



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

*Identifying blind spots
in Roma inclusion policy*

Prepared by:

Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture
Association for Culture, Education and Communication
Roma Advocacy and Research Centre
Roma Media – ROMED
Community Centre of Minorities
People in Need
Roma Platform
February 2020



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
Directorate D — Equality and Union Citizenship
Unit D1 Non Discrimination and Roma Coordination

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-19900-7 doi:10.2838/881655 Catalogue number DS-03-20-402-EN-N

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The report was prepared by a coalition of NGOs:

- Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture,
- Association for Culture, Education and Communication,
- Roma Advocacy and Research Centre,
- Community Centre of Minorities,
- Roma Media,
- Roma Platform,
- People in Need.

The main editor was Ms. Jarmila Lajcakova while other members of the coalition offered support and information.

The report was prepared as part of the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, 'Capacity-building for Roma civil society and strengthening its involvement in the monitoring of National Roma Integration Strategies'. The pilot project is carried out for the European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers. It is coordinated by the *Center for Policy Studies* of the Central European University (CEU CPS), in partnership with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO Network), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (FSG) and the Roma Education Fund (REF) and implemented with around 90 NGOs and experts from up to 27 member states.

Although the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, as part of which the report was prepared, is coordinated by CEU, the report represents the findings of the author and it does not necessarily reflect the views of CEU. CEU cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEC	Association for Culture, Education and Communication
CCM	Community Centre of Minorities
CVEK	Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union
MERSaS	Ministry of Education, Research, Science and Sport
MPC	Methodical Pedagogic Centre
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
OGPRC	The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities
PE	Physical education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RAVS	Roma Advocacy and Research Centre

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to sports for Roma children and youth

The first chapter reviews two main pillars of state's policies in sport and their ability to facilitate access to sports to Roma children and youth. First, Sport for All 's policy relies as main policy tool for this age group physical education (PE), taught at primary schools, secondary schools and universities. Our mapping of PE courses at elementary schools found that Roma children's participation in PE classes is likely lower than children on average. In the teachers' view, this was mostly due to the children often failing to bring proper sports attire to the schools. Some teachers believed that the parents of Roma children disproportionately more often sought permission for their children to be absent from PE. A couple of PE teachers observed that Roma children feel uncomfortable to change their clothes in front of other children of the same sex in the changing rooms. More generally, interviews with the PE teachers across Slovakia indicated that they somewhat accept this status quo and invest limited efforts into addressing the causes of lower participation in sport or even compulsory PE courses. The main measure to promote access to after school activities, vouchers, worth 32 EUR a year per child is far from sufficient to cover the costs of the monthly fees in sport clubs. Finances for club membership, for example, in a football club can cost between 30-100 EUR a month with additional expenses required for the proper attire as well as for costs associated with competitions or tournaments.

The other pillar of the state sports policy, Support of Talented Youth, acknowledges that financial costs are one of the barriers preventing talented youth from becoming elite athletes. Yet, there are no system measures to overcome this barrier. This is also the case with the newly established fund for sport with a yearly allocation of 20 million EUR. Furthermore, one of the system-level measures, a nationwide testing of sport aptitudes among pupils enrolled in year one and year three of elementary school, does not envisage any comprehensive follow-up activities that would actually help parents and children in enrolling into sports clubs.

While official state policies in sport are blind to the situation of socially disadvantaged or Roma children, the action plans implementing the National Roma Integration Strategy of 2011 (NRIS) do not cover sport.

In practice, we have found merely random activities supporting access of Roma children to sport promoted mostly by community centres or individuals. These activities have not been part of any policy efforts but really depend on the willingness of individuals, often working in community centres or occasionally sport clubs that focus on this target group.

In terms of barriers, aside for financial costs, accessing sport, especially as a non-organised, leisure form of activity, accessibility to sports facilities may pose one of the most obvious barriers for children living in marginalised areas. This can be caused by the fact that a certain portion of such children live in segregated or separated areas with no available playgrounds. Besides residential segregation, other direct or indirect discrimination practices can curtail access to sport facilities, included cases when a municipality banned access of Roma children to the local outdoor pool. Also, racism may pose yet another barrier as some observers noted that non-Roma parents would object to a "disproportionate presence" of Roma children in some of the sports clubs. Finally, girls are even less likely to participate in sport, both as a leisure-time activity as well as in organised sports, due to fewer opportunities for sporting for girls, especially in rural areas and also due to gender biased expectations by some families.

Monitoring and evaluation of Roma inclusion programmes

Slovakia has allocated significant funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) on Roma inclusion through so-called national projects with large, several million EUR budgets often

provide certain services in numerous localities in a rather uniform manner, e.g. social field workers, assistant personnel in school or health mediators provide similar services following same methodology with the same costs.

Projects funded from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are monitored based on methodical guidelines and strategic documents. Thus, during the implementation phase, monitoring focuses on progress, which provides a basis for refunding of undertaken activities. Second, monitoring officers gathers data to assess the implementation of the entire operational programme. After the project completion, recipients of funding submit their final monitoring reports as required in their contract. Aside from lacking basic disaggregation of the basis of gender, a rather striking aspect of the monitoring process is the lack of indicators would help to monitor the quality of services.

While monitoring is an obligatory aspect of each national project, this is not the case with evaluations. We were not able to find out why certain national projects plan evaluations and why others do not. Moreover, our review of three better quality evaluations of key programmes – community centre workers, field social workers and support staff at schools and kindergartens promoting inclusive education providing better standards – shared similar shortcomings that prevent us to learn from past mistakes. Evaluations failed to focus on the results and impact of the activity on Roma inclusion. Also, none of the evaluations thoroughly considered perspectives of the clients or target groups – Roma. Gender perspective was absent too. Also, the independence of the hired experts to pursue evaluations should be reinforced.

Targeting the mainstream society

The third chapter focuses on how Slovakia addresses prejudice and stereotypes shared by the majority society that undermine Roma inclusion efforts. The chapter finds that while Slovakia's NRIS of 2011 declared the need to target the mainstream society through communication activities as a precondition for successful implementation of social inclusion policies, there is very little, if any, implementation in place.

Furthermore, also the educational system provides rather limited resources to tackle and prevent prejudice. It appears, for example, that available textbooks do not provide accurate and balanced information about Roma and Roma history.

Currently, the only traceable effort to address this deficiency through a material on all legally recognised national minorities, including Roma has been delayed for more than two years.

Finally, the chapter cautions that the potential of the educational system to equip children and youth with skills to be able to critically understand information presented in social and other media, including the widely shared hoaxes and misinformation about Roma that constructs and perpetuates anti-Roma stereotypes, is very limited.

INTRODUCTION

The report focuses on access to sports, monitoring and evaluation of large-scale programmes and policies targeting mainstream. We have selected these areas because they either present blind spots in Roma inclusion policies or their importance and/or implementation is underestimated. These areas thus in our view, deserve significantly more attention in the post-2020 efforts to increase the impact of Roma inclusion policies.

The first chapter argues that access of Roma children and youth to sports is an example of area that presents a blind spot in Roma integration policies. As well, mainstream sport policies fail to consider the situation of socially disadvantaged children and youth and their opportunities to participate in organised sports. There is a vast research indicating that sport provides a valuable policy tool in addressing prejudice and tackling stereotypes, helping children from disadvantaged background to acquiring social capital. Sport is known to be beneficial for the healthy development of children and youth. Sporting can also provide a sense of importance and meaning in life especially during the problematic period of puberty and to prevent criminality among youth as well as drug abuse. Given the potentially enormous benefits of sport for Roma children and youth, it is striking how little attention is paid to this area. Indeed, as we argue in the chapter, support of poor Roma children is mostly left to the efforts of community centres or individuals that is rather random. Generally, Roma children and youth of disadvantaged social standing face enormous barriers in accessing sports – from discrimination in accessing sports facilities through financial barriers or their parents' lack of social capital. In this group, Roma girls are even less likely to participate in sport as typically the only accessible activities are related to so-called boys' sports, facing further gender-based prejudice. Equally limited sports opportunities, however, are provided to poor children regardless of their ethnic background.

The second chapter focuses on monitoring and evaluation of large-scale projects using European structural and investment funds. In the Slovak contexts, a typical example of such projects is so called national projects. These are implemented by state agencies, using multimillion EUR budgets and often provide certain services in numerous localities in a rather uniform manner, e.g. social field workers, assistant personnel in school or health mediators provide similar services following same methodology with the same costs. The chapter reveals monitoring of the quality of performed services is absent. In terms of evaluations, even those that present better standards and evaluations, fail to focus on the actual impact of the programmes. We believe that in post 2020 policy efforts, monitoring and evaluation of at least projects with large budgets should be performed diligently. There is a risk that projects repeat the same deficiencies and ultimately reinforce the popularly shared prejudice that despite millions of EUR invested into inclusion policies, there is no progress and that thus feed into the extremists' narrative that 'Roma are unadaptable' despite the millions of euros invested.

Finally, the third area of this report addresses policies affecting mainstream society to fight stereotypes and reduce prejudice against Roma in Slovakia. The state action in this area could be significantly reinforced to reduce discrimination against Roma, and also to create more favourable conditions for Roma inclusion policies. While we recognise that changing deeply ingrained anti Roma attitudes and stereotypes is a challenging endeavour and require sustained effort, we see very little efforts in this area. Well-meant state plans to target mainstream society and prejudice has been left without any tangible implementation actions that one could expect yielding tangible results. A state educational system that is unable to tackle institutional segregation promotes stereotypes about Roma children as being inferior while doing very little to actually target children and reduce their prejudice. Information about Roma and Roma history that would also help students to understand the complex reasons behind Roma exclusion is scarce. Saliently, the potential of the system to equip children and youth to be able to critically assess massively shared hoaxes and misinformation about Roma is very limited.

ACCESS TO SPORTS FOR ROMA CHILDREN AND YOUTH

At the end of August 2018, a photograph of 13-year-old Roma girl Annamaria Horváthová standing on the first-place podium for the 800-metre sprint run went viral in Slovakia. The iconic picture captured Annamaria wearing ballet flats, in which she ran the race, unlike her professionally trained and appropriately equipped non-Roma competitors on the stand. The photo of the girl, raised in a single parent household in a poor home without tap water in Moldava nad Bodvou made it quickly into the mainstream media, stirring a wave of sympathy and financial donations to fund her training with the local athletic team. ¹



(Photo CVrček, Moldava nad Bodvou, 2018)

Incidentally, a few days after, incumbent Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini paid an official visit to the newly constructed multimillion-euro national football stadium in Slovakia's capital of Bratislava. The stadium, built by an oligarch with close ties to the governing parties, was anticipated to be shortly bought off by the state. The state is planning to buy the stadium, but at a significantly higher price than originally agreed. To justify the expense, including the additions, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini argued in an emotional speech that Slovaks deserve to have the highest standard facility, including the highest standard seating and lighting.²

¹ „Dievčatko z osady predbehlo súperky o kolo. Obuté malo namiesto tenisiek balerínky“, tvnoviny.sk, 31 August 2018, available at: https://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1932858_dievcatko-z-osady-predbehlo-superky-o-kolo-obute-malo-namiesto-tenisiek-balerinky

² Ján Petrovič, „Pellegrini: štát možno dá na stavbu Kmotříkovho štadióna viac“, aktuality.sk, 4 September 2019, available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/620292/pellegrini-stat-mozno-da-na-stavbu-kmotrikovho-stadiona-viac/>



(Photo, Pravda Ivan Majerský)

There is vast research, especially in the context of integration of migrant communities, indicating that sport provides a valuable policy tool in addressing prejudice and tackling stereotypes. Sport can help children and youth to develop social capital that can be used later in their lives while looking for jobs or other opportunities and can more generally support their integration into the broader society. There are also studies looking at the integration of migrant girls through sport, exploring the potential for overcoming multiple discrimination. Moreover, sport can help to build a community spirit and common identity and promote intercultural learning. Sport is furthermore beneficial for the healthy development of children and youth. Sporting can provide a sense of importance and meaning in life especially during the problematic period of puberty. In addition, sport can be a helpful tool to prevent criminality among youth as well as drug abuse. Sport can furthermore help to develop a positive image of oneself that can help to overcome the negative impact of racism. Some research also indicates a positive impact on the development of motor skills and on the development of cognitive capacities in early childhood. Naturally, when organizing sports activities, school clubs have to respect the equality and equal standing of each of their participants. By contrast, if the organisation of a sport is based on the development of ethnically and socially homogenous teams, it can also reinforce racism and segregation.³

Given the potentially enormous benefits of sport on the integration of Roma, it is striking how little attention is paid to this area. Indeed, the current state of affairs is well captured by the story of Annamaria and of the newly built stadium. An exceptionally talented girl is now practicing athletics only thanks to the private donations and efforts of the local team, brought about purely incidentally because of the mass media attention. Indeed, as we show in this chapter, it is at best only the gifted children that have the opportunity to participate in organised sport. Socially disadvantaged children are invisible in sports policies, while significant funds are invested into projects and, in fact, sports clubs with questionable backgrounds, as illustrated with the case of the national football stadium. Support of children from poor households is mostly left to the efforts of community centres

³ For an overview of research with references see Elena Gallová Kriglerová, Zuzana Havírová, Alena Holka Chudžíková, *Šport ako cesta z geta* (Bratislava, CVEK, 2019) at 9-12, available at: http://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Šport-ako-cesta-z-geta_final.pdf

or individuals. Interestingly, even Roma integration plans fail to address these deficiencies of system-level sports policies. Roma children, especially from socially deprived backgrounds, face enormous barriers in accessing sports – from discrimination in accessing sports facilities through financial barriers or their parents’ lack of social capital. In this group, Roma girls are even less likely to participate in sport as typically the only accessible activities are related to so-called boys’ sports, facing further gender-based prejudice. Equally limited sports opportunities, however, are provided to poor children regardless of their ethnic background.

The chapter explores this area through the perspectives of various stakeholders, ranging from Roma parents; community centre leaders; representatives of state agencies, including the MERSaS; and physical education teachers and concludes with policy recommendations.

State sports policy

Sport for All

The Conception of State policy in area of Sport – Slovak sport 2020, adopted in 2012,⁴ sets out the main policy framework based on two pillars: 1. Sport for All and 2. Support of Talented Youth.

The Sport for All policy approach was formulated already in the 1970s by, among others, the Council of Europe and was included in Slovakia’s legislation in the late 1990s.⁵ The Sport for All approach endorses leisure-time, non-organised sports that are accessible for all segments of society, supporting their physical and emotional well-being and preventing health problems.⁶ Among the main policy tools is PE, taught at primary schools, secondary schools and universities. The Slovak version of the approach sets out among its objectives an increase of the number of physical education classes from two to three per week. This has not been implemented yet.

Among the barriers that generally curtail PE courses at elementary schools, the government’s sport policy included in a government resolution lists inadequate supply of sports facilities in school premises for so-called traditional sports such as volleyball, basketball, handball, football or athletics. On the other hand, the state policy welcomes an increasing number of multifunctional facilities available for schools. In terms of access to sport, the state helps parents to cover expenses associated with attending after-school activities with vouchers worth 32 EUR per year with a yearly allocation of almost 20 million euros. However, the MERSaS was unable even to provide a rough assessment the portion of vouchers that covers sports activities. Moreover, the costs of the vouchers, i.e. 3.20 EUR a month is insufficient to cover the costs of the monthly fees.

More generally, the state sport strategy does not analyse financial or other barriers that can in practice prevent certain segments of children and youth from accessing sports. The state sports strategy at times even relies on institutions such as kindergartens, to which, for example, Roma children have limited access.⁷ At only one instance does the resolution state that community centres should address the situation of socially disadvantaged children, acknowledging that they are unable to financially access regular sports clubs.

⁴ State Conception in Area of Sport – Slovak Sport, adopted by government resolution No 703/2012 on 6 December 2012, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/612>

⁵ Act No. 288/1997 Coll. on Physical Education, as amended, para 3 section 2.

⁶ State Conception in Area of Sport – Slovak sport, adopted by government resolution No 703/2012 on 6 December 2012, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/612>, at 2.

⁷ Please see further data on preschool enrolment of Roma children e.g. in *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia* (2019), at 64-65, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-2-slovakia-2018-eprint-fin-3.pdf>

There are no measures facilitating access to mainstream sports clubs. The document does not analyse the situation of Roma girls, or in fact girls in general, who may be further disadvantaged in access to sport. There is no account on whether sport can or perhaps should be used to integrate and/or tackle stereotypes.⁸

Our interview with an employee of the MERSaS working at the sport department confirmed that the state policy in this area is lagging behind developments at the international level. Aside from noting that the official policy document adopted by the government is largely a formal instrument without providing much practical guidance for the MERSaS, she recognised that matters regarding sport for socially disadvantaged children remain neglected. In fact, drawing on her experience at various international sports policy-related events, she listed gender equality, overtraining and abuse of power of coaches towards athletes among the additional salient issues that remain ignored in the Slovak context.⁹

The interviewed civil servant further pointed out that the section for Sport at the MERSaS has difficulties in cooperation with the department responsible for regional education. And this regional education department is responsible, for instance, for physical education in schools that is also an important item in the Sport for All approach. More fundamentally, the MERSaS felt that their capacities were limited concerning the support of inclusion as they sought their real role to be mainly in the distribution of funds for sport to the sports unions which distribute the funds to the clubs. However, the clubs receiving funding have no responsibility to promote participation of socially disadvantaged children in sport.

Nevertheless, several other stakeholders have underlined the benefits of including sport for socially disadvantaged children into the centre of state policies. Vladimír Horváth, assistant to currently the sole Member of Parliament of Roma background, argued that based on his experience, sport can be used also to promote school participation and more generally improve school performance of poor children.¹⁰ Peter Németh, who leads a community centre in Prešov, further added that sport can help to develop the motor skills of poor children. In his view, among other things, sports activities designed to address prejudice among children proved to be very effective.¹¹ An employee of a municipal office of a mid-size town in western Slovakia underlined the importance of sports activities, in terms of not only physical conditions but also mental skills such as being responsible, punctual, patient or being able to integrate. However, they note that they have no specific policies targeting poor children.¹²

Our mapping of PE courses, essentially the only pillar of the Sport for All approach included also the interviewing of five PE teachers working in elementary schools across Slovakia. We found that Roma children's participation in PE classes is somewhat lower than children on average. In the teachers' view, this was mostly due to the children often failing to bring proper sports attire to the schools. Alternatively, some teachers underlined that the parents of Roma children disproportionately more often sought permission for their children to be absent from PE. A couple of PE teachers observed that Roma children feel uncomfortable to change their clothes in front of other children of the same sex in the changing rooms. Especially Roma girls either do not exercise or change their attire in washrooms and arrive to PE already in their sporting clothes. A teacher of physical education at an elementary school specialised in sports observed that Roma children do not participate in any sports clubs. She could not relate the reasons but believed that the

⁸ State Conception in Area of Sport – Slovak Sport, adopted by government resolution No. 703/2012 on 6 December 2012, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/612>, at p. 2.

⁹ Interview at the MERSaS CVEK (October 2019).

¹⁰ Interview with Vlado Horváth for CVEK (October 2019).

¹¹ Interview with Peter Németh from Community Center in Stará Tehelňa for CVEK (August 2019).

¹² Interview with a municipal office employee in Trnava for CVEK (October 2019).

children there probably were not interested.¹³ More generally, interviews with the PE teachers across Slovakia indicated that they somewhat accept this status quo and invest limited efforts into addressing the causes of lower participation in sport or even compulsory PE courses.¹⁴

Support of talented youth and children

The other pillar of the state sports policy seeks to identify and support talented youth to eventually become elite athletes. The State Resolution on Work with Youth Talented in Sport for 2015-2020 anticipates that the support of youth to become elite athletes must be systematic and based on state-wide recruitment.¹⁵ The support shall be organised through several channels – centres of leisure activities, sports classes within regular schools and elementary and secondary sports schools. The resolution also anticipates support in terms of sport for children and youth with disabilities.

In the section “the main problems of the school system in support of talented youth,” the resolution acknowledged financial costs as one of the barriers preventing talented youth from becoming elite athletes. The objective of the policy is reduced to merely increasing Slovakia’s sports representation at international events, support of talented youth, renovation and development of sports infrastructure, especially of the national football stadium and to the support of sport for people with disabilities. The strategy mentions socially disadvantaged groups among the target groups; however, without a link to any specific activities. There are no remarks on the objective of gender equality in sport, which is central at the Olympic games level¹⁶ and recognised by the EU¹⁷ and the Council of Europe.¹⁸

In 2015, the parliament adopted a new law regulating sport that extends to the governance of this area between the MERSaS, higher municipal units, towns and municipalities. The legislation anticipates that the organisation of sports at a highly competitive and elite level is governed mostly through federations with separate budgets based on the number of their athletes and outcomes measured through results in competitions. The Sport for All methodology is more vested within the governance of higher territorial units, towns and municipalities. Self-government administration units are responsible for the maintenance and development of sports facilities and should also develop their own conceptions of support for Sport for All. The legislation does not anticipate any specific targeting of children with socially disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁹

In September 2019, the parliament adopted a new law on sport funding that anticipates a rather autonomous yearly distribution of 20 million EUR per year through a newly established fund for sport and includes both priorities: Sport for All as well as support of talented children.²⁰ However, the act does not mention or focus on the situation of socially disadvantaged children, and given the silence or perhaps rather ignorance of this issue in public policies and among the current decision makers, it is unlikely that the fund will be

¹³ Interviewed with PE teacher in Prešov for CVEK (August 2019).

¹⁴ Information included in memos prepared by RAVS, ACEC and CCM for this report.

¹⁵ Conception of work with talented youth in sports for 2015-2020, government resolution no. 564/2015 of 14 October 2015, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/12368/1>

¹⁶ Please see for instance at: <https://www.olympic.org/gender-equality>. This is, however, a not discussed issue within the Slovak Olympic committee <https://www.olympic.sk/novinky/5651>

¹⁷ Please see sport agenda at the European Institute for Gender Equality available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/sport>

¹⁸ Please see on the sport and gender equality agenda at the Council of Europe, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/sport>

¹⁹ Act No. 440/2015 Coll on Sports, as amended

²⁰ Act No. 310/2019 Coll on the Fund on the Support in Sports.

used in part to target participation of Roma or more generally socially disadvantaged children in sport.

Nevertheless, one of the system-level measures that the MERSaS implemented to support talented children was nationwide testing of sport aptitudes among pupils enrolled in year one and year three of elementary school. However, the MERSaS, in their internal circular to the directors of elementary schools argued that the aim was not to identify the most talented children. The testing should rather help children and parents to choose the type of sport in which their children can be successful. The first pilot testing was implemented in 2017/2018 among pupils enrolled in year one while the first nationwide testing of all children enrolled in year one took place in 2018/2019. The Ministry envisaged that the testing of this age group cohort should be undertaken once they reached grade three. According to the plan, the Ministry anticipated that significant efforts would be invested into the preparation of the methodology and its incorporation into a rather sophisticated online tool. Interestingly, the resolution merely anticipated that each child could be optionally issued information for the child and parents with the results and five recommended sports with a list of sports clubs in the region.²¹ At this point, the MERSaS is evaluating results from testing focused on the measurement tools and their relevance rather than follow-up activities.

However, the testing does not envisage any comprehensive follow-up after the testing that would actually help parents and children in enrolling into sports clubs. In practice, we have seen that the testing was performed, and children received their grades based on charts prepared by the MERSaS. However, there were no follow-up discussions. No plans are envisaged for talented or socially disadvantaged children that are accompanied with a financial and other support system. At best, one of the schools reported that they provided parents with a list of sports clubs in the region. Rather surprising was the reaction of one of the interviewed teachers, anticipating that it was the parents who failed to reach out to learn about the testing of the children: "*parents do not seek out these results at all.*"²²

Roma integration policies and sport

While official state policies in sport are blind to the situation of socially disadvantaged or Roma children, the action plans implementing the NRIS do not cover sport.²³ Interestingly, the strategy was adopted after the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (OGPRC) organised a Roma youth symposium that in their official declaration called for the creation of a long-term programme aiming to seek out and support talented athletes and support sport counselling in order to increase the number of Roma coaches and to encourage the proper following of school curricula of physical education, in part in the context of Roma children.²⁴ In our interview, Tibor Škrabský, an employee at the OGPRC, noted that they have no specific focus on sport. Indeed, Škrabský pointed out that they have limited knowledge about the use of sport for social inclusion. He argued

²¹ *Celoslovenské testovanie pohybových predpokladov žiakov prvých a tretích ročníkov základných škôl na identifikáciu športového talentu* (podklady pre sekciu regionálneho školstva na poradu riaditeľov základných škôl), (not dated) available at: http://zsss.stranka.info/stranky/zsss/F/subory/sport_testovanie_identifikacia_sportoveho_talentu.pdf?PHPSSESID=d1b6216aa9c4c8b91bcc73018da0f5a6

²² Interview in Prešov for CVEK (August 2019)

²³ See the most recently updated Revised Action plans on NRIS until 2020 for years 2019-2020 for areas D.2.1 education, D.2.2. employment, D.2.3 health, D.2.4. housing and D.2.5 financial inclusion, government resolution 25/2019 adopted on 17 January 2019, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/963>

²⁴ First Joint declaration of the congress of Roma youth adopted on 6 April 2018 in Bratislava. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEWjKk6e1y8HIAhUHohQKHcciAw4QFjAAegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.minv.sk%2F%3Ftlacove-spravy%26sprava%3Dvieme-presne-co-chceme-odkazuju-mladi-romovia-spolocnosti%26subor_spravy%3D292659&usq=AOvVaw2P4Q_imsGRu5eHMxiuNywj

that they do not see any specific role of sport in relation to Roma children, meaning that it's equally important for both Roma and non-Roma children. The office was also aware merely of random local initiatives, mostly focusing on football, which did not present as mixed activities engaging both Roma and non-Roma children. He also pointed out that in order to promote inclusion, it is necessary to focus on mixing Roma and non-Roma players into teams rather than letting the kids play against one another based on their ethnicity.

Participation of Roma children in sports

In practice, while looking at how Roma children participate in sports either for leisure or in a manner that could potentially lead to elite sporting, we have found merely random activities promoted mostly by community centres or individuals, typically with some ties or a prior experience working with Roma children or youth. These activities, however, have not been part of any policy efforts but really depend on the willingness of individuals, often working in community centres. Most frequently, Roma children do sport in community centres as leisure activities, mostly playing table tennis or ball games that do not require major financial investments. These activities typically cater solely to Roma children living in a certain excluded locality. Only when a certain community centre caters to both Roma and non-Roma children in a certain locality do children practice sport jointly. This is, however, a rather exceptional situation.²⁵

In our interviews, community centre employees argued that they have limited capacities to facilitate inclusion of Roma children into regular sports clubs. As admitted by one of the community centre leaders in Prešov, *"also for us, sport is a secondary, tertiary issue; we do not have people, we have here a great deal of clients with enormous problems, there are three employees from the Implementation Agency; we are working as volunteers until the period when the next project starts, [...] we do not have the capacity to organise sport here professionally; we can try, like we tried karate or table tennis [...] it's only us, me and my colleagues [...] if we see a kid that is extremely talented, such as has been the case with some football players, we try to help him to advance and convince the club to take this child."*²⁶

Also, we have encountered situations, mostly with football clubs, where they lack a sufficient number of good players and reach out to children and youth in marginalised communities. Typically, this is mostly driven by sport clubs seeking football players. In Trnava, for example, Juraj Štofej, who leads the local community centre, drives four Roma children twice a week to a football club in a village at the outskirts of the town, outside his work duties. In our interview, Štofej noted that for children who spent most of their time in a segregated urban ghetto, this is also a good opportunity to get outside of this environment and encounter non-Roma children. According to Štofej, the local football club did not have a sufficient number of good football players and thus reached out to the community centre. The club is covering expenses for training sessions and tournaments while the community centre is paying for the transportation to the football club.²⁷ If Štofej did not volunteer to help with the transportation, this activity would most likely cease to exist as the club is located outside the city limits of Trnava in a small village that is not easily accessible by public transportation. Similarly, in Veľký Krtíš, a local club in a nearby village provides transportation for several Roma from town, recognizing that commuting is an issue and without such efforts, their participation in the club would likely cease to exist.²⁸ We have found a slightly different scenario illustrating another possible pattern of Roma children's participation in sport in a smaller village in eastern Slovakia. In a

²⁵ Information included in memos prepared by RAVS, ACEC, Roma media, Roma Platform and CCM for this report.

²⁶ Interview with Peter Németh of the Community Center in Stará Tehelňa for CVEK (August 2019).

²⁷ Interview with Juraj Štofej of the Community Center in Trnava for CVEK (October 2019)

²⁸ Memo prepared by the CCM for this report.

community with hundreds of Roma, only five boys from better-off Roma families play football for the local village club supported by the municipality. The boys are children of parents who themselves play football at the local gym of the elementary school that is made accessible by the municipality.²⁹

In our mapping of recruitment strategies among bigger football clubs, these only rarely reach out to Roma communities. In our interview with the manager of a large and nationally renowned football club located in the same town, he recalled having perhaps a couple of Roma players in the past. Indeed, these were Roma girls who were recruited from a foster home to play in newly opened female team. They were recruited rather accidentally while taking part in a charity event. Normally, the team recruits talented children from kindergartens across town. Roma children, however, rarely attend these kindergartens. Alternatively, it is the parents who reach out to the football club to enrol their child.³⁰ The local athletic club in Trnava does not undertake any specific recruitment activities. According to the club manager, they used to approach schools, organise sports clubs at schools and even events where children could try different sports. Now, the club is rather large. With almost five hundred members, there is no need to undertake any outreach activities. Parents apply to the club instead. Nevertheless, the club has a special social fund for children whose families may have difficulties to cover expenses for talented children.³¹

In our mapping, along with football, Roma children were also likely to engage in boxing and martial arts.³² A rather well-known example is the academy of Tomy Kid, which was established by Slovakia's leading boxer in Galanta and supported through state financial mechanisms, recruiting children from socially disadvantaged environments, including Roma children.³³ We were also able to find a couple of local clubs in Veľký Krtíš focused on Thai boxing and similar martial arts. In Veľký Krtíš, Pavol Berky, who leads a local club for mixed martial arts, regularly visits the school and presents exhibitions that motivate the children to attend. Also, teachers can contact the club in case they spot not only talented but also children that behave aggressively. The club is mixed in terms of ethnicity and gender, with 60 members from age 5 to 40 years. Children practice boxing and/or mixed martial arts three times a week and pay 35 EUR a month. Half are Roma children, including children from poor social background and one-third are girls. While the fee is rather high for poor families, the fees are exempted for poor children. However, they need to attend the course regularly. They can afford to drop the fee thanks to support from private donors. According to Berky, sporting has an enormous positive impact on children: *"Children come from elementary schools with no physical abilities, they train and they also learn collective spirit, respect of one another and gain self-confidence."*³⁴ This observation is in line with available research on benefits of sport.³⁵ In another town, Holíč, we found children from the poorest Roma families attending the local boxing club under the leadership of a Roma coach. The club, similarly to the one in Veľký Krtíš, trains mixed athletes, including girls. One of the most successful athletes is a Roma girl. As the family

²⁹ Memo prepared by Romed for this report.

³⁰ Interview with manager of Spartak for CVEK (October 2019).

³¹ Interview with a manager of a local athletic club for CVEK (October 2019).

³² However, there is also a known sport club in powerlifting in Filákovo targeting Roma children from urban ghetto. See e.g. in Jana Čavojská „Tréner rómskych silákov z Filákova: Som rád, ak v práci niekto z klubu odchádza, lebo je to kvôli práci“, January 6, 2019, Plus 7 dní, available at: <https://plus7dni.pluska.sk/ludia/trener-romskych-silakov-filakova-som-rad-ak-niekto-klubu-odchadza-lebo-je-to-kvoli-praci> [Coach of Roma powerlifters from Filákovo: I am pleased is someone is leaving the club, it is because of getting a job]

³³ Please see more information at: <https://www.tomikid.com>

³⁴ Interview with Pavel Berky (October 2019).

³⁵ Please see sources cited in footnote 3, above.

does not have funds to cover her expenses, her coach helps to cover the expenses with his own funds or with the help of private donors.³⁶

Barriers that Roma children face in accessing sports

In accessing sport, especially as a non-organised, leisure form of activity, accessibility to sports facilities may pose one of the most obvious barriers for children living in marginalised areas. This can be caused by the fact that a certain portion of such children live in segregated or separated areas with no available playgrounds. In Trnava, we observed one city councillor who proposed the building of a football playground in proximity to the urban ghetto. Together with local inhabitants of the ghetto, he cut the grass to prepare for the playground as well as for a community garden that would allow additional leisure-time activities to be held there. Eventually, however, other councillors rejected this plan, arguing that Roma kids should rather use the sport pitch of the local elementary schools. However, this appears to be a strategy to water down any efforts as these areas are either not accessible or poorly accessible.³⁷

Besides residential segregation, other direct or indirect discrimination practices can curtail access to sport facilities. For example, a few years ago in Moldava nad Bodvou, the city banned access of Roma children to the local outdoor pool.³⁸ In 2016 in Hrčel', the municipality divided the operating hours of the multifunctional playground, newly built from EU funds³⁹, for Roma and non-Roma visitors. On odd-numbered days, the playground was accessible for non-Roma while on even-numbered days, it could be used by Roma. This regulation, presented as a written notice, was dropped after a challenge by Ondrej Dostal, one of the Members of the Slovak Parliament.⁴⁰

In Veľký Krtíš, a natural swimming pool (called a bio-swimming pool) is, in practice, inaccessible to poor Roma families as they do not qualify for a city card that is provided only to those without any outstanding debts. Thus, they do not qualify for significantly reduced fees and therefore cannot access the city facility. The city also has an ice-skating stadium. This is not attended by Roma children at all as they do not own skates, cannot afford rental fee or the entrance fees. The access to sports playgrounds in school areas is too complicated to be available for the children to play.⁴¹

In another smaller village in eastern Slovakia, children tend to play just outside the local multifunctional playground. The rules for accessing it are rather complicated. It is locked and only a designated person has the keys and no-one among Roma knows who the designated person in the municipality is. The Roma parents interviewed for this report would welcome having a playground close to the settlement as they do not believe that their children would be welcome using the facilities for the majority populations in the municipality.⁴²

In terms of access to organised sports, most of the respondents agreed that actual availability of sports for Roma children living in marginalised areas is very poor. The state relies on parents, their social skills and capital along with a certain financial stability rather

³⁶ Memo prepared by RAVS.

³⁷ Interview with Juraj Štofej for CVEK.

³⁸ Memo prepared by Roma platform.

³⁹ Operational programme Development of Rural Areas (Rozvoj vidieka) during the programming period 2007-2013, Priority axes 4, basic services for rural population, code of the measure 321, project code 44181100004, information available at: <https://oks.sk/oks-vyzyva-odstranit-segregacnu-prax-v-obci-hrcel/>

⁴⁰ SITA, TASR „ Dostál upozornil na segregačné praktiky v obci Hrčel'“, 12 March 2016, sme.sk, available at: <https://romovia.sme.sk/c/20121173/dostal-upozornil-na-segregacne-praktiky-v-obci-hrcel.html>

⁴¹ Memo prepared by CCM.

⁴² Memo prepared by Romed.

than creating opportunities and reaching out to disadvantaged children. Families living in segregated environments, struggling to survive, are less likely to invest efforts to enrol their children into sports clubs than more affluent parents having social capital and perhaps a previous experience with participation in organised sport. Funding sports activities for parents living in material need was, according to one of the interviewed community centre leaders, “one of the lowest priorities [...] for them [Roma parents], it is important to buy food, pay bills, school fees and millions of other fees...”⁴³ However, we have encountered that better-off Roma families from larger towns actively seek out sports activities, often using the internet.⁴⁴ Moreover, in a rural environment, in which most marginalised Roma live, their access to sports clubs is generally more challenging with significantly fewer opportunities than in larger towns.

A significant barrier is posed by the financial costs of participating in organised sport. Finances for club membership in a football club can cost between 30-100 EUR a month with additional expenses required for the proper attire as well as for costs associated with competitions or tournaments. Some clubs recognise this barrier and reduce or drop the fee for children from poorer families. Mostly, however, the fee is dropped only in cases where children are gifted. Furthermore, the economic backgrounds of children may play out differently in different sports, as pointed by one of the respondents. In the view of one of the interviewed athletic coaches, collective sports such as football create an incentive for unfair calculations when coaches may in some matches let children play depending in part on the capacity of their parents to sponsor the club. This practice is less likely in the case of individual sports, such as athletics, that depend on the actual results of each athlete. Athletes participate in competitions based on their individual results.⁴⁵ Moreover, sports such as gymnastics and also others, largely depend on additional support of parents, such as working as coaching assistants, judges or helping with driving to tournaments, which may pose yet another barrier that is hard for socially disadvantaged parents to overcome.

Finally, through interviews with one of the PE teachers, we have found that racism may pose yet another barrier. The teacher notes that non-Roma parents would object to a “disproportionate presence” of Roma children in some of the sports clubs.⁴⁶ At the same time, racism and residential and school segregation may be somewhat internalised by Roma children who worry about joining ethnically mixed clubs. One of the Roma parents in our interview observed that sometimes “Roma children are more afraid, especially those that are not used to being among non-Roma” to do sport with non-Roma children, which can be an additional barrier in accessing sport.⁴⁷

Specific barriers experienced by Roma girls

Our mapping furthermore revealed that girls are even less likely to participate in sport, both as a leisure-time activity as well as in organised sports, due to two main reasons. First, due to fewer opportunities for sporting for girls, especially in rural areas. Often the only available clubs or activities are viewed as designed for boys, such as football, even though these can be equally played by girls. In Prešov, the community centre leader observed that if girls are sporting, it is typically only jumping using the elastics or similar activities close to their homes.⁴⁸ Also, girls are rather stereotypically led to participate merely in dancing as a sport or a leisure-time activity designed for girls, especially for

⁴³ Interview with community centre leader in Presov for CVEK.

⁴⁴ Interview with a Roma mother in Trnava for CVEK.

⁴⁵ Interview with an athletic coach in Trnava for CVEK.

⁴⁶ Interview with a PE teacher in Presov for CVEK.

⁴⁷ Interview with a Roma parent in Trnava for CVEK (October 2019).

⁴⁸ Interview with Peter Németh in Prešov for CVEK (August 2019).

Roma girls. Second, Roma girls' chances to do sport are constrained by expectations by some families that sport is more of an affair for boys, typically opting for football, which is most widely available.⁴⁹ ACEC observed that Roma girls in several smaller municipalities in eastern Slovakia tend to perform sport only when they are very small, before reaching the age of puberty.⁵⁰ There are no policies or practices to respond to this traditions with the objective of facilitating participation of girls in sports.⁵¹

Conclusions

Given these potential positive benefits for the integration of excluded groups, combatting racism and prejudice, and for developing desperately needed social capital among disadvantaged youth, it is striking how little attention is paid to the sporting of Roma children and more generally to the socially disadvantaged perspective. In proposing changes, we believe that it is not sufficient to merely mainstream the cause of these groups into policies. The entire system of support for sport and its organisation likely requires a mindset of reform in line with more recent developments that focus on stimulation of a less competitive environment for children that will not discourage and stress them, in line with principles of respect and dignity of athletes, aiming at gender equality. Such reform should be also accompanied by a comprehensive system of support for socially disadvantaged children and their parents and/or members of deprived minorities. Equally, there is likely the need to reconsider the allocation of financial resources. The proposal of complex reform steps is beyond the scope of the report. In chapter 5, we thus limit ourselves to merely several recommendations that may help to improve the standing of poor children with a disclaimer that much larger reform is needed.

⁴⁹ Interview with Juraj Štofej in Trnava for CVEK (October 2019).

⁵⁰ Memo prepared by ACEC for this report.

⁵¹ Memo prepared by ACEC for this report.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ROMA INCLUSION PROGRAMMES

Slovakia has allocated significant funds from the ESF on Roma inclusion through so-called national projects. National projects are prepared and implemented by state agencies upon a specific call for proposal issued by a governing agency of the operational programme and typically also implement a certain national policy.⁵² In Roma inclusion policies, national projects with large, several-million EUR budgets often provide certain services in numerous localities in a rather uniform manner, e.g. social field workers, assistant personnel in school or health mediators provide similar services following the same methodology with the same costs.⁵³

Specifically, national projects that fund such positions can be questioned as paying for basic services that should be continuously funded through the state budget. A major disadvantage of project funding is the lack of continuity and months-long breaks that typically disrupt provision of services. If a municipality is not able or interested to provide its own funding during this period, trained workers are discharged and are forced to look for other opportunities. With the inception of a new project in a new funding cycle, new staff must be recruited and trained, which may diminish the possible positive impact of previous work of field workers on the clients. Nevertheless, we observe that there is more or less an agreement among policy makers, mayors and NGOs that these types of services are needed, and that national projects, if running, do promote inclusion.

In this chapter, we focus on monitoring and evaluation of the national Roma inclusion projects with the largest budgets. These projects derive from an assumption that they are effective and deliver inclusion. Yet, as we argue in this chapter, this assumption and indeed the actual impact may be questioned mainly due to two main reasons: monitoring of the quality of performed services is absent and the evaluations – even the most advanced – do not evaluate the actual impact of the programme and thus we are left merely with subjective perceptions that the programmes promote inclusion. Such assumption without the support of reliable data is problematic. There is a risk that projects repeat deficiencies and flaws and reinforce the popularly shared prejudice that despite millions of EUR invested into inclusion policies, there is no progress and that it is Roma's fault as "they are unable to integrate".

Monitoring

Projects funded from the European Structural and Investment Funds shall be monitored based on methodical guidelines and strategic documents. The key policy document issued by the central coordination unit, entitled System of Governance of the European Structural and Investment Fund, includes the monitoring of projects among the basic principles of their implementation.⁵⁴

During the implementation phase, projects are monitored through two steps. First is the implementation of progress, which provides a basis for refunding of undertaken activities. Second, monitoring officers gathers data to assess the implementation of the entire operational programme. After the project completion, recipients of funding submit their final monitoring reports as required in their contract. The guidelines also

⁵² This information is available at the web site of the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family, available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/esf/programove-obdobie-2007-2013/narodne-projekty/>

⁵³ Please see for an overview of national projects web sites of the main implementing agencies at the MERSaS at <https://www.ia.gov.sk>, OGPRC at <https://www.minv.sk/?narodne-projekty>,

⁵⁴ *Systém riadenia európskych štrukturálnych a investičných fondov* (Centrálny koordinačný orgán, Úrad podpredsedu vlády Slovenskej republiky pre investície a informatizáciu, 2019) (version 9), at 120-121, available at: <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/zakladne-dokumenty/>

anticipates that project activities shall be sustained for a certain period after their completion, typically on a yearly basis.⁵⁵ The operational programme Human Resources, which funds the large-scale Roma inclusion national projects, sets out quantitative objectives for each priority – for example, the number of members of marginalised Roma communities that use social services. The programme contains a baseline number, for example, 37,639 clients in 2014 along with end value to be achieved in 2023 – 75,261 recipients.⁵⁶ The specification of a particular national project does not, however, contain baseline data. For example, the national project funding field social work contains additional quantitative indicators to be measured and monitored: number of new social field workers participating in the project, number of newly or continually employed persons from marginalised Roma communities employed as field social workers or their assistants – without baseline information. The end values are not disaggregated on the basis of gender. They also do not include qualitative indicators that would also monitor the quality of the provided services.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, each national project contains further additional indicators that are set out to monitor activities in more specific terms, which allow the modification of activities, especially to ensure that they have a required composition of clients. According to our interview with an officer at the Implementation Agency, modification of indicators is doable, for example, in a situation when there is no longer a need to provide a certain service. Monitoring of larger-scale projects such as field social work or of community centres is vested with one monitoring manager that continuously gathers data on a weekly or a monthly basis. Data are analysed once a year at the level of the entire operational programme.⁵⁸ All this information is publicly available through a dedicated system called ITMS.

A rather striking aspect of the monitoring process is the lack of indicators would help to monitor the quality of services. In our interview, the government plenipotentiary for Roma communities, Ábel Ravasz, indeed underlined that monitoring indicators are mostly quantitative, not qualitative. In his view, this is “*not such a strong aspect, but rather a weakness of these projects; I accept this.*”⁵⁹ However, in his view, regional coordinators perform monitoring through random on-site controls. He also underlined that that these controls of actual project implementation are more revealing than monitoring through quantitative indicators.

The MERSaS, implementing key inclusion projects through its agency, the Methodical-Pedagogic Centre (MPC), monitors quality merely informally through the school implementing the project. Veronika Palková, who is responsible for EU funds at the MERSaS explained “*Colleagues also perform also on-site control and thus they do not visit only the MPC, but also schools. Recently, when they went to eastern Slovakia, they also visited also schools and wanted to see, for instance, what a special pedagogue was doing, but did not check the content – that, is what a certain member of inclusive team is doing well; or what he or she is not doing well, this is not the role of our section. This*

⁵⁵ *Systém riadenia európskych štrukturálnych a investičných fondov* (Centrálny koordinačný orgán, Úrad podpredsedu vlády Slovenskej republiky pre investície a informatizáciu, 2019) (version 9), at 120-121, available

at: <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/zakladne-dokumenty/>

⁵⁶ Operačný program Ľudské zdroje na programové obdobie 2014-2020, Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, Riadiaci orgán pre OP, available at: https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/esf/op-ludske-zdroje/oplz_final.pdf

⁵⁷ Vyzvanie na národný projekt Terénna sociálna práca a terénna práca s prítomnosťou MRK-II. Fáza, Zoznam povinných merateľných ukazovateľov, vrátane zadaných relevancie k horizontálnym princípom, Appendix 5, available at: http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/mvsr_a_eu/oplz/vyzvania/np_terenna_socialna_praca_a_terenna_praca_v_obciach_s_pritomnostou_mrk_ii/P5_Zoznam%20PMU.pdf

⁵⁸ Interview with employees of the Implementation agency (21 October 2019)

⁵⁹ Interview prepared for this report with Ábel Ravasz on 21 October 2019

is undertaken by the school. Probably, if the school is not satisfied with a certain person, he is replaced by someone else.”⁶⁰

While officers interviewed at the MERSaS, Ministry of the Interior and the Implementation Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Families claimed that changes in actions required on the basis of monitoring are envisaged and frequent, Ravasz was more sceptical. He described the process drawing on the example of changes in qualification criteria required for field social workers. *“If one of the field social workers has a good idea on how to improve the project [...] by changing the qualification criteria to ensure that one can employ someone in the project who has some other schooling or a field of study, he communicates it with the municipality. The municipality communicates with our regional coordinators; the proposal arrives from the regional coordinators to Bratislava, we are communicating with our intermediary body, the intermediary body communicates with the central coordination body and eventually the central body with the European commission and then it comes back. It can be not only months, but years before this happens. If something gets into the system and is not useful but is kept there, it takes very long time to change. It is all because these projects come from the European funds.”⁶¹*

Monitoring is overseen by committees: one for the specific priorities relevant for Roma inclusion projects (priority axes 5 and 6 of the OP Human Resources) and one for the entire operational programme. Among the numerous members are also several representatives of NGOs, however, with insufficient voting rights to change the decision of the majority of members representing state agencies.⁶²

Evaluations

While monitoring is an obligatory aspect of each national project, this is not the case with evaluations. We were not able to find out why certain national projects plan evaluation and why others do not. It appears to be a rather subjective decision of the intermediary authorities. For example, Adriana Ďatková, responsible for monitoring of national projects administered by the OGPRC confirmed that none of the national projects implemented by this office plan evaluations of the entire projects (i.e. support of community centres, field social workers, support of preschool education and of legalisation of lands in settlements).⁶³ In her view, the intermediary body at the Ministry of the Interior made such decisions. This department did not directly respond to our question about the basis upon which evaluations were planned. Nevertheless, Ďatková also added that given that there is a certain flexibility in allocation of funds, implementing agencies can undertake at least some partial evaluations of certain activities. Specifically, she mentions the project NP PRIM focused on support of pre-school education of Roma children, which anticipates the evaluation of two programmes developed in the course of the project – assessment of children’s needs and their stimulation and evaluation of work with family – which are viewed as innovations. However, it is not clear whether these evaluations will be performed by external

⁶⁰ Interview prepared for this report with Veronika Palková, head of department for Operational programme Human resources and operational programme Education on 28 October 2019.

⁶¹ Interview prepared for this report with Abel Ravasz on 21 October 2019

⁶² Information about monitoring committees is available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/esf/programove-obdobie-2014-2020/monitorovaci-vybor-op-ludske-zdroje/>

⁶³ Please see information about the projects and the method of their implementation in *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia* (2018), at 21 ff, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-slovakia-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

evaluators as Ďatková declared that external evaluations are not planned by the OGRPC.⁶⁴

The Implementation Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and by the MERSaS are more likely to undertake evaluation of their national projects. In our interview, one of the agency's employees explained, *"There are national projects with no evaluations. This is because of the decision of the ministry or there are other means how the project and its results are being monitored. Personally, I can say that I regret this, because evaluation reports, if professionally prepared, are a good precondition, in case European funds are to be used again, to ensure that this issue is moving forward. But there are other means, either through monitoring reports or evaluation reports [...] however it does not completely replace evaluation reports."*⁶⁵ These officers, however, noted that some of the projects that were evaluated also included a proposal of how field social work could continue after the duration of the project. Generally, they believed that evaluations were very important: *"Our employees, because we put emphasis on this, to ensure that terms of references for these evaluations are well prepared and undertaken [...] we also work closely with the evaluation agency to define questions of the evaluations as well as methods."*⁶⁶

The interviewed officer of the MERSaS believed that there should be more efforts to really see what the impact on the target group was – i.e. the pupils. *"We see that now we are halfway there; I would say [...] one thing is what is requested from the system of governance that we are bound to do. It is not that we could not do anything beyond this framework – the evaluation provides us with a good opportunity to evaluate the impact in time, undertaking of both internal and external evaluations – but it requires financial means and someone who would coordinate it all somehow..."*⁶⁷

Available evaluations: What is missing?

Aside from availability of evaluations, another important aspect is the quality of available evaluations. We have thus selected three evaluations that were produced in the last several years focusing on provision of key services – community centre workers, field social workers and support staff at schools and kindergartens promoting inclusive education. These projects also tend to repeat and provide services that are largely agreed to be useful. We have selected evaluations that represent better standards even though not being counterfactual. As we discuss in relation to each of them, they still share common deficiencies that prevent us, among others, to accurately tell what the impact of the provides services is.

Community Centres

The first reviewed ex post evaluation was prepared by a team of academic experts in Roma studies, Rastislav Rosinský, Tatiana Matulayová and Jurina Rusnáková, in 2015. The authors evaluated pilot national project of community centres with a budget of 17 million EUR implemented from 1 January 2014 until 31 November 2015.

The evaluation asked four main questions: What was the basic structure of the participating community centres? How effective was the national project (in terms of its administrative governance)? What were the results at the local level regarding the community and target groups of the community centres? Which factors influenced the quality of activities of the community centres? The evaluations relied on both qualitative and quantitative research methods, such as desk research, questionnaires distributed

⁶⁴ Written responses to our questions prepared for this report, received by Adriana Ďatková on 21 October 2019.

⁶⁵ Interview at the implementation agency, Zuzana Valentová and Miroslav Repka, 21 October 2019

⁶⁶ Interview at the implementation agency, Zuzana Valentová and Miroslav Repka, 21 October 2019

⁶⁷ Interview with Veronika Palková, head of department for Operational programme Human resources and operational programme Education on 28 October 2019.

to providers of community centres and expert employees of the community centres, focus groups with coordinators of community workers and field work with community service providers. The evaluation thus provided a good overview of the structure of community service workers and their geographical set up. Also, we can learn about the type of activities pursued by these centres; however, only on the basis of information submitted by community centre workers. Also, evaluation of their quality is derived only from the perception of those who were undertaking them.

The evaluators did not have at disposal baseline data and thus indeed unable to accurately tell us accurately results and impact of the project. The authors did not engage in a method that would help to evaluate the actual impact of the programme on social inclusion. We do not learn about how many clients improved their capacities in finding jobs, improved school attendance or school performance, improved capacities to support their children or how community workers were able to shape mainstream institutions to be able to integrate Roma. Also, a common problem, is that the report does not reflect the views of the target group – clients of the community centre. The evaluation reproduced the view of the community centre workers who believed that their activity was meaningful for the clients and consequently authors assumed that *“this perception should also play out in changes (educational, social, behavioural and others) of the impact group.”*⁶⁸

Overall, this evaluation likely provides a useful feedback for the organisation and implementation of the project as perceived by community centres provides and community centre workers. The evaluation, however, does not inform about the impact of the activities or indeed even their quality. The gender perspective is also absent. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that the project provides a *“comprehensive approach to addressing problems of the target group and problems in municipalities.”*⁶⁹

Field Social Work

The 2016 evaluation prepared by Daniel Škobla, Jan Grill and Jakob Hurrle focused on another key policy measure – field social work as provided through a national project implemented in 2007-2013.⁷⁰ This time, the goal of the authors, social scientists and anthropologists was to evaluate the programme in relation to the target groups (both Roma and non-Roma) and its relevance to social inclusion based on quantitative and qualitative research methods. The ambition of this evaluation was more advanced as it sought to explore the workings of the programme and its ability to ‘transform structures’. The authors asked what changes in municipalities were brought by field social work. The evaluation also aims to review how the method of implementation of field social work contributed to the quality and how different actors perceive social field work. The evaluation adopted several methods: statistical analysis of available data on social field work based on the projects database; questionnaires distributed to field social workers, field social worker assistants and regional coordinators; in-depth interviews with field workers, experts and project managers; and representatives of NGOs. This evaluation, however, rather exceptionally in the Slovak standard, also

⁶⁸ *Komunitné centrá: Národný projekt komunitné centrá : Evalvačná správa* (Implementačná agentúra ministerstva práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny, 2015) available at: https://www.ia.gov.sk/data/files/np_kc/Dokumenty/V_stupy/Evaluacna_sprava_november_NP_KC_fin.pdf, Section 2.4. the of study that does not have pages numbered.

⁶⁹ *Komunitné centrá: Národný projekt komunitné centrá : Evalvačná správa* (Implementačná agentúra ministerstva práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny, 2015) available at: https://www.ia.gov.sk/data/files/np_kc/Dokumenty/V_stupy/Evaluacna_sprava_november_NP_KC_fin.pdf

⁷⁰ Daniel Škobla, Jan Grill and Jakob Hurrle, *Exploring field social work in Slovakia (Evaluation of the programme funded by the European Social Fund in 2007-2013)* (Bratislava: The Institute for the Research on Labour and Family, 2016) available at: https://www.academia.edu/23319843/Exploring_field_social_work_in_Slovakia_Evaluation_of_the_programme_funded_by_the_European_Social_Fund_in_2007_-_2013_

included reflections on the programme of the targeted communities through case a case study of three localities.

The evaluation, translated into English, provided what are likely to be valuable academic insights into the operation of the programme assessing its potential at the local level and acknowledging power hierarchies. The evaluations also provided anthropologically interesting categorisation of types of social field workers on the basis of their approaches towards clients or their previous life, career experience and also types of shared stereotypes. We also learn about the administrative challenges associated with the implementation of the projects and the quality of their offices.

However, similarly as in the case of the first evaluation discussed above, we learn little about the results and impact of the project in quantifiable terms. We do not learn about the results of the field social workers' actions vis-à-vis their clients. How were the field workers able to help their clients to acquire the skills to able to find and keep work? What were the outcomes in terms of their financial situation given that most of the activities focused on dealing with client's debts? What about the impact of the programme on the educational outcomes of the clients' children? Moreover, the authors, despite their efforts to integrate also the perspective of the clients as well, end up describing the impact only through the lens of field social workers. Gender perspective is also absent from the evaluation.

Inclusion in education

The third evaluation that we have selected focuses on the key national project in education called School Open for All. The MERSaS has repeatedly argued that this project provides the critical contribution towards desegregation.⁷¹ The project, with its overall budget of almost 30 million EUR, funded pre-school activities mostly for Roma children who were unable to attend regular kindergarten and support staff of teachers and assistants (so-called inclusive teams) to promote inclusion of Roma children at elementary schools. Preparation of local plans for desegregation was one of the project's activities. The project running from February 2016 until November 2019, targeted 50 kindergartens and 200 elementary schools where the share of socially disadvantaged children should be at a minimum of 20 per cent.⁷²

The evaluation, prepared by a group of mostly independent experts, relied on quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation measured, among other things, also the impact of the interventions on the learning and social capacities and skills of the targeted children departing from baseline data gathered at the project's inception. The evaluation also rather thoroughly reviewed study plans of the targeted schools. Nevertheless, similarly to the previously mentioned evaluations, the impact on children's capacities is measured merely through the subjective assessment of participating teachers or school directors, not by independent experts. Also, views of the Roma parents of the targeted children were not taken into consideration at all.

One of the most striking aspects of the evaluation is its avoidance of the problem of segregation. According to EU MIDIS-II data gathered by the FRA, 62 per cent of Roma children experience segregation, i.e. attends classes with mostly or exclusively Roma peers.⁷³ The project targets 200 schools with major Roma communities, with the

⁷¹ See e.g. reaction of the MERSaS to the reasoned opinion sent to Slovakia as the next stage of infringement procedure initiated against Slovakia for violation of Race Equality Directive for segregation of Roma children, in TASR, „Rezort školstva reaguje na EK: Školský zákon zakazuje diskrimináciu“, teraz.sk, 19 October, 2019, available at <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/rezort-skolstva-reaguje-na-eu-skolsky/425163-clanok.html>

⁷² Information about the project is available at the project's dedicated web site at: <http://npsov.mpc-edu.sk>

⁷³ Please see: FRA, *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey: Roma – Selected findings* (Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2018), at 28, available at:

minimum share of Roma children (assessed through a proxy category of socially disadvantaged children) of 20 per cent. It is thus unavoidable that the project targets also schools that have a problem with segregation of Roma children.

The evaluation does not refer to the ethnic composition of classes and schools. Inclusion is presented merely as an attempt to integrate children with disabilities. This ignores the fact that Roma children can also experience spatial segregation in the regular school track.⁷⁴

The MERSaS presented to the media that in the course of the project 117 of desegregation plans were prepared and 1211 teachers were trained desegregation and preparation of local plans without any further details on the impact.⁷⁵ The evaluation does dedicate a separate chapter to these desegregation plans. However, this chapter does not discuss these plans or even present an ambition to evaluate them. Rather the author of this chapter Emil Komárik argued *"the Project SOV was conceived as an effort to be able to educate children from the majority with the children from the minority who are handicapped by the low income of their families, and especially children of parents living in excluded Roma communities without knowledge of language of instructions or children of parents who do not view education as a value and do not view as values basic moral norms, hygienic rules and often principles of elementary ethnic of interpersonal relations."*⁷⁶ Inclusion was reduced merely to the 'adaptation' of Roma children to a potentially ethnically mixed environment. Interestingly, the evaluation instead of using segregation/desegregation concepts, uses arguably a more 'neutral' term of the best interest of the child. The author asked teachers whether they were willing to share their ideas about *"what to do to ensure that the school can as well as possible link the principle of inclusion with the principle of respect of each child."*⁷⁷ Out of 200 participating schools, 47 responded to this call and provided some of the insights. In practice, the author avoided evaluating the impact of the project on desegregation.⁷⁸

The project builds on similar initiatives worth tens of millions of EUR⁷⁹ and is presented as a basis for further projects and policies. The inability (or perhaps unwillingness) to actually independently and genuinely evaluate the impact on desegregation may, in fact, reinforce the perpetuation of policies and projects that at best preserve the status

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf

⁷⁴ Ladislav Alberty et al, *Závěrečná evalvačná správa národného projektu Škola otvorená všetkým* (Prešov: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum, 2019), available at: <http://npsov.mpc-edu.sk/dolezite-oznamy/pracovne-stretnutie-ohladam-implementacie-narodneho-projektu>

⁷⁵ Information provided by the MERSaS in writing on 26 September 2019. However, the MERSaS and MPC refused to provide us with examples of the prepared desegregation plans.

⁷⁶ Emil Komárik, "V najlepšom záujem dieťaťa – desegregačné plány škôl" in Ladislav Alberty et al, *Závěrečná evalvačná správa národného projektu Škola otvorená všetkým* (Prešov: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum, 2019), at 272, available at: <http://npsov.mpc-edu.sk/dolezite-oznamy/pracovne-stretnutie-ohladam-implementacie-narodneho-projektu>

⁷⁷ Emil Komárik, "V najlepšom záujem dieťaťa – desegregačné plány škôl" in Ladislav Alberty et al, *Závěrečná evalvačná správa národného projektu Škola otvorená všetkým* (Prešov: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum, 2019), at 276, available at: <http://npsov.mpc-edu.sk/dolezite-oznamy/pracovne-stretnutie-ohladam-implementacie-narodneho-projektu>

⁷⁸ Emil Komárik, "V najlepšom záujem dieťaťa – desegregačné plány škôl" in Ladislav Alberty et al, *Závěrečná evalvačná správa národného projektu Škola otvorená všetkým* (Prešov: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum, 2019) available at: <http://npsov.mpc-edu.sk/dolezite-oznamy/pracovne-stretnutie-ohladam-implementacie-narodneho-projektu>,

⁷⁹ Please see National project MRK – Through education of pedagogical employees to inclusion in marginalised Roma communities" (2011-2015), 24 million euro, information available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/narodny-projekt-skvalitnil-vzdelavanie-viac-ako-22-000-romskych-ziakov/>, Project MRK II, Inclusive model of education at pre-school level (February 2013- November 2015), budget 7,4 million EUR, information available at: <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/4257.pdf> (National Project PRINED, Project of inclusive education (May 2014- November 2015) budget 16 million euro, information available e.g. at: <https://www.minedu.sk/projekt-prined-ma-plny-pocet-prihlasenych-skol-najviac-je-zo-spisa/>

quo of Roma without addressing the core of exclusion. In the long run, this strategy not only fails to deliver tangible progress in reducing inequalities, but also feeds into the extremists' narrative that 'Roma are unadaptable' despite the millions of EUR invested.

National ESF project "Monitoring and Evaluation"

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation is anticipated also through a separate national project called Monitoring and Evaluation of Inclusive Policies and their Impact on Marginalised Roma Communities anticipated (2016-2022) with allocation of approximately 3 million EUR. Through data collection on the socio-economic conditions of Roma, the projects should provide comprehensive monitoring and evaluation. So far, the OGPRC, in its administration of the project, has funded the preparation of the new Atlas of Roma communities. Atlas data were released in an Excel chart in late 2019.⁸⁰ More detailed analysis of this data should follow. The Atlas should provide insights into the quality of housing and perhaps also on residential segregation, but actually very little about other aspects of inclusion, such as for example in education. Moreover, the project also funded the specialised EU SILC gathering in 1,500 Roma households.⁸¹ The project should also provide funding for thematic quantitative and qualitative data gathering in selected localities. However, the Government Plenipotentiary Ravasz indicated that the implementation of these tasks may be delayed as they have to follow regular rules of public procurements, which he deemed rather lengthy.⁸² Yet, these rules were known before the project was designed. Still, these gathering activities would not be able to replace proper monitoring and evaluation of projects, in particularly those with the largest budgets.

Conclusions

In conclusions, monitoring and evaluation, especially of projects with the largest budgets require significantly more attention. Ideally, monitoring and especially evaluation should be performed also in part by independent actors with a professional reputation. According to evaluators that preferred to stay anonymous, independence of hired experts is absolutely critical as they are often hired on employed contract and exposed to pressures of national project coordinator not to present project in a very negative manner. Furthermore, mainstream gender perspective and involve target groups and Roma in both actions. It is critical that monitoring focuses also on the quality of performed actions and provides a certain flexibility for modification. Also, all large-scale projects should include evaluation of results and impact on Roma inclusion. Evaluations should consider the perspectives of all stakeholders, including the clients or target groups to provide a basis for further actions that will actually target the core of exclusion and segregation.

⁸⁰ Data is available at: <https://www.minv.sk/?atlas-romskych-komunit-2019>

⁸¹ Please see further information about the project at: <https://www.minv.sk/?zber-dat-od-ministerstiev-a-ostatnych-organov-statnej-a-verejnej-spravy>

⁸² Interview with Ábel Ravasz on 21 October 2019.

TARGETING THE MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

The third area of this report addresses policies affecting mainstream society to fight stereotypes and reduce prejudice against Roma in Slovakia. We believe that state action in this area could be significantly reinforced to reduce discrimination against Roma and also to create more favourable conditions for Roma inclusion policies. Indeed, while we note and appreciate that thanks to the numerous initiatives acknowledging positive initiatives in Roma inclusion policies and conscious efforts of the media and also some politicians to portray Roma success stories, social distances towards Roma have reduced as captured in part by the 2019 Eurobarometer data.⁸³ At the same time, recent data prepared by the Slovak Academy of Sciences signal that anti-Roma stereotypes are still prevalent, and in political communication, most respondents prefer hostile political communication towards Roma.⁸⁴ We believe that more significant action targeting the mainstream would create a more favourable conditions for genuine inclusion policies rather than those that merely aim to improve the standards of Roma education or housing without addressing the segregated setting in which they operate.⁸⁵

In this chapter, we focus on official state action plan of the NRIS, which has the objective to target the mainstream, as well as on the measures within the educational system to fight prejudice and stereotypes. The chapter argues that this area is at the bottom of policy priorities. We argue that more robust efforts must be invested to raise capacities of teachers to be able to improve literacy skills and to raise the students' ability to think critically which is much needed, among others, to be able to recognise myths and hoaxes that are spread through social media and questionable media outlets and about the Roma.

⁸³ Eurobarometer 2019 data on social distances to Roma signals that while Slovakia is still being below EU 28 average, social distances have in the last five years reduced. When asked about how one would feel if one of her or his colleagues were Roma in 2015, 36% respondents would feel completely uncomfortable, 21% moderately comfortable and 23% completely comfortable. In 2019, the share of those feeling totally uncomfortably dropped to 15%, as well those that felt moderately comfortably to 15% while the share of those feeling totally comfortably increased to 61%. Also, the question of how respondents would feel of one of the children was in a love relationship with a Roma (regardless of whether they actually have children), signals significant reduction of social distances. While in 2015, 65% would feel totally uncomfortably, 13% moderately comfortably and only 11% totally comfortably, in 2019 the share was 44%, 16% and 29% respectively. Please see data from 2015 Eurobarometer gathering on discrimination available at https://data.europa.eu/euodp/sk/data/dataset/S2077_83_4_437_ENG, and data from 2019 at: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKFwi7sa6C9NPnAhVUj1wKHRmMBwsQFjAAegQIBRAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fcommfrontoffice%2Fpublicopinion%2Findex.cfm%2FResultDoc%2Fdownload%2FDocumentKy%2F87621&usq=AOvVaw2wr64raXDDynmEqoNPQmFa>

⁸⁴ The Slovak Academy of Sciences in June 2019 indicate that anti-Roma stereotypes seems to be still prevalent. 80% of respondents approved statements suggesting that Roma have access to benefits that they do not deserve and are in some areas privileged. Moreover, almost 64 % of respondents agreed with negative stereotypes about Roma, such as that Roma are lazy and steal. Only 50% approved statements underlying the value of Roma culture, such as Roma can be proud of their cultural heritage. Interestingly, in terms of political communication, most respondents preferred hostile political discourse about Roma that is based on negative statements about Roma, about their criminality and attitudes to work (45,2% agreed while and 23% disagreed). A discourse underlying the need to help Roma noting that are not able to help themselves preferred 26,9% respondents (more than 50% disapproved). The least popular discourse was so-called unifying suggesting that both non-Roma and Roma must stand against. Less than one fifth would be willing to invest personal or public resources to improve standing of Roma in Slovakia. Data was gathered as part of the project Pol Roma supported by DG Justice, led by Barbara Lasticova and Xenia-Daniela Poslon, Department of social communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, available at: https://www.sav.sk/index.php?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=8688

⁸⁵ Please see chapters on education and housing in [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia \(2018\)](#) and [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia \(2019\)](#).

NRIS and targeting the mainstream

Slovakia's NRIS prepared in 2011 stipulated the need to target the mainstream society through communication activities as a precondition for successful implementation of social inclusion policies. The strategy argues that there is a widely shared prejudice that in terms of social rights and social security, the Roma are in a somewhat privileged position in comparison to the non-Roma population.⁸⁶ According to the NRIS: "*The goal of the initiative is to tackle stigmatisation of the Roma population through targeted inclusion into the society. Through awareness raising and education, [the strategy] seeks to promote objective knowledge about Roma and consequently support their acceptance.*"⁸⁷ The strategy presents that its communication action should be based on three pillars: 1. Communication focused on tackling myths associated with Roma and awareness raising, 2. Support of inclusion approaches, education and development of expertise and 3. A joint integration platform for action. While the first pillar is focused more generally on mainstream society, the second specifically targets key professionals such as teachers, health care professionals, law enforcement bodies and journalists within schools, hospitals, media outlets, law enforcement bodies, and municipalities. The third pillar anticipates creation of a joint integration platform pursuing a common coordination of communication of all stakeholders, data gathering and monitoring.⁸⁸

These rather vaguely drafted and unspecified objectives were not translated into a specific action plan until September 2017.⁸⁹ The action plan was derived from a communication strategy prepared by the Open Society Foundation in 2014, noting that in terms of social distance, Roma are among the most negatively perceived groups in Slovakia. The action plan argued that the majority population does not have sufficient objective information about Roma; believing that Roma are unchangeable and even pose a threat to the majority. A significant segment of the population believed that it is acceptable to keep a social distance to Roma and it is even socially desirable. Most Roma are construed in the media as 'problematic' inhabitants of settlements, participating in criminal activities. The action plan sets out as the main objective: de-ethnicization of public discussion, which would allow for a debate without prejudices through a public educational campaign.⁹⁰

The government's plan set out as its general aim the reduction of mutual prejudice and the reinforcement of solidarity between Roma and non-Roma. The fulfilment of this objective should be measured through indicators of social distance as produced by the FRA and other unspecified surveys. Additionally, the plan should measure the progress on the basis of numbers of items about Roma in mass media that perpetuate stereotypes as well as perception of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. Partial goals aim to gather information, undertake surveys and to support proactive communication of objective information. Specific actions include the creation of a working group on the issue, data gatherings, developing a long-term communication strategy, work with media and awareness raising among key professionals. The action plan, however, anticipates that the costs of actions for three years will be merely 270,000 EUR, partially

⁸⁶ *Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma until 2020*, adopted by the government resolution 1/2011, at 47.

⁸⁷ *Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma until 2020*, adopted by the government resolution 1/2011, at 47.

⁸⁸ *Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma until 2020*, adopted by the government resolution 1/2011, at 47

⁸⁹ Action plans of the strategy of the Slovak Republic for integration of Roma until 2020, for years 2017-2020 for areas D.2.6 area of non-discrimination and D.2.7. are of attitudes toward majority society – Initiative integration of Roma through communication, adopted by the government resolution 423/2017. Available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22311/1>

⁹⁰ Action plans of the strategy of the Slovak Republic for integration of Roma until 2020, for years 2017-2020 for areas D.2.6 area of non-discrimination and D.2.7. are of attitudes toward majority society – Initiative integration of Roma through communication, adopted by the government resolution 423/2017. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22311/1>

covered by ESIF (78,000 EUR) and the remainder should be covered by the state budget or co-financing of projects recipients.⁹¹

In 2019, the OGPRC prepared a monitoring report of all activities relevant for the NRIS's action plans, including one focused on the mainstream society in the year 2018. According to the report, out of 20 anticipated activities, 13 were marked as being continuously implemented or already completed, six were in the progress and only one was indicated as not fulfilled. Interestingly, implementation of these activities has costs nothing as no funds have been used.⁹² In a more detailed examination of the monitoring report, we find that most activities marked as being under implementation consist of coordination meetings or "communication" of the OGRPC with other agencies. No communication strategy or campaign has been prepared. Indeed the only activity that seems to be on going is a regular leaflet produced by the OGPRC that informs about "positive programmes", one training that took place in Nitra for 40 participants and several seminars for young Roma journalists that eventually lead to one of them being employed by the Slovak Television.⁹³

Indeed, in our interview Abel Ravasz, the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma communities, acknowledged that this action plan is the weakest one. He observed: *"not necessarily in its quality, but in its outputs for sure. I sense that people take plans more seriously in more tangible areas such as employment or housing."* According to Ravasz, no palpable change can be delivered through the rather the formalistic preparation of the plan and its formal evaluation. He confirmed that coordination meetings of the working group likely did not yield any results. Also, no anticipated studies on attitudes were prepared. However, Ravasz also underlined that in this area they contributed to improvement through his own communication: *"our media department plays a huge role, communicating with the media on a daily basis. I personally perform a great deal of informal work, communicating directly with journalists, often convincing them to use different language, to handle the issue differently [...] I am explaining what is needed. We present numerous positive press conferences, and a lot of people are accusing us of using this as self-promotion, but that's not the point. Our point is to present as many positive examples as possible."*⁹⁴

Targeting the mainstream society and fighting prejudice in education

Learning about Roma

Nevertheless, aside from time-limited action plans, the key role in tackling stereotypes and building cohesive societies should be played by the educational system. In response to our questions on how the schools address prejudice, the MERSaS listed several objectives that are streamlined into the educational system: development of pre-school age children's capacities to cooperate through games; school-age children's civic education to learn to be tolerant to the opinions, values and cultures of others; and through ethics, children should learn about the attitudes and skills needed to participate in their social environment and about the meaning of human dignity. In year 7 at elementary school, civic education focuses on analysis of society based on age, sex, religion, education and nationality. In year 8, the civic education looks at human rights

⁹¹ Action plans of the strategy of the Slovak Republic for integration of Roma until 2020, for years 2017-2020 for areas D.2.6 area of non-discrimination and D.2.7. area of attitudes toward majority society – Initiative integration of Roma through communication, adopted by the government resolution 423/2017. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22311/1>

⁹² Monitoring report of the fulfilment of Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma until 2020 for 2018. The Slovak Government on its meeting on 25 June 2019 discussed this material and concluded as being taken into consideration. The material is available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/992>

⁹³ Annex to the Monitoring report of the fulfilment of Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma until 2020 for 2018, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Negotiation/992>

⁹⁴ Interview with Abel Ravasz on 21 October 2019.

and especially children's rights. Also, pupils should be able to identify examples of gender stereotypes in media and their social environment as well as specific examples of discrimination. Furthermore, learning curricula for high schools contain plans to learn about diversity and tolerance to others. The MERSaS also refers to learning lists that teachers can access on subjects of human rights and discrimination, sexual violence and abuse of children through a joint portal. Furthermore, the MERSaS listed courses and seminars attended by teachers focused on the teaching of children from marginalised backgrounds.⁹⁵

It is the scope of this report to evaluate how these activities are performed which should be indeed subjected to thorough scrutiny and evaluation. Based on our anecdotal experience, the quality varies depending on the skills and efforts of individual teachers. What is notable, however, is that subjects focused on human rights are incorporated rather lately in lower secondary schools and grammar schools. There are no actions targeting secondary vocational schools or lower education. Moreover, efforts to promote tolerance undermines the institutional segregation experienced by a significant segment of Roma children⁹⁶ that promotes acquisition of prejudice and feelings of superiority among non-Roma children while stigmatising Roma children.

Furthermore, formal educational settings provide a valuable opportunity for the state to allow children to acquire objective information about Roma, to understand the complex reasons for the cycle of poverty and exclusion of some of them and to promote tolerance and understanding, in part through learning about Roma and Roma history. In the recent review prepared by the Council of Europe,⁹⁷ Slovakia's textbooks only rather occasionally provide some information, and this information is often inaccurate and biased. For example, recently published 9th revision of a widely used History book for year nine includes several factual mistakes about Roma and fails to provide contextual and comprehensive information to allow pupils to understand present-day marginalisation. The text book asserts that Roma, prior to the WWII, lived as nomadic groups, which is not true for most Roma who have been settled since the 15th century.⁹⁸ This statement is often perpetuated as a myth to reinforce the understanding of Roma as nomads who are unwilling to adapt to the norms of the majority and have no ties to Slovakia. While mentioning that Roma were placed into labour camps, the historians in this textbook fail to inform about other restrictive measures that lead to the current exclusion, including the regulation that Roma families should be expelled to isolated areas that were visible from the main roads on lands that the families did not own and lead to the present-day problem with illegal settlements. Also, the information about the Roma Holocaust is rather scarce. Moreover, the authors of the history book try to assert that the Roma were offered material aid during the communist regime but underestimated deeply held customs and traditions of the Roma ethnic group. This type of explanation fails to present an accurate view of forced assimilation policies, forcing students to engage in debate as to whether such a policy can be successful. The historians merely place the burden of "inadaptability" on Roma.⁹⁹ A more accurate and

⁹⁵ Written response of the MERSaS requested for this report, received in October 2019.

⁹⁶ Please see on segregation in education chapters on education in [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia \(2018\)](#) and [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Slovakia \(2019\)](#).

⁹⁷ *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks – Appendix 1, Lists of References in European Textbooks*, Analytical report, (Council of Europe, Ref, Georg Exkert Institute, 2020) available at: <https://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/306/COE%20-%20The%20Representation%20of%20Roma%20Appendix%201.pdf?sequence=13&isAllowed=y>

⁹⁸ See e.g. in Viera Bačová, "Rómska menšina: vznik a charakteristika rómskej menšiny na Slovensku" in Anna Zelová et. al. *Minoritné etnické spoločenstvá na Slovensku v procesoch spoločenských zmien* (Bratislava: Veda, 1994).

⁹⁹ Dušan Kováč, Viliam Kratochvíl, Ivan Kamenec, Herta Tkadlečková (2016) *Dejepis pre 9 ročník*, Bratislava: Orbis Pictures Bratislava, 324, reproduced in *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks – Appendix 1, Lists of References in European Textbooks*, Analytical report, (Council of Europe, Ref, Georg Exkert Institute, 2020) available at:

detailed account of Roma history can be found in a textbook for third year of secondary grammar school, including information about Roma persecution and genocide during the WWII and rather detailed information about mass murders of families in several localities in central Slovakia. However, this information is merely accessible to a segment of secondary students, as it covers only grammar schools.¹⁰⁰

Civics textbooks contain basic information about diversity in Slovakia in terms of the territorial concentration of legally recognised national minorities, without providing further information about the accuracy of public data gathered through public censuses or issues associated with cohabitation of diverse groups. Civics textbooks merely focuses more on analysis of extremism. Geography textbooks contain data on the ethnic make-up of Slovakia's regions.

The State Pedagogical Institute has been preparing a textbook on all legally recognised national minorities that should contain more detailed information also on Roma and Roma history – indeed the first efforts to provide teachers with such material. History teachers of lower secondary and higher secondary schools expected this item already in January 2018.¹⁰¹ While the MERSaS did not explain the reason for this delay, they clarified that this is not an official textbook, but a complementary informational and methodological material. The aim is to support mutual understanding and tolerance among pupils and currently the material is “being finalised”. The MERSaS added that the state curriculum is sufficiently flexible and allows teachers to integrate Roma history and information about Roma into their learning as much as they wish to pursue.¹⁰²

Development of critical thinking skills among children and students

In our view, along with learning towards tolerance, respect to each other and learning about minorities, including the Roma, the education should equip students with skills to be able to critically understand information presented in social and other media and be able to recognise hoaxes and myths that frequently target minorities, especially Roma. Indeed, the most recent widely shared hoax was about participation of Roma at antifascist protests organised by local civil society actors in several towns in eastern Slovakia. These protests were against fascism and were in opposition to the meetings of the People's Party Our Slovakia. A youth organization with close ties to this extreme right wing party prepared a video that intentionally and fraudulently portrayed Roma as being drunk and aggressive, trying to incite fear of Roma.¹⁰³ Moreover, one the most widely shared hoaxes ever in Slovakia has been an eight-year-old Facebook post that is still being shared. Without any reference to facts, the post relates a story from a pharmacy, arguing that unlike others, Roma do not have to pay for medications.¹⁰⁴

Recent the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results have revealed significant deficiencies in learning literacy skills among children, signalling limited capacity to be able to recognise that false and misleading information shared by conspiracy web sites, in periodical or shared by social media. Only 5 per cent of 15 year-old students achieved level 5 or 6 in reading literacy tests meaning, among other things,

<https://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/306/COF%20-%20The%20Representation%20of%20Roma%20Appendix%201.pdf?sequence=13&isAllowed=y>

¹⁰⁰ Letz Robert, Maria Tonkova and Bockova Anna (2015), *Dejepis pre 3. ročník gymnázií* (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo), 3rd grade of high school, ISCED 2 reproduced in *ibid.* at 324-325.

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Ivana Štefúnová, „Do škôl mieri učebnica o menšinách“ *Pravda daily*, 26 January 2018, available at: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/456000-do-skol-mieri-ucebnica-o-mensinach/>

¹⁰² Written responses to our questions prepared by the MERSaS

¹⁰³ Vladimír Šnidl, *Kotlebovci šíria fámy o opitých a agresívnych Rómoch, ktorí si na nich chystali zbrane*, *dennikN. Sk*, 22 January 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1726380/kotlebovci-siria-famy-o-opitych-a-agresivnych-romoch-ktori-si-na-nich-chystali-zbrane/?ref=tema>

¹⁰⁴ *Opäť sa šíri 8-ročný hoax, že Rómovia nemusia platiť za lieky, reaguje aj ústredie práce*, *omediach*, 26 November 2019, available at: <https://www.omediach.com/hoaxy/16710-opaet-sa-siri-8-rocny-hoax-ze-romovia-nemusia-platit-za-lieky-reaguje-aj-ustredie-prace>

that they can establish a distinction between fact and opinion, based on implicit clues, content or sources, which is salient in being able to distinguish manipulative hoaxes from verified facts.¹⁰⁵

Rather disturbing has been a recent survey indicating that even teachers have difficulties to distinguish between trustworthy and manipulative media that produce false, misleading and hateful information also about various minorities, including Jews, Roma or LGBTI. According to this recent representative survey of teachers, more than half of them would recommend most influential conspiracy portal *called Hlavné správy* and a periodical called *Zem a Vek* to their pupils as trustworthy. Indeed, in a ranking of trust, teachers scored as the third internet portal *Hlavné správy*. It was recommended by 57 per cent of teachers, while only 34 per cent found it not trustworthy. *Hlavné správy* is the most influential conspiracy portal, producing reports without using proper sources with questionable ownership scheme.¹⁰⁶ More than 50 per cent of teachers would recommend their students also a periodical called *Zem a Vek*, which is also listed among periodicals producing and reproducing conspiracy theories.¹⁰⁷ Recently, the editor-in-chief of *Zem a Vek*, Tibor Rostas, was convicted for hate speech for publishing his article that was spreading anti-Semitism.¹⁰⁸ A significant share of teachers clearly has difficulties in telling the difference between a conspiracy media outlet and a reliable source. Indeed, reliable media outlets such as *SME* or *DENNÍK N* were listed as scoring worse than *Hlavné správy* or *Zem a Vek* with only 49 per cent (in the case of *SME*) and 39 per cent (in the case of *DenníkN*) included to recommend these dailies to their students as reliable resources.¹⁰⁹

In response to our question of what the MERSaS plans to do to as a response to this survey, the Ministry argued *"On the basis of a research prepared by the Centre of Scientific-technical Information of the Slovak Republic (CVTI) on a sample of more than 2,000 students of primary and secondary schools is preference of internet websites are as follows: Facebook 82.2 per cent, Google 75.1 per cent, YouTube 55 per cent, Wikipedia 49.7 per cent, referaty.sk 29.3 per cent. The listed media [Zem a Vek and Hlavná správa] did not make it to the list of the 22 most sought-after websites."*¹¹⁰

To sum up, PISA data on children's literacy skills, the survey among students on reliability of mass media resources as well as the response of the MERSaS to this situation cited above indicate significant need for further actions in developing critical thinking targeting not only students, but also teachers and officials at the MERSaS.

Conclusions

We recognise that changing deeply ingrained anti Roma attitudes and stereotypes is a challenging endeavour and require sustained effort. However, we see very little efforts in this area. Well-meaning state plans to target mainstream society and prejudice have

¹⁰⁵ OECD, Slovak Republic, country note, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), results from PISA 2018, at 2, available at: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_SVK.pdf

¹⁰⁶ Please see on this e.g. Jakub Goda " Pod falošným menom som písal hoaxy pre Hlavné správy", dennikN.sk, 11 January 2018, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/995647/pod-falosnym-menom-som-pisal-hoaxy-pre-hlavne-spravy/>, or at website that is specifically focusing on websites producing and reproducing conspiracy theories and hoaxes, available at: <https://www.konspiratori.sk/assets/screenshots/s.php?i=hlavnespravy.sk.png>

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. at <https://www.konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok.php>

¹⁰⁸ Rostas was convicted by a specialiomanimancourt that has jurisdiction also on so called crimes of extremism that includes also hate speech and hate crimes. Rostas was fined 4000 euro. Please see e.g. in Lucia Osvaldová, Rostas je vinný z hanobenia rasy a národa, Harabina vykázali z miestnosti", dennikN.sk, 16 December 2019, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1688183/rosta-je-vinny-z-hanobenia-rasy-a-naroda-harabina-vykazali-z-miestnosti/>

¹⁰⁹ Filip Struhárik, „Učítelia považujú Hlavné správy a Zem a vek za dôveryhodné média, odporúčili by ich žiakom

¹¹⁰ Written response of the MERSaS requested for this report, received in October 2019.

been left without any tangible implementation actions that one could expect to yield tangible results. A state educational system that is unable to tackle institutional segregation promotes stereotypes about Roma children as being inferior while doing very little to actually target children and reduce their prejudice. Information about Roma and Roma history that would also help students to understand the complex reasons behind Roma exclusion is scarce. Saliently, the potential of the system to prepare children for massively shared hoaxes and misinformation about Roma that constructs and perpetuates anti-Roma stereotypes is very limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to sports for Roma children and youth

To the MERSaS, to the Government Plenipotentiary for Youth and Sports in coordination with the OGPRC:

1. For the preparation of the next state policy plan on sport due in 2020, a thorough quantitative and qualitative study focused on access to sport to marginalised and socially disadvantaged children should be prepared, the outcomes of which should be reflected in the policy plan. The policy plan should, on the basis of this analysis, present outreach and support, and both a financial and personal system based on cooperation of schools and community centres that will help to facilitate access of marginalised children into regular sport clubs. The plan should include also specific indicators measuring how many socially disadvantaged children, including Romani, are participating in organised sports.

To MERSaS in partnership with the Plenipotentiary for Youth and Sport, Fund for Sport Support

2. Sport clubs should be provided with new funding schemes (perhaps through a new fund for sports) for the integration of socially disadvantaged children (membership, commuting and other expenses) as well as methodical guidance on how to integrate disadvantaged children and address and prevent racism in sport.
3. Responsible state agencies should develop methodical guidance on the use of sport in addressing racism, prejudice and promoting tolerance to be used in schools and school clubs.

Evaluation and monitoring of Roma inclusion programmes

The Ministry of Transport and Construction in partnership with the OGPRC

4. Roma integration programmes using ERDF should focus also on the development of playgrounds close to deprived areas and sports facilities in non-segregated settings.
5. Funding schemes using the state budget as well as ESF should be available to sports clubs, NGOs and schools, promoting after-school leisure sports activities targeting all children available.

To all ministries and relevant directing authorities implementing large scale programmes using ESIF

6. Ensure that each project with large budget (at minimum so-called national projects) provides for independent monitoring of quality of provided activities and services
7. Ensure that each project with large budget (at minimum so-called national project) provides for independent evaluation of results and impact of undertaken interventions, considers the views of all key stakeholders, including Roma clients, ensure participation of Roma in the evaluation and mainstream gender perspective. If possible, provide for counterfactual evaluation.

Targeting the mainstream society

To the Government and the OGPRC

8. Comprehensive actions should be targeting mainstream society through, for example, well-targeted public campaigning using innovative strategies, and conventional as well as social media.

To the MERSaS

9. The educational system must thoroughly integrate human rights education and education towards tolerance from pre-school age along with genuine desegregation efforts.
10. The MERSaS and the responsible agency the State Pedagogical Institute, should revise existing textbooks containing information about Roma and provide accurate and comprehensive materials (including integration into newly prepared textbooks for history, civics, geography and ethics) providing the provision of a comprehensive understanding among pupils and students.
11. Relying on already available innovative Slovak or international strategies, methods, textbooks or materials on critical thinking and media literacy, the MERSaS should develop and implement a plan with measurable indicators on how to improve the skills of both teachers as well as children.

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