

**MUTUAL LEARNING PROGRAMME:
PEER COUNTRY COMMENTS PAPER - SERBIA**

How to diversify economic empowerment through social support
networks in breaking the cycle of Roma exclusion?

Peer Review on “Field social work and labour counselling within the schemes of
strategies combating unemployment of Roma”

Prague, Czech Republic, 25 – 26 November

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1 LABOUR MARKET SITUATION IN THE PEER COUNTRY

This paper has been prepared for a Peer Review within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides information on Serbia's comments on the policy example of the Host Country for the Peer Review. For information on the policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper.

Since 2005, Serbia has increasingly recognized the improvement of the position of the Roma population as a priority. The Ministry of Economy and Regional Development (MERD) has been responsive in structuring labour market measures targeting vulnerable groups and categories defined as the most vulnerable in terms of their employability. Improvements have been registered, especially in the establishment of institutional mechanisms focusing on Roma issues. Despite the fact that some results have been achieved, these lag far behind expectations. As in the case of the Czech Republic, the high incidence of Roma unemployment is conceived as both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion that is deeply rooted in systemic, institutional, cultural and socio-economic practices which are difficult to change. This suggests that though beneficial, structural measures alone are not enough to tackle this complex problem. Thus, in order to promote real change, in terms of increasing both employment opportunities and employability of Roma, all dimensions of social exclusion need to be understood and treated through coherent, integrated, and holistic approaches towards a welfare-mix logic.

Keeping in mind the interconnectedness of exclusion patterns, the EU's 2009 Progress Report on Serbia attests that: "Roma population continues to endure very difficult living conditions and frequent discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health care, employment and adequate housing"¹. Specifically in terms of the labour market, Roma are categorized as one of the three most vulnerable groups for employment and employability. Like in the Czech Republic, difficulties in measuring (un-)employment trends depend on inaccurate samples of the target group: the figure on registered Roma is significantly lower than their actual numbers² and data often relate to more integrated individuals. This suggests that the situation is more critical than reported. In 2009, the Labour Force Survey (LFS)³ revealed strong disparities between the Roma and the general population. In particular, it found employment gender gaps, which pinpointed widespread unregistered and exploited employment of the Roma population in the grey economy. The participatory studies Rapid Crisis Assessment, Assessment of Labour Market Measures, and the Strategy for Improvement of the Position of Roma in Serbia⁴ depict (un-)employment trends and types of non-formal and formal employment - where the majority of economically active Roma is engaged - as fields most affected by the crisis. The scenario emerging from the aforementioned sources provides evidence of the increasing disadvantaged and unfavourable position of Roma individuals in the labour market. To cope with this situation, the MERD developed active labour market policy measures including public works.

LFS findings and MERD's figures report the Roma unemployment rate at 48% (compared to 16.5% of the general population) with Roma men possessing more than twice the unemployment rate (68.2%) of women (28.5%).

¹ EU Serbia 2009 Progress Report, page 19,

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/olacrf/20091014Elarg/SR_Rapport_to_press_13_10.pdf

² Number of registered Roma is ca. 108 000; however it is estimated that there are between 250.000 and 500.000 people

³ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/lfsurvey/lfsurvey.list?p_lang=en&p_country=XS <http://www.merr.gov.rs/arhiva/?lang=cir#>

⁴ <http://www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs/dokumenti/roma/strategija%20za%20web%20en.pdf>

<http://www.inkluzija.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Impact-of-financial-crisis-on-the-labor-market-and-living-standards.pdf>

http://www.crnps.org.rs/xdoc/arhivavesti/Procesna_evaluacija_javnih_radova_finalni_izvestaj.pdf

Table 1: Vulnerable Roma employment shares (age 15-64), %		General population %	Roma %
Status on the labour market: comparison between the general population and Roma population	Employed	71.4	53.2
	Owners of entrepreneurships	7.2	4.0
	Self-employed	3.8	34.3
	Helping household members	7.5	3.4
Formal employment		65.1	16.5
Non-formal employment		34.9	83.5
Vulnerable employment		28.6	46.8

The participatory research employed in the Rapid Crisis Assessment shows that the crisis mostly affected vulnerable groups and their status in the labour market, thus exasperating the vulnerability and exclusion of Roma in the following manner:

- Low education levels (now aggravated by the increase in schooling costs and textbooks) restrict Roma engagement in daily waged work, which in the meantime dropped in demand;
- Roma workers in daily salaried employment are more likely to be dismissed (increased discrimination and escape-goat strategy effect, typical of crisis situations);
- Turn-over in the grey-economy, in which Roma mostly engage and on which they rely, decreased;
- Price of and demand for secondary raw materials - representing the primary revenue source for Roma-dropped.

The efforts of the National Employment Services (NES) in this respect, focused on the implementation of active labour market measures such as: subsidies for self-employment of Roma; subsidies for employers and public works evaluated as a crisis intervention in-between social measures and active labour market programs (ALMP). While employment policy measures are well structured, their effective implementation has unveiled challenges: the unpreparedness and inability of NES branches to reach target groups; insufficient inter-ministerial cooperation for an integrated approach; Roma's lack of trust in the public administration. A recent attempt to tackle these systemic downfalls resulted in the consensus MERD reached with five Ministries to integrate social and employment measures through specific actions by outreach teams active in employment promotion. This project is supposed to decrease the distance between the Roma and public institutions and implement more non-formal approaches such as job-caravans, which best suit the Roma population in Serbia.

2 ASSESSMENT OF THE POLICY MEASURE

Serbian employment policy measures included in the National Employment Strategy 2005-2010 focused on ALMP including public works. This section provides an overview of the implemented measures, underlining their strengths and weaknesses and drawing parallels with the Czech Republic example focusing on field social work and labour counselling.

Reference Institutional Bodies for the improvement of the position of Roma in the labour market

The *Council for the Improvement of the position of Roma* was established in 2008 as a government body to harmonize coherent policies for the improvement of the position of Roma. One of the crosscutting documents produced by the Council is a Strategy for the improvement of the position of Roma, guiding the work of the Roma action plans of established working groups, within line Ministries.

Improving the position of Roma in the labour market

One of the first priorities of the MERD in 2009 was the development of a database of unemployed Roma that would facilitate the collection of evidence and provide quantitative measurement of the unemployment phenomenon within the Roma population. This action was promoted to bridge formal and informal data on the number of Roma in Serbia. Challenges in information collection arose also because of the improper definition of Roma. On one hand, vulnerable Roma living in settlements often prefer to remain invisible by public administration, whose intentions they constantly question. On the other, a number of mainstreamed Roma living in urban settings do not declare themselves as Roma. This is a phenomenon occurring when integration-assimilation is fostered by the mainstream, thus entailing the loss/rejection of cultural background and identity of origin.

Roma in the active labour market policy measures and programs

The MERD through NES, started developing employment measures within the national employment strategy 2005-2009 that targeted different groups and especially those identified as the most vulnerable in terms of employability. Up to 2009, measures were not affirmative-action programs in the sense that Roma were not directly and specifically targeted, but were included in the broader category of target groups. The ALMP measures included the following:

- Programs for the promotion of self-employment – entailed the delivery of partial financial assistance for setting up entrepreneurs. Enrolment in this line of action had, as expected, the least turnout of Roma who pursued partial financial assistance. Some of the explanations for this include: choice of information channels used by NES; the cost-benefit pragmatic calculation that lead Roma back to non-formal employment; the limited realm of jobs in which Roma can be engaged. Despite the poor turn-out in 2009, data for 2010 shows an increase in the number of Roma candidates interested in attending the entrepreneurship training, a precondition for further selection (see table below).
- Public works – employed, amongst the measures, the highest number of Roma people. According to the “Process Evaluation of Public Works in Serbia”⁵ this measure emerged in-between social and active labour market measures programs. Public works functioned as a buffer during the economic crisis, produced useful results for communities and created short-term employment for the most vulnerable categories. However, their results ceased with the end of the program itself and long-term employment was not achieved. In fact, public firms and enterprises did not sufficiently reconfirm contracts to workers after the end of the program.

⁵ www.inkluzija.gov.rs/.../Procesna-evaluacija-javnih-radova_finalni-izvestaj.doc

- Subsidies for employers – were and are supposed to increase the motivation of potential employers to formally engage Roma workers. It is still too premature to assess the impact and outcomes of this measure, since the 2-year program is still on going and employers are supposed to guarantee formal contracts to employees for at least the whole duration of the program. However, resistance from potential employers in employing Roma was registered already.
- Qualification training programs included the earning of elementary school degrees and vocational training for hairdressers, auto body shops, painters, etc. NES implemented this project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Andragogy and Pedagogy and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

Table 2: Numbers of Roma participants in employment measures	2009		First 5 months of 2010	
	Total	Women	Total	Women
Information campaign	4.968	2.191	2.855	1.278
Development of Individual Employment Plan	5.910	2.351	8.752	3.677
Training for active job-hunting	297	134	444	191
Employment fair	778	281	543	205
Training and vocational training	88	17	68	22
Entrepreneurship training	120	47	397	113
Information and counselling on entrepreneurship	233	83	610	167
Subsidised self-employment	79	25	120	36
Subsidised employment	125	52	149	43
Employment in public works	590	125	331	75

Challenges encountered during implementation of Roma employment measures

Overall, the measures implemented so far in Serbia were somewhat beneficial, especially in unveiling the multi-dimensional issue of Roma employment. However, their limited impact can be linked to the “blindness” of the measures themselves and their focus on public works rather than on entrepreneurship and training⁶. These downfalls are also attributable to: overall lack of operational knowledge of the target group and the sectoral and rigid systemic functioning of NES; insufficient levels of minority institutional mainstreaming measures (e.g. almost total absence of Roma representatives working in the NES). In short, one of the main challenges remains the low level of motivation within the Roma community that also depends on:

- Information channels (pro-Roma and Roma NGOs) used by NES to reach Roma communities;
- NES branches’ formal/static approach; socio-cultural blindness in communication and functioning;
- Lack of institutional cross-sectoral communication/harmonization; e.g. loss of social benefits such as material and child assistance in case of formal employment;
- High numbers of contacted Roma lack the pre-requisites (basic documentations) to participate in the programs and the economic means to obtain them;
- Pragmatic risk and cost-benefit calculations often leading Roma back to non-formal employment; e.g. very low cost-benefit evaluation of the payment of the social welfare and social insurance.

Affirmative action 2010 Roma active labour market measures

The 2010 action plan for Roma employment foresees specific employment measures directly targeting the Roma population. The measures resemble the ones implemented in the previous years: incentives for self-employment, subsidies for employers, and functional job-trainings. This time, in order to increase the impact of the measures, MERD will: strengthen cooperation with the NGO sector; raise the awareness of NES branches; promote

mobile teams reaching Roma communities and deliver more culture-specific trainings focusing on traditional jobs and crafts. Furthermore, MERD reached cooperation agreements with the Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports, Human Rights and Minorities and of Labour and Social Policy on specific outreach actions in youth employment. The MDGs funded outreach multidisciplinary teams (job-caravans) are better equipped to mobilise Roma communities through the increased responsiveness of diversified actors towards specific Roma issues.

Comparisons to the Czech Republic:

Similarities between Serbia and the Czech Republic can be traced both in terms of the socio-economic status of the Roma population and the institutional functioning and sectorial approaches. More specifically, both countries are facing similar challenges while elaborating criteria defining the “Roma”. This difficult partly derives from strict and homogeneous European definitions of nationality. The latter has been identified up until recently, with “ethnicity and cultural backgrounds” conceptualized more in genetic than cultural terms. Besides such commonalities, institutional responses to similar challenges, vary in conceptual approaches in the two countries.

Despite their internal differences and peculiarities, Roma in both countries share the status and conditions of socio-economic, cultural and political exclusion. This is embedded in complex and interconnected dynamics where both individuals and institutions share responsibilities. In fact, often institutions reflect a mainstream trend that often re-creates patterns of exclusion and deepens dependency relations (e.g. welfare transfers). On the other hand, Roma have developed an adaptive closed system that to some extent exploits mainstream structural measures, towards which they project their suspicion and detachment. The resulting insufficient space for mutual interactions increases the gap and reinforces the divide between the mainstream and the Roma societies.

Differences in terms of employment measures between the two countries are based on the selection of an “advantaged standpoint”. The latter magnifies, over the others, a specific dimension of exclusion, which in turn becomes a lens of interpretation that dictates the predominant approach. The Czech system focuses on social approaches widely implemented by the NGO sector, scarcely measurable and failing to produce pro-active alternatives to dependency patterns. The Serbian experience is based on economic empowerment implemented by (government) NES and its branches. These have often been operating in isolation, regardless of the existing differences in the socio-cultural and economic milieu and in the systems of meaning of the target groups. The two approaches, lenses of interpretation, should be harmonized and integrated, as the author Roman Krištof points out: “the only sensible approach to the integration of “Roma” in the labour market lies not only in initiatives focusing on providing better access to employment, but in combining educational, housing and welfare policies in order to increase “Roma” employability”⁷. This also entails the adoption of a cross-sectoral and diversified approach in which a variety of stakeholders, ministries and local actors participate, targeting - through more sustainable employment and socio-economic solutions - both whole communities and vulnerable groups.

⁷ Host Country paper by Roman Krištof, Peer review on “Field social work and labour counselling within the schemes of strategies combating unemployment of Roma”, Czech Republic, 25 – 26 November 2010
Should field social work and labour counselling be separated from ethnically defined Roma issues?

3 ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS FACTORS AND TRANSFERABILITY

The mainly social (Czech Republic) and economic (Serbia) approaches find a locus to integrate and harmonize through the Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities implemented in the Czech Republic since 2008. In fact, the Agency can adopt a more holistic and sustainable definition of “social inclusion”, that in the specifics entails the recognition and understanding of different perspectives, dimensions and attributes of employment and employability of Roma. This model can also become a mechanism in the process of establishment of the welfare-mix in the planned Serbian system of integrated service delivery targeting specific Roma needs and general ones. This holistic model can be transferred to already existing mechanisms and institutions in Serbia such as the inter-government Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Team that would thus better integrate top down with a bottom up mechanism through the establishment of local branches. Social entrepreneurship, inclusive education, outreach teams and minority mainstreaming would be priority areas of work.

Added values, roles of the Agency for social inclusion as adapted to the Serbian context

One of the main purposes of social inclusion branches in municipalities would be to diminish the distance and the divide between Roma and non-Roma communities and institutions. Thus, social, economic, cultural, educational, health and housing issues would be treated from a “mainstream” and a “Roma” specific viewpoint. The branches would increase “cultural mediation” drawing from the experience of “job-caravans” and outreach teams, joining the local and national levels through bottom-up and top-down communication mechanisms. The branches would then link together on concrete projects and actions the existing local institutions and stakeholders such as: Centre of Social Work, NES branches, schools, health services and hospitals, urban and spatial planning bodies, NGOs, local authorities. For example, two of the main areas of work of the Agency would be **social entrepreneurship** and **minority mainstreaming**. Social entrepreneurship is one of the EU well-established socio-economic models that Serbia considers as the most promising for the social inclusion of the Roma. The branches could both: act as a catalyst of social entrepreneurship knowledge and practices; further study culturally sensitive ways in which this socio-economic paradigm can be applied successfully in Roma communities and accepted by local governments. Furthermore, the branches could also be an important mechanism facilitating **minority mainstreaming** that entails the empowerment of Roma representatives to access institutional decision-making bodies. The mobility of the agency, its closeness to both Roma and communities at large (also visible in the staff structure), its culturally sensitive approaches and methodologies of work (e.g. social entrepreneurship), would represent its values and operational functions.

Existing institutions as an enabling environment for the establishment of the Agency

Council for the improvement of the situation of Roma; line Ministries through strategies, action plans and work-groups for the improvement of the situation of Roma in specific policies/fields; Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction; Roma Decade; platform of NGOs supported by the Team for Social Inclusion for the elaboration of social entrepreneurship models; NES and NES branches; network of Social work centres; institution of Roma mediators in the health and education system.

Challenges, areas that need improvement

- Improvement of communication and cooperation mechanisms amongst and between sectors at the institutional levels (Ministries, central and local-governments, NGOs and GOs).
- Establishment of GO crosscutting and cross-sectorial operating mechanisms/bodies as main referents and responsibility holders.
- Increased efforts to recruit qualified Roma in public administration, NES and business sector

- Harmonization of policy measures regarding Roma and vulnerable groups, e.g. formal employment precludes the access to welfare transfers (material and child assistance).
- Improvement of good governance mechanisms and practices at the local and central level.
- Fluidity of actions of the agency could be hindered by the heaviness of public administration processes and by the inclusive process.
- The number of diverse actors and institutions need to be clearly defined and include objectives, scope of work, competencies and mandates transparently elaborated to avoid overlapping.

4 QUESTIONS

1. Which one is the main referent body for the Agency? Is the referent a cross-sectorial government body, such as the Serbian Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Team ? Or is it a line Ministry? Who are the representatives of the Agency? To whom do they report?
2. How does the Agency reach sustainability?
3. What are the challenges the Agency faces in Roma and non-Roma communities at large? What are the first results obtained?
4. How will the Agency operate in order to increase the participation of Roma stakeholders in decision-making positions also within the structure of the Agency itself?
5. How will the Agency join the socio-economic needs of vulnerable groups (underclass) with the cultural diversities existing within the underclass defined predominantly as an economic category? This question suggests that the “underclass” is not a homogeneous group and that while sharing commonalities, needs and goals, it also presents peculiarities in terms of cultural background, aspirations, modalities in conceptualizing reality and functioning.

ANNEX 1: SUMMARY TABLE

Labour market situation in the Peer Country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifically in terms of labour market, Roma are categorized as one of the three most vulnerable categories for employment and employability. The 2009 Labour Force Survey (LFS)⁸ discloses data referring to the Roma population that indicate: strong disparities between the Roma and the general population; employment gender gaps; widespread unregistered and exploited employment in grey-economy. LFS findings and MERD figures report the Roma unemployment rate as 48% (compared to 16.5% of the population at large) with Roma men possessing more than twice the unemployment rate of women. As found by the Rapid Crisis Assessment through focus groups, the crisis mostly stroke vulnerable groups and their status in the labour market, thus exasperating the vulnerability and exclusion of Roma. While employment policy measures are well structured and focused, their effective implementation has unveiled challenges: the unpreparedness and lack of mobility of NES branches to reach target groups; insufficient inter-ministerial cooperation for an integrated approach; Roma's lack of trust in the public administration.
Assessment of the policy measure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 2009, measures were not properly affirmative-action programs; e.g. Roma were not directly and specifically targeted, but were included in a broader target group referring to the identified most vulnerable categories in terms of employment and employability The active labour market policy measures included public works, self-employment promotion, qualification training and subsidies for employers. One of the main challenges remains the low level of motivation within the Roma community. Self-employment measures had the lowest turnout. Public works attracted the highest number of Roma participants and functioned as a buffer during the crisis. However, they did not achieve long-term employment results. Affirmative action measures for 2010 include, beside the aforementioned programs, outreach multidisciplinary teams implemented through inter-sectoral agreement between MERD, Ministries of Education, Social Policy, Human Rights and Minorities. Employment Measures cannot alone solve the problem. Implementation strategies need to be improved through participation of target groups, NGOs and cross-sectorial approaches, cooperation amongst and between ministries, integration and harmonization of strategies.
Assessment of success factors and transferability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agency model could be transferable to existing mechanisms in Serbia such as the Social inclusion and Poverty Reduction team (that is an inter-government body). It would function as a "cultural mediation" body, drawing from the experience of "job-caravans", joining the local and national levels through bottom-up and top-down communication mechanisms, and culturally sensitive approaches. The agency would provide a unique opportunity to integrate approaches and spread inter-

⁸ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/lfsurvey/lfsurvey.list?p_lang=en&p_country=XS <http://www.merr.gov.rs/arhiva/?lang=cir#;>

sectorial cooperation.

- The agency could work on social entrepreneurship and minority mainstreaming.

Questions

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- How does the Agency reach sustainability?
- What are the challenges the Agency faces in Roma and non-Roma communities at large? What are the first results obtained?
- How will the Agency operate in order to increase the participation of Roma stakeholders in decision-making positions also within the structure of the Agency itself?
- How will the Agency join the socio-economic needs of vulnerable groups (underclass) with the cultural diversities existing within the underclass defined predominantly as an economic category? This question suggests that the “underclass” is not a homogeneous group and that while sharing commonalities, needs and goals, it also presents peculiarities in terms of cultural background, aspirations, modalities in conceptualizing reality and functioning.