

NEW AVENUES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ROMA

In and around Vilnius and in two areas north and south of the capital, a new partnership is testing novel solutions to the vocational, and also the social, integration of Roma. What is extremely important is that Roma representatives are directly involved and they are making sure that many other members of that community have the opportunity to gain additional skills and to strengthen their existing capacities. All this is aimed at ensuring that these isolated individuals and groups can participate in the labour market and in wider public life.



Roma people in Lithuania have on average between 4 and 7 grades of school education which are much lower than those required for the school leaving certificate. In total, only 6 % have acquired any sort of a qualification. In terms of employment, 5 % of men and 0.7 % of women have permanent jobs. The majority of the Roma population in Vilnius lives in isolation from the mainstream society in the "so-called" Kirtimai Gypsies Camp. They are not willing to integrate into surrounding community and this tends to reinforce the negative stereotypes of Roma people, which the general public holds. Similarly, employers are reluctant or unwilling to recruit some of their workforces from the Roma community. However there are some signs of change, as now some Roma families, and especially those with younger parents, prefer to live outside the camp where they have easier access to shops and services.

One EQUAL DP with a very long name is tackling all of these problems head on. It is called "Romų integracijos į darbo rinką mechanizmo sukūrimas ir iš bandymas" and it is doing exactly what its name says: the Development of Support Mechanisms for the Integration of Roma into the Labour Market. Its work is very much in line with the Council's Recommendations on the implementation of Member States' employment policies.^[1]

"We knew about some positive experience in the more western Member States that had trained people to work as Roma social workers or their assistants," explains Romualda Navikaitė, who is the Director of the Lithuanian Children's Fund, *"and we decided to test similar approaches in three areas here in Lithuania."* The Lithuanian Children's Fund was joined in this endeavour by three government agencies, the Department of National Minorities and Immigration, the Social Workers Training Centre and the Ukmergė District Public Employment Service, two Roma organisations, the Lithuanian Roma Association "Gypsy Fire" and the Roma Community Centre, the Ukmergė District Municipality Administration's Employment Office and the Vilnius City Municipality Administration .

TRAINING TO IMPROVE CONTACT AND QUALIFICATIONS

The DP is working on two main fronts. The first is the training of Roma people to become Social Work Assistants. These assistants help to act as a bridge between social workers and the Roma community so that Roma can benefit from the DP's activities and mutual understanding and interaction between the Roma and the "host" society is reinforced. The second aspect of the DP's activities is the provision of training to Roma individuals with a view to increasing their vocational skills and opportunities.

The three areas are all very different in their nature and in the stage of development of the project. In the Ukmergė region, the local Roma are beginning to integrate into the local community, as most of them speak Lithuanian and have attended school. This is where the DP started its work and so activities in this region are quite well advanced. In Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the Roma are more isolated. There are problems in that some people in the camp are manufacturing and selling drugs and also houses have been built in the camp without planning permission and they have subsequently been demolished by the authorities. In general, there is a high level of mutual mistrust which the DP is now seeking to overcome. However, there are

Roma people living outside the camp in two other areas of Vilnius, Shnipishkes and Naujoji, where they are more integrated. The DP's work in these districts has produced much more effective contact between social workers and social work assistants. The third centre, Salcininkai, is a small town that has a lot of ethnic minority groups and where, in addition to Roma, there are Ukrainians, Polish, Russians and Byelorussians. While the infrastructure for the project has been established in both of these areas, there have been delays caused by lengthy public procurement procedures and these have interrupted the project's progress.

Launching a Cooperation Network and recruiting Social Work Assistants



Participants at a meeting called by the Ukmergė Coordination Network

The DP employed Sigitas Labanauskas as its regional coordinator in Ukmergė. While Sigitas is not from a Roma background, he grew up with, and knows, a number of people from that community. He gained his entrée into this community on the basis of these personal relationships and as he explains *"only three to four months later, I was being invited into Roma homes to discuss issues and problems and of course you begin to understand their culture even better,"* and he adds *"sometimes it's much more important to listen than to talk."* Lina Sukackienė, the DP Coordinator agrees that if you want the project to work you have to accept some of these cultural differences, *"for example, it's impossible to make an appointment in advance, when it's getting near to the start of the training, you have to phone everyone involved, and in some instances you have to go, put them in the car and take them directly to the training centre."*

Shortly after Sigitas' appointment, the DP employed an assistant for him called Zarina Michailovskaja and together they began an on-going search for potential social workers and assistants and they started to inform the Roma about the possibilities for future training and created lists of interested people. At the same time, they launched a Cooperation Network (CN) and they were joined in the initiative by six organisations that together signed a Cooperation Agreement. These were:

- The Municipality of Ukmergė Region;
- Ukmergė Branch of the Vilnius Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- Ukmergė Employment Office;
- Ukmergė Forest Rangers which is a public organisation;
- The S.Dičpetrienė Company;
- A car servicing and repair firm called Izobaros Auroservasas.

One of these partners, the Municipality of Ukmergė, provided an office in its social services centre for meetings of the CN and for the project to offer advice and information to Roma people. Two Social Workers and two Roma Assistants have played an important role in offering this type of support, although they had not at that point received any "official" training, as there were problems in finding a suitable training provider. However, they did have the opportunity to meet in Vilnius with a social work expert and the project manager and this provided them with a basic induction to their new roles. They only began their formal training when the courses for the Social Workers and their Roma Assistants finally started in March 2007, at the Vilnius Pedagogical University.



One successful candidate receives his diploma

The professional training is now under way at Vilnius Pedagogical University with 10 Social Workers and 10

Roma Assistants participating in the various courses. They are studying subjects like:

- Social Work;
- The Social Security System;
- Roma Culture and Lifestyle;
- Methods of Working with Minorities;
- Communication and Cooperation Skills;

They also explore the Assistant's Functions and Values and Social Partnerships.

Developing Individual Capacities and Motivation for Work and Self-employment

Another partner in the CN is the Ukmergė Branch of the Vilnius Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This organisation provides the vocational training courses and the original plan was to train 54 people and to offer them money for the meals that they needed when they attended the courses. The following courses were designed: Basic Computing; Job search; English; Basket Mending; Metalworking; Social Skills; Floristry; and Car driving.



Students in the first basic computing course

However, after the training had been planned a number of people emigrated from the area. In the end there were only 16 participants but as the number of courses that they could attend was not limited, some took three or four courses. There was also a degree of mutual accommodation, as the tutors had never worked before with Roma. They were however experienced tutors who were willing to learn at the same time as they taught. Apart from the meals, the people's motivations or reasons for attending the courses was very varied. One 54 year old lady who owned a Roma cafe took the computer course so that she could better understand, and therefore control, her book-keeper. Four of the others were thinking about becoming self-employed and they are now applying for financial support for their start-ups.

However, for the other participants who were looking for a job, the involvement of the Ukmergė branch of the Vilnius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and its Director, Mr. Baravykas was very important because of their excellent reputation amongst employers. Sigitas explains that *"employers in our region are very conservative and very reluctant to employ Roma. However, a number of them have told me that if Mr. Baravykas or one of his tutors recommends someone as being worthy of employment then they will recruit that individual irrespective of his or her background."* The project also works hard to change the viewpoints of employers and the general public. A number of articles have been published in the regional press about the activities of the DP and an information seminar has been held to attempt to counteract some of the more negative stereotypes.

The approaches that have been tested in Ukmergė are now being transferred to the other two areas. Members of staff have been appointed and Cooperation Networks have been established in Salcininkai and Vilnius. However, the DP encountered problems with the public procurement procedures that were needed to recruit vocational training providers and providers of the professional training for the Social Workers and their Roma Assistants, and this delayed the implementation of training for some months. Finally, the following vocational training courses have been launched in both areas.

| Subject | Students | Location | Training Provider |
|-------------------|----------|-------------|---|
| Car Mechanics | 4 | Vilnius | Vilnius School of Car Mechanics and Tailors |
| Floristry | 7 | Vilnius | A private company called "Naujoji Sistema" |
| English | 113 | Vilnius | "Zinija"- Lithuanian Knowledge Society |
| Computer Literacy | 10 | Vilnius | "Zinija" - Lithuanian Knowledge Society |
| Job Search Skills | 8 | Vilnius | Vilnius School of Car Mechanics and Tailors |
| Art Programme | 6 | Vilnius | Trakai Education Centre |
| Car Driving | 8 | Šalčininkai | Local Driving School |

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THE POTENTIAL OF PARTNERSHIP

National and Local Partnership

The Lithuanian Children's Fund and the Roma Community Centre have worked together in the past and have considerable experience and knowledge of Roma both living in Lithuania and throughout the rest of Europe. They cooperated closely in a project funded through the [Phare Programme](#) in which they also had a French partner "Un Enfant Par La Main," (A Child by the Hand) so both Lithuanian organisations brought their skills in transnational working to the new DP. The direct involvement of the target group was very important to the DP and the Roma Community Centre operates right where Roma live helping their children and parents in the Kirtimai Gypsy Camp near Vilnius airport. While this centre had a lot to offer, it was also decided that "Gypsy Fire," a self-help Roma organisation, should be involved in those meetings and consultations that led up to the preparation of the application for funding from EQUAL.

Through both of these Roma organisations, the DP has identified individuals to take part in its activities such as the Cooperation Networks, the training for Roma Social Workers and their Assistants and the vocational training. In these ways, Roma people have had a chance to influence decision making, to express their opinion and to take initiatives. Thus, in addition to the "official" training, their competence to manage their lives has increased and they have begun to understand that they themselves are responsible for their own welfare.

The Social Workers Training Centre was one of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. While it was not directly involved in the theme of Roma, it had considerable experience in social work training and was expected to be directly involved in the DP's training activities. However, in the course of the project, the Training Centre was reorganised to become a division of Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority and so its role in the project has changed. The Centre now provides consultancy to the lead and other partners on professional and qualification issues and also analyses the development of the project in terms of the production of professionals and the gaining of qualifications.

The Department of National Minorities and Lithuanians Living Abroad of the Government of Lithuania joined the project because of its previous experience of working with the Lithuanian Children's Fund on a different project for Roma community. The department planned and implemented, during 2000-2004, a programme to integrate Roma into Lithuanian society and its labour market. Thus, the department was willing to be involved in formulating the application for

the EQUAL project and as a partner it is now gaining the information about the real, grassroots needs and problems of the Roma minority.

Given the difficulties that they were experiencing with their Gypsy populations, Vilnius City Municipality Administration and Ukmerge District Municipality Administration and its Employment Office were very willing to join the project. Then, when the actual application was submitted to EQUAL, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour suggested that its National Public Employment Service would be a useful addition and the other partners were willing to involve this service in the DP.

All of these bodies are members of the project implementation group that has been established to manage the project. Early on, they received training in topics like team work, inter-communication, public speaking and the management of project cycles. During the process of establishing this group and in the training that was offered to members, each partner got to know the others better. *"Good personal relationships are so important to the effective coordination and management of this project,"* as Romualda Navikaitė says *"and this process of getting to know our 'new neighbours' enabled us to decide on the specific responsibilities that would be allocated to each partner and to ensure the co-ordination and implementation of the project's activities.* The same process is mirrored in the Coordination Networks in each area, as the following four stages reflect the operation of the DP:

- Identifying activities and ensuring no overlap with, or between, the activities of partners;
- Implementing each activity including an assessment of the end-results;
- Placing the highest possible value on human resources and giving personal responsibility to the workers and trainers;
- On-going monitoring and documentation of the process.

Transnational Partnership



Costume and dance - fundamental elements of Roma culture

In its transnational work, the DP is cooperating in the [European Network of Ethnic Diversity](#) in Employment (ENEDE) with [Vielfalt im Arbeitsleben \(ProViel\)](#) (Diversity in Working Life) from Germany, [Madrid Entre Dos Orillas](#) (Madrid between two borders), [Acces Europe](#) from France, Association of Supervisors and Social Advisors (ASSA) from Slovakia and the lead DP called [Contribution of Ethnic Minority Employees to UK Small & Medium Sized Enterprises](#) that is based in the North of England. This Transnational Partnership is concentrating on the main ethnic minority communities in the respective countries:

- Spain on the Latin American communities;
- Germany on the German/Russian & Turkish communities;
- France on the North African communities;
- The UK on the South-East Asian / Chinese /African Caribbean communities;
- Slovakia and, of course, Lithuania on the Roma communities.

The common interest within this Transnational Partnership is to work in a combined effort, at European level, to promote diversity management and the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. This activity is based on the [Annual Report 2003-04](#) of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, which indicates on page 67 that *"employment discrimination should increasingly be on the agendas of the Member States. The EU, through the European Employment Strategy, has been concerned in particular with the disadvantage of vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities in employment."*

Thus, this partnership of five Member States is researching the complementary problems in the labour market, testing new innovative approaches to integration and attempting to mainstream the lessons that have been learned. The final result will be a joint publication that will compare and contrast the situation in the various countries and the approaches that have been developed by each of the DPs, in their respective Member States. For Lithuania, the other projects' experience of small businesses and of vocational training will be particularly useful in the future,

when it is hoped that a new Government Integration Programme (2007 - 2010) will enable the Support Mechanisms created by the DP to be sustained and extended.

**The Three Most Important Lessons from DP
Development of Support Mechanisms for the Integration of Roma into the Labour Market**

Members of the project's implementation group feel that the most relevant lessons are:

1. "When you write a project application don't expect that it will be implemented exactly as you design it. If you practise empowerment then changes are inevitable. You have to be flexible in adapting to changes suggested by your partners and your beneficiaries.
2. Successful integration is a two way, and not just a one way, street. In other words it's not all about them having to adjust to us - the host community must also make efforts to accommodate the Roma community and its culture.
3. Contrary to the generally held viewpoint, our project found that many Roma people were pleased to be involved in the activities and thrilled to have the opportunity to learn. They would willingly live in a different way if it improved their chances and, often more importantly the prospects of their children, of having a more secure and rewarding lifestyle."

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