

# EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

## “Roma access to decent and sustainable employment in Slovakia”

### Introduction

This report was prepared by Roma Advocacy and Research Center which has long been dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organization contributes to the formation of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalized localities.

The main objective of the report is to describe access to decent and sustainable employment for Roma in Slovakia. We have chosen secondary analysis as a method for the elaboration of the report, analysing documents, research studies and public policies in the field of employment. Secondary data analysis is a useful tool for comparing studies and data collected by other researchers. In the process of secondary analysis of research data, we analysed the results that show the access to decent and sustainable employment for Roma. It is important to note that some data in the analyses are based on ascribed ethnicity, or data from the Atlas of Roma Communities<sup>1</sup>, as it is not possible to collect data based on ethnicity in Slovakia and nor unemployment statistics are disaggregated by ethnicity. We have supplemented the secondary analysis with information that we have gathered over many years of research work.

#### ✓ *Socio-economic situation of the Roma*

The Roma live in Slovakia in different socio-economic conditions. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities<sup>2</sup> about 400 thousand Roma live in Slovakia, of which 46.5% of Roma live integrally among the majority population in the same socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in settlements within the municipality, 23.6% live in settlements on the outskirts of the municipality and 18.4% live in segregated communities. Most Roma communities are in the Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov regions. Most of the settlements in which marginalized Roma live are rural, with a smaller proportion located in urban areas. In these regions we find the largest number of segregated Roma communities, in which several disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Atlas of Roma Communities is a settlement-based survey of the living conditions of Roma in Slovakia.

<sup>2</sup> In 2019, another geographical survey of Roma communities took place. However, due to the use of a different methodology in the detection and subsequent inaccurate interpretation of the data, we do not draw this data.

<sup>3</sup> Mušinka et al, *Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013* (Bratislava: Regional Centre UNDP in Bratislava, 2013), available at: [https://www.minv.sk/?atlas\\_2013](https://www.minv.sk/?atlas_2013)

In the light of several research findings<sup>4</sup>, experts agree that the area of employment is one of the most crucial areas for the inclusion of excluded groups, as their inclusion in the labour market and subsequent access to adequate wages is a key factor in lifting them out of poverty. Getting a decent-paying job means breaking out of the cycle of dependence on welfare or other state support, while strengthening one's own social capital<sup>5</sup>.

## Roma access to decent and sustainable employment

### ✓ *Where do the Roma work?*

The employment rate of persons from marginalised Roma communities (MRC) has a long-term upward trend, but still lags significantly behind the level of the general population.<sup>6</sup>

Data from the EU SILC\_MRC and EU SILC surveys allow comparing the employment situation in both populations, i.e. in marginalised Roma communities and in the majority society. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that working people from MRC are more likely to be employed in sectors sensitive to changes in the economic cycle (e.g. construction or services). In the event of a recession or economic crisis, they are thus at a higher risk of losing their jobs.<sup>7</sup>

Around 12% of all officially employed persons from the MRC work less than 30 hours per week. This proportion is the same among both men and women from the MRC. In the case of integrated Roma, 7% of all employed persons worked less than 30 hours per week, with some gender differences (5% of men and 11% of women). Within the total population, 2% of those employed work less than 30 hours per week; for men, the figure is 1% and for women 3%.

71% of those from the MRC working less than 30 hours per week said they would like to work more but have not yet been able to find full-time employment; among the integrated Roma, 41% and 25% of the total population mentioned this reason. Thus, people from the MRC are more likely to be employed part-time, but this is much less likely to be the result of choice compared to those in the general population. Regarding the individual types of employment, the most frequently reported occupations in the MRC population as well as among the integrated Roma were construction, manufacturing, cleaning and care services.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: OECD. 2019. Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic 2019 or Kahanec, M. a kol. 2020. The social and employment situation of Roma communities in Slovakia.

<sup>5</sup> Havířová, Z. 2022. Vylúčenie z trhu práce v kontexte protirómskeho rasizmu. Pomáhajúce profesie, roč. 5, č. 2. p 40-54, available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367246046\\_Vylucenie\\_z\\_trhu\\_prace\\_v\\_kontexte\\_protiriomskeho\\_rasizmu](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367246046_Vylucenie_z_trhu_prace_v_kontexte_protiriomskeho_rasizmu)

<sup>6</sup> Hidas, S. a kol. 2022. Vplyv pandémie na marginalizované rómske komunity, available at: [https://www.mfsr.sk/files/archiv/22/2022\\_1\\_Vplyv-pandemie-na-MRK\\_final.pdf](https://www.mfsr.sk/files/archiv/22/2022_1_Vplyv-pandemie-na-MRK_final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC\_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at: [https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka\\_sprava\\_eu\\_silc\\_mrk\\_2020\\_elektronicka\\_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417](https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417)

<sup>8</sup> Markovič, F.- Plachá, Ľ. 2020. Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania EU SILC\_MRK 2020. USVRK, 2020, available at:

As of 30 April 2024, the registered unemployment rate in Slovakia is 4.9%. The highest unemployment rates are in the Prešov, Košice and Banská Bystrica regions, which are also the regions with the most Romani communities (Tab. 1). So it can be assumed that it is the Roma who are most at risk of unemployment in these regions.

Tab. 1 Basic indicators on unemployment in the Slovak republic by region (April 2024)

Territory	Balance of jobseekers at the end of the month	Economically active population	Number of available jobseekers	Unemployment rate calculated from the total number of jobseekers (v %)	rate of recorded unemployment (%)
Bratislava region	11 919	404 953	11 380	2,94	2,81
Trnava region	10 595	289 348	9 747	3,66	3,37
Trenčín region	10 955	290 400	9 803	3,77	3,38
Nitra region	14 358	349 493	12 607	4,11	3,61
Žilina region	15 598	364 287	13 623	4,28	3,74
Banská Bystrica region	28 285	318 177	21 863	8,89	6,87
Prešov region	41 014	395 634	33 397	10,37	8,44
Košice region	33 105	371 154	26 562	8,92	7,16
<i>Slovakia</i>	<i>165 829</i>	<i>2 783 446</i>	<i>138 982</i>	<i>5,96</i>	<i>4,99</i>

Source: Social Affairs and Family Labour Office, 2024

✓ **Are the Roma adequately supported to access employment?**

Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices are state administration bodies that carry out their activities in the field of employment services for clients who are job seekers and job applicants, students and their parents, citizens at risk of losing their jobs, employers, self-employed persons, foreigners, citizens of the European Union and their family members, i.e. any person moving on the labour market within the Slovak Republic or preparing to enter the labour market can be a client of the Office.

Therefore, the activities of the offices are also oriented towards clients and activities related to reducing unemployment and increasing employment. The primary activity of the employment services is the mediation of suitable employment for job seekers and job seekers, which entails keeping records of job seekers and job seekers; of vacancies and employers in their territorial district; deciding on the (non)inclusion of citizens in the register of job seekers and, consequently, on their removal from the register of job seekers, ideally for employment or for the purpose of starting self-employment.

[https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka\\_sprava\\_eu\\_silc\\_mrk\\_2020\\_elektronicka\\_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417](https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1563/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=16467433414994029417)

An important part of the activity consists of providing information to employers on the possibilities offered by the Employment Services Act, on their rights and obligations and monitoring compliance with these obligations.

Providing information and advisory services and professional consultancy services and implementing projects and programmes aimed at improving the labour market situation in the region are indispensable activities. Act No 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts, as amended, defines in Section 13 the competences of the Office, which include, inter alia, mediating suitable employment for jobseekers and jobseekers.<sup>9</sup>

In practice, however, job placement works quite differently. An unemployed person has to visit the employment offices because if he or she does not visit them, he or she is excluded from the register of jobseekers for non-cooperation. This means that the unemployed person loses benefits such as unemployment benefit payments or health insurance.

This is also the case if the unemployed person refuses the offered job for various reasons. There are known cases where a jobseeker has been offered a job 50 km away from where he or she lives, but the officials did not take into account how the person would turn up for the interview or how he or she would go to work for the first month without any money. We also have experience from our practice when Roma were offered jobs with low remuneration, and when the Roma refused the job, they were removed from the register of the labour office.<sup>10</sup>

A number of research findings suggest that the unemployed seek employment through channels other than the employment offices. The latter are very rarely used in job search or as a source of already found employment.<sup>11</sup>

#### ✓ ***Can the Roma access income support while unemployed?***

A person is entitled to unemployment benefit if he/she has been insured for unemployment for at least two years, i.e. 730 days, in the last four years before being registered as a jobseeker. Entitlement to unemployment benefit is conditional on a period of participation in unemployment insurance.

Entitlement to unemployment benefit commences on the date of inclusion in the register of jobseekers and expires on the expiry of a six-month 'unemployment support period' - this period does not include the period during which the insured person is not entitled to unemployment benefit payments for the following reasons: (a) the insured person is not entitled to unemployment benefit for the following reasons: sickness, sickness benefit, maternity, parental allowance.

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<sup>9</sup> Central Office for Labour, Social Affairs and Family: Competences of labour, social affairs and family offices, Available at: [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/sluzby-zamestnanosti/zakladne-informacie-o-sluzbach-zamestnanosti/kompetencie-uradov-prace-socialnych-veci-a-rodiny.html?page\\_id=12821](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/sluzby-zamestnanosti/zakladne-informacie-o-sluzbach-zamestnanosti/kompetencie-uradov-prace-socialnych-veci-a-rodiny.html?page_id=12821)

<sup>10</sup> Experience from the organisation's research

<sup>11</sup> Research project APVV-17-0141 entitled Analysis of barriers to access to employment opportunities for marginalised population groups: selected regions of Slovakia in socio-economic, geographical and socio-anthropological perspectives.

The jobseeker shall claim unemployment benefit at the branch of the Social Insurance Institution competent according to the place of permanent residence, where he/she shall submit an application and the documents necessary for the assessment of entitlement to unemployment benefit.

The amount of unemployment benefit is based on the average wage, so if the person was earning a reasonable wage, the unemployment benefit is based on the wage earned, or it is 60% of the average wage earned.

The insured person shall claim unemployment benefit on the basis of a written application, which shall be deemed to be a notice of inclusion in the register of jobseekers issued by the competent labour, social affairs and family office.<sup>12</sup>

Roma are subject to the same law as the majority, and Roma are usually assisted in applying for unemployment benefits by outreach social workers or community workers. They are from NGOs but they are also employed through national projects.

✓ ***Antigypsyism in accessing employment***

Roma face antigypsyism when entering the labor market not only because of their belonging to the Roma national minority but also because they live in a segregated environment. The segregated environment constitutes a significant barrier to entering the labor market because it does not create sufficient social ties with the majority population, which represents an important source of information and social networks in the search for employment.<sup>13</sup>

Research findings show that discrimination in entering the labour market is an insurmountable barrier for Roma because it is a structural problem that Roma cannot solve on their own. Employers reject Roma for a number of reasons, the main one being lack of education. However, even Roma who have sufficient education for the job they want also face discrimination when entering the labour market.<sup>14</sup>

✓ ***Adequate wages and the ethnic pay gap***

There are no research findings on this topic. However, our experience from the field shows that if Roma do not have a proper employment contract, they tend to be paid differently than the majority, or they are paid differently than the majority for the same work.

This applies to cases of black labour. There are also jobs for which only Roma used to be employed, such as digging canals or manual digging in construction sites. If such work is being done nowadays, it is mainly done by Roma.

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<sup>12</sup> Act No. 461/2003 Coll. on social insurance

<sup>13</sup> Granovetter, M. 1995. *Getting a job. A study of contacts and careers*. 2nd edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. ISBN 978.0-226-30581-3.

<sup>14</sup> Havířová, Z. 2022. Vylúčenie z trhu práce v kontexte protirómskeho rasizmu. Pomáhajúce profesie, roč. 5, č. 2. p 40-54, available at:

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Roma were mainly employed 20 years ago in the so-called technical services of the municipalities, which were mainly rubbish collection, but also cleaning in the towns, street sweeping and so on. However, when the law on material need was changed, the so-called activation work was added, which is carried out by the unemployed, and so the Roma also lost the classically paid work in the municipalities, because nowadays it is done by the unemployed in order to receive the material need allowance. And garbage collectors' jobs are also now middle-skilled jobs, so it is necessary to have a certain degree of education.

✓ ***Sustainable contracts, employment rights, working conditions***

Labour relations are governed by the Labour Code. If a person enters into an employment contract, he or she is subject to the employment relations of the Labour Code, i.e. he or she is protected. However, it happens that so-called black labour occurs, i.e. persons work without an employment contract and are therefore not protected by the Labour Code. This applies to everyone, whether Roma or majority.

It is also common for people to be employed as tradesmen, but not covered by the Labour Code, and then to be subjected to precarious conditions, whether in terms of payment or in terms of breaches of protection at work. However, there are no statistics to prove that this affects more Roma than the majority.

Nowadays, the Roma themselves are very careful not to be deceived and they know what rights they have at work. So we are no longer faced with the fact that they have a contract and are given worse conditions. Of course, there may be cases of individuals.

✓ ***Access to on-the-job training and career progression***

Education and training for the labour market of a jobseeker is, within the meaning of Section 44(1) of Act No.5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts, as amended by later regulations, the theoretical training or practical training of a jobseeker which is required for his/her application on the labour market and which enables him/her to acquire new professional knowledge, skills and abilities for the purpose of job placement in a suitable employment.

Training helps to adapt the skills of the labour force to the needs of the labour market, improves access to jobs and contributes to overcoming the socio-economic disadvantages caused by unemployment. Training of a jobseeker within the meaning of the Employment Services Act is not an increase in the level of education.

The Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family may provide a jobseeker with training within the meaning of Section 46(4) of the Employment Services Act, on the basis of an assessment of the jobseeker's abilities, work experience, professional skills, the level of education attained and medical fitness for work, in particular in the event of a lack of professional knowledge and professional skills, the need to change knowledge and professional skills in view of labour market demand and the loss of the ability to perform the work activity in the previous job.

The training is provided free of charge to the jobseeker on the basis of an agreement concluded with the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office. After completion of the training, the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office shall also provide the jobseeker with reimbursement of proven travel expenses for transport and reimbursement of accommodation and boarding expenses within the meaning of Act No 283/2002 Coll. on travel allowances, as amended.

A jobseeker who is participating in education and who is a parent caring for a child before the start of compulsory school attendance or a person under a special regulation who is caring for a child before the start of compulsory school attendance may be granted an allowance for services for a family with children by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family after the end of the course, if he or she applies for this allowance in writing, up to a maximum of EUR 54,00 per month for one child, and up to a maximum of EUR 42,00 per month for each additional child.<sup>15</sup>

If the employer is inclusive and open-minded, the Roma employed by the employer have the opportunity to receive additional training. This is very common with foreign owners in Slovakia, who send their employees for training in their mother factories and largely do not differentiate whether the employee is Roma or of a different nationality. The problem, however, is in the case of national projects, most of which are structured in such a way that, although they employ Roma, they do not offer them further personal and educational development.

If Roma workers prove that they are responsible and promising, the employer will provide them with career development, training and further education so that they can advance at work, or so that they can stay at work if technology changes, etc. For example, one Roma nurse was so good at her job that her employer sent her to various training courses until she eventually became head nurse in one of the wards in the hospital.

✓ ***Roma representation in trade union structures***

The Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic is a voluntary association of trade unions and their equal trade union associations in the Slovak Republic, which have come together to defend the rights and legitimate interests of trade union members - trade unionists. The basic aim is to contribute to the development of freedom, social justice and solidarity so that every employee can lead a meaningful life while fully developing the personality and abilities of every man or woman, with the guarantee of human and civil rights within a democratic society, based on the principles of a socially oriented market economy.

The aim is to bring together trade unions and trade union associations to defend the rights of trade unionists and to promote their economic, social, cultural and other interests and needs arising out of or in connection with the exercise of their employment and occupation. The Confederation of Trade Unions represents everyone, regardless of ethnic minority. Trade unions and their documents prohibit discrimination as part of the law. Roma are part of trade unions in workplaces because they know that the union represents their rights in case their employer violates them.

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<sup>15</sup> Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services

### ✓ ***Antigypsyism and discrimination in employment***

Roma who face antigypsyism in the workplace mostly resolve their problems immediately with a manager in the workplace. Currently, however, the occurrence of antigypsyism in the workplace is very rare. Once a Roma person has been in employment and has been working for a long time, he/she is treated the same as other persons.

Also, many employers are subject to the Labor Code and will not risk having trouble with the law. Our anti-discrimination law is very good and employees know they can take advantage of it. In addition, there are trade unions in large companies that employees can turn to if they feel they are being treated badly or differently.

A much bigger problem is that Roma face discrimination before entering the labour market or in the process of looking for a job. Here we see a high incidence of antigypsyism, open racism against Roma when they are looking for a job. For example, from the research that has been published: "In one company I went to ask and they told me straight out that they do not hire Roma" (male, 45 years old, West Slovak region).<sup>16</sup>

### ✓ ***Atypical employment forms***

Some Roma work as freelancers, which of course means that their labour rights are different from those of employees. For example, they are not entitled to holidays or sick leave reimbursement, despite the fact that they work in the same way as employees. The reason why they take up this form of employment is often because the employer does not want to have higher costs for the employees and therefore will offer them a job, but only if they work as a sole trader and pay social security contributions and health insurance for themselves. This is very disadvantageous, because a sole trader is supposed to have a form of freedom in that he or she is running a business and looking for different jobs, but if he or she is employed by one employer in this way, the trade licence loses its meaning, and the sole trader still has to bear the risks associated with such earnings. Often, however, they have no other option because they don't get an employment contract, so if they want to earn money, they set up a freelance business and work that way.

One of our clients told us that when he was looking for work on a regular contract, small employers told him that he could work as a freelancer, that they wouldn't give him a contract because they didn't know how long they would have the job for. So the client got a trade licence and started working as a sole trader. However, while he was working, he had an accident, so he had to stay at home. But just because he wasn't an employee, he wasn't entitled to money for the work injury and even while he was off work, he didn't get any money because he didn't have health insurance. And even if he had it, it's still a smaller amount than if he's a sick employee with a regular employment contract.

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<sup>16</sup> Havířová, Z. 2022. Vylúčení z trhu práce v kontexte protirómskeho rasizmu. Pomáhajúce profesie, roč. 5, č. 2. p. 40-54, available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367246046\\_Vylucenie\\_z\\_trhu\\_prace\\_v\\_kontexte\\_protiriomskeho\\_rasizmu](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367246046_Vylucenie_z_trhu_prace_v_kontexte_protiriomskeho_rasizmu)

Blacksmithing has disappeared as a source of livelihood for the Roma and only artistic blacksmithing has survived, but the Roma do not do this as a source of income. So, no, today the Roma no longer go around Slovakia with traditional crafts and sell their products. Also, the concept of traditional crafts is not explained correctly and in many cases is associated with negative stereotypes.

✓ ***Roma working abroad (temporarily or permanently)***

Roma who go abroad for work, whether seasonally or permanently, are much more satisfied with life outside the Slovak Republic. For example, research on Slovak Roma living in the UK shows that, despite any initial or ongoing difficulties, Roma are more satisfied and live better than in Slovakia. From their experience of looking for a job, they all appreciated the more humane, polite approach of officials or agency staff. The absence of discrimination or feeling of unequal treatment when looking for a job because of belonging to the Roma minority. Last but not least, all those who were looking for work appreciated its availability and flexibility.

Many also preferred to work through agencies, which offer the most common types of jobs that do not take place on a regular basis and the applicant registered with the agency waits to be notified by email or text message when and for how long he or she will next work. A number of respondents were positive about the opportunity to train for free through the Job Centre or through a given job in their chosen field.

And last but not least, all workers mentioned the possibility of advancement at work, which was very motivating for them in terms of higher income, but also improved status, increased self-confidence and further career development. None of the respondents mentioned motivation or reliance on social benefits. Several had some benefits or temporary help, but all were primarily trying to find and keep a job. A few had initially experienced short-term jobs or not very favourable working conditions. However, they agreed in their statements that they had subsequently managed to find better jobs.

Last but not least, on the basis of the interviews in the research, the authors identified several characteristics that the respondents identified as the most positive in relation to their job search compared to their experience in Slovakia: humane, polite, respectful approach of the officials of Job Centres or other public institutions, enough work even for people without education or knowledge of English, the opportunity to train in the area where the applicant finds a job, the willingness of employers to give chances and to judge a person on performance, discipline or attendance and not on whether they belong to a minority group, - supervision at work - an engine for higher performance and accountability for attendance, discipline and good work performance, as well as the opportunity for career advancement and pay increases.<sup>17</sup> The more negative aspects include, above all, the separation of families, the absence of one parent in the upbringing of children.

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<sup>17</sup> Gabčová, L. 2022. Job opportunities and job search tools. What have roma experienced in Slovakia and how are they. Prognostický ústav SAV. PP - FAR, 14, 2022, No 1. Available at: [https://www.prog.sav.sk/wp-content/uploads/Clanok-3\\_Lydia-Gabcova\\_JOB-OPPORTUNITIES-AND-JOB-SEARCH-TOOLS.-WHAT-HAVE-ROMA-EXPERIENCED-IN-SLOVAKIA-AND-HOW-ARE-THEY.pdf](https://www.prog.sav.sk/wp-content/uploads/Clanok-3_Lydia-Gabcova_JOB-OPPORTUNITIES-AND-JOB-SEARCH-TOOLS.-WHAT-HAVE-ROMA-EXPERIENCED-IN-SLOVAKIA-AND-HOW-ARE-THEY.pdf)

### ✓ ***Job creation and (social) entrepreneurship***

Creating jobs that are accessible to Roma in Slovakia is a serious problem that is linked to deepening segregation. Over the years, a parallel system of jobs that are filled exclusively by Roma has developed. We are talking, for example, about health assistants or local civil order services. These positions are filled by Roma and do not offer them any further development opportunities. These positions are funded by the EU through national projects. The problem is that these positions and job opportunities have been created in segregated localities, but it is suspected that they rather contribute to increasing segregation, as the clients of these services have no contact with mainstream services. And the employees themselves do not integrate into existing professions because they do not receive any training that would help them to get a better job in a professional field.

In Slovakia, social entrepreneurship is regulated by Act No. 112/2018 Coll. on Social Economy and Social Enterprises and on amendment and supplementation of certain acts, as amended. The basic principle of social entrepreneurship is the operation of socially beneficial activities with the help of economic instruments. This means that it is still business first and foremost, but the underlying objective is to achieve positive social impacts, which makes the business activity meaningful not only for society, but often also for the workers of the business and the entrepreneur himself. Social entrepreneurship brings an ethical dimension and the principle of solidarity to business. The fields of social entrepreneurship are not limited. The business plans of many social enterprises respond to global challenges such as climate change, ageing populations, cyber-security, extreme poverty, and seek to contribute to their solution through activities implemented at local level. Through their activities, social enterprises often contribute to local development and improving the quality of life in both urban and rural areas.<sup>18</sup>

Some social enterprises do bring benefits to Roma because they help them gain skills, earn money and move into the regular labour market. One such example is the Wasco social enterprise - a laundry in Valaska, where several disadvantaged groups work together - Roma, single mothers, people released from prison, the disabled, etc. But unfortunately, some social enterprises rather preserve disadvantages and do not move Roma forward. There are really very few social enterprises that understand what they are actually meant to do and where their position is on the labour market, and they provide Roma with a space to acquire skills and practice so that they can develop further.

### ✓ ***National Roma Strategic Framework***

The NRSF wants to contribute to addressing these challenges through a number of measures and activities. The global objective for the priority area of employment is to increase employability and increasing employment of Roma, specifically those who are associated with the marginalized Roma communities (MRC). This is to be done by creating opportunities for their integration into the labour market. For the case of lack of qualifications as a barrier to entry into the labour market includes an activity aimed at supporting Roma girls in obtaining secondary education vocational education through three-year apprenticeship courses.

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<sup>18</sup> Act No. 112/2018 Coll. on Social Economy and Social Enterprises

The aim is thus combat stereotypes about the status of Roma women that are often associated with ineffective two-year apprenticeships. The authors of the AP assume that girls will first complete a two-year degree and then start another three-year degree. We believe that this activity will not be successful because Roma youth from poor backgrounds cannot afford to study in secondary school for five years. This is not realistic, especially because their goal is to complete at least compulsory schooling and get a job, start earning for family.

The intention to modify the decree on secondary vocational education seems much more acceptable, as stated in the second measurable indicator of the strategy. However, it is not known how the decree will be modified. For example, we think that an extension of the compulsory school attendance up to the age of 18. Young Roma would then have to study at three-year courses of study ending with a diploma.

In the context of promoting equal access to trades and businesses for people from the MRC, including social entrepreneurship through targeted support, the AP defines, for example, an activity aimed at the promotion of entrepreneurship for disadvantaged unemployed people, including NEETs, and a measurable indicator is the number of people setting up a trade. For this activity €16 million of EU funding is earmarked for this activity. However, such an activity requires that the target group to have at least minimum financial literacy and financial management skills, as well as an entrepreneurial spirit.

It is also important that those concerned have at least basic knowledge of taxation and accounting. We have already seen cases in the past where Roma have set up business, but due to their inability to pay the basic compulsory payments (health insurance, social security contributions, income tax) have fallen into a debt trap. Therefore we hope that the support will be aimed at helping the Roma concerned to achieve minimum competences in the area of entrepreneurship so that they avoid insolvency, which would lead to bankruptcy.

Activities related to the acquisition of digital skills, extension of advisory services through digital technologies in community centres, or the provision of integrated information services to young people under the banner of the Youth Guarantee ('Youth Guarantee') have their merits. However, we would have expected more attention towards changing employment legislation so that it systematically removes barriers to entering the labour market.

For example, there are no activities in the AP regarding the promotion of job mobility. This is despite the fact that we know from the available researches that a certain proportion of Roma from the MRC migrate to more economically developed regions of Slovakia in search of work and often migrate with their entire families. It would certainly be beneficial to set up a support mechanism for people who decide to move for work and to change the law regulating the mobility allowance.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Roma Civil Monitor, 2022: Monitorovacia správa občianskej spoločnosti o kvalite národného strategického rámca rovnosti, inklúzie a participácie Rómov na Slovensku. Available at: [https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RCM2-2022-C1-Slovakia\\_final\\_SK.pdf](https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RCM2-2022-C1-Slovakia_final_SK.pdf)

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The area of employment is one of the most important areas in society because it both provides income for the individual and forms the economic picture of the national economic unit. For the individual, employment represents the possibilities of obtaining an adequate income to meet living and social needs, and if this area is disrupted, the social status of the individual, the group and the national unit as a whole is also threatened. For persons facing multiple disadvantages, it is therefore important to know the barriers they face in order to remove them on a systemic basis.

Roma are one of these people, and it is important to know the barriers they face when entering the labour market so that they can be eliminated and so that a system can be created that enables Roma to apply for different jobs and to be present in different areas of production and services. Unfortunately, this is not the current situation, and we have been observing for several years now that it is mainly Roma from very poor localities who have difficulty finding employment in various areas. First of all, they face high levels of discrimination and racism, structural antigypsyism and segregation in all areas of work. Furthermore, parallel jobs are created in which social segregation is only cumulated and not conducive to inclusion. Last but not least, the state does not react adequately to the situations that arise and does not implement active labour market measures sufficiently.

Inclusion of people from marginalised Roma communities is an important area of our society in which we are still failing to improve the living conditions and status of Roma people from excluded localities. Our findings show that there is a link between spatial exclusion and poverty among Roma, as geographical and social segregation reduce the chances of better placement in the labour market as well as overall inclusion in society. Although topics such as desegregation and combating antigypsyism are not popular, systemic solutions need to be put in place because social disadvantage, poverty and discrimination are areas that Roma have not chosen to face as barriers that they want to face throughout their lives. Our society must take action to break down these systemic barriers until, finally, we can say that the process of inclusion is having positive results.

We therefore recommend the following:

- to reduce antigypsyism, it is necessary to break down stereotypes among employers and educate them about structural disadvantages
- building a system of mutual introductions between potential job seekers and employers as a way of overcoming the barrier of segregation
- raise awareness of violations of anti-discrimination law in access to employment
- various national projects in which new working professions are created for Roma need to be gradually integrated into existing professions through re-education

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