

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

Is it possible to implement appropriate policies of social inclusion for Roma as a stigmatized and discriminated minority without regard to their ethnic identity?

Peer Review on “Supporting the Labour Market Integration of the Roma Community in the Czech Republic”

Czech republic, 25-26 November 2010

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Date: 25/10/2010



This publication is supported for under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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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 Slovenia'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.

The picture of the age structure, education and working activities for the Roma is significantly different from the majority population of Slovenia. The difference lies primarily in the fact that Roma are a very young population and their full-time employment is rare. Roma are traditionally settled in the region Prekmurje in the area of the Murska Sobota municipality and in the surroundings of Novo mesto in the Dolenjska region, living in isolated settlements on the outskirts of villages and towns¹. The largest number of Roma who immigrated from other places of the former Yugoslavia predominantly live in industrial centres. The socio-economic status of Roma and level of integration in mainstream society differs also among Roma communities in relation to various areas and municipalities. In the Prekmurje region, the socio-economic status of Roma is higher than in the Dolenjska, Posavje and Bela Krajina regions, as well as other regions with Roma populations. There are differences in the way of life, education, working habits, religious affiliation and customs between the so-called traditionally and non-traditionally settled Roma who mostly live in large cities (Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Jesenice, Velenje).

Compared with the demographic situation and geographical distribution of the Roma population in the host country, the most significant difference in Slovenia is that Roma live dispersed predominantly in the rural areas and not in the compact ghetto areas or slums in the suburbs of the biggest cities².

In general, the employment rate of Roma is much lower than that of the majority population in Slovenia. The majority of adult Roma in Slovenia are registered at the local offices of the Employment Service as unemployed persons, which estimate that more than 95% of them are unemployed. In September 2009, the employment offices registered 2,193 Roma, representing 2.5% of all registered unemployed persons in Slovenia (total number of unemployed persons is 96,672)³. In accordance with the regulation in the Personal data Protection Act (Ur. l. RS, No. 94/2007), this recorded number of Roma in the registers includes only those individuals who expressly wished to identify themselves as Roma. Due to sensitivity, the question about collection of data on ethnic affiliations and nationality is considered to be one of the most complex census questions. Although Roma are involved in education and training programs offered by Employment Offices, such questions do not in themselves contribute sufficiently to an increase in employment opportunities and adequate inclusion of Roma in social life. Problems in the employment of Roma and their role in the labour market in Slovenia have some specific characteristics which are similar to the situation presented in the Host Country Discussion Paper. The level of education of Roma is low; the majority did not complete primary education, which means that they are virtually illiterate. The main challenge in increasing regular Roma employment lies in how to overcome the lack of basic skills and functional illiteracy of the majority of unemployed members of the Roma community. In combination with different living habits and prejudices

¹ According to the official data in the 2002 Population Census number of Roma is 3246. Non official number is estimated to about 10 000 persons.

² Number of the inhabitants in Slovenia is 1.964.036. The Slovenian capital, Ljubljana has 270.568 inhabitants. Other major towns are Maribor (96.090), Celje (38.006), Kranj (36.604), Velenje (25.975), Koper/Capodistria (24.810), Novo mesto (23.090), Ptuj (18.331), Trbovlje (15.500), Kamnik (13.617), Jesenice (13.484), Nova Gorica (13.080), Domžale (12.336), Škofja Loka (12.099), Murska Sobota (11.723), Izola/Isola (11.380).

³ Registered unemployment rate in Slovenia (2009) is 9.1%.

on both sides, employers are reluctant to employ Roma job seekers. Regular employment is rare, often limited to public works and due to the temporary nature of the jobs. The combination of features that negatively effect Roma employability prevent them from successfully integrating into the labour market.

In regards to social welfare benefits, Roma are entitled to social security services under the same conditions as the rest of the population, but due to the specific way of life, low education level and high unemployment rate, the assertion of rights to social and family security is the main source of income for the majority of Roma families in Slovenia. Certain types of benefits that they can receive as citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, are legally bound to the status of long term unemployed persons, registered with Employment Offices. According to reports from these offices, some members of the Roma community register only for the enforcement of social rights, without underlying attempts to seek a job.

The economic crisis did not undermine the programmes for the improvement of the position of the Roma community in Slovenia or those aiming at the distribution of social benefits. Social assistance and funding of these measures and activities is ensured through various projects implemented within the EU structural funds for social cohesion, the European Social Fund and special earmarked funds from the Ministry for Labour and Ministry for Education. The economic crisis in general mostly affected young educated people seeking their first job, and older workers, as a result of bankruptcies of major enterprises in the transition period.

2 ASSESSMENT OF THE POLICY MEASURE

The strategic documents and policy measures adopted in the last two decades in Slovenia deal with the Roma community as an ethnic group with special needs for assistance for social integration, combined with activities for promotion of their ethnic identity and political participation. Compared with the policy measures described in the Host Country Discussion Paper, the major difference is that in Slovenia the basic principle of the policy measures is a combination of ethnic and social dimensions, which complement each other and are not mutually exclusive⁴.

The Roma community Act (Ur. I. RS, No. 33/2007) adopted in 2007, concentrated on proactive measures for the improvement of the situation of Roma and their effective social integration. Protection of the Roma ethnic community is based on the territorial principle, following the model of protection of the Italian and Hungarian national communities. Special rights are designed as collective rights and members of the Roma community have the legal status of a special ethnic group⁵. Political participation of Roma is sought as one of the key issues in all phases of adoption of programmes for Roma. The Law on Local Self-Government (Ur. I. RS, No. 51/2002) provides seats for Roma councillors in 20 municipalities, traditionally inhabited by Roma. Representatives of Roma elected the National Roma Council as a partner institution in shaping the models of policy measures and strategies for Roma. At a national level the Government Commission for the Protection of the Romany Ethnic Community has been formed. Governmental activities and special measures for Roma are elaborated as obligations of Ministries and governmental offices in the National program for Roma 2010-2015⁶. In contrast to the approach in the Host Country Discussion Paper, the government in Slovenia gives high priority to protecting the ethnic

⁴ On the contrary, the author of the Host Country Discussion Paper, suggests to separate “two incompatible approaches (social and national)”, p 13.

⁵ Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia stipulates: “The status and special rights of the Romany community living in Slovenia shall be regulated by law.”

⁶ The Government Office for Nationalities is coordinator of these activities. More information: <http://www.uvn.gov.si/>

identity of Roma in the process of social inclusion. The campaign 'Dosta', on the elimination of prejudices, was launched in November 2008, with Slovenia as the first EU Member State to join this international campaign. It includes various activities at national and local levels in Slovenia concerning the improvement of the image of the Roma people in the media and in public life in general.

In 2001, the first training workshop for staff of local employment services working with Roma job seekers, aimed at improving the employability and social inclusion of Roma, was held in Slovenia. Since then, a range of initiatives dealing with the improvement of employment possibilities for Roma has continued⁷. Lessons learnt from the original workshop confirmed the assumption that the issue of employment of Roma is closely interrelated with other fields of social inclusion. The most important qualitative changes and improvements of the situation of Roma in the labour market could be achieved by simultaneously increasing their educational attainment, vocational and professional qualifications, improvement of housing conditions, infrastructure in Roma settlements and awareness raising campaigns. The focus and central point in field work in multicultural societies is the acquisition and improvement of intercultural skills, education towards a more tolerant acceptance of diversity and a constructive discussion on outstanding issues that are related to inter ethnic and social relations. Such comprehensive and demanding work would require specific criteria in the employment of qualified personnel and systematic training for staff in social security or local employment offices. Field work and regular contacts with the clients from the Roma community should become one of the usual methods of their work. In the Host Country Discussion Paper the field work method is elaborated mainly within the competences of nongovernmental organisations.

According to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, two main types of programmes are implemented in this field. The first group contains programmes specifically targeted at Roma, including a large number of public works programmes aimed at the socialisation and integration of Roma in the local environment (for example, the "Roma for Roma" programme), promotion of self employment and creating new jobs within standard codification of national vocational qualifications. Recently, within the EU funded project, 30 Roma assistants were employed to work with Roma children in the school and in Roma settlements. Unfortunately, at the moment, their employment is limited to the three year project period. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, 2147 Roma were included in the measures within the Active Policy of Employment/ AEP. Due to the low level of education, the training of Roma for employment often include preliminary courses for the elimination of illiteracy and achievement of basic education within courses for the education of adults. Apart from these, individual development and prevention programmes for the integration of Roma are regularly co-financed within the framework of annual calls of the Ministry of Labour and Family and Social Affairs for applications from the NGO sector⁸.

The second group contains programmes for all vulnerable groups and is aimed at improving employability and social inclusion, creating jobs for vulnerable groups and ensuring gender equality. "Vulnerable groups" include those that are listed in the Operational Programme for Human Resources Development for the period 2007-2013, under "Equality of opportunity and promoting social inclusion" and preferential policies. These groups may include long-term unemployed persons older than 50 years, young people, especially first-time jobseekers, persons with disabilities and other disabled people, ethnic groups, refugees,

⁷ MARIC, Alina, BITU, Virgil, KLOPČIČ, Vera, TONELLI, Simon. *South East Europe regional project to promote employment opportunities for Roma : A Stability Pact Initiative supported by the Austrian government : training workshop for the staff of local employment services working with Roma job seekers : Workshop I - Slovenia (Novo mesto, 3-5 October 2001)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2001. 19 str, Ilustr.

⁸ In 2010 the Ministry of Labour /Directorate of Social Affairs dedicated funds in the amount of € 45.062.95 to support programs designed to improve integration of Roma at local level.

Roma, migrants, etc. The basic regulation in the area of social security is the Social Security Act (Ur. l. RS, No. 54/92, 2/2004, 3/07), which *inter alia* provides for the social security services, social welfare benefits, as well as the conditions and ways of exercising these rights. Cash benefits as provided by the Social Security Act and the Family Benefit Act (child allowance, parental allowance, assistance upon child birth) ensures the subsistence of Roma. Cash benefits are given to all Roma families who have children or no adult family members in employment and are bound to enter into a contract on resolving social problems. The contract is monitored on a monthly basis through certificates of class attendance for children of school age or pre-school age, or through attendance certificates from organisations of adult education or other similar educational organisations. After 2001, potential removal from the unemployed record, as a sanction in cases of non-compliance with the attendance contract, has influenced benefit recipients to actively seek employment or undergo relevant training. The departments of social security can establish eligibility for social welfare benefits. In the case of doubt about the proper use of social welfare benefits, an appropriated payment (food, schoolbooks, electricity) in the form of a delivery order is recommended; the latter is done not by payment of the money order which the beneficiary brings to the department of social security, but by direct payment to the beneficiary based on an agreement with him/her or by service of a particular amount of social welfare benefits to a Roma for the payment of an individual money order. The social welfare benefits are paid in such form only when the case involves families with a large number of members and those who are incapable of disposing of assistance by themselves (e.g., alcoholism).

3 ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS FACTORS AND TRANSFERABILITY

As is the situation in the host country as presented in the Host Country Discussion Paper, some initiatives targeted at the employment of Roma in Slovenia started within wider international programmes, tackling also the question of whether field social work and labour counselling should be separated from ethnically defined Roma issues. In the year 2006 the project "Vocational Informing and Advising for Roma" was conducted within the PHARE programme and co-financed by the Ministry for Education of the Republic of Slovenia. Project partners conducted a survey of educational and occupational interests on a sample of 774 economically active Roma between 15 and 45 years of age in Dolenjska, Bela krajina, Posavje, Kočevsko and Grosuplje. Data collected within the project show that the majority of Roma left school at the age of 11 or 12 years. However, one of the findings of the survey is that almost 60% of Roma are satisfied with their situation in general, and did not express a wish for further education or training. According to the information collected from public institutions, social welfare services, schools, local employment offices, an unemployed family of five members with no property receives 750 -800 Euro of social welfare benefits and child allowance per month. If one of the adult family members finds a job, they all lose such status and the right to social benefits. It is one of the main reasons why they are not motivated for further training or active job-seeking. Consequently, they tend to be engaged mostly in unorganised forms of work. Within this project a model and training program for the new national vocational qualification was prepared and carried out as a pilot project and 30 Roma coordinators were trained⁹. The primary objective of the pilot project was to engage Roma as coordinators in field work, to build a bridge between Roma communities and the majority population. In practice, their work was not straightforward. It often occurred that coordinators who began accepting more advanced norms and rules were faced with obstacles in their own environment and rejected by the Roma community.

⁹ At the completion of the project publication was published, which presents all project activities and results. ŽAGAR, Nada (ur.), KLOPČIČ, Vera (ur.). "Vocational Informing and Advising for Roma" *Poklicno informiranje in svetovanje za Rome - PISR: zbornik projekta*. Črnomelj: Zavod za izobraževanje in kulturo: = Institute for Education and Culture, 2006. 360 str., ilustr. ISBN 961-238-703-6.

One of the starting points, common to both countries is recognition of the importance of fieldwork as a useful tool and working method in the field of social inclusion, which should be used by NGOs and social and employment services. In Slovenia it was already established as a regular form of the work of social services and employment offices since 2001. In the context of individual treatment and contacts with clients, special programs were designed for the employment of members of the Roma ethnic group to overcome obstacles due to their unprivileged social position, low levels of education, lack of basic skills, etc. The Host Country Discussion Paper provides some examples, where especially in large cities, the administrators lack any realistic information about the actual situation of the families¹⁰. Also because of the differences in the demographic structure and dispersion of the Roma community in Slovenia, it is not often the case that staff in social services are at all aware of a client's identity, their actual needs and family status. The introduction of new professions for the employment of young Roma as assistants or coordinators in the public social and employment services contributed to the creation of conditions for multicultural dialogue and gradually increased the motivation within the group itself.

In the Host Country Discussion Paper, the creation of the (governmental) Agency for social inclusion in Roma localities is assessed as a viable outcome from the limited success of field work and labour counseling. In October 2010, the Decade Watch, an initiative of Roma activists supported by the Open Society Foundations and the World Bank, has issued *Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey*, its third report assessing government action toward implementing commitments made under the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015. The *Inter alia*, survey identified that a considerable proportion of experts in the Czech Republic (40%) assessed that the employment programs did not help at all to achieve the objectives of the action plan¹¹.

Taking into account the situation in Slovenia, experiences from practice and given a wide range of activities and already established network and partnership of governmental and non-governmental organisations working in this area together with representatives of Roma organisations in Slovenia (within a relatively stable funding scheme), the establishment of the new Agency dealing with inclusion of Roma in Slovenia could lead to a duplication of competences, having only a limited impact in practice.

Some other activities assessed in the Host Country Discussion Paper as potential success factors for transfer to other countries, for example the outcome of the work of non-governmental organisations and their input in formulating policies and measures in the field of social inclusion, are already implemented in Slovenia.

4 QUESTIONS

The first question concerns some inconsistencies regarding the approach towards the division of ethnic identity issues and measures in the field of social inclusion of Roma in the host country. The Host Country Discussion Paper suggests that social inclusion should be separated from ethnically defined Roma issues. It is not clear whether the separation of the ethnic dimension as a reference or criteria is recorded only as a fact from the practice of the non-governmental organisations which conducted field work in the host country, or it is considered as a recommendation for the work in the future also in shaping public policies for Roma in other areas of social life. However, it would be partly inconsistent with the frame and the title of the Agency, dedicated to social inclusion in Roma localities and with

¹⁰ These decisions are often taken on the basis of personal impression, and are therefore subjective. The Host Country Discussion Paper, p. 8

¹¹ Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey, page 95, Table A1.50

http://www.romadecade.org/decade_watch_results_of_the_2009_survey,

proclaimed objectives of the State assistance for social inclusion of Roma, which also cover cultural and educational projects.

The second question is related to the presentation in the Host Country Discussion Paper, where the creation of the (governmental) Agency for social inclusion in Roma localities is assessed as a success itself, worthy of transfer to other countries. Without sufficient information on working methods, contents of the projects or involvement of the Roma community, the Agency lacks verification of its results in practice. Apart from the reference to establishing a network, the Host Country Discussion Paper does not provide further information on any qualitative shift.

ANNEX 1: SUMMARY TABLE

Labour market situation in the Peer Country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, the Roma employment rate is much lower than that of the majority population in Slovenia. The majority of adult Roma in Slovenia are registered at the local offices of the Employment Service as unemployed persons, which estimate that more than 95% of them are unemployed. • In September 2009, the employment offices registered 2,193 Roma, representing 2.5% of all registered unemployed persons in Slovenia (total number of unemployed persons is 96,672). • The economic crisis did not undermine the programmes for the improvement of the position of the Roma community in Slovenia or the distribution of social benefits. • Social assistance and funding of these measures and activities is ensured through various projects implemented within the EU structural funds for social cohesion, the European Social Fund and special earmarked funds from the Ministry for Labour and Ministry for Education.
Assessment of the policy measure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategic documents and policy measures adopted in the last two decades in Slovenia deal with the Roma community as an ethnic group with special rights in need of assistance for social integration, combined with activities for promotion of their ethnic identity and political participation. • Compared with the policy measures described in the Host Country Discussion Paper, the major difference is that in Slovenia the basic principle of the policy measures is a combination of ethnic and social dimensions, which complement each other and are not mutually exclusive. • According to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, two main types of programmes are implemented in this field. The first group contains programmes specifically targeted at Roma, including a large number of public works programmes. The second group contains programs for all vulnerable groups and is aimed at improving employability and social inclusion, creating jobs for vulnerable groups and ensuring gender equality.
Assessment of success factors and transferability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As is the situation in the host country, some initiatives targeted at the employment of Roma in Slovenia started within wider international programmes. • In 2006 the project "Vocational Informing and Advising for Roma" was conducted within the PHARE programme and was co-financed by the Ministry for Education of the Republic of Slovenia. • Taking into account experiences from practice, and given a wide range of activities and already established network and partnership of governmental and non-governmental organisations working in this area together with representatives of Roma organisations in Slovenia within a relatively stable funding scheme, the establishment of a new Agency in Slovenia, modelled along the Czech lines, could lead to a duplication of competences, having only a limited impact in practice.

Questions

- Two questions concerning the approach towards the division of ethnic identity issues and measures in the field of social inclusion of Roma in the host country and clarification of the impact of the (governmental) Agency for social inclusion in Roma localities are posed.

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Decade Watch: Results of the 2009 Survey
http://www.romadecade.org/decade_watch_results_of_the_2009_survey