

STUDY

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The social and employment situation of Roma communities in Slovakia



Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies
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Abstract

This paper first presents key indicators on employment and poverty for Roma communities in Slovakia and reviews existing social and employment policies. Second, it discusses the situation of Roma children in education. Third, the paper presents achievements and lessons learned from the use of EU funds for marginalised communities and, finally, it reviews the work of other organisations in assessing the situation of Roma people in Slovakia.

The paper is an update of a previous note from 2020.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
CAHROM	Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues
CoE	Council of Europe
COLSAF	Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
CPPC	Centres of Pedagogic-Psychological Counselling
EAC	Ex Ante Conditionality
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERGO	European Roma Grassroots Organisation
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETP	ETP Slovakia – Centre for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
EU-MIDIS	European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IP	Investment Priority
MoLSAF	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
MRC	Marginalised Roma Community
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training

NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
PRIM	Project of Inclusion in Kindergartens
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
RISS	Regional Investment Spatial Strategies
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SCE	System of Second-Chance Education
SDE	Socially Disadvantaged Environment
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This briefing paper on 'The social and employment situation of Roma communities in Slovakia' was commissioned by the committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament for the purpose of its planned delegation visit to Slovakia in April 2020. It was updated in October 2021 in view of the rescheduled visit. It provides the Members of the European Parliament with background information for their visit, including up-to-date information and analysis covering four key areas:

- Overview of social and employment policy with a focus on the Roma minorities and the implementation of the Roma national strategy in the areas of housing and employment policies, social and economic integration and fighting poverty among the Roma;
- The situation of Roma children, integration in the educational system, especially segregated schooling, pre-primary education, and second-chance education programmes;
- Achievements and lessons to be learnt with regard to the use of EU funds and relevant programmes in Slovakia; and
- Related work of the Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Auditors and their findings on the Roma situation in Slovakia.

Based on extensive desk research of the available literature and descriptive analysis of the data available, this briefing note presents the following key findings.

Overview

Slovakia has one of the largest Roma communities in Europe, but there is a severe lack of systematic data on the Roma population, including on their economic integration.

The employment rate of persons from marginalised Roma communities (MRC) significantly and persistently lags behind that of the majority population and is characterised by significant differences between the employment of women and men.

While the overall employment rate of persons from MRC aged 20 – 64 years was 20 % in 2018, the employment rate of Roma women was 12 %.

The share of retired persons in the population is three times higher than among people from MRC.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate of persons in MRC in Slovakia reached 85 % in 2018, compared to 12 % in the general population. About 17 % of people in MRC live on an income of EUR 3.8 or less per day.

While the share of at-risk-of-poverty of those in employment in the general population is 7 %, in the MRC it is up to 53 %. Thus, employment is not necessarily associated with improved living conditions.

Almost half of the unemployed Roma participate in public works schemes, which often provide the only available income for Roma. However, these programmes do not improve relevant skills for the participants, leaving them unable to escape the unemployment trap and find a job in the open labour market.

Social partners in Slovakia do not pay adequate attention to the labour market integration of Roma workers who, as a result, lack collective representation in the labour market.

As many as 54 % of Roma in Slovakia felt discriminated against because of their Roma origin in the last five years. They perceive discrimination mostly when they look for a job.

A large share, 48 %, of all Roma settlements, are located on the outskirts of a village or town, 34 % are located inside a village or town, and 18 % are outside of a village or town or are remotely located.

Education and schooling

In Slovakia, early school leaving is particularly common among the Roma and socially disadvantaged individuals. Young Roma women, particularly, are overrepresented among those who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The proportion of young Roma not in work, education or further training is 65 % in Slovakia compared to the Slovak NEET rate of those aged 16-24 of 14 %. The worst situation is observed for young Roma women in Slovakia, of which 77 % are not in work, education or further training, compared to 52 % of young Roma men. There was an upward trend in the early school dropout rate in Slovakia, increasing from 4.9 % in 2008 to 8.6 % in 2018, although there has been a slight decline since then to 7.6 % in 2020.

The drivers of early school leaving are associated with limited access to inclusive education at the primary and secondary level, inadequate educational and career guidance services, ill-functioning second-chance education programmes and a lack of other supportive measures. There is a lack of evidence about the impact of the pandemic on the dropout rates of the Roma pupils and students. Nevertheless, socially disadvantaged children are likely to be particularly badly affected by the pandemic due to limited access to distance learning, especially online classes, because of poor internet access.

At the primary school level, Roma children encounter school segregation and discriminatory practices as well as extensive and unjustified enrolment in ethnically segregated special schools and classes.

Schools are not adequately equipped to provide inclusive education due to a lack of professional pedagogical personnel (e.g. special education teachers) and pedagogical assistants. Another contributing factor is the low quality of professional preparation of teachers to enable them to create a safe and friendly school environment and develop school-parent cooperation in the context of the education of children and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Only one third of Roma children between the ages of 4-6 years (the statutory school age at primary level) attend preschool facilities in Slovakia. The introduction of compulsory preschool education for 5-year-olds (in force in 2021) aims at increasing the number of Roma children in preschool, but it does not address the low quality of teaching, shortage of professional pedagogical personnel, or other supportive measures that would foster regular attendance. At the national level, there are no systematic public early childhood education and care programmes targeting children aged 0-3 and fostering parenting skills.

The Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan adopted in 2021 introduced several key measures relevant for inclusion of Roma communities, especially in the area of inclusive education. The proposed measures include implementation of inclusive supportive measures for children with special needs at all levels of education, desegregation policies at the school level, enhancing capacities of the pre-primary facilities for children aged 3-5, the reform of the second-chance education programmes, and preventive measures tackling early school leaving.

Infringement proceedings regarding discrimination against the Roma and access to education of Romani children were launched against the Slovak Republic in April 2015; similar procedures were launched against the Czech Republic (September 2014) and Hungary (May 2016).

In response, the respective national governments adopted a number of measures and legislative amendments. There is no systematic evidence about their effectiveness, but key stakeholders such as the European Roma Rights Centre have evaluated these measures and legislative changes as

insufficient and ineffective.

Lessons from the use of EU funds

The implementation of activities to improve the lives of people from marginalised Roma communities (MRC) in the long-term is one of the main areas of EU funding support in Slovakia.

During the 2007-2013 programming period, the integration of MRC was recognised as a horizontal priority across all operational programmes and the so-called 'comprehensive approach to integration of MRCs' was adopted. For the programming period 2014-2020, the assistance of ESIF explicitly addressing integration of MRCs is concentrated in two separate priority axes of the OP on Human Resources, with a total amount of EUR 153,954,885 from the European Social Fund (ESF) and EUR 228,707,577 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The spending rate of this programming period has remained low (as of 30.6.2021 it is 49.34 % for ESF and 20.94 % for ERDF).

Assistance from the Fund for European Aid for the most Deprived (FEAD) allocated to Slovakia for the 2014-2020 programming period is EUR 55.1 million (with an additional EUR 9.7 million from national resources). Under the REACT-EU (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe) programme, the budget has been increased by a further EUR 24 million. **The level of funds drawn had reached 94.3 % as of December 31, 2020.**

The low absorption rate may be attributed to the high level of mistrust in ESIF implementation in Slovakia, the significant administrative burden in ESIF implementation, but also the resistance to these schemes at the local municipality level.

In spite of the difficult situation, there are several municipalities that are successful in the integration of MRC. The common denominator of their success is the determination of the mayor, the support of the municipal council, and options for property ownership settlement.

With regard to the current programming period, the assistance aiming integration of MRC is among the priorities, its scope and format is a subject of discussion.

Related work

The Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, the European Roma Rights Centre, and the European Court of Auditors have engaged with the Roma situation in Slovakia within their missions and mandates.

There is a broad consensus that permeates the work and actions of these various organisations and bodies which is that structural discrimination, school and spatial segregation, anti-Gypsyism, and inadequate policy efforts are some of the key factors precluding progress towards the social and labour market integration of Roma.

1. OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT SITUATION AND POLICIES

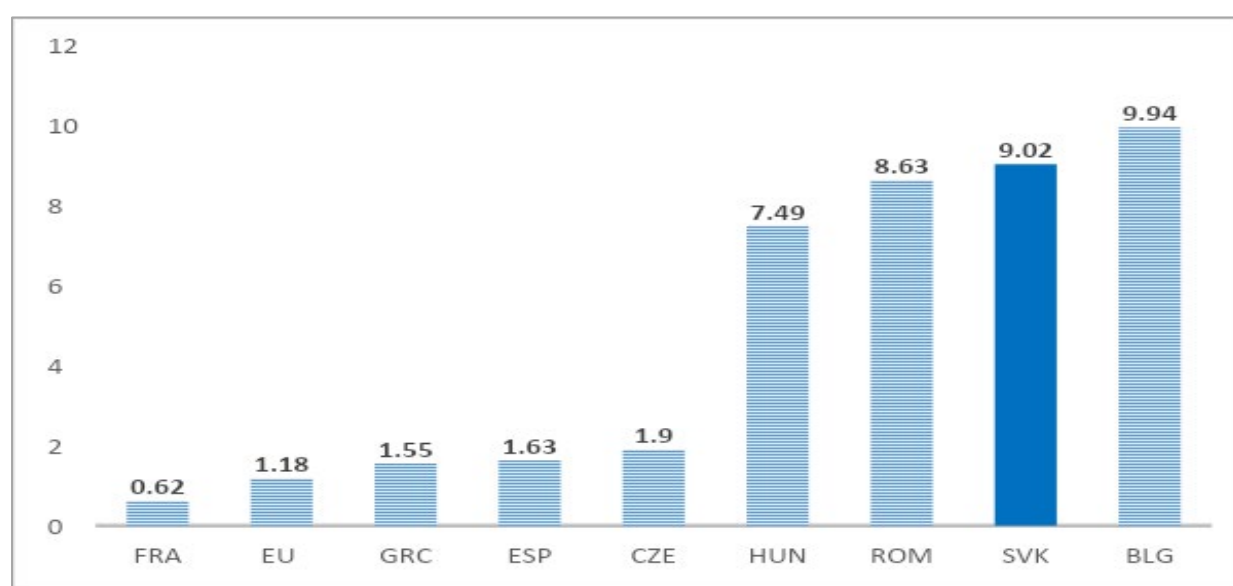
KEY FINDINGS

- Slovakia has one of the largest Roma communities in Europe. Still, there is a severe lack of systematic data on the Roma population, including a lack of data on their economic integration.
- Employment of persons from the marginalised Roma communities (MRC) lags significantly behind that of the majority population, and this over the long term, and is characterised by significant differences between the employment of women and men.
- While the employment rate of persons from MRC aged 20 – 64 was 20 % in 2018, the employment rate of Roma women was 12 %.
- The share of retired persons in the general population is three times higher than among people from MRC.
- The at-risk-of-poverty rate of persons in MRC in Slovakia reached 85 % in 2018, compared to 12 % in the general population. About 17 % of people in MRC live on an income of EUR 3.8 or less per day.
- While the share of at-risk-of-poverty of working people in the general population is 7 %, in the MRC, it is up to 53 %. Thus, employment is not necessarily associated with improved living conditions.
- Almost half of the unemployed Roma participate in public works schemes, which often provide the only available income for Roma. However, these programs do not improve relevant skills for the participants who are left unable to escape the unemployment trap and find a job in the open labour market.
- Social partners in Slovakia do not pay adequate attention to the Roma population's labour market integration. As a result, the Roma population lacks collective representation in the labour market.
- 54 % of Roma in Slovakia felt discriminated against because of their Roma origin in the last five years, and the most common discrimination is perceived when they look for work.
- There are 818 municipalities that have Roma settlements in Slovakia. The total number of Roma settlements is 1043. 48 % of all Roma settlements are located on the outskirts of a municipality, 34 % in a municipality and 18 % are outside of a municipality or are remotely located.

1.1. Introduction

Slovakia has one of the largest Roma communities in Europe (see Figure 1). **Still there is a severe lack of systematic data on the Roma population** and a vast difference between population estimates based on self-identification and those based on other identification approaches. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) data from 2014 estimated the number of Roma people at 402,840 (about 7.4 % of total population)¹, compared to about 100,000 self-reported Roma from the 2005 Census². The most recent estimates of the share of Roma population in Slovakia place it at 9 % (see Figure 1). In addition, **there is a lack of data on the economic integration of Roma**³. The literature focused on the experience of people from marginalised Roma communities in the labour market is limited by the low quality of ethnic identifiers in publicly available data. Employment of persons from the MRC environment significantly and persistently lags behind that of the majority population and is characterised by significant differences in the employment of men and women⁴.

Figure 1: Estimated share of Roma in the EU (2012) (%)



Source: Council of Europe, taken from Bednarik, M., Hidas, S. and Machlica G., 2019, *Enhancing the social integration of Roma in Slovak Republic*⁵.

Note: The presented shares represent the average of different estimates. Country codes: FRA-France, GRC-Greece, ESP-Spain, CZE-Czechia, HUN-Hungary, ROM-Romania, SVK-Slovakia, BLG-Bulgaria.

1.2. Development of employment and poverty

The recently adopted Roma national strategy 2030 states an overall goal to improve employability and increase the employment of Roma, specifically from the MRC, by creating opportunities leading to their integration into the labour market. Four specific aims should achieve this overarching goal, according to the strategy. First, equal opportunities for people from MRC must be ensured; people from MRC

¹ UNDP, 2014, ATLAS rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013.

² Kahaneč, M. and Sedláková, M., 2016, The social and employment situation in Slovakia and outlook on the Slovak EU Presidency 2016, European Parliament.

³ Kahaneč, M., 2014, *Roma integration in European labor markets*, IZA World of Labour.

⁴ Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community (2021b). *Stratégia rovnosti, inklúzie a participácie Rómov do roku 2030* (Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma up to 2030).

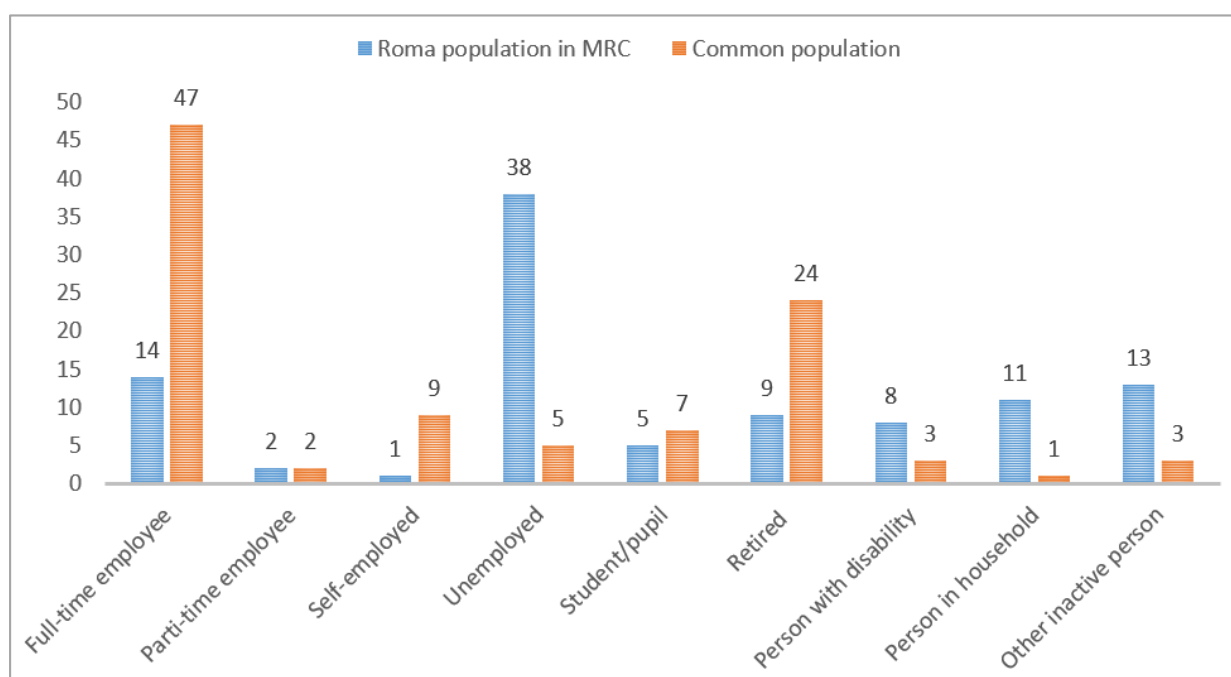
⁵ Bednarik, M., Hidas, S., Machlica, G., 2019, *Enhancing the social integration of Roma in Slovak Republic*. Available at: [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=ECO/WKP\(2019\)20&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=ECO/WKP(2019)20&docLanguage=En).

should acquire the necessary skills and gain practical experience to allow for an effective transition from education to the labour market. Second, the quality and efficiency of the provision of employment services and access to public and non-public employment services as well as active labour market policies (ALMP) for MRCs must be ensured. Third, conditions must be created to support employers in employing MRCs, with an emphasis on employers in the social economy. Fourth, discrimination in the labour market and other manifestations of anti-Roma racism must be fought⁶.

According to the EU SILC MRC survey in 2018⁷, **unemployed persons form the largest group in terms of economic status (38 %) among the MRC, followed by the full-time employees (14 %)**. This is in contrast to the general population, where full-time employees with a share of 47 % are the largest group and retired persons the second largest group (24 %) out of the economic statuses measured (see Figure 2).

The most frequently mentioned jobs in the MRC population are ancillary work in building construction and in forestry, cleaning and masonry. Roma auxiliary workers in various types of production are primarily men and are often the only employed members of the household.

Figure 2: Economic status of persons aged 16 years and over (2018) (%)



Source: Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community, 2021, *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania*, EU SILC MRC 2018⁸.

46 % of unemployed persons in the MRC population are young people under 34 years of age, and 38 % are people in the age category 35 - 49 years. Among unemployed MRC people, 40 % participated in activation work, which means they received an activation allowance as assistance for material needs. Of this, men made up almost 47 % and women 53 %, with the most significant proportion aged 26 - 50

⁶ Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma up to 2030.

⁷ The specialised EU SILC MRC survey was conducted according to the same methodology as the regular EU SILC survey in the Slovak Republic and other countries, with some added questions. The sample size was 1,033 households and 4,956 persons, of which 2,656 persons over 16 years old. The basic unit, as in the current EU SILC survey, is a household and its current members form MRC. The term 'MRC' for the purposes of the EU SILC MRC survey means an area of geographically delimited communities that are inhabited almost exclusively by Roma.

⁸ EU SILC MRC 2018. Available at: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/atlas_romskych_komunit_2019/EU%20SILC_MRC_web.pdf.

years. Based on the same survey, 43 % of people from the MRC environment (58 % of men and 42 % of women) were looking for work in the last four weeks, compared to 21 % of the general population (53 % men and 46 % women).

According to the data, the share of retired persons in the general population is three times higher than among people from MRC. The ratio of men and women in this category is practically identical in both groups.

Table 1: Share of men and women within particular economic statuses (2018) (%)

Status category	Roma population in MRC		General population	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Full-time employee	69	31	52	48
Part-time employee	67	33	32	68
Unemployed	58	42	53	46
Pupil/student	52	49	48	52
Retired persons	40	60	40	60
Person with disability	52	49	54	46
Person in household	26	74	4	96
Other inactive persons	25	75	94	6

Source: Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community, 2021, *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania*, EU SILC MRC 2018⁹. Percentages for men and women may not add up to 100 % due to rounding.

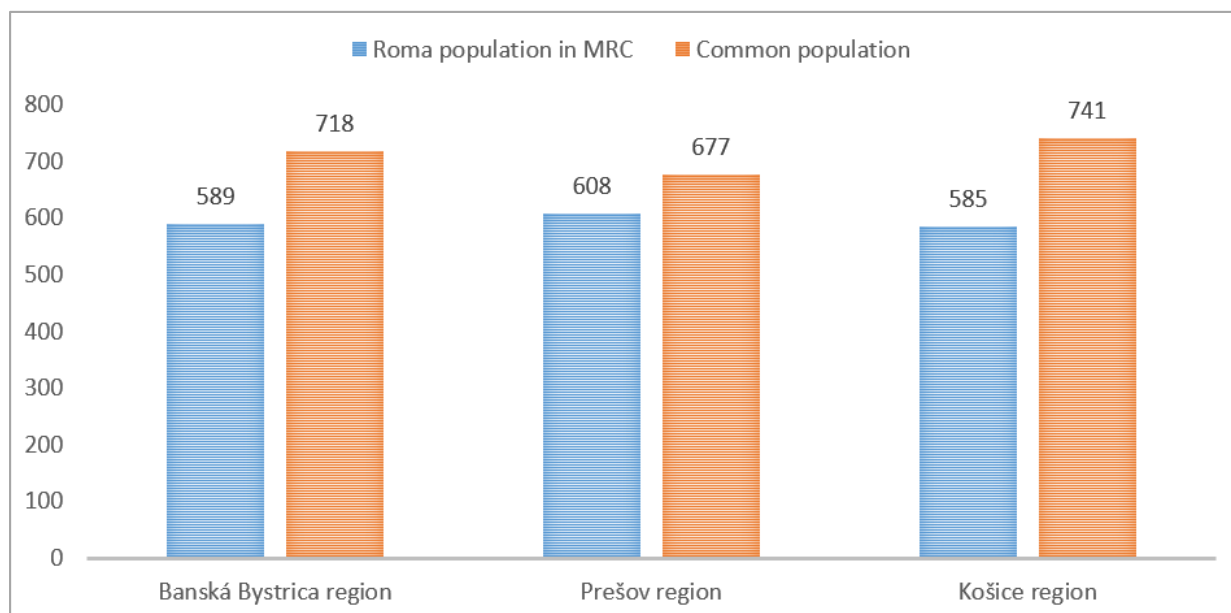
For the MRC population, the EU-SILC MRC data shows that the average number of months of receiving income for the last 12 months is 9.4 months. More than half of the people had income for 12 months.

The average monthly wage of full-time employed people from MRC was approximately EUR 550 in 2018, which was not much higher than the statutory minimum wage (EUR 480 in 2018). The EU SILC MRC data provides an opportunity to compare the average income of employed persons in selected regions, in Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice regions (Figure 3). The smallest difference between the average monthly income of the general population and people from the MRC environment is 11.4 % in the Prešov region. This is followed by a difference of almost 22 %, in the Banská Bystrica region and 28.4 % in the Košice region. The average and median gross monthly income of employed people from the MRC environment approximately corresponds to the average amount of salaries of auxiliary workers in the given regions.

However, **the most significant wage gap can be observed in the western regions of Slovakia.** While the average monthly wage of people from MRC employed full-time is EUR 498, within the general population it is EUR 828, which means two thirds more.

⁹ Ibid.

Figure 3: Average monthly gross income from employment in selected regions (2018) (EUR)



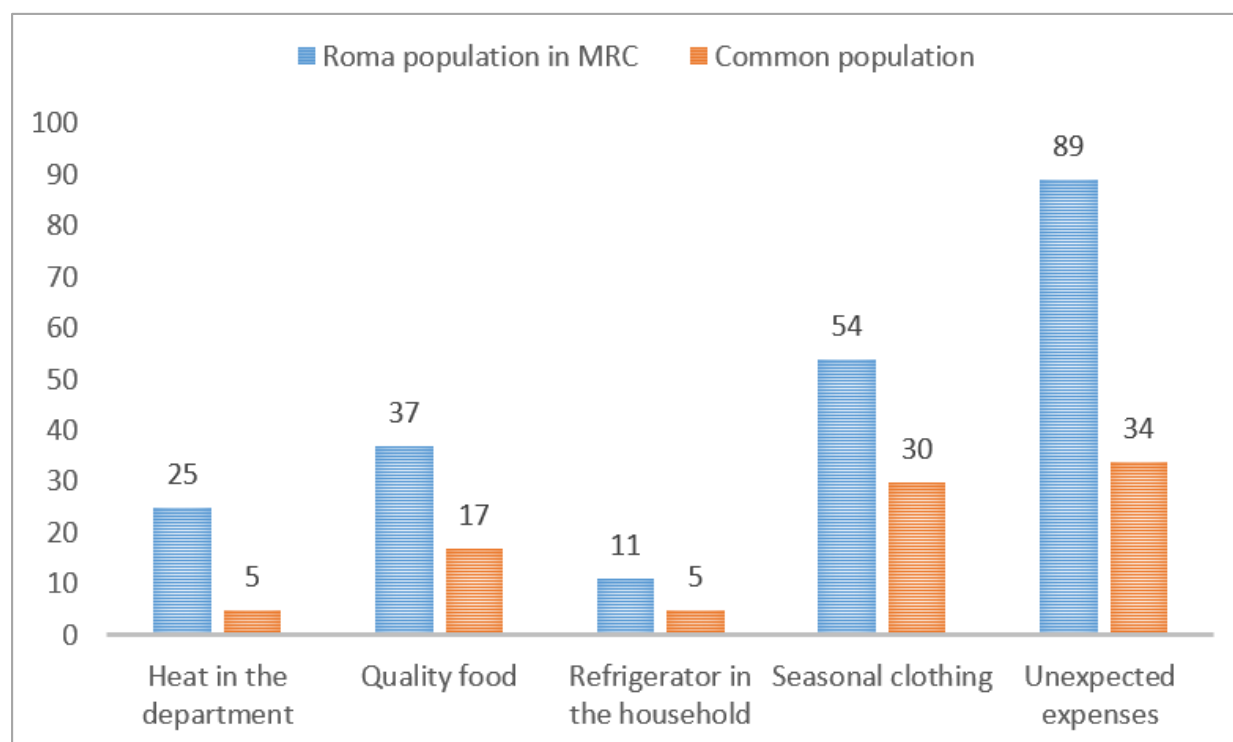
Source: Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community, 2021, *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania, EU SILC MRK 2018*¹⁰.

The Roma population remains at high risk of poverty and social exclusion. According to the EU SILC MRC survey, **the risk of poverty rate of persons from MRC in Slovakia reached 85 %** as compared to 12,2 % in the general population in 2018. In Prešov, Banská Bystrica and Košice regions, the difference in the share of the people from the MRC environment living below the poverty line is four to six times higher than in the general population of the given region. 17 % of people from MRC live **on an income of about EUR 3.8 per day.**

While the share of at-risk-of-poverty of working people in the general population is 7 %, in the MRC, it is up to 53 % of those in employment (in the EU, the average working population living at risk of poverty is 9.4 %). This fact indicates that, despite employment, every second person from MRC lives below the at-risk-of-poverty line. Thus, employment status may not necessarily be associated with improved living conditions. **Material deprivation in MRC households is much higher than in the general population.** EU SILC MRC data show that 80 % of workers cannot afford to pay unexpected expenses of EUR 360, and 20 % cannot afford quality food at least every other day. 90 % of workers cannot afford a vacation outside the house. Every fourth household in the MRC has a problem maintaining adequate heat in the home. Nine out of ten households have a refrigerator, only about half of households can afford to change clothes with the seasons, 18 % of households in MRC do not have a washing machine, 16 % do not have a telephone (or mobile phone) in their home. As for other equipment, 47 % of households do not have internet access, and 55 % do not own a car. In the general population, 0.5 % of households do not own a telephone, 5 % do not have access to the internet, and 13 % do not own a car.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Figure 4: Rate of absence of selected items of material deprivation in households (2018) (%)



Source: Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community, 2021, *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania*, EU SILC MRK 2018¹¹.

According to EU SILC MRC data, **47 % of MRC households rely on assistance in material needs and their components** (households with children make up 80 %). In the general population, less than 4 % of households rely on this assistance¹².

Half of the households in MRC borrow money to cover home running costs. 45 % of households have borrowed money once or twice in the past 12 months, 40 % of households borrowed three to six times, 14 % of households borrowed almost every month, and 12 % of households borrowed money to run the household more than once a month. 32 % of households in the MRC stated that they are currently repaying some non-residential loan. Moreover, 69 % of these households (22 % of the total number) described repayments as very burdensome and 28 % as slightly burdensome¹³.

1.3. Employment and labour market policies

Spending on active labour market policies in Slovakia remains low compared to the other EU members (Kahanec and Sedláková, 2016). The most essential active labour market policy (ALMP) programme in relation to Roma integration appears to be public works schemes (Activation Work Programmes), since **almost half of the unemployed Roma participate in these programmes** (Bednarik et al., 2019). They focus on jobs in the public sector to help the unemployed maintain basic work-related skills. They last

¹¹ EU-SILC MRK, 2018. Available at: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/atlas_romskych_komunit_2019/EU%20SILC_MRK_web.pdf.

¹² Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community (2021). *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania* EU SILC MRK 2018 (EU SILC MRC, 2018).

¹³ Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Roma Community (2021). *Príjmy a životné podmienky v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách: Vybrané ukazovatele zo zisťovania* EU SILC MRK 2018 (EU SILC MRC, 2018).

between six to 18 months, during which a lump-sum benefit is received. Benefits from public works schemes are often the only income available to Roma (Bednarik et al., 2019).

However, studies show that these programmes do not provide relevant skills for the participants who are left **unable to escape the unemployment trap and find a job on the open labour market** (Bednarik et al., 2019). In addition, the Roma participate less in policies with higher potential for labour market integration (Bednarik et al., 2019). Thus, experts call for **higher spending on ALMPs** that focus on long-term unemployed Roma, including the improvement of training, skills, on-the-job training supported by better and closer involvement of employers in Slovakia and individualised services of labour offices in the regions (Bednarik et al., 2019).

Data shows that the **successful integration of Roma would help the labour market: the estimated impact of increasing the employment rate and productivity of Roma to the level of the general population by 2060 could increase GDP by more than 12 %** (Bednarik et al., 2019). Employment and labour market policies also need to address the fact that **many Roma work in the informal economy** (Kahanec 2014; Gatti 2016), however, there is no specific measure targeting this at the moment.

The new national Roma strategy up to 2030 sets six key indicators in terms of employment (see Table 2). Although the target values represent approximately a 50 % or 30 % increase compared to the departure values, only a few policies and employment measures supporting the achievement of the targets are indicated in the Strategy¹⁴.

Table 2: Departure and target indicators for Roma employment up to 2030

Indicator	Departure value	Target value
1. The proportion of persons from MRC (men and women) aged 16-24 who are not employed and are no longer in the educational process.	68 %	40 %
2. The proportion of women from MRC aged 16-24 who are not employed and no longer are in the educational process.	76 %	44 %
3. The proportion of persons from MRC (men and women) aged 20-64 who are employed (the employment rate).	20 %	45 %
4. The proportion of women from MRC aged 20-64 who are employed (the employment rate).	12 %	41 %
5. The difference in the employment rate between women and men from MRC aged 20-64 years.	16 %	8 %
6. The proportion of Roma over the age of 16 who have felt discriminated against on the grounds of their ethnicity in their job search in the last 12 months.	22 %	11 %

Source: Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma up to 2030¹⁵.

Note: The source of the departure values of the indicators 1 – 5 is EU SILC_MRK 2018, and of the indicators 6. FRA, EU MIDIS II 2016.

One of the latest policies is Act no. 112/2018 Coll. on **the social economy and social enterprises**. This type of support aims in creating new opportunities for socially disadvantaged job seekers, people with

¹⁴ Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma up to 2030. Available at: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategie/strategia-pre-rovnost-inkluziu-a-participaciu-romov-do-roku-2030/?csrt=15139693805081197711>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

disabilities and other vulnerable persons. Unlike activation work, working in an integration enterprise offers a regular job and more space for developing skills valuable to potential employers. A new tool in the framework of financing integration social enterprises is the contribution for employers prepared to support their employees in finding employment in the open labour market¹⁶.

As Roma from the MRC are often forced to borrow money to run their household, a fundamental change was the amendment to Act no. 7/2005 Coll. on bankruptcy and restructuring (effective since March 2017) that facilitates **bankruptcy proceedings and relief of the debt for individuals**. According to this amendment, debtors may be freed of debt by (1) declaring personal bankruptcy (in that case debtors lose their property) or (2) scheduling loan repayments. The basic condition for applying for personal bankruptcy is at least one execution procedure in place against the debtor. Importantly, the debtor can be provided with consultations and legal aid by the Centre of Legal Aid (Centrum právnej pomoci) in the whole process of declaring personal bankruptcy or settling repayment schedules. This adjustment helps borrowers, in particular those in an unfavourable financial situation, to get out of the debt trap in a relatively short period, with special regard for the protection of living needs, especially housing, etc. This change directly promotes legal employment and impacts on employment security, and later provides security in the event of unemployment, accident and pension (Act no. 7/2005 Coll. on bankruptcy and restructuring).

The employment of people from the MRC environment is characterised by high volatility, which indicates a more frequent occurrence of shorter-term and seasonal contracts. In this context, **supporting seasonal employment in agriculture** by introducing a new allowance in 2020 is relevant. The allowance for EUR 200 per month paid to the employer is intended to cover compulsory public health insurance, social security contributions and old-age pension contributions paid by employers and employees. Receiving the allowance is conditional on employing a job seeker based on a regular contract¹⁷.

1.4. Social dialogue structures and the role of social partners

Slovakia has relatively well-established social dialogue structures at three levels: national, sectoral, and company level. The tripartite structure involves the following three constituents: representatives of employers organised in employers' associations, trade unions, and the government. While the national tripartite committee serves mainly as an advisory body to the government, sector-level social dialogue dominates in the key sectors of the Slovak economy - automotive, steel, electronics, chemicals, construction and transport industries (Kahancová and Sedláková, 2016). Nevertheless, sector-level collective bargaining has been losing its significance to the multi-employer and single-employer levels. The collective bargaining coverage rate, which has decreased over time, stood at 25 % in 2015. Trade union density has been steadily declining and is currently at 10.7 %¹⁸.

Social partners have been actively trying to shape labour legislation; however, they have not focused their attention on addressing the labour market participation of Roma specifically. In general, trade unions represent workers; hence, with the high unemployment rate of Roma and the large share of undeclared work, the **Roma population lacks collective representation in the labour market**.

¹⁶ Strategy of equality, inclusion and participation of Roma up to 2030.

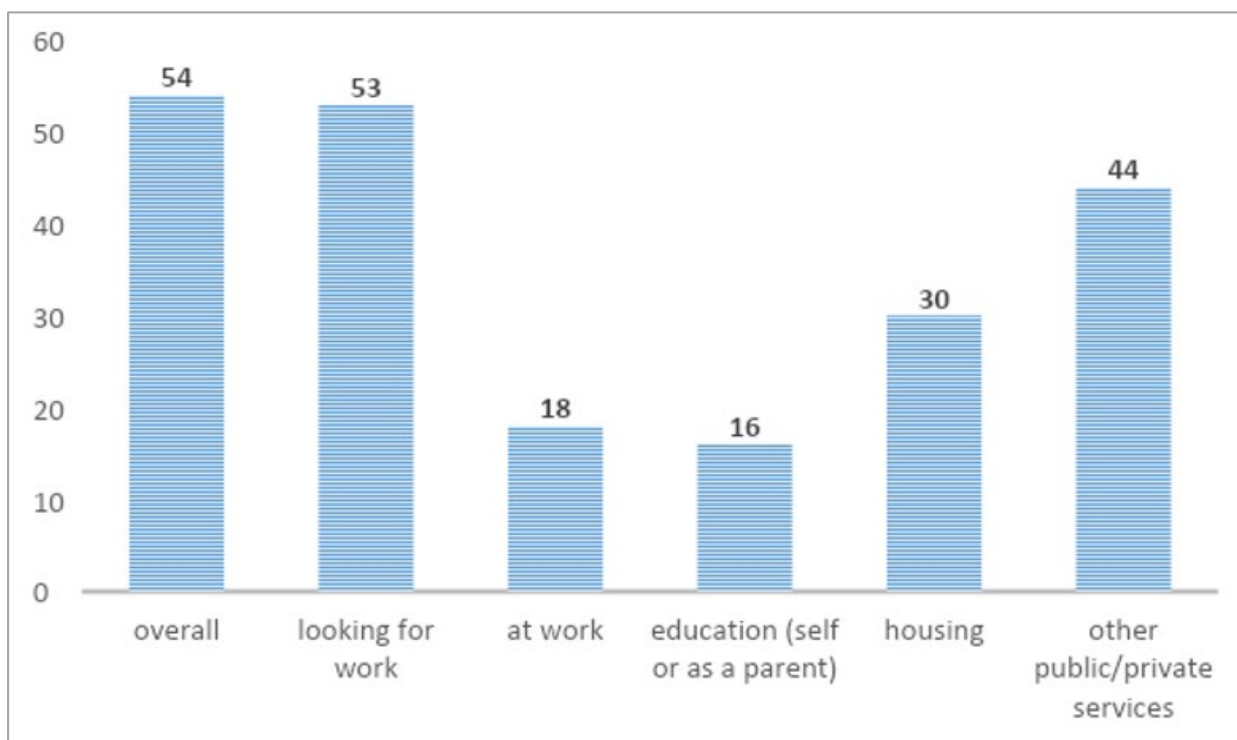
¹⁷ Seneši, N., 2020, Seasonal employment allowance in agriculture. Available at: <https://www.podnikajte.sk/financie-na-podnikanie/prispevok-na-sezonne-zamestnavanie-v-polnohospodarstve>.

¹⁸ ICTWSS Database Version 6.1 - November 2019. Available at: https://aias.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/website/uploads/20191107 ICTWSS_6_1_Codebook.pdf.

1.5. Public perception of Roma in society and the workplace

The EU-MIFID II survey data show that overall, **54 % of Roma in Slovakia felt discriminated against because of their Roma origins in the last five years** in at least one area of life and 30 % felt discriminated against in the past twelve months. **Most Roma feel discriminated against when they are looking for work.** This is consistent with the findings of the Institute of Financial Policy (2014), which showed that applicants with Roma names had less than half the chance of being invited to a job interview than participants with non-Roma names, even though both groups - Roma and non-Roma shared the same personal and professional characteristics, including educational attainment. Another substantial area where the Roma feel discriminated against is 'other private and public services', a category that includes administrative offices or public services, public transport, shops, hotels or restaurants and bars.

Figure 5: Prevalence of discrimination based on Roma background in the past 5 years in different areas of life (%)



Source: EU, 2016, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma – Selected findings*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights¹⁹.

Note: Out of all Roma respondents at risk of discrimination on grounds of Roma background in at least one of the domains of daily life asked about in the survey ('the past 5 years': n=7,745; weighted results).

¹⁹ EU, 2016, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Roma – Selected findings*. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf.

1.6. The reality in Roma settlements

Based on the data from the **Atlas of Roma communities**²⁰, which was last updated in **2019**, there are **818 municipalities** with the presence of Roma settlements in Slovakia. Furthermore, 200 of these municipalities register two or more settlements in their territory; **the total number of Roma settlements** was determined **to be 1,043** based on the results of the Atlas²¹.

Based on the data from the Atlas, it can be stated that **48 % of all settlements** (498) **are located on the outskirts of a municipality, 34 % inside a municipality** (351 settlements) **and 18 % are outside of a municipality or are remote** (194 settlements); there is no road or walkway leading to 17 of these settlements.

A common problem in these settlements is access to **drinking water**. In spite of the fact that in approximately 77 % of all settlements (810 settlements), more than 50 % of the population of the settlement has access to the public water supply, the public water supply is used by more than 50 % of the population of the settlement only in 64 % of the settlements (677 settlements). However, in 13 % of the settlements, more than 50 % of the population gets water from a public tap on the street, and in **5 % of the settlements** (56 settlements), **more than 50 % of the population of the settlement uses non-standard water sources such as a river or puddles**.

There is also a problematic situation in connection with the **sewerage system** and treatment of sewage. In case of approximately 44 % of all settlements (464 settlements) more than 50 % of the population of the settlement has access to the public sewerage system, however, it is used by more than 50 % of the population of the settlement only in the case of 33 % of the settlements (350 settlements). In fact, in **44 % of settlements** (463 settlements), **more than 50 % of the population of the settlement does not use any sewerage system, septic tank, or treatment mechanism and the sewage is freely discharged**.

The **electrical grid** is accessible to more than 50 % of the population in 97 % of the settlements. Based on the data from the Atlas of Roma communities, it is possible to conclude that there are still 67 settlements where the connection on the electrical grid is used by less than 10 % of the population of the settlement and **53 settlements where the connection to the electrical grid does not exist**.

Gas (or green sources) as a source of heat is virtually not used; in case of 83 % of the settlements (872), more than 50 % of the population uses solid fuel for heating. Waste management is also a problem; 38 % of the settlements have no solid waste landfill in their vicinity.

A major problem is **ownership of the land** under the individual settlements and the ownership of individual dwellings. Difficulties with the land ownership is also one of the basic obstacles in the implementation of investment projects in the municipalities. Based on the information from the Atlas of Roma communities, **approximately two thirds of the people living in Roma settlements** (about 170,000 people) **live in houses or apartments with a cadastral number**, therefore it is possible to conclude that these are legal buildings. Even though these may be legal dwellings, ownership of these dwellings may not be resolved, or the quality of the dwellings may be substandard. A situation when the dwelling is legal, and the ownership is settled, but the ownership of the property under the dwelling is unresolved, is also not exceptional. The remaining third of the population of the Roma settlements (about 90,000 people) live in houses without a final building approval certificate; these are usually shanties, campervans, or other structures not suitable for housing. They are thus considered to be living in irregular housing.

1.7. Examples of successful projects

Examples of good integration practice can be divided into three levels. The first of these is legislation promoting the employment people from MRC environments, the second are the so-called national projects, which are usually financed from the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF), and the third are individual initiatives of individual municipalities, NGOs, or business entities.

1.7.1. Legislative level

In 2018, the Act on Social Economy and Social Enterprises was adopted, setting conditions for establishing **social enterprises, including work integration ones**. As of March 15 2020, 93 social enterprises were registered in the register of social enterprises²² of which 92 were of the work-integration type. The possibility of registration is used also by the so-called **municipal social enterprises**. Examples of these are the municipal enterprise 'Hrhovské služby' (Hrhov services) in the municipality of **Spišský Hrhov**, which is internationally known²³ as an example of good practice in the integration of people from the MRC environment. It employs over 50 people, mostly Roma, and it is seen as an inspiration for other municipalities. Another example is the municipal enterprise in **Raslavice**, which employs over 20 people, most of whom are women from the MRC environment.

Given the short period of time since the adoption of the Act, there is no assessment of its impact. However, on the basis of the statements of the social enterprises, it is possible to conclude that the existence of the Act has provided a range of support mechanisms (such as financial aid, tax benefits, measures improving access to the market) that significantly simplify the daily functioning of social enterprises in Slovakia and hence the inclusion of people from MRCs.

It is also worthwhile to mention a recent update of Act 245/2008 Coll on Education (School Act) from June 2019. It introduced **compulsory preschool education for children aged five**. Preschool education does not count toward compulsory school attendance, which lasts 10 years in Slovakia, yet the new measure is expected to increase the readiness of children from MRCs for primary school. The update will come into effect on January 1, 2021. The main challenge for the proper application of this measure is the capacity of preschool facilities, which are rather limited in number of localities.

1.7.2. National (large-scale) projects

Healthy Communities (Zdravé komunity)

Project 'Healthy Regions' is focused on the implementation and development of **health mediation in MRCs**. The activities are aimed at identifying social determinants of health, at overcoming barriers in access to healthcare, at increasing health literacy (including raising the awareness in the area of health care for people from MRC), and at improving health-related behaviour. In the framework of the project, **253 health mediation assistants** and 25 coordinators are employed. Most of the **employees are Roma directly from the local communities** and for many, the work on the project is the first paid employment of their lives. Employees of the programme are systematically trained, the programme also achieves a strong emancipation effect for a number of its employees, and dozens of employees

²⁰ Atlas of Roma communities, available at: <https://www.minv.sk/?atlas-romskych-komunit-2019>.

²¹ For the purposes of the Atlas of Roma communities, a settlement is defined as a concentration of a minimum of 30 people or five houses, which provide sub-standard quality of living and are inhabited by people who are considered Roma by majority.

²² It can be assumed that many more organizations that have characteristics of social entrepreneurship exist in Slovakia, but only those which have registered pursuant to the Act on Social economy and social enterprises are listed in the register. Due to their registration, they have access to more types of support.

²³ *New York Times* article - available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/09/world/europe/slovakia-roma-spissky-hrhov-integration.html>.

increased/completed their formal education due to their employment in the programme. An interesting point of the programme is that the workers in the programme are de facto employees in public interest (employees of a contributory organisation of the Ministry), which provides them with relatively stable working conditions.

The project is co-funded by the ESF and implemented by an allowance organisation Healthy Regions of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic.

Field social work programme (Terénna sociálna práca)

Field social work programmes are implemented directly in MRCs with the main **aim of assisting people from MRC to access public services and receive assistance in areas where no other assistance accessible for people from MRC exists**. A strong element of the programme is the individual empowerment of people from MRC. The programme, in a form of various technical settings, has existed since 2002. There are currently approximately **980 field social workers/field workers**, many of whom are Roma. The field social workers are employed by local authorities; however, the programme is implemented centrally (part of the programme is carried out by the implementing agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and part by the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma communities) with the support of ESF. The Programme is currently active **in 380 locations**.

Community centres programme (Komunitné centrá)

With the aim of establishing a network of **community centres active in MRC**, the first large-scale programme called 'Community centres' was launched in 2013, under which 166 community centres were supported. Subsequently, the role of the community centres was set out in the Act on Social Services²⁴, and community centres were qualified as **accredited social services**. According to the legislation, community centres (among other activities) **provide basic social counselling, organise after-school activities for children, assist children from the community in achieving good school performance** and organise harm-prevention activities. Currently **175 community centres** are operating thanks to European Social Fund (ESF) assistance. In order to improve community centre facilities, the financial scheme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), supports the construction/reconstruction of community centres in localities with MRC presence. So far, 61 community centres have been supported under the scheme.

Local municipal civil patrol services (Miestne občianske poriadkové služby)

The programme of municipal civil patrol services is currently implemented **in 212 locations**, each of which has a separate project co-financed from the ESF. The goal of the local municipal civil patrol services is **to monitor compliance with the rules of civil coexistence and reduce the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours** in the community. The programme is considered an important source of job opportunities for people from MRC. **Employees** of the local municipal civil patrol services **are in most cases men living directly in the MRC**. In comparison with the programme Healthy Regions or Field social work, the employees of the patrol services are not given any further education from the central level and their work is not methodically managed.

²⁴ See Act 448/2008 Coll on Social Services.

1.7.3. Individual initiatives

In addition to programmes co-financed by public sources (in particular the ESF), recently, **individual initiatives of commercial subjects targeting people from MRCs have started to appear.**

These are primarily related to **employment** and respond specifically to the current shortage of labour. An important role is played by the 'Pontis' Foundation (the administrator of the Business Leaders Forum initiative), which has prepared a series of seminars on the employment of the Roma for business companies. An example of a good practice initiative is **the company Stiga from Poprad**, which has been implementing a programme of supported employment for the people from the MRC environment in cooperation with the non-profit organisation 'People in Need'. The **company Whirlpool** (also from Poprad) implements a so-called work incubator, which is a gateway to employment for prospective employees with low educational attainment and without established work habits. The services of the incubator are to a large extent intended for the people from MRC.

Regarding **housing programmes**, an important initiative is **project DOM.ov**, a **joint venture of three NGOs²⁵ and the commercial bank Slovenska sporitelna** (part of the Erste Group). The aim of the initiative is to help individual families from MRC to get **affordable and decent housing**. Based on participating in the **savings programme** for a year, a participating family is eligible to **apply for a mortgage** (the mortgage is provided by Slovenska sporitelna) which is **used for the construction of a house**. The house **is low-cost and is constructed by family members**, who are supervised by a construction instructor. Instructors are contracted by the project DOM.ov. Project DOM.ov also assists in communicating with the relevant authorities in the process of obtaining all the necessary permits. Newly constructed houses are inspected by the Construction Authority in order to receive an official permit to inhabit them. The programme is present in **8 localities**.

²⁵ Org. For Better life, org. People in Need and org. ETP.

2. SITUATION OF ROMA CHILDREN IN EDUCATION: BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Infringement proceedings regarding discrimination against Roma and access to education of Roma children were launched against the Slovak Republic in April 2015; similar procedures were launched against the Czech Republic (September 2014) and Hungary (May 2016).
- In response, the respective national governments adopted a number of measures and legislative amendments.
- There is no systematic evidence about their effectiveness but key stakeholders such as the ERRC evaluate these measures and legislative amendments as insufficient and ineffective.
- There is an upward trend in the early school dropout rate in Slovakia: the rate increased from 4.9 % in 2008 to 7.6 % in 2020. Nevertheless, during the last three years (2018-2020), there was a slight decline, down from a peak of 8.6 % in 2018.
- Early school leaving is particularly common among the Roma and socially disadvantaged youth; young Roma women are particularly overrepresented among the NEETs.
- Drivers of early school leaving are limited access to inclusive education at primary and secondary school level, inadequate educational and career guidance services, ill-functioning second-chance education programmes and a lack of supportive measures such as mentoring.
- At the primary school level, Roma children encounter school segregation and discriminatory practices, including extensive and unjustified enrolment in ethnically segregated special schools and classes.
- Schools are not well-equipped to provide inclusive education due to a lack of professional pedagogical personnel (e.g. special education teachers) and pedagogical assistants; school personnel is also poorly prepared to work with children and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Only one third of Roma children between the age of four and the beginning of compulsory education at the primary level attend preschool facilities in Slovakia
- The introduction of compulsory pre-primary education for children aged five years old (in force since 2021) aims to increase the number of Roma children in preschool education
- At the governmental level, there is no systematic early childhood education and care programs targeting children aged 0-3 and fostering parenting competences.

2.1. Overview of the Commission infringement procedure against Slovakia and comparison to the cases of Hungary and Czech Republic

Infringement proceedings are established by Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. They provide the Commission with a legislative tool to ensure compliance of Member States with EU law.

On April 19, 2015, **infringement proceedings were launched against the Slovak Republic** that call into question Slovakia's compliance with Article 21 (1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which prohibits discrimination based on any ground such as race or ethnic origin; and the Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC (RED)) Articles 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 3.1.g, which prohibit discrimination in access to education on the grounds of race or ethnicity.

Prior to that, in September 2014, the European Commission started an **infringement procedure against the Czech Republic** for breaching the EU Anti-Discrimination Law by discriminating against Roma children in education. In May 2016, the Commission launched a **similar procedure against Hungary**.

All three countries were called on to stop discriminating against Roma children in education and to adjust their laws accordingly. Should this not be achieved satisfactorily, the cases could end up before the European Court of Justice.

Slovakia has taken **four legislative measures in response** to the infringement procedure: (i) extension of the powers of the state school inspection to oversee the functioning of diagnostic centres (Centres of Pedagogic-Psychological Counselling, CPPC); (ii) limiting the placement of a child enrolled in a so-called specialised class (catch-up class) of a regular school to one year; (iii) amending the School Act to stipulate that a child whose special educational needs stem merely from being raised in a socially disadvantaged environment cannot be placed in a special school or special class; and, (iv) changing the methodology of determining whether a child is from a socially disadvantaged environment (SDE), and thus qualifies for a special state subsidy, to one based on a diagnosis by the CPPC, rather than based on whether the child's family is in material need²⁶.

Aside from these four legislative measures, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport implemented **several ESIF-funded national projects to foster desegregation**, such as the 'More Successful at School' project that funds primarily teacher assistants and other supportive school personnel for disadvantaged children (among them Roma, but also children with disabilities) with a budget of EUR 50 million²⁷.

In the **Czech Republic**, the Education Act was amended in 2016 and several reforms to foster inclusion were enacted, such as the abandonment of the categorisation of children, pupils and students according to types of disadvantages and the establishment of a new monitoring body, the National Institute for Education. Since the 2017/2018 school year, a compulsory year of free preschool has been introduced. However, the number of Roma children educated according to reduced curricula remains

²⁶ European Commission. (2018). Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia. Available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-slovakia-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid.

disproportionately high and about a quarter of Roma pupils are educated in a segregated setting. This is partly due to the fact that the residential segregation of Roma has practically not been addressed²⁸.

In **Hungary**, as of 2015 (prior to the procedure), three-year kindergarten education became compulsory. However, the accessibility and quality of preschools varies. The Sure Start children's centres, aiming to integrate children into local communities, were set up in settlements with a high share of Roma population and child poverty. In spite of these efforts, children in Hungary are increasingly segregated on grounds of their socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds²⁹.

Gabriela Hrabaňová, director of the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO), stated in an interview, however: '**infringement procedures of the European Commission against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia concerning segregation in education have not brought any results**. Above all, structural anti-Gypsyism has not been addressed in most Member States. A lot of commitment and action from decision-makers are needed to achieve more equality for Roma in the coming years'³⁰.

Concerning Slovakia, a note of the European Roma Rights Centre concludes that these legislative changes adopted in response to the infringement procedure have been highly insufficient, as they alone cannot secure equal access of Roma children to education if not accompanied by any concrete and sustainable de-segregation policies and measures³¹.

2.2. Early school leaving

Over the last ten years, there has been an upward trend in the early school dropout rate in Slovakia. In **2008** the **early school dropout rate** in Slovakia was **4.9 %** and the rate increased to **8.6 % in 2018**³². However, during the last three years (2018-2020), we can observe a slight decline in the dropout rate, which dropped from 8.6 in 2018 to 7.6 % in 2020. The highest rate of early leavers from education can be found in regions with high concentrations of Roma communities. In Eastern Slovakia, the rate was approximately 12 % in 2020, three times higher than the figure in Western Slovakia³³.

The available evidence shows that early school dropout is particularly common among the young Roma³⁴ and socially disadvantaged communities³⁵. Although there is no ethnic data on the attendance level in secondary education, according to the research of the Institute of the Financial Policy, only every second Roma student aged 17-18 years studies at secondary school³⁶. **Young Roma are also overrepresented among NEETs** and early school dropout affects Roma women more than Roma men. The proportion of young Roma not in work, education or further training is 65 % in Slovakia compared to the Slovak NEET rate of those aged 16-24 at 14 %. The worst situation is observed for young Roma

²⁸ European Commission, 2018, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Czech Republic*. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/51003529-b1ac-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-113947200>.

²⁹ European Commission, 2018, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Hungary*. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b5fa7f29-b1aa-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-121387732>.

³⁰ *Brussels Times*, 'Roma Integration still far away in EU'. Available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/eu-affairs/67303/roma-integration-still-far-away-in-eu/>.

³¹ ERRC, *Written submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. Available at: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/slovakia-cerd-submission-5-november-2017.pdf.

³² Eurostat 2021 [edat_ifse_14].

³³ Eurostat 2021 [edat_ifse_16].

³⁴ Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, 2018, *Národný program rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania*.

³⁵ Institute for Educational Policy and Value for Money, 2019, *Revízia výdavkov na skupiny ohrozené chudobou alebo sociálnym vylúčením*.

³⁶ Hidas, S., Lafférová, Z., Machlica, G., 2018, *Inklúzia Rómov je celospoločenskou výzvou*.

women in Slovakia, of which 77 % are not in work, education or further training, compared to 52 % of young Roma men³⁷.

A recent study about second-chance education (Rigová, Dráľová, and Kováčová, 2021) suggests that drivers of early school dropout of Roma pupils and students are manifold. Early school dropout is caused mainly by **low academic performance, negative experiences with the school personnel, and a lack of finances for school commuting, clothing, or textbooks**. As a consequence of poverty and lack of finances to cover school-related expenses, young Roma from marginalised communities may tend **to prioritise employment opportunities** (including short-term and seasonal jobs) **over completing education**. Roma **girls and women** may drop out of school due to **teenage pregnancies, early childbearing** and the need **to take care of children or dependent family** members (e.g. younger siblings, relatives with disabilities). Health issues also play a role in early school dropout since people living in marginalised Roma communities are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases than the majority population (Holubová et al, 2021).

The available data do not yet provide a systematic picture of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early school dropout in the marginalised Roma communities. Nevertheless, Roma children have likely been particularly impacted by the pandemic situation and school closures due to limited access to online classes and the overall lack of effective inclusive school policies. According to the survey of primary and secondary schools carried out by the Institute for Educational Policy, about 7.5 % of the student population in Slovakia had no access to any form of distance learning, while 18.5 % had no access to online (internet-based) classes. The situation in this respect was critical mainly in schools with a high share of pupils and students from socially disadvantaged environments and in special schools (Ostertágová and Čokyna, 2020).

On a policy level, there is a lack of educational policy tools with a potential to mitigate early school leaving. First, in general **a low quality of education, which includes a lack of inclusive education tools utilised in pre-primary, primary and secondary level** (see below), presents a major factor behind low academic performance of Roma pupils and students. This in turn leads to low self-motivation and self-esteem of students, grade repetition and eventually to early school leaving. These factors are intertwined with other aspects such as early pregnancies, a lack of parental and family support, the need to earn money to support a family, and others (Miškolci, Kubánová and Kováčová, 2019).

Second, **career and educational guidance services are currently underdeveloped and ill-functioning**. These measures serve as preventive interventions for early school leaving and have a positive impact on decisions to pursue education (De Witte and Cabus, 2013). Effective career guidance services are particularly important for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or for other vulnerable cohorts facing multiple barriers in the access to education and the labour market.

Third, **the access of Roma pupils and students to secondary education is very limited** due to segregation in housing which increases the distance to school facilities and also travel costs for school commuting. Importantly, the motivation to attend secondary school regularly is low among Roma students from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is associated with the above-mentioned ill-functioning career guidance services, and the low quality of inclusive education and supportive measures such as flexible school schedules, tutoring, etc. Besides that, there is no stipend provided for socially disadvantaged students or any form of affirmative action or intervention that would aim at increasing the number of Roma in secondary and higher education (Lajčáková, 2015).

³⁷ EU-MIDIS II. (2016) Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey.

Fourth, the **system of second-chance education (SCE) does not work effectively** and does not offer proper educational options for early school leavers to complete their formal education, or acquire skills and competences needed for successful work integration or to pursue higher education (Kešelová, Ondrušová and Urdžiková, 2018; Rigová, Dráľová and Kováčová, 2021). Those students who do not graduate from primary school successfully are frequently offered two-year programmes (so called F programmes) provided by secondary vocational schools. It appears that the **F programmes are the only option for early school leavers to return to the education system**. As part of the F programmes, students can attend courses to complete primary education (ISCED 2A) provided that the school offers such a course. Moreover, there are problems with the implementation of these SCE programmes, such as a poor financial support (from the state and municipal budget), absence or poor access to tutoring and supportive services offered to students, a lack of staff capacity at schools, the absence of a curriculum or guidance for the programme providers, and low awareness about the programmes among schools and potential students and their families. All of this leads to poor access to SCE programmes in some regions. Besides that, the SCE programmes are often implemented in ethnically segregated school environments and students can choose from only a narrow selection of specialisations, many of which are ethnically and gender stereotyped (Rigová, Dráľová and Kováčová, 2021). As a result of the deficiencies, (i) graduates of the programme only receive a lower secondary vocational educational level (ISCED 2c)³⁸, which means that the graduates cannot pursue further education at the secondary level (ISCED 3); (ii) the employment rate of graduates is very low; and (iii) only 33 % of students successfully complete these programmes³⁹. The newly **adopted Strategy for life-long learning and counselling for 2021 – 2030** introduces several changes in SCE programmes that would address some of the above-mentioned shortcomings. The Strategy proposes a flexible funding mechanism that reflects individual needs of students with a purpose of keeping those at risk of dropping out early enrolled in primary school. This is based on the premise that students should preferably complete their primary education in primary school, and not in the F programmes. In addition, the courses required for the completion of primary education will be an integral part of F programmes, which would allow graduates to pursue higher education after their graduation. The Strategy further proposes to clarify qualification requirements of teachers and implement proper training of teachers working in adult education.

The **cross-cutting problem** related to the above-mentioned barriers in the access to education and the labour market is the **poor collaboration between regional, local and national stakeholders**. The social field workers and public servants of the local Labour Offices are not cooperating with the stakeholders in education effectively. As a result, Roma youth (NEETs) are not actively approached to return into the system of training and education. Similarly, Roma NEETs are not provided with individually tailored interventions that would enable them to foster their skills and education. In addition, active labour market policies seem to add a creaming off effect since the most vulnerable groups of unemployed, especially the Roma with low educational attainment, are not eligible for different employment schemes and, thus, participate mainly in work activation programmes, which do not contain skill-upgrading elements.

³⁸ Completion of the F programme, the lower secondary vocational level (ISCED 2c), is not equivalent to completion of the primary school level (lower secondary educational level ISCED 2) which means that the graduates of the F programmes cannot apply for the regular programme at the secondary school and further pursue their education and attain higher educational level. There has been an initiative of the Ministry of Education to include the training on the completion of primary school level into the F programme which would allow graduates to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no legal amendment has been made in this respect.

³⁹ Institute for Educational Policy and Value for Money, 2019.

2.3. Main barriers in the access to inclusive education

Poor academic performance and high early school dropout rates are results of a set of factors related to the school environment and quality of learning. Kindergartens and primary schools in Slovakia **lack professional pedagogical staff, including special education teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, and social pedagogues**, as well as **pedagogical assistants**. These professionals could provide pupils/students and their families with complex services, set individual plans and address the individual difficulties the disadvantaged children encounter in the process of learning and socialising in the school environment.

Salaries of professional pedagogical staff are covered by financial contributions for students with special education needs but the funding system applied in recent years does not allow schools to hire them. Support in special education is partially provided by the Centre for Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention (their district offices), however they reportedly lack the capacity to provide teachers with individual training and consultation.

The same applies to the **pedagogical assistants** that are funded by the financial contributions for pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The amount of contribution per pupil is low and, as a result, schools often cannot cover the labour costs of full-time assistants. In addition, there is a lack of pedagogical assistants and hence, the demand from schools for these professionals are not met (Hapalová, 2020)⁴⁰. This has several negative consequences because the role of pedagogical assistants is crucial for creating a safe and supportive school environment. They assist regular teachers in providing an individualised approach to pupils in learning, mediate communication between school and families and organise extra-curricular activities. Therefore, the kindergartens and primary schools lack an inclusive team of experts consisting of pedagogical assistants, professional pedagogical staff and other supportive personnel.

Additionally, **school staff (school management and pedagogues) are poorly trained in creating a safe and friendly school climate and working in culturally diverse classes**. They are often not trained in Roma language and culture and as a result the language barrier between school staff and pupils and/or their families persists. Additionally, school staff tend to have anti-Roma attitudes, which manifest themselves in complicated school-parent relations and an unfavourable school climate (Petrasová and Porubský, 2013; Miškolci et al., 2017).

Owing to the above-mentioned problems, **Roma pupils are very often enrolled in ethnically segregated schools or classes, special classes** in regular schools, or **in special schools**. School segregation is a result of anti-Roma prejudice on the institutional level, a lack of inclusive tools in education and diagnostics, but also housing segregation.

Overall, the share of children enrolled in special education in Slovakia is 5.9 % which is among the highest in the EU countries (the EU average is 1.6 %) (Ramberg, Lénárt and Watkins, 2018). The re-integration of children from special education (either special schools or special classes) into mainstream education has not been initiated or systematically supported, and thus is almost non-existent.

Due to a lack of ethnic data, there is no recent evidence on the enrolment rate of the Roma children in special primary schools or special classes. Nevertheless, it is estimated that **Roma pupils represent almost 60 % of all pupils in special primary schools, 86 % of pupils in special classes at regular primary schools and 35 % of all students in special secondary schools** (Friedmann et al., 2009).

⁴⁰ Analysis of findings on the state of education in Slovakia. Available at: <https://analyza.todarozum.sk/docs/346831004e0a/>.

Given that the Roma population in Slovakia presents only about 9 % of all the population, the enrolment rate of Roma children and youth in special education is considerable.

Special schools are self-motivated to retain the number of pupils and students and are frequently established close to Roma settlements, which strongly affects the decision of parents to enrol their children in such schools. Not only for safety reasons and travel costs, but also the overall lack of information about educational possibilities lead Roma parents to enrol their children in special schools (Miškolci et al., 2017).

There is no de-segregation strategy or other systematic, institutionalised support that would assist schools and municipal stakeholders to systematically de-segregate school facilities and, thus, address ethnic discrimination in the school system. Desegregation efforts must be planned, coordinated and implemented by various actors at a local, regional and national level, involving not only educational authorities but the whole set of actors including pedagogical experts, social field workers, municipal representatives and others.

2.4. Education and care in early childhood

Despite the recognised importance and benefits of pre-primary education on further educational paths, Roma children in Slovakia encounter limited access to pre-primary education and care. **In 2016, the participation of Roma children (aged between 4 years and the starting age of compulsory education) in preschool facilities was only 34 %, while the participation rate of the general population was about 77 %.** Looking at other central and eastern European countries, the participation rate of Roma children in preschool facilities in Hungary⁴¹ was 91 % (compared to 95 % of the general population), in the Czech Republic 34 % (compared to 86 % of the general population) and in Poland 42 % (compared to 94 % of the general population) in the same year (FRA, 2016).

The causes of the low attendance are manifold. **First, a lack of capacities in preschool facilities represent a major barrier for Roma children in the access to pre-primary education.** In the school year 2018/2019, 12,502 applications to preschool were rejected. However, evidence shows that the available capacities are distributed disproportionately since in the same school year approx. 7,000 to 12,000 places were available in kindergartens across the country (Varsik, 2019).

Second, as mentioned above, **kindergartens lack financial resources to pay for the professional pedagogical staff** (e.g. special education teachers) as well as pedagogical assistants that would enable the preschool staff to apply an individualised approach, particularly in ethnically diverse classes. **Preschool staff is currently ill-equipped to utilise inclusive tools in education including creating favourable school climate**, develop parent-teacher cooperation (together with other local stakeholders), and others. **A shortage of professional staff and cases of hostile preschool environments may discourage Roma parents from enrolling children in local kindergartens** (Miškolci et al., 2017).

Third, **Roma families often encounter financial restrictions in access to pre-primary education** due to formal and informal fees, and other associated expenses (proper clothes, shoes, hygiene utilities, etc.). Besides formal fees, there is a set of so-called hidden fees such as fees for Christmas parties or preschool trips (Parental Fund). In some kindergartens, parents are asked to pay one-off payments for bedding or a package of hygiene products. Even though these types of fees are approved by parents

⁴¹ The participation of children in preschool facilities in Hungary is compulsory for children aged 3-6.

themselves, parents in material need may feel pressured to agree with the other parents due to a fear of stigmatisation (Rigová, Kováčová and Šedovič, 2020).

In July 2019, the Slovak Parliament introduced **compulsory pre-primary education for children at the age of five** (one year prior to the beginning of compulsory education at the primary level) by adopting the amendment of the School Act⁴². The act came into force in 2021. This policy aims to increase the participation rate of children primarily from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, the amendment of the School Act abolishes zero classes which serve as preparatory classes for children that were considered as 'not prepared' to pursue education in primary school. Worryingly, **the amendment also introduces a provision allowing grade repetition at the preschool level**, provided that a child is considered as unprepared to attend primary school level. However, grade repetition may harm the self-confidence and motivation of the children (Miškolci et al., 2017).

Regular attendance of Roma children in preschool education might be hindered by the above-mentioned barriers that were not addressed by the amendment of the School Act or any other recent state policy intervention. Importantly, the Slovak municipal system is fragmented and typical of many small-sized municipalities (about 20 % of the municipalities have a population smaller than 500) which means they lack financial resources to establish and run preschool facilities. The amendment also does not allow other, more flexible forms of preschool education such as small children's groups. Similar to the case of primary education, Roma children might be extensively enrolled in the ethnically segregated preschool facilities such as kindergartens in the close proximity to the Roma settlements.

Since compulsory pre-primary education for children aged five came into force only recently, from the school year 2021/2022 onward, there is a lack of evidence about implementation problems with regard to the inclusion of Roma children in kindergartens. In particular, as of October 2021 there is no information about the implementation of policy measures that were supposed to strengthen capacities of kindergartens to make them well-equipped to provide disadvantaged children with individualised support. For instance, although raising awareness campaigns were supposed to be implemented at the community level to inform parents and caretakers about the compulsory pre-primary education, there is no information yet about how the campaigns have been implemented. Additionally, a programme of supportive school personnel such as tutors and school nurses was planned as a pilot measure but this programme has not been launched yet⁴³ (this measure is included also in the Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan).

2.5. Government versus non-governmental initiatives

There are several governmental initiatives that foster inclusion of Roma children in education. **Increasing the participation rate of Roma children in pre-primary education is currently actively supported by the ESF-funded Project of Inclusion in Kindergartens - PRIM** (Operational Programme Human resources) which has been implemented by the Office of Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma communities in 120 kindergartens. The aim of the project is to support inclusive teams operating the kindergartens that would enhance an individualised approach in teaching and foster parent-teacher cooperation. The inclusive teams consist of teachers, pedagogical assistants, special education teachers and coordinators of inclusive education. Preschool teachers are provided with guidance and training in utilising inclusive tools and mitigating the barriers Roma

⁴² School Act. Available at: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2019/209/20190716.html>.

⁴³ *Denník N* article. Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/2573359/skolsky-tyzden-so-zvysovanim-platov-uciteliek-a-ucitelov-sa-zatial-v-rozpocte-nepocita/?ref=in&cst=da9378e6752d3d9dd912de7108784ace20c4d137&fbclid=IwAR2C1EKfhaL63wbYbqrONU497FNwNDS2q- jsNVUc-g1OimYAcGwRtexx48>.

children encounter in access to education. Nevertheless, the project is time-limited since the end of the implementation period is 2020 (it is expected to be extended until 2023). Additionally, **to enhance capacity in kindergartens, the Operational programme Human Resources and Integrated Regional Operational Programme currently provide municipalities with funds to enlarge or build preschool facilities.**

However, recent governmental interventions only partially alleviate the barriers the Roma children encounter in access to pre-primary education. **The interventions to create inclusive teams at preschool level are small in scale and project-based, thus, the support is currently not systemic nor sustainable.** Also, there is no systemic support for pre-primary education for younger children aged 0-4 nor for fostering parenting skills.

There is a set of non-governmental initiatives in the field of education that reflect the above-mentioned barriers. For instance, the **Omama programme implemented by a non-governmental organisation Cesta von** (Way out) focuses on fostering child development from the prenatal period to the age of three. It consists of interactive educational activities and counselling services provided by Roma trainers in homes and in parents' clubs. Roma women are trained in parenting skills, particularly in methods of fostering early childhood development. After completion of the programme, they become employees with a regular employment contract and provide services in their own communities⁴⁴.

ETP Slovakia, another non-governmental organisation operating in eastern Slovakia, currently runs a mentoring programme for Roma children from socially disadvantaged communities called **Competent children – Mentoring programme**. It is based on a buddy system and children are provided with interactive learning and are mentored in the form of both online and personal communication. Mentors are supposed to provide children with consultation about educational and career paths, or advise on suitable seminars or training courses, so that they can develop their skills and knowledge⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ NGO Cesta von–Omama programme: <https://cestavon.sk/projekt-omama/index>.

⁴⁵ NGO ETP- Competent children – Mentoring programme: <https://schopnedeti.sk/>.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE USE OF EU FUNDS AND RELEVANT PROGRAMMES IN SLOVAKIA

KEY FINDINGS

- The implementation of activities to improve the lives of people from marginalised Roma communities (MRC) in the long-term is one of the main areas of EU funds support in Slovakia.
- During the 2007-2013 programming period, integration of MRC was recognised as a horizontal priority for all operational programmes and an approach of so-called 'comprehensive approach to integration of MRCs' was adopted.
- For 2014-2020, ESIF assistance explicitly addressing integration of MRCs is concentrated in two separate priority axes of the OP Human Resources, with a total amount of EUR 153,954,885 (ESF) and EUR 228,707,577 (ERDF).
- Despite the advanced stage of the programming period, the spending rate remains low (as of 30.6.2020 it is 49.34% for ESF and 20.94% for ERDF).
- The low spending rate can be attributed to the high level of mistrust in ESIF implementation in Slovakia, the significant administrative burden in ESIF implementation, but also resistance from the level of local municipalities.
- Despite the difficult situation, there are several municipalities which are successful in integration of MRC. The common denominator of their success is the determination of the mayor, the support of the municipal council, and options for property ownership settlement.
- In connection with the upcoming programming period, support for achieving integration of MRC is among the priorities, its scope and format is a subject of discussion.
- FEAD assistance allocated to Slovakia for the 2014-2020 programming period is EUR 55,112,543. By 31 December 2020, 94.3% of the funds had been drawn.

3.1. Overview of the implementation of the ESIF 2014-2020

The implementation of activities **to improve the lives of people from MRC** in the long-term **is one of the main areas of EU fund support in Slovakia**. The narrative and type of support has developed over time, and is affected by international discourse, in addition to domestic experience.

3.1.1. Lessons learned during the 2007-2013 programming period

With the goal of better focus in the use of EU support, the term **marginalised Roma community (MRC)** began to be used in the context of EU funds in the programming period 2007-2013. The adoption of this new concept in the discourse strengthened the social marginalisation aspect, which is conditional upon belonging to an ethnic minority, but clearly separated the Roma, who, despite belonging to the ethnic minority, are not the recipients of social assistance and are fully integrated into mainstream society.

The programming period 2007-2013 can be considered important with regard to MRCs also due to the fact that the **integration of MRCs had been recognised as a so-called horizontal priority for all operational programmes** and six out of a total of eleven operational programmes were required to implement the so-called 'comprehensive approach to integration of MRCs'. The initial plan was that projects that have positive relevance to integration of MRCs would be scored more favourably in competition with other projects. However, the approach to MRCs as a horizontal priority has not been successful. The main reason for this was an inadequate methodology for determining which projects, and based on what criteria, can be considered as relevant to MRCs. The inclusion of projects was based on self-identification of the project, which, in practice, meant the inclusion of projects that had no connection to the integration of MRCs. From the standpoint of the general public and the expert community, however, the biggest problem was caused by the discussion of the amount of funds invested in favour of MRCs, which was the sum of all the projects identified as relevant to MRCs. It does not need to be emphasised that the amounts were absurdly overestimated.

A similar failure has ended the implementation of the so-called '**comprehensive approach to the integration of MRCs**', which was built on the logic of a coordinated approach of the operational programmes involved and the concentration of aid (in the form of financial resources and technical assistance) for the territories, which were prepared for the absorption of the funds. The preparedness was supposed to be proven by the presence of the so-called 'Strategy of comprehensive approach to the integration of MRCs', which was a document describing the sequence of individual steps in the medium term, approved by both, the local government and the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma communities (which played a coordinating role in the comprehensive approach). According to an external evaluation of the comprehensive approach⁴⁶, the proposed policy of ESIF aid failed in particular due to the highly ingrained culture of departmentalism and the inability of individual ministries to cooperate.

3.1.2. Implementation structure during the 2014-2020 programming period

In **2012, the first impact assessment of ESF** on the Roma in Slovakia was conducted⁴⁷. It highlighted the **uncertain results with regard to the most disadvantaged Roma groups**, the inability of small municipalities to draw funds (they do not have the financial resources for project co-financing or the human capacities necessary for the successful implementation of the projects), and the frequent hostility of local authorities⁴⁸. Also, **based on the evaluation** results, a strategy was adopted for the programming period 2014-2020, in which, based on the findings of the so-called Atlas of Roma communities from 2013⁴⁹, **150 municipalities in the most serious situation were identified**. These municipalities have automatic access to basic assistance programmes such as field social work or community centres.

In the programming period 2014-2020, MRCs as a horizontal priority for ESIF was discontinued and the issue of **integrating MRCs is concentrated in two separate priority axes of the OP Human Resources**. These are the priority axis 5 Integration of marginalised Roma communities and the priority axis 6 Technical facilities in municipalities with a presence of marginalised Roma communities.

⁴⁶ Salner et al., 2013, Lessons from Slovakia's Comprehensive Approach - Assessing the feasibility of designing and implementing integrated territorial programmes targeting marginalised Roma communities.

⁴⁷ Škobla et al., 2012, Uncertain Impact: Have the Roma in Slovakia Benefited from ESF? Findings from an Analysis of ESF Employment and Social Inclusion Projects in the 2007-2013 Programming Period.

⁴⁸ The implementation of projects benefiting the people from the MRC environment is politically unpopular in many municipalities and the mayor with the public council rejects the implementation of such projects.

⁴⁹ The Atlas of Roma communities comprises information about locations with the presence of marginalised communities and the infrastructure situation of these locations.

The **contribution of the European Community for priority axis 5 is EUR 153,954,885** (with an additional EUR 25,144,105 from national resources). This assistance is from the **European Social Fund** and the financial resources are **primarily intended to benefit the 150 municipalities with the most dire situations**.

The **contribution of the European Community for priority axis 6 is EUR 228,707,577** (with an additional EUR 26,906,775 from national resources). This assistance is from the **European Regional Development Fund** and the funds are directed to any municipality with the presence of an MRC, which is listed in the Atlas of Roma communities.

Municipalities that have not been included in the list of the 150 municipalities with the most dire situations may apply for financial assistance for the benefit of the MRC through OP Human Resources priority axis 4 'Social inclusion', in which people from the MRC constitute one of the priority target groups, or within any other priority axis of any operational programme.

Within **priority axis 5**, funds are distributed in particular through the so-called national projects, to a large extent administered by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma communities. **As of June 30, 2021, the spending rate was 49.34 % and the rate of contracting was 94.65 %**⁵⁰.

Within priority **axis 6**, the funds are used exclusively through individual, so-called demand-oriented, projects. The project administrator is an intermediate body of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic (not the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma communities). **As of June 30, 2021, the spending rate was 20.94 % and the rate of contracting was 75.98 %**⁵¹.

3.2. Low absorption rate and possible misuse of ESIF

The **reasons behind the low spending rate** of ESIF can be found in several factors. In addition to a **delayed start of ESIF** implementation in Slovakia (the funds started to be drawn in 2017) and a **high administrative burden**, there is an especially **high level of distrust in the implementation of ESIF** as well as **structural obstacles** to drawing ESIF funding **at the lowest level**.

High administrative burden is often the result of a conservative approach and lack of ability to establish up-to-date procedures in ESIF administration in Slovakia⁵².

However, from the point of view of social significance, the **culture of mutual mistrust**, which is characteristic for the implementation of ESIF in Slovakia, **can be considered a significantly larger problem in comparison with the administrative complexity**. The mistrust can be observed on the side of the management and intermediary bodies, which often approach the beneficiary of the aid with a large degree of suspicion of misuse of the aid, as well as on the side of the potential beneficiaries, who often do not trust the processes implemented by the management and intermediary bodies (whether in the context of the project selection or process control) and thus do not even apply for aid. The reasons for this situation can be found in the past, when cases of misuse or inefficient use of ESIF resources repeatedly occurred. At present, similar cases (particularly, failures in selection and control

⁵⁰ Informácia o stave implementácie európskych štrukturálnych a investičných fondov v programovom období 2014 – 2020 (polročná) (Information on the status of implementation European Structural and Investment Funds in the programming period 2014 - 2020 (semi-annual)). Available at: <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/informacie-o-implementacii-esif/>.

⁵¹ ibid.

⁵² It is not an exception that a procedure, which can be executed electronically (it may even be executed electronically), must be executed also traditionally in 'paper' form.

mechanisms, when projects without any link to the target group were supported) are not reported, and it can be argued that in the case of the resources intended for the benefit of MRCs, similar fraud can no longer happen. On the other hand, the use of ESIF currently represents a **disproportionate risk for potential beneficiaries and many of them are not interested in the use of ESIF**. The beneficiary is often (even after the support is finished) in a situation of legal uncertainty and is often forced to provide documents that exceed the common standard of duties.

A low level of flexibility in ESIF implementation in Slovakia often impedes the implementation of any innovations, and only highly standardised activities can be implemented and financed. The orientation towards 100 % risk prevention of misuse is currently becoming the main obstacle to the utilisation of the funds, since the designated conditions are often unclear and rather difficult to fulfil. The focus on reducing the risk of misuse would be entirely legitimate and correct, if it had not been oriented exclusively towards control of the administrative processes, without considering the needs of the target group or the specifics of individual projects.

Another serious obstacle to using ESIF in favour of MRCs **is the approach of local municipality governments**. It is not exceptional that the local municipality is hostile and unwilling to address the problems of people from MRCs. In the analysis of the lack of interest of the local authorities, **the question of capacities of the specific municipality often resonates**. In many cases, the municipalities concerned have a yearly budget⁵³, which is not sufficient to ensure the compulsory co-financing of the project and even if the local government is interested, it does not have the capacity to implement a strategic project that could bring real change. In addition to financial resources, human resource capacities are a problem. **The municipalities often do not have the internal capacity for the implementation of development projects**, project management is usually outsourced, and there are almost no possibilities for building internal capacities required for the implementation of integration projects in the future. Slovakia, particularly its eastern part, also suffers from the **impact of brain drain** and the main problem during the implementation of development projects is often a lack of the human and intellectual resources necessary for the successful implementation of the projects.

3.3. Examples of proper use of ESIF

Despite the difficult situation, there are **several municipalities**, which are **successful in integration and development initiatives**. The **common denominator of their success is the determination of the mayor, the support of the municipal council, and options for property ownership settlement** (which is often related to the presence of vacant land in the ownership of the municipality). The municipalities, which can be a source of inspiration are, for example, Raslavice, Spišský Hrhov, Čířč, Muránska Dlhá Lúka, Ulíč, and other. All of the municipalities above implemented their successful initiatives with significant ESIF support.

In principle, **ESIF can be considered the main resource for any activities aimed at integrating MRCs**. The programme **Healthy regions covers 263 localities**; the **programme of field social work covers 372 municipalities**⁵⁴; and the **programme of support for community centres**, within the

⁵³ In Slovakia, there are 2,927 municipalities, of which 404 have fewer than 200 inhabitants. Budget of these municipalities is approximately EUR 25,000 per year.

⁵⁴ In the case of 168 municipalities the field social work is implemented within the project implemented by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, in the case of 204 municipalities the programme is implemented within the project implemented by the Implementing Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic (in the case of the latter project, the target groups, in addition to the people from the MRC, include also homeless people).

framework of which 180 community centres⁵⁵ operate, can be considered as examples of good practice in the utilisation of ESIF. The programme of **local municipal civil patrol services** established in 211 communities can be also considered a good practice.

The facilities for community centres in 61 municipalities with an MRC presence were improved via the programme for the **construction/reconstruction of a community centre** and 120 preschools in municipalities with the presence of MRCs were supported under the calls for **increasing the capacities of preschools**. A programme to **support waste management and solutions to illegal landfills** in municipalities with MRC presence was met with a great deal of interest and 132 projects were supported. Forty-seven projects were supported under a **programme to support access to drinking water**, 128 projects under a programme **aimed at the construction of local roads and improving accessibility to services** for people from MRC, 52 projects under the programme aimed at the implementation of **simple land improvements with the aim of settling property rights to land**.

A programme that has been met with the least interest so far is a **programme to support transitional housing**, through which only 20 projects have been supported so far.

The project **Support of land settlement**, which is implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma communities is also noteworthy. In the framework of the project, municipalities with the presence of MRCs receive free-of-charge technical assistance in order to reach settlements in ownership of the lands, **so that people acquire a legal relationship to the land under their home**, which is a condition for the legalisation of their housing, other possible modifications in the future, and improvement of conditions of their housing. Unfortunately, due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was implemented on a smaller scale than originally planned.

Another project being carried out with the support of ESIF by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma communities is called **Monitoring and evaluation of inclusive policies and their impact on MRCs**, in which data and information on socio-economic conditions of the Roma are systematically collected, which are subsequently used to design public policies. The Atlas of Roma communities, EU-SILC, and several other studies were conducted through the project.

3.3.1. Upcoming programming period and future use of ESIF in regards of Roma

In connection with the approaching programming period 2021-2027, the extent and the form of ESIF aid for MRCs **is still under discussion**.

The forthcoming Operational Programme Slovakia, under policy objective 4 'A more social and inclusive Europe', defines a **specific objective of 'Supporting the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as the Roma'**.

The proposed activities focus, as a priority, on **promoting a comprehensive, integrated approach** targeting whole communities. Priority is also given to the implementation of targeted programmes aimed at **tapping the potential of young people** and their activation, higher participation of **Roma girls and women in education and the labour market**, as well as **better housing and health conditions**. It is proposed to continue the implementation of legal, consultation and coordination activities aimed at assisting municipalities with a presence of the MRC in the **process of land settlement and regularisation of dwellings**. Compared to previous programming periods, more

⁵⁵ 93 of these were implemented within the project implemented by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, the rest under the project implemented by the Implementing Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

emphasis is placed on the implementation of awareness-raising, educational and other activities aimed **at eliminating anti-Roma racism and sentiment**. Emphasis is also placed on **supporting the capacity of municipalities to set up measures at local level**, with the aim of **strengthening synergies** with other interventions at municipal or regional level.

It is suggested that the focus should continue to be on **supporting research/monitoring activities** (such as Atlas of the Roma Communities, EU-SILC) that contribute to an understanding of the living conditions in the MRC.

Compared to the 2014-2020 programming period, the division of the programmes into two parallel channels, one focused on municipalities with the most dire situations (150 municipalities, which during 2014 -2020 received aid through the priority axis 5), and the other one comprising the rest, will be dropped.

Despite the existence of a separate specific objective explicitly targeting MRC, projects aimed at assisting the **MRC are not excluded from the other specific objectives**, but are mainstreamed within them into activities for a wider range of target groups.

The draft Operational Programme Slovakia has been the subject of consultations with representatives of civil society and is currently in the inter-ministerial comment procedure.

An important role in the programming process is played by the **Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities**, which is part of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic as of 2021. It ensures the content part of the proposal. However, it is currently **unclear what role the Office will play in the implementation process**. The possibility is currently being discussed that the Office of the Government of the SR will play the role of an intermediary body and the Office of the Plenipotentiary will be the main implementer of individual projects and will directly guarantee both their content and the quality of their performance. Irrespective of the outcome of the negotiations on the tasks in the implementation phase, the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic seeks to obtain the strongest possible range of competences.

As well as the distribution of tasks in the context of the implementation phase, the **financial allocation earmarked for the needs of this specific objective is currently not yet clear**.

The topic of integration of people from the MRC also resonates strongly in the context of Objective 5 'Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories'. **A significant part of the budget, which is still under discussion, should be implemented through the higher territorial units** on the basis of the so-called Regional Investment Spatial Strategies (RISS). RISS are developed at regional level and include activities and objectives that are perceived as priorities by the region. It is perhaps natural that in the case of the Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice self-governing regions in particular, the topic of Roma inclusion plays a significant role. The scope and focus of activities implemented at regional level is currently the subject of discussions at the regional level.

3.3.2. Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

In the programming period 2014-2020, an **Operating programme Food and basic material aid** co-financed through the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived has also been implemented in Slovakia. The **contribution of the EU is EUR 55.1 million** (with an additional EUR 9.7 million from national resources). Under the REACT-EU programme, the budget has been increased by a further EUR 24 million. The programme is implemented by the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic and the aid is distributed through partner organisations, which were

selected for cooperation based on a publicly accessible call. In the first and fourth measures (providing food packages and provision of hygiene packages), the aid is distributed through three organisations⁵⁶ across the entire territory of Slovakia. **Approximately 360,000 food packages** (the weight of food in one package is 12.2 kg) **and about 50,000 hygienic packages are distributed per year**. In the framework of the second measure (provision of a hot meal), there are five soup kitchens providing warm soup⁵⁷, which are operated by four partner organisations⁵⁸. The distribution of donated food (measure 3) has not been implemented yet and the funds originally intended for the implementation of this measure were reallocated in favour of measures one and four (the distribution of food and hygiene packages). The drawing on the funds has reached 94.3 % as of December 31 2020. Even though the food and basic material assistance is not explicitly intended for people from the MRC, they are frequently beneficiaries of the aid.

3.3.3. Overview of the Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan with regard to marginalised communities

The Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan (hereinafter the Recovery Plan) was adopted by the European Commission in June 2021 and will be financed by EUR 6.3 billion in grants over the period 2021-2026. The Recovery Plan is divided into five main areas: (1) **Green economy** (EUR 2 301 million); (2) **Education** (EUR 892 million); (3) **Science, research and innovations** (EUR 739 million); (4) **Health** (EUR 1 533 million) and (5) **Effective public administration and digitalisation** (EUR 1 101 million).

The area of education consists of measures highly relevant for inclusion of marginalised Roma communities in education and the labour market. The area of education is divided into three components, namely (1) **Access, development, and quality of inclusive education at each educational level**, (2) **Education for the 21st century**, and (3) **Enhancing performance of Slovak universities**.

As for strengthening inclusive education, the Recovery Plan aims to (1) improve conditions for the implementation of the **compulsory pre-primary education for children aged 5** and introduce the **legal right for a guaranteed place at the kindergarten for children aged 3-4**; (2) enhance supportive mechanisms for **inclusion of children with special needs** with a focus on individualisation of services; (3) **reform the system of counselling and prevention** with a purpose to improve the mental health of pupils and students; (4) support the implementation of policy tools **preventing early school dropouts** and **reform the F programmes**; (5) **facilitate desegregation** policies at the school level such as pilot projects of school desegregation, methodological support provided to the schools, financial support provided for school commuting, etc.; (6) provide **compensation measures to alleviate the impact of the pandemic** on the pupils and students.

Importantly, the above-mentioned policy measures are supposed to be implemented together with several key legislative changes that have been part of the policy discussion during the two last decades in the expert community in inclusive education. Particularly, the reforms proposed by the Recovery Plan contain adoption of **a novel definition of special needs which should reflect individual needs and a broader range of disadvantages arising from health conditions, family background and socio-economic environment**. Additionally, this definition should reflect not only disadvantages of children (such as socio-economic conditions) but also deficiencies of school facilities and the whole education system. Importantly, the Recovery Plan acknowledges **individual needs of Roma children**

⁵⁶ Slovak Red Cross, Slovak Catholic Charity and The Charity of St. Elizabeth.

⁵⁷ Prešov, Liptovský Mikuláš, Poprad, Spišská Nová Ves, Bratislava.

⁵⁸ Slovak Red Cross, Spiš Catholic Charity, Greek Catholic Charity Prešov, and the non-profit organization Depaul.

speaking Romani language. The inclusive tools are supposed to be financed by the ESIF programme 2021-2027.

The Recovery plan also introduces the **Action plan for alleviating barriers at the school facilities at all levels of education.** The Action plan should aim at eliminating barriers by provision of standards, methodological support and direct financial support for construction works. Reducing barriers at larger secondary schools (with more than 275 students) will be funded within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), while alleviating barriers at kindergartens, primary schools and smaller secondary school will be funded by the ESIF programmes.

In total, EUR 210 million will be used for the **Access, development, and quality of inclusive education at each educational level**, out of which EUR 135 million will be allocated to enhancing kindergarten capacities, EUR 27.2 million will be used for alleviating barriers at the larger secondary schools, EUR 22.5 million for the inclusive measures for children with special needs, EUR 13 million for compensation measures tackling the impact of the pandemic on the students and pupils, EUR 6.1 million to the piloting of early child care programmes for Roma communities, and EUR 5.7 million for the administrative costs related to alleviating barriers and enhancing capacities of kindergartens (see Table 3).

Table 3: Overview of the funding of the measures in the Access, development, and quality of inclusive education at each educational level

Policy measure	Allocated budget (in million EUR)
Enhancing capacities of kindergartens	135.4
Alleviating barriers at the larger secondary schools	27.2
Inclusive measures for children with special needs	22.5
Compensation measures alleviating the impact of the pandemic	13
Piloting of early child care for Roma communities	6.1
Administrative costs related to alleviating barriers and enhancing capacities of kindergartens	5.7

Source: The Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021⁵⁹.

The aim of the component '**Education for the 21st century**' is to **improve literacy, skills and competences of pupils and students** with a **focus on critical thinking, digital skills and social skills**. In this respect the Recovery plan proposes a reform of the state curriculum, of the education and training of teachers, enhancing digital and overall infrastructure of schools, especially in school with high concentrations of socially disadvantaged pupils and students. The reform of the curriculum as well as training of teachers will be based on reflecting individual needs of pupils and students; teachers are supposed to be well-prepared to teach in multilingual school environments and address needs of socially disadvantaged children. The measures are supposed to eliminate double-shifts systems at schools, which are typical for the school with Roma student population.

In total, EUR 469 million will be allocated for the component 'Education for the 21st century', out of which EUR 99.7 million will be allocated for reforms of the national curriculum, EUR 50.4 million will

⁵⁹ Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Available at: https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/assets/files/1019/kompletny-plan_obnovy.pdf.

be used for reforms in teacher training, EUR 187.2 million will be allocated for enhancing digital infrastructure of schools, EUR 123.3 million for overall school infrastructure, EUR 8.4 million for investment management and administrative costs (see Table 4).

Table 4: Overview of the funding of the measures in the Education for the 21st century

Policy measure	Allocated budget (in EUR million)
Enhancing digital infrastructure of schools	187.2
Enhancing overall school infrastructure	123.3
Reforms in the national curriculum	99.7
Reforms in education and trainings of teachers	50.4
Investment management and administrative costs	8.5

Source: The Slovak National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021⁶⁰.

3.4. Overview of individual projects and settlements

3.4.1. Raslavice

The village is located between the regional city Prešov and the district town Bardejov with a population of 2,700. The village has relatively good civil amenities and regularly carries out development projects. Based on the data from the Atlas of Roma communities 2019, approximately **400 people live in a Roma settlement**, which is located on the outskirts of the village. The **ownership of the land under the settlement has been resolved** and the land is owned by the homeowners. Approximately 40 % of the dwellings have final building approval. There is a public **water supply** in the settlement, which **is used by approximately 60 % of the population** in the settlement, approximately 30 % has their own well, and the rest of the inhabitants use a public tap. A **sewerage system**, which is available to approximately 80 % of the population of the settlement, **is used by approximately 60 % of the population** of the settlement; the rest does not use any sewage treatment mechanism. The settlement is electrified; approximately **75 % of the population uses the official connection to the electrical grid**. Based on the results of the Atlas of Roma communities, the village was included in the list of 150 municipalities with MRCs with the most serious situation.

The village is involved in all currently implemented assistance programmes - there are field social workers (the field social work programme), health assistants (the Healthy regions programme), the local municipal civil patrol service, and Roma assistants in the preschool. The village has an active **community centre**, and in the past, an **investment was put into increasing the capacity of the preschool**. There is a **waste sorting centre** in the village, which has been co-financed by the ERDF. According to the data from the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (COLSAF), as of June 30 2021, there were 206 registered jobseekers in the village, of which 113 were registered long-term⁶¹.

The village manages **one of the most successful municipal social enterprises** in Slovakia. It employs 20+ people, most of whom are women. The social enterprise is devoted to vegetable production, which is sold or used within the facilities of the enterprise (school dining room, meals for seniors), performs

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ This is the number of the registered unemployed, the number of the unregistered is significantly higher.

construction work and lets a bus. According to the publicly accessible information, the revenue of the social enterprise in 2020 was EUR 396,577⁶².

In 2012, the village was recognised in the initiative of the network of the Open Society foundation called 'Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion Network' for the property settlement programme.

3.4.2. Hermanovce

The village of Hermanovce is located 20 kilometres northwest of Prešov with a population of around 1 950. Based on the data from the Atlas of Roma communities, there **are two Roma settlements in the village** (Old settlement, New settlement). Both are located on the outskirts of the village and **around 250 people live in each**. In each of the settlements, there are approximately **40 dwellings**, most of them without final building approval, since they are sub-standard dwellings. In the New settlement, there are 5 apartment buildings with a total of 22 apartments. The road to the Old settlement leads directly through a creek, which often overflows and makes it difficult and risky to access the settlement. The Old settlement in Hermanovce is also known under the name 'settlement on the island'. **About one quarter of the land** in each of the settlements **is owned by the owners of the houses** built on them. In the New settlement, the rest of the land is owned by the municipality; in Old settlement a quarter is owned by the municipality and almost a half belongs to various private owners. In the New settlement, 100 % of the population has access to the **public water supply, which is used by approximately 90 % of the population**. In the **Old settlement, there is no water supply system in place and about 90 % of people use water from a public tap**. Approximately 10 % of the population in both locations has their own well. There is no **sewerage system in either of the sites**; in the New settlement, approximately 60 % of the population uses its own septic tank, the rest of the population does not use any method of sewage treatment. In the **Old settlement, 95 % of the people do not use any method of sewage treatment**. Both settlements are electrified; in the New settlement, 100 % of the population uses the connection to the **electrical grid**, while in the Old settlement, it is only about 20 %.

Based on the results of the Atlas of Roma communities, the village was included in the list of 150 municipalities with the most serious MRC situation.

In the village, there **are field social workers** (the programme of field social work) and **the local municipal civil patrol service**. The programme Healthy regions is not implemented in the village. The village has received the **support of OP Human Resources to build a community centre and to increase the capacity of the preschool**.

According to the data from COLSAF, as of June 30, 2021, there were 126 registered jobseekers in the village, of which 67 were registered long-term.

In 2017, a **group of mothers** from Hermanovce in cooperation with the organisation Center for Civil and Human Rights initiated a petition against discrimination of their children at the local school, who were placed in the special classes located in the separate building. They achieved partial success, but they are continuing in their fight.

⁶² Finstat digital data platform. Available at: www.finstat.sk (paywall).

3.4.3. Moldava nad Bodvou

The town is located 30 km south-east from the city of Košice, with a population of 11,300. Based on the data from the Atlas of Roma communities, there are **three Roma settlements** in the town with a **total number of inhabitants at approximately 2,300**. The largest settlement is the so-called 'Budulovská', which is situated on the edge of the town and where around **1,000 people live in about 150 dwellings**. There are 12 apartment buildings in the area with a total of 66 apartments and approximately 80 shanties. The **municipality owns 95 % of the land under the settlement**. There is **no sewerage system in the area**; people use their own septic tanks. The **school and preschool are about 3 km from the site** and no transportation is provided for the children. 'Budulovská' is **known for a brutal police raid in 2013** against the local inhabitants (for more information, see below).

The two other sites are situated **inside the town** and around **700 people live in each**. The first location (ČSA, Rožňavská, Bartalošova) consists of 17 apartment buildings, with a total of 112 apartments. The municipality owns 48 of the apartments as rental apartments. **In 2017, evictions were recorded** in the area. The town sold their flats to a private entity and started evicting tenants for energy debts amounting to hundreds of euro, without giving them the opportunity to repay the debts or settle on a payment schedule^{63,64}. **The second site consists of 56 family houses**, which have final building approval and 12 shanties. 80 % of the property under the site belongs to the house owners, and the rest is owned by the municipality or other entities. About 30 % of the population of the site uses the public water system; the rest uses their own well. The sewerage system is used in full, as well as the connection to the electrical grid. There is also access to a gas pipeline.

There are **field social workers** (the field social work programme), **health assistants** (the Healthy regions programme), and the **local municipal civil patrol service** in the town. The village has **received the support** of OP Human Resources to **build a community centre and to increase the capacity of the preschool**. There is no city-operated community centre, the community centre in the past was operated by the non-profit organisation ETP.

According to the data from COLSAF, as of June 30, 2021, there were 645 registered job seekers in the town, of whom 355 were registered long-term.

The town of Moldava nad Bodvou is known to the public in connection with a **brutal police raid in the settlement Budulovská in the summer 2017**, when 63 police officers with dogs arrived at the settlement in 23 police cars. It should have been a repressive-search raid. None of the wanted persons were found by the police during the raid, as well as no objects resulting from criminal activity. After the examination of the raid, the Ombudswoman Jana Dubovcová concluded that the police violated the constitutional rights of some individuals and used disproportionate means and illegal practices. The Ombudswoman's report was ignored by the government and the parliament⁶⁵.

The police inspection, which investigated the intervention, did not identify any faults and the case was closed. In October 2017, a complaint about the brutality of the police officers was rejected by the Constitutional Court and the lawyer of the injured Roma confirmed that they will turn to the European Court of Human Rights⁶⁶. The six injured Roma were accused of perjury a few years after the raid. In the

⁶³ Often those that have some outstanding payments are granted contracts only for a certain period, which simplifies their evictions after the contract termination.

⁶⁴ EC, 2018, *Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Slovakia*.

⁶⁵ Aktuality.sk, *The White Crow Award was also awarded to a victim of the police raid in Moldava nad Bodvou from the year 2013*.

⁶⁶ SITA, *Constitutional Court rejected a complaint of the brutality of the police officers during a raid in Moldava*.

case of one of them, the prosecution was halted in March 2020; with regard to the other five, the court proceedings have not yet concluded and the defendants could receive up to 5 years in prison.

3.4.4. Luník IX (Košice)

Luník IX is one of the boroughs of the city of Košice. Approximately **7,000 people live in Luník IX and the settlement is generally considered the largest Roma ghetto in Europe.**

The neighbourhood was designed in 1975 with the working title 'ABC' which was the abbreviation for 'Army-Safety-Gypsies' (Armáda-Bezpečnosť-Cigáni). It is possible to say that it was a social experiment conducted in the framework of the 'Concept of the solution of the gypsy question' adopted in the 1970s⁶⁷. The ambition was to situate army workers' families and Roma families in one location, and the presence of the members of the armed forces would guarantee safety in the neighbourhood. However, the myth of the ABC concept quickly fell apart, as members of the armed forces were not interested in the apartments in Luník IX. The high concentration of Roma families began to be a problem for the non-Roma inhabitants, and they tried to leave the neighbourhood and move to other parts of the city. Luník IX gradually became a Roma settlement, and Roma families from other parts of the city were moved there, when they had difficulties paying rent or the municipal apartments they inhabited became lucrative real estate in the 1990s⁶⁸, which the city was interested in capitalising on. Luník IX became not only a Roma neighbourhood, but gradually became a neighbourhood for Roma families with difficulties.

A **long-term disregard for the problems** of the neighbourhood by the city created an **unsustainable social situation** and a complete destruction of a number of the residential blocks. During recent years, **the city proceeded to tear down six apartment houses, which, according to a report of a static engineer**, had impaired statics and had become life threatening for the inhabitants. However, **the demolition** of the apartments took place **without providing any alternative accommodation**, which has contributed to the **creation of additional settlements** on the city property (one of the latest ones is for example Mašličkovo), in which people are living in substandard conditions (usually in shanties built from various materials) or the families from the demolished apartments have moved to non-residential premises in the existing apartment blocks, which leads to further devaluation of the existing apartment buildings.

Currently, according to the Atlas of Roma communities, there are **386 apartments** in Luník IX, **all of which are in theory linked to public water supply, electrical grid, sewerage system, and gas.** However, many apartments are disconnected from the energy sources and use energy in an unofficial manner, or alternatively, solid materials are used for fuel directly in the apartments. There is **a primary school, a preschool, a community centre and an active church congregation directly in the neighbourhood. Field social workers, health assistants, and Roma teaching assistants are present in the neighbourhood.** In the latest period, due to ERDF aid, approximately EUR 500,000 was invested in the **reconstruction of the preschool.** The preschool is known for the inspired artwork of its students and the determination of the teaching staff.

According to the data from COLSAF, as of June 30, 2021 there were 350 registered jobseekers in the city, of which 218 were registered long-term. A number of inhabitants of the neighbourhood moved to the UK and Belgium.

⁶⁷ Filčák and Ficeri, 2020, *Making the Ghetto at Luník IX, Slovakia: People, Landfill and the Myth of the Urban Green Space.*

⁶⁸ During socialism, Roma families usually inhabited the historical city centre, since apartments in historical buildings were generally considered as apartments of lower standard.

One of the most **recent efforts** to improve the situation is a joint initiative **of ETP Slovakia, the city of Košice, and the borough of Košice - Luník IX to build a model house** similar to individual houses utilising community construction during which the construction workers acquire professional skills.

Luník IX also attracted attention in the context of Pope Francis' visit to Slovakia in September 2021, when he personally visited Luník IX and drew attention to the discrimination experienced by Roma in Slovakia.

4. RELATED WORK OF OTHER RELEVANT BODIES AND FINDINGS ON THE ROMA SITUATION IN SLOVAKIA

KEY FINDINGS

- The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Auditors have engaged with the Roma situation in Slovakia within their missions and mandates.
- There is a broad consensus that permeates the work and actions of these various organizations and bodies that structural discrimination, school and spatial segregation, anti-Gypsyism, and inadequate policy efforts are some of the key factors precluding progress towards the social and labour market integration of Roma.

This last chapter briefly summarises key evidence from the related work of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Council of Europe (CoE), European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), and the European Court of Auditors (ECA), along with their findings on the Roma situation in Slovakia.

4.1. Fundamental Rights Agency

A 2019 FRA report⁶⁹ examines data from the second European Minority and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) conducted by FRA in Slovakia and eight other EU-Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Spain) to compare the situation of Roma women to that of Roma men and to that of women in the general population. **The key areas studied were experiences with hate-motivated discrimination, harassment and physical violence, living conditions, employment, education, housing and health.**

Among some of the specific findings for Slovakia are the following:

- Regrettably, the highest rate of those who have **experienced violence motivated by racism among the studied countries is in Slovakia (19 % men, 13 % women).**
- Besides Croatia and Czechia, **limitations due to health and long-term activity limitations were more prevalent among Roma than non-Roma in Slovakia.**
- Next to Greece and Czechia, **Slovakia exhibits the lowest levels of agreement with the statement that 'both girls and boys should stay in school for the same length of time'** (74 % among Roma men and 75 % among Roma women).
- In Slovakia, besides Bulgaria, Greece, and Croatia, **the majority of respondents speak Romani as their first main language at home.** Interestingly, this is more prevalent among men than women. This linguistic aspect must be taken into account when designing educational policies.
- On the other hand, **a significant proportion of respondents (49 %) in Slovakia reported that they benefited from the assistance of Roma teaching assistants at schools,** whereas, except for Croatia (35 %), a rather low share of respondents reported benefits from such support in the other eight Member States studied (3-11 %).

⁶⁹ FRA, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma women in nine EU Member States. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-eu-minorities-survey-roma-women_en.pdf.

The report concludes that '**The results in education and employment show that the EU and its Member States are far from reaching the goals set by the EU Roma inclusion framework**, especially for specific, critical indicators, such as the share of early school leavers and the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training. A serious investment in targeted and gender-sensitive measures is therefore required'.

In another report⁷⁰, FRA studied the link between the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights. With regard to Roma, the report provided country-specific recommendations and **highlighted anti-Gypsyism as a driver of structural discrimination and segregation in education**.

Finally, the FRA report⁷¹ on anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion, covering nine countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain), finds that **Roma children face similar risks of verbal abuse at school regardless of the type of neighbourhood they live in**, suggesting this being driven by their ethnicity and hence anti-Gypsyism as a cause of such abuse.

The report highlighted **negative attitudes towards Roma in housing** (62 % of the population over 18 years of age opposes having Roma as their neighbours, based on the 2017 European Value Survey); however, it also reported that perceived discrimination in housing declined considerably only in Slovakia among the studied countries, with 30 % of Roma having felt discriminated against in 2016 (down from 44 % in 2011).

On the other hand, Slovakia reported the **third highest rate of perceived discrimination in access to health services** (at 11 %, topped by Greece (20 %) and Romania (12 %)) **as well as with regard to hate-motivated harassment** (at 37 %, topped by Czechia (56 %) and Greece (50 %)).

4.2. Council of Europe

The CoE has established an ad hoc **Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM)** to address the situation of Roma and Travellers in Europe. The **Operational Platform for Roma Equality (OPRE)** is another platform, which enables the representatives from equality bodies and human rights institutions to discuss the rights to quality and inclusive education of Roma and Traveller children in the Council of Europe member states. The **Commissioner for Human Rights** is an independent and impartial, non-judicial institution established in 1999 by the Council of Europe to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in the member states.

Among the **key tasks of CAHROM** are: (i) review the implementation of policies (national programmes and/or action plans) and identify good practices of member States concerning Roma and Travellers; (ii) exchange information, views and experience on member States' policies and relevant measures for Roma and Travellers; (iii) prepare recommendations, advice and opinions for the Committee of Ministers, including ad hoc opinions on emerging issues requiring urgent attention; (iv) draw up guidelines for the development and/or implementation of policies which promote the rights of the Roma and Travellers; (v) keep under review the situation of Roma and Travellers in member States; (vi) support the implementation of relevant activities launched by the Council of Europe, particularly within the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019) and follow its implementation; and others.

⁷⁰ FRA, *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-fundamental-rights-report-2019_en.pdf.

⁷¹ FRA, *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion_en.pdf.

The then-Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, paid a country visit to Slovakia in March 2018. Responding to the dire situation of many Roma communities in Slovakia, **the Commissioner called on Slovak authorities⁷² in 2018 to tackle school and spatial segregation, discrimination, and anti-Gypsyism, including the importance of politicians refraining from perpetuating stereotypes about Roma.**

4.3. European Roma Rights Centre

The ERRC has prepared a written note⁷³ on the issues faced by Romani communities in Slovakia. The report documents the situation of Roma communities and EERC actions in three key areas: police ill-treatment and harassment, access to adequate housing, and discrimination in education. For example, in 2017 the ERRC filed an actio popularis claim against the Ministry of the Interior, challenging Police harassment of Roma.

Concerning housing, **the note documents residential segregation, substandard housing, restricted access to basic infrastructure, and a lack of access to drinking water.** Importantly, with many Roma dwellings located on either state owned or private land, the report highlights that many **Roma families live under the threat of forced eviction due to insufficient legal protection** and an ineffective legalisation procedure which could regularise their home ownership.

Concerning education, the note concludes that in Slovakia, many **Roma children face systemic discrimination and segregation in education**, being segregated into Roma-only schools or classes and disproportionate channelling into special schools and special classes for children with 'mild mental disabilities'. As a result, they are excluded from quality education.

4.4. European Court of Auditors

In its report⁷⁴ from June 2016, the European Court of Auditors assessed whether EU policy initiatives and financial support had contributed effectively to Roma integration during the previous decade. Whereas some progress was reported, so were obstacles and dilemmas that prevented the programmes from having the greatest possible impact. Progress had also been hampered by a lack of suitable data, including data on ethnicity.

Whereas significant progress was made in setting out EU policy initiatives promoting Roma integration and all Member States had developed a National Roma Integration Strategy, **a number of shortcomings precluding further progress remained.** These included (i) a lack of proper budgeting; (ii) a lack of attention to anti-discrimination and, in particular, anti-Gypsyism; (iii) that active Roma representation was not always taken into account; and (iv) a mismatch of resources and responsibilities sometimes undermined the work of the National Roma Contact Points.

The report noted **a number of improvements scheduled for the period 2014-2020 compared to 2007-2013**, including Roma inclusion being explicitly referred to in the European Structural and Investment Funds Regulation and having a specific funding priority. In addition, Member States with country-specific recommendations related to Roma integration within the European Semester are now obliged to devote EU funds to promoting Roma inclusion.

⁷² Council of Europe, Slovak Republic country visit. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/slovak-republic-adopt-a-bolder-approach-to-ensure-inclusive-education-and-strengthen-the-safety-of-journalists>.

⁷³ ERRC, Written submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Available at: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/slovakia-cerd-submission-5-november-2017.pdf.

⁷⁴ ECA, Special report no 14, 2016, EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration. Available at: https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_14/SR_ROMA_EN.pdf.

The report makes a number of **specific points referring to Slovakia**. According to the report, Slovakia (along with Bulgaria, Czechia and Greece) only partially met the ex-ante conditionalities (EACs) applicable to ESF OP investment priority IP 9(ii) Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma, mostly due to the lack of proper monitoring tools or methodology for implementing their National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). Along with Croatia, Italy, and Hungary, Slovakia had not met the general EAC concerning anti-discrimination. The report however concluded that Slovakia eventually had met the EAC regarding IP 9(ii) on the basis of the action plan submitted.

The report of the European Court of Auditors also makes **specific recommendations to Member States and the Commission** summarised in Box 1.

Box 1: ECA report recommendations

Europe Court of Auditors, Special Report No 14, 2016:

'EU policy initiatives and financial support for Roma integration: significant progress made over the last decade, but additional efforts needed on the ground'.

Report recommendations:**The Member States should take the following steps:**

- When revising their National Roma Integration Strategies, they should:
 - specify the level of funding needed for Roma integration measures proposed in their respective strategies; include indicators and targets which deal with anti-discrimination or, more specifically, anti-Gypsyism;
 - ensure that Roma representatives are consulted and included in planning integration measures; and define the role played by National Roma Contact Points in more detail.
- When implementing their operational programmes, they should:
 - make use of best practice criteria for Roma integration in proposals and for selecting projects; and complement current output and results indicators with Roma-specific indicators, where appropriate.
- They should also consider acting together to ensure legal certainty on the use of ESF funds for social inclusion irrespective of a link to employment.

The Commission should:

- ensure that measures carried out under the ESIF are of an inclusive nature and contain provisions aimed at fighting segregation;
- make full use of the reports from Member States on effective Roma integration measures;
- ensure that Roma inclusion objectives in their National Roma Integration Strategies are reflected in the ESIF framework;
- consider legislation to ensure that, from 2020, the distribution of funds among Member States takes into account social inclusion indicators;
- work with the Member States on a common methodology for Roma ethnicity data to monitor their social inclusion; and
- encourage Member States to collect comprehensive statistical data on ethnicity within the next two years.

Source: [Europe Court of Auditors, Special Report No 14, 2016](#).

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This paper first presents key indicators on employment and poverty for Roma communities in Slovakia and reviews existing social and employment policies. Second, it discusses the situation of Roma children in education. Third, the paper presents achievements and lessons learned from the use of EU funds for marginalised communities and, finally, it reviews the work of other organisations in assessing the situation of Roma people in Slovakia.

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