

## Country fiche: LATVIA

### Position of civil society involved in the Roma Civil Monitor

#### SUBSTANTIVE POLICY AREAS

##### STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

##### WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

#### EDUCATION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Education and Science in collaboration with municipal education boards carry out the monitoring of the education of Roma school children.</li> <li>• An effective tool for promoting Roma education is considered to be the work of the Roma teacher-assistants in preschool and primary education.</li> <li>• In 2017 the State Education Quality Service started to implement an ESF-funded project “Support to reduce early school leaving”, which aims to reduce the number of children and young people dropping out of education and not completing schooling.</li> <li>• Based on the NGO initiatives, in 2014, Roma Resource Centres (RRC) were opened in several cities to promote the inclusion of Roma children and young people in the education system.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the achievements and weaknesses of Roma education policy is missing.</li> <li>• One of the main reasons for the low preschool attendance among Roma children are low pedagogical skills of facilities’ personnel to provide inclusive and multicultural education.</li> <li>• 15.8% of Roma children are educated in special schools.</li> <li>• The “Second chance” education programmes with no age limit provide education for those who already have graduated the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but a large proportion of Roma who could benefit from the measure do not meet this condition.</li> <li>• Unfortunately, the programme of Roma teacher assistants is not being implemented at the national level. They should be available in pre-school and primary schools with a larger number of Roma and provided with professional training.</li> <li>• There is no targeted national-scale planning to encourage school attendance and reduce the drop-out rate for Roma children.</li> <li>• Since more vocational choices are offered by vocational schools located in larger cities, most Roma do not participate in these due to lack of financial support (i.e. travel, living and other expenses).</li> </ul> |
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#### EMPLOYMENT

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mainstream public employment services are available and cooperate with NGOs and Roma mediators to reach out to Roma jobseekers.</li> <li>• The Ministry of Culture implemented activities to support cooperation between Roma jobseekers, employers and social partners.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Roma participate in active labour policy measures that have poor employment outcomes.</li> </ul> |
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#### HEALTHCARE

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic health care coverage in Latvia is broad; low-income people are free from paying patient co-payments and have the right to receive state-funded health care services free of charge.</li> <li>• Reforms planned by the Ministry of Health may have a positive impact on Roma access to health care services.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drug use, HIV-infection rates among the Roma are relatively high.</li> <li>• Awareness of the available health services among Roma remains low; awareness of family planning options among some Roma women is especially missing.</li> <li>• Involvement of skilled Roma (for example, Roma mediators) in healthcare programmes could help deliver important information in the healthcare sector to the Roma community.</li> </ul> |
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#### HOUSING

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing benefit and social assistance programmes are available for all disadvantaged families, and there are no circumstances that exclude disadvantaged Roma families.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some 75-80% of Roma families in Latvia encounter difficulties in accessing social housing and quality provision, e.g. eligibility criteria (like owning a car) and</li> </ul> |
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- Roma families are not subject to forced evictions from social rentals. If a private landlord breaks the rental agreement, the local government offers and ensures the accommodation of the families in so-called crisis centres. Families are allowed to live there for a period up to three months for a relatively low fee, in the meanwhile they may resolve their housing.

administrative barriers, or low income which would not cover the rent and amenities.

- The most significant issue is the bad sanitary equipment and low technical conditions, which significantly hampers access to basic hygiene and increases the health risks.
- Policy documents do 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.

## HORIZONTAL MEASURES

### STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

### WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

#### ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

- Ombudsman Office pays attention to the protection of the rights of detainees, including Roma.
- To provide the best possible availability of Ombudsman Office specialist's consultations, Ombudsman Office regularly organises educational seminars and on-site consultations in Latvian cities, including prisons.
- Ombudsman Office and the implementers of the state integration policy recognise the continuing problem of negative stereotypes and prejudices against Roma community that promote discriminatory attitudes in Latvia as a key issue.

- Roma mediators have no reported cases of direct discrimination, but indicated that indirect discrimination against Roma occurs at municipal level, and largely goes unreported.
- There are no adequate measures in place to prevent unfounded placement of Roma children in special schools.

#### FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM

- Roma are officially recognised by the government as an ethnic minority.
- The Latvian state officially recognises the historical fact of genocide against the Roma during the Second World War and since 2015 the International Roma Day is being marked. About 50 Latvian Roma have been paid compensation for forced labour.
- Funding, though limited, is available to combat discrimination against Roma and to strengthen intercultural dialogue.

- Insufficient measures have been taken to eliminate the spread of hate speech against the Roma.
- It is necessary to promote a more active application of criminal law, to strengthen the effective mechanism of rights protection and to take preventive measures to eliminate the spread of hate speech and hate crime.
- Law enforcement agencies must pay more attention to the issues of identification, definition and investigation of hate speech and hate crime.

#### ADDRESSING SPECIFIC NEEDS OF MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS AMONG ROMA

- Some municipalities included the task into their local development programmes to establish a complex support system for Roma children (focusing on education).

- No measures have been adopted to address (explicitly) Roma LGBT+ issues.
- No specific measures have been adopted to improve the labour market situation of Roma women.
- Teaching assistants / mediators should be employed in order to facilitate Roma children's participation in preschool education.

## STRUCTURAL MEASURES

### STRENGTHS/KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MS APPROACH

### WEAKNESSES/GAPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

#### STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

- Because of the small Roma population in the country, Latvia has not developed a special Roma inclusion strategy, but rather a set of policy measures aimed at Roma integration.
- The government informs the Parliament about the course of the Roma integration policy, achieved results and the good

- In the last years, no legislative proposal related to the Roma context have been discussed in the committees.
- Ministry of Culture is the responsible authority for the coordination of the national Roma integration policy planning and implementation, yet several line ministries

practices; moreover, parliamentary committees they organise hearings with Roma NGOs.

- Ministry of Culture as the National Roma Contact Point coordinates a network of regional experts in Roma integration issues, including 13 municipalities.
- At the level of legislative power Roma integration and anti-discrimination issues have been included in mandates of three Parliamentary Committees.

have not been granted particular responsibilities in working with the Roma community.

### CIVIL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- Since 2012, within the Ministry of Culture, the *Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy* operates. The Council includes public institutions and representatives of different NGOs.
- The responsibilities of the Council are to evaluate the reports and results of the implementation of the integration policy of the Roma, provide with consultations and suggestions, and improve the cooperation between the government and the Roma community.

- Numerous practical obstacles exist in the implementation of Roma voting rights, as for instance, absence of documents (passport), absence of citizenship (foreign passport), unavailability of the actual information (declared residence does not coincide with factual residence).

### MAINSTREAMING OF ROMA INCLUSION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Some municipalities with higher number of Roma inhabitants frequently set specific goals and tasks and elaborate them in their development programmes/strategies.
- Some municipalities that have founded specific integration institutions, like society integration administrations, need to develop integration plans for the integration of the minorities (including Roma) living in their respective territory.
- Five Roma mediators worked in four regions out of five. The initiative of Roma mediators was initiated by an NGO “Centre for Education Initiatives” and is co-financed from public budgets.

- A negative trend has been observed in some municipalities to concentrate poor people, including Roma, in certain houses at municipalities’ outskirts, often in form of provision of social housing.
- Many municipalities with smaller Roma communities that would need assistance do not engage in (Roma) integration initiatives under the pretext of the lack of financial resources and capacity or claiming that all inhabitants enjoy formal equality.

### DATA COLLECTION

- Data and information on the situation of the Roma are gathered within specific surveys targeted at Roma community in the frame of the specific support measures, such as tracking the unemployed Roma.
- Ministry of Education and Science carries out a monitoring of the number of Roma children in pre-school and primary education every three years.
- In the last years a considerable part of the Roma population has emigrated to foreign countries for economic reasons.

- Existence of the monitoring of Roma pupils has not had any positive impact on policy-making (e.g. increasing availability of the education or quality of education).

### FUNDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- Several funding sources are available to NGOs for development of the civil society, including the Roma NGOs.
- Public funds support maintenance of the Roma History and Art Museum.
- The existing programmes including ESF programmes and thematic campaigns (e.g. campaign *Dosta!*) are being targeted towards wider target groups, including Roma.

- Already nine years since the implementation of the national programme “Roma in Latvia 2007-2009”, there has been no purposeful programmes aiming specifically at Roma.

### EXAMPLE OF PROMISING PRACTICE

In 2014, there were 5 Roma mediators in Latvia. The Roma Mediator Initiative was launched in 2014 by a non-governmental organization “Education Initiative Center”, but in 2017 the administration of the Roma mediators was taken over by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, continuing to finance the activities of Roma mediators within the EU funded project. The



main task of the Roma mediator is to promote and ensure dialogue and cooperation between Roma families and professionals from municipal institutions as well as government agencies in areas such as education, social affairs, employment, children's rights, etc. The main outcomes of the Roma mediator's work include identifying the Roma situation and the most problematic issues at the local level and finding appropriate solutions in cooperation with the representatives of the municipal social administration, education administration and other institutions to promote the integration and social inclusion of Roma at risk of social and poverty.

#### **MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED**

- Adequate funding and to ensure the establishment of Roma Teacher's Assistants Group, to provide the implementation of training and operating in the pre-school institutions and primary schools.
- Employment of Roma (particularly Roma youth).
- Reduction of bureaucratic obstacles in areas related to housing availability and improvement of living conditions.