrated in practice should become parts of the system and be provided stable financing and human capital capacity, the lack of which often leads to stoppages in the provision of services, such as field social work;

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