



Civil society monitoring report
on implementation
of the national Roma integration strategy
in Latvia

*Assessing the progress
in four key policy areas
of the strategy*

Prepared by:
Centre for Education Initiatives
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----|--|
| CEI | Centre for Education Initiatives (NGO) |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EU | European Union |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| RRC | Roma Resource Centres |
| SEA | State Employment Agency |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the areas of employment, education, housing, health there are no national programmes specifically targeted at the Roma; although Roma are not a specific support target group, they are included in the group at risk of social exclusion in all national support programmes for which sectoral ministries and municipalities are responsible.

The lack of statistical data and analysis of the effectiveness of the support measures provided in different areas does not allow to accurately evaluate the achievements and flaws in Roma policy, however, it is possible to identify the existing trends based on the available data.

Employment

At national level there are no specific projects or measures aimed to reduce unemployment among the Roma. There are various active labour market policy measures and programmes stipulated in the Law on Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment available for the unemployed Roma among other groups of the unemployed registered in the State Employment Agency.

The direct impact directly on the improvement of the employment of Roma community cannot be identified yet because there is no assessment made on the efficiency of the support measures. Furthermore, no measures are being taken to analyse and address specific barriers to the employment of Roma women. No research or analysis has been carried out on discrimination against the Roma in the labour market and on self-employment among Roma.

Housing and essential public services

Municipalities with a significant number of Roma population do not have data on the situation of Roma in the housing area, because municipalities do not carry out housing registration along ethnic line.

The bad sanitary equipment and low technical condition, which significantly limits the access to basic needs for hygiene and increases the risk of spread of different diseases, is considered to be the most significant issue in the housing area. There is no special/residential segregation and the policies in place do not segregate Roma in Latvia.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

Roma as the target audience are integrated in the mainstream policy of health promotion and healthcare, however, special health promotion measures particularly targeting Roma were not implemented.

The existing lack of knowledge and unavailability of information of health care services limits their efficient use. In addition, the existing communication channels between Roma and health service providers are not effective enough or do not work at all. There is no information on the evidence of segregation of Roma patients by health care providers.

Education

The Ministry of Education and Science in collaboration with municipal education boards carry out the monitoring of the education of Roma school children. Even though the monitoring can be recognised as a positive initiative, practically it has not improved the situation in terms of access to education and ensuring the provision of quality education to Roma children and pupils.

The absence of statistical data on graduates of different level education institutions at the ethnic perspective does not allow to accurately define the situation of Roma in education, as well as to fully evaluate the achievements and weaknesses of Roma education policy.

Examples of good practice provide an insight into the educational situation, for example, an effective tool for promoting Roma education is considered to be the work of the Roma teacher-assistants in preschool and primary education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The topical tasks and activities in Roma integration policies are outlined in the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012-2018). The Action Plan in the Guidelines includes series of policy tasks and activities for the integration of Roma community in the Latvian society. Part of those tasks and activities are applied particularly to the Roma target group (targeted approach), but there is also a general type of activities (mainstreaming approach) in order to raise the level of tolerance in the society, to improve the protection of rights and interests of the minorities, including Roma people.

The report is prepared on the basis of the analysis of the current situation of the period 2017-2018. Evidence of data and facts were collected and analysed using the following methods: critical analysis of the national documents and programmes, research, statistics, reports and other documents; specific surveys for different groups at different levels; interviews with the officials responsible for the implementation of the Roma integration policy and with representatives of civil society.

This report is a continuation of first part of the Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Latvia which included the following topics: governance and overall policy framework, anti-discrimination and addressing antigypsyism. The main recommendation was to renew the national programme "Roma in Latvia" and establish it as a sustainable national strategy to combat social exclusion simultaneously in all sectors; to engage Roma civil society activists as well as Roma integration experts with relevant academic knowledge and international experience in the process of development and implementation of this plan.

EMPLOYMENT

Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

According to the information provided by the State Employment Agency (SEA) on 31 July 2018, there were 536 Roma unemployed (the total number of unemployed in the country was 58,888); on 31 December 2016, 423 Roma were unemployed. In general, the unemployment rate in terms of nationality is not calculated in the country as a whole. However, data on Roma's unemployed in the regions are available: in Kurzeme region 21.6 per cent of Roma; in Latgale Region 37.1 per cent; in Riga region 20.3 per cent; in Vidzeme region 5.6 per cent; and in Zemgale region 15.3 per cent.¹ The structure of the Roma's unemployment as registered by the SEA, according to the duration of unemployment is as follows: up to 6 months 38.6 per cent; 6-12 months 21.1 per cent; 1-3 years 15.9 per cent, and 3 and more years 24.4 per cent.

Roma people who have the education lower than pre-primary education are predominantly among the Roma unemployed and registered by SEA, if the breakdown is made according to education level:

| Education level | Female | Male | In total | % of total |
|------------------------------|--------|------|----------|------------|
| Higher education | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Vocational education | 11 | 18 | 29 | 5.4 |
| General secondary education | 16 | 10 | 26 | 4.8 |
| Primary education | 108 | 57 | 165 | 30.8 |
| Lower than primary education | 195 | 119 | 314 | 58.6 |
| Not specified | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.2 |

SEA cooperates with Roma non-governmental organisations, promoting the visibility of SEA services, as well as with Roma mediators who help their compatriots to overcome communication difficulties and more actively use the services offered by SEA. The representatives of SEA participate in the work of the Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy,² informing Roma about the current employment promotion measures.

Although specific projects and measures to support Roma people in the field of unemployment are not implemented at national level, Roma unemployed and registered by SEA, along with other unemployed groups, have access to active labour market policy measures set out in the Law on Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment.³ Roma unemployed and Roma jobseekers can engage in any employment promotion activity, including training programmes,⁴ if they meet the criteria set for the specific target group. Various target groups (including young people and students) have the opportunity to engage in diverse programmes with sources of funding from both the European Social Fund (ESF) and the state budget. For each programme, job placement

¹ From survey of SEA, July 2018.

² More information about Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/konsultativa-padome>

³ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=62539>

⁴ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433>

rates are evaluated 6 months after completion of the activities (this is done by SEA and this information is not available for public).

The job placement rates of Roma (6 months after participation in the support measure):⁵

| Title of support measure | Number of participants | | The job placement rate (%) after participation completed in 2017, arranged for work in the period until 30 June 2018 |
|---|------------------------|------|--|
| | 2017 | 2018 | |
| Hired temporary public works | 282 | 193 | 8.2 |
| Support measures for long-term unemployed | 465 | 384 | 10.1 |
| Non-formal education | 43 | 30 | 13.6 |
| Professional education | 8 | 5 | 14.3 |
| Promotion of regional mobility for employed persons | 1 | 0 | - |
| Measures for certain groups of persons | 2 | 4 | 66.7 |
| Students summer employment | 1 | 6 | - |
| Competitiveness enhancement measures (including info days) | 317 | 173 | 9.2 |
| Youth Guarantee - Development of skills necessary for work in the non-governmental sector | 5 | 1 | 50.0 |
| Youth Guarantee - Workshops for young people | 13 | 3 | 33.3 |
| Youth Guarantee - Competitiveness enhancement measures | 65 | 40 | 10.2 |
| Youth Guarantee – Non-formal education | 17 | 16 | 15.8 |
| Youth Guarantee – First work experience for a young person | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Youth Guarantee – Professional training programmes | 7 | 5 | 33.3 |
| Youth Guarantee – Subsidised jobs for young unemployed persons | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Special measures are not offered to Roma (or other ethnic groups) to support the transition from school to work. However, any interested person has the opportunity to receive career counselling,⁶ to engage in summer employment activities,⁷ young people who have completed vocational education have the opportunity to get a state-subsidised job for first-year work experience.⁸

⁵ From survey of SEA, July 2018.

⁶ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/karjera/>

⁷ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=610>

⁸ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=1&mid=548&txt=4619>

SEA implements an employment measure “Vocational continuing education and professional development education programmes for unemployed with a coupon method”⁹ in which the unemployed, including Roma, have an opportunity to obtain professional qualifications, retrain or improve their professional knowledge. Training areas and professions that meet the demands of the labour market and the development of economic sectors are offered within this measure.¹⁰

The long-term unemployed, including Roma, who are registered by SEA, have the opportunity to participate in the Motivation Programme for Job Search and Social Mentorship Services,¹¹ which aims at supporting long-term unemployed in suitable permanent jobs or engage in self-employment, thus reducing the risk of social exclusion. Participation in this programme can be combined with participation in the employment initiative “Hired Temporary Public Works”.¹²

Every unemployed person has a responsible employment agent providing job search support, including an individual job search plan in cooperation with the unemployed person. Upon completion of the motivation programme, the unemployed person is assisted by mentor services (individual counselling) to be employed at a permanent basis, providing psychological and practical support in job placement. In addition, unemployed persons have the opportunity to receive individual career counselling.

SEA has relatively little cooperation with governmental and non-governmental social service providers to address the social problems of Roma jobseekers. SEA participates in the events organised by the Ministry of Culture on the integration of Roma into the labour market and in the work of the Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy, as well as provides consultations on job search and career development for various support providers.

If an unemployed person participates in the employment measure for the first four months, s/he has an opportunity also to benefit from “Support for regional mobility within the framework of active employment measures”. The person can receive a financial compensation of up to 100 EUR per month for regional mobility support if the work place is at least 15 km from the declared place of residence and the unemployed person has been declared at least six months in the indicated place of residence.¹³ Conversely, if an unemployed person is involved in a training activity, financial compensation for regional mobility can be obtained throughout the training period. Employed persons can receive a financial remuneration for the rent expenses of transport and accommodation in the framework of the measure “Promoting the Regional Mobility of Employed Persons” during the first four months after the start of employment legal relations.¹⁴

SEA implements the active employment measures for the most disadvantaged unemployed persons, including Roma. Another measure offered by SEA for the employers is a participation in “Measures for certain groups of people”;¹⁵ within this measure the employer receives:

- a wage subsidy for the unemployed person – 50 per cent of the monthly wage of an unemployed person, not exceeding the amount of the national minimum wage;

⁹ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=311&txt=2837>

¹⁰ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=311&txt=2837&from=0>

¹¹ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=445&txt=5253>

¹² Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=313&txt=2912&from=0>

¹³ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=313&txt=2908&from=0>

¹⁴ Available at: <http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=435&txt=3100&from=0>

¹⁵ Available at:

<http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?cid=433&mid=53&txt=4013&mode=content&method=edit&from=0>

- a grant for the salary for supervisor – 50 per cent of the national minimum wage.

Significant impact on the improvement of Roma employment has not been observed. Moreover, no measures are being taken to analyse and address specific barriers to the employment of Roma women.

Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

Complaints about cases of discrimination against Roma in the labour market have not been received by the SEA.¹⁶ SEA has not conducted a separate research or analysis on discrimination against the Roma in the labour market. But in 2017, the research *"Profiling of potential target groups for motivation and support services and the needs assessment study"* carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences mentions that discrimination against the Roma in working relationships is linked to very strong stereotypes about Roma in the Latvian society, which stipulates that Roma are perceived as unreliable workers among employers.¹⁷

According to the results of the survey, 82.3 per cent of the Roma responded that during the last three years they themselves or their close family members have experienced situations in which the employer refuses to recruit them for nationality. Still, in practice, there is a negative attitude of employers and prejudices against job-seekers with dark-coloured skin or some external appearance that might indicate their Roma origin. At the same time, the research found that the basic need for the Roma, in their perception, is the need for work.

Despite these findings, the research concluded that reducing the risk of social exclusion and discrimination among the Roma requires the development of individual support to activate the Roma person's capacity, ability to recognise and resolve their problems, and motivation to change their current situation. The conclusions thus do not reflect the barriers at the side of employers.

The biggest problem for the integration of the Roma into the labour market is the low level of education and lack of work experience, as well as low social activity. SEA offers for Roma both active employment measures (subsidised work, training activities for acquiring professional qualifications, etc.) and preventive measures to reduce unemployment (career counselling, job placement support) to help understand labour market requirements, promote inclusion in the community and find a permanent job. The transition from social benefits to employment opportunities is facilitated through the implementation of various programmes (qualification upgrading, motivation programmes etc.)

SEA city branch executives, for example, the Head of Jelgava City Branch, observed, that there is a weak feedback from Roma – the Roma are keen on measures to increase competitiveness, because these courses generally last for only one-two days, but few attend trainings provided by SEA. Mostly, temporary public work is required by the Roma.¹⁸

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia launched a project "Latvian Roma Platform II: Dialogue, Cooperation and Involvement" (funded from the EC's Programme "Right, Equality and Citizenship"), aimed at promoting cooperation between Roma potential employees, employers and social partners, as well as to developing the exchange of experience and information on Roma involvement in the labour market. In order to raise

¹⁶ From survey of SEA, July 2018.

¹⁷ Available at:

http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/petij_sif_motivac_paaugst_un_atbalst_pakalpoj_potencial%2Bmerka%2Bgrup_profiles_un_vaj_izpete.pdf

¹⁸ Research "The Roma in Latvia," 2015.

public awareness about discrimination or antigypsyism at work, various measures have been organised within the framework of the project, for example, in 2018 an activity "Better access to the labour market for Roma".¹⁹ Within such measures, concrete barriers or obstacles are analysed, for example, by interviewing Roma people about their experiences and analysing, together with employers, the barriers or impediments that affect cooperation with the Roma community (results are not available at the moment of the research).

There is no statistical or research information available about self-employment among Roma.

¹⁹ The event's programme available at:
https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Platforma/Programma_140318.pdf

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Access to secure and affordable housing

According to a study conducted in 2009 by Latvia RAXEN National Focal Point "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers (Thematic Study)",²⁰ Roma people have more limited access to housing and their living conditions and accommodation are of lower quality as compared to the rest of population in Latvia.

In accordance with the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance there are social service offices established in all municipalities.²¹ The goal of the social service offices is to provide social assistance, to organise and provide social services, as well as to give material support to low-income persons in crisis situation. The basic principles for the provision of social assistance are to give support to a person on the basis of an evaluation of his or her material resources (income and property), determined by the Law on Social Security.²² One of the forms of assistance provided by local governments in housing issues is the provision of housing, giving the opportunity to rent (providing the house) flat or a social housing (for a period up to 6 months) owned by the local government, as well as the provision of short-term shelter while another living space is being searched. None of the binding regulations for the local governments single out Roma as a separate or special category of persons entitled to rent social housing, and the rights to the housing is being granted in compliance with general procedure, thus formally ensuring non-discriminatory access to social housing (there is no any rules at central or local level that prevent Roma to access social housing).

Municipalities do not have data on the situation of Roma in the housing area, because municipalities do not carry out housing registration along ethnic line. Municipalities declare that they are providing assistance in resolving housing regardless of citizenship or ethnicity, gender and religious affiliation, in compliance with normative acts of the Republic of Latvia and binding decisions of municipality. However, in the research "Roma in Latvia" several issues have been identified that prevent the access to the social housing, despite the fact that come 75-80 per cent of Roma families in Latvia encounter difficulties in the availability of housing and its quality provision.²³ For instance, applicant's failure to conform with the basic preconditions for receiving municipality support: the applicants for social housing must comply with the status of a socially vulnerable or low-income person and the research has identified several cases where neglect of the necessary formalities in connection with property has deprived Roma of the possibility to obtain the status of a needy person which is a prerequisite when applying for municipal assistance in the area of social housing. People who officially possess valuable property, such as car, are denied from the status of needy person cannot legally receive the status of a needy person because of owning a property – such the car – that is registered in their name although in fact it is owned and used by another person.²⁴ Another obstacle in providing access to decent housing is insufficient income and therefore Roma more often choose housing

²⁰ Available at:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKFwipxpU1srgAhWhx4UKHbLJAK0QFjAAegQIBxAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffra.europa.eu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Ffra_uploads%2F586-RAXEN-Roma%2520Housing-Latvia_en.pdf&usg=AQvVaw3BfnVHgDbTOB35R3VdMT_

²¹ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=68488>

²² Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=36850>

²³ Available at:

https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf

²⁴ Research Roma in Latvia, 2015

without amenities and in average more often than other inhabitants in Latvia they live in houses owned by municipalities and social homes.²⁵

Based on the information provided by housing specialists and municipality employees,²⁶ Roma often decline housing options that offer a better quality in remote districts because they prefer to live near places where there is active urban social life. Another obstacle in providing access to housing is insufficient income and therefore Roma more often choose housing without amenities and in average more often than other inhabitants in Latvia they live in houses owned by municipalities and social homes.²⁷

According to the data obtained from the study,²⁸ the average number of members in one household in Latvia is 2.4 (2-3 persons), while the average of a Roma family is 4.7 (4-6 persons); almost 70 per cent of Roma's households is overcrowded. The study also assessed the quality of Roma inhabited housing: electricity is available in 98.5 per cent of housing where Roma live which does not essentially deviate from the general electrification level in Latvia. Approximately in 14 per cent of the housing heating is not available, 26 per cent do not have access to water supply in their housing. The most essential differences are observed in the provision of housing with sanitary utilities – in Roma housing there are considerably fewer flush toilets, showers or bathrooms. In total 83.5 per cent of the housing in Latvia have showers or bathrooms and only in 44.1 per cent of the housing where Roma live such facilities are available. 85.5 per cent of the population of Latvia live in housing with flush toilets as compared to only 57.9 per cent of Roma that live in such conditions. This is a circumstance that limits the provision of basic hygiene requirements causing a negative effect upon Roma health and increases the risks of the spread of various diseases. The technical quality of Roma housing is assessed as rather poor: in 30 per cent of the housing walls, ceiling of their housing is damp, while one-fifth of Roma respondents have indicated that their housing is too dark and that the light is insufficient (19.6 per cent). When comparing the provision of separate domestic amenities and utilities services it is evident that Roma are in more unfavourable/deprived situation than the majority of population in Latvia.

According to the data Ombudsman has indicated in the "Report on the spending of funding for Roma integration in the period from 2007 to 2012" of the year 2012 it is evident that in the area of ensuring access to housing no systematic improvement has been achieved.²⁹ Whereas in the Ombudsman's 2017 "Report on the current state of assistance of local governments in the area of housing and of compliance with recommendations of the case Nr. Nr.2014-35-18AC" it has been emphasized that in the nearest future a sufficient quantity of social housing is needed, in order to improve the access to the housing to low-income households, since granting of housing allowance to cover the rent in private sector to low-income persons will not be effective as long as the private housing market will not be developed accordingly.³⁰

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ From interviews, June 2018.

²⁷ Research "Roma in Latvia", SIF, 2015.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, 2012. *Pārskats par Eiropas Savienības finanšu instrumentu un valsts budžeta līdzekļu izlietojumu romu integrācijai pārskata periodā no 2007. gada – 2012. gadam.*, Rīga, p. 10

³⁰ The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, 2018. Report available at:
http://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/lapas/zinojums_pasvaldibu_majokli_1535636795.pdf

Effectiveness of housing benefits and social assistance to access and maintain housing

In 2015 research on Roma in Latvia, it has been concluded that, Roma mainly live in one-family private houses, social homes, as well as in flats with low-standard utilities (i.e., housing with a low level of amenities lacking some of the minimum standard facilities – water supply, flush toilet, toilet or bathroom).³¹ Taking into account that in Latvia the social housing fund is outdated and the houses are of low quality, in 2015 state support programme for families with children has been initiated to acquire the house (“Housing guarantee programme”),³² which provides a guarantee loan for the first instalment. Even though no statistics is available on how many Roma families have participated in the programme, it is reasonably believed that the majority of Roma families with children could not use this programme as they could not afford to pay the minimum instalment to receive the requested bank loan for housing. Roma make an active use of the assistance the municipalities and NGOs provide in housing area. The most frequently used possibility is the possibility to receive a housing benefit which is a small financial assistance to pay the housing rent or maintenance costs and pay for services that are connected housing. Besides the material allowance for housing maintenance, various other kinds of benefits are also available to Roma with low-income status, for example, discounts of property tax, a different size discounts on consumed electricity, allowance for the repairs of housing, etc. The municipality, in its binding rules, establishes the procedure by which all the allowances are granted, and the amount determined. In addition, for people who live in social housing, including Roma, payment for the use of public utilities has been lowered by municipality.

Housing benefit and social assistance programmes are available for all disadvantaged families, and there are no circumstances that exclude disadvantaged Roma families. Heads and employees of social service offices surveyed have indicated that there are enough housing benefits and social assistance to avoid extreme poverty.

Local NGOs often offer different hygiene services, for example, shower and laundry services, however, the amount of these services is insufficient.

There is no available information about projects or initiatives co-funded by the EU aimed at improving the situation of Roma in housing. Policy documents developed so far did not envisage special measures for improving the living conditions of Roma as a socially vulnerable group and municipalities have not implemented special projects in the housing area for the Roma community.³³

Fight against discrimination, residential segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in housing

There is no official policy of spatial or social segregation of Roma and there are no localities or settlements inhabited either exclusively or predominantly by Roma in Latvia. Still there are examples of so-called “Roma houses” with low living conditions where Roma tend to live in a kind of community.

Similarly, there are also no data of cases of discrimination in rental market having existed and investigated.

³¹ Research “Roma in Latvia”, SIF, 2015

³² Housing guarantee programme: <https://www.altum.lv/lv/pakalpojumi/iedzivotajiem/majoklu-garantiju-programma/par-programmu/>

³³ From interviews, June 2018.

There are no official (or unofficial) data on forced evictions of Roma or adequate protection in cases of eviction. Families with children are not subject to forced evictions from homes owned by the local government. However, in situations where Roma families are being evicted from their homes, for example, the private owner of the property breaks the rental agreement, the local government offers and ensures the accommodation of these families in the so-called crisis centres. Families are allowed to live there for a period up to three months for a relatively low fee (in the meantime a home-based problem is usually solved).

Analysing the data from the study *Latvia RAXEN National Focal Point* in comparison with the information available at the moment, it can be concluded that no relevant changes have been observed that would have worsened the conditions of Roma in the last ten years.

IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

Ensuring equal access to public health care services

In accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Procedures for the Organization and Financing of Healthcare",³⁴ healthcare services, including public health supporting measures, are being ensured in accordance with the legislation to all inhabitants of Latvia, regardless of their ethnic origin, social or legal status or any other factors. In order to protect the inhabitants with a low income level, these regulations stipulate that low-income persons, recognised as such in accordance with the regulations, are free from paying patient co-payments and have the rights to receive state funded health care services free of charge (low-income status can be obtained if average monthly income in the last three months does not exceed 320 EUR). Public health services are free of charge to children under 18 years of age.

Roma as the target audience are integrated in the common policy of health promotion and healthcare. In recent years health promotion measures are being organised to several groups of society, including Roma. However, special health promotion measures particularly to Roma were not implemented.

In 2017 the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia developed informative report "On Healthcare System Reform", where necessary reforms were defined.³⁵ Within the reforms, complex transformations have been planned, for example, the role of local governments in the healthcare system is planned to be defined. It is planned to define the framework of responsibilities, involving local governments in the assurance of those services which are necessary to each citizen of the municipality in the level of primary healthcare. The planned changes in the health care system may have a positive impact upon access to health care services by the Roma, because access to services will be ensured at a faster and closer to home.

Information on Roma integration policy measures in Latvia 2012-2018 prepared by the Ministry of Culture in 2012 recognizes three main challenges that have been drawn up for Roma integration in the area of healthcare:

1. information on health issues of the Roma population living in anti-sanitary conditions or under the poverty line, observing general hygiene and opportunities for rehabilitation and social care;
2. preparation and training of social workers on specific aspects of Roma culture, and in the area of culturally sensitive services for low-income Roma families;
3. improvement of monitoring the socio-economic conditions of Roma.³⁶

Data on matters concerning health in ethnic perspective is not being collected but, in accordance with the information provided by the Ministry of Health, within the framework of specific objective 9.2.6. "To improve the qualification of medical practitioners and medical support staff", a participant survey have been conveyed, and statistical data collected, including identification of participants' ethnic belonging to Roma.³⁷ The project is implemented in the whole territory of Latvia, ensuring the improvement of qualification to all medical practitioners and medical support staff, regardless of their ethnicity, which

³⁴ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=263457>

³⁵ Report available at: http://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/par_veselibas_aprupes_sistemas_reformu/

³⁶ Information on Roma integration policy measures in Latvia:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/latvia_national_strategy_roma_inclusion_en.pdf

³⁷ Information available at: <https://www.cfla.gov.lv/lv/es-fondi-2014-2020/projektu-istenosana/9-2-6-uzlabot-arstniecibas-un-arstniecibas-atbalsta-personala-kvalifikaciju>

is necessary for the maintenance of the certificate of medical practitioners and medical support staff.

In the research of the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of 2014 "Drug Use Habits and Tendencies in Latvia" it has been concluded that Roma represent the highest rate of drug users compared to other minorities - approximately 31%.³⁸

Although no data on HIV infected persons by ethnicity are compiled in official registers and data bases, according to the information provided by the NGOs, the rate of HIV infections among Roma is high – average 42 HIV infected persons per 1,000 Roma inhabitants. Latvia has no special programmes aimed at HIV/AIDS reduction in the Roma community, but at the end of 2017, HIV, STDs, B and C hepatitis prevention action plan 2018-2020 was developed by the Ministry of Health. The main goal of the action plan is to prevent the spreading of HIV, hepatitis B and C and STDs; 22.7 million EUR have been allocated to the implementation of these measures in 2018.³⁹

Results of the research "Roma in Latvia" suggest that the knowledge and lack of information of Roma on the accessibility of definite health care services limits their efficient use. In addition, the common communication channels are not effective enough or do not work at all. However, one of the essential aspects of health care is women's health condition – they often face difficulties in family planning, and they lack information about contraceptives which in its stead leads to early pregnancies or abortions. The data of the study also shows that the knowledge of Roma on the available health care services can be evaluated as insufficient. In order to promote social inclusion and integration of Roma in the health care sector, in the end of 2017 it was suggested by the Ministry of Health to complement the Healthcare Financing Law, including persons belonging to Roma community in the list of persons insured eligible under the rights to health care services within the framework of state compulsory health insurance. However, the amendments to the law have not been adopted.

Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in health care

There is no information on the evidence of segregation of Roma patients by health care providers. Neither the Health Inspectorate, nor the Patients' Ombudsperson has received any complaints on possible discrimination or segregation of Roma in access to and provision of health services.

³⁸ Report available at:

https://www.spkc.gov.lv/upload/Petijumi%20un%20zinojumi/Atkaribu%20slimibu%20petijumi/Diana/2017_ko_horta_report_final.pdf

³⁹ Information available at:

http://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/preses_relizes/5560_apstiprinats_ricibas_plans_hiv_seksualas_transmisijas_infekcija/

EDUCATION

Improving access to quality preschool education and care

About 87 percent of children aged 3 to 7 take part in a formal pre-school education. Data on the ethnic origin of children are not collected. The lack of information on Roma children who attend preschool programmes is hampering the assessment of the attendance dynamics. This creates the need for a systematic collection of information in order to accurately reflect the involvement of Roma children in pre-school institutions and help to respond more effectively to the needs of Roma children.

The preschool educational institutions may also choose to implement specially developed minority education programmes in different minority languages (mostly use Russian language). Minority education programmes in Roma language are not registered during the monitoring period.

There are preschool establishments that provide round-the-clock groups, which means that children go home only on weekends. Parents with a difficult economic situation, social origin or mental health, including Roma parents, are more likely to choose such groups.

The research "Roma in Latvia" concluded that the main reasons why Roma children do not attend the preschool institutions include:

1. long waiting lists to enter preschools due to insufficient number of pre-schools in some cities;
2. language barriers;
3. low motivation (Roma parents look after their own children at home).

The study emphasizes that these barriers should be diminished by the Roma teachers' assistants. Their work is considered significant and effective, especially in the pre-school stage.⁴⁰

Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

The Ministry of Education and Science monitored the quality of education of Roma students. National Monitoring is carried out once every three years. The last monitoring took place at the end of 2016. The monitoring was carried out by electronically sending educational institutions a poll that had to be filled in with data. The National Monitoring includes five questions:

1. the number of Roma pupils in the educational institution, indicating the gender and grade in which the pupil is studying, and the number of Roma pupils whose age does not correspond to the age of a pupil;
2. the educational programme that the pupils learn;
3. the number of subjects, where pupils have extended school year;
4. the number of excluded Roma students and the reasons for exclusion;
5. the number of Roma teacher assistants.

According to monitoring data collected by the Ministry of Education and Science, 900 Roma students (0.4 per cent of the total number of Roma pupils) study at 144 general education institutions (20 per cent of the total number of educational institutions in the country) in the 2016-2017 school year. Out of all Roma pupils, 50 per cent studied the general primary education programmes and 34.2 per cent studied at the special primary education programmes offered by general education institutions. Remaining part of the Roma pupil population, or 15.8 per cent, is educated in special schools. The number of Roma students

⁴⁰ The reserch "Roma in Latvia", 2015

studying in special primary education programmes has not decreased in the last three years. There is a tendency to increase the number of Roma students who are integrated into general education institutions by acquiring special education programmes. Special education programmes are implemented based on a health/mental problems and learning disabilities of students. The number of Roma students who do not acquire compulsory primary education by the age of 18 has significantly decreased.

Although such monitoring is recognised as a good practice, actually this has not contributed to the improvement of the availability of education and the provision of quality education for Roma children and pupils, because it does not promote the quality of multicultural education. In addition, information is not collected and analysed at the professional and higher education stages in the process of monitoring.

In 2017, on this basis, the Centre for Education Initiatives (CEI) implemented a project "Recommendations for improving Roma pupils' education quality monitoring" which developed and piloted their own independent monitoring and analysis of the learning outcomes of Roma pupils. Based on the comparative analysis of both monitoring, recommendations to improve national monitoring were formulated. The main proposed actions were:

1. To carry out a Roma educational monitoring at least every two years in order to provide objective, well-timed information.
2. To identify the number of Roma children who do not meet age of the appropriate grade students for more than two years (it is an important indicator to assess qualitatively the potential risks of Roma pupils at risk of drop-out from education).
3. In order to get the correct information about the real number of Roma teacher assistants, CEI suggested to supplement a question about Roma teacher assistants with the specific professional code (5312), since in some educational institutions Roma are employed as other technical staff, and, therefore, their duties do not reflect work description of Roma teacher assistant.
4. To include the information about Roma children from compulsory school age (5 years) in the monitoring data and to identify the situation in all educational institutions, where the compulsory preparation education for school (for 5- and 6-year-olds) are offered, including preschool education establishments.
5. To complement the National monitoring with collection of data about Roma pupils absences in education. It is recommended to indicate the total number of absences from lessons (in percentages) for each grade group, including unjustified absences (monitoring that student's learning outcomes levels correlate with the attendance of lessons, but purposefully organized support such as work of the Roma teacher assistant).

In addition, the data described in the research "Roma in Latvia" confirms the need for a qualitative improvement of National monitoring system. The data of the research makes it possible to assume that about one half of the Roma population living in Latvia does not comply with the state guidelines on the acquisition of primary education as a mandatory requirement and that illiteracy is not an infrequent case-related problem in Roma communities living in Latvia. The illiteracy is a problem for half of the Roma (48.8 per cent), especially among the older people.

Roma are aware of the importance of education, namely, 98,8 per cent admit that it is important for their children to be literate and 97,5 per cent want their children to acquire primary education. Although the results of the research reveal a positive change in Roma attitudes regarding the need for education, statistics show that the general level of education of Roma is still low and there is a high percentage of school drop-outs.

In 2014, a research was conducted on the causes and risks of early school leaving for young people aged 13 to 18 years.⁴¹ According to the research data, 1.1 per cent of all young people who have been identified as having undergone early school leaving were Roma in the 2013-2014 school year. According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science, most often Roma children stop schooling at grades 6-7. In 2017 the State Education Quality Service started to implement an ESF-funded project "Support to reduce early school leaving" (PuMPuRS),⁴² which aims to reduce the number of children and young people dropping out of education and not completing schooling. The project promotes the establishment of a sustainable system of cooperation between the municipality, school, pedagogues and parents in order to identify in a timely manner the children and young people, including Roma, at the risk of dropping out of education and providing them with personalised support. Within the framework of the project it is planned to provide individual consultations of specialists (pedagogue, psychologist, social pedagogue, pedagogue's assistant, special education teacher, etc.), compensation for public transport tickets, accommodation, catering, individual learning materials, personal use items, special transport. In addition to school leaving, another important element of access to primary education is the mass schooling of Roma children in the grades that do not match the age of Roma children; as indicated above, by the last available data from the 2016 monitoring, 250 Roma pupils studied in a grade that does not match the age range.

The "Second chance" education programmes are available in the evening schools where there is no age limit. However, most of these schools offer programmes beginning with the 7th grade. However, considering the fact that a large part of the Roma leave school until the 7th grade, the offer of these school programmes is seen as inadequate to the need of the Roma community to return in education.

In the document "Informative Report on the Implementation of the Latvian Roma Integration Measures in 2017", which was developed by the Ministry of Culture, it was pointed out that in 2017/2018 school year, four Roma teacher assistants worked at different general education institutions. Unfortunately, the programme of Roma teacher assistants is not being implemented at national level; it is CEI's initiative and a result of a good cooperation with specific municipalities. Roma teacher assistant role is to help to fill the "gaps" in cultural and linguistic skills of children who do not come from the mainstream culture environment; teacher assistants serve as a link between children's home culture and the culture of the education system and strengthen the parental support for children in the learning process. Roma teacher assistants are employed in the classrooms with a purpose to raise and strengthen Roma students' academic knowledge and skills to the level that allows them to follow the requirements of the national curriculum. Assistants' role is also to reduce existing prejudices against the Roma with their practical examples at work and to promote the civic activity of Roma people and involvement in improving their welfare.⁴³ According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Culture, educational institutions indicate that in 2017/2018 school year, in education institutions, there would be a need for 16 Roma teacher assistants.

Based on NGOs' initiatives, in 2014, Roma Resource Centres (RRC) were opened in Daugavpils, Jelgava, Valdemārpils and Valmiera to promote the inclusion of Roma children and young people in the education system. Aim of RRC is to provide place for after school activities for Roma children, promote cooperation, development of various skills and to encourage civil activities for Roma families. The activities of the centres are very wide, offering opportunities for Roma children and families to acquire various skills and knowledge in an innovative way, for example, to use computers for learning the Latvian

⁴¹ Research available at: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/41.pdf>

⁴² Information about project available at: <http://www.pumpurs.lv/>

⁴³ More information available at: <http://goodpracticeroma.ppa.coe.int/en/pdf/22>

language. In this way, an interactive approach to the learning process is found and RRC activities as good practice.⁴⁴

In 2017, in the framework of the project "Latvian Roma Platform II: Dialogue, Cooperation and Involvement",⁴⁵ carried out by the Ministry of Culture, Roma mediators were trained and employed in five cities of Latvia: Valmiera, Ventspils, Jelgava, Dobeles and Rīga. In parallel with other tasks, Roma mediators promote the involvement of Roma children in the education process, i.e. ensure regular meetings with representatives of the Education Administration and parents of Roma children, as well as, as far as possible, identify the real situation in the area of Roma education at the local level.⁴⁶

Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand

Comparing the results of the Population Census 2000 and the last Population Census 2011,⁴⁷ the number of Roma with general secondary education, vocational education and higher education has grown. The latest results of Population Census show that in Latvia only 41 Roma or 0.8 per cent of the Roma population have higher education, including doctor degree. Over the past 10 years, this number has changed: 0.4 per cent of the Roma population had higher education in 2001.⁴⁸

More vocational choices are offered by vocational schools located in larger cities, so financial support is needed to finance travel, living and other expenses. In part, these needs are offset by the mentioned national project "PuMPuRS". The second opportunity for vocational education is the project "Youth Guarantee",⁴⁹ which is implemented in Latvia from 2014 to 2020. It aims to help young people return to education or enter the labour market, thus reducing youth unemployment and improving their competitiveness in the labour market. The target group of the project is young people aged 15 to 29 who do not study or work. The State Educational Development Agency offers young people twice a year – in summer and winter – to join and start their studies at a vocational education institution in Latvia. Within one or 1.5 year, they can acquire a profession. Young people also receive targeted scholarships in the amount of 70-115 EUR during the acquisition of the profession, and the programme can also be acquired by young people who are in detention.⁵⁰ All the above projects are funded by ESF and there is no available data on the number of Roma youth in them.

Information about children who do not start learning at any school and do not study anywhere is collected by the State Education Quality Service, according to data provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. Ethnicity is not defined in these data, so it is not possible to find out how many of the children at the age of compulsory education who are not registered in any educational institution are Roma by nationality.

⁴⁴ Examples of good practices in Roma inclusion: <http://www.sif.lv/images/atteli/SIF/progress/Brochure-roma-education-ENG.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/projekti-un-pasakumi/latvijas-romu-platforma-ii>

⁴⁶ Guidelines for Roma mediators: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Platforma/Darba_vadlinijas_romu_mediatoriem.pdf

⁴⁷ Research "Roma in Latvia", SIF, 2015

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Information available at: http://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79985

⁵⁰ Information available at: <http://rmk1.lv/item/113-sakotnejas-profesionalas-izglitiba-programmu-istenosana-garantijas-jauniesiem>

The lack of statistical data on the ethnic distribution of graduates of different levels of education precludes the accurate identification of the situation of the Roma in the field of education, as well as a thorough assessment of the achievements and weaknesses of Roma education policy. The lack of data and also research on the real situation of the Roma from the side of responsible authorities leads to the conclusion that the implementation of the Roma education policy and its impact in the country cannot be fully assessed and, therefore, does not provide for its deliberate efficiency improvement in line with the real needs and opportunities of the Roma community. There is no targeted national-scale planning to encourage school attendance and reduce the drop-out rate for Roma children. This "problem" has been transferred to the municipality's responsibility and good will. On the other hand, the representatives of the Roma, aware of the importance of education in nowadays situation, point out that the promotion of lifelong learning issues among Roma is complicated, as education is largely due to their financial capabilities and time resources.

Fight against discrimination, segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in education

An overview of courses offered by several Latvian pedagogical university study programmes shows that future pedagogues are educated to work competently with children and young people representing diverse cultures as well as to be able to meet the diverse needs of students and facilitate their implementation in practice, depending on the specific tasks of their profession. It is difficult to analyse whether these courses offer topics that reflect the specifics of Roma pupils' education, as the subject matter is not freely available. Higher educational institutions also implement various projects and develop support and methodological materials for work in educational institutions.

Although the development of intercultural education in the Latvian education system takes place within the framework of courses and projects of higher education institutions and other lifelong education providers, there is still a unilateral position – the inclusion of Roma students, but the readiness of students to enter, the readiness and ability of teachers to integrate and accept the overcoming ethnic-based barriers, knowledge on the formation of ethnic identity and the causes of conflicts, etc., important aspects are often not addressed.

The Rules of the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the education and professional qualifications required for teachers and the improvement of professional qualifications of pedagogues" stipulate that the teacher is responsible for the improvement of his professional competence.⁵¹ A pedagogue must complete a programme of at least 36 hours in a three-year period, and this should be planned in co-operation with the head of the educational institution in which the person carries out the work of the pedagogue. The offer for further education of teachers, which extends the professional knowledge and competences for working with ethnic group pupils, is quite extensive, but lifelong education programmes aimed specifically at the inclusion of Roma pupils are offered only by the Centre for Educational Initiatives.⁵² Within the framework of life-long education programs, the teacher may choose to study topics related to work with Roma children, including combating discrimination, segregation and other types of antisepic in education. Although there are various courses on tolerance, schools are too passive and there is a lack of pedagogical initiative to invite lecturers and acquire new programmes and technologies.

Latvian legislation stipulates that the education of children is primarily a parental responsibility. The research "Roma Rights to Education: Implementing Situation in Latvia", concludes that it is impossible to determine whether there is a general change in the Roma

⁵¹ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301572-noteikumi-par-pedagogiem-nepiecesamo-izglitibu-un-profesionalo-kvalifikaciju-un-pedagogu-profesionalas-kompetences-pilnveides>

⁵² Home page of CEI: www.iic.lv

education as there is no formal or informal data collection mechanism that could provide regular and reliable information on the achievements of this ethnic group, school attendance, school drop-out rates, as well as on the successful continuation of education in the context of lifelong learning.⁵³ However, it can be concluded that in municipalities where education institutions have engaged in various projects for the inclusion and integration of Roma, where teachers have attended several lifelong education courses on this topic, they have significantly higher work outcomes.

⁵³ Research available at:
https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/IIC_petijums_romu-tiesibas-uz-izgl.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employment

- State Employment Agency to develop criteria and assess the effectiveness of the implemented programmes and support measures in order to identify the most effective programmes and the most unsuccessful measures regarding their accessibility and benefits to different target groups, including the Roma as a separate group.

Housing and essential public services

- In developing priorities and implementing the EU support programmes for improving infrastructure, plan support programmes to improve the sanitary conditions of housing - primarily installation of water supply and sewerage, as well as for the purchase of materials necessary for housing renovation with the possibility for the people themselves to carry out the renovation of their home.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

- Promote the involvement of skilled Roma (for example, Roma mediators) in healthcare programmes in order to ensure the timely dissemination of the most important information in the healthcare sector in the Roma community.

Education

- Responsible policy makers (ministries, local governments) to carry out regular monitoring and situation analysis on the processes of Roma education, collecting information on the number of Roma in all levels of education. Future policy planning and implementation should focus on a planned and targeted improvement of the situation, thus ensuring the sustainability of the process.
- Find opportunities to provide training to the Roma teacher-assistants in preschool groups and primary education classes, since the number of these teacher-assistants is insufficient.

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