



The specific needs of Travelling People regarding the organisation of educational and professional training systems

Interviews with Institutions

A survey about the specific needs of Travelling People regarding the organisation of educational and professional training systems has been achieved by the project partners in 2005.

- interviews of Travelling People
- interviews of people working in institutions dealing with Travelling People.

This report summarizes the results of interviews with institutions

Number of interviewed people :

- 15 in France
- 4 in Lithuania
- 2 in Romania
- 4 in Spain

In the partner countries of the project the representatives of the institutions working with the traveling people were asked to consider some questions about the circumstances of their integration.

We were mainly interested in finding out what are the particular needs, which have to be addressed in order to help the integration of traveling people in the job market, what are the common obstacles and what kind of measures should be taken to overcome them.

Characteristics of the participating institutions.

In the annex No1 you can find the list of the institutions, which participated in the survey. There were schools, public authorities, associations, NGOs among them. They have different experience working with the traveling people: from about two years till more than forty. The numbers of traveling people they assist also differ significantly: starting from individual consultations and ending with thousands. Some of the institutions do not have the statistic records about traveling people, because they did not distinguish their clients according ethnicity. In some of the institutions the number of females is higher and in the others' – on the contrary. The institutions, survey participants, are involved in a wide range of activities:

- Community development for Roma people that aims to identify local resources able to support and attract Roma community into the design, planning and implementing activities which would improve their quality of life.
- Information, employment counselling, vocational guidance, work mediation, financial support for vocational courses
- University education – courses & seminars
- Sociologic research, human resources training, project management, culture, health, education, accommodation, monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Integration of Roma people into broader society.
- general education
- Organization of social and financial support for the children in need. Education of the society about the way of live of Roma people (the catalogue of photographs was issued), organization of summer schools for Roma pupils, organization of the art workshop for the Roma children and children from foster home

- Mediation at labour market
- Helping Roma/Gypsy people to satisfy their direct needs: education, vocational training and employment, the youth, women, health, housing, culture, social inclusion, legal aid... and actions aimed at fostering active policies for the Roma/Gypsy community, such as institutional guidance and awareness, training programmes, information offices, international cooperation, publications, encouragement of social policies;
- Adult education;
- Vocational training.
- Guidance on financial aid, management and application, training and sociocultural workshops
- Assessment and monitoring of students with special needs; Absenteeism control in collaboration with secondary schools;
- Vocational training for children with school difficulties.
- The PMI supervise the development of children from 0 to 6, about health and education. It supervises pregnant women.
- Meeting of several local communities to develop collective management
- Helping the foreigners in France for their education
- Promotion and improving social and professional insertion: help and formation actions and guiding a pupil, helping unemployed people, helping young people with major difficulties, social and professional reinsertion of person on welfare.

Most of travelling people they assist are illiterate or have minimum education. Only one Romanian organization (The Agency for Community Development “Inter-Activa”) had 5% of Roma people with the university degrees.

The percentage of Roma people among the other clients in these organizations also differ from about 5 till 100. Not all of them have the statistical records about Roma they serve.

Attitudes towards the education and employment of Roma people.

We have started to explore this question by asking the representatives of the institutions about the actual state of education of Roma people in comparison with the past few years: has the rate of students increased or decreased? Only one institution have noticed, that the rate of students decreased. It was the school from Lithuania, which has a long experience working with the Roma children. They think it happened, because girls marry in a very young age. Many Roma people immigrated to the other countries of EU. Vilnius municipality started reorganization in Roma living place, which attracted their attention, mobilized the community, disturbing the usual way of life and the schooling as a part of it. Five of them did not have the information and the majority noticed that the schooling rate of young travelling people increased. Trying to answer, why it was happening, these reasons were mentioned:

- The new opportunities provided by internal and external policies encouraged the Roma children to enrol into mainstream classes and reduced their school abandonment. For example, if in 2003 there were only 3 Roma children enrolled in the high schools in Botosani, in 2005 there were over 65 on the places added by the Ministry of Education and Research. The same situation has been registered at the university level. According to the last statistics, the school abandonment is also decreasing comparing with previous years.
- The presence of Roma teachers into the educational system and the possibility to use Romani language in schools (as teaching language) are positive aspects that motivate Roma children to continue their studies and to believe in equal chances after graduation.
- It was very important the involvement of Roma communities in children’s education.
- Because there is a constant work with the parents. There are the preschool classes and day centres organized for the Roma children close to their living places, so that parents could see what are their children doing at school. Families’ awareness has risen.
- Parents get the social support only in case, if their children are going to school.
- Children attend (infant) school at a younger age, which may improve their attendance patterns. Roma/Gypsy families start to appreciate the importance of education, especially at Infant School, which is a step forward.

- More and More children are going to the primary school, and they are respecting school rules. Social workers are doing a good job with them, the intervention of the mediators was very effective.
- Institutions saw the importance of their schooling, and everybody worked together in the same way.
- Collective willpower (school, government , public authority) and census of travelling children
- Law: schooling is obligatory.
- Department for Education has established a specific organisation and there are schools built on the hosting areas
- More parents wish their children to be fully educated in school.

In general most of the institutions value the measures, which were taken by the different bodies of the society to improve the school rate of Romany people. They also stress the importance of the involvement of Roma communities in to the schooling process and the role of the social workers, the parent's commitment. Coordinated actions of the different organizations, governmental support and the obedience to law are very powerful tools.

One among the most significant factors for the successful education is family support. What is the attitude of Roma families towards their children education in schools? These are the answers of the asked representatives of the institutions:

- They are prisoners of poverty culture and they are resigned that it is to be for gypsies. It is the common attitude for those who are living in poverty: lack of perspectives after graduation lead to reluctance with respect to the school performance.
- Education is not a great value. They do not see the significance of education
- Learning is not a prestigious thing. Boys are becoming independent from their families in about 15 years and they do not listen to their parents.
- In traditional families the women status and role perpetuate a low rate of school attendance. Girls are taught to look after the smaller children, because the main goal of their life is to be a wife and mother.
- Families feel that schooling is necessary. They know times have changed ...but, still, they are not demanding enough with their children and their system of family organization (hawking, etc.), family roles, fears, rejections.
- They are afraid that training, and the places where it takes place, i.e. high schools, will entail losing their cultural identity.
- At this time the children are the main promoters of education within families; they make aware their parents about the importance of education for their future well-being.
- There also have been registered significant differences between urban and rural areas, between open and isolated Roma communities and between poor areas and more developed ones.
- On the one hand, their wishes meet with frustration. They want their children to study, but at the same time they are quite sceptical about it. They know there are obstacles and they see them as something "natural".
- At the beginning, they were afraid to lose their culture, but now they can see the utility of the school in the life of every day, some want to learn how to read to become parson.
- Travelling people are really proud when their children began to read, but it's really difficult to have more because for them to read little is enough.
- Despite the occurring lack of confidence of certain groups they try to abide by the educational expectation in primary school and to carry on and study in secondary schools which are still difficult to succeed in.

In general learning is not very prestigious, but this is changing in different situations. There is a more positive attitude towards education in urban areas, more modern Roma families and when education concerns boys, but a more negative attitude towards education in rural areas, old Roma families and towards the education of girls.

Most respondents agree that education is important at a minimum level, even though they are still afraid of a system that is unknown to them and fear that they might lose their identity.

Regarding the attitudes of Roma people towards employment, the opinions of the respondents' are as follows:

- They are generally open to the employment opportunities because the lack of incomes is one of the biggest problems in Roma families.
- In some cases they are dependant on social aid and consider this state as enough for their needs; this attitude is common for those living in a poverty culture and it is not a feature of Roma people only.
- They lack a feeling of self-confidence.
- They find it necessary, but to a certain extent they are sceptical about getting one. Even though they are educated and have good qualifications, they are convinced that they will have fewer job opportunities than others, so they usually end up carrying out activities traditionally supposed to belong to certain ethnic groups (hawking/peddling), as the only field in which to strive.
- They want to have a job, but not during all the year, to let them travel when they want, they prefer to work alone without a boss, because they to do what they want when they want.
- Girls want to find little jobs like clean houses.
- Those who have some personal experience as far as employment is concerned—or even thanks to a person close to them— think it can be achieved with some effort, support and some good luck.
- Roma/Gypsy women try to be educated and get new skills—SHE is the one that is making progress in this century.
- They have a bad attitude towards systematic work, many of them do not want to be the employees
- “Little work and much money”
- They want a work place close to their homes, they think, that they could do a qualified work and can learn at the work place.
- They want to work with a high salary but without any employment obligations

So, we can see the contradictory opinions about the attitudes of Romany people towards employment. Some of these opinions are based on efforts to look deeper under the surface of common situations and some are just observations themselves, like: they prefer the work places close to their houses. Roma people are not all the same, despite the fact, that in many cases their behaviour is alike. Thinking about their attitude, we have to overcome ours. The attitudes of the society in all four countries towards the employment of Romany people are very alike and not good at all:

- The society is reluctant towards employment of Roma people, even discriminatory.
- The sceptical attitude is prevailing: “illiterate, lazy, thieves”
- There is a long-existing history of awful interethnic relationships and mutual distrust and disregard. In general, people do not see the Roma/Gypsy communities as trustworthy, so they do not offer the contracts of employment to them.
- The society pushes them to the unskilled works, in cleaning enterprises for example. The traditional society doesn't want to integrate them inside itself. The proof - it's difficult to find them training in firms.

But as the school attendance rate is increasing, the society is probably becoming aware of this state and taking measures to overcome it.

What is the most important for Roma people in order to successfully integrate into professional life?

Looking at the answers of our respondents, we can say, that there many important things: education, vocational training, employment opportunities (some of them said, there is a need for the places, supported by the government), family relations and support, (because the new way of life changes the customs and feelings of belonging). We failed to distinguish the most important one. May be there could be some national differences (French institutions, for example, more often draw our attention to the importance of family relations), but our survey do not have enough evidence for that.

But even if only one institution said, that the systematic approach is needed, that is probably, the true.

Roma people at the job market: current situation.

How many of your beneficiaries succeeded to get a remunerated activity in the past several years? This was not an easy question to answer, because many institutions did not have any records. The biggest number was 320 Roma/Gypsy people (262 males y 58 females) in Spain, and the smallest – 0 in France.

The commonest professional activities among travelling people:

- unskilled jobs in building industry
- fruit collection in agriculture
- traditional skills
- seasonal works
- street cleaners

The most demands are for men.

Typical woman s job: cleaning in institutions, stations, hospitals

In general, they have got simple unskilled jobs without qualification and occasional jobs.

There were some people, who worked as social workers, computer registration workers, art performance.

Special needs of Roma people for the professional training and employment.

Most of our respondents agree that special needs arise from poor basic academic skills, reading and writing abilities, low levels of formal education. This condition makes an obstacle for the further professional training. There were also some other important points of view:

- Learning the language, understanding administrative documents.
- They want to get the work, which demand high qualification, so they need to get oriented about the demands of different kinds of work and the possibilities to get the necessary qualification. Professional counselling is needed.
- Some of them have a little practical work experience, lack of self-confidence, they do not respect orders at work, can't keep their mind on one thing only, have a poor motivation for employment. So, they need to develop necessary social skills.
- They also learn better, if there is direct contact with the teacher and when the teaching process is dynamic with the quick and obvious results.
- They need more practical experience, since their educational levels are rather low and this fact makes a theoretical focus difficult to apply. They appreciate training if they are offered financial aids and get a job immediately soon after finishing it.

In order to meet these needs the constant collaboration with Roma people is needed.

There is a need for training that will:

- allow them to be competitive in the labor market,
- be based on their culture and concept of life,
- use educational material designed based on their educational profile and needs

Such kind of training may have the form of:

- short and specific courses,
- training in basic skills, such as reading, writing, driving, etc., and
- training in traditional jobs.

Having in mind the existing educational systems in our countries, we must to admit, that almost all Roma people need assistance and guidance, adaptation of the existing professional courses, work places supported by the government, social aids. Our societies are becoming more and more aware about this. The evidence of it: special governmental programs, activities of NGOs, associations and Roma organizations in particular. For example in Spain support is observed within the Access to Employment Programme (ACCEDER): information, advice/guidance, documents processing, internal and public awareness, link with other institutions.

Obstacles that hinder the access of Roma people to education, qualification and jobs.

From the point of view of our respondents, the main obstacles both for education and employment are :

- poverty
- educational system not adapted for them
- discrimination
- their specific culture
- lack of motivation
- travel
- racism

Specific obstacles for :

- education :
 - . they are not prepared to school
 - . parents don't allow their children to go to school
 - . they have poor school results because school is not adapted
- qualification
 - . insufficient level of education
 - . lack of perspectives or unrealistic expectations
 - . their traditional jobs don't need qualification
 - . they can find jobs without qualification
- jobs
 - . lack of qualifications
 - . lack of work
 - . their traditional jobs are not useful on the labor market
 - . low salaries if they work
 - . they don't wish a fixed job

Possible solutions for the improvement of the situation of Roma people at the work market.

One of the most important things is changing the attitude in both sides (travelling people to education and work, employers to travelling people and educational institutions to travelling people). For that, we all must fight the racism and break the stereotypes.

The measures should be realistic, take into account the existing situation of Roma people. In every country there is a need for promotion of education importance, professional integration, state aid for the promotion of employment of travelling people.

Some specific suggestions from the institutions:

- Recognition of traditional trades that should be accompanied by certificates issued by the Ministry of Labour (validation of the existing skills)
- Adaptation of the vocational training to their knowledge and their way of life.
- Information and counselling to Roma people and employers
- Dissemination of success models (even case studies) to the employers and other social groups.
- Education focused on employment should start in kindergartens and primary schools
- Survey that should identify the most favourable professions for Roma people and the vocational courses accordingly.
- To give opportunities to groups at risk of being excluded from first job through a policy of positive discrimination.
- Overall social intervention programmes to meet people's needs in a co-ordinated way
- Increasing the salaries over the social aid would motivate to work the young Roma who are assisted by state Social Services
- Financial stimulation of the employers that hire Roma people