Roma: Situation Assessment

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Summary

In Lithuania the Roma issue has been drawing public attention for a few years. However, until today a number of deep-seated problems have contrasted policy makers’ poor understanding of how to solve them.

As identified in the government-initiated 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme, the principal problems faced by the Roma still persist in the sectors of labour, housing, education, healthcare and public services. The Roma themselves as well as the experts and officials dealing with Roma problems do realise in one or another way these issues. However, the causes of these problems are not regularly analysed or superficial popular opinions are provided to explain them.

Although the 2001 Population Census registered 2,500 Roma in Lithuania, it is believed that the actual number is probably closer to 3,000. Even though they constitute a relatively small group of residents, the government should be capable in terms of both finances and administration to develop policies that would help achieve essential changes in Roma life. Marginalisation in the labour market, educational system and public services sphere makes it difficult for the Roma to overcome this exclusion on their own.

About every other (46 percent) Lithuanian Roma is younger than 20 years of age, while this age group constitutes 27 percent nationwide. Therefore, education and employment are crucially important for the development of the Roma community.

Education continues to pose the most serious problems for the Roma Community. In recent years, the percentage of Roma children enrolled in school increased compared to previous years. However there are very few Roma with a diploma and a high rate of illiteracy prevails. A number of Roma children attend specialised instead of general education schools in provincial areas.

Elderly Roma speak Lithuanian much more frequently than the younger generation in comparison to other ethnic minorities whose young people speak Lithuanian better than the older generation. This reflects a “regressive tendency” showing the extending exclusion of the Roma.

Roma involvement in the labour market is one of the most painful issues since only poor results have been attained in this field. Although the development of a mechanism for Roma integration into the labour market is underway in the framework of a project supported by the EQUAL programme, this project will not replace the necessity to formulate policy on Roma integration in the labour market.

The vast majority of Roma either have very few possibilities or none at all to improve their living conditions. The quality of housing in the Kirtimai settlement is especially poor, and the prospects of this compound are unclear. Social housing is not necessarily a suitable alternative as it increases living costs and the Roma question whether they can afford it.

The provision of primary healthcare services, especially in the Kirtimai settlement, is very important for the Roma because of health risk factors, including easily available drugs. Certain gaps were bridged by mobile medical services (visits of medical doctors and nurses to the Kirtimai settlement), which experts rated as effective assistance. However these services are not guaranteed.
The analysis of collected data contradicts the opinion pointing to Roma self-isolation and reluctance to integrate (it is sometimes claimed that perhaps social exclusion does not exist except for the alienation of the Roma themselves). Even though Roma have not expressed any attitudes of alienation, success stories of effective Roma involvement in various initiatives are practically non-existent. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that gaining Roma trust is not so much the task of the Roma but the challenge to all who are willing to change the current situation.

The input of non-governmental organisations in seeking forms of activities for the Roma is also vital. Over the last ten years, a number of cultural and educational projects have been implemented. However, the majority of projects were short-term and had limited impact, failing to achieve systemic changes. On the other hand, this generated a network of experts on issues related to Roma integration.

No marked changes have been achieved in developing the Roma capacity to participate in integration efforts. Although around 20 Roma organisations have been founded over the past 15 years, most of them are no longer active. Only four NGOs were able to take advantage of an opportunity to participate in a programme allowing taxpayers to donate two percent of their income tax for the non-profit sector.

At the moment, there is a growing need for both the detailed identification of Roma-specific problems in individual fields and for a critical revision of Roma integration policy. The shortcomings of institutional coordination in the implementation of the 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme posed the main administrative problems. This resulted in incoherent integration efforts in separate regions, no review of the experiences gained in the programme implementation, an absence of an impact assessment and a failure both to set priorities and to ensure the continuity of programme activities. Programme implementation revealed that the Department of Minorities and Emigration lacked the administrative capacity and political importance to ensure the coordination of Roma integration. Roma integration policy could become more effective if greater attention was paid to it on the governmental level.

The current situation calls for the drafting of a national strategy for Roma involvement in both the education system and the labour market, setting priority fields of social assistance, development of community-oriented target projects and support for non-governmental organisations.
1. Introduction

In Lithuania the Roma issue has been drawing public attention for a few years. However, until today a number of deep-seated problems have contrasted policy makers’ poor understanding of how to solve them.

It cannot be said that Roma issues are unknown to the public since they have been identified in a programme implemented by the government. Furthermore it also cannot be stated that no information has been gathered to find ways to tackle these issues, it just needs to be structured, or that no experience exists since quite a few organisations have already implemented several projects for the Roma.

Nevertheless, the changes in Roma life are very few. Persisting exclusion and social challenges call for more attention to the situation of the Roma and raise questions as to why integration efforts have been fruitless. On the one hand, the Roma are entitled to the same rights as all other citizens and seem to be equal to other non-Roma members of the population. On the other hand, people need to realise that the Roma live in poverty, are uneducated and unemployed, and thus have little understanding of how to exercise their rights. In short, this circle of routine problems limits their possibilities to change their lives. There is also no public understanding that overcoming the exclusion of marginalised groups is in the common interest of the entire society.

The problem of Roma integration lies not only on the institutional level and in the hardships of activity coordination, but also in the absence of a clear concept for changing the Roma situation. Here emerges the dilemma: the acknowledgement on the one hand that Roma problems are extremely serious, that they cover the majority of life spheres and call for special efforts on the part of the public and the government, and on the other hand the lack of understanding about how to avoid creating “a separate reservation” when improving the Roma situation.

The present overview considers critical aspects of the social situation of the Roma and provides certain statistics on the Roma residing in Lithuania. Particular spheres of social life posing specific problems for the Roma such as education, employment, housing and healthcare are also reviewed. Furthermore, the overview aims at drawing attention to the formulation of Roma integration policy. The completion of the 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme enables the evaluation of obstacles hindering the development of Roma integration policy.

Although the shortage of data on the Roma situation impedes analysis and policy formulation, the overview attempts to provide relatively recent data obtained from the comprehensive analysis of the Roma integration programme conducted by the Open Society Institute in 2002\(^1\), and enables adequate understanding of the current situation.

2. Roma Integration Policy

2.1. State Policy: Challenges of Coordination and Concept

After Roma problems were taken into consideration on the European level at the end of the last decade, the national governments of Eastern and Central Europe were encouraged to solve the issues of Roma integration, employment, education, housing and discrimination with more vigour. International organisations played an important role in formulating the current agenda and setting key objectives, while their guidelines have aided in tackling the most urgent problems of the Roma living in different countries.

The inclusion of Roma problems into the government-conducted policy field in Lithuania was also partially influenced by international discourse and initiatives supported by international organisations in Lithuania. The 2000-2004 Programme for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society was drawn up in 2000. It was formulated and coordinated by the Department of Minorities and Emigration (hereinafter - DME) under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. The programme acknowledged and identified the majority of Roma problems such as the hardships the Roma community faces in the social, economic, educational, healthcare and legal fields. The programme set specific tasks and determined respective budget allocations for their implementation. The first stage of the programme was intended to address the issues of the Vilnius (Kirtimai) Roma community and later to expand the measures to improve the Roma situation nationwide. The objectives of the programme included the establishment of the Centre of Romany Society (hereinafter – CRC), teaching of the Lithuanian language, professional training for the unemployed, legal education, health checks, drug prevention programmes and support for cultural activities.

The 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme was rather successfully implemented as all intended measures were actually realised. However, it is still too early to speak about any visible changes since education development, involvement in the labour market and the change of housing conditions on the community level are time consuming processes. Thus, the problems identified in the programme persist. Successful policy development requires critical analysis and the evaluation of experiences gained.

The key problems in the implementation of this programme were comprehensively examined in an analysis commissioned by the Open Society Institute in 2002 and were conducted at the commencement of the programme’s implementation. It must be said that the majority of problems in the programme’s implementation identified in this analysis were not settled. The analysis of the Roma Integration Programme can still serve as one of the most relevant documents in planning specific measures for Roma integration.

However, there were some attempts to tackle issues related to Roma ID documents and their civil status, involvement in the education system, availability of public services and lack of Roma civil involvement in the framework of the programme. Due to the somewhat narrow scope of activities, the efforts taken in these fields resembled pilot projects, failing to achieve acceleration and, consequently, continuity. Despite this, the above-mentioned efforts enabled the gathering of some experience.

In terms of content, the programme was adequately drawn up, corresponding to the issues of the Lithuanian Roma. However, it lacked strategic dimension. So far the government does not

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have clear-cut objectives or the concept of how to achieve them. Nor has it assumed any long-term undertakings in the field of Roma integration. The new 2005-2007 activity plan of the DME includes the Support for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society that sets two objectives. Sadly, both objectives, i.e. “to provide conditions for the integration of Roma ethnic minority into the life of the Lithuanian state” and “to assist the Roma in preserving their ethnic and cultural identity” seem like a vexing regression in comparison to the previous programme that detailed a number of specific issues. The government has failed both to make use of the gained experience and to set specific priorities.

One more challenge is the issue of Roma leaders and Roma representation. At the launch of the Roma Integration Programme in Lithuania in 2000, Roma leaders complained that not enough attention was given to the opinion of the Roma community, which should have been taken into account in the drafting of new programmes. However, until now the particular approaches towards Roma community involvement were not sufficiently considered or tested.

The successful implementation of social programmes requires a well-balanced organisational operation as well as cultural sensitivity and attention. Although rather recent, Roma integration practice in Lithuania revealed that “social integration” was not just a technical task that could be solved without public debate, having no approach to the problems of minorities and abstaining from expressing it when these minorities fall into difficulty or are the focus of mass media.

The 2000-2004 Programme for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society specifies that “the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society is impeded by the prevailing public opinion that the Roma’s social situation and their integration are not very important since there are other deprived people or children who do not attend schools in the country.” The existence of such an opinion among the various strata of society not affected by Roma problems directly prompts the development of public discussion on whether the Roma need and why they need special attention.

The most extensive public discussions on the Roma social situation in the mass media were most probably triggered by the imposition of more stringent police control in the Kirtimai Roma settlement in autumn 2004 and the demolition of a few buildings there in December 2004 by the Vilnius City Municipality. However, the strategic stance of the government and its representative the DME on Roma integration issues was not expressed on these occasions.

The deficiencies in interdepartmental coordination and administration that came out into the open at the start of the programme’s implementation now seem to pose the key difficulties for further policy development. The Open Society Institute analysis of 2002 notes that “the Department of Minorities and Emigration experienced difficulties in cooperating with organisations in charge of individual tasks in the programme, and thus there was poor coordination that could not ensure that the implementation of individual projects would complement each other and contribute to the general objectives and aims of the programme.”

The accomplishment of the programme clearly revealed the general problems in the implementation of ethnic minority policies. Not only insufficient organisational capabilities of the DME, but also the political insignificance of the DME became obvious. Therefore, this institution does not influence the agenda of other authorities (such as ministries or municipalities) nor does it ensure effective coordination of Roma integration programme.

2.2. Roma-related Projects and Programmes: Model Initiatives and their Limits

The overview of different Roma-related programmes implemented over the last decade reveals that they largely focused on education problems, cultural events and some support of the Roma and their children in particular. However, the most pertinent to Roma are social issues which remain the major challenge to be solved.

The pioneer projects in Lithuania aimed at tackling the Roma situation as well as educational issues were initiated by foreign donor organisations in the mid-1990s. The very first Roma-related initiative was implemented by the Open Society Fund - Lithuania (hereinafter - OSF) in 1993 in order to draw public attention to the problems of the Roma community, to encourage social activities and to integrate the Roma into society. Between 1996 and 1999, the OSF implemented Roma programmes and support for Roma school children that mainly addressed educational issues. Organisations founded by the OSF were also engaged in Roma-related activities.

Since 1994, the Lithuanian Children’s Fund has been actively engaged in addressing social problems experienced by the Roma residing in the Vilnius encampment, organising seminars and other activities such as professional adult training, children’s activities in the summer, providing conditions for attending preparatory classes and the improvement of sanitary conditions in the Kirtimai settlement (water, showers, laundry, etc.). The Programme of Financial Support to Roma Children has been ongoing since 2004. The Lithuanian Children’s Fund also won support from the EQUAL programme funded through the EU initiative for the project Development and Testing of the Mechanism for Roma Integration into the Labour Market in 2004.

A social worker, some teachers and assistants work in the Centre of Lithuanian Romany Society founded in 2001, which has now gained importance in the Roma community by providing education, teaching and counselling services for the community members of different age groups and ensuring the availability of services in the Kirtimai settlement most affected by exclusion.

Different initiatives were also implemented in regions around the country: Panevėžys City (Roma community Nevo drom, kindergarten Ramunė, general education school), Klaipėda City (Klaipėda Second Special Boarding School, Klaipėda Roma Community Paše jak), Žagarė Town (Joniškis Region) and Kybartai Town (Vilkaviškis Region).

On the one hand, the activities carried out over the past ten years remain somewhat fragmented as there have been plenty of short-term, single impact projects addressing after-school activities for children but not their overall involvement into the broader educational system. It was noted that, for instance, education initiatives are mostly implemented on the regional level or at individual institutions and thus largely rely on individual persons (usually teachers) and their direct contacts with Roma families and the leaders of Roma organisations. On the other hand, these initiatives, implemented projects and programmes have generated a network of specialists who continue working with Roma, and have prompted the consideration of the Roma situation.

On various occasions, Roma leaders have expressed their opinions about the key problems faced by their communities; however, these opinions have not been formally declared and were only heard by people working with the Roma directly. The Roma have sought the help and advice of persons holding a certain authority in the community on the issues of ID document formalisation, qualification for grants or allowances, formalisation of property or search for subsistence sources. According to the opinion expressed by certain Roma leaders,

the arrangement of Roma training should be linked with employment, for example, by issuing qualification documents that could be helpful in search of employment. Creative offers of subsistence sources to the young generation of the Kirtimai community could serve in distracting the young Roma from criminal risks. The Kirtimai situation also calls for identification of methods to promote the learning of Lithuanian. Compensation payments for Holocaust victims are also one of the relevant concerns. Moreover the Roma community needs formal political acknowledgement, meaning the conferring of a certain status for Roma Day (8 April).

After Lithuania’s Restoration of Independence, about 20 Roma organisations were founded. Unfortunately, not all of them managed to address the previously mentioned problems, and most existed for only a short period (for example, the departure of organisation leaders abroad resulted in the termination of organisation activities). No accurate data exists on the number of currently active organisations. Judging by data from February 2004, only four Roma organisations were registered as support beneficiaries with the State Tax Inspectorate. This data indirectly indicates that administrative capabilities of the majority of Roma organisations remain minimal.

To achieve more substantial changes, the diversity of non-governmental activities should be integrated into clear, publicly discussed activities that could perhaps be ensured by state institutions. Without the support of institutional players, individual initiatives remain limited and their activities fail to cause structural impact.

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Given the experience gained during the implementation of the government’s 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme and the input of non-governmental organisations, and in view of ensuring the interdepartmental coordination of Roma integration, the following measures for the Roma integration policy development could be implemented:

To support non-governmental organisations providing social services and other services aimed at the improvement of the Roma situation;

To consider the funding (grant allocation) of target projects with state-allocated funds through the DME. This funding would be less than certain EU programmes such as EQUAL but more than support for mainly cultural or amateur activities. Funding of target projects addressing the communities would encourage local initiatives and would initiate work with the Roma in other Lithuanian locations (other than Kirtimai). There are certain instances of programme adaptation (simplification) in Lithuania, thus this opportunity could be considered.

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8 For example, in 2004-2006 Lithuania is to implement a simplified model of the Leader+ programme that aims at the formation of structures required by this programme and training of skills.
3. Situation Overview

3.1. Roma: Population

The 2001 Population Census showed that 2,571 persons of Roma/gypsy nationality lived in Lithuania. According to certain estimations and opinions expressed by NGOs, there are actually more Roma in Lithuania since some could have remained unrecorded due to various reasons. Some documents indicate that there are about 3,000 Roma in Lithuania, although this number is tentative as no mathematic calculations exist.

The Roma reside in various regions around the country but the major Roma communities are located in the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Panevėžys. The largest Roma community resides in the Kirtimai District near Vilnius.

The residents of Kirtimai call their settlement Parubanka and there are upper and lower encampments. According to DME data, around 450 Roma live in the Kirtimai settlement, while the 2001 Population Census indicated that 72 buildings in the settlement housed 428 people. Judging from the survey data, about three out of four Roma have lived in the “encampment” since birth.

According to Naujininkai Neighbourhood, there were 78 buildings including three burnt ones in the Kirtimai Roma settlement and along the Rodunė Road, based on estimates during an inspection conducted by the Third Passport Division of the Vilnius Chief Police Commissariat on 6 May 2004.

Age Groups

About every other (46 percent) Lithuanian Rom is younger than 20 years of age, while this age group constitutes 27 percent nationwide. Even if not all Roma were recorded due to census deficiencies, and adults were recorded less often than other age groups (since they are more mobile than children and could have been away at the time), the Roma community is characterised by a different age structure than the average nationwide. That is, the Roma community is relatively younger. This demographic characteristic could serve as a crucial argument in deciding on Roma integration policy priorities such as education and employment, which are especially important for the social development of this population group.

It also has to be noted that the elderly (above 60 years of age) constitute a rather small percentage of the Roma in comparison to the rest of the country’s population. This fact most likely shows that the relatively poorer quality of life the Roma have in all domains also influences their life expectancy.

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11 A Roma survey was conducted in Kirtimai and in other locations near Vilnius under the commission of the Department of Minorities and Emigration under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in September 2001: Institute of Labour and Social Research. 2001. Social Survey of Roma Residing in Vilnius City Encampments. (Survey Report).
Citizenship and ID Documents

The second report on Lithuania issued for the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance stresses that the majority of Roma in Lithuania do not have Lithuanian citizenship because their documents have not been formalised in time. Lithuania indicated in the 2002 report that there were 1,431 Roma with Lithuanian citizenship, while 161 Roma had the status of a permanent resident after they proved that their parents or grandparents had lived in Lithuania before 15 June 1940. Thirty-six Roma possessed citizenship from other countries.

In response to the query of the DME, the Migration Department in October 2004 provided data revealing that there were over 2,000 people of Roma ethnicity in Lithuania who had been issued ID documents: 1,870 people who declared that they were of Roma/gypsy nationality had Lithuanian citizenship, while 150 had residence permits.

However, the Roma with ID document difficulties (for example, expired documents) find it complicated to solve them. Furthermore, there sometimes occur unprecedented cases (the person has no birth certificate, does not know the place of birth, etc.), which are reluctantly, if at all, settled by the officials of individual services because of the absence of information.
3.2. Roma in the Education System

*Education Level of the Roma*

Although education is where the majority of projects have been implemented and where the best results have been achieved over the last decade, it still remains the most serious problem within the Roma community. Many Roma children never finish school or acquire a general education.

Very few Roma have finished secondary school (with very few exceptions and one person still studying in a high school) in recent years. The low level of education and illiteracy issues were revealed by the 2001 Population Census, the results of which showed that there were 31 illiterate persons per 1,000 Roma (60 illiterate persons were identified in total), when the national average is a little bit above three illiterate persons per 1,000 residents over ten years of age.

In the census, 38 percent of Roma claimed that they did not speak Lithuanian (one of the highest rates). More detailed analysis revealed that in comparison to other ethnic groups in Lithuania, the Roma are characterised by a “regressive tendency” in respect to age. Usually, the older generation of ethnic minorities speaks a language worse than the young generation; however, more elderly Roma people speak Lithuanian than the young Roma. Over 30 percent of the Roma in the 20 to 39 year old age group stated that they did not speak Lithuanian. The language barrier may additionally aggravate the educational development of the Roma community as well as their opportunities to acquire a diploma, participate in training courses or find a job. Furthermore, this “regressive tendency” may indicate that Roma exclusion has deepened since Lithuania’s restoration of independence.

According to data collected in a social survey\(^\text{12}\) conducted by the Institute of Labour and Social Research in 2001, about 18 percent of male heads of household and 35 percent of women heads of household among Roma residing in the Vilnius environs are illiterate, while the majority have no profession. Nonetheless, the majority of Roma (83 percent) do not think that their children should study in a separate Roma school while only 8 percent said they wanted such separate schools for their children. The majority also believe that both girls and boys should be trained for some profession.

*Changes in Roma School Children Numbers*

Official education data is collected based on the language taught at a particular school instead of the ethnic origin of the children, which means no official or accurate data exists on Roma school children. Statistics on Roma school children are not collected regularly, but data collected by NGOs has revealed that Roma involvement in the education process has been increasing lately. However, summarised data confirms that the attendance remains irregular and the majority of Roma never finish school.

In 1996-1997, 276 Roma children\(^\text{13}\) attended Lithuanian educational institutions, mainly primary schools, while in 2004 almost 600 Roma children attended schools nationwide.

Greater Roma involvement in the educational system has resulted not only from improved data collection (more institutions were surveyed, information providers knew more about the

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Roma and related initiatives) but also from a number of Roma-related initiatives and projects implemented, aid and support to Roma families, educators and other factors.

The majority of school children (about 75 percent) study at the primary school level. With each higher grade, the number of Roma school children decreases, i.e. their attendance at school among higher grades is lower. Notwithstanding, the data of 2004 showed a positive trend as the number of Roma children in higher grades has increased. In 2004-2005, at least 14 Roma schoolchildren have the opportunity to finish a general school.

More than every third Roma child attends schools that teach in either Russian or Polish, and every eighth Roma pupil studies in a specialised boarding school (75 percent of school children in 2004-2005). A number of experts (representing specialised and general education schools) claim that Roma children are frequently socially and educationally neglected: they do not attend kindergartens or preparatory schools, often start school older than age seven and frequently find themselves in a bilingual or even trilingual environment at school. This clearly encumbers their adaptation in general education schools and increases the likelihood of their transfer to specialised schools.

It has to be noted that during the implementation of the Programme for Roma Support, the Foundation for Educational Change in 2003 initiated and published the first Roma language textbook *Romane Bukvi. Romany Alphabet* to be circulated in primary schools. Co-authored by a female Rom actively engaged in Roma education activities, the textbook’s publication was funded by the Ministry of Education and Science.

**Peculiarities and Challenges of Roma Education**

Following the Study of the Roma Situation in the Education System conducted by the Department of Ethnic Studies of the Institute for Social Research in 2004, and analysing the information and data from different sources, below are key conclusions covering the most relevant aspects of Roma involvement in the educational system that also reflect future challenges:

*Poor school attendance and frequent drops out are related to delayed school enrolment (for example, at 10-11 years old).* The high drop out rate is generally credited as one of the major issues of Roma education. However, even temporary school attendance should be stressed as an important step. Early enrolment of children and purposeful support measures for Roma should be emphasized for Roma integration into the general education system.

*The disproportionate number of Roma children attending specialised schools* indirectly confirms that Roma needs are not met in general education schools. The specialised education system partially encourages Roma parents to take their children to specialised schools. Yet if the need for social support was satisfied in other ways, a certain percentage of school children who now attend specialised schools could be integrated into the general education system.

*Kindergarten and pre-school education and regular support of social workers and special teachers* help encourage better attendance and learning results.

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Studies reveal that the better understanding of the specific social and learning needs of Roma and working with them to overcome these enables their improvement in the general educational system. To avoid Roma discrimination and segregation, more attention should be paid to the identification of their individual needs instead of treating them as one general group associated with low expectations in education and therefore relatively lower requirements are placed on them. One of the educational challenges is to provide relevant support to teachers who work with Roma school children.

So far, general education schools have made little use of the experience gained by NGOs and other institutions which work with Roma. A range of organisations and institutions helping the Roma cooperate both on the NGO level and with state institutions. However, organised and consistent changes can be achieved only after a clear national strategy is formulated for the development of Roma education.

3.3. Involvement in the Labour Market

No recent statistics exist on the Roma in the labour market since employment and unemployment data is gathered without any indication of the person’s nationality or ethnicity.

Presumably, the highest unemployment rate is among the Kirtimai residents. However Roma involvement in the labour market is quite specific and prejudiced throughout the country.

According to research on the Roma of the Vilnius environs conducted in 2001, about 50 percent of men and 70 percent of women in Roma families did not specify their occupation and called themselves unemployed, while only 7 percent indicated that they had a profession.

Those who worked irregularly included 25 percent of men who claimed that they worked in a market and 16.5 percent who were engaged in an individual business. About 40 percent mentioned a lack of employment opportunities, while every fifth woman stated they were unemployed because they reared children. The respondents also brought up the fact that Roma were not desirable employees.

Only a small percentage (5 percent of men and one woman) stated that they had a regular source of income. Since the majority of respondents have no regular job, their income comes from casual earnings or social grants or allowances. Most likely the situation in the Kirtimai Roma settlement has not changed within recent years.

Nearly every other Roma family expressed their willingness to take any job if only there was a chance. This contradicts the prevailing stereotype that the Roma are unwilling to work, which raises the question why the usual employment methods are not effective in respect of the Roma and how accessible work places can be found or created for them.

In autumn 2004, the Vilnius Municipality offered approximately 50 residents of the encampment public work opportunities. The fact that no one was willing to get involved caused the disappointment of some Vilnius residents who had previously sympathised with the Roma and in a way justified the belief that “they do not want to work.” However, a basic job offer in ghetto conditions is not so simple. There have been other offers when, for example, the DME implemented the Roma Integration Programme. This experience could have been used and specific employment scenarios could have been prepared accordingly. In

16 Institute of Labour and Social Research. Social Survey of Roma Residing in Vilnius City Encampments conducted under the commission of the Department of Minorities and Emigration under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in the second half of 2001.
this case, a lack of experience working with the Roma destined the adopted decisions to failure.

As a result of long-term exclusion, the existence of illegal sources of income in certain cases must be taken into account. Additional factors limiting the risk taken by uneducated and inexperienced people in the labour market are the developed social ties, labour distribution in families and the necessity to provide for children. One of the latest initiatives was launched in this field after Lithuania’s EU accession. Supported by the EQUAL programme, it considers Roma problems in social policy spheres.

*EQUAL project Development and Testing of the Mechanism for Roma Integration into the Labour Market*

The DME under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Vilnius City Municipality Administration, the Administration of the Ukmėrgė Region Municipality, the Public Institution Centre of Lithuanian Romany Society, the Lithuanian Gypsy Community “Čigonų laužas” and the Social Workers Training Centre under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour are the partners in the project, which is managed by the Lithuanian Children’s Fund.

The project is aimed at testing the support mechanism for Roma integration into the labour market and cooperation networks by employing specially trained Roma representatives and the public. Unlike previous experience in working with the Roma, the project targets the Roma residing throughout Lithuania instead of one regional segment of the Roma community.

It should also be noted that this project is one of the largest in scope in comparison to other projects aimed at Roma problems in Lithuania and certainly greater than all measures for Roma involvement in the labour market implemented so far, and thus partially bridges the critical gap. Effective project implementation can be expected because of the high requirements for project administration. It can also become a positive model of EU policy support.

Yet it has to be considered that the EQUAL programme supports experimental initiatives designed for the search of new solutions: therefore, it does not form a part of a continuous regular social policy. Thus, this project does not replace the need to formulate Roma integration policy and does not exempt the government from assuming long-term obligations.

### 3.4. Housing

Although it is recognised that there are Roma in the country who live in unsatisfactory housing, no generalised data exists on the number and types of Roma housing. The housing issue has two significant aspects, namely 1) the quality of the existent housing, and 2) the opportunities to legitimise present housing or change place of residence. The fact that Roma housing, in spite of the overall quality level inside, are often located in disadvantaged places in terms of infrastructure should also be considered. The extreme example is the Kirtimai settlement which was only equipped with basic amenities such as water, electricity or waste collection in 2001. In rating Roma living conditions and their potential to change their lifestyle shaped by exclusion, the accessibility of public services, education and healthcare institutions has to be taken into account.

In recent years, the Roma housing issue was most openly raised when the Vilnius City Municipality demolished some buildings in the Kirtimai settlement on 2-3 December 2004.

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17 For example, see [www.roma.lt](http://www.roma.lt)
Opportunities to Change Place of Residence: Social Housing Alternatives

Social housing could be an alternative offered by the government to the Roma living in unsatisfactory conditions that is provided by the municipality. Even though no accurate data exists on the number of Roma willing to move to social housing, the deprived Roma reside not only in Kirtimai but also in other Lithuanian municipalities. Notwithstanding, some doubt exists whether social housing under the conditions it is currently provided could constitute a desirable and realistic alternative to the present housing of Roma.

Many Roma officially have no permanent place of residence (are not “registered” at a certain address), therefore, pursuant to effective laws they are not entitled to the social housing provided by the municipality. If a Rom cannot register or is not allowed to do so in his or her place of actual residence, then there is no possibility to apply for social housing either.

The social housing fund at the disposal of the Municipality in Vilnius where the majority of deprived Roma reside (in Kirtimai) is not adequate for the needs of the city residents. About 1,000 people\(^{18}\) queued for the allocation of social housing in December 2004 and the Roma had to wait with all other applicants.

There are some Roma families residing in social housing in Vilnius. According to the CRC, the Roma living in the Kirtimai settlement have expressed interest in the opportunity to settle in the city and have questioned social workers about the conditions of social housing allocation and maintenance. Apart from the formal barrier of having no registered place of residence, the higher costs of housing costs in the city in comparison to their own homes in the Kirtimai settlement also aggravate the issue. They usually only have to pay for electricity and water in Kirtimai and they receive assistance. More deprived Roma realise the limits of their opportunities when comparing their income with the costs of housing maintenance in the city. In practice, none of the pensioners have work experience, hence they receive only minimal pensions. The unemployed cannot be sure that their irregular income would be permanent and would suffice to cover housing costs. However, in no case should they be advised to spend funds allocated for child development for other purposes.

Thus, given the observations of the CRC officers, the Roma initiative to seeking housing is impeded not by absolute contentment with current conditions or willingness to live in exclusion, but by the realisation of risk and limited possibilities to survive in another place. Their determination to seek social housing is inhibited by the potential prospect that in case of failure to sustain the housing, the Roma family would lose both their actual housing and the real opportunity to apply for it. If they remain in their own housing as long as possible, then they retain this opportunity in theory.

Prospects of the Roma settlement in Kirtimai: pull it down or legitimate it?

Most buildings in the Roma settlement in Kirtimai have been around for decades, yet all of them are registered under one address. Because of the unresolved issue of land ownership, residents have no possibility to register and legitimise their homes since they do not own the land on which they have built their housing. In 2002, the DME raised the issue of granting Roma the opportunity to legitimate their property. A detailed plan of the area should have been drawn up by the end of 2002. This issue was discussed in the Vilnius Municipality, but the previous owners of the encampment land failed to come forth in a period of one year. Unfortunately, the Vilnius Municipality rejected this proposal in 2004.

\(^{18}\) The list used to be published on the website of the Vilnius City Municipality at www.vilnius.lt; however, since 2005, the list of applicants for social housing is not listed on the Internet anymore.
The actions taken by the Vilnius City Municipality to demolish buildings in Kirtimai deserve individual consideration. Following the municipality decision, six buildings were demolished in Kirtimai on 2-3 December 2004. The Municipality based its decision on the claim that the buildings were illegal and that it would fight drug dealing. Kirtimai residents applied to various institutions seeking both compensation and the legal opinion of the Municipality concerning five buildings (the sixth one was vacant) that had been pulled down.

The Municipality failed to draw up and publicise any consistent development project for the Kirtimai settlement, which is a major mistake in case the Municipality decides to take radical measures in Kirtimai. The unprepared project raises further doubts as to the adequacy of the Municipality’s actions; that is, whether the demolition indeed corresponded to the threat posed by the buildings in the encampment, and whether the buildings had any direct relation to the alleged drug dealing. It should be noted that in other cases of unauthorised construction, the Municipality negotiated and try to find a legal remedy instead of resorting to demolition.

The inconsistency of actions taken by the authorities to implement changes only complicates the Roma situation and deepens their exclusion. Although at the beginning of the demolition campaign, the officials stressed that all encampment buildings were illegal and would be pulled down, it contradicted earlier reforms carried out in the settlement. The CRC was set up with government support in order to carry out its goals to normalise the situation in the settlement by equipping it with lavatories and laundries, arranging courses and preparatory classes for pre-school Roma children.

In 2003, Vilnius City Municipality committees discussed drawing up a detailed plan for the Roma settlement in Kirtimai and asked the government to allot a plot of land for this use. Furthermore, in 2004 the Municipality authorised the inventory of buildings in the settlement. All this led the Roma to expect that the legal status of the settlement buildings would be settled by legitimating them. However, after the inventory, the Municipality’s opinion on the further management of Kirtimai Roma settlement was delayed, meaning that the Roma could not clearly evaluate the situation, plan housing management (like building an addition onto the existing house instead of erecting a new house) or seek alternative housing outside of the encampment.

It also has to be noted that the Municipality’s offer to the Roma complaining about the demolition of their buildings to move to the shelter (doss-house) cannot be considered an adequate housing alternative. By building residential buildings, the Roma probably sought to create a stable place of residence and to create a long-term housing solution instead of a temporary shelter.

The resolution of the issue of Roma housing is complicated in the absence of any complex improvement plan for their situation. The absence of this plan makes the prospect of reforms in the Kirtimai settlement impossible.

3.5. Healthcare

Several aspects related to Roma healthcare issues need to be considered. First are overall wellness and life expectancy related to overall deprivation and the specific conditions of Roma living. Secondly, there are problems concerning drug use, drug dealing and drug availability in the Vilnius encampment. Like in other fields, accurate information on the Roma’s state of health is insufficient.

Healthcare issues were recognised in the 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme which indicated that the majority of Roma suffered from respiration and digestive tract diseases and
tuberculosis. The majority of Roma cannot receive the services provided by healthcare institutions, especially hospitals, since many have no health insurance, registration or ID documents. Children’s treatment is free, yet with no accurate statistics of children available, the disease prevention measures (like vaccination) cannot be taken. Poor sanitary habits among Roma result from the difficulty to ensure them.

A paediatrician said that Roma children have no characteristic illnesses except those related to deprived living conditions such as pediculosis or scabies and the rare outbreaks are controlled. This paediatrician maintained that more children attended schools and visited polyclinics than before. A therapist whose district serves the majority of the Roma said that the Roma usually visit doctors because of trophic ulcers, thrombophlebitis (caused by the abuse of intravenous drugs), heightened blood pressure, colds, headaches and stomach aches as well as various traumas. The visits of outpatients are irregular. The director of the Polyclinics claimed that the advertisements on physician availability, work hours, telephones for making an appointment and all other required information are posted in the Roma encampment. The doctors are called to the encampment about three or four times per week on average, mainly because of child ailments.

**Drug Taking (the Case of the Roma Settlement in Kirtimai)**

According to the Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders (hereinafter – VCAD), there were about 50 drug-abusers in the Kirtimai encampment in 1999. The Roma start abusing drugs as early as 13-15 years of age because of easy drug availability. No accurate data on drug abuse in the Roma settlement has been collected for five years; thus, the assumption that the number of drug-abusers dropped in 2004 would be ill-founded. It has been observed however that the majority of drug-abusers have recently been enrolled in methadone treatment programmes.

Deprivation, limitation of utilities, low rate of education, illiteracy and drug-addiction provide perfect conditions for the outbreak of infectious diseases in the Roma settlement. In autumn 2004, a few AIDS cases in the encampment were mentioned by social workers during an informal discussion.

The VCAD has been providing healthcare services to drug addicted Roma since 1996. Over 30 Roma took part in a drug treatment using methadone conducted by the Naujininkai Polyclinics in cooperation with the VCAD in 1996-1999. After recognising the potential spread of contagious diseases via intravenous drugs, a syringe exchange programme was started in Kirtimai in 1996 in the framework of primary healthcare. Nurses visiting the community exchanged syringes and distributed other medicines. General practitioners provided information on safe drug taking, the threats of HIV/AIDS and other illnesses.

Funded by the Vilnius City Municipality, the VCAD implemented the healthcare programme *Mobile Healthcare Services in Roma Community* at the end of 2004 and beginning of 2005. Each day a minivan with medics arrived at the encampment (from 11:30am – 1:30pm on weekdays and 1:00 – 3:00 pm on weekends). The objective of the programme was not only to provide aid to drug-abusers (provide them with methadone) but also to expand the healthcare services to all Roma in need. For some encampment residents this was the only opportunity to undergo medical checks, receive advice from doctors on different health issues and share

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19 From conversations with employees at the Naujininkai Polyclinics at the beginning of March 2005.
21 Report for 09-31 December 2004 on the *Mobile Healthcare Services in Roma Community* programme conducted by Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders.
other concerns, even though the limited room of the minivan prevented comprehensive health checks and people must wait in queues outside the van. Sometimes they do not trust provided services and distributed medicines. In some cases, the Roma were visited at home. Since Vilnius City Municipality did not allocate any funds for 2005, the future of the programme remains uncertain.

The physicians who took part in the programme specified the following healthcare needs of the Roma community in Kirtimai:

- Continuous methadone treatments, consultation by health experts, esp. about the treatment of trophic ulcers;
- The majority of Roma have no health insurance and believe that the polyclinics will provide them only with primary care in case of serious health disorders and thus reluctantly visit polyclinics;
- Regular treatment of contagious diseases such as pediculosis or scabies.
- Due to the Roma illiteracy level, regular oral information needs to be provided not only about disease treatment and medication usage, but also about how they can be examined by a general practitioner as well as other specialists in both polyclinics and other healthcare institutions (names of institutions and their operating hours, etc.).

Healthcare experts rate the purposefulness of mobile services (or services adjusted to the community) as an effective means of assistance to an isolated, disadvantaged community. The issue of ensuring healthcare services to the Roma who have no health insurance calls for a resolution, too. The cooperation of healthcare institutions and the coordination of their activities in providing aid to the Roma community are also very relevant in this respect.

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22 Report for 9-31 December 2004 on the Mobile Healthcare Services in Roma Community programme conducted by the Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders.
4. Human Factor

4.1. Lack of Trust

Mutual trust is among the key factors in seeking to make the efforts of both the Roma and other people consistent and complementary. Unfortunately the estimation of trust is the most complex of all issues discussed herein.

Trust must be earned and maintained, which is not simple. Using only formal measures which are the foundation for the majority of Government-initiated initiatives makes this difficult to achieve. The failure to identify an appropriate model of communication or incidences of tension is usually justified by putting the blame on the Roma and their reluctance or inability to behave properly. In certain cases, explanations are “discovered” in traditional Roma culture by drawing assumptions centring on their insular character and reluctance to integrate, etc. The external circumstances shaping the Roma attitude are rarely considered, if at all. First of all, a relatively small amount of relevant information reaches the Roma because of isolation and their low literacy rate. Secondly, relatively poor education limits the possibilities to notice the information and to select the relevant or reliable parts. Third, it is plausible that because of exclusion, the social contact circle of Roma (acquaintances, relatives, etc.) is narrower and less diverse than that of an average Lithuanian resident. Therefore, they have fewer opportunities to discuss, enquire or rely on those whom they simply trust. Those who reproach the Roma often fail to see the importance of informal relations in everyday practice and using the infrastructure of public services. The cases of fruitless efforts and discrimination only increase Roma distrust of their external environment.

It should be noted that gaining Roma trust is not so much the task of the Roma but the challenge to all who are willing to change the current situation. However the complexity of this challenge must also be realised. All those involved in addressing Roma issues in an organised approach, soon face certain limitations. Officials, doctors, teachers, policemen and even project implementers or volunteers should adhere to certain standards of conduct that sometimes maintain the distance between them and the people they meet performing their duties. Professional responsibility requires the separation of professional attitudes and emotions.

Even those driven by positive preconceptions sometimes experience frustration when the Roma response is not in line with their expectations. This is often the case when people say “I did my best on my side but what have they done?” or “we treat them as humans and put all our efforts for their sake, so why can’t they respects us as human beings?” Moral sentiments of the observer in this case are targeted at the speaker (as the other party, i.e. the Roma are listened to very seldom) and then the fault of the Roma is likely to be seen in the failure to find an agreement.

However, the explanation of civil servant conduct can in no way serve as justification, while these difficulties do not exempt the state or the public from responsibility to seek contacts and solutions. The majority of civil servants serving the Roma only perform their duties and do provide personal favours; therefore, they should not feel too hurt if the human contact is not always warm enough. A fruitful psychological attitude in solving the issues experienced by the Roma should be formulated without giving too much importance to everyday routine, but instead focusing more on long-term aims. Personal gratitude from the Roma helped should not be sought. However efforts should be made to see the progress in changing living conditions, seeking Roma involvement in labour and other life spheres, identifying and promoting good examples, and perceiving that step by step as the contacts expand the Roma and their children will gain the skills to function independently.
4.2. Problem of Leadership

The very first efforts to organise joint activities with the Roma clashed with the leadership issue. Although this issue has usually been discussed on an informal level, it has posed serious obstacles for the implementation of a number of initiatives.

Here the problem of reliable figures among the Roma emerges. Outsiders find it difficult to determine who actually has the authority among them and what the limits of this authority are. On the one hand, the influential members of the Roma community are not always willing to go public. On the other hand, internal segregation and a lack of mutual recognition exist within the Roma community. The observations of the Centre of Lithuanian Romany Society show that more well-off Roma residing outside the encampment avoid any contact with the community in order to elude the requests for help. Limitations in communication can be illustrated by the shortage of information on the formal representatives of the community among the Roma residing in the city.

Thus, the leadership issue not only raises the question of who is capable of representing the community but also about the channels of information regarding the quickest method to reach community members. The support of authorities is vital for quickly gaining the trust, support and willingness of the Roma to take part in a proposed initiative.

People involved in addressing Roma problems are well-aware of the leadership issue, but there are no discussions on the possible solution. Although the lack of leaders is usually considered a problem, there also exists another approach. Striving to implement initiatives relying only on leaders reflects the limited organisational capacity of the initiators and may cause extra difficulties when the access to sources of support and information is controlled by a limited number of persons. The UNDP recommendations for donors (2002) warn against support monopolisation.

4.3. Mediation

Research carried out in other countries (UNDP 2002), indicates that contacts between the Roma and the residents of other nationalities are sufficiently frequent, which contrasts the common belief. Still the distrust barrier occurs in decision-making in the public sphere. Tremendous mistrust in mediators and representatives characterises the Roma in the majority of countries. Thus, formal functions of officials or state support given to choose informal leaders is far from effective. The mediator idea can have a lot of advantages in this respect though.

A mediator is a middleman assisting not only the Roma in grasping the situation but also in selecting and providing information for policy makers. Usually, the feedback link is very weak in the majority of administration fields in Lithuania but it could be useful in evaluating implemented measures and improving them correspondingly. Since some of the Roma integration programmes were temporary, their implementation was ineffective and continuity was not ensured. Mediators could serve in overcoming these problems, namely the adjustment of planned integration measures to everyday circumstances.

The role of mediators as immediate helpers is also especially important because quite a number of the Roma are either illiterate or barely literate. Therefore, the typical informational campaigns relying on written material would have poor plausible effect. Even clear, well-prepared and simple leaflets could be useless if they manage to interest only some literate Roma who would not make use of the provided information. Yet, mediators could convey the required information. Furthermore, after gaining Roma trust they could help them
in perceiving information and enhancing their motivation (to apply for a grant or job, to be more proactive, etc.).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations for a More Effective Roma Integration Policy

The main problems faced by the Roma and identified in the government-initiated 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme, still persist. The Roma themselves as well as experts and state officials know about them. However, the causes of the problems are either not regularly analysed or superficial popular opinions are provided to explain them.

Although the 2001 Population Census registered 2,500 Roma in Lithuania, it is believed that the actual number is probably closer to 3,000. Even though they constitute a relatively small group of residents, the government should be capable in terms of both finances and administration to develop policies that would help achieve essential changes in Roma life.

Schooling and Education

Education remains to be among the most serious long-term problems of the Roma. Few Roma have graduated from secondary schools in recent years.

Elderly Roma speak Lithuanian much more frequently than the young generation in comparison to other ethnic minorities whose young people speak Lithuanian better than the older generation. This is a “regressive tendency” showing the extending exclusion of the Roma.

Kindergarten and pre-school education in addition to the well-organised support of social workers and special teachers could encourage better attendance and learning results. Therefore, this area of support should be improved.

Involvement in the Labour Market

No up-to-date statistics exist on Roma involvement in the labour market. However this field is among the most urgent ones and the results achieved so far have been poor. An independent plan should be drawn up regarding Roma involvement in the labour market since this should considered as one of the major directions of the Roma integration policy.

Although the development of a mechanism to integrate the Roma into the labour market is underway in the framework of the project supported by the EQUAL programme, this project will not replace the need to formulate policy on Roma integration in the labour market and does not exempt the government from the responsibility to undertake long-term programmes.

Housing

A great number of the Roma have very limited opportunities to improve their living conditions. These opportunities are further encumbered by marginalisation in the labour market, education system and public sector.

The Roma initiative for new housing is not impeded by their absolute contentment with current conditions or their willingness to live in isolation, but by the realisation of risk and their limited possibilities to survive in another place. Resolving the issue
of Roma housing is complicated without any complex development plan, and the absence of this plan makes the prospect of reforms in the Kirtimai settlement impossible.

**Healthcare**

The provision of healthcare services in cases where Roma patients do not have the necessary documents, social insurance or are non-citizens continues to call for a solution.

Readily available drugs in the Roma settlement in Kirtimai and related issues continue to raise concerns (risk of catching infectious diseases, detoxification programmes, etc.).

Some gaps in primary medical care provision were bridged by mobile medical services (visits of doctors and nurses to the Kirtimai settlement), which was rated by experts as effective assistance. However, the provision of these services is not guaranteed.

The current situation not only calls for the detailed identification of Roma problems in various spheres of life, but for critical revision of the Roma integration policy, i.e. seeking professional recommendations on the formation and selection of measures aimed at changing the Roma situation as well as on the elimination of defects detected in the earlier formation of Roma integration policy.

Failures of institutional coordination in the implementation of the 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme constitute the key administrative problem resulting in the following flaws:

- integration efforts in individual fields remained inconsistent and did not complement each other,
- the experience of programme implementation was not reviewed and no impact assessment was conducted,
- priorities were not set, while continuity was not ensured of actions taken during the programme implementation.

Programme implementation revealed that the DME lacked the administrative capacity and political importance to ensure the coordination of Roma integration. Another crucial impediment is the absence of a clear-cut concept and the definition of long-term undertakings. This results from the lack of both political will and social responsibility.

In a period of ten years, a number of NGO projects conducted have been implemented, mainly in the education sphere. The majority of these projects were short-term, had only local impact and did not incite any changes in the system. The implemented projects and programmes did generate, however, a network of experts to further develop Roma-related work.

No marked results have been achieved in training the organisational capacity of the Roma. After the Restoration of Lithuanian Independence, about 20 Roma organisations were founded in Lithuanian, but now many are inactive. Only four NGOs were able to take advantage of an opportunity to participate in a programme allowing taxpayers to donate two percent of their income tax to the non-profit sector.
Considering both the experience gained from the 2000-2004 Roma Integration Programme and the input of NGOs, the following courses of action could be recommended for Roma integration policy and to tackle persistent social problems:

To draw up national strategies for Roma involvement in the education system and labour market. Even though changes can be achieved in other fields merely by improvement of administration, due to their scope it is hardly possible to tackle the problems in education and employment spheres by employing *ad hoc* measures.

To prioritise social assistance fields vital for the Roma and to support the NGOs that provide social services or employ other measures targeted at the improvement of Roma situation.

To prepare a funding scheme for projects targeted at communities. These projects would enable the implementation of initiatives and the development of Roma work in other locations of Lithuania (not only in Kirtimai).

To form a body of social workers and mediators that could assist in adapting and implementing the measures of Roma integration policy.

Maximum efficiency of these measures can only be achieved by ensuring interdepartmental coordination of Roma integration issues.